

**Homily for September 25, 2005
26th Sunday in the Year of the Eucharist**

By Father Charles Bowes

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalm 25:4-9

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

When it comes to receiving Holy Communion, we are what we eat.

As our Year of the Eucharist instructed by our Holy Father the Pope draws to a close in October, we're reflecting on the heart of our faith, the source and summit of all that we are and believe.

Have you ever seen that poster that pictures a whole array of junk food with these words: "You are what you eat"? It's intended to make us think a little more about what we put into our mouths.

Centuries ago, St. Augustine had a similar goal and used similar language in speaking about the Eucharist. "Receive what you are," he wrote. "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery." (Sermo 272: PL 38, 1247, cited in Euch. Eccl. #41)

This is a fundamental insight into the meaning of the Eucharist. There is an intimate connection between the body of Christ we receive from the altar and the body of Christ that comes to the altar. As Saint Augustine put it, "Those who are at the table become what's on the table." The core mystery of the Eucharist lies in this connection between the sacramental body and the mystical body of Christ that is the Church.

It is instructive to note that when Christians in the first thousand years of our history spoke of the mystical body of Christ, they meant the sacrament, the bread and wine. The real body of Christ, the real presence of Christ, they believed, was the community of believers. In the past thousand years, we have reversed the language – so we talk about the sacramental body as the real presence of Christ and call the Church the mystical body of Christ. One could defend either way of saying it. The point is that these two forms of Christ's body are so closely linked that we can interchange their names.

This link also points us to the purpose of the Eucharist and the real meaning of Holy Communion. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the 13th century, taught that the goal of the Eucharist is the unity of the Church. Christ did not give us this sacrament to turn bread and wine into his body and blood. It does that of course, but the purpose of the Eucharist is to transform us into his body.

We became members of Christ's body when we were baptized. The Eucharist renews and strengthens the unity of the body of Christ. When we come to the table and share the body and blood of the Lord, we are committing ourselves to live as the body of Christ. St. Augustine put it this way: "You reply 'Amen' to that which you are, and by replying you consent. For you

hear 'The Body of Christ' and you reply 'Amen.' Be what you see, and receive what you are."

In his apostolic letter titled "The Day of the Lord," Pope John Paul II insists that it is important "to be ever mindful that communion with Christ is deeply tied to communion with our brothers and sisters. The Sunday Eucharistic gathering is an experience of brotherhood, which the celebration should demonstrate clearly, while ever respecting the nature of the liturgical action." (Dies Domini #44).

Receiving Holy Communion brings us into an intimate union with Christ, but that intimacy can never exclude those around us. When we share the body and blood of the Lord, we are united not only with the head of the body but also with every member of the body of Christ. That's the purpose of the Eucharist, and that's why we call it Communion.

When it comes to receiving Holy Communion, we are what we eat.