

Dear Parishioners: I hope that this information will help you to understand and appreciate what a wonderful gift we have in this beautiful Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, what it should mean to all of us and how we should address the issues which occurred in our parish family a couple of weeks ago.

Take this to your hearts, discuss with your family members and reflect on it. Let us pray that mutual respect and understanding will increase in all of us as we continue our earthly journey under the guidance of the Risen Lord. *Father Chris*

Receiving the Lord in Holy Communion

THE PURPOSE OF THE EUCHARIST

We know that each of the Catholic sacraments produces its own special effect or effects. If the purpose of all sacraments were simply to give a single kind of grace, one sacrament would be enough; there would have been no need for our Lord Jesus to have instituted seven.

The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist was instituted as a **food**, a spiritual food. That is why the outward sign of this sacrament—the appearances of bread and wine—is a sign of **nourishment**, just as in Baptism the outward sign is water, a sign of cleansing.

The action by which we as individuals receive the Holy Eucharist is an act of **eating**. We swallow the appearances of bread and wine under which Jesus is present. This is the action which we call **Holy Communion**.

As the Catechism's section on Holy Communion and the Eucharist says:

The Lord addresses an invitation to us, urging us to receive him in the sacrament of the Eucharist:

"Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (Catechism, 1384)

UNION WITH THE LORD

Since the Holy Eucharist is a spiritual food, it does for the soul what physical food does for the body. When we eat physical food, it becomes united to us - it is changed into our own substance and becomes a part of us.

In Holy Communion something similar happens to us spiritually, but with a great **difference**: in this case it is the individual who is united to the Food, not the Food to the individual. The lesser is united to the Greater. We become one with Christ.

This sacramental union of ourselves with Jesus is more than the mere physical union between our body and the Sacred Host which we have swallowed. More importantly, it is a mystical and spiritual union of the **soul** with Jesus. This is produced in the soul by our physical contact with the sacred Body of Jesus.

This marvellous blending of the soul with Jesus is a very special kind of union. Obviously we do not become "part of God." It is much more than the "ordinary" union with God which the Holy Spirit establishes in us by sanctifying grace. Yet it is less than the ultimate and most intimate union with God which will be ours in the beatific vision in heaven.

This union is simply called **Communion**.

THE MYSTICAL BODY

Being united with Christ in this close and personal union, we are necessarily united also with all others who are "in" Christ - all others who are members of His Mystical Body. Union with Christ in Holy Communion is the bond of charity which makes us one with our neighbour.

When we grow in love for God through our union with Jesus, we also necessarily grow in love for our fellow man. If we have the right dispositions, our Holy Communions should produce **fruits** in ourselves that we notice over time: a lessening of racial and national prejudices, of neighbourhood resentments; an increase in neighbourliness, in compassion, in patience and forbearance towards others.

COMMUNION'S SACRAMENTAL GRACE

It is characteristic of every sacrament either to give or to increase sanctifying grace.

Each of the **other** sacraments however has a specific purpose of its own in addition to the bestowal of sanctifying grace:

- Baptism cleanses from original sin
- Penance forgives mortal sin
- Confirmation strengthens faith
- Matrimony sanctifies marriage.....and so on.

But in the Holy Eucharist we have the one sacrament whose principal purpose is to **increase** sanctifying grace, repeatedly and often, through personal union with the Giver of grace Himself.

That is why the Holy Eucharist is pre-eminently the sacrament of **spiritual growth**, of increase in spiritual stature and strength.

A STATE OF GRACE IS REQUIRED

That also is why the soul already must be in the state of sanctifying grace when we receive Holy Communion- in other words, free from mortal sin.

Physical food cannot benefit a dead body, and the Holy Eucharist cannot benefit a dead soul.

Indeed, a person who knowingly would receive Holy Communion while in the state of mortal sin, would add a new dimension of guilt to his already sinful state: he would commit the grave sin of **sacrilege (The sin of sacrilege is a grave sin that consists of profaning or treating unworthily the sacraments and liturgical actions of the Church as well as things consecrated to God)**. In the very act of outwardly offering himself to Jesus for the union-in-love which is the essence of Holy Communion, he would be opposing Jesus by that rejection of God which is inherent in all mortal sin.

Holy Communion is indeed the Bread of Life, a banquet overflowing with grace and richness:

He who knowingly receives Holy Communion in mortal sin receives the body and blood of Christ, but he does not receive His graces and commits a grave sin of sacrilege.

To receive Holy Communion unworthily is a serious abuse of the sacred body and blood of the Lord, and therefore a sacrilege.

A GRACE THAT PROTECTS

However, the reception of the Holy Eucharist **will** forgive venial sin – presuming of course that the person has sorrow for his venial sins.

Here again it is love that does the work. What we might call the "charge" of love which Jesus unleashes upon the soul in this moment of personal union, is a purifying force; it purges the soul from all lesser infidelities. Whatever accumulation of venial sin may encumber the soul, it is dissolved and annihilated (if repented) as Christ's love makes contact with the soul.

Another effect of Holy Communion is to preserve the soul from spiritual death, to preserve the soul from mortal sin.

The strength of our inclination to sin (called concupiscence) is also reduced each time we receive the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

A RICH BANQUET OF THE LORD

Holy Communion unites us with Christ and intensifies our love for God and for neighbour.

It increases sanctifying grace. It remits venial sin, lessens concupiscence, and thus preserves us from mortal sin.

Finally, as good food should, it readies us for work. A frequent communicant who receives worthily and fruitfully cannot possibly remain wrapped up in himself. As love for Christ more and more fills his horizon, he feels the urge to do things for Christ and with Christ. Powered by the graces of Holy Communion, he becomes an apostolic Christian.