

THE SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 12.12-31a

"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. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body.

... On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect;

Maurice's sermon began like this:-

"When we were in St Peters in Musselburgh there were two women who joined the community and the church there – Margaret and Christine. They had Down's Syndrome and had just moved into the neighbourhood. Like many people with Down's they could be unusual, had a disregard for the rules. They would come in to church (making a great performance of keeping quiet) shuffling up to their seats – beside us – waving to their friends, settle in and with a lot of rustling get the sweeties out of their wrappers. Throughout the service Margaret especially would play with her bangles, comb her hair, show off her polished nails or any new bit of jewelry to those around. At the peace, she excelled, always up for a big hug and a kiss. On more than one occasion she could be seen coming back from communion, smiling and waving and removing a bit of the wafer from her teeth. If she got really bored at the sermon, she couldn't help giving a loud sigh or even a tut-tut.

One Sunday our rector, Jenny, came in and began saying she couldn't take the service, she was too upset. She had just heard that her brother had died, killed in an accident. We were all shocked. Didn't know what to do. We felt so sorry for her, but just sat there as she wept. It was wee Margaret who got up slowly out of her pew and went up and put her arms round Jenny, gave her a kiss and began to pat her back. Now people who know about Down's will tell you how affectionate folk with that syndrome can be.

We thought that Margaret and Christine were the weaker members of that congregation – the ones we had to carry, to make allowances for. They were the embarrassing organs, best kept out of sight and treated with modesty [if possible!]. But they turned out to be vital organs, the ones who cared for us.

We have discovered since then that it can be the emotionally wrecked people, the alcoholics, the ones who are mourning who can sometimes bring a depth of compassion and a level of spirituality that take your breath away. It is often the vulnerable ones who lead us into greater truth and a more human way. They are the one who minister, they are the important, needed human contact. For their sakes, most of all, the Word himself became flesh.

We should protect the apparently weaker members of our communities and allow their unique and vital truth, beauty and meaning to be realised. Thankfully we are not all the same, *If the whole body were a mouth, where would the seeing be?"*