

# IX. “The Body of Christ... Amen!”

The previous article walked through various parts of the Communion Rite and offered theological and reflections from the *General Instruction* in order to look more deeply into the unfolding of the mystery of the Church caught up in the life of the Trinity and draw fruit. Recall.

***The Communion Rite includes:***

The Lord’s Prayer  
the Sign of Peace  
the Breaking of the Bread  
(the Fraction Rite)  
Communion  
the Prayer After Communion

One would expect *GIRM* to address every aspect of the liturgy, to dig into every nook and cranny of the rite. Not so. Not “The Body of Christ... Amen!”

Neither the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* nor the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* comments on this brief but powerful dialogue between minister and recipient. The *Roman Missal* (2011) gives no context, theological or pastoral, for this encounter either. Instead, it merely records the rubrics for receiving communion in but a few words.

After this, [the presider] takes the paten or ciborium and approaches the communicants.

The Priest raises a host slightly and shows it to each of the communicants, saying:

**THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

The communicant replies:

**AMEN.**

And receives Holy Communion.

If a Deacon also distributes Holy Communion, he does so in the same manner.

(Roman Missal, no. 134)

However, it seems good to meditate on this very brief encounter.

## The Proclamation

Recall the very first engagement of presider and the faithful at the beginning of Mass and the importance of the opening dialogue.

*May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*  
(Roman Missal, no. 2)

“Then through the greeting the priest signifies the presence of the Lord to the community gathered together.

***By this greeting and the people’s response  
the mystery of the Church gathered together  
is made known.”***

(GIRM 48)

Indeed, from the very beginning of Mass, the faithful have been immersed in the mystery of the Church-gathered-together – the Body of Christ in the world, united with the Risen Christ in the Spirit, offering thanksgiving for redemption and praise for creation to the Father. The liturgy reveals to all who enter it in faith the reality of the Body of Christ in the world steeped in the mystery of the Triune God.

Liturgical dialogues occur regularly throughout. What if they could serve as signposts, reminders that call us to remember *who* we are and *with whom* we are and, as it were, call us back from whichever distractions capture our attention to be present again to the Mystery.

## The Proclamation – “The Body of Christ...”

“The Body of Christ... Amen!” The proclamation of the presider, deacon, or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist to the person coming to receive Communion initiates a dialogue of similar significance.

Again, this exchange could very easily call each of us to attend to this moment of sharing or receiving the Body of Christ. To engage, for example...

First, while liturgical practice makes an implicit distinction between the consecrated bread as *the Body of Christ* and the consecrated wine as *the Blood of Christ*, there is no distinction. Since the Church uses bread and wine in its faithful response to Christ’s command, “Do this in memory of me,” it’s common sense to designate one *Body* and the other *Blood*.

Yet the Risen Christ is one. The Risen Christ is the One who is sacramentally present in the consecrated bread and wine. This was never much of an issue before Vatican II when the faithful received only the consecrated bread (perhaps once a year).

The Church doctrine of **concomitance** holds that Christ is entirely present in each element, bread and wine. (Some look to this doctrine to justify the practice of offering the consecrated bread only to communicants). An accurate theological proclamation would be, “The Body and Blood of Christ” for the consecrated bread and wine. The Church, rather, saw fit to align its usage with the gospel’s (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul) telling of the Last Supper.

Second, “Body of Christ” announces the presence of the Risen Lord in the consecrated bread and wine (don’t forget – *concomitance*). “Amen,” therefore, involves both minister and communicant in a brief affirmation of belief in the Risen Christ, in his sacramental presence in the elements, and in his presence in the Body of Christ. It’s a mini-creed! “I do believe!”

Third, the proclamation “Body of Christ” also calls the faithful to recognize the presence of the Risen One in his members, those present at this liturgy in this place and those attending other liturgies throughout the world.

The Body of Christ in the world is made manifest to all who have eyes to see when the faithful stand for the opening song and procession. Each dialogue during Mass reveals the mystery of the Church as the presider and faithful engage in dialogue.

And so, announcing to a communicant, “**This** is the Body of Christ,” referring only to the Host, limits the breadth and depth of the meaning of Body of Christ.

