

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION

I write you these lines from Providence, with the great hope that I will be with you for this Sunday. The Sundays following Corpus Christi seem like a blessed occasion to focus on the Fruits of Holy Communion. I hope my reflections on these will complement both our summer Bible Study on the Church in mission, and our July reflection on the beautiful gift of fertility. Since I have so little time at the moment I would like to present to you the panorama of the fruits as they are set forth in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Summer Peace

Fr. Walter

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On the feasts of the Lord, when the faithful receive the Body of the Son, they proclaim to one another the Good News that the first fruits of life have been given, as when the angel said to Mary Magdalene, “Christ is risen!” Now too are life and resurrection conferred on whoever receives Christ.²²⁸

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1393 Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is “given up for us”, and the blood we drink “shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins”. For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins:

For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord’s death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always

receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy.²³⁰

1394 As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity wipes away venial sins.²³¹ By giving himself to us Christ revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures and root ourselves in him:

Since Christ died for us out of love, when we celebrate the memorial of his death at the moment of sacrifice we ask that love may be granted to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We humbly pray that in the strength of this love by which Christ willed to die for us, we, by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be able to consider the world as crucified for us, and to be ourselves as crucified to the world.... Having received the gift of love, let us die to sin and live for God.²³²

1395 By the same charity that it enkindles in us, the Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin. The Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins—that is proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist is properly the sacrament of those who are in full communion with the Church.

1396 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.²³³ 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”.²³⁴

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. To that which you are you respond “Amen” (“yes, it is true!”) and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, “the Body of Christ” and respond “Amen”, Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.²³⁵

1397 The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren:

You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother,. . . You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal. . . . God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.²³⁶

1398 The Eucharist and the unity of Christians. Before the greatness of this mystery St. Augustine exclaims, “O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!”²³⁷ The more painful the experience of the divisions in the Church which break the common participation in the table of the Lord, the more urgent are our prayers to the Lord that the time of complete unity among all who believe in him may return.

²²⁷ Jn 6:57.

²²⁸ Fanqith, Syriac Office of Antioch, Vol. I, Commun., 237a-b.

²²⁹ PO 5.

²³⁰ St. Ambrose, De Sacr. 4,6,28:PL 16,446; cf. 1 Cor 11:26.

²³¹ Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1638.

²³² St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, Contra Fab. 28,16-19: CCL 19A,813-814.

²³³ Cf. 1 Cor 12:13.

²³⁴ 1 Cor 10:16-17.

²³⁵ St. Augustine, Sermo 272:PL 38,1247.

²³⁶ St. John Chrysostom, Hom. in 1 Cor. 27,4:PG 61,229-230; cf. Mt 25:40.

²³⁷ St. Augustine, In Jo. ev. 26,13:PL 35,1613; cf. SC 47.

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #2

Last week, I introduced a series of reflections for us on the Fruits of Holy Communion, presenting the whole treatment of this subject by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This discussion will build, I hope, on our winter's work with the Gifts of Baptism. Together these conversations rest on our belief that the sacraments are effective.

So often our focus on sacraments is preparatory: we have courses set up to get people ready for Baptism, First Confession, First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage. But do we stop and recognize that these encounters with Christ actually form us, redirecting, thoughts, activities, and impulses? If we take a step back from ourselves and survey our patterns of worship, and prayer, philanthropy and advocacy, we see something at work that is more than sheer conviction or effort: we perceive an ongoing reorientation of the individual and the group. This growth happens from within each of us, but it has a source in God. Grace is the name we give to God's action in the soul, and each time we celebrate the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we open ourselves to this amazing intervention.

When we spoke about the gifts of baptism we tried to say that they worked together to give us a whole new identity, so that our Christianity imparts to us a discipline of life, a view on the world, and a confidence in the One beyond the view. Self control, social concern, faith in eternal life enable us to enter fully into the mystery of the Mass, and the Mass deepens them in turn, so that the efficacy of Baptism leads us to the efficacy of the Eucharist.

When we walk into our church we see the marbled design of the floor creating an axis between font and altar because we fulfill the potential of our baptism in the celebration of Mass. But that same axis leads us from the altar back to the doors, for the Eucharist itself impels us more deeply into the life we share with self, neighbor, and God. We grow, if you will, inward, outward, and upward, but growth in each direction furthers it in the other two.

