


Written in an engaging style that is both conversational and informative, *Inwardly Digest* is a timely invitation to life in the Spirit sustained by the patterns and rhythms of the Prayer Book.

—FRANK GRISWOLD
25th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church


With the spiritual foundation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, Derek Olsen shows how everyday Christians can grow closer to God through a “training regimen” that incorporates the spirituality of Anglican liturgy as a daily practice. In straightforward and accessible writing, Olsen provides a guide to Prayer Book spirituality for everyone.

—THE REV. SUSAN BROWN SNOOK
Episcopal priest and editor of *Acts to Action: The New Testament's Guide to Evangelism and Mission*



INWARDLY DIGEST

THE PRAYER BOOK AS GUIDE TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE



DEREK OLSEN

FORWARD MOVEMENT
CINCINNATI, OHIO

DISMISSAL

The deacon—in places where there is one—also has an official liturgical goodbye. Like the priest's blessing, like the post-communion prayer, the Dismissal has two key aspects: We are God's, and he has some work for us to do. Our work in worship is directly connected to our work in the world.

Our response, "Thanks be to God," is our liturgical goodbye. It also stands as an act of thanks, an act of praise, and an acknowledgement of the charges that we have been given. In Easter, extra alleluias are added in consonance with Easter's general theme of rejoicing; during Lent the more sober, "Let us bless the Lord," is suitable.

CHAPTER 10

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Disciplining yourself to exercise regularly is an effort. As an effort, as a discipline, we need to have reasons and purposes to keep at it: to crawl out of bed at an entirely unreasonable hour; to pause in the middle of our day to sweat; to push through that last set of repetitions that our muscles scream against. There are many reasons why people push through those obstacles to exercise. Too, there are many reasons that people tell themselves why they do it. (The "why" and the "what we tell ourselves" aren't always the same—the human mind is like that.)

Let me be clear. I tell myself that I exercise for my health, to maintain stamina, and to keep a well-functioning body as I move through middle age. But I would be lying if I said that how I look in the mirror in a semi-clothed state has nothing to do with it. I know vanity is not really a praiseworthy motivation. As somebody who studies this stuff, I realize the irony of being motivated by one of the classical vices. However, even without that perspective, there are a couple of good reasons why vanity is not a great motivator.

First, appearances can be deceiving. As we are well aware, a slender body (or a buff one, for that matter) does not

automatically equate to a healthy body. All sorts of unhealthy behaviors can mimic health in the body's appearance. A host of supplements and pharmaceuticals—legal and otherwise—promise improved results with less efforts, while at the same time tearing down the body's health.

Second, vanity falls into the perception trap. I am always amazed by the guys in the gym who seem to focus only on the chest and the biceps. Since that's what they notice, they assume that's what everyone else notices. But that's not the way the body works. Muscles are parts of interlocking and interdynamic systems—you exaggerate one part of the system to the peril of the rest of it. Your perception of the health of the whole system becomes skewed.

Wiser heads point to the notion of functional fitness rather than appearance: Does the body do what you need it to do? Do the parts work together? Is the system stronger, healthier, more efficient? Do the habits promote the health of the entire system—not just the most noticeable bits?

Vanity can be an effective motivator—a helpful reminder that you have some work to do—but it should never be the only motivator. And vanity always fails as a goal or an effective measure of progress. This is just as true of spiritual fitness as it is of physical fitness.

There is a temptation in the spiritual life to be spiritual for the sake of praise. It's vanity of the soul; it's the exact spiritual correlation of vanity of the body because it is driven by the exact same motivation: We want praise from others because of their perception of us. As with vanity of the body, vanity of the soul promotes unhealthy practices. Just as the perception trap leads to crazy imbalances in the body, it does so with the soul as well. On one hand, it can lead to the adoption of only those spiritual habits that can be seen (and appreciated and approved of) by other people. That is, we engage in something only if it means other people can see it and observe how very

spiritual we are. On the other hand, just as pernicious is a loss of perspective: We see ourself more than anyone else and come to the conclusion that we are the most important part of the system. Spirituality becomes about my spiritual journey, about my spiritual experience, about my spiritual fulfillment.

But it's not.
Authentic Christian spirituality is a team sport, not an individual endeavor.

