

Epiphany III (Grace, Charleston)
The Right Reverend Charles G. vonRosenberg
January 27, 2013
Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6,8-10;
I Corinthians 12:12-31a;
Luke 4:14-21

“Baptized into One Body”

New things certainly are happening in the life of the church these days! Grace Church has a new associate rector. The Episcopal Church in South Carolina has a new bishop. But, the really big news is that we are here today to welcome a new Christian into the Body of Christ – Daphne Zahl!

I had this idea in mind – this emphasis on newness and baptism – when I began to look at the readings for today. You can imagine, therefore, that I was not all that delighted when I found reference to the Water Gate in the Old Testament reading! I was going to have trouble with that one.

However, St. Paul came through in his First Letter to the Corinthians. “Just as the body is one and has many members”, he wrote, “and 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” (12:12). What a magnificent passage of scripture those words begin! How appropriate it is on the occasion of Daphne’s baptism. And, how appropriate it is as well at the time that this new, old thing of The Episcopal Church South Carolina is taking its initial, tentative steps.

Daphne is not alone in this world, and she never will be alone. At the time of birth, she was the focus of attention - for parents, certainly, but also for doctors and nurses. She needed and required such attention, for without it, life would have become perilous, very quickly, as with any newborn child.

Today we focus attention on Daphne once again ... but in a new and different way. She continues to be a unique and precious child of God. But she also is part of a larger body, a greater whole. Again we turn to St. Paul and to his familiar analogy about the church. He writes, “As it is, there are many members, yet one body” (12:20). So, she who was born as an individual is now reborn – baptized – into a larger reality. And that larger reality is none other than the Body of Christ.

Today is a time for rejoicing. Daphne gives up nothing of her uniqueness, her particularity, her special gifts. However, those unique attributes are welcomed as parts of a greater whole. The greater whole consists of many unique individuals, with particular gifts and talents, exercised for the good of all. Thus, again from St. Paul, no part of the Body may say to another part, “I have no need of you” (12:21). Such division, such separation, would diminish the Body. Neither Daphne nor anyone else may say to another, “I have no need of you.” Nor may such words be directed at Daphne nor at anyone else. Again, these words from St. Paul, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (12:26-7).

Daphne enters the Body of Christ at an interesting time in its life. In South Carolina, we Episcopalians have reached a point of division. I have no doubt that such division grieves the heart of God. It certainly indicates our failure to live into our Lord's call and prayer for unity. Indeed, division diminishes the whole body.

Yet, the hope and goal of unity - unity depicted by the analogy of the Body of Christ – that hope and goal remain. The fact that we fall short does not diminish God's will, nor does it compromise our Lord's prayer on behalf of a goal that we have been unable to achieve.

Daphne will have times in life that she falls short of her goals. Her hopes and dreams may not be completely realized. Yet, those goals, hopes, and dreams will remain, calling her to be everything that she was created to be – a unique child of God, a full part of the Body of Christ on earth.

Soon we will pray several petitions, on Daphne's behalf. Listen to them and sense the fullness, the wholeness, described. "Deliver her, O Lord, from the way of sin and death. Open her heart to your grace and truth. Fill her with your holy and lifegiving Spirit. Keep her in the faith and communion of your holy Church. Teach her to love others in the power of the Spirit. Send her into the world in witness to your love. (And) bring her to the fullness of your peace and glory" (BCP, pp305-6).

In those petitions for Daphne and for her life in the Body of Christ, we can indeed sense the balance and wholeness for which we pray. In times of failure, her goals – her hopes and dreams – will continue their call to her. In times of hardship and pain, words and actions of grace will come to her, through other members of the Body of Christ. In moments and occasions of uncertainty and instability, the calm steadiness of the Body will reassure her. As part of the Body of Christ, Daphne will never be alone.

Today, for Daphne and for our diocese, this is a time for rejoicing. We give thanks; we praise God; we relish a sense of hope for the future which seems so real at this moment. We know that difficulties and disappointments will come our way, for they are ever-present in this life. But we recognize that our lives are tied to one another, and our strength does not depend on ourselves alone. For, we "are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (12:27). Amen.