

# Sermon for January 21, 2001

**Title: "All for One and One for All!"**

**Text: I Cor. 12:12-21,26-27**

Alexandre Dumas wrote a tale that has been retold and parodied in print and movies over the years called *The Three Musketeers*. These three heroes were bold and brash, brave and bawdy. They came to the aid of those in society who were easily preyed upon by the rich and powerful. Their motto, which became a rallying cry as they went up against their enemies, was: "All for one and one for all." Each of these men, while individuals, was united in their cause for justice. If one Musketeer was in trouble, the other two would race to his rescue. If two were being held captive, the other one would try to free them. "All for one and one for all!"

This is also a good motto for Christians to adopt. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are united into His body called the church through baptism. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians in our text: **"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."** Members of Christ's body, the church, can never stand alone. We all have different gifts and abilities that we use to build up the rest of the body and to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it. This is a fitting word-picture to assist us today as we renew our efforts to recruit future pastors and church workers. As we encourage and nurture these future leaders from our own congregation, we are truly, "All for one and one for all."

The Apostle Paul needed to remind the Corinthians that their life in Christ's church was a team effort. Many of these believers at Corinth were jealous of those who had been blessed by God with the more impressive spiritual gifts—healing, performing miracles, prophesying, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues. They suffered from bruised egos, for they reasoned that these more spectacular gifts should bring them more individual status and recognition in the church than they would receive by exercising the more "ordinary" gifts. And of course, people with "ordinary" abilities in the Corinthian congregation developed what could be termed a "false sense of modesty," feeling that there was no sense in contributing such puny gifts to Christ's church. As a result, they allowed their God-given gifts and abilities to lie dormant. "All for one and one for all" meant nothing to these Corinthians because they were only concerned about themselves and not the rest of the body of Christ.

As members of Christ's body, the church, we fail to realize our need for other Christians, as well as failing to recognize the contributions we can make to the church. Sometimes our reasoning goes like this: *"I don't need help from my brothers and sisters in Christ because then I would have to admit to them my problems and shortcomings. It's none of their business what I'm going through. They will probably just gossip to others about me. I don't see any contradiction in being a 'Lone Ranger' Christian. I can manage without their help, thank you very much. Or why should I be on the lookout to help other Christians? Surely somebody else can give them a hand and do even a better job than I could!"*

And then there are those of us who suffer from a false sense of modesty. Others may see God's gifts and abilities with which He has blessed us but we can't see them, nor do we want to try to use what He has given us. We think, *"I could never serve on Church Council or that church board or committee because I don't have what it takes. Who are they kidding by telling me that I've got the 'knack' for visiting people in their homes? They must be crazy thinking that I'd be a good pastor. I could never take the hours or the salary as a full-time church worker! I respectfully submit that my fellow Christians are wrong when they think that I would be a good leader in the church. 'All for one and one for all'—no thanks! I'll just stick to my little corner of the church and mind my own business!"*

The Apostle Paul would not agree with such thinking: "For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body."

Just try sometime walking in a straight line with your eyes closed, or writing your name with a pen in your toes. All the parts of your body need to function properly. Stop and think for a moment what really happens when someone steps on your toe, or you accidentally whack your thumb with a hammer. Your whole body is affected: your eyes twitch or water; your nose contorts as the pain causes you to breathe heavily; your mouth opens and lets out a cry from your throat. And then for hours or days later, the nagging discomfort of your sore thumb or toe leaves you feeling miserable.

We are individuals, to be sure, but we are individuals who contribute our individual God-given skills for the strengthening of the body of Christ. We are, in a very real sense, "All for one and one for all." Jesus made us individual members of His Body—the church. He claimed us as His own, making us one in His body even from the moment of our baptism. The Apostle Paul

writes in our text: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” No matter what our ethnic background or social status, no matter what gifts or abilities God has given us, the Holy Spirit has brought us into the one body of Christ through our baptism. Through that blessed Sacrament of water and Word, our sins are washed away and new life is ours, all because of what our Saviour did for us through His perfect life, innocent suffering, atoning death, and triumphant resurrection. We are never just baptized, but we are all baptized *into* the body of Christ. That washing with water and God’s Word brings us into an intimate relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Apostle Paul agrees when he writes: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Since we are *in* Christ, we are also incorporated or brought into a special relationship with His church. We are definitely now, “All for one and one for all.” We rely on one another and each other’s gifts in the church, just as the human body relies on each of its members.

“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.”

As Christians we rely on each other in the body of Christ—the church—in order that it be healthy and function properly. When one member of the body experiences pain through sickness, or sadness through death, we all feel it in the body of Christ. But Christ’s love, which He first showed to us, is something that we can now use to comfort one another in our distress. And when one member of the body of Christ is honoured or singled out for praise, we rejoice with them for we know that they have used their gifts and abilities for the strengthening of the entire body.

As a member of the body of Christ, God may not have blessed you with the skills to be a preacher. But He may have given you the ability to encourage others to be pastors. You may not have been blessed by God to be a teacher, or director of parish services, giving your service full-time to the Lord. But He may have blessed you with the ability speak to those in whom you see

these abilities in your congregation. God may not have blessed you with the desire to go to a foreign land and be His missionary. But He may have given you the financial resources to assist those who have been called. God may not have blessed you with qualities to serve Him and His church full-time, but you can pray that “the Lord of the harvest would send out labourers into his harvest.” You may not *think* you are qualified for full time service in the church. But you may want to reconsider the comments and encouragement of others who have seen qualities in you that they believe would make you a true servant for Christ.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Today we truly thank God for the gifts He has given to the individual members of the body of Christ. As we use the gifts He has so generously given to us, we do so to His glory and for the building up of His church. As we rely on each other’s God-given gifts, we can do no more precious work than telling others of Jesus’ love. Amen!