

The Body and Blood of Christ (A)  
(1 Corinthians 10:16-17 / John 6:51-58)  
22.06.2014

### *Communion*

At first glance, for communities like ours who celebrate the Eucharist everyday, it may seem a bit strange to have a Sunday especially consecrated to the Body and Blood of Christ. However we have to acknowledge that this celebration may be an occasion for us to reflect anew on the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Today St Paul's reading, two short verses from his first Letter to the Corinthians, is a powerful reminder of the inexhaustible richness of the Sacrament we celebrate. And not only that, St Paul's words are a huge challenge to the way we receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The most obvious dimension of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is its power to unite us to Christ. In Greek, the word *koinonia* is used to express a close and intimate relationship into which people enter. In one of his sermons, St John Chrysostom puts these words in Jesus' mouth: "I not only am mingled with you, I am entwined in you. That the union may be more complete, I am eaten, broken into minute particles. Things united remain yet in their own limits, but I am interwoven with you. I would have no more any division between us. I will that we both be one" (*Serm.* 15, on 1Tm).

For St Paul, the word *koinonia* can have a broader and more encompassing meaning, for example at the beginning of the same 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, he uses the word *koinonia* in order to describe God's plan for humanity: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the communion – *koinonia* – of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1Co 1:9). Following St Paul's intuition, for us Christians, the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is the means and the sign of our deepest vocation: to become one with God.

Yet our communion to the Body and Blood of Christ is not a private way for us to assure our salvation. In our Catholic spirituality, we may have been tempted, and maybe still are, to transform the celebration of the Eucharist into an individualistic and private devotion.

The Mass becomes "my Mass" and the communion "my communion"; in this perspective there is no problem in reading one's own book of prayers during the whole celebration; in this perspective, there is no point in answering the priest or joining in the singing during the liturgy. The focus is just on me and the consecrated Host, the rest does not really matter.

St Paul would be utterly scandalised by such a way of relating to the Sacrament. As we have heard in our reading, for him, the first fruit of our communion to the Body and Blood of Christ is to create communion between all the faithful.

For the first Christians, and for us as well, in no way is it possible to separate our communion with Christ from our communion with one another. The call for you and me is to become what we receive: men and women in communion, men and women of communion.

As one theologian wrote, the goal of the Sacrament of the altar is to make "but one Church of all the world; of all men and women, but one worshipper; of all their voices, but one praise" (Olier, quoted in de Lubac, *The Splendour...*, p. 108).

This explains why the divisions in our Churches, between our Churches, in our families and communities are a deep scandal. They are a scandal because what we proclaim solemnly in our liturgy is contradicted by the way we live. Really, what does it mean to

receive the Sacrament of communion and at the same time to be complacent with the divisions which prevent us from being in communion?

The link between the communion we celebrate on the altar and the communion between us is perfectly described by Jesus himself: "When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister" (Mt 5:23-24).

We are used to genuflecting in front of the tabernacle or kneeling during the consecration of the bread and wine or facing the monstrance and the consecrated Host, and these are legitimate expressions of our respect for Christ's presence in the Sacrament.

And yet we have to ask ourselves: why are we not as much concerned with Christ's presence revealed in our communion with one another? What about our communion with our brothers and sisters from other denominations, or with the poor we do not want to see, or with some relatives from whom we have become estranged? Are they not the Body of Christ too?

Today's feast is as much the feast of the Sacrament of the Church as it is the feast of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the feast of our communion with Christ in the communion of the Church. The Eucharist and the Church are one because both are the one Body of Christ.

As we gather together for this celebration, we should give thanks for this wonderful Sacrament of our unity in Christ. We are not just individuals who come together in order to satisfy a religious obligation, we are members of each other. The Spirit which is at work in our communion should move us to be concerned for one another, to care for one another, to love one another.

Communion to the Body and Blood of Christ creates communion with one another. From our participation to this liturgy, we should be able to look at one another and to speak to each other in a new way.

St Augustine calls the Eucharist, the "sign of unity and the bond of love" (*Comm. on John*, 26.6,13). Let us allow the Sacrament we celebrate to make our communion grow in unity and in love.

The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is for us and for all the world a promise of true life. May it free us from all seeds of division, jealousy, fear and sectarianism; may it fashion our communities into communities of forgiveness, reconciliation, mutual support, outreach to people in need, and solidarity with all those who suffer.