



A journal for restless minds

BODY PARTS

To everything there is a purpose

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DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

Body Parts

To everything there is a purpose

There is something to be said for metaphors, those handy-dandy figures of speech that make imperfect sense while granting meaning to a thing we might otherwise well not understand.

Saint Paul was a master at metaphoric tropes. Which is a good thing, for much of what he wrote would have been difficult, if not impossible, to decipher without their use. One particular passage—among many—provides a model for properly addressing several controversial issues of our current day and times. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul uses the metaphor of the body to explain the Body of Christ, the Church, and the indispensable importance of each member, no matter their differences:

"¹²For 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.



¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should 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. ... ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell! ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ... ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and those parts of the body which we think less honora-

ble we invest with the greater honor and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, ²⁵that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-15, 17-18, 20-26).

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Life Is Not Fair

The kingdom is one of justice

If this week's homily feels vaguely familiar it is because it is partially derived from the first homily I delivered six years ago after my diacnal ordination.

Today's Gospel tugs at our sense of "fair play." We are all familiar with the concept of fairness. From an early age, we learn what "fairness" is all about. Soon after the words "No!" and "Mine!" we all learn that marvelous phrase, "It's not fair!" As parents, we have all heard it from our children, I heard it frequently from my own daughters even though they knew what I would say to them in response, "Life's not fair, so deal with it."

Our sense of fairness is most keen when we believe that we are the victims of an injustice. Or when we feel someone is treated more favorably. How many of us have felt someone treated us unfairly or favored another over us? All of us have endured some hurt when our dreams are dashed or ambitions denied. Preferred treatment can lay the foundation for many bitter memories.

But Jesus isn't speaking about fairness; rather he is telling us that the kingdom of heaven is one of justice. And, there is a very real difference between the two.

Fairness is based upon self-interest. When we insist upon our rights without regard to the needs of others, we are focusing on ourselves to the exclusion of others. How can God reward us when we insist upon mak-

ing ourselves "Number One?"

Justice, however, is based upon the needs of others. When we focus upon the needs of others, even if they encroach upon our rights, we sacrifice ourselves for the Kingdom, just as Jesus did.

The men who had worked all day received a normal day's wages. But they believed that the men who had worked less than they should receive less, particularly those who had worked only one hour. Yet they received the same amount. Those who had worked the longest complained because they felt that they had been treated unfairly.



We have a tendency, as the parable aptly illustrates, to covet and to be resentful of what others receive from God. The owner of the vineyard asks those who have worked the longest and (presumably) the hardest for him, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" The point is that God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness are God's to give away as God sees fit.

God tells us that "... my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways." God is more than just to us; God is generous. God is generous in opening the doors of his kingdom to

all who will enter, both those who have labored a life-time for him and those who come at the last hour.

God's pay scale is very small; he pays everyone exactly the same wage. You can't climb the corporate ladder in the Kingdom of God because there is no ladder! Those who enter His kingdom share equally in his love; we are all paid the same wage; and the wage paid by God to each is eternal life with him in heaven.

The question is, what does God, in justice, owe us; what do we deserve; what have we of our own merit earned? If we are honest with ourselves we would admit that no one, absolutely no one is owed anything, especially eternal life with God, from God. You cannot earn eternal life; you cannot work your way into heaven; you cannot achieve salvation by your own efforts, for salvation is a gift freely and generously given by God to anyone who would receive it.

It is God's gift; we do not deserve it and we cannot earn it, ever. God opens the gates to all of us, no matter our station in life, because he is generous and merciful.

This is a "thought of God" that is far above our thoughts. If God were strictly just to us we would all be in a bad way for no one can truly say that they have earned God's gifts. Our hope lies in the fact that God is generous and merciful. We could say that in God's kingdom, life isn't fair. If it were, we would all be in deep trouble.

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The problem, which the parable clearly and rightly shows, is this: like the workers who complain, we seek fairness not justice. We believe we are owed something for whatever it is we do. *"What's in it for me?"* is our typical response whenever we are asked to do something for another.

In the eyes of those who had worked all day, they deserved something more than what they had agreed to be paid. Out of fairness. After all, they had worked more than those who worked little yet received the same compensation. And that is the crux of the matter: they were working only for themselves; working only for what they could receive for themselves. And isn't that what we do as well, whenever we ask, *"What's in it for me?"*

It seems as though we simply cannot resist anthropomorphizing God, that is, projecting our human thoughts, desires and actions, our humanity onto the divine. That isn't how God is. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD."* God doesn't think as we do. God doesn't act as we do. We have been created in his image and likeness, not God in ours.

