

LESSON SEVEN



The Body of Christ

By far the most startling of the Catholic teachings to many will be our understanding of the Holy Eucharist, or the Body of Christ. We genuflect before the consecrated host, because we truly believe that the Blessed Sacrament is the real presence of Christ our Lord in our midst. Moreover scripture tells us that we should never receive Communion with grave sin on our hearts, and we are taught by our reverence in the Mass to prepare ourselves in all that we do to receive Holy Communion. While we believe that the consecrated host and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and the real presence of our Lord sacramentally made manifest here in our parish, we also believe that the Church is the body of Christ living throughout the world, in the sense that we become the agents of our Lord in the world, and represent him by our actions and words to those around us. And so while we recognize the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we who are in Communion with

him are also in Communion with each other, and become part of that one unity of the historic Church. In short, the mystery of the Eucharist and the mystery of the Church are linked, and that is why those non-Catholics entering into the Church are to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they are properly baptized and/or confirmed into the Church. Unity (for the Catholic) is not just some vague sense, and Communion is not just some nice thing we do, but the Blessed Sacrament and the Unity of the Church are things we historically take very serious.

And so, as a baptized and confirmed Catholic, you will become a part of the Body of Christ which is the Church, founded by Christ and extended throughout the world and throughout the ages. A real churchman or churchwoman will love the Church, but this does not mean we are utterly broken off from other Christians, with whom we share baptism and some measure of a wounded unity. Nevertheless, as a Catholic, it is okay to love the Church, and to see in her our own salvation. The Church fathers used to say “outside of the Church there is no salvation,” and when we think of the typical church building, the main body of that room is called the nave. The word “nave” is related to our word “navy,” and it means essentially a ship. Those within the nave (those within the Church) find themselves in a saving ark or boat, and sometimes it is also called “the Bark of Saint Peter.” The Bark of Peter is the symbolic boat of the fisherman from Galilee that holds up the apostles and all of Christ’s disciples. In a world that is a sea of storms, the Church, like a ship, endures the waves, but is not submerged.

Preparing for Baptism

Traditionally those being baptized into the faith would wear white, and so we encourage you to do the same for your own baptism. You will need to have your sponsor at your baptism as well. You will receive a candle at your baptism, because this is symbolic of the light of faith you receive through this enlightening sacrament. You should also receive a baptismal certificate after your baptism. Generally adults should enter the Church at the Easter Vigil, which is the traditional time for adult baptisms, but Pentecost is also a time in the past when adult baptisms were traditionally done. Pentecost Sunday is also called Whit Sunday (or White Sunday) because of its link with the newly baptized who wore white. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is also an appropriate time to consider scheduling your baptism. Because there may be

more than one adult coming into the Church at any given year, we may also try to put these adult baptisms together. Certainly we can work together to find a time that suits best your needs and the needs of the parish.¹

Preparing for Confirmation

After baptism comes confirmation, and it is here where you will receive a new name (the name of your patron saint). In scriptures whenever there was a significant conversion, the Lord could give a new name to those he called (Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, Simon becomes Peter), and this taking on a new name continues in the tradition of receiving a name of a saint. In the earliest days of the Church the adult converts would sometimes have names of pagan deities, and receiving a Christian name was an important mark of their transition into their new faith.

Confirmation is a strengthening of the grace one has already received in baptism, and it can be done minutes or years after baptism (depending upon the circumstances). A person seeking confirmation may have been baptized as a Catholic years ago, and this is your goal of finishing a process that was interrupted by circumstances over the years. Another person seeking confirmation may have been baptized in a different Christian tradition, but now the Church will receive you into full communion. Another person who is seeking confirmation may have just been baptized minutes before, because you are becoming a Christian all at once, but even still the sacrament of confirmation should be deeply respected as essential to your full initiation into the Church. In the Latin Rite of our Church, Confirmation has been traditionally reserved as properly reserved for the bishop, but priests can and do confirm, especially when adults come into the Church.

Preparing to Receive

¹ Generally this would happen in the course of a Sunday morning mass, but Saturday morning masses may also work.

The Blessed Sacrament

Those of you who are coming into the Church will be receiving Holy Communion for the first time. One should fast at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion as a means of preparing to receive the Eucharist. Eucharist is a word that is sometimes applied to *the celebration of the mass* (which is a *thanksgiving*) but it is also a word that we will at times apply to that which we receive at Communion (*the Eucharist, the consecrated host, which we also call the Blessed Sacrament*). The host and wine become the body and blood of Christ, but it is not as if you *must* receive *both* a consecrated host *and* then receive from the chalice, for one or the other is both the body and blood of Christ. Receiving one or the other is sufficient for Holy Communion.² Reception of the Eucharist is something we take very seriously, and in a sense this has been the point of our work together. As we have said this communion is the consummation of our work together, but remember that a real Catholic will not receive Holy Communion and then walk away, because again the word Communion can mean that which we receive (the consecrated host) but it is also the reality of being united to Christ and to his Church, and *remaining* in Communion requires us to attend Sunday masses, and to go to regular confession, and to really *live* this faith to its fullness.

Some Questions

As part of the rites, you will be asked a series of questions by the priest. He will help you to answer them as you go through the rites, but if you are overly anxious about what to do, or how to do it, ask more questions, and we'll go through part of the rite with you to put you at ease.

Homework Follows

² The hosts have gluten in them, so those who are gluten intolerant will only be able to receive from the chalice.

- You should be able to say the Creed, and you should be comfortable with the responses and prayers of the mass.
- If you are coming into the Church and are not receiving Holy Communion at present, you should ask the priest or catechist to practice with you in receiving the Eucharist.
- Make certain that your Christian sponsor will be present for the scheduled events.
- Fill out the following questionnaire, and bring it in with you when you come.

Last Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions, and return this information to us.

1. Have you completed all the required readings and questionnaires, and turned in all the paper work and letters required for your baptism and/or confirmation?
2. If the average healthy individual has been able to attend Sunday masses with regularity, it is a good sign that they are taking this faith serious, but we once again ask are you ready to commit to live the faith?
3. Are you choosing freely this path, and do you personally desire to achieve this fullness of faith in the sacrament(s) of baptism and/or confirmation?
4. Please write a letter, date it and sign it, and turn it in for us for our files indicating your continued desire to grow in your faith, and to be received into full communion in the Catholic Church by reception of baptism & confirmation or by confirmation.
5. Consider volunteering and start making a contribution to this parish. As a full-fledged Catholic, you need to be committed to supporting the Church and the various charitable institutions and ministries of the Catholic Church and of this parish both financially and with your willing presence. There are many ministries to which you may contribute, but as a neophyte (a new Catholic) you may want to take small steps at first, but becoming Catholic is not enough ... you have to choose to be Catholic too.