

# Take This, All of You, and Eat It

2/5/10

What gifts and treasures we have in the Mystical Body of Christ! Christ lives among us in our wholeness as the living Body of Christ, made of many members operating in unity to accomplish the purposes of God. Christ reveals to us the truths of the Divine Heart in the Holy Scripture. And as the greatest of these gifts—the source and summit of our salvation—Christ is wholly present to us in the Blessed Eucharist. He gives himself to us as food. When we eat the sacred meal, he fills us with himself, his whole and undivided self. In the Eucharist, we transcend time and stand with Mary his mother and the other women, and the Beloved Disciple, at the foot of the Cross, sharing the life-giving moment of his death, when the boundless love of God for us all, in its impenetrable depth and limitless breadth, is poured out on us and all humankind.

We Catholics have Jesus alive among us in his Body and Blood. We share him with one another at Mass and fill ourselves with him in Holy Communion.

Is it right that we Catholics should keep so precious a gift to ourselves? Should we deny the precious Body and Blood—the living presence of Jesus—to anyone who sincerely desires a more intimate union with the Lord by receiving the Sacred Meal? How could we justify such a denial of this precious gift?

It is true that the Catholic Church is the “chosen people of God.” We have been chosen to receive this precious gift of the Eucharist. But never in its history has the Church seen itself as an exclusive organization, shutting itself off from the rest of the world to engage in private rituals and secret practices. Though during the ancient times of persecution, the fledgling Church was forced to worship in hiding and to protect itself from spies and infiltrators, the Church has always seen itself as a missionary organization, devoted to spreading the Good News of salvation and to extending itself until it thrives in every nation.

In other words, the Church is *chosen* in the sense that it is the source and the purveyor of the Precious Gift of the Living Christ to all people.

Why, then, does the Church erect barriers to the reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus by all people of good will, whether Catholic or not?

We Catholics know that the Blessed Sacrament is the living presence of Jesus. Why should it matter whether one who approaches to receive the Blessed Sacrament understands the theological structure in which we have set the Sacrament? So long as the recipient honestly recognizes Jesus in some way in the sacramental species, why should she be denied the union with the Lord which she seeks?

If the recipient honestly wants closer union with Jesus by receiving the Sacrament, we should rejoice to share the Gift of Jesus with her.

We know that Jesus is present in the sacred species. We should be pleased to share Jesus in this way with an honest recipient, whether or not she likewise recognizes the real presence of Christ, because in any case, the living Christ will enter the heart of the willing recipient and do his work there. He will heal that heart. He will feed that heart with his truth and love. He will bring that heart into greater union with himself.

Why would we Catholics not prefer *that* situation over all the theological disputes about transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and all the other stantiations . . . Why would we not prefer such a beautiful union of heart and Christ over allegiance to one institutional structure or another, or to one ecclesial authority over another, whether it be pope or metropolitan or preacher or minister or the Book itself or “the God in my heart.”

When we are able to feed and uplift a human heart with the living presence of Jesus, how can we justify denying this nourishment to the person on the basis of disputes—disputes over theological stances or institutional structures?

Is it that we feel we must deny the Eucharist to blatant sinners: apostates, defectors, detractors, rebels, outed homosexuals, and public malefactors of all sorts, at whom we take offense? Teach me the real difference between public sinners and us, who carry our hidden sins deeply within us. In truth, we all stand as sinners at the foot of the Cross—and the Cross is given to us daily in the Eucharist precisely because we *are* all sinners.

Is it that we feel competition with other religions and must set ourselves apart as the “true” faith, bestowing our best gifts only on those we judge to be *of us* and worthy? In this case, are we not in truth seeking institutional loyalty rather than to save the lost sheep, in whatever ways—by whatever desires they may feel—which are the inscrutable urgings of God?

Is it that we have bound up this precious gift of the Living God in layer after layer of laws, regulations, tests of worthiness, proofs of fidelity, manifestations of institutional allegiance, and avowals of sinlessness, when we know truly that the Eucharist is about none of that—that the Eucharist is simply about forgiveness and joy and life in the eternal presence of the Living God.

Let us not imitate the Pharisees. Let us follow the Lord.

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