Again, the “Amen” of the communicant affirms her belief in Christ’s presence in the consecrated elements, to be sure, *and* in the Body of Christ in the world, indwelled by the Spirit of God, wounded, yet redeemed by Christ. As St. Paul wrote, “Now you are the Body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

As for my part, I still find it challenging to discern the difference between recognizing the Body of Christ in the congregation (e.g., receiving communion) and people-watching.

### Saying, “Amen!”

It seems like the easiest thing in the world to say, “Amen!” As in, “Let’s go get some ice cream!” “Amen!” We usually reply enthusiastically to this sort of proposal. Enthusiasm, though, is not the main point.

*Amen* comes from the Hebrew root word, אָמֵן. Got it? Reading right to left, as Hebrew does, the letters *aleph-mém-nun* enter English as, “Amen.” *Amen* is related, amazingly enough, to the Aramaic word we hear in the gospels – *mammon*, or, *that in which we trust* - מַמְוֹן. *Mammon* refers to property, money, wealth, anything of value, anything I believe in, or even, bribe: “I trust in, I base my life upon...”

This amazingly brief proclamation and response calls the question about my/our allegiance. The gospel of Luke is especially attuned to the divisions within the disciple’s soul – in our woundedness we follow desires for riches, honor, and pride to ease our fear and discontent. Take, for example, this key passage.

No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other.  
You cannot serve God and wealth. (MAMMON)  
(Luke 16:9–13)

Literally in the Greek it says, *No one has the power or is sufficient to serve two masters*. This passage sets up the next scene in which Jesus characterizes the Pharisees as “lovers of money.” Jesus called out these caretakers of religious observances that buttressed Jewish identity during Roman occupation – “Whom do you actually serve?”

What would it be like to become mindful of our reply to the minister’s proclamation, “The Body of Christ,” as another Catholic pledge of allegiance? Our affirmation

of the sacramental presence of Christ leans outward from profession to action, a commitment to building up the Body of Christ in the world.

- “Amen to the sacramental presence of the Risen Christ in the consecrated bread and wine.
- “Amen” to the presence of Christ in the Body of Christ-in-the-world with a commitment to build up the community of all members.
- “Amen” to discerning where I actually place my trust – in “stuff” and prestige? or in Christ?

### “Amen!” Toward an Adult Liturgical Spirituality 1

“Amen!” I believe in Christ’s presence and I commit myself totally to him. I trust in Christ for everything. I will build up the Body of Christ-in-the-world and never harm any of its members.

Well, I don’t trust totally. Now what? What do I do when I realize I don’t live up to the ideals of Christ, the Church, my family, etc.? At this crossroads, it’s possible to step onto the pathway of *adult* discipleship, which has more to do with discovering the roots of my resistance to God and others than it does being a good little Catholic girl or boy.

An adult disciple may have the capacity to reflect on his/her experience in such a way as to account for one’s fundamental resistance to God’s will. (Concupiscence) One response: guilt, shame, remorse, and drama. “Try harder.” Which doesn’t work. Another reply: “The fact is, I resist God and don’t readily trust the Lord.”

Noting the fact, facing the fact, and accepting the fact that one’s will regularly dismisses or denies God’s will can bring the “What drives me to do this?” question to the surface. Which in turn can lead one to find and bring to the light for healing the particular and terribly human wounds that drive our resistance. “Here I am, Lord.”

“I believe. Help my unbelief.” “Amen! I trust but want my own way.” At this crossroads, one can stand before Christ with just a little less pretense, to be and be seen. Engaging Christ in all parts of the liturgy reveals one’s divided heart, which is how each *always* prays. The question really becomes, “What does it mean to *receive* the Body of Christ with a divided heart?”

### For discussion/reflection:

- What did you learn from this article?
- What is your experience of receiving Communion?
  - What would you like it to be?
- What is your experience of the proclamation “The Body of Christ?” How do you understand it?
- What is your experience of saying “Amen”

This is the eighth in a series of articles about the liturgy. Article #10 will present “*Proceeding with Communion I*”