

St Botolph's Church Worthing
1 Corinthians 12: 12-31, Luke 4: 14-21
Father Roger Walker

Last Sunday we heard Saint Paul telling us how God gives different spiritual gifts to Christians so that together we may work to build up his Church. Saint Paul may have thought that that teaching - from the beginning of 1 Corinthians 12 - was possibly a bit too theological for some of the congregation, and so he gives a simpler illustration of how we can have different gifts and yet work effectively together. It is his famous simile of the Church as a body and it was very easy for everyone to see how feet, hands, ears, eyes and so on all have to work together for a body to function harmoniously.

There are, he writes, 'many parts, but one body'. He reinforces the sense of interdependence by saying that all parts of the body must have an equal concern for each other because, as we know only too well, if one part of the body suffers every part suffers with it. And he tells them - and us - 'you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it' and then he goes on to explain how the different spiritual gifts he wrote of in last week's Reading fit us for various roles in the Church. So the Church has apostles, like Paul, people who travel from place to place proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Our modern day equivalent is Bishops and missionaries, and you can see they how require a gift of wisdom, which enables them to relate God's eternal actions to the world today. Then prophets, and we spoke of the way in which they say to the Church 'this is what God is doing and what He wants *now*'. Then come teachers, who of course need the gift of knowledge, and we can see them among us in the clergy, teachers in schools and Sunday schools, study groups and so on. This Church and every Church would be very much the poorer without them.

Then come miracles and healing - both spiritual gifts - before we come to something that can really link into our lives - those able to help others and those with gifts of administration. These are the outworking of the gift of faith and you will readily recognise the faithful helpers and administrators among you and if you are being a bit lazy about using the gift of faith you have been given, you ought to be able to see yourself in one of these roles and move into it. Finally comes the gift of Tongues and Interpretation - not one that we see a great deal in our Church - and Paul ends by reiterating that you cannot expect to see all these gifts in one person.

It has been one of the great errors of the Church of England to have expected in the past that the Vicar would do it all. If you have learned nothing else over the past three years it is that this is not the case, and you will be a healthier and stronger church for it. So how do we apply the simile of the body to St Botolph's, and how can it show us a way into the future? We can see quite easily the different roles that individuals play within the Church and we can put them into the categories that St Paul listed at the end of our reading. And these are not the only ones. In a list in Ephesians, Paul includes also Pastors and Evangelists and we can easily think of ways in which God's spiritual gifts

lead to other roles that enrich his Church, and we need to pray that God will continue to pour out his spiritual gifts on all of us in the different things we do for Him.

But probably the most important of Paul's words in this reading come in verse 23 where he tells us that there should be no division in the body, but its parts should have equal concern for each other. That is surprisingly hard to achieve, because the Devil is always there tempting us. And the more a good work is being done for God, the more the Devil wants to break it up. One of the great marks of the Devil's work is division. I have seen it a good many times down the years and would be sad to see it here after all you have achieved together.

But be aware that you are in danger. The Devil wanted to see St Botolph's closed: he would like to see every Church closed! And he failed - so now he will redouble his efforts to sow division among you, so that the Church – the Congregation, not the building – collapses into factions who will not work together and the number of new members will fall as it will no longer be viable to keep the Church open. *You* don't want this to happen after working so hard to avert closure, but the Devil does. God doesn't want it to happen, but he give us free will – that is, freedom to use His spiritual gifts wisely and to support and pray for those to whom particular gifts are given *or* the freedom to give in and complain, criticise and spread division. Let's have our eyes open to know that - in Saint Paul's words – 'We are the Body of Christ and each one of us a part of it' and 'all the parts should have equal concern for each other' Have that thought in your minds as you face the challenges of the future.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

24.1.16