

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Spring 2009 – Series #4
Themes of St. Paul

Talk #8
St. Paul on the Sacraments



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk. It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church". If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site. The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at: <http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/Studies/MysteryofIsraelChurch/mysteryofisraela.html>



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.org • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

8. St. Paul on the Sacraments

Given that next week we celebrate the Institution of the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday and celebrate the Baptism of adult converts on the Easter Vigil, I thought that it would be appropriate to reflect on St. Paul's teachings on the sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist.

The Sacraments Knit Together the Body of Christ

One of the great overarching themes of the Letters of St. Paul is that of the Body of Christ. The People of God of the Old Covenant has been transformed, under the New Covenant, so as to become the very Body of the Messiah. The head of this Body is the Messiah Himself, and its vivifying and animating spirit is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son of God.

As we have seen in other lectures, many of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament proclaimed that the Messiah would establish a Messianic Kingdom, which was to receive the Gentiles who would come to faith in the true God, grow to cover the whole earth, last until the end of time, and provide an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul proclaims that this Messianic Kingdom announced by the prophets is realized in the Church, which is, in its innermost essence, the Body of Christ. The Messianic promises are fulfilled in this Body, in which all the members are given to drink of the Spirit of God through channels—arteries and veins, joints and ligaments—that connect the members with the life-giving Head.

In Eph 4:4-16, St. Paul speaks of the unity of the Church. This unity comes from the fact that it is one Body of Christ, animated by one Spirit, formed by one Baptism, and nourished into the fullness of Christ.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . . We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Likewise, in Col 2:19, St. Paul exhorts his listeners to hold "fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God."

How are the members of this Messianic Body united with the Head of the Body, and how are they given to drink of

the Spirit? What are these "joints and ligaments"? St. Paul and the Christian tradition answer: faith and the sacraments which nourish the faithful in faith, hope, and charity. Christ instituted the seven *sacraments* of the Church so that the faithful would be joined to His Body as living members and be progressively nourished with the grace of His Spirit, as long as they receive them with the proper dispositions (faith and repentance).

The sacraments of the Church distinguish the Messianic Kingdom from the Kingdom formed by the Old Covenant with Israel. The Church has been provided with living channels of grace *different in kind* from the religious rites ordained by God in the Old Covenant, although not without profound continuity with them.

The Gift of the Spirit, the New Covenant, and the Sacraments

The sacraments of the Church provide the ordinary means for the realization of the Old Testament prophecies that foretell the abundant giving of the Spirit in the Messianic Kingdom of the New Covenant, by which the Lord writes the Torah interiorly on man's heart. Let us look at a few of these prophecies.

Ezekiel speaks of the Ingathering into the Messianic Kingdom, which will be marked by a baptismal cleansing from sin, and the giving of the Spirit:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ez 36:25-27)

Another well-known text is Joel 2:28-29:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

This text was cited by St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, in which it was fulfilled through the miraculous reception of Confirmation by the Apostles and disciples, and the reception of the sacrament of Baptism by three thousand Israelites who were brought to faith on that day.

Distribution of the Spirit in the Old and New Covenants

The giving of the Spirit is not unique to the New Covenant. The saints of the Old Testament had received the indwelling Spirit, as we see from many texts. David, for example, after his sin with Bathsheba, prays in Ps 51:11 that God “take not thy Holy Spirit from me.”¹

The Messianic Kingdom, however, is characterized by a fuller outpouring. In what does this fuller outpouring consist?

The Messiah’s redemptive death enables a new economy of grace to be made present in the New Covenant, so that the grace of the Spirit can now be communicated by the sacred rites of the Church, as long as no obstacle is posed in man’s heart.

The sacred rites of the Mosaic Covenant served, as sacred signs, to prefigure the Sacrifice of Christ and to sanctify Israel, like the sacramentals of the Church used in the liturgy (such as blessings, the use of holy water, veneration of the Cross, etc.).²

These rites of Israel disposed the hearts of the Israelites to receive grace, but did not give grace directly through the rite itself, just as a blessing with holy water in Church does not give grace directly, but disposes us to sanctification, if we use it with reverence.

