

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ - Lectionary: 167

Reading 1 - [Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a](#)

Moses said to the people: "Remember how for forty years now the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the desert, so as to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments. He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does one live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD.

"Do not forget the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery; who guided you through the vast and terrible desert with its saraph serpents and scorpions, its parched and waterless ground; who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock and fed you in the desert with manna, a food unknown to your fathers."

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20](#) -R. (12) Praise the Lord, Jerusalem.

Reading 2 - [1 Corinthians 10:16-17](#)

Brothers and sisters: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Gospel - [John 6:51-58](#)

Jesus said to the Jewish crowds: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "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. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Summary

The central theme in the homily is the restoration and elevation of humanity through participation in God’s divine life—a process known as *theosis* or divinization. This participation is made possible through the "real presence" of the risen Christ in the Eucharist, which is inextricably linked to the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Drawing from Genesis, the Gospels, and Pauline epistles, the sources establish a typology that connects the Tree of Life in Eden to the Eucharistic "bread of life." While the original communion with God was lost through the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, it is restored and surpassed through Christ. This transformation is initiated by Baptism and perfected through the sharing of the Eucharist, which unites believers into a single supernatural organism—the Church—whose bonds of faith transcend biological ties.

The homily concludes that the sacramental life—beginning with Baptism and culminating in the Eucharist—is a mystical ascent. This process realizes the patristic principle: "God became human so that humans might become god." This transformation is a ‘hard reality’ that transcends human reason alone, requiring faith guided by the Holy Spirit to fully comprehend the mystery of the Word made flesh.

The New Tree of Life: From Eden’s Loss to the Eucharistic Restoration

Two Trees: From Eden to the Eucharist

The original Tree of Life sustained earthly immortality. Adam and Eve’s communion with God was maintained by eating the flesh of that tree.

Death entered through the “Wrong Tree.” Disobedience led to the loss of divine friendship. Choosing the Tree of Knowledge broke the communion, inviting death into the human experience.

The Barrier: Sword of the Cherubim

	The Garden of Eden	The Catholic Eucharist
The Source	Tree of Life	Christ (The Living Bread)
The Result	Preservation of Innocence	Participation in Divine Life (Theosis)
The Barrier	Sword of the Cherubim	Removed by the Spear (The Cross)

The Eucharist as the “New Fruit.”

The Eucharist as the “New Fruit.” Christ is the fruit of the New Tree of Life (the Cross). His flesh is “true food” that restores and elevates humanity to share in God’s life.

One Body: The Mystical Reality of Communion

Baptism is the Essential Entry Point. Neither the Eucharist nor the Mystical Body is possible without Baptism. Baptism restores the path; the Eucharist perfects our incorporation into Christ’s life.

The Interconnectedness of the One Loaf. Because the bread is one, we are one body. In this supernatural family, when one member suffers or sins, the whole body is affected.

“Be what you see, and receive what you are.” We become the Body we receive. As St. Augustine taught, worthily receiving the Eucharist transforms us into the Mystical Body.

The Living Bread: Eden Restored in the Eucharist

Catholic teaching calls the goal of the Christian spiritual life, participation in God’s own life. We often described this mystery of our faith as divinization or theosis. In this participation, grace transfigures a person so that he or she is really brought into communion with Christ and with the Holy Spirit.¹ If we are to better understand this mystery, we would do well to reflect upon the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil since they are important features of creation if we are to more deeply understand the mystery and the gift of the real presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist. Inseparably intertwined with this truth is that by our baptism we not only are restored to participation in the divine life but at that same moment we become members of Christ’s mystical body the Church – therefore ourselves as new creations in Christ.

¹ Synod of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. *Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ – Our Pascha*. 2016. § 850. https://ukrcatholic.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/Our_Faith/Christ-our-Pascha-Catechism-of-the-Ukrainian-Catholic-Church-by-Comission-for-the-Catechism-z-lib.org_.pdf

God created us in their image and likeness within a world where we were free to live according to our nature, in communion with God and with whom we shared the care of our home, or not. The first children of God ate from the tree of life which sustained them in their original communion with God and functioned to preserve against bodily decay and death, contingent upon their obedience. Unfortunately, they chose, against the will of God, to also eat of the other tree subsequently losing their friendship with God, and the divine life of immortality.

