

Fr. John McCusker, OSB
Sunday, September 27, 2015 – Year B
Homily on Mutual Influence of the Mystical Body
(Nm 11:25-29, Jas 5:1-6, Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48)

In the Spring of 2002, I was a Freshman in college, and in addition to dealing with the adjustment to college life, I was discovering the riches of our Catholic faith. But Lent that year was a painful time for Catholics. Serious scandal had arisen due to the ugly behavior of her priests. I was insulated from having my faith shaken due to the example of many faithful priests I had known since I was young. I suspect most of us could say something similar. But for some Catholics, this scandal led them to sin—it became a reason to stop practicing. To call it quits.

Now, those priests who caused scandal did not intend that their behavior would eventually shake the faith of so many. Similarly, all those faithful priests you and I have known did not set about to help preserve our faith during Lent of 2002. It just happened that way. These were the unforeseen consequences of the fidelity of the one group, and the infidelity of the other.

We can recognize here a principle: for a Christian, there is no such thing as a purely private deed. Because we are all members of one another through Christ's Mystical Body, the actions of one always end up affecting the whole. Our private fidelity to God brings health and growth to the entire Church, just as healthy blood benefits the entire body.

To put it in corporate terms, every single member of the institution has an impact on the bottom line.

In our first reading, Moses said to Joshua, "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!"

This desire of Moses was fulfilled in the New Covenant. In our Baptism, when the minister poured the water and anointed our head with chrism, we were conformed to Christ as priest, prophet, and king, and given a share in his Spirit. It is our job to use the gifts we've been given, even to exercise that spirit of prophecy.

How is this done? Don't prophets live in the desert, raving about repentance? Really a prophet simply conveys a message from God, and acts as a sign pointing to the truth about God. So the grace we received at Baptism is meant gradually to shape us into a living message from God, a "word" of God, a sign which often quietly, unobtrusively, but firmly points to Jesus Christ, to His Church, to the ultimate destination we are meant to receive.

I'm sure we could each name individuals have given to us this prophetic witness: a grandmother, a relative, a coworker, a friend whom we were able to see up close in their very ordinary Christian lives, the extraordinary grace of God.

And more often it is in the seemingly little and insignificant actions which by God's grace become prophetic, that form us in holiness, that cause the Kingdom of God to arrive on earth in a small way. These small events are like the insignificant, poor baby born in a cave, which also meant the arrival of the Kingdom.

It's in that small choice to pray, to be honest when cheating would be so easy, to remain faithful to our spouse and family in trial, or in the face of confusion and darkness, to continue trusting and believing in Jesus.

These “yes’s” to God, so often completely hidden from the eyes of men, are not only very pleasing to Him, but they contribute mightily to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ, and have ripple effects on our neighbor.

And these ripple effects are far greater than we can imagine, and most often we are unaware of it. Remember those priests whose faithful witness insulated us from taking scandal during the abuse crisis—without realizing it, they had given a prophetic testimony, pointing to the truth: the Church is good, don’t believe the newspapers; and prepared their flock for the time of trial. Or on the flip side, think of Pontius Pilate, in putting an innocent man to death just once to placate the crowd, without realizing it he condemned to death the righteous one, the eternal Son of God.

It is in part to manifest these influences that there will be a final judgment: So that we can see, before God and all the angels, the wonderful unknown consequences our cooperation with God’s grace has had on so many, on the whole Body of Christ; and so that those who have obstinately resisted God’s grace see the full consequences of their destructive choice on themselves and on others.

We live in an age of nihilism, when many are convinced their lives are devoid of meaning, and desperately try to be distracted from it by entertainment, or whatever. But for the Christian, this cannot be—every moment is shot through with meaning, eternal meaning, because everything we do can be directed to Christ and to His People.

And our Lord promises a divine payment for everything, no matter how insignificant: “Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to me, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.” This reward, the crown of our good influence, will be beyond anything we can imagine—the reward is God Himself.

In the words of St. Paul: “We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”¹

¹ Ephesians 4:15-16