The seven sacraments, however, are distinguished from the rites of Israel and the sacramentals of the liturgy by being sacred signs which *efficaciously produce the grace* that they signify, a grace merited for mankind by the sacrificial death of the Messiah. Only God could give mere sensible signs this supernatural efficacy, and He has done so in a stable way in the seven sacraments.³

The difference between the sacraments of the New Covenant and the rites of the Old was clearly proclaimed by John the Baptist at the beginning of Christ’s public ministry: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals

¹ See also Num 11:25-29, which speaks of the Spirit of the Lord being given to the 72 elders of Israel.

² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1667: “Holy Mother Church has, moreover, instituted sacramentals. These are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy.”

³ See *CCC*, no. 1227: “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.”

I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt 3:11).

The baptism of John was a kind of sacramental prophetically instituted by John to prepare the Israelites to receive the Messiah with hearts disposed by conversion. The Baptism instituted by Christ was immeasurably more powerful, for Christ gave it the stable power to communicate the life of the Spirit, forgive all sins—original and personal—and engraft the recipient into the Body of Christ.

Like the baptism of John, the sacred rites of the Old Covenant, although instituted by the holy will and design of God, could not in themselves efficaciously communicate the Holy Spirit, His manifold gifts, and the fire of charity. This nobility was reserved for the seven sacraments of the New Covenant.

The Sacrament of Baptism according to St. Paul

Baptism thus is the first of the sacraments, by which new members are incorporated into the Body of Christ and are spiritually reborn in Him. In 1 Cor 12:12-13, St. Paul speaks of this mystery: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

Baptism here is given two principal functions: to incorporate a person into the Body of Christ which is the Church, and to give the neophyte the supernatural life of the Spirit: sanctifying grace, faith, hope, and charity, infused moral virtues, and the seven gifts of the Spirit. Thus St. Paul speaks of the sacraments, beginning with Baptism, as giving the members of the Body of Christ to “drink of the one Spirit.”

In Rom 6:3-5, St. Paul further develops the function of the sacrament of Baptism as a participation in Christ’s death and resurrection: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Baptism symbolizes a death to the old life of the old man: original sin and personal sins. This death involves a forgiveness of those sins through the infinite merit of Christ’s death on the Cross. The death to sin is followed by a new life in Christ on the model of His Resurrection. This entails a spiritual resurrection through reception of the same Spirit that animated Christ, which is the Holy Spirit and His gifts. As Is 11:1-2 describe the seven gifts of the Spirit resting on the Messiah, so Baptism gives the members of Christ an incipient share in those gifts.

For this reason it is most fitting and traditional for adults to receive Baptism in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil in which the Church most solemnly celebrates Christ’s tri-

umph over sin and death, and the new life made possible for the Church through his Resurrection.

Another Pauline text that speaks of Baptism is Tit 3:4-7: “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit*, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”

As mentioned above, the Baptism of Christ is different from the ritual baths (*mikveh*) and immersions (*tevillah*)⁴ of Israel precisely because it has been given the power to convey the Holy Spirit, as long as one receives it with faith and contrition. The ritual baths of Judaism are indeed holy because they symbolize conversion and thus help to dispose one for it, being instituted by the will of God. Baptism, however, is holy in a higher way, because it has been mysteriously endowed with the power to give the grace that it symbolizes.

It is interesting to note that conversion to Judaism also involves a ritual bath conceived along the same lines as Christian Baptism, and presumably predating it.⁵ The convert must undergo a full (and threefold) immersion which symbolizes death and rebirth. One rabbi describes it as follows:

What physical act could a person perform in order to symbolize a radical change of heart, a total commitment? Is there a sign so dramatic, dynamic, and all-encompassing that it could represent the radical change undergone by the convert to Judaism?