"God starts from a different place. Having all that is required, God's actions do not spring from need, unless it be the need to give. The whole point of God's love is in giving something to the other."

We needy creatures, however, act most basically out of insufficiency. It is understandable that we perceive all love in terms of fulfilling our lack. The other,

*whether God, human, animal, or thing, stands before us to serve our needs."*¹

Jesus begins this parable by saying: *"The kingdom of heaven is like ..."* and yet we never seem to make the connection. The parable is about God and his unbounded generosity; it is not about earning what we believe we deserve, an honest wage. It is about God's justice, not man's sense of fairness.

We live in a competitive world, a world where too often *"might makes right."* But in the kingdom of heaven that isn't how things work. In the kingdom *"right makes right"* for it is a matter of justice rather than a competition. As long as we see everything as a competition we will necessarily find it difficult to understand God's generosity.

The parable further highlights how expectations play in our lives. When expectations are not met, like those hired first, our emotions often override our senses and we experience disappointment, anger, resentment, and bitterness at the unfairness of it all, and that is when we find ourselves shouting: *"Life's not fair!"*

Unrealistic expectations lead us down paths we do not want to go: depression, physical and mental stress, even emotional and relationship breakdown.

When we live with an *"attitude of gratitude"* rather than *"What's in it for me"* we receive God's just wage. We too often base our value and self-worth on what we earn for what we do. Seldom do we see ourselves as God sees us, in our willingness to ac-

cept his unmerited and unearned generosity.

Saint Ignatius Loyola once observed that ingratitude *"is the cause, beginning, and origin of all evils and sins."* If we are ungrateful to God for all which we have received it is because we have forgotten that we have received everything from him out of his generosity and his love.

In our ingratitude, we cut God out of the equation, giving ourselves credit for all that we have. We, like our first parents, find ourselves tempted—*"to be as gods"* (Gn 3:5)—no longer needing God. We believe we have the means to be totally self-sufficient; we believe that the world owes us something; we believe we are like gods, self-determining the terms and conditions of our lives.

What God gives to those who work for him is a gift, not compensation. It can never be earned; it is never deserved; it can never be considered payment for services rendered, for the gift we receive is the gift of God himself.

Lest we forget: God created us out of nothing; before he created us, there was no *"us"*; and *"nothing"* is precisely what God owes us. All that God does he does out of love and generosity. Our only response should forever be our gratitude. Amen.

Homily for the
Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:20C-24, 27A
Matthew 20:1-16A

1. John Kavanaugh, SJ, *Envious Comparisons*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

Blessed Are You

Properly speaking

Recently, I was asked to explain how to pronounce a word that we speak during every Eucharistic celebration. Now this, as you might readily surmise, does not fall into either the category of weighty moral issues or deep theological discourse, and to those who hold a fascination with linguistics, it is of small importance.

The English language is a strange and difficult language to speak or to understand. Linguists rank English as one of, if not the most, difficult of languages to learn due to the complexity of its syntax, the number of meanings for single words, and the confusing variations in pronunciation and usage.

The last point was made apparent in a song written by George and Ira Gershwin in 1937 entitled "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off". Within the refrain the pronunciation of numerous common words was juxtaposed to highlight how words can be pronounced so differently.

either: *ee-ther* or *eye-ther*
neither: *nee-ther* or *neye-ther*
potato: *po-tay-to* or *po-tah-to*
tomato: *to-may-to* or *to-mah-to*
pajamas: *pa-jam-as* or *pa-jahm-as*

We also find words that are pronounced the same but spelled quite differently and have different meanings; words such as *flower* and *flour*.

Another area of confusion arises

with the use of the apostrophe', which can be used for both contractions (shortened forms of multiple words, e.g. *don't* for *do not* or *haven't* for *have not*) and possessives (e.g. *John's car*.)

A common usage error is made with the word "it's" which is a contraction of the two words "it is." The possessive form "its" does not contain an apostrophe'.

And then there are words that are identical in spelling but may be pronounced differently depending on their usage.



In the liturgy of the Mass, during the Eucharistic celebration, the priest elevates the body and blood of our Lord and proclaims:

*Behold the Lamb of God,
Behold him who takes away
the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called
to the supper of the Lamb.*

The word in question is "blessed." How is it pronounced? Some pronounce it with one syllable: *blest*, while others pronounce it with two syllables: *bless-ed*. Which is correct?

