

ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

THE BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST

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Sunday **The Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ**
June 18 **You are the Body & Blood of Christ**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Mon **Monday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **Living Communion with Christ**
 Reflection from Fr. Ives Congar's The Mystery of the Church

Tues **Tuesday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time**
20 **Renewing Our Experience of Christ's Love**
 From On the Feast of Christ's Body by St. Thomas Aquinas

Wed **Memorial of St. Aloysius Gonzaga**
21 **Imitating Christ in All Things**
 Reflection inspired by a homily of Bishop Bruno of Segni

Thurs **Thursday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time**
22 **The Greatest of Gifts**
 A reflection by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria

Fri **Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**
23 **Who Truly Imitates Christ?**
 A reflection from an address by Bl. Pope Paul VI

Sat **Solemnity of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist**
24 **Living in Holy Hope**
 A reflection adapted from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

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YOU ARE THE BODY & BLOOD OF CHRIST

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

When you approach the altar for communion you see bread and a cup. This, at least, is what your eyes tell you, but your faith requires that you believe the bread is the Body of Christ and the cup the Blood of Christ. But faith seeks understanding. So you point out: We have been told what we have to believe but help us understand. We know from whom the Lord Jesus Christ took flesh; it was from the Virgin Mary. As a baby he was suckled, he developed and came to a young man's estate. He was slain on the cross, he was taken down from it, he was buried, and he rose again on the third day. On a day of his choosing he ascended to Heaven in his body and it is from Heaven that he will come to judge the living and the dead. But now that he is there, seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father, how can bread be his body? How can what is in the cup be his blood?

These realities are called sacraments. Our eyes see in them one thing and our understanding another. Our eyes see the material form and our understanding its spiritual effect. If you want to know what the 'body of Christ' is you must hear what St. Paul tells the faithful: "*Now you are the Body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.*" If that is so, it is the sacrament that you are which is placed on the Lord's altar. It is the sacrament that you are that you receive. You receive it and reply "Amen" to what it tells you that you are. You thereby agree that you are this. You hear the words "*The Body of Christ*" and you replay "*Amen*". So be a member of Christ's Body. Then your "Amen" will accord with the truth.

Yes, but why all this in bread? Let us listen again to what St. Paul says, over and over again. "*Because there is one loaf, we though we are many form one Body.*" Let your mind take this in and rejoice. For here you will find unity, truth, piety and love. St. Paul speaks of one loaf; but who is that loaf? "*We, though we are many, form one body.*" Bear in mind that bread isn't made of a single grain but of many. So be what you see! Receive what you are! So too with the cup; many grapes contribute juice which flows together to form a single liquid. The result is unity; "*they were all of one mind and heart*", in God.

In this way Christ points to us and to his will that we should belong to him and serve one another. He hallows this sacrament of our peace and unity on our altar. To receive the sacrament of unity but not keep the bond of peace is to receive it unprofitably and for condemnation. Live the unity which this sacrament signifies and gives according to Christ's will. That is our peace and joy.

LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

A reflection taken from The Mystery of the Church by Fr. Ives Congar

“Jesus said to the crowds, I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever”. The eucharist is the sacrament of the redemptive mystery of the cross and the sacrament of the unity of the Mystical Body. By its grace this body is brought into being. In this sacrament we receive Christ as our food. We are united with Christ in a special union similar to that of a living being and its food. Ordinarily, a living being assimilates its food and makes it part of its own substance. But here the roles are reversed. We feed on the eucharistic bread and wine but all the power of assimilation resides in Christ. In feeding us Christ unites with himself and incorporates us into his own life.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine pictures Christ as saying, *“Eat me and grow in stature; but it is not you who will change me into yourself, as you do bodily food, but it is I who will change you into me.”* (Book VII, 10) The union with Christ which results, an infinitely mysterious one, is like the union which takes place in a living thing. It is both an incorporation and an intensification of life. As we have seen, our Lord compares, in a most explicit way, the union he wishes to establish between us and himself, especially through the eucharist, to the unity existing between him and his Heavenly Father. But this is a unity of perfect life, a substantial unity of life.

The Eucharist is, then, the perfect sacrament of our incorporation with Christ. Theologians are unanimous in holding that its special effect is to bring about the unity of the Mystical Body. By a special increase of grace and of living faith, it incorporates us with Christ precisely inasmuch as it takes us into the supreme act of love by which Christ offered himself for us on the cross, so as to bring together into one all God’s children, scattered far and wide.

We may not communicate in isolation from our brothers and sisters. We communicate in the true Body of Christ only by communicating at the same time in his Mystical Body. The “breaking of the Bread” brings with it, inseparably, the presence of Christ uniting us to that multitude which shares in Christ’s redemption. The one bread makes us one body; though we are numerically many. Here we have the entire mystery of the Mystical Body. But it is not a mere fact but a call and command and promise. Living the unity of this Body is salvation.