Jewish tradition prescribes a profound symbol. It instructs the conversion candidate to place himself or herself in a radically different physical environment—in water rather than air. This leaves the person floating—momentarily suspended without breathing—substituting the usual forward moving nature and purposeful stride that characterize his or her waking movements with an aimlessness, a weightlessness, a detachment from the former environment. Individuality, passion, ego—all are submerged in the metamorphosis from the larval state of the present to a new existence.

Ritual immersion is the total submersion of the body in a pool of water. This pool and its water are precisely prescribed by Jewish law. Immersion, *tevillah*, is the common core component of every [traditional]

4 Immersion in a ritual bath was required in various aspects of Jewish life. The Talmud requires it for purification after one had become ritually impure so as to enter the sacred precincts of the Temple, for women prior to marriage, for married women after their monthly cycle, and for those who convert to Judaism.

5 The Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yevamot*, chapter 4, speaks of immersion as essential to the rite of conversion, and this is presented as a long received tradition.

Jewish conversion process, for male and female, adult and child, ignoramus and scholar. It is *sine qua non*, and a conversion ceremony without immersion is unacceptable to the traditional religious community and simply not Jewish in character. . . . No other religious act is so freighted with meaning as this one which touches every aspect of life and proclaims a total commitment to a new idea and a new way of life as it swallows up the old and gives birth to the new.

The water of the mikveh is designed to ritually cleanse a person from deeds of the past. The convert is considered by Jewish law to be like a newborn child.⁶ By spiritually cleansing the convert, the mikveh water prepares him or her to confront God, life, and people with a fresh spirit and new eyes—it washes away the past, leaving only the future.⁷

Christ’s institution of Baptism as the sacrament of Christian initiation took the waters of the *mikveh* of the Old Covenant with its profound symbolism, and gave it a new power: not only to symbolize new birth, but to supernaturally accomplish it by engrafting the recipient into Christ’s Mystical Body, forgiving his sins, and pouring into his soul the supernatural life of the Spirit.

The Sacrament of Confirmation

The outpouring of the Spirit that was begun with Baptism was an initial gift destined to be nourished and grow into maturity, just as a newborn must grow into manhood. As Baptism is the sacrament of spiritual birth, Confirmation is the sacrament of spiritual maturity, by which the recipient is strengthened in grace and a fuller outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit so as to engage in the manifold combat of the Christian life as a “Christian soldier.”

Although we find no explicit mention of the sacrament of Confirmation in the Letters of St. Paul, Acts 19:2-7 recounts the administration of the sacrament by St. Paul himself. When he arrived in Ephesus at the beginning of his third missionary voyage, he found some disciples there and asked them if they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they were initiated into the faith. They replied that they did not even know of the existence of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul then asked them: “‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ . . . On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the

6 See Yevamot 48b: R. Yosi rules that when “a convert is immersed [in a mikvah] he is comparable to a newborn child.” Rashi notes that the convert is no longer liable for previous sins. See Rabbi J. Simcha Cohen, *Intermarriage and Conversion: A Halakhic Solution* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav publishing House, 1987), p. 67.

7 Rabbi Maurice Lamm, *Becoming a Jew* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1991), available online at http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/Conversion/Conversion_Process/Mikveh.shtml.

Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.”

First St. Paul baptized the disciples and then afterwards he laid his hands upon them. Although the sacrament is not named, this clearly refers to the sacrament of Confirmation, as in Acts 8. The effect is the same as on Pentecost: the Holy Spirit came upon them, they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The Eucharist

The sacrament that St. Paul dedicates most attention to is naturally the Eucharist, which is the “source and summit” of the life of the Church. He has a magnificent short catechesis on the Eucharist in 1 Cor 11:23-34, which contains one of the four accounts of the institution of the Eucharist in the New Testament (the others are Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; and Lk 22:29-20). St. Paul begins by solemnly reiterating what he has received and passed on concerning the institution of the Eucharist, which stands at the heart of the Apostolic Tradition.⁸ He writes:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Christ’s words of institution show the dual nature of the Eucharist as sacrament and sacrifice. It is the great *sacrament* of the presence of Christ’s Body and Blood, which is given to the faithful as spiritual nourishment, and the great *sacrifice* of the Church, which makes the one sacrifice of Calvary present on our altars until the end of time. As sacrament, it makes Christ present under the sacramental veils of bread and wine, to nourish the faithful with the Body and Blood of Christ. As sacrifice, the Body and Blood of Christ are mystically separated and offered to the Father. He who is offered and He who offers through the hands of His priests is one and the same Son of God.

