

Homily for the 3rd Sunday After Epiphany: Spread the Good News and Build Unity
By Ericca Cavender-Caldwell

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My Dear Siblings in Christ,

Today's readings invite us into a deep and life-changing reflection on the mission of the Church and our place in it. God has equipped each one of us with unique gifts, talents, and passions to be used for His glory. As a community of faith, we are called to use these gifts to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and to build unity within the body of the Church. Today, we are challenged to think about how we might serve one another, reaching out to those around us with the love and hope that we have received in Christ.

In the epistle reading from 1 Corinthians 12, Paul offers us a beautiful and profound image of the Church as the body of Christ. He writes, "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." In this metaphor, Paul reminds us that just as a body needs each part—whether it is the hands, feet, eyes, or ears—so too the Church needs each of us. We cannot function as a whole unless every individual is contributing their unique gifts to the greater work of God.

This is an essential truth for us to embrace: no gift is too small, no calling too insignificant. Sometimes we might feel that we aren't as important because some are not called to stand in the pulpit or lead a large ministry. Perhaps some are shy, or feel as though their abilities don't "stand out." But Paul makes it clear that every member of the body, whether visible or hidden, is indispensable. The Church needs the quiet prayers of the faithful, the hospitality of those who welcome others, the hands that serve behind the scenes, and the hearts that give of themselves in love and kindness. All these gifts, big or small, are necessary for the flourishing of the body of Christ.

When we begin to think of ourselves as parts of a body rather than individuals working alone, it becomes clear that we cannot function well without one another. Imagine a body where the eyes refuse to cooperate with the feet. What would happen? The body would be disoriented, disconnected, and unable to function as it should. The same is true for the Church. If any member of the

body—whether it be a person or a group—feels disconnected or excluded, the whole body suffers. But when we work together, as God intends, we can accomplish far more than we could alone.

Paul's message in 1 Corinthians isn't just a call to embrace our differences; it is also a call to celebrate them. We are meant to work together in unity, each using the gifts God has given us to contribute to the larger mission of the Church.

We all have something unique to offer, whether it's the gift of teaching, of mercy, of wisdom, of service, or of prayer. The key is to recognize that none of these gifts is less valuable than the others. Just because one person is in the spotlight doesn't mean that another person, who works quietly behind the scenes, is less significant. Every role is important in the kingdom of God.

This brings us to the Gospel reading from *Luke 4*, where we hear the powerful moment when Jesus declares that He is the fulfillment of the Scripture from Isaiah. He reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then He rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is declaring, in no uncertain terms, that He is the long-awaited Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises to bring justice, healing, and salvation to the world. He is not only declaring His mission but also inviting all of us to participate in it. The Good News isn't just a message for Jesus to deliver alone—it is a message that we, as His followers, are called to continue spreading.

We are called to bring good news to the poor, to release the captives, to restore sight to the blind, and to set the oppressed free. The Good News is a message of freedom, healing, and hope. It is a message that speaks to the heart of human suffering and promises a way out, a way to wholeness, and a way to God. Jesus came to offer salvation not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles, the outcasts, and the marginalized of society. His message is universal and radical in its inclusivity.

Jesus' proclamation that He has come to fulfill God's promise invites us to look around and ask ourselves: Who are the poor in our community? Who are the captives—those bound by addiction, fear, or shame? Who are the blind—those who can't see hope or purpose in their lives? Who are the oppressed—those suffering from injustice or discrimination? Jesus calls us to see these people not as problems to be fixed but as beloved children of God in need of the Good News of His love and grace.

The Good News is transformative. It changes lives, it heals brokenness, and it builds bridges where there was once division. But in order for this transformation to happen, it must be shared. The Gospel is not meant to be kept to ourselves. It is meant to be lived out in our actions, in the way we serve others, in the way we welcome the stranger or alien, and in the way we build up the body of Christ. This is where our unique gifts come into play.

When we look at the world around us, we can see that there are many who need to hear this Good News. The world is changing rapidly, and with that change comes new challenges, new anxieties, and new fears. The vulnerable in our society—those who are often overlooked—are still in need of the love and grace that only the Gospel can provide. As we look at the world around us, we are called to ask: Who are the people that need to hear the Good News today? Who are the people that need our help, our encouragement, our love?

Perhaps we can relate to the Gentiles of Jesus' time. Nazareth was a Jewish city, and the Gentiles would have been considered outsiders, marginalized, and oppressed. Yet Jesus calls all people, regardless of background, to receive the Good News. The love of Christ is not limited by gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, or social status. Jesus' message is for everyone.

This is why our call to evangelism and service is so important. It's not enough to share the Good News with those we know or with those who are already in the Church. We are called to go out and reach the people who are outside our immediate circles. We are called to look for those who may have slipped through the cracks, those who need love and hope, and bring them into the family of God.

At St. Andrew's, we have long been known for our work in service, reaching out to those in need, and sharing God's love with the world. But as we enter a time

of discernment, we must ask ourselves: How can we continue this work in new and creative ways? How can we serve those who are most vulnerable in our community? How can we use our gifts, our time, and our resources whether they be large or small to spread the Good News in ways that are relevant to the needs of today?

Fred Rogers of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood once said, "*The greatest thing we can do is to let people know that they are loved and capable of loving.*" In a world that often seems divided, overwhelmed, and hurting, our message is one of love. It's not a passive or weak love; it's an active, transformative love that reaches out, that serves, that heals, and that builds unity in the body of Christ.

So, my friends, as we move forward today, I encourage each of us to reflect on the gifts God has given us. How can we use those gifts to serve others? How can we spread the Good News in our own lives? Whether in small, quiet ways or in larger public acts of service, we all have a role to play in building the body of Christ and spreading the hope of the Gospel.

Let us remember that we are part of a larger body, and together, using our unique gifts, we can accomplish far more than we could alone. And as we do so, let us find joy in the knowledge that the Good News we share is not just a message but a way of life—a way of love that brings healing and hope to the world.

In Christ we pray. Amen.