

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 12 – Be What You Receive, the Body of Christ...AMEN!

Last week, we discussed how the bread and wine are consecrated – transubstantiated – into the Body and Blood of Christ. Just as these physical elements are transformed into the Body of Christ, we too are called to be “transformed” into the Body of Christ. We do this by receiving the Eucharist and living out what it means.

First, we must prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist. Immediately after the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray the “Our Father,” which is a prayer that helps us to recognize all that God does for us. The “Our Father” expresses our relationship with God. However, as mentioned in previous columns, this prayer also reminds us that we are part of a community of believers. [cf. *Looking Through Stained Glass*, “The Mass, Part 3 – Mom, Do I Have to Go?”, Sept. 30, 2018] The very next action we make in the Mass, the Sign of Peace, further accentuates our relationship with each other as a community, a Church, the Body of Christ. According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM)*, “There follows the Rite of Peace, by which the Church entreats peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament.” [GIRM, 82]

Now that we have expressed our oneness through prayer and action, the priest completes what is known as the “Fraction of the Bread.” Although today we use individually formed hosts for convenience sake, originally the bread that was used would have come from loaves that needed to be broken to be distributed, just as Jesus would

have done at the Last Supper. Do not let the convenience of today’s “Fraction of the Bread” distort the significance of this rite as Paul explained it in the First Letter to the Corinthians, “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” [1 Cor. 10:17]

After the “Fraction of the Bread,” we continue with the distribution of the Eucharist. In our parish, we distribute both the Body and Blood of Christ, as this helps us better re-present Christ’s actions in the Last Supper. However, if, for some reason, we receive only the Body or Blood of Christ in the Eucharist (for example, if we are ill, we should not receive from the cup), we still receive the entirety of the Sacrament – the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ – in the one element. When we are presented with the Body and Blood of Christ, we say, “Amen,” which is not only an affirmation of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, but a statement of hope in our own transformation into the Body of Christ. As St. Augustine reminds us, “You are saying ‘Amen’ to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. [...] Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your ‘Amen’ may ring true! [...] Be what you see; receive what you are.” [Augustine, Sermon 272]

After receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we spend a few minutes in private thanksgiving to Jesus who gave His life to us. The final part of the Mass to discuss is the “Farewell,” or the Concluding Rites. However, next week, we will have a special Christmas column.