The Eucharist sacramentally “proclaims” Christ’s sacrificial death, by *re-presenting* it on the altar—the very same Body and Blood that were given and poured out on Calvary. And this sacramental *re-presentation* of His death is to be continued until the Second Coming.

The sacramental re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary was not meant to be a one-time event limited

⁸ See Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience, Dec. 10, 2008: “With what profound respect St. Paul transmits verbally the tradition on the Eucharist received from the witnesses themselves of the last night. He transmits these words with a precious treasure entrusted to his fidelity.”

to the Last Supper, for Christ commanded His Apostles to “do” what He did “in remembrance of me.” The word “do” is frequently given a sacrificial connotation in the Old Testament. Sacrificial offerings are said to be “done.” Furthermore, the reference to “remembrance” or “memorial,” is also a sacrificial term frequently used in the Old Testament. There are sacrifices which are said to be memorials of the great works of God.⁹ The most important reference to “memorial” sacrifice is in the institution of the Passover: “This day shall be for you a memorial (*zikaron*), and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord” (Ex 12:14). The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was a “memorial” of the liberation of Israel from Egypt, so that the foundational event of the history of Israel would be liturgically re-enacted every year and stay ever alive in the minds and hearts of Israel. The Eucharist is likewise a memorial of the event of Good Friday, on which Israel and the entire world was liberated from the dominion of sin and death.

As at the first Passover in Egypt, the blood of the sacrificial lamb was applied to the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites to save them from the angel of death, so in the Eucharist, the blood of the true Lamb of God is applied, not to doorposts, but to our lips and heart to exclude Satan—the true angel of death—and communicate the grace of the Spirit.

Furthermore, Christ speaks of the Eucharistic chalice as the cup of “the *new covenant in my blood*” (1 Cor 11:25). Here Christ is making a twofold reference: to the blood of the Old Covenant poured out at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and to the prophecy of Jer 31:31-33¹⁰ which speaks of a New Covenant¹¹:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they

⁹ See, among others, Ex 20:24; Lev 2:2 and 24:7, which speaks of a memorial offering of fine flour, oil, and frankincense.

¹⁰ See also Is 42:6, in which the Suffering Servant is said to be “given to you as a *covenant* to the people.”

¹¹ See Benedict XVI’s interpretation of these words of St. Paul in his Wednesday Audience of Dec. 10, 2008: “Hidden in these words is a reference to two fundamental texts of the Old Testament. The first reference is to the promise of a new covenant in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. Jesus says to the disciples and says to us: now, in this hour, with me and with my death the new covenant is realized; with my blood this new history of humanity begins in the world. However, present in these words also is a reference to the moment of the covenant on Sinai, where Moses said: “Behold the blood of the covenant . . .” (Exodus 24:8). There it was a question of the blood of animals. The blood of animals could only be expression of a desire, the hope of the new sacrifice, of true worship. With the gift of the chalice the Lord gives us the true sacrifice. The only true sacrifice is the love of the Son. With the gift of this love, eternal love, the Word enters into the new covenant. To celebrate the Eucharist means that Christ gives himself to us, his love, to conform us to himself and thus create the new world.”

broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This decisive text of Jeremiah is quoted in chapter eight of the Letter to the Hebrews, to show that the Mosaic Covenant, in God's eternal plan, was to be followed by a new and better Covenant:

Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second. . . . In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:7-13).

