

Our Gospel is taken from John chapter 6 which speaks of Jesus as the Bread of life. In that long chapter our Evangelist tells us first that Jesus nourishes us, metaphorically speaking, when we listen to his words, letting them shape our thoughts and actions. This is the equivalent of St Matthew describing the disciple as someone who listens to the word of God and acts on it.

And then in the second part of the discourse, the section from which today's Gospel is taken, Jesus is the Bread of Life through his body and blood given to us as food and drink.

In today's Gospel Jesus says "My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." The feeding that Jesus is speaking about now is not metaphorical. Jesus, the Bread of Life, nourishes us with his body and blood, given to us as real food and real drink, but obviously not like our ordinary human food.

Our second reading, from St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, complements our Gospel by reminding us what Jesus, as our food in the Eucharist, brings about. Paul tells us that by nourishing us with his body and blood, the Risen Lord draws us more deeply into his body, the Church. "The bread that we break, is it not a sharing 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."

St John Paul II described the Church as drawing her life from the Eucharist. That is how he began his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of 2003, "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." He was echoing the *Catechism's* statement that "the Eucharist makes the Church."

St Augustine and other early Church Fathers made much of this – that the Eucharist makes the Church. In one of his sermons Augustine pointed out that when we hear the words "Body of Christ," as we come forward to receive communion, we are being invited not only to make our response of "Amen" to the minister's "the body of Christ" as an act of faith in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, but, as well, to be conscious that the eucharist is given to us to deepen our identity - who we already are through baptism – members of the Church which is the body of Christ.

Thus startlingly – Augustine was a great preacher – he said "If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive."

May our 'Amen' when receiving communion be an act of faith in the real presence of Jesus in the sacrament and a renewal of our sense of identity, first given us at Baptism, as belonging to his body, the church, recalling that the church draws her life from the eucharist.

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