

Life Abiding in *Christ's Body*

I remember seeing, many decades ago, some literature that spoke of the Bible as an acronym for "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth". While we might find this a cute turn of phrase, we might be unaware of how deeply that phrase has come to define the Christian life.

Many, including many Christians, boil the Christian faith down to a series of rules to live by, or a kind of moralism that is rewarded after you die. While there is an unavoidable moral dimension, and while we do wait for our eternal reward in the life to come, the moral dimension is actually secondary, and our participation in the divine life has life in the here and now very much in mind.

As **Pope Benedict XVI's** first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* reminds us, the beating heart of the Christian faith is a living encounter with the living

person of Jesus Christ (*DCE*, 1). In a [General Audience on 24 October 2012](#), the pope would go on to say that faith is not about accepting certain truths about God, but an act of ongoing entrustment of oneself *into* God's care. God's love and care, Benedict says, forms the indispensable foundation for the Christian life, framed as it is by hope and trust. More to the point, Benedict says that the *adherence* to the God who provides that hope and trust is what constitutes the heart of Christian living.

God's care is not something abstract. Instead, it comes in the concrete form of the person of Jesus Christ, or more concretely still, the *body* of Jesus Christ. God's care is also not a decorative add

Faith is an ongoing entrustment of oneself into God's care.





on to our life; it forms the very basis for life itself, and the body of Christ forms the anchor for our life. Scandalously concrete is Christ's reminder that the act of *consuming* that body is what anchors our life. This is what Jesus means when he says in John's Gospel:

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (John 6:57)

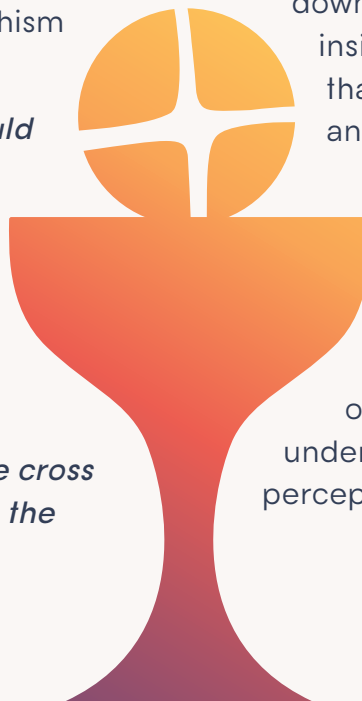
We need to be reminded that the life given by Christ is not a simple once-off, here today and gone tomorrow. For as Scripture says, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8), and that reality also applies to His life giving presence within us who consume His body, since he who loved us to the end will remain with us always until the end (Mt 28:20). In the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. Since Christ was about to take his departure from his own in his visible form, he wanted to give us his sacramental presence; since he was about to offer himself on the cross to save us, he wanted us to have the

memorial of the love with which he loved us "to the end," even to the giving of his life. In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, and he remains under signs that express and communicate this love. (CCC 1380)

The words of the Catechism suggest something even more dramatic and profound. Jesus' presence is not inert, He does not simply "sit there". His Eucharistic presence - not a literal but a sacramental extension of his body - is an ongoing act of love. As we profess in the Nicene Creed, it is through Christ that all things were made. This means two things at once. First, Christ is in every moment pouring himself out to his creatures, giving His life to His creatures right to the very end, so that we in turn might have life to the very end. This life extends from the loftiest heights of creation down to its very depths, right down to the things that we might think insignificant. Second, it also means that Christ's presence is constantly and actively making new things and opening new possibilities in our lives that we in our limited perspective might never expect or comprehend.

It is this confidence in Christ's ongoing act of self-giving life that underwrote Saint Teresa of Calcutta's perception of Christ even in those that





society has rendered disposable, the poor, homeless, sick and dying. It is also the reason why the work of her Missionaries of Charity is always punctuated by daily Mass and Eucharistic adoration. The daily regimen of perceiving Christ's Eucharistic presence in the humble form of bread, became the foundation of their ability to perceive Christ in the humble form of those they assist, and also become Christ present for those they assist. "Every Holy Communion", St Teresa would say to her coworkers in 1977:

fills us with Jesus and we must, with Our Lady, go in haste to give him to others. For her, it was on her first Holy Communion day that Jesus came into her life, and so for all of us also. He made himself the Bread of Life so that we, too, like Mary, become full of Jesus.

It is precisely this reality of "becom[ing] full of Jesus" that forms the beating heart of Scripture, not abstractly, not spiritually, and not even occasionally, but concretely and ongoingly.

While we rightly defend the real Eucharistic presence of Christ, we may also in preparing for the International Eucharistic Congress open our hearts and minds to receive the profundity of that presence. For Christ is present to us so what we might abide in Christ's presence, since that presence is nothing short of the manifestation of God's ongoing act of self-giving and life giving love.

Life in His presence is an ongoing revolution of love, worked into the sinews of the earth and made anew in every moment.

