Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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Our faith has so many beautiful teachings it's a wonder that our hearts don't burst with joy.

Consider these two:

The Incarnation. The Son of God becomes the Son of Man so we can become the children of God. It is the meaning of Christmas. It is the beginning of our faith.

The mystical body of Christ. We have become one with Christ and each other. It is an extension of the Incarnation. It is *our* Christmas story.

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians compares the mystical body to the body we can touch: "Just as the human body is one body but has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is the spiritual body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

The comparison makes me think of the old spiritual some of us sang as kids: just as the backbone is connected to the shoulder bone and the shoulder bone connected to the neck bone and the neck bone connected to the head bone — all parts of one body — in Christ I am part of you and you are part of me and we are really one, indivisible and interdependent. What could be simpler, and more profound?

We all belong, to Christ and to each other. Everyone has a purpose. We are one in Christ Jesus and, despite appearances, connected to each other. We need each other.

St. Paul writes: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I do not need you.' " We are many members of one body, and what hurts one, hurts all of us. What honors one, honors all. We depend upon Christ "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) and the Christ who lives in each of us.

> What blesses one, blesses all, independent of space and time. The mystical body of Christ is not a dogma, it is a vibrant spiritual community with Christ as its head.
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We can trace the biblical DNA of the mystical body to Jesus himself, who told us that someday we would understand that "I am in my Father, you are in *me*, and I am in *you*" (John 14:20), and went on to teach us how to pray by saying, "*Our* Father…"

St. Paul then described it, the saints lived it, and in 1943 Pope Pius XII promulgated the teaching in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*. That letter describes the church as a mystical union of all Christians with Jesus as its head, the word mystical meaning "of a spiritual nature." The term mystical body signifies a spiritual union, an essential oneness, an unbreakable wholeness.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council in a historic document called *Lumen Gentium*, or "Light of the World," expanded the idea of mystical body to embrace everybody of all time because Christ died for all of us We are all baptized — whether by water or fire or desire — by one Spirit, and, as St. Paul reminds us again and again, "now we are Christ's one body."

Isn't it amazing how science now bolsters spirituality, affirming what the mystics have written about for centuries? We hear about "the butterfly effect," how when a butterfly flaps its wings in India a storm brews in Indiana. What happens to each of us happens to all of us. When a child in Calcutta goes hungry a child in California can sense her pain. When a Samaritan helps a wounded man on the side of the road, a hospital goes up 2,000 years later.

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So, we need each other because we *are* each other. Our work on earth is to glow for God and become light to each other: the weak and the strong, the celebrated and the ignored, those on the inside and those on the outs, those in the shadows, and even those who are despised.

"To be connected with the church," writes theologian Ronald Rolheiser, "is to be associated with scoundrels, warmongers, fakes, child molesters, murderers, adulterers and hypocrites of every description. It also, at the same time, identifies

you with saints and the finest persons of heroic soul of every time, country, race, and gender. To be a member of the church is to carry the mantle of both the worst sin and the finest heroism of soul because the church always looks exactly as it looked at the original crucifixion, God hung among thieves."

The mystical body of Christ not only points to a profound truth of our being, it is profoundly practical. It is the basis for charity, it is the foundation for forgiveness. It inspires us to see the truth — and be the truth — in our daily lives.

When standing in line at the checkout counter, I remind myself that the lady in front of me is, like me, a member of the one mystical body of Christ, and that the injunction to love her as I love myself (Mark 12:31), is literally true because she is part of our one Self. A little miracle then happens: I not only love her, I *like* her, and if her credit card is no good or the odd piece of kohlrabi doesn't scan, I don't get mad.

While walking down the street, I smile at a stranger walking his pit bull and choose to see him the same way God sees me. I say hello, and an alchemy of grace happens: The stranger smiles back and says hello, and we are strangers no more. What we give, we get right back. Even dogs know that.

> We all belong. We are one. We love our neighbor as ourself because we are our neighbor. And our neighbor is us.
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While watching the news — seeing people die, children starve, families struggle — I ask Jesus, the head of the body connected to all those who seem to be "out there" — to see for me. I close my eyes, and hear him whisper: "My peace I give you, my peace I leave you" (John 14:27). We are all members of one spiritual body. Any member can literally give another member her peace, across space and time, and the peace of both will increase and multiply. We can watch the news and ask God for peace of mind and give that peace to someone else, and suddenly experience a peace that is beyond understanding. This is what it means to be a member of the mystical body of Christ!

We all belong. We are one. We love our neighbor as ourself because we are our neighbor. And our neighbor is us. We even love those whom we think are our enemies, because in the kingdom of God there are no enemies. There is only Christ and each of us, all of us, inseparable members of one great body of love. It is real. It is there. It's *here*.

When you gaze at your Christmas tree and its many lights of red and blue and green, and its many branches holding many ornaments of every shape and texture, realize that the stable beneath it with the infant in his crib symbolizes the Incarnation — God become man so we may become like God — and that the many shepherds and wise men and sheep together with all those lights and ornaments remind us of our reality in the mystical body of Christ — many parts shining bright as one glorious tree of life.

And if you don't have a tree, that's all right, you get the idea.

Then, when you go to Mass on Christmas Day and get in your pew, be sure to look in front of you, to your left, then your right, then behind you, and you will see what you already are, an indispensable member of one great glowing family in Christ. What on earth could be more beautiful?