Jesus says His Blood poured out on Calvary, and sacramentally poured out in the Eucharist, *is the New Covenant*, which is superior to that of Sinai because it has the intrinsic power to merit the forgiveness of all sins and iniquity, to communicate sanctifying grace and the gifts of the Spirit, to write the Law of God on hearts and give man the inner strength to keep it.

The Mosaic Covenant was sealed at the foot of Mt. Sinai with the blood of many oxen. In Ex 24:5-8, burnt offerings and peace offerings of bulls were offered, and the blood was gathered in basins. Half of the blood was poured out on the altar, and the other half "poured out" or sprinkled on the people after they promised to be faithful to the covenant: "And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Ex 24:8).

Just as the Old Covenant was sealed with sacrificial blood poured out and sprinkled on the people, so too the New Covenant is sealed with blood. The difference lies in the victim whose blood is poured out. The victim in the New Covenant is not a multitude of irrational beasts, but the Messiah, the Son of God made man, "who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). As stated in the Letter to the Hebrews (10:4), "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins."

The New Covenant thus is sealed with the Blood of Christ by which He gave His life in obedience to merit our redemption. Not only is it sealed with the blood of Christ, but in some sense the New Covenant *consists* in the Body and Blood of Christ. This can be seen from the words of institution recounted by St. Paul in 1 Cor 11:25: "This cup *is the new covenant* in my blood." The promise of the New Covenant and the inheritance we obtain from

it through Christ's sacrificial death, is nothing other than a share in the divine life of Christ Himself, given to us through the Spirit which vivifies the Church, and which is communicated through the sacraments of the Church.

As the Old Covenant promised an inheritance of land—*Eretz Israel*—the new covenant promises a spiritual inheritance: the Kingdom of Heaven. This promise stands at the very start of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

Every covenant replies mutual obligations. God's promises require our fidelity. In order to inherit the promise of the heavenly kingdom and the full outpouring of Christ's Spirit, we must live in the Church, firmly believe and live by her teachings, and make reverent use of her sacraments, the chief of which is the Eucharist, source and summit of the Christian life.

Today, not a few theologians are embarrassed by the expression "New Covenant," and the words of Heb 8:13, and prefer to speak of parallel covenants, rather than of the Old and New Covenants. However, the expression, "New Covenant," is used by both the Old and the New Testaments. As we have seen, Christ Himself consecrates this expression in one of the most solemn moments of His entire life: the institution of the Eucharist in the Last Supper. The Ancient Covenant given through the mediation of Moses was, by its very nature, ordered to the New Covenant in Christ's Blood.

The fact that there is a New Covenant does not annul the election of the people of Israel, for in the words of St. Paul in Rom 11:28-29, "as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." The Second Vatican Council says that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues."

The fact that the election of Israel has not been annulled, however, does not mean that the Ancient Covenant is not ordered to its fulfillment by the New Covenant.

Worthy Reception of the Eucharist

After recounting the narrative of the institution of the Eucharist, St. Paul speaks about worthy reception of the sacrament (1Cor 11:27-31):

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged.

What does it mean to receive Holy Communion “in an unworthy manner”? The Catholic Tradition has always interpreted this with regard to any mortal sin. To eat and drink “without discerning the body” may refer to communicating without faith in the Real Presence. Given the context, however, it seems that St. Paul is referring more generally to profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord by reception of the intimacy of communion on the part of one who gravely violates charity. One fails to discern the Body if one fails to see the necessary purity from grave sin that one must have in order to receive the Spotless Victim.

It should be noticed that the text certainly presupposes the Real Presence of Christ’s Body and Blood. Only if they are truly present can they be so gravely profaned by unworthy communion, as to make one “eat and drink judgment on oneself.”

This teaching of St. Paul is of great practical importance. The faithful must examine their conscience before receiving Holy Communion. Canon 916 of the *Code of Canon Law* is based on this teaching of St. Paul. The canon states:

A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible.

In practice there is almost never a grave reason to receive Communion without sacramental confession for a person who has committed mortal sin.

