

Communion in the Body and Blood (Corpus Christi, Year A)

1 Corinthians 10:16-17—The Cup and the Bread

¹⁶ The *cup of blessing* which we bless, is it not a *participation in the blood of Christ*? The *bread which we break*, is it not a *participation in the body of Christ*? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

1. Cup of Blessing: an ancient Jewish name for the third cup of the Passover meal:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine (Mishnah, *Berakoth* 6:1)

2. The Breaking of the Bread: compare practice of the early Church:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to *the breaking of bread* and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

3. Participation: “participation” or “communion” (Greek *koinōnia*) (10:16)

4. Ecclesiology: the Eucharist *constitutes* the unity of the Church (10:17)

The Living Tradition

John Paul II: Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in *her unity as the body of Christ*. Saint Paul refers to this *unifying power of participation in the banquet* of the *Eucharist* when he writes to the Corinthians: “The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (*I Cor* 10:16-17). Saint John Chrysostom's commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: “For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ”. *The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church*. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. *I Cor* 12:13, 27). (John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* no. 23)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Corpus Christi, Year A)

1. Where does Paul get the language of “cup of blessing”?

2. What does Paul mean when he speaks of a “communion” or “participation” in the body and blood of Christ?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. Gerald Bray, ed. *1-2 Corinthians* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI; Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 1999).
3. George T. Montague, SM, *First Corinthians* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).