

[Readings: Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; John 2:1-11]

When adults first meet someone, there are two questions usually asked: "What's your name?" and "What do you do?" I wonder what children and teens ask each other. Maybe, "What school do you go to?"

So much of who we are centers not on who we are, but what we do. Identifying ourselves is the key to understanding today's three readings.

This is what Paul was getting at. Paul is urging the Corinthian Christians to stop their puny, petty squabbles over perceived differences and instead to embrace the greater unity that bound them together. These Corinthian Christians had benefitted from different teachers, hailed from different backgrounds, were of different generations, and drew from different social classes. They had genuinely unique histories and lives. But they all had one thing in common: they had ultimately been led to the same place of wood and water, the wood of the cross and the water of baptism. We are called to do the same.

Paul doesn't ask for Jesus' followers to give up their unique identities. Later in this letter Paul emphasizes the matchless role each member of Christ's body plays in making it strong and whole. The existence and experience of the eye is different from that of the hand or the ear or the foot. Each body part or "member" has a different perspective on the whole. Each has a different function within the body. But the body is still one whole. It is not at war against itself.

Christianity began as a working man's religion. Matthew tells us that immediately after Jesus began a public preaching ministry, he took four fishermen as his apprentices. He was walking by the Sea of Galilee and spied Andrew and Peter casting their nets. He called them to follow him, promising to make them fishers of men. "Follow me" is a call to them and us, of "follow-ship."

You and I are to follow Jesus. Work is to take a secondary role in our lives. If Christ is truly our Master, then work cannot be equally important. We may be engaged in work, but never married to it. And whenever we are pressed or tempted to make work supreme, we are to recall the story of the four fishermen.

We are to remember how they left their nets and their boats to go and be with Jesus, to do what he would have them do. Following this logic, we can see the difference between “having a job” at church and having a ministry at church.

If you are doing it because no one else will, it's a job. If you are doing it to serve the Lord, it's a ministry. If you're doing it just well enough to get by, it's a job. If you're doing it to the best of your ability, it's a ministry. If you'll do it only so long as it doesn't interfere with other activities, it's a job. If you're committed to staying with it even when it means letting go of other things, it's a ministry.

It's hard to get excited about a job. It's almost impossible not to get excited about a ministry. An average parish is filled with people doing jobs. But a GREAT parish is filled with people involved in ministry.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” says Isaiah in today's First Reading. This is the first half of the First Reading for what used to be called Midnight Mass but is now called the Christmas Mass during the Night.

How much of our journey is still going on in the darkness? Are we courageous enough to walk out into the light? The light of Christ? The light of the Church?

It's been said that in most Catholic parishes in the United States, there are five primary areas of ministry, outreach and service: Worship and Liturgy, Christian Service, Faith Formation, Administration and Stewardship, and Evangelization. Archbishop Allen Vigneron, our Chief Shepherd of this Archdiocese of Detroit, has missioned us to “Catch the Fire” of the Gospel, and to move each parish from “maintenance to ministry.” I want to do that here. But it takes a great parish with people involved in ministry, not simply doing jobs.

I had hoped to share my dreams and visions for this coming year with you three weeks ago, but God and life had other plans. Next weekend will be the first time that I will be able to preach at all the Masses, and then I will share my dreams and vision for St. Martin de Porres Parish. Stay tuned! AMEN!