

## **The Body of Christ**

*The body is a unit, though it is comprised of many parts. And although its parts are many, they all form one body. So it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free, and we were all given one Spirit to drink.... (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). [NLT “The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So, it is with the Body of Christ”]*

It is no coincidence nor accident that this subject, The Body of Christ, follows immediately on the heels of The Holy Eucharist (and too Trinity Sunday). “At the very heart of the Eucharist is the incontrovertible fact that it’s not just about me but that we are all in it together. Literally. There’s a key phrase that is at center of our Eucharistic practice and theology: The Body of Christ.”

\*\*\*On June 11<sup>th</sup> Fr. Whitmire made a profound presentation of the Holy Eucharist, to which you are referred.

Language around the Body of Christ and the Real Presence are deeply related. In simple terms, where your body is located is where you are present. Let’s take a quick look at some of the ways that the scriptures and the Church talk about the Body of Christ:

1. The Physical Body of Christ: The physical body of Jesus that has blood, guts, bones and bile. The historical body that lived, occupied space, sweated, smelled and performed all the physical functions of a body. John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” The teaching of the Church asserts that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine, born from his mother Mary, he was both completely human and completely God. This is the body that got weary from walking, the body that became exhausted after nights spent in prayer rather than sleep, the body that took bread, blessed it, and broke it, saying, “This is my Body, given for you.” The body that was nailed to the cross, died and rose again.
2. The Resurrected Body of Christ: We affirm that it was the physical Body of Christ that died and was raised. Yet, the resurrected body did things that normal living bodies do not e.g. entering locked rooms (John 20:19); did things that normal bodies can do, e.g. breathes on the disciples (John 20:22); walked and talked with the men on the road to Emmaus. He took bread and broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35). In John 20 Jesus shows proof of the wounds in his hands and on his side in his physical

body remain in his resurrected body. As Luke and John tell it, the resurrected Body is fully continuous with the physical body but is beyond it in some important ways.

3. The Ascended Body of Christ: The ascended Body seems to be continuous with the resurrected Body and is thus linked to the physical Body as well. This is the Body that we confess in the creeds to be “seated at the right hand of the father.”
4. The Pneumatic Body of Christ: “With the ascension of the resurrected Body, and its enthronement – literal, metaphorical, symbolic – at the right hand of God, we pass into various post-physical modes of the Body of Christ.” **HELP!?????** [This seems to mean that the pneumatic body of Christ is not a spiritual Christ but rather the pneumatic body of Christ is the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit. The Christ who gives life is the pneumatic Christ. He is not Christ in the Spirit; He is the Christ as pneuma, as the Spirit. The actual Christ, therefore, is the pneumatic Christ]. **What do you say, Father W?**
5. The Mystical Body of Christ: The Mystical Body of Christ is captured in a single verb: abide. This is the mode of mutual indwelling where Christ dwells in us and we in him. [Jesus said:] *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. ...* (John 15:1-8). By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.
6. The Social Body of Christ: The Social Body of Christ is the visible institution of the Church. There is overlap between the mystical Body of Christ and the social Body of Christ; perhaps in a perfect world they would be identical, but in this present age that is not to be. The distinction is that the social Body is a human society, reinforced with human rules and administered by human beings. While we truly believe that the Church is of divine origin and receives divine guidance through the Spirit, the Anglican tradition acknowledges the fallibility of such institutions. The Body of Christ – this Social Body – does not yet fully possess the Mind of Christ.
7. The Marginal Body of Christ: Mathew’s famous parable of the sheep and goats appropriately speaks as to whom or what can be construed as marginals. At the moment of judgment when all peoples are gathered before the throne and judged based on how they treated Christ, the crowd is confused and asks “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison...?” (Matthew 25:44). He responds: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least

of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). God’s concern is for those at the margins, those who get the short end of the social stick no matter how society is structured. “... the more that the social Body overlooks or deliberately ignores the marginal Body, the further from the presence of Christ it is.

8. The Eschatological Body of Christ: Eschatological is a fancy word that simply pertains to final things (the end times). We grasp the great eschatological vision as it appears in Isaiah’s prophecies about the coming messianic rule: “*The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).*” (... groaning in anticipation of God’s birthing of the new age – Read Romans 8:19-23). **The Eschatological Body – Looking forward in hope to the point when Christ is all in all.**
9. The Sacramental Body of Christ: Finally! The most common use of the term. Theology suggests that the phrase Body of Christ is a metaphor and that the consecrated bread reminds us to remember Christ’s death on our behalf and to nourish ourselves and our faith through this fundamentally mental act of memorial. Another way of understanding takes the identification of the bread with the Body of Christ literally and believes that Jesus is truly and fully present in the bread. There are many other metaphorical interpretations. However, when the consecrated Eucharistic bread is distributed from the altar, the priest never just gives it silently, i.e. he/she prays: “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.” or “The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven” (Among many other phrases). The phrase makes it clear that the Church claims that the piece of bread being put into your hand at that moment is the Body of Christ. There is an unavoidable continuity between the physical Body, the resurrected Body, and the sacramental Body. Likewise, all the prayers forge a direct verbal connection between the bread of the rite and the Body of Christ. The practice of reserving the sacrament – keeping leftover consecrated bread within a special box in the ambry or on the altar – within many episcopal churches follows the logic of Real Presence. No matter how we understand it or what the mechanics are, our prayers emphasize that the consecrated bread is the Body of Christ – This is the faith of the Church!

## **Real Presence & The Eucharist**

The Lord Jesus, on the night before he suffered on the cross, shared one last meal with his disciples. During this meal our Savior instituted the sacrament of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages and to entrust to the Church his Spouse a memorial of his death and resurrection.

By his Real Presence in the Eucharist Christ fulfils his promise to be with us "always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). With this gift of Christ's presence in our midst, the Church is truly blessed. In the Eucharist the Church both receives the gift of Jesus Christ and gives grateful thanks to God for such a blessing. This thanksgiving is the only proper response, for through this gift of himself in the celebration of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine Christ gives us the gift of eternal life.

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. .  
.. 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. (Jn 6:53-5)

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