And this is how we get back to the Eucharist. At the very heart of the Eucharist is the incontrovertible fact that it's not just about me and that we are all in it together. Literally. There's a key phrase that is at center of our Eucharistic practice and theology: the Body of Christ. Two little words in Greek (*soma Christou*), three in English, this term has several interrelated meanings that lead us deeper into our consideration of the Eucharist, into the sacraments as a whole, and into the identity of the Church. In essence, it takes us full circle, back to our initial discussion of what spirituality is all about, and we will end by considering from a new perspective some of the topics with which we began.

Language around both the Body of Christ and the presence of Christ—particularly Real Presence—are deeply related. In the simplest terms, where your body is located is where you are present. As a result, I'd like to take a look at some of the ways that the scriptures and the Church talk about the Body of Christ—and in some cases the presence of Christ without necessarily using the phrase Body of Christ. This isn't intended to be exhaustive, but suggestive. Instead of locking ourselves into a single literal sense of the term, I want us to think about all of the multiple meanings that this term can—and does—have. Then, we will talk a bit about what that means for how we understand the Eucharist.

THE PHYSICAL BODY OF CHRIST

This is the absolute starting place; any proper discussion of the meaning of the term, Body of Christ, has to start here—with the physical blood, guts, bones, and bile of Jesus. His was a historical body that lived, occupied space, sweated, smelled bad, and performed all of the physical functions of a body.

The letter of 1 John affirms this body by taking the physical encounter with it as its literal opening point:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1:1-3).

And here we hit on our first key point concerning this body. The Johannine perspective, found both in this letter and in the Gospel of John, emphasize that this body is simultaneously the Word (of God, of Life) and a real body. The most paradoxical aspect of John's hymn-like start to his Gospel becomes the great antiphon of Christmas encircling it, encapsulating it, and proclaiming it: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (1:14).

Here we assert the perennial teaching of the Church: that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine. In his body, born from his mother Mary, he was both completely human and completely God. We all know that 100 percent plus 100 percent doesn't add up to 100 percent! Countless explanations have attempted to fix the equation ranging from all human

pretending to be God (0 + 100) to a human body but a divine soul (50 + 50) to all God pretending to be human (100 + 0). At each explanation, the Church has looked, sniffed it a few times, and said, "No, this isn't it." The best answer that we have come up with is a mystical union. The Word of God united to physical flesh is both God incarnate and a true human being.

This is the body that got weary from walking up and down the hills of Galilee; this is the body that became exhausted after nights spent in prayer rather than sleep; this is the body that took bread, blessed it, and broke it, saying, "This is my Body, given for you." This is the body that was nailed to the cross, died, and rose again.

THE RESURRECTED BODY OF CHRIST

We affirm that it was the physical Body of Christ that died and was raised. And yet, the resurrected Body did things that normal living bodies do not. On the other hand, it also did things that only normal living bodies can do. John goes to great pains in his Gospel to affirm a direct and fundamental continuity between the physical Body of Christ and the resurrected Body of Christ; as proof of his identity, the Risen Jesus shows the disciples his hands and side (John 20:20).

The story of Thomas serves to hammer this point home:

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). Of course, when Jesus comes to the disciples again, he invites Thomas to do just that: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe" (John 20:27). The wounds that Jesus received in his physical Body remain in his resurrected Body.

Furthermore, Jesus uses this resurrected Body in very physical ways. He breathes on the disciples (John 20:22). He cooks fish for them, with the clear implication that he ate some of it as well (John 21:9-14). And this isn't just a John thing either; Luke spends some time with this also. Jesus walked and talked with the men on the road to Emmaus. He took, blessed, and broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35). He specifically invites the apostles to touch him, including his hands and feet, and asks for some broiled fish to eat in their presence (Luke 24:41-3).

On the other hand, both John and Luke record the resurrected Body doing things beyond the ability of physical bodies—entering locked rooms (John 20:19), appearing suddenly among them in a manner that seemed like that of a ghost (Luke 24:36-7), and ascending into heaven (Acts 1:9). Furthermore, disciples who knew him well—including Mary Magdalene—had a hard time recognizing him by sight in both Luke and John.