The way God set for us to be restored, was to send the only begotten Son of the Father. Christ, who died on the cross, became the fruit of the new tree of life. The fruit of the tree of life, which is Christ Himself, becomes the means to everlasting life. The typology is not only “tree of life = eternal life.” It is also: Eden’s loss becomes Eden restored—not by re-entering Eden, but by receiving the Eucharistic “food” Christ offers. God’s gift in Eden (the tree of life that signifies life without end) finds its fulfillment in Christ’s “bread from heaven”, which gives eternal life—especially in the Eucharistic reality of the “flesh” and “blood” believers receive. The key difference is that it is not merely the preservation of an earthly bodily existence; it is participation in God’s own life through Christ.

St. Thomas Aquinas helps to make the connection between the tree of life and the Eucharist explicit. Commenting on John 6, he says *“This bread was signified by the tree of life in the midst of Paradise, which somehow gave life without end...”* And he links this directly to Genesis 3:22’s reason for the ban: *“...he must not be allowed to stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever.”*² Today, the Feast of Corpus Christi celebrates Christ in the Eucharist. It celebrates the way in which God chose to provide for the children of God by heavenly bread that fills them materially and spiritually. In both cases, the human being is confronted with life through a divinely given “means,” and in both cases that gift relates to communion with God. The Eucharist, however, is the Christ-gift that restores and elevates what humanity lost—sharing in God’s life rather than merely being preserved in the original state of innocence.

Pope John Paul II explains how John 6 clarifies what “eternal life” means here: *“In the language of the fourth Gospel, ‘eternal life’ is the divine life itself which transcends the bounds of time.”*³ Pope Benedict XVI highlights a hymn by Saint Ephrem that strongly parallels Eden with the Eucharist. St. Ephrem describes the closure of access to the tree of life and then says Christ himself becomes food for humans: *“It was by closing with the sword of the cherub that the path to the tree of life was closed. But for the peoples, the Lord of this tree gave himself as food in his (Eucharistic) oblation.”* And Ephrem continues: *“Indeed, we had all left Paradise together with Adam, who left it behind him. Now that the sword has been removed here below (on the Cross), replaced by the spear, we can return to it.”*⁴

Thus, for Saints Thomas and Ephrem, Popes JP II and Benedict, Jesus is not merely speaking metaphorically: the *“bread from heaven”* is the divinely intended fulfillment of what Eden’s tree of life signified.

We must also reflect, when we listen to the words of Jesus, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world,”* on our origins and what took place in that garden. Because doing so helps us to understand the deep significance of what St. Paul says in the second reading today, *“Because the loaf of bread is one, we,*

² Aquinas, Thomas. “Commentary on John.” 1272. <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~loan>.

³ Pope John Paul II. *General Audience*. Saint Peter’s Square, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20001025.html

⁴ https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20071128.html

though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." Here Saint Paul gives us the mystical description of the Church.

St. Paul speaks about the nature of the Eucharist through which we participate in Christ and experience true communion, not as a symbol, but a reality. As we receive Christ in the Eucharist, made possible by the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism, we are fully participating in the divine life of the Trinity. Our participation in their divine life, manifested most clearly in our belonging to the Mystical Body of Christ the Church, and our communion in the Eucharist are inseparable aspects of one reality: the Eucharist is Christ's own gift that unites us to Christ the Head and, through him, to his Body, so that Christ's life is communicated to us and makes us truly partakers of God's life.

We partake of the divine life by being united to Christ, and we are united to Christ as members of his Mystical Body. The Eucharist flesh is the sacrament that gives us Christ's own Body and Blood as true nourishment, just as the flesh of the fruit of the tree of life was for Adam and Eve in their particular life with God. We are thereby conserved and deepened in our incorporation into Christ and into the Church. In fact it isn't enough to say that we receive the Body of Christ in communion, rather it is better to say that we share in it. St. Paul emphasizes this in today's Second Reading: *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?"* 'Body' here means the whole Body of the Risen Christ—Jesus and the community of followers. He continues by saying that the one loaf which is broken and distributed is a sign that, ...we who are many are one body...we all partake of the one bread. The Eucharist is the celebration of a living Body, the Body of Christ of which we are a part, and through which we are a communion.