St. Thomas comments on this text of 1 Cor 11:27 by explaining why those in mortal sin are excluded from receiving Communion. First he poses an objection:

But it seems that sinners do not approach this sacrament unworthily. For in this sacrament Christ is received, and He is the spiritual physician, Who says of Himself in Matt (9:12): “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” The answer is that this sacrament is spiritual food, as baptism is spiritual birth. But one is born in order to live, but he is not nourished unless he is already alive. Therefore, this sacrament does not befit sinners who are not yet alive by grace; although baptism befits them. Furthermore, the Eucharist is the sacrament of love and ecclesial unity, as Augustine says (*On John*). Since, therefore, the sinner lacks charity and is deservedly separated from the unity of the Church, if he approaches this sacrament, he commits a falsehood, since he is signifying that he has charity, but does not.¹²

When the mortal sin in question is grave and public, there is a special reason for Communion to be withheld.

Not only would it constitute a grave sacrilege, offending the Lord and harming the communicant through an additional grave sin, but it would also create *grave scandal*, leading people to think that anyone can receive Communion independently of whether they live according to the moral teachings of the Church in grave matter. Or it could lead one to think that the grave public sin in question is not truly a sin.

This text of St. Paul has great relevance today with regard to the controversial issue of whether Holy Communion should be withheld from those who publicly and obstinately persevere in grave sin. The Code of Canon Law has a canon based on this teaching, canon 915: “Those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion.” Archbishop Burke has commented extensively on the importance and proper interpretation of this canon.¹³

Two weeks ago we reflected on the self-emptying of Christ, as proclaimed in Phil 2:5-11. The self-emptying of Christ that began at the moment of the Incarnation when the Word was made flesh, continues even more profoundly in the Eucharist. In the Incarnation, Christ emptied Himself of divine glory by appearing as a common son of man, allowing Himself to be humiliated and crucified. In the Eucharist, Christ empties Himself not only of the manifestation of His divine glory, but even of the appearance of His adorable Humanity, hiding under the veils of the appearances of common bread and wine. As at Calvary He did not resist the hands of His enemies, here He allows Himself to be received in sacrilegious communion by those who make themselves into His enemies through unrepented grave sin.

Last week we spoke of how we can aggravate the agony of Christ in Gethsemane and Calvary through our present sin, and also console Him through our fidelity to His grace. Nowhere is that more true than in the Eucharist. Communion without proper dispositions wounds the Heart of Christ, whereas devout and reverent Communion is most consoling to Him, and to us!

The Eucharist as the Sacrament of Ecclesial Unity

Precisely because worthy reception of the Eucharist unites us most intimately with Christ, it binds us intimately with all the other members of the Body who are similarly united with the Head. The Eucharist is thus the sacrament of ecclesial unity and charity, binding all the members in communion. The Eucharist is at one and the same time the sacrament which produces charity in the faithful and

¹³ See “The Discipline Regarding the Denial of Holy Communion to Those Obstinate Persevering in Manifest Grave Sin,” *Periodica de Re Canonica*, 96 (2007): 3-58 (available online at <http://www.the-realpresence.org/eucharst/holycom/denial.htm>).

¹² Commentary in 1 Cor 11:27, Marietti #691.

which binds the Church together with the bond of unity, a fruit of charity.

In 1 Cor 10:16-17, St. Paul stresses this aspect of unity: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

The Eucharist therefore produces the interior unity of the Mystical Body. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1396 explains:

The unity of the Mystical Body: the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body—the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call: “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? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

Benedict XVI comments:

We receive Christ in communion, but Christ unites himself also in my neighbor. Christ and neighbor are inseparable in the Eucharist. And thus we are only one bread, only one body. A Eucharist without solidarity with others is an abuse of the Eucharist. And here we are at the root and at the same time at the center of the doctrine of the Church as Body of Christ, of the Risen Christ.

