

The Body and Blood of Christ (A)  
(Genesis 14:18-20 / Luke 9:11-17)  
11.06.2023  
*Become what you receive*

In an Easter Sermon preached in 413, St. Augustine exhorted his people with the following words: “If we receive the Eucharist worthily, we become what we receive.” (*Serm.* 227)

This statement is quoted abundantly in many sermons and books on the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. The fact that it is a famous sentence and that many have tried to discern its meaning does not prevent us from trying to answer the question: what does it really mean for us to become the Eucharist?

We must begin by reminding ourselves that the Eucharist is the Sacrament of God’s love for us, a love which knows no bounds and which is given to us generously. In the Eucharist, Jesus gives himself totally and unconditionally. So, for us, to become the Eucharist means that our lives should be generously given to God and to our brothers and sisters in humanity.

Our communion at the Sacrament of the Eucharist spurs us on to give ourselves for others. We cannot enjoy the graces of the Sacrament on our own, in a private manner. Because there is nothing stingy or self-centred in the Eucharist, the graces bestowed on us cannot bear fruit in individualistic hearts. The words of St Paul speaks in the manner we should receive the Sacrament: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:4-5)

Moreover the signs that Jesus gave us for the Sacrament of his self-giving love reveal, in a challenging way, how we must give ourselves to others: like the bread and the wine which are humble realities, part of the reality of our daily human lives, in the same way the gift of ourselves, the witness to our communion with Christ, must be humble, discreet and rooted in the fabric of our everyday existence. To become the Sacrament we receive means, according to St Paul, being gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love (cf. Eph 4:2).

In all our Churches, at the moment, there are believers who tend to mistake evangelical boldness with being aggressive, who confuse the proclamation of the Gospel with imposing on others their personal ideologies.

The paradox of our faith, of the Catholic faith in the Body and Blood of Christ, is that the Sacrament of the Eucharist is powerful in its humility and fruitful in its apparent smallness.

In the same way that the bread and the wine are changed by the power of the Spirit, so we are supposed to be changed by our communion at this Sacrament. Like the bread and the wine which are given to all, to be shared generously and which have become far more than a piece of bread and some wine, so our lives should be given to all and become seeds of change in the world.

According to St Ephrem the Syrian, on the altar, “in the Bread and Cup are Fire and Holy Spirit.” So also in us there are fire and Spirit. That is another aspect of what it means for us to become the Eucharist. Too often we are lukewarm or cold, stuck in the mud of old habits, dozing or asleep, and our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ does not challenge or awaken anything within us. Unfortunately, in many subtle ways, we are able to

smother the Fire and to silence the Spirit so that we can continue to live lives that remain untouched by the power of the Sacrament.

As we prepare to receive communion, Jesus' words are addressed to us: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Lk 12:49)

The sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ is a fire that does not destroy or blind us but which purifies and enlightens us so that we might become the "light of the world" (Mt 5:14). For us to become what we receive is to become radiant, bright light for all those we meet.

Today many men and women are lost, lonely, exhausted trying to keep up appearances, searching for meaning and purpose. With them, we may be confronted with challenging questions about what it means to be alive and to love, what it means to suffer and to die, what it entails to be part of a family or a country. These questions are legitimate and need to be addressed seriously.

The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ does not work like a magic wand but, if we allow it to accomplish its work in us, if we come to church with the desire to become what we are going to receive, then our lives can be challenged and empowered, transformed and yield fruit, "some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty." (Mt 13:8)

The fruit that we will yield is love because ultimately, the Sacrament we receive is the Sacrament of love. In our Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the Sacrament as a real food. The hunger and the thirst that are satisfied by the Sacrament is our hunger and thirst for love, our longing to be loved and able to love. In our communion to the Body and Blood of Christ we rediscover the deepest meaning of our lives which is to become love, to be love "for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51)

Today and every day may we become what we receive in the Sacrament of love.