In these weeks I would like to look at the impact of Eucharistic efficacy on us in its various aspects. I think we will see that each of the Fruits of Holy Communion fosters the discipline, concern, and perception of eternal vocation that

mark a baptized person. And so we begin with how the Eucharist fosters our union with Christ.

1391 Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."²²⁶ Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me."²²⁷

Faith itself teaches us to take living in Christ seriously. Yes, we believe in Christ, and, yes, we follow him, but Jesus speaks of a connection that goes beyond these more easily defined truths. Christ presents himself not only as savior, and not only as pattern, but as the source, companion, and goal of each moment. If you think back a few weeks you will find the images of the Easter Season speaking to this mystery. "Bread of Life," "Good Shepherd," "Vine and Branches," "Resurrection and Life," are each something Jesus says of himself in relation to the human soul. As I live each moment of my life I am nourished, guided in my actions, directed in my relations, and made peaceful in myself. Even when I am alone, I am never alone.

Because the Sacraments are effective this intimacy with Jesus is real in me whether I recognize it or not, but conversion comes, and sacramental efficacy in me grows, when I do recognize this truth and open myself to it.

Intimacy with Jesus consoles and challenges in equal measure. I reach out to Him in trouble and perplexity, but relish some distance when it comes to party time. Here is the conversion: Christ proposes to connect himself to my celebration, my leisure, and my loving. So the implication of receiving the sacrament lies in the very name we give it, communion, that is, fellowship. Over a lifetime receiving the Eucharist brings about between Jesus and me a "partnership of the whole of life." We usually use this last phrase to describe what the sacrament of marriage brings about between a man and a woman, but it also speaks to the bond between Jesus and the soul. In this intimacy my primary work is saying yes to it, so that I do not inhibit its effect by my fear, my

anxiety, or my willfulness. As in marriage this love will demand my choosing the truth of myself, namely that I am not self-sufficient. In the Eucharist I embrace the incompleteness of my self because I recognize that He who is the Bread of my Life is completing me.

If accept Christ's way of loving me my presence in the world changes. Yes, people see a person who believes in Christ: yes, people see a person who works hard for Him, but more profoundly they see the one in whom I "live, and move, and have my being." I am in the world as one who has a source, and so sourced I have strength on the inside when all is in turmoil on the outside.

Summer Peace!

Fr. Walter

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #3

You are settling in to summer, I hope. Let me remind you, and myself, that this season lasts all the way to September 21. I try to take this fact out of the calendar and live it: summer for me is the sabbath of the year. I take its whole length to marvel at the work of God designing and fueling nature's abundance. I see His handiwork in continuity: when I arrived here last July the black-eyed susans behind the church were in bloom and, sure enough, they are opening up just now, right on time. But I also see it in growth: in our gardens the perennials have already exceeded the size and luxuriance they had attained at the end of last season. If we can discern God's goodness in summer's surge of life, can we also recognize it growing our inner life?

In these verdant weeks of the year we have been reflecting on the luxuriant effect of the Eucharist in us and among us. Last week we recognized the Eucharist as the leaven of our intimacy with Christ, who in each Communion makes inroads into every corner of our lives. He pushes beyond our "Sunday best" self and our "penitent in trouble" self to embrace us at work, at play, and in love. One of the gentle beauties of our area is ground cover. Carpets of vegetation enrobe our hillsides and ravines, making hard terrain lush, and so Christ grows in the soul, so that all of it has His protection and bears His pattern.

His pervades not only for beauty but for growth. The True Vine grows in us and among us for fruitfulness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

1392 What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh "given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit",²²⁹ preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum.

By our nature we grow paradoxically. Always remaining ourselves we progress through very distinct chapters of being human: youth follows infancy, adulthood follows youth, and so on. Our

body changes apace, and with it our view of ourselves and our world, but we never become a different person. Casting a glance backward we perceive growth in all its power. Do you ever marvel at what you said, did, or thought 20, or 40, years ago? We may be amused, or taken aback by our old self, but that stage of our living and thinking remains part of us. What we grow out of shapes what we grow in to. The tension of continuity and change is one of the most creative forces we deal with.

The Catechism realizes that the life of grace follows nature's pattern. It too takes account of the abiding and evolving elements of our inner self, so that we do not lose ourselves as we progress in the spiritual life. Development within never detaches from temperament, history, talent, and deficit as they shape our individuality: at the same time, no trait blocks the vitality of grace, unless we insist.

