

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Sanctity of Life Sunday
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

A MEMBER OF THE ONE TRUE BODY.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from St Paul's first epistle letter to the Corinthians, the 12th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Thirty-eight years ago, President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation designating January 22, 1984, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. (cf: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/proclamation-5147-national-sanctity-human-life-day-1984>) Ever since that proclamation, on the third or fourth Sunday of January, pastors, churches, and life organizations across the United States have observed *Sanctity of Life Sunday* to raise awareness of the attacks waged against human life in our nation.

When a pastor brings up topics such as transgender, crisis pregnancy, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, assisted suicide, and euthanasia, many Christians get uncomfortable. They'll say: "*Pastor, those hot-button political topics have no place in the church.*" And while I agree that someone's political agenda shouldn't be promoted in the Divine Service, as baptized believers in Christ Jesus, each of us must recognize that Jesus is the Author of life. His Word is truth. (John 17:17) He alone has the *final word* on all questions of sex and gender – and – issues of life and death from conception to natural death.

Satan wants you to believe that the Church is comingling politics and religion. The devil, the world, and the sinful flesh have seduced society into believing that "*it's your body so it's your choice*" to do whatever you wish with *your* body – and if there's a little one growing in the womb, mom can also do whatever she wishes with *that* body. The devil deceives you by saying: "*Did God actually say that life begins at conception? Did God actually say that boys cannot become girls and girls cannot become boys? Did God actually say that while you no longer find value in living or you are dying from an incurable disease that you should not seek assisted suicide?*" But the devil is a liar. According to God's Word, your body is not yours to do with as you please. St Paul writes:

"... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

God chose you in Christ Jesus and that changes everything. In the beginning God created man in His own image, male and female He created them, calling them to be fruitful and multiply and be

stewards over His creation. (cf: Genesis 1:27-28) Therefore all human life is sacred and is to be treated with special respect. Death was never part of God's original plan for mankind but was a result of sin coming into the world. (cf: Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12) And because all mankind is cursed by sin, in His infinite love, God chose you and all mankind before the foundation of the world for adoption to Himself as sons through Christ Jesus whom He sent to be the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. (cf: Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 John 4:9-10)

Scripture teaches that even before conception, God has written out the course of everyone's days, from their conception to natural death. (cf: Psalm 139:16) This means that no one is conceived apart from the will of God. Scripture also teaches that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (cf: 1 Timothy 2:4) It teaches that the Holy Spirit desires to call all mankind to faith through God's Word and unite them to Christ and to each other in the waters of Holy Baptism. (cf: Romans 6:3-5, 10:17) Each person is an indispensable part of the Body of Christ. St Paul writes:

"¹² 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. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

The human body is made up of many, many different parts: groups of cells that form tissues and tissues that form organs and organs into organ system, eyes, ears, hands, feet, and so on. So, too, is the Body of Christ, the one holy Christian and Apostolic Church. It is made up of many unique and diverse individuals, slave and free, from various political and socioeconomic backgrounds. All who have been baptized have been united into one Body and one Spirit – and are one in Christ Jesus. (cf: Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 4:4-5) To be sure, none of this is of your own doing. You could no more chose to be conceived than to be saved. Jesus says to you:

"¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (John 15:16)

You are *critical* to the Body of Christ. Sure, you might not think so. You may not be the most talented singer, speaker, or leader in the congregation. I know that I'm certainly not. Or maybe you believe that everything in Christ's Church can operate just fine without you. In our text St Paul stresses that no matter how insignificant a part of the body may seem, each has its own vital role to play in the healthy functioning of the whole.

Perhaps pride and jealousy cause you to desire that God had made you a different part of the body with a higher or lower gift. Just like your human body, every member of the Body of Christ cannot have the same function. Repent of thinking that the Church doesn't need you. Repent of your pride and jealousy. Repent of your rebelling against God's will for your life. It's not you or your fellow believer that placed you into the Body with your specific gift. St Paul says that:

"... God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." (1 Corinthians 12:18)

God arranged eyes and hands, head and feet – each to assist and complement each other. The body is like a choir or an orchestra, where each singer or musician has an assigned and vital role in producing a pleasing result. Similarly, God chose you as an individual part of Body and

appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. If He has granted you the gift of music, bear fruits with hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. (cf: Ephesians 5:19) If He has granted you the gift of teaching, bear your fruits in the Sunday School department where we have plenty of children and too few teachers. If He has granted you the gift of leadership, bear your fruits on the Church Council leading St Timothy into the future. If He has blessed you with the gift of finances, bear your fruits of tithes and offerings so that the lights and heat stay on, the Gospel is proclaimed, and the Sacraments are administered in this place.

No matter how insignificant a part of the body may seem, each has its own vital role to play in the healthy functioning of the whole. Even those parts that you and I think are lacking and ineffective. St Paul says:

“... the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it.” (1 Corinthians 12:21–24)

Unfortunately, the world views those born with physical and mental disabilities as weak and unpresentable. If those disabilities are discovered before birth, and for the unplanned or inconvenient pregnancy, society’s answer is abortion. People who are no longer able to work, no longer find value in living, or are dying from an incurable disease – now seek out assisted suicide. They call it death with dignity. They call assisted suicide – death with dignity. Death with dignity sounds majestic but it is not. There is no dignity in taking your own life. The only One who died with dignity died in **glory** at the hands of sinful men, bleeding and dying to purchase you from death into life. You are not your own. As for all of your self-perceived deficiencies, it is:

“... God [who] arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” (1 Corinthians 12:18)

God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; He chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong. (cf: 1 Corinthians 1:27) On the Last Day, many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first. (cf: Matthew 19:30) Jesus would remind you that His grace is sufficient for His power is made perfect in weakness. (cf: 2 Corinthians 12:9) In His rich wisdom our Lord has given us these parts of the body to be treated with greater modesty, to serve in love and compassion just as Christ loves and compassionately serves you. He would have you love one another with brotherly affection, attempting to outdo one another in showing honor and service to those deemed inferior. (cf: Romans 12:10)

“²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

Brothers and sisters, in Christ, Life Sunday is not political. Christ Jesus is the Author of life. His Word is truth. He alone has the **final word** on all questions of sex and gender – and – issues of life and death from conception to natural death. Thankfully, the God who chose to knit you together in your mother’s womb (cf: Psalm 139:13) also chose not to let you die in your sin. He chose instead to redeem you so you could be reconciled to Him. For all the times you have

sinned against God with your poor life choices, God chose to send His Son to die in your place, taking away the guilt of sins of abortion, transgenderism, and assisted suicide, regardless of your active and passive participation in it. He died to forgive you of your sin of not bearing fruits of being part of the Body of Christ, however He has assigned you. He died to forgive you of failing to show honor and service to those who society deems as inferior. Repent, confess your sins, and receive our Lord's Absolution.

As a called and ordained servant of the Word, in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ~~F~~ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The God who chose to give you life at the moment of conception is the same God who chose to rescue you and redeem you and give you eternal salvation. And He did it by sending His Son, Jesus, to experience every stage of human life so you could be forgiven and given life everlasting with Him. In love and grace, God chose you before the foundation of the world to be His child. In Baptism, you were united into the one Body and one Spirit – and are one in Christ Jesus, a member of the true Body. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. He has chosen you and appointed you for a purpose – to serve as His disciple by bearing fruit for His kingdom. So glorify God in your body. By God's grace bear good fruit and make God-pleasing choices that glorify God in all of your life choices for the sake of the One who first chose you.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.