



THE CHURCH

The Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The Church is communion with Jesus

From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them and gave them a share in his mission, joy and sufferings. Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: “Abide in me, and I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches”. And he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”.(Jn 15:4-5; 6:56) (787)

United around him and in him

When his visible presence was taken from them, Jesus did not leave his disciples orphans. He promised to remain with them until the end of time; he sent them his Spirit. As a result communion with Jesus has become, in a way, more intense: “By communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation.” (Vat II, the Church) (788)

The comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered *around him*; she is united *in him*, in his body. Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ. (789)

“One Body”

Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body, become intimately united with him: “In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his Passion and glorification”. This is especially true of Baptism, which unites us to Christ's death and Resurrection, and the Eucharist, by which “really sharing in the body of the Lord,...we are taken up into communion with him and with one another.” (Vatican II, the Church) (790)

Diversity of the members of the Body

The body's unity does not do away with the diversity of its members: “In the building up of Christ's Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church.” The unity of the Mystical Body produces and stimulates charity among the faithful: “From this it follows that if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with him, and if one member is honoured, all the members together rejoice”.(Vat II, the Church) Finally, the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions: “For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.(Gal 3:27-28) (791)

“Christ is the Head of this Body”

Christ “is the Head of the body, the Church” (Col 1:18). He is the principle of creation and redemption. Raised to the Father's glory, “in everything he [is] pre-eminent” (Col 1:18), especially in the Church, through whom he extends his reign over all things. (792)

Christ unites us with his Passover: all his members must strive to resemble him, “until Christ be formed” in them. “For this reason we... are taken up into the mysteries of his life,... associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified”. (Vat II, the Church) (793)

Christ provides for our growth: to make us grow toward him, our head, he provides in his Body, the Church, the gifts and assistance by which we help one another along the way of salvation. (794)

Christ and his Church thus together make up the “whole *Christ*” (*Christus totus*). The Church is one with Christ. The saints are acutely aware of this unity:

“Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man... The fullness of Christ then is the head and the members. But what does ‘head and members’ mean? Christ and the Church.” (St Augustine)

“Our redeemer has shown himself to be one person with the holy Church whom he has taken to himself.” (St Gregory the Great)

“Head and members form as it were one and the same mystical person.” (St Thomas Aquinas)

“A reply of St. Joan of Arc to her judges sums up the faith of the holy doctors and the good sense of the believer: ‘About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they're just one thing, and we shouldn't complicate the matter.’” (Acts of her trial) (795)

The Church is the Bride of Christ

The unity of Christ and the Church, head and members of one Body, also implies the distinction of the two within a personal relationship. This aspect is often expressed by the image of bridegroom and bride. The theme of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church was prepared for by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. The Lord referred to himself as the "Bridegroom". The Apostle speaks of the whole Church and of each of the faithful, members of his Body, as a bride "betrothed" to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him. The Church is the spotless bride of the spotless Lamb. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her" (Eph 5:25-26). He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant, and never stops caring for her as for his own body:

"This is the whole Christ, head and body, one formed from many... whether the head or members speak, it is Christ who speaks. He speaks in his role as the head (*ex persona capitis*) and in his role as body (*ex persona corporis*). What does this mean? "The two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the Church." And the Lord himself says in the Gospel: "So they are no longer two, but one flesh". "They are, in fact, two different persons, yet they are one in the conjugal union,... *as head, he calls himself the bridegroom, as body, he calls himself 'bride'.*" (St Augustine) (796)



THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the 'soul' of the Church

"What the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church" (St Augustine). "To this Spirit of Christ, as an invisible principle, is to be ascribed the fact that all the parts of the body are joined one with the other and with their exalted head; for the whole Spirit of Christ is in the head, the whole Spirit is in the body, and the whole Spirit is in each of the members" (Pope Pius XII). The Holy Spirit makes the Church "the Temple of the living God"(2 Cor 6:16):

"Indeed, it is to the Church herself that the 'Gift of God' has been entrusted... In it is in her that communion with Christ has been deposited, that is to say: the Holy Spirit, the pledge of incorruptibility, the strengthening of our faith and the ladder of our ascent to God... For where the Church is, there also is God's Spirit; where God's Spirit is, there is the Church and every grace." (St Irenaeus) (797)

The Holy Spirit works by Baptism, by grace and by the virtues

The Holy Spirit is "the principle of every vital and truly saving action in each part of the Body" (Pope Pius XII). He works in many ways to build up the whole Body in charity:

- by *God's Word* "which is able to build you up";
- by *Baptism*, through which he forms Christ's Body;
- by *the sacraments*, which give growth and healing to Christ's members;
- by "*the grace of the apostles*, which holds first place among his gifts";
- by *the virtues*, which make us act according to what is good; finally,
- by *the many special graces* (called "charisms"), by which he makes the faithful "fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church." (Vat II, the Church) (798)

Charisms - graces of the Holy Spirit

Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men and to the needs of the world. (799)

Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them, and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms. (800)

It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds. "Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good", so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). (801)

IN BRIEF

- **The Church is the Body of Christ. Through the Spirit and his action in the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, Christ, who once was dead and is now risen, establishes the community of believers as his own Body. (805)**
- **In the unity of this Body, there is a diversity of members and functions. All members are linked to one another, especially to those who are suffering, to the poor and persecuted. (806)**
- **The Church is this Body of which Christ is the head: she lives from him, in him and for him; he lives with her and in her. (807)**
- **The Church is the Bride of Christ: he loved her and handed himself over for her. He has purified her by his blood and made her the fruitful mother of all God's children. (808)**
- **The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the soul, as it were, of the Mystical Body, the source of its life, of its unity in diversity, and of the riches of its gifts and charisms. (809)**
- **"Hence the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' " (St. Cyprian). (810)**