Well, both are correct pronunciations for the word, but which one you use is determined by its usage and context: the word *blessed* can be used as either an adjective or as a transitive verb. If it is used as an adjective, such as "*Blessed Virgin Mary*", it is commonly and correctly pronounced with two syllables, as in "*bless-ed*."

If it is used as a verb, as in "*Blessed are those called...*", you guessed it, it is pronounced with one syllable, as *blest*.

And, to add to the confusion, it is sometimes deemed acceptable to use the single-syllable form when it is used as an adjective!

As a final test, I offer you this final prayer. Speak it aloud and try it with the different forms: "*May you be blessed with blessed lives by the Blessed Virgin Mary.*"

I believe that you will find that the first instance should be the single-syllable, *blest*, while the third instance should be the two-syllable *bless-ed*. The second instance can be pronounced either way.

And so I pray:

May all your days be blessed. May all the blessed saints in heaven watch over you and intercede for you to the Lord, our God. May you be blessed with abundant love and peace, forever.

The human body is a marvelous creation, composed of many individual and unique parts; each with a specific function and purpose; each designed to coexist and function seamlessly within the whole; each dependent on the proper functioning of the rest in order to properly perform what it was designed to do.

There is awesome wonder in this body which God has made, made in his image and likeness. Each, so much the same, yet none so similar as to be indistinguishable from another. Superficial differences mark our unique individuality: skin, hair, and eye color, height, weight, and body-type; all made in his image, all made by his hand.

Yet, there are deeper, far more profound differences which are as essential and necessary as any other; differences essential to reproducing what God has so well conceived. “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Genesis 1:27). God did not create two men or two women, but male and female, two beings created in his image and likeness, alike yet not the same; each with a unique role and purpose.

To each has been given unique organs and functions, characteristics and traits specific to God’s purpose. And yet, at an even more fundamental level, God’s genius is profoundly revealed. For at the genetic level, the genomic codes that make us who and what we are, are alike yet not the same. Even at the moment of conception, that instant when life begins

anew, male or female God creates us.

He creates us either-or, never TBD. While man may modify the superficial for appearance sake, only God determines gender.

Our gender cannot be determined by a feeling or emotion; gender cannot be genuinely altered through the surgical alteration of specific body parts. No amount of scientific tinkering can cause an eye to hear or a nose to speak or a man to ovulate or a woman to inseminate.

Such thoughts are predicated on a lie, a lie first uttered when “*the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’*” (Genesis 3:4-5). Wishing to be like God—even though they had been made in his image and likeness—they willingly and deliberately deceived themselves.

Here again, we find Paul giving us sage advice: “³*For if any one thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ... ⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. ⁸For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption*” (Galatians 6:3, 7-8).

Our insatiable desire to be what we are not is but evidence of our enormous arrogance and pride. We love ourselves too much; we think too highly of ourselves and too little of our Creator God. Philip Neri once said: “*He who desires anything but God deceives himself, and he who loves anything but God errs miserably,*” which is something each of us should seriously consider.

Deacon’s Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

2007, 82 pages.

How the West Really Lost God

Mary Eberstadt

Templeton Press

June 9, 2012, 268 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Charles J. Chaput

Henry Holt and Co.

February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

Editor: R. R. Reno

Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

www.touchstonemag.com

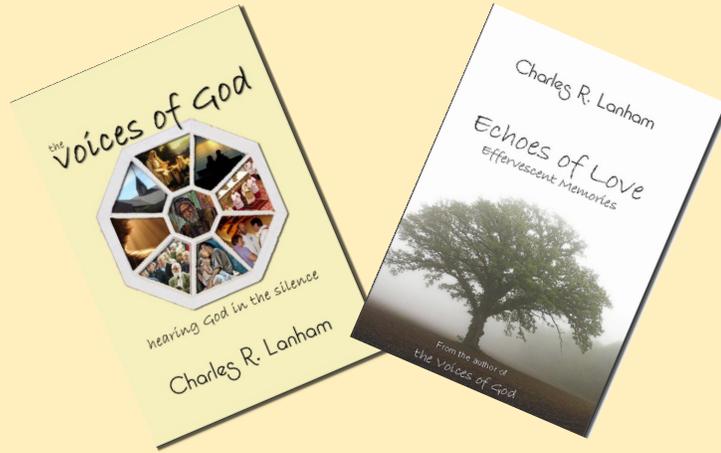
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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