As Holy Communion "preserves" the life of grace in us, we persevere. With each passing year I see the inner strength of those who stay close to the Eucharist and "keep on keeping on." Strengthened by the "bread for our pilgrimage" they resolve to keep walking through life, opening themselves to its cycle of life and death. Every summer day I walk out of the Priory and luxuriate in the hillside of golden rod, black-eyed susan, and monarda. But my enjoyment is shaped by the bareness of that same hillside as it confronts me each winter morning. I am alive in the cycle of delight, loss, and expectation. So in the life of grace times of loss and gift hone each other as we recognize that spiritual winters and spiritual summers, coming in succession, are the making of us.

Cycles account for a lot of life, natural and supernatural, but so does their breakage. New species come into our garden, furthering its design through the choice of the gardener to change the landscape. Holy Communion figures in our lives according to a weekly, even daily, cycle but it propels us to challenge cycles of behavior and thought which impede our pilgrimage. Increased by the Eucharist the life of grace leads us to the hinge moments in life when we decide to take a step out of pattern into freedom.

If there is a time to persevere in pattern and a time to break pattern, we will recognize each one

in prayer. Refreshed in Holy Communion, grace drives us deeper into that conversation with God where we learn to desire Him. With such a longing in our hearts we perceive each consolation and chastisement as step on the way to Him. Prayer recognizes that He is the gardener bringing to completion the design He has for our fruitfulness.

Perhaps all the flowerings of grace come coalesce in the mature garden of humility. Formed by constancy, conversion, and divine conversation we manage at last to get over ourselves. Receiving the gift of the Eucharist we come to recognize that being part of God's design we can never know completely what that part is. Planted in the garden we do not see the garden: ours is the joy of having a place in His design, of putting down roots ever deeper into His soil, and of opening blossoms higher and higher in His air. Between root and blossom His life flows.

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THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #4

As usual I am mailing this letter to your Sunday Bulletin from six days ago, trying vainly to get in under the wire of Eleanor's deadline (She is a font of patience.) But this week I send the letter forward in time and eastward across the mountains. I have crossed them this afternoon and am perched in a motel room, high on a hill on the west side of Charleston, West Virginia. Hopefully the lush, green, undulating landscape will both elevate and soften my words.

We continue to reflect on the way Holy Communion effects growth and transformation in our lives. We have spoken of our Eucharistic intimacy with Christ as comfort and strength in the present, but also as the wherewithal for growth through the chapters of life. The Eucharist comes to us under the forms of food and drink so that we may recognize the Body and Blood of Christ as nourishment and refreshment, for now and later. If communion touches each age of our lives it also reaches out, connecting to each facet of the one who receives it. Further it stretches backward to address the wounds that limit our engagement with Christ and His Gospel. So, Holy Communion comes to us as the medicine of the soul. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

1393 Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is “given up for us”, and the blood we drink “shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins”. For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins: For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord's death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy.²³⁰

Most of us probably associate sacramental forgiveness with Confession. In actuality the two sacraments work together to bring a healing as pervasive as the illness. In the Confessional we name the sins our conscience presents to us,

especially those grave sins that require the healing of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Eucharist though embraces the things we forget and the vices of which we are unaware because they have become instinctual in daily life. Working medicinally the Eucharist can also prepare us for confession. By its nourishment many are strengthened for the moment when the Holy Spirit reveals to them past sins: what they could not have faced two years ago, they can now name, take responsibility for, and accept the unmerited forgiveness that comes from the challenging love of Christ Crucified. Christian maturity means living more and more serenely with the facts of sins committed and mercies received, two truths that level pride with equal force.

But if the Eucharist heals forward then it touch not only my past failure and current moral blindness, it will also address the sins toward which I will tend, by attraction or compulsion. Here we can pause to acknowledge the ways in which sinful patterns become a “go to “ in our lives. Like old drinking buddies they surface at moments of stress, offering breezy companionship and solace glibly dispensed. Moments of upset drive us to eat, to drink, to shop, to gossip, and to sex. We know all too well the ephemeral consolations these therapies afford, but when the pressure is on or the bottom falls out, we reach for them. The cycle of these patterns comes to seem inevitable to many of us.

The grace of the Sacrament of Confession surely impels us toward “amendment of life.” But the Eucharist also works on us at the level of desire. As a font of charity the Eucharist is teaching me to love myself properly and so to want differently. People who live the Eucharistic life are often startled by the change in their desires. In an intentional way I begin not to want what I know will set me back.

