

In Communion with Christ

5. Communion

Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that *each of us receives Christ*, but also that *Christ receives each of us*. He enters into friendship with us: 'You are my friends' (*Jn 15:14*). Indeed, it is because of him that we have life: 'He who eats me will live because of me' (*Jn 6:57*). Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual 'abiding' of Christ and each of his followers: 'Abide in me, and I in you' (*Jn 15:4*).

By its union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant, far from closing in upon itself, becomes a 'sacrament' for humanity, a sign and instrument of the salvation achieved by Christ, the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. *Mt 5:13-16*), for the redemption of all. The Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you' (*Jn 20:21*). From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both *the source* and *the summit* of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this *unifying power* of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist when he writes to the Corinthians: 'The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (*1 Cor 10:16-17*). Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: 'For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ'. The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. *1 Cor 12:13, 27*).

The joint and inseparable activity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, which is at the origin of the Church, of her consolidation and her continued life, is at work in the Eucharist. This was clearly evident

It may be helpful to emphasise the modesty of the liturgical homily. It is not an exposition of 'the meaning' of a particular passage or of two or three passages from the Bible. It is not a survey of all the possible meanings of the this passage. It is not a complete exposition of the liturgical texts or the meaning of the liturgical action. It is simply a response in faith by a limited human being in a specific situation. I am convinced that the best a preacher can do week-in and week-out with sensitivity to the liturgical assembly, to the assembly's act of thanksgiving, and the scriptures that have been determined for the day is to discern one thing that needs to be said in this situation and to say it imaginatively enough to have an impact. In my experience many a promising homily flounders on the shoals of over-ambition.

John Baldovin,
'Biblical Preaching in the Liturgy'
Studia Liturgica 22 (1992), pages 113-114.

Key Texts

General Instruction of the Roman Missal

80-89, 152-165

Mass with Deacon: 181-183

Concelebrated Mass 237-249

Celebrating the Mass

100-102, 107-109, 200-216

to the author of the *Liturgy of Saint James*: in the epiclesis of the Anaphora, God the Father is asked to send the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and upon the offerings, so that the body and blood of Christ ‘may be a help to all those who partake of it for the sanctification of their souls and bodies’. The Church is fortified by the divine Paraclete through the sanctification of the faithful in the Eucharist.

The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more profoundly ‘in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race’.

John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 22-24

An aspect that must be cultivated with greater commitment within our communities is the experience of silence. We have need of this ‘to receive in hearts the full resonance of the voice of the Holy Spirit, and to unite more closely personal prayer with the Word of God and with the public voice of the Church.’ In a society that lives ever more frenetically, bewildered by rumours and distracted in the ephemeral, it is vital to rediscover the value of silence. It is no accident that beyond Christian worship, meditation practices are spreading that give importance to recollection. Why not undertake, with pedagogical audacity, a specific education in silence within the confines of the Christian experience? Before our eyes must be the example of Jesus, who ‘rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed’ (Mark 1:35). The Liturgy, among its different moments and signs, cannot neglect that of silence.

The liturgical pastoral program, through the introduction to the various celebrations, must instil the taste for prayer. It will do so, surely, taking into account the capacity of the individual believers, in their diverse conditions of age and education; but it will do so seeking not to be satisfied with the ‘minimal.’ The pedagogy of the Church must be able to ‘dare.’ ... This privileged attention to liturgical prayer is not placed in tension with personal prayer, rather it assumes and requires it, and combines it well with other forms of community prayer, especially if recognized and recommended by the ecclesial Authority.

John Paul II. *Spiritus et Sponsa* 13, 14.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a way as gives us breath;
Such a truth as ends all strife,
Such a life as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a light as shows a feast,
Such a feast as mends in length,
Such a strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a joy as none can move,
Such a love as none can part,
Such a heart as joys in love.

George Herbert

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Communion Starting points

What particular points struck you from your reading of GIRM and/or CTM; from the People's leaflets; or from the other reading material?

In what ways do these particular points challenge or affirm your present practice?

How do you mark the beginning of the Communion rite as the start of our preparation for Holy Communion?

What helps or hinders the prayerful ministering and reception of Holy Communion in your parish?

What determines whether you have a song of thanksgiving or a time of silence after the ministering of Holy Communion?

What are the main points you wish to continue to explore?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Communion

Homily notes

How is the action of communion represented or described in

- today's readings and psalm?
- the Mass propers?
- the preface and Eucharistic Prayer?
- the Ordinary of the Mass?
- the music and songs chosen for use in the Mass?

Where does this action of 'communion' take place in the daily life of your community?
What is there to learn from this?

What are the major events in your parish/town at present?

What are the major national/international events at present?

What stories/experiences connect with the 'communion' theme?

And what songs, plays, films, paintings etc.?

Main points to be carried forward into homily

1.

2.

3.