Written by Chiara Lubich
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"There are many members, yet one body."
(1 Cor 12:20)

Have you ever visited a community that is alive because it is made up of authentic Christians? Have you ever attended some of their gatherings? Have you tried to understand their way of life? If you did, then you must have noticed that the people who make up this community have different roles: some have a gift for speaking and can communicate spiritual truths that touch your soul. Others have a gift for helping, caring for the sick, or providing aid, and it is amazing how much they can do to benefit those who suffer. Some teach with such wisdom that they add new strength to the faith you already had. There are those who know the art of organizing or leadership, while others have a gift for understanding those around them and offering consolation to those in need.

Yes, you may have noticed all of these things, but what is striking above all in such a vibrant community like this is that all the members have the same spirit, something that you seem to feel in the air and that makes this particular community into a single body.

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Paul too, in a special way, found himself before vibrant Christian communities, communities that had actually come into being through the power of his extraordinary preaching.

One was the young community of Corinth, to whom the Holy Spirit had very generously conferred gifts, or charisms, as they are called. In those days extraordinary charisms were given for the special vocation of the early Church.
Even after the uplifting experience of receiving numerous gifts from the Holy Spirit, however, this community fell into rivalries and confusion, even among those who received such gifts. Therefore it was necessary to ask for help from Paul, who was at Ephesus.

Paul was quick to reply through one of his remarkable letters, explaining how those special graces should be used.

He explained that there is a variety of charisms and ministries, such as apostles, prophets, and teachers, but there is only one Lord who bestows them all. He said that in the community there are those who work miracles and those who heal, while others have special gifts for serving or for leadership. There are those who can speak in tongues, and those who can interpret them. But, he added, there is only one God from whom all these gifts have come.

Since these various gifts are expressions of the same Holy Spirit, who gives them freely to each person, these gifts will always be in harmony with one another, always complementing one another. They are not given for one's personal satisfaction, nor should they be a cause of vanity or of pride, but they are given for a common purpose: to build up the community. Their goal is service. Thus, they cannot cause rivalries or confusion.

Although Paul was thinking of the particular gifts that concerned the life of the community as a whole, he saw that each member possessed an individual talent, a special ability that should be utilized for the good of all. Each person should be happy with what he or she has been given.

He envisioned the community as a body and asked, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?" (I Cor 12:17-19). As it is,

"There are many members, yet one body."

If each of us is different, each is able to be a gift for the others. In this way, we all can be ourselves and fulfill the plan that God has for us in relation to the others.

In a community in which this variety of gifts work together, Paul saw such a reality that he gave it the splendid name, Christ. The fact is that this original body, made up of members of the community, was truly the body of Christ. Christ truly continues to live in his Church and the Church is his body. Through baptism, in fact, the Holy Spirit incorporates the believer into Christ, and he or she becomes a part of the community. There, all are Christ, every division is eliminated, and every discrimination is overcome.

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Since the body is one, then the members of the Christian community can bring to fulfillment their new way of life by accomplishing unity among themselves, a unity that presupposes diversity and pluralism. The community does not resemble a block of lifeless matter, but a living organism with different members.
To provoke division is, for Christians, to do the opposite of what they should do.

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How then can you live this new word that Scripture proposes?
You should have great respect for the different functions, gifts and talents present in the Christian community.

You need to be open to the entire Church in all its aspects, not only to the particular community that you know or you belong to, like the parish community or the religious organization or movement you are a member of. You need to be open to the universal Church in all her manifold expressions.

You should feel that everything is your own because you are part of this one body.
As a result, just as you consider and protect every part of your physical body, you should do the same with every member of the spiritual body…

You should value all of them and do your part so that they may be useful to the Church in the best possible way…

Do not be scornful of what God is asking of you right where you are. Even though your daily work may seem monotonous and lacking in significance, we all belong to the same body. As members, each one of us participates in the activities of the entire body, even though we remain in the place that God has chosen for us.
What is essential, then, is that you possess that charism that, as Paul proclaims, surpasses all others; and that is love, love for each person you meet, love for all people on earth.

It is through love, through mutual love, that the many members are able to be one body.

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