Separation from sinful patterns tells a story of something deeper. If my besetting sins have provided release from tension, they have also given an escape from my own life. Growing symbiotically with the desire not to sin is the disposition not to escape. The phrase, “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” speaks to many of us who have never been to Vegas. We recognize

in these words the concept of “shore leave,” a time when the rules are suspended, I can vent my spleen and reach for my fantasy. As Holy Communion leads me deeper and deeper into the relationships assigned to me by the Lord, it gives me the fortitude not to run away from them. In the end grace works to that I stay in life more successfully and then desire reality more profoundly.

Sewn into the Eucharistic pattern of life is the likeness of Jesus who went down to Nazareth and was obedient of Mary and Joseph, the one free of bad behavior but full of the love of people.

Well I am signing off to run and get my hearty traveler’s breakfast.

Summer Peace!

Fr. Walter

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #5

The Love that Lets Go

Last week I-64 lead me from our neighborhood, through hills and hollows, to my father's neighborhood in Louisville. It was a joy to see him, but of course what followed was saying good bye to him. I have bidden my parents farewell multiple times a year since 1976 when they first dropped me off at boarding school. In all that time the parting has never become easy.

During the same week Br. Ignatius Perkins left our community, accepting a new assignment to Providence College. Before I left for Kentucky I was able to thank him for the gift of his time with us and to wish him well in a new chapter of life. Over thirty-five years in Dominican life I have had this exchange with Brothers countless times, but separating from them has never become matter-of-fact. Emailing with a Brother is not the same as sharing life with him. If I have never lost the pangs, I nevertheless have learned over all this time that the separations do set a limit to love, they express it and deepen it. It occurs to me as I write this that the intimacy of Holy Communion has taught me about the intimacy of separation.

Last week in these pages we observed that the Eucharist helps to us to separate ourselves from patterns of sin that do not prepare us for eternity. Holy Communion also separates us from good things, indeed wonderful people. If breaking from sin means a rejection, parting from our beloved demands a reordering. Our hearts are taught to love differently finding already the heavenly shape of love. This we shall know in the life beyond all separations, in which the "light of glory" enables our humanity to receive and respond to God's love directly, without the mediation of sacraments.

His grace begins to elevate us toward divine engagement even now, not by magic, but by renovation of our entire life, over the course of our whole life. He uses every day to foster His plan for each of us. So deep is His love for us that He does not want us to walk into heaven as strangers, but as those who belong there, recognizing instantly that they are at home. Becoming at home with God begins now as the Eucharist refashions our loving. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say:

1394 As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity wipes away venial sins.²³¹ By giving himself to us Christ revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures and root ourselves in him: Since Christ died for us out of love, when we celebrate the memorial of his death at the moment of sacrifice we ask that love may be granted to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit. We humbly pray that in the strength of this love by which Christ willed to die for us, we, by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, may be able to consider the world as crucified for us, and to be ourselves as crucified to the world.... Having received the gift of love, let us die to sin and live for God.²³²

Put simply, charity is the love that lets go. When I love most profoundly I choose not to possess. In accepting his Passion, Jesus loved his own in the world by separating himself from the fleshly way he had served them and enjoyed them. In response, the Father's charity gave him a new, infinitely more profound connection to us in the life of the Resurrection. In the Lord's Ascension and in the Sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, love lets go again, only to reach a new depth and a new expansiveness of connection. In his humanity then Jesus loves by not hanging on to a good time, place, or way of relating. Here lies no stoic detachment, but the clear perception that the God who gave good will give better. In this light I ponder the "Noli me tangere" Jesus thrusts at Mary Magdalene on Easter Morning. Is he not inviting her to join him in a detachment for a connection more profound?

In his communion with me, renewed in each Mass, Christ trains me in this way of loving so that I may keep arms open for the heavenly embrace. Under his tutelage I come to recognize each of my painful good-byes as a commending. I surrender the one I love into God's plan, which will not fail to include the fulfillment of their potential, and their attainment of true happiness. Sometimes good-bye is not departure: my beloved is growing and changing, moving beyond familiar patterns in

which we bonded. In this moment the “Noli me tangere” of the Risen Lord echoes in my ears, and I let go, only to receive back. Sometimes too, charity will mean separating myself from the way I understand my beloved, and from my plan for them.

