

FINDING OUR PLACE IN GOD'S CHURCH

Reading: Romans 12:1-8

From this reading I have taken as my theme "Finding our place in God's church". Obviously, we have other roles God calls us to outside the church, but here St Paul is talking about finding and fulfilling our roles within the church, not just when we meet here on Sundays, but in all its organisations.

I hope you have some idea of the tasks God wants you to do in this church. If not, look around and then speak to me. If all together we make up the body of Christ, then it follows that if some people don't know or carry out their tasks, then the whole body suffers. The tasks God asks you to do are likely to be things you are good at, though they may well challenge you in some way. So what are the roles or tasks God has called you to, or is calling you to, and are you fulfilling them as best you can? "Well," I hear you say, "I don't know about God calling me to it, but I just do the teas and occasionally clean the church." Well, the sample of tasks St Paul mentions in the reading is a mixture of "spiritual" and practical: serving, encouraging, sharing, doing kind things: those don't sound very "spiritual", do they, and yet they are: Paul says, "We have different gifts in accordance with the grace (ie help) that God has given us" (verse 6). God's church should be a welcoming, increasing, widening, ever-changing organisation, not a tired, fossilised thing with an ever-shrinking, ageing membership struggling to plug holes.

Now I imagine that we all like the idea of everyone being important, everyone having tasks to fulfil, everyone's tasks being important. That's pleasantly democratic and is in vogue. But I haven't yet spoken about the first two verses of the reading: "So then....offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing him. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind." (verses 1-2).

In verse 1 "The Good News says "offer yourselves as a living sacrifice", but in the original it says "offer your bodies". A sacrifice was something that belonged to you but that you gave to God; it then belonged to Him and you did not get it back. So how do we treat our bodies? Do we treat them as God's? What do we do to

them? What do we do with them? For example, do we over-eat, eat the wrong things, over-pamper or prettify them too much? Are our bodies God's or still very much ours?

And then St Paul says, "Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind." He's talked about our body; now he talks about our mind. "The Message" translates this, "Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out." Or "The Street Bible": "Don't get moulded by what the adverts say you should have/ should do/ should be. Keep on becoming more and more outstanding - literally, standing out, as your thinking is freshened up."

So how do we let God transform us in our minds?

1/ By being willing to be changed, by being open. Are we willing?
2/ By reading the Bible, listening to sermons, watching the News on TV, questioning all we read and hear, and then letting it soak into us and affect us. Are we doing that?

St Paul is saying that finding and carrying out our functions in the church should not start with letting ourselves be put on a rota, but with presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice and with letting God transform us. A church should be different from other organisations if God is at work in us all, changing us, moulding us together, making us into the body of Christ. Without Him at work we are like any other organisation; we need to be different: not cliquy, not out to impress each other, not just suiting ourselves, not valuing the wealthy and the powerful more than others. We are to be different, an organisation led by the Holy Spirit - the Body of Christ! - and with us finding our roles in it.

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