RENEWING OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST'S LOVE

Taken from On the Feast of Christ's Body by St. Thomas Aquinas

It was the will of God's only-begotten Son that we share in divinity. He assumed our nature in order that by becoming human he might make us divine. When he took our flesh he dedicated its entire substance to our salvation. He offered himself to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice of reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification so that we might be cleansed of all sin and freed from our wretched state of bondage to it. To ensure that the experience of such a great gift would always be available to us, he left his body as food and his blood as drink for all who believe. It is this gift we consume in the form of bread and wine.

How precious and wonderful is this banquet. It brings us salvation and contains all the sweetness and wonder of the experience of being embraced by Christ's love and forgiveness. Could anything be more valuable? Under the Old Law the flesh of calves and goats was offered and eaten as a sacrificial offering. But here Christ himself, the true God become human, is set before us. What could be more marvelous than this? No other sacrament has greater healing power. Through it sins are purged, virtues are increased, and we are enriched with an abundance of every spiritual gift. It is offered for the living and the dead so that what was instituted for the the salvation of all may be for the true benefit of all.

In the end, no one can experience a greater sweetness than in the love of Christ which we encounter in this sacrament. In it spiritual delight is tasted at its very source. In it we renew the memory of that surpassing love we experienced when Jesus Christ claimed us as his own. It was this love which led Jesus to offer himself in his passion and death. It was to impress the warmth and vastness of this love on us as solidly and lastingly as possible that the Lord instituted this sacrifice as a "memorial" at the Last Supper.

As he was at the point of leaving this world to go to the Father, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he gave this to us as a "perpetual memorial". In it all the ancient figures and promises are fulfilled. It is the greatest of all his signs and wonders. For those who would also experience the sorrow of his departure it would serve as an abiding and unique consolation. And so it always can be for us. Jesus is with us always in his love and forgiveness. He always draws us to himself, as he did when we first surrendered ourselves to him, and so to our Heavenly Father.

IMITATING CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

A reflection inspired by a sermon of Bishop Bruno of Segni

“Be imitators of God as God’s dearest children, and walk in love, just as Christ loves us and gives himself up for us as a sweet-smelling oblation and sacrifice.” Today we celebrate St. Aloysius Gonzaga for his imitation of Christ. Consider Christ’s example & that of Aloysius. In everything he did Jesus left us a pattern of humility. Although he is the Almighty Lord he chose to be poor for our sakes. He refused honors, freely submitted to suffering and even prayed for those who did him evil. And he did all this so that no one could disdain any of these things if they wished to follow him, insofar as human frailty allows. If we fail to do these things we are not true Christians. Anyone who professes love for Christ must tread the path Christ trod. Look! Aloysius did all these things, and simply in order to follow Christ.

Because the Lord freely submitted to suffering and the cross he delivered us by his very death from the power of death and all evil. Moreover, he prayed for all, and especially sinners, even as he hung on the cross. If the Lord of the universe was willing to endure so much how can we not bear everything that befalls us with the greatest patience? Look! Aloysius did all these things and simply in order to imitate his Lord.

When we are in the midst of affliction, we must pray earnestly. Afflictions are of two kinds. There are afflictions caused by suffering some loss of earthly goods or honors. It is an even greater affliction to know that one has given way to doing wrong to someone. Our prayers must be such that they cannot be turned to serve sin or merely earthly quests for passing goods. And we must give all that we have and are simply in order to walk the more perfect way that Jesus walked. Look! This is precisely what Aloysius did.

The perfection of giving and self-giving consists of two things. The first consists in giving forgiveness. The Lord himself says: “Give and it will be given you. Forgive and you will be forgiven!” The second consists in giving things that happen to be in your possession. The willingness to give in both these ways is a great virtue. Such virtues are stepping stones on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. Look, didn’t Aloysius walk just this path? Now we know what it means to imitate our Lord Jesus. Now we know that we too can imitate Jesus, and do this in a way that will make us saints, even as it made Aloysius Gonzaga a saint. The Lord in his great love has given us all such a wondrous gift. How can we not shape our life by this gift?

THE GREATEST OF GIFTS

A reflection from a homily by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria

What could be a greater happiness for those who love God and long for true life than to enjoy God for ever and rest in his love? People often boast of their physical well-being when they have only indulged themselves with all sorts of food and drink, yet these bring pleasures that are only fleeting and often selfish. How much more wonderful the delight of those who care for themselves spiritually by drinking of the water of refreshment that is the Holy Gospel! They are clothed spiritually as though arrayed in cloth of gold richly embroidered!

Our spiritual journey has brought us to the most exalted and life-giving of mysteries. The Lord has set before us gifts that no words can describe. We need only meet together for a sacred meal to rejoice in inexpressible delights. As sharers in a heavenly calling we have willingly put on the wedding garment of undefiled faith and Christ, as a host, waits upon us as we feast of his love and goodness. Christ who loves us refreshes us!

As wonderful as such words are, yet deeds are even better. The fatted calf has actually been sacrificed. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, has been slain for us. The Heavenly Father rejoices that his Son is offered as a willing victim. Could we have a clearer proof of this love? We need only pay attention to Scripture.