Then too I grow and change, and here charity will mean not clinging to a prior age of myself so as not to disturb my loved ones. Here I break the peace, but only then will we find the new harmony God has in store.

Such losses never cease to wound, to dislocate, and to confuse—truly they put an end to a world. But from the Triduum forward we see that God allows profound disruption to enable more profound transformation. But also gives us the food that sees us through the cyclone of loss and makes us able to befriend in love even the ending of worlds. We call the Eucharist Viaticum, food for the journey, and we usually use this title for our last communion, when we let go of the life of sacraments and set out for the life in which communion will never end. But each Eucharist also enables the dispossession of the present moment, and the loving loss that is our growth.

Summer Peace!

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THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #6

Taking Delight

Pondering the Fruits of Holy Communion, as we have of late, means grappling with the efficacy of the Sacraments, and this task may challenge us more than we admit. In a pluralistic, indeed secular, society we readily perceive our religion as something we choose. Catholicism looks like one of the many “isms” seeking our intellectual and emotional assent. We are Catholic because we agree with what the Church teaches, and we are at St. Thomas because we like the building, or the music, or the preaching.

To such thinking Jesus responds down the ages from the Last Supper, “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.” (John 15:16). Put simply, we find ourselves in RC pews because Jesus has summoned us to sit in them, acting on our minds and hearts via the Holy Spirit who has been sent into the world. So when you look around at Mass what you see is the group gathered by the Lord for worship and service. The crowd’s unity owes more to Divine initiative than to human agreement or approval.

Furthermore, what the Lord begins he finishes, and the sacraments are the means by which he perfects each of us, and all of us. So, going to Communion grows the individual and the group, and the two growths impact each other continuously. Incorporation is an essential facet of our personal completion, and the group does not mature without the perseverance of the member. St. Peter puts this lyrically in his First Letter; “Come to him, a living stone....and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2: 4-5)

Anybody who studies her history can tell you that the Church has survived the millennia not because of her collective virtue or intelligence, but because the Lord has kept her together and has actually deepened that unity over time. In this bonding the Eucharist enables people to maintain and deepen their life in the Church, despite the sin, division, and mediocrity they encounter in others and in themselves.

Our unity as the Catholic Church is His work, stretching across miles and centuries, language and taste, politics and education, indeed across the grave itself. Our phrases Church Militant, Church Triumphant, and Church Suffering describe an incomprehensible connection, real nevertheless in the eyes of faith, and deepened at every Mass. The passage below from the Catechism of the Catholic Church lays before us the comprehensive consequence of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

1396 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.²³³ 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”;²³⁴ 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. To that which you are you respond “Amen” (“yes, it is true!”) and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, “the Body of Christ” and respond “Amen”, Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.²³⁵

As Christ’s work of incorporation takes hold, it brings gift and challenge. What a blessed epiphany it is to pause amid the congregation’s singing a hymn, to look around, and to grasp that these are my people; I belong to them, and they belong to me. Not only technically but spiritually I make part of the holy sound that encourages my spirit. Belonging to Christ Head and Members brings to the heart support, rest, and consolation: on life it confers shape and direction.

Nevertheless the process of becoming “part of” throws down gauntlets of spiritual challenge as it moves forward in us and among us.

Consider the matter of gifts. The more we become part of a marriage, a family, or an office the more we face the uneven distribution of gifts, and thence the struggle with comparison. Church is no different: inevitably some people’s gifts get all the acclaim. It isn’t fair and it leaves us fighting pride or envy, and sometimes both in alternation. Alas, for most of us this knot in the stomach is integral to our conversion. Were we not brought together to realize that not only our gifts but our deficits are part of our making: our unique combination of them makes for our singular place in the jigsaw puzzle of interdependence. Fulfillment and humility intersect in the acceptance of this truth. I truly become a person of the Church when I am as happy in the way I can be of service as I am in the way I can receive the service of another. In this joy I truly embrace God’s creation of me.

When interdependence becomes well rooted in me it makes a foundation for amazement. Free from the burden of comparison I may delight in the gifts another has received. I perceive this in the gifts of preaching and celebration that my brothers have received. It has become a wonderful thing for me when one of them gives a homily entirely out of my ballpark. The Brother received the gift of crafting and delivering singular words, and I got the gift of being evangelized by them. The temptation would be to compare his work to what I would have done or to evaluate its effectiveness in a professional way, but incorporation works to make his gift my gift.