So, as Luke and John tell it, the resurrected Body is fully continuous with the physical Body but is beyond it in some quite important ways.

THE ASCENDED BODY OF CHRIST

The ascended Body seems to be continuous with the resurrected Body and is thus linked to the physical Body as well. This is the Body that we confess in the creeds to be “seated at the right hand of the Father.” In the New Testament, we seem to have three separate references to this mode of Christ’s presence with a strong common thread: They are all visionary, ecstatic experiences by individuals.

In Acts, the dying Saint Stephen turns his eyes to heaven, “and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right

hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (7:55b-56). The point is that Christ in his ascended state was fully present with Stephen within his martyrdom.

Similarly, Saint Paul receives an experience of Jesus in Acts 9:3-6, which is later retold in Acts 22 and 26. While Paul speaks of “heavenly visions” in Acts 26:17, the experience is consistently described as a blinding light accompanied by the voice of Jesus speaking to Paul. There is certainly no question in Paul’s mind that Jesus was fully present.

The third is the vision of Saint John in the book of Revelation. There is an initial vision where John is “in the spirit on the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10) and he both sees and hears Jesus who, in dramatic fashion, dictates letters to seven churches in Asia (modern Turkey). John’s words convey a sense of full-on bodily presence—like when he passes out in fear “at his feet” and is revived when Jesus “placed his right hand on me [John]” (Revelation 1:17). John then discloses a more traditional enthronement scene clearly located “in heaven” (Revelation 4:2) where the Lamb appears at the right hand of God following the standard creedal image.

The key aspects of this mode of presence seem to be twofold: First, it is a very intense mode of presence; second, it is located spatially in heaven.

THE PNEUMATIC BODY OF CHRIST

With the ascension of the resurrected Body, and its enthronement—literal, metaphorical, symbolic—at the right hand of God, we pass into various post-physical modes of the Body of Christ. The lines between some of these are admittedly fuzzy but are worth mentioning, including the pneumatic Body.

From the Greek word *pneuma* (spirit), this is the Body that is mediated to believers by the Holy Spirit. I find this mode in particular when Jesus promises, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). This seems to be the mode of presence that Paul invokes at the start of 1 Corinthians 5 when he tells the Corinthians that he is present with them spiritually: "When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus" (5:4b).

Just as there is a special continuity between the physical and resurrected bodies, this mode of the Body of Christ has a certain continuity with the next two as well.

THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

The mystical Body of Christ is best captured in a single verb: abide. This is the mode of mutual indwelling where Christ dwells in us and we in him. Scripture speaks of it in a variety of ways:

[Jesus said:] I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is

glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples (John 15:1-8).

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 John 4:13-16).

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:19-20).

Perhaps most telling is this last selection, which is one of my favorite passages in the Pauline letters:

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:2-3).

Particularly significant here is the means by which our death occurs: "...you were buried with him in baptism..." (Colossians 2:12).

When we are baptized, we are baptized into the Body of Christ and become partakers of the divine life of God. Specifically, this is the Body of Christ that we are baptized into. And, being baptized into Christ, we are linked with all those who share that baptism. This is the Communion of the Saints spoken of in the creeds. We share a common life in Christ through our connection in him.

THE SOCIAL BODY OF CHRIST

The social Body of Christ is the visible institution of the Church. There is a lot of overlap between the mystical Body of Christ and the social Body of Christ; perhaps in a perfect world they would be identical, but in this present age that is not to be. The distinction is that the social Body is a human society, reinforced with human rules and administered by human beings. While we truly believe that the Church is of divine origin and receives divine guidance through the Spirit, the Anglican tradition acknowledges the fallibility of such institutions.

We cannot be Christians properly by ourselves. Our binding into the Body of Christ obligates us to gather with one another into the visible institution of the Church. Both the scriptures and the witness of the Early Church legislate particular forms of church life that include bishops, priests, and deacons alongside the main body of the faithful. As an Episcopal church—that is, one whose name includes the Greek word for bishop—we believe that these structures are important and necessary channels for the maintenance and proclamation of the faith.

Furthermore, the Church has been granted means of grace as sure and certain channels of the grace of God. Chief among these are the sacraments and various sacramental rites, Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing, Marriage, Ordination: these rites and others like them connect individuals, families, and communities deeper into the life of the Church, the social Body, and—hopefully—deeper into the mystical Body as well.

