



Once again this week, our Lord continues His teaching on the gift of the Holy Eucharist and the question that I want to explore today is: What does the Eucharist do to us? What happens inside of us when we receive Holy Communion?

Our Lord gives us the answers today: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in Him.” When we receive Holy Communion, our joining with Christ becomes deeper. That’s why we call it Communion – com-union – from the Latin, to become “one with”. At each Communion we become more deeply “one with” Jesus.

Of course, our sin pulls us in the other direction and that’s why Holy Communion is also an antidote to sin. The more deeply we join in communion with the Lord, the less desire that we have to sin.

I’d like to adapt an analogy from Fulton Sheen. Think of yourself as a block of wood. Think of sin as driving a nail into that block. Through Confession, God’s mercy removes the nail. What’s left? There is still a hole caused by the damage of the sin, the pull of sin or the habit of that sin. Through receiving Jesus in Holy Communion, our intimacy with Christ “fills that hole”, if you will. Holy Communion “fixes the damage” of that sin. The closer we get to the Lord, the less desire that we have in our wills to drive that nail of sin in again.

So receiving Jesus in Holy Communion deepens our intimacy and oneness with the Lord and drives us away from sin: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

Also, Jesus said to us today: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” Notice that Jesus does not say, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life.” Rather, He says, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” now. When we receive Holy Communion, we receive into us now eternal life. Our partaking of the Eucharist week by week, even day by day, is transforming us for heaven. By our taking of the Eucharist, our old ways of sin and selfishness are being transformed out of us.

The Eucharist is making us like God. Does that statement shock you? St. Augustine said: “God became man so that man could become God.” He was not saying that we

literally are to become our own gods – but rather, God’s plan is to make us all like Himself: perfectly loving, selfless, self-giving, merciful, kind, peaceful and list goes on and on. The Fathers of the Church called this process “divinization”. When we receive Holy Communion, God wishes to “divinize” us, to make us like He is. And on the last day, we will be raised to the perfection of divinization in heaven. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood – I will raise them on the last day.”

Here is an interesting question: What about all those non-Catholic Christians (Methodist, Lutheran, etc.) who never will receive the Eucharist? We believe and understand that only Catholics, Orthodox and a few others have a true Eucharist because you must have true priests to have true Eucharist. Many Christians do not have this. Yes, they share communion, but their communion is not the Eucharist, is not the real presence of Jesus. It is merely only a symbol, still only bread and wine. So, what about them? Jesus clearly said: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink the blood, you do not have life within you.” So do they not have life? Will they not be raised up on the last day as we will?

Pope Benedict formulated a brilliant answer to this question: What makes you part of the body of Christ? The answer is Baptism. All baptized people (Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, etc.) are part of the body of Christ. Although non-Catholics are not as perfectly united to the Body of Christ, none the less all are in the body.

So, when your tongue eats something, does your toe not benefit? When your stomach digests nourishment, does your ear not benefit? So too is the Body of Christ. When you and I receive Holy Communion, that divine life which we receive in Holy Communion pulses through the whole Body of Christ.

Our individual taking of Communion benefits the whole body. Now, it is better to be the one receiving, because we who receive directly receive all the graces of Holy Communion. Nonetheless, every part of the body of Christ is nourished by our taking of Communion.

What an incredible thing and also an incredible responsibility for us. That is why the obligation for us to attend Mass every Sunday is so important, not just for our own sakes, but also for the sake of the whole body. How many souls benefit from your taking of Communion? You will only fully know in heaven. So, see how beautiful, too, is our communion with each other in the body of Christ.

I could go on for an hour about this, but I’ll stop there. How breathtaking! How beautiful! How incredible is this gift of the Holy Eucharist by which we come to eternal life!

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua, South Bend  
20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2009**