Our patron, St. Thomas Aquinas calls the Eucharist a “pledge of future glory.” Through this mystery the Lord prepares us now to delight in him forever. So when we truly savor what He has accomplished in our fellow creatures we should recognize that we are on the way. If we are God’s “work in progress,” the progress is real. For us the fruit of receiving Jesus is perceiving here what he knows on high, namely the victory of goodness, beauty, and truth, in human nature. Here and now I taste that victory, for I come back to my pew from Communion with a perspective on life that transcends competition and comparison. I can really see my ordinary world and my ordinary companions transfigured by His gentle but unrelenting work.

Summer Peace!

Fr. Walter

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #7

August-heavy is the air, but the movement of things will not wait for crisp mornings. Moving In Days are still two weeks off but already we are after you for school supplies for Red Hill Elementary. And we are just getting started! The Hope for Haiti Golf Tournament will soon vie for your attention with the Walk for the Poor on St. Vincent de Paul's feast day, September 27. We'll also ask you about supporting the activities of our youth. October will bring the new challenge of supporting mothers and babies in a post-Roe world. After one year I notice already that we rev up the parish year with works for the poor near and far.

Such a surge makes a great introduction for our annual crop of First Years, and a focused recommitment for the rest of us. Easily we could ascribe this burst of activity to our deep social concern and our overflowing energy for service. If you know our parish you know these traits abound in our midst, but if you think about it for a second you will perceive more deeply and realize each is a Fruit of Holy Communion. Regularly, sacramental life energizes service and service enriches the encounter with Christ in sacraments. Symbiosis like this sounds like the stuff of textbooks, but as a relative newcomer myself I perceive it fueling the practical and spiritual life of the parish. Perhaps without ever having read this passage of the Catechism of the Catholic Church many people you know are living it.

1397 The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren: You have tasted the Blood of the Lord, yet you do not recognize your brother, . . . You dishonor this table when you do not judge worthy of sharing your food someone judged worthy to take part in this meal. . . . God freed you from all your sins and invited you here, but you have not become more merciful.²³⁶

I think we can identify this concern for the poor as part of the mystery by which the Eucharist makes the Church, steadily expanding the circle of our concern. The list below shows you the concern of the parish arrayed across the calendar

year. This or that may not happen in a given year, and of course emergencies arise, but I hope you can take a look at this list and be justly proud of a comprehensive response to need. We have been working with the folks in our Mercy and Justice groups to present this image of the parish's giving life so that you can ponder it and plan your participation in it.

PARISH GIVING YEAR

This list, while comprehensive, does not include the many hours of dedicated service donated by innumerable volunteers. The gift of such service is vital to the work made financially possible through the following appeals and fundraisers.

LATE SUMMER/EARLY FALL

Youth Ministry fundraiser

Hope for Haiti Golf Tournament

St. Vincent de Paul Society Holy Trinity Conference: Friends of the Poor Walk

Mission Cooperative Appeal (Diocesan)

Red Hill School Supplies Drive

MID-FALL/THANKSGIVING

Haiti Arts Fair

Respect Life Month: 40 Days for Life (October)

Turkeys (Parish donation to Loaves and Fishes)

ADVENT

Advent Gift Fair (Christ the King)

St. Vincent de Paul Society Holy Trinity Conference: Give the Gift of Light

Giving Tree

Knights of Columbus: Coats for Kids

Knights of Columbus: Keep Christ in Christmas card sale for vocations

WINTER

Catholic Schools Week (CCS; January)

Haiti Sponsorship event (February)

SPRING

Spring Break Trips (Catholic Hoos, service to the poor)

LENT

Annual Diocesan Appeal

Operation Rice Bowl (Catholic Relief Services)

Knights of Columbus: 40 Cans for Lent

Knights of Columbus: Friday Soup Suppers

EASTER

St. Vincent de Paul Society Holy Trinity Conference: Easter Collection

Province of St. Joseph Formation Appeal

SUMMER

KOVAR: Knights of Columbus collection for VA Citizens with mental health challenges

Youth Ministry Cupcake Fundraiser

ONGOING

St. Vincent de Paul Society Holy Trinity Conference

Charlottesville Catholic School (CCS) (Grant Money for Scholarships)

IMPACT (Interfaith Movement Promotion Action by Congregations Together)

PACEM (People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry)

AIM (Alliance for Interfaith Ministries)

Love, Inc.