“Wisdom has built a house, set up seven pillars, slaughtered victims, prepared fine wine and spread a banquet table”. That is what Scripture actually says. But all these words, and the images they evoke, are only symbols. But the unending delights of Christ’s banquet are now realized. The bountiful giver is with us, the divine gifts are set before us, the sacred meal is ready and the life-giving wine poured out. The King of Glory summons you. The Son of God receives you! God the Incarnate Word invites you! It is Christ, the permanent fullness of the wisdom of the Heavenly Father has built a house that is a temple not made by human hands and distributes his own body as bread and gives his own blood as wine.

Christ urges us: Come! Eat my bread! Come! Drink the wine I have prepared! I have prepared myself to be your food and drink. Do you long for me? I am life itself become your flesh. I am the Word and Image of the Father, sharing my body and blood to save you. Taste and see that I, your Lord, am truly good! You have experienced this. Do this now in memory of me and my love for you.

WHO TRULY IMITATES CHRIST?

From an address by Bl. Pope Paul VI

“Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to you I offer praise; for what you have hidden from the learned and clever you have revealed to the mere children.” How do you picture Christ? His own words can help us evaluate our picture of Him. *“I am meek and humble of heart”*, he says. That is how he wants to be seen. If we could see him in an ordinary way is that how he would look to us? Or would we see him as he is presented in Revelation? What is essential?

Jesus is good, the good person par excellence. He became a baby, poor, a sufferer, a victim so that none of his human brothers or sisters could feel he was above or distant from them. He placed himself at the feet of all and is for all and belongs to all and to each of us individually. *“He loved me”*, as St. Paul says, *“and he sanctified himself for me”*. So it’s no wonder that iconography always tried to express his mildness and goodness. Mystical understanding, born of contemplation, presents the Sacred Heart as a fiery furnace and holds that up for us. We value feelings and psychology and are always oriented toward love.

Well, what about Christ the ruler of the universe? What about the strong Christ, the Lord of Lords, the reformer Christ, the polemical Christ, the Christ of anathemas and curses of the wicked, the liberating Christ—is he a Christ of violence? Is there a contradiction between this picture of Christ and that of Christ the Good Shepherd, who was crucified for love and invites others to follow him to a cross and in the confrontation of evil? What about Christ indignant and pugnacious? He was certainly strong and a reformer and brought reforming energy to this corrupt and fallen world.

To confront such questions we need to reflect on the actual hopes Christ offers. The figure of Christ presents, over and above the charm of mercy and gentleness, a strong, formidable, and grave aspect. He condemns cowardice, hypocrisy, injustice, cruelty and yet never lacks a sovereign aura of love. Love alone makes Christ our Savior. Only through the ways of love can one approach Christ, imitate Christ, bring Christ the gentle and the strong Christ into one’s self and all the ups and downs human experience. Only in love can we see how he lived among us, and wants to go on living through us, in order to bring the Gospel of salvation to the world, and even prepare it for salvation’s fullness. In doing these things he is strong and never backs down or gives up. That is why we celebrate a feast to the Sacred Heart, the sacred love, that is the heart of Christ our savior and king.

LIVING IN HOLY HOPE

A reflection adapted from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

The church observes the day of John the Baptist's birth as a special holy day. No one else but Christ is commemorated in this way. Why is this? This answer lies in the need to celebrate the hope we have from God and our confidence that it will be fulfilled. Just as did the Jewish people before Christ's birth we who follow Christ live in hope. Just as they believed that God would fulfill their hope so we believe that God will fulfill ours. John's mother was old and barren; she was beyond all ordinary hope for having the child, especially the son, his parents had hoped for. Christ's mother was young and a virgin, and so was the symbol of hope for the coming of that son who would save his people. But she didn't conceive in the ordinary way; she conceived by faith to indicate that the son she would bear would not fulfill just ordinary hopes by a spiritual one. But what was that hope?

The Jewish people did not agree about the nature of the hope they had from God. According to New Testament Scripture, before John Israel put its hope for abundant life in service of God according to the Law of Moses. John called Israel to turn to the Lord by returning to observance of the Lord's Law, as had all the prophets before him. John was a prophet and greater than a prophet because he didn't proclaim hope but hope's fulfillment. He pointed toward Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's age-long hope, and in an unexpected way.

When an angel proclaimed to Zachary, and in the Holy Place of the Temple, that his wife would have a son he doubted. As a result he fell silent and lost the power of speech until John was born. He regained speech in prophesying that his son would point Israel toward Christ as its Messiah and Savior—the fulfillment of all its hopes. The restoration of Zachary's power of speech is like the rending of the veil of the temple at Christ's death. John was to be a voice crying out in the wilderness so as to make Israel ready for its Lord and for the fulfillment of its hope. It proved to be the forgiveness of sin, and not the recovery of political freedom and any of the other hoped for good things.

Christ is the Word which John as the voice proclaimed. That Word fulfills Israel's hope to be one with God. That is what forgiveness of sin brings. But it doesn't bring fulfillment of the hope for a life of utter abundance in God's Kingdom. Christ is the hope for the fullness that is the experience of perfect love and joy. That is the hope we live for as we labor to learn to love as our God loves. It is our hope and Israel's.