

FRIENDS OF AUGUSTINE

## AUGUSTINE FOR TODAY



## SACRAMENT OF LOVE

### THE WORD

The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched Elijah, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey might be too much for you." He got up, ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights at Horeb, the mount of God.

1Kgs 19:7-8

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. Jn 6:51

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 1 Cor 10:16-17

## FROM AUGUSTINE

O sacrament of love, sign of our unity, bond of our community! Whoever longs for life has here its very source. Let them come near and believe, unite with you and live.  
On John's Gospel 26,13

The faithful know the Body of Christ for as long as they do not fail to be the Body of Christ themselves. On John's Gospel 26,13

You want God to be wholly yours. You will eat him so that you may not hunger. You will drink him so that you may not thirst. On Psalm 36, 1,12

Receive and eat the body of Christ, yes, you that have become members of Christ in the body of Christ; receive and drink the blood of Christ . . . Just as this turns into you when you eat and drink it, so you for your part turn into the body of Christ when you live devout and obedient lives. Sermon 228B,3

The table is great where the Lord of the table is himself the meal. No one feeds guests with himself as food, but this is exactly what the Lord Christ does; he himself is the host who invites; he himself is the food and drink.

Sermon 329

## REFLECTION

Jesus' ministry wasn't all hard work! He and his disciples did pause to have meals and celebrate together, and not only among themselves. Their table fellowship crossed social barriers and embraced the outcasts of society: tax-collectors, prostitutes and the like (see *Mk 2:15*). Jesus also dined in the houses of some of the Pharisees (*Lk 7:36-50; 19:1-10*). The hospitality of these meals took on a deeper significance at Jesus' last meal with his disciples. On that occasion Jesus took ordinary items like bread and wine and invested them with an extraordinary new meaning. Taking the bread, Jesus gave thanks and said, 'this is my body'. Taking the wine, he said, 'this is the new covenant in my blood' (see *1 Cor 11:24-25*). These very actions of Jesus enabled two of his disciples to finally recognise him at Emmaus (*Lk 24:13-35*).

St. Augustine, commenting on the Emmaus scene, notes the importance of the disciples' faith:

When we believe, we have Christ with us.  
The disciples at Emmaus had Christ  
with them during the meal.  
We have him with us in our hearts.  
It means more  
to have Christ with one in one's heart  
than to be in the same building with him.

(*Sermon 232,7,7*)

Augustine was always concerned for unity in the Church of his time. At the heart of this concern was the celebration of the Eucharist. He was at pains to highlight the link between what happens on the altar and what should be happening in those celebrating the Eucharist. It was not just a matter of what was on the altar as with the hearts of those around the altar. They had to understand that they were the body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:12), receiving Christ's body:

'Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it' (1 Cor 12:27). If that is so, it is the sacrament of yourselves that you receive...

You hear the words, 'the body of Christ' and you reply 'Amen'. Be then a member of Christ's body, so that your 'Amen' may accord with the truth... Be then what you see, and receive what you are.

(Sermon 272)

To be present at the Eucharist and to be unaware of this intimate connection between what happens there and our own identity as the body of Christ, would be like being on the road to Emmaus, unaware of the one walking the road with us. If we truly believe, we must have Christ with us in our hearts. In that case our lives are open to transformation:

Just as this (the body and blood of Christ) turns into you when you eat and drink it, so you for your part turn into the body of Christ when you live devout and obedient lives.  
(*Sermon 228B,3*)

How are **we** as we celebrate the Eucharist?

### POINTS TO PONDER

- What do you understand by "Eucharist"?
- What does the celebration of the Eucharist ask of my lifestyle and relationships?
- How important is a sense of community for celebrating the Eucharist?
- What does Augustine's teaching on the Eucharist have to say to you?

### FROM ANOTHER TRADITION

The passages quoted below are both taken from the early Irish/Celtic Christian tradition. The excerpt from **St. Columbanus**, is from one of his thirteen extant sermons. In it he skillfully interweaves two images from the scriptures – 'the Fountain' (*Jer 2:13; Jn 7:37*) and 'the Bread' (*Jn 6*). Both images convey the life of Christ in which our deepest hungers and thirsts are met.

The extract from the **Stowe Missal** (9<sup>th</sup> century Irish manuscript) gives a series of chants, which were recited or sung during the breaking of the bread before reception of communion. The scriptural content of the chants conveys the sense of nourishment drawn from the word of God that is spirit and life, and from the bread of life 'that came down from heaven' (*Jn 6:51*).

Observe whence that Fountain flows; for it flows from that place whence also the Bread came down; since he is the same who is Bread and Fountain, the only Son, our God Christ the Lord, for whom we should ever hunger. For though we eat him in loving, though we feast on him in desiring, let us still as hungering desire him. Likewise as the Fountain, let us ever drink of him with overflow of love, let us ever drink of him with fulness of longing, and let us be gladdened by some pleasure of his loveliness. For the Lord is lovely and pleasant; though we eat and drink of him, yet let us hunger and thirst, since our food and drink can never be consumed and drained entire; for though he is eaten he is not consumed, though he is drunk he is not lessened, since our Bread is eternal, and our Fountain is perennial, our Fountain is sweet.

*St. Columbanus, Sermon 13,2*

They recognised the Lord, Alleluia;

In the breaking of the loaf, Alleluia (*Lk 24:35*)  
For the loaf that we break is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, Alleluia.  
The cup which we bless is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Alleluia (*1 Cor 10:16-17*).  
For the remission of our sins, Alleluia (*Mt. 26:28*).  
O Lord, let your mercy come upon us, Alleluia;  
In you O Lord have I put my trust, Alleluia (*Ps 31:1*);  
They recognised the Lord, Alleluia;  
In the breaking of the loaf, Alleluia (*Lk 24:35*).

*Stowe  
Missal*

### **A CLOSING THOUGHT FROM AUGUSTINE**

The Eucharistic Bread should be for us daily bread that we eat to make us live. When we have reached Christ himself, it will no longer be necessary to receive the Eucharist...So the Eucharist is for us bread for every day. We must, however, receive it in such a way that we not only get new bodily strength, but also spiritual power. For the power that the Eucharist gives us is unity. This means that after we have received Christ's body and become his members, we are what we have received. Only then does the Eucharist really become our daily bread. However, what I preach to you is also your daily bread. The same holds true for the hymns that you hear and pray...When, however, we have reached our destination...we will see the Word himself, eat, hear and drink him.

**Sermon  
57,7,7**

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