

Dear Parishioners,

A long time ago, there was a beautiful old monastery that had fallen on hard times. Its buildings were still magnificent and in good shape. Its library was still filled with the finest of leather-bound books. Its tower stood tall and its bells could still be heard around the countryside. But despite all that, the monastery was dying, for no young monks had come to join the community for many years. All that remained were the abbot and four brothers, all of whom were over the age of eighty. The end seemed close at hand.

One day, the abbot went into the nearby woods to seek the advice of a wise rabbi who lived in a tiny hut. The two of them prayed together, and then the rabbi spoke these strange words, “The only thing I can tell you is the Messiah is one of you.”

When the abbot returned to the monastery, the monks were waiting and asked, “Well, what did he say?”

“Not a thing,” replied the abbot, “except that the Messiah is one of us. I don’t know what he meant.”

In the days and months that followed, the old monks pondered the rabbi’s words. And the thoughts of each went something like this, “Did he really mean one of us monks here at the monastery? I wonder which one. Maybe the abbot? Yes, that’s it. The abbot has been our leader for more than a generation. On the other hand, he might have meant Brother Thomas. Thomas is certainly a holy man. Everyone says he’s a man of light. Maybe.

“Surely he couldn’t have meant Brother Elred. Elred is always criticizing and disagreeing. But come to think of it, even though he’s a pain sometimes, he’s almost always right and he has prevented a lot of big mistakes. Maybe the rabbi did mean Brother Elred. Definitely not Brother Philip. Philip is so passive, a real nobody. But then, he has this gift for always being there when you need him. He just magically appears by your side and pitches in. Maybe Philip is the Messiah.

“Of course, the rabbi didn’t mean me. He couldn’t possibly have. I’m just an ordinary person. Yet, what if he did? Suppose I’m the Messiah. Dear Lord, not me. I couldn’t do that much for you, could I?”

As they continued their thoughts along these lines, the old monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect on the off chance that one of them might be the Messiah. And on the off-off chance that each monk himself might be the Messiah, they began to treat themselves with extraordinary respect.

In the days of its decline, the monastery received few visitors, though once in awhile, people still came to picnic on its lawns, to wander along its paths, and even to pray in its empty chapel. After the abbot's visit to the rabbi, the few who still came began to sense something new, a different atmosphere of extraordinary respect. They found themselves drawn back to the monastery more and more frequently. Then it happened that some of the younger men who visited the monastery started to talk with the old monks about their lives, hopes, and dreams. And after awhile, one asked if he could join the monks, then another and another. So within a few years, the monastery had become once again a thriving place, a vibrant center of spiritual light and life for the whole kingdom – thanks to the wise rabbi's simple words.

When we consider our call to Christian discipleship, we often find ourselves asking this question: "Can I really live as the Body of Christ in the world?" The answer is both simple and difficult; it is "yes". It is yes because when we are baptized into our faith, we become members of the Body of Christ.

Now, I ask you to think of this. When we enter the church, we bow or genuflect as a gesture of profound respect for the Body of Christ in the tabernacle. Do we have that same respect for everyone who comes into the church to worship? Think of how much more enriching and fulfilling our experience of the Mass would be if we were able to show the same awe, reverence and respect for each other as we do the consecrated hosts in the tabernacle. The Messiah is one of us.

Our vocation as Christian disciples demands that we treat each other with the same love and respect we receive from Christ who says, "Love one another, as I have loved you." I hope we don't have so many excuses and distractions that we would fail to love the Body of Christ alive and present in us.

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel