

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time: Not a Number, but an Integral Part

2-4-6-0-1. You hear this number numerous times in the musical adaption of Victor Hugo's great novel, Les Miserables. 2-4-6-0-1 is the prison number of the protagonist in the play and movie, Jean Val Jean. The antagonist, Inspector Javert, refuses to call Jean Val Jean by his name. To him he is a number, depersonalized, just one of many prisoners who by law has to be released, but who in the eyes of Javert, is not fit to have a name, just a number.

There is much in our society that also depersonalizes us. For example, we are often identified by our Social Security number. This is how all the branches of the government recognize us, as well as banks, investments firms, colleges, etc. All this can easily lead us to see ourselves as just a number, one of many, depersonalized before all except our closest relatives and companions.

This is not how God views us. He doesn't see someone as human being #18,352,786,674,504. To God we are each a unique person, a unique reflection of his image and likeness, an integral part of the Body of Christ. He created each of us to have a particular role in the living, spiritual entity that is the Body of Christ on earth.

St. Paul teaches this in today's second reading. Each of us has a necessary function in the Body. No two of us are alike, no two functions in the Body are alike. We are each necessary for the victory of that Body.

When we hear this reading about how the eye needs the body and the body needs the eye, the ear needs the body and the body needs the ear, and so forth, we ask ourselves, "So what is my function in the body? What is it that I have to offer?"

The reading presents general areas in the Body of Christ. Some are prophets, apostles, healers, teachers, etc. We can add, some are mothers, fathers, priests, ministers, artists, handymen, care givers, investors, service men and women. Some are health care workers, others protectors of legal rights. Some design buildings, others build them. All are different. Everyone is necessary. Together we each have our general roles in the Grand Plan, God's plan of love for his people. Together we constitute the vehicle for God's plan. Together we make God's plan a reality. Together we make up the Body of Christ.

None of our roles is insignificant. The Body of Christ needs every part, every person, to fulfill his or her role in life so that God's plan can triumph over the powers of evil. Perhaps, you work hard to make a life with your husband or wife; you spend endless hours molding your children, and you wonder what part your checking over fifth grade math homework has in the grand scheme of your life. Don't forget, the love, the care, and the encouragement you give to that ten year old helps him or her become the person God created your child to be.

Perhaps, you are no longer working, in fact retired for so long that you happily

forget what it was like to get up for work every day. You go about your routine the best you can, interrupting your week with a visit to this or that doctor, or two visits, or more. You wonder what part your present life has in God's plan. You forget that those younger than you are looking to you for wisdom and understanding and an example of a living Christianity. And when you spend your retirement drawing closer to God through prayer and Christian charity, you are helping the other members of the Body value their lives.

Perhaps, you are a single person, and you wonder, "What significance can there be to my life?" Well, how do others view you? Do they see you as a Christian in the way you approach your life and in the way you respect their lives? Do they witness your reaching out to others in their needs with your time? Do you give an example of Christ's love? If any of this is true, the why would you doubt the significance of your role in God's plan?

Perhaps, you are young and in school. Maybe you are a child in grade school or a Teen in high school or a young adult in college. You have tons of homework and wonder why you should take it so seriously. What purpose does this serve in the Grand Scheme? If you do your best to realize your potential, to become all you can become, then you will be able to fulfill the role that the Body needs you to fulfill. More than this, if you work as a Christian, if you fight off selfishness and are determined to be good to others, in the home, at school and outside the school, then you will be fulfilling the particular role that God has set aside for you right now.

These are some of the general roles which you and I have been given. But there are a lot of doctors and lawyers and mechanics and teachers, and parents, etc. Still, God does not view us as one of many in this field and that field. None of us is number 2-4-6-0-1. To God each of us is a person. Each of us fulfills our roles in a unique distinct way. There is no husband in the Body of Christ like John, no parent in the Body of Christ like Mary, no dentist like Dr. Frank, no administrative assistant like Harriot, no 7th grader like Sally and no sophomore like Billy. When John and Mary and Frank and Harriot and Sally and Billy and you and I live as parts of the Body of the Christ, we strengthen the presence of God in the world. At the same time we need the Body to give us the strength to reflect God's image, to be who He created us to be.

And then there are those talents the Lord has given each of us, unique talents. Two people may sing, but no two voices are identical. Each person brings a different tone, a different beauty to the world. Every talent we have is given to us to develop for the Body of Christ.

There is much in our world that attempts to depersonalize us. There is nothing with God that turns us into just another number. That is why we can be our true selves when we are united to God. It is also why we lose our identities when we turn away from Him. When we sin, we become to ourselves prisoner number 2-4-6-0-1, just one of many. People often say when they sin, "I'm just a guy like the other guys, just a girl like the other girls." Sin leads us to reject our unique identity before God. But when we

are united to God, we become the unique person God created us to be, a person with a name that God knows and a reason for being that brings joy to the Body of Christ and receives life from the Body of Christ.

Today's second reading reminds us of our dignity. We are children of God. In one Spirit we were baptized into one Body. This Body is not a single part but many. We are Christ's Body and, individually, parts of it. We pray today for the courage to embrace every moment of our lives as unique members of the Body, the Body that gives each of us meaning for our existence.