That participation does not happen as a private, isolated relationship. It unfolds within a real communion among us—the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, which is animated by the Spirit and directed by Christ the Head. The Catechism emphasizes that the unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity and even makes the life of one member bound to the life of the others, *"if one member suffers... all the members suffer..."*⁵ So, for us to be partakers in their divine life means, in practice, being incorporated into a living organism that is truly Christ's Body—not merely a group united by shared ideas or goals. The Church is not simply a 'moral body'; it is a mystical and supernatural unity 'animated by the Holy Spirit'.⁶ This is why the Church can teach that the spiritual family established through Christ transcends physical or biological ties. The Church is a supernatural family where shared faith, communion in charity and the Sacraments create profound, eternal bonds that even extend into heavenly communion.

The central act of the Church is the celebration of the Eucharist; the individual believers are sustained as members of the Mystical Body of Christ, through their reception of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.⁷ Playing on the two meanings of "Body of Christ," St. Augustine tells those who are to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist: *"Be what you see, and receive what you are"*⁸ In another sermon he says, *"If you receive worthily, you are what you have received"*⁹ The Mystical Body of Christ and the Eucharistic Body of Christ are inseparably linked. By Baptism we enter the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, and by receiving the Eucharistic Body of Christ we are strengthened and built up into the Mystical Body of Christ. Consistent

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992. § 791. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

⁶ Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap. "Henri de Lubac: The Church as the Body of Christ and the Challenge of Ethnic Nationalism." In *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 8, no.1. Steubenville, OH: St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, 2010. Page 7

⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001. https://www.usccb.org/resources/The_Real_Presence_of_Jesus_Christ_in_the_Sacrament_of_the_Eucharist.pdf

⁸ Sermon 272

⁹ Sermon 227

with that, incorporation “begun at baptism” is perfected by being united to Christ through the glorified Body shared in the Eucharist—so that we “*may no longer live for ourselves, but for him.*”¹⁰

This participation transforms the human person: initiation through baptism and chrismation, culminating in the Eucharist, corresponds to the mystical ascent to theosis—two representations of the same event, each clarifying the other, mystically identical—realizing the principle that “God became human so that humans might become god.”¹¹ From beginning to end the living Word of God reinforces these truths: participation in the cup and bread constitutes participation in Christ’s blood and body, and because the loaf is one, the many become one body through partaking of the one loaf. Whoever eats Christ’s flesh and drinks his blood remains in him and he in them.

Jesus’ teaching on the Eucharist was and is a hard reality to accept, if we choose to limit our understanding to human reason, but it is possible by faith and reason animated and guided by the Holy Spirit. To summarize in the simplest way, what we have meditated on today, we partake of the divine life by being united to Christ, and we are united to Christ as members of his Mystical Body; the Eucharist is the sacrament that gives us Christ’s own Body and Blood as true nourishment, thereby conserving and deepening our incorporation into Christ and into the Church.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Corpus Christi	The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, celebrating the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
Divinization / Theosis	The process of being transfigured by grace to participate in the divine life of the Trinity.
Eucharist	The sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ; described as the "sacrament of unity" and the "sacrament of salvation."
Manna	The "bread from heaven" provided by God to the Israelites in the desert; a physical food that served as a precursor to the spiritual food of Christ.
Mortal Sin	A grievous offense that breaks communion with God, likened to the original act of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.
Mystical Body of Christ	The Church, viewed as a supernatural, living organism where Christ is the head and the faithful are the members.
Real Presence	The theological truth of the risen Christ being truly and substantially present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.
Tree of Life	A feature of Eden that preserved humanity from death; typologically fulfilled by Christ, who is the fruit of the new Tree of Life.
Tree of Knowledge	The tree from which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat; symbolic of the choice that led to the entry of death and the loss of divine friendship.
Transfiguration	The change effected by grace whereby a person is brought into real communion with Christ and the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰ Kwasniewski, Peter A. "Aquinas on Eucharistic Ecstasy: From Self-Alienation to Gift of Self." In *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 6, no. 1. Steubenville, OH: St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, 2008.

¹¹ Paul Evdokimov, *Orthodoxy*, ed. Callan Slipper, trans. Jeremy Hummerstone (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), 101. There is a close parallel between the way of the sacraments and the life of the soul in Christ. Initiation through Baptism and Chrismation, culminating in the Eucharist, corresponds to the mystical ascent to the pinnacle of *theosis*. They are two representations of the same event, each clarifying the other, mystically identical. Here we see realized the golden rule of all Patristic thought, ‘God became human so that humans might become god’, and we touch the very heart of Orthodox spirituality: ‘The human becomes by grace what God is by nature’.