

Our Body and God's

As the summer heat grows, we are probably more body-conscious than usual. We shorten sleeves and pants, wear light clothing, and bring out the swimsuits. We may notice our own bodies more: the freckle, the rash, or sunburn; winter's extra pounds; the allergies and insect bites; the perspiration on brow or back of neck; unshod feet; the ravenous thirst and the pleasure of satisfying it. We tend to have a conflicted relationship with our bodies. We love them when they give us pleasure. We want to escape them when we are sick, injured, or uncomfortable.

In Christ, God took a body. Jesus' body wasn't a costume; it was as real as yours and mine, and experienced both poles of sensitivity: pleasure and pain. Despite his human experience of suffering, Jesus did not despise his body. In fact, he left us his body—not in a tomb, but in bread and wine transformed by the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament of his body and blood, Jesus reminds us that living as he taught will always bring us both pleasure and pain—the pleasure of God's presence, the pain of self-giving. This is one dimension of the Eucharistic mystery we celebrate today, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

We are more than one body. The sacraments of Initiation—baptism, confirmation, and eucharist—join us to the Mystical Body of Christ. This body is called the Church. Individual piety directed toward the sacramental presence of Christ in the Host is important but secondary to the meaning of Eucharist. This is why a communion service or merely “taking communion” can never

replace the spiritual efficacy and graces of the Mass (Mass=Liturgy of Word + Liturgy of Eucharist). The Mass does not exist to “make communion.” In the Mass from beginning to end—but especially in the Eucharistic Prayer—we witness anew Jesus Christ's self-giving action or “sacrifice.” Through the Mass, we *are* Christ's body and we *become* Christ's body. And through communion, if you will, we are *more* Christ's body. Absence from Sabbath Mass depletes us, Christ's body. Sin wounds us, Christ's body. The Sacrament of Reconciliation—Confession—celebrates God's forgiveness and is a kind of apology to the Body of Christ (us) for the injury and division we have caused.

We are yet another body. This body is called the human race. Make no mistake about it, we are connected and intertwined with every person in the world. The cynical cliché that this would be a great world—except for the people—is a statement of denial. Without others, we cannot live. Even the ancient hermits depended on good will from others in order to eat. Saint Basil the Great did not approve of the hermit life because it deprived the monk of the grace and holiness that conflicts and irritations from other members may offer.

Clothing, food, drink, appliances, and much more are now made in countries that have cheaper labor. Our decisions and lifestyle affect others whether we intend it or not.

The summer heat will make us body-conscious. Hopefully it will remind us of the pleasure and pain of all our bodily memberships.

Father Keith