We also see all the realism of this doctrine. Christ gives us his body in the Eucharist, he gives himself in his body and so makes us his body, he unites us to his risen body. If man eats normal bread, this bread in the process of digestion becomes part of his body, transformed in substance of human life. But in Holy Communion the inverse process takes place. Christ, the Lord, assimilates us to himself, introduces us into his glorious Body and so all together we become his Body.¹⁴

This is another reason why any unrepented mortal sin renders one incapable of worthily receiving Christ. Mortal sin causes separation: separation from God and from one’s neighbor who is wounded by the sin. If I am in a state of separation I cannot receive the sacrament of unity without prior reconciliation.

It follows that the Eucharist will not be able to achieve its proper role in our sanctification if we do not make a more assiduous use of the sacrament of Reconciliation. One of the greatest problems of the contemporary Church, it seems

to me, is the proliferation of sacrilegious communions and the simultaneous radical decline in the reception of the sacrament of Penance. Let us resolve to put in practice St. Paul’s exhortation on reconciliation from 2 Cor 5:19-20:

In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Orders on the Last Supper, at the same time as the Eucharist, when He said: “Do this in memory of me” (1 Cor 11:24; Lk 22:19).

St. Paul does not speak much directly about Holy Orders as a *sacrament*, although he refers to its institution. He alludes to the sacramental nature of Holy Orders, however, in the Pastoral Letters to Timothy.

In 2 Tim 1:4, St. Paul tells Timothy to “rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control. Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God.” The gift of God that Timothy received through the laying on of Paul’s hands seems to refer to the fullness of Holy Orders: the episcopate.

The sacrament involves the sensible sign of the laying on of hands, joined by the prayer of ordination. It imparts the spiritual power of the priesthood, and the sacramental graces necessary for the holy exercise of Holy Orders. It seems that St. Paul is speaking of these latter graces when he urges St. Timothy to “rekindle the gift of God” received through the laying on of Paul’s hands.

In 1 Tim 4:14, he likewise tells Timothy not to “neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you.”

This issue is tremendously important because Martin Luther denied that Holy Orders is a sacrament of the New Law, contrary to the entire Christian Tradition. Luther’s position had incalculable consequences, for it led, in the ecclesial communities stemming from the Reformation, to the loss of most of the sacramental system, except for Baptism and matrimony, for the valid celebration of which Holy Orders is not strictly necessary.

The Sacrament of Matrimony (Eph 5)

The sacramental nature of Christian marriage is beautifully explained by St. Paul in Eph 5:25-32:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of

14 Wednesday Audience of Dec. 10, 2008.

water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery [sacrament] is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Christ left His Father in the Incarnation to become one flesh with His Church, His Bride, whom He loved to the end (Jn 13:1), to the shedding of all His blood. His union with the Church has thus become the perfect exemplar of human marriage, and His spousal love is sacramentally represented in the marriage of Christians who are joined to His life through Baptism, by which the Bride of Christ has been sacramentally “cleansed by the washing of water with the word.”

The fact that Christian matrimony has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament means that the grace signified by the sacrament is actually given to the spouses who receive it with the proper dispositions. Each of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ has this power of efficaciously communicating the grace that it signifies.

Human marriage is a sacred sign of the love of Christ for His Church, for whom He shed all His blood. This means that the sacrament of matrimony must communicate to the spouses the grace enabling them to love their spouse and children after the pattern of Christ—to the point of heroic self-sacrifice.

This grace involves two dimensions. On the one hand, worthy reception of the sacrament of matrimony gives an increase of sanctifying grace, from which charity flows. The sacrament also gives the spouses a title, as it were, to a whole series of actual graces which aid them in the particular circumstances of married life to correspond with the demands of spousal, maternal, and paternal love. Of course, they are capable of rejecting these graces by neglecting to cooperate with them. However, to the extent that spouses do cooperate, they can be assured that still more graces will be forthcoming to help them progressively in the difficulties and temptations of married life. In this way, the vocation of matrimony is a beautiful path to continual conversion and sanctification.