Food Pantries (at Holy Comforter and Incarnation Parishes)

Habitat

The Haven: Personal Care Items

Road to Emmaus (Catholic Hoos)

Respect Life

Salvation Army Dinners

Various Diocesan Collections throughout the year

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION #8

Breaking the Breach

Berlin's wall divided a city, a nation, a continent, indeed a world. In my growing up it figured as an icon of the inevitable, expressing an impasse cemented into history by mutual threats of utter destruction. Then it was gone! Perhaps, if you are of my vintage, you can conjure the emotions that flooded you as you watched the citizens of the East join those of the West in tearing it down. The eyes of faith recognized this as an Advent moment when God intervened to burst the tragic sclerosis of human life, disclosing possibilities that our wisdom deemed to be pipe dreams.

Three decades later we chart a new network of fissures in human society, and once again we do not see a way for us to heal them. Now too, Advent hope recognizes that getting stuck is a property of human life, but not of God's, and those possessed of theological hope read the news and pray beyond it, with a longing that comes from their Eucharistic life.

Put simply, you and I acquire a connection from Christ's Body that makes us His Body, and naturally we long for others to share the intimacy we have found with our Lord and with each other. Holy Communion generates desire for deeper and wider communion.

Here too holy desire confronts the immense weight of history, for the Sacrament of Unity has coexisted with division almost from the beginning. Many of us can name the bigger breaches. At some point development of the Church in the Latin West and Greek East diverged to the point of fracture, and we usually date this to 1054 AD. We mark 1517 as the moment of splintering in the Western Church. But all along the way excommunications over belief and practice have rent the unity Christ prayed for at the Last Supper, "Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are." (John 17:11)

History also happens on a domestic scale, bringing the pain of separation. Each time we receive the Lord on a Sunday how often do we think of those loved ones who no longer feast upon him with us. By drift or by choice they are elsewhere, and by the desire we have for them we learn what it means to have fellowship and what it means to love. By this same learning we grasp that restoring people to Communion usually demands more than a persuasive talk, the breach being as emotional as theological. The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks eloquently of the pain and longing that accompany charity as it craves happiness for the other.

1398 The Eucharist and the unity of Christians. Before the greatness of this mystery St. Augustine exclaims, "O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!"²³⁷ The more painful the experience of the divisions in the Church which break the common participation in the table of the Lord, the more urgent are our prayers to the Lord that the time of complete unity among all who believe in him may return.

The mystery of Pentecost makes clear the spreading nature of intimacy in the Body of Christ. Inveterate temptations arise to image the Church as a sect of the pure, a stratum of the enlightened, or a club of the likeminded, but the wind of the Spirit blows away gated community understandings of this mystical union. The desire to include my neighbor in my happiness comes into me with every host I receive, and with it the regret that my neighbor is not here.

The desire and its frustration teach me.

First, I learn that I do not have the power to heal this breach because I cannot cause belief in someone else. I can exemplify and explain, listen and condole, but I cannot reveal: this is God's work, done in His way and in His time. Here I must fall back on the pleading and intercession that figure in the Mass itself. The Eucharistic Prayers themselves ask for the deepening of Communion as a fruit of communion, and as a work of the Spirit: "...grant that we who, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ." (Eucharistic Prayer III)

The second learning follows the first: entree to Eucharistic communion, with the Lord and with His People, comes as a new way of perceiving, God, self, and others. Real sacramental fellowship recognizes the pervasiveness of human sin, God's power to heal it, and that both are ongoing. Our sin and God's love meet

each other in the Crucifixion, and the encounter continues, as communion by communion, God's reorienting power addresses itself to the human weakness of each and of all. Without this perception what people get is a vista of hypocrisy, a teaching not lived up to, and, hence, abundant reason to discount the teaching and abandon communion.

In the face of Eucharistic disunity I testify that I am a sinner who is loved, a selfish person being drawn out of himself, a lazy man energized for service, and a materialistic person receiving a desire for eternal life—all this by the effect of the Eucharist which out-pervades the pervasiveness of sin. I hope that if I tell the truth of myself God will bless my testimony as a moment for opening the eyes of another to the riches hidden in plain sight in the midst of the Christian assembly.

I hope these essays on the Fruits of Holy Communion testify to the identity, imparted in baptism, that becomes more complete in us with each Mass. Let me thank you for reading along and ask your prayers that the Lord will bless the testimony of our whole Parish during the cycle of life about to begin.

Summer Peace!

Fr. Walter