This social Body is one of Paul's favorite uses for this multivalent term. In several of his Epistles, he makes reference to this metaphor, particularly to speak of the nature of the Church and its essential interdependence:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

That's long, but the passage is worth citing in full. The reason is because here we see Paul talking about differentiation within the Body; not everybody has the same job—nor do they need to. Not everyone fulfills the same role, but all roles are important even if some are more visible than others. Differentiation and the hierarchy or potential for hierarchical ranking emphasizes the social character of the Church, particularly as it grapples with the ways that the Church both is and is not (or should not be) like other human social groupings.

Continuing with the theme of differentiation within the Body causes us to return to where we began. When we started speaking about the purpose of Christian spirituality, we began with Paul's use of the body metaphor in Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love (4:4-7, 11-16).

Paul goes to great lengths to emphasize the unity of the Body without insisting on uniformity but also makes clear

that being the Body is not enough. The Body of Christ is not yet fully matured. It is in the process of becoming filled out and strong but is not there yet. The Body of Christ—this social Body—does not yet fully possess the Mind of Christ. Only when the Body grows into full unity will it most fully be what it is.

THE MARGINAL BODY OF CHRIST

Another mode of presence that exists in partial relation to the previous ones is made explicit in one biblical passage (although others allude to it). This is Matthew's famous parable of the sheep and the goats. Set at the moment of Judgment, all peoples are gathered before the throne and judged based on how they treated Christ. The whole crowd—righteous and unrighteous alike—is confused and asks the same basic question: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison...?" (Matthew 25:44). He responds: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Scholars argue over exactly what group Matthew and Jesus are referring to with "the least of these who are the members of my family." Is this the Church specifically, or is it broader than that? At the end of the day, when we are wrestling with this passage's call on our lives and actions, it fundamentally doesn't matter to whom Matthew was referring. Scripture makes clear God's concern for those at the margins, those who get the short end of the social stick no matter how society is structured. To put a finer point on it, the more that the social Body overlooks or deliberately ignores the marginal Body, the further from the presence of Christ it is.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL BODY OF CHRIST

Eschatological is a fancy word that simply pertains to final things. Theologians use it when referring to the ideal future state where all of God's plans have come to fruition, and humanity and creation are finally and ultimately reconciled with God and one another. One way of grasping the great eschatological vision appears in Isaiah's prophecies about the coming messianic rule:

¶

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Isaiah speaks of entire ecosystems being fundamentally realigned in order to communicate the radical nature of this idyllic state and to contrast God's perfect image of reality with our current situation. This is a new Eden. Everything is as it was in the garden, full harmony between Creator and creation.

Humans are included in this vision too, and a passage from Isaiah uses similar imagery, combining it with undertones of the sacrificial meals in his description:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet

that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation (25:6-9).

We'll return to this image a little later—I'm sure you've noticed that it has some interesting interpretive angles—but the key point I want to make is that this is a comprehensive gathering of all people.

So, what does this have to do with Christ?

In the Stoic philosophy of the time, the term *Logos* (word) was used to speak of the logic or pattern underlying the universe. It's likely that when John's prologue speaks of Jesus as "the Word," it is tapping into this sense of a cosmic pattern. Paul certainly has this notion in mind in Colossians:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything (1:15-18).

Imagining the fullness of time, all creation is reconciled back to Christ the Logos within the eschatological Body. All creation is conformed, in joy and perfect freedom, to the pattern intended for it by its shaper. Romans alludes to this when it speaks of creation's groaning in anticipation of God's birthing of the new age:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (8:19-23).

This, then, is the eschatological Body—looking forward in hope to the point when Christ is all in all. This mode of Christ's presence exists for us now as a future state. It is something that our present activities can point toward but cannot be fully realized until the consummation of all things.

THE SACRAMENTAL BODY OF CHRIST

Finally, we arrive at one of the most common—and most argued over—uses of the term. When the consecrated Eucharistic bread is distributed from the altar, the priest never just gives it silently. The prayer book gives three phrases to choose from:

"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life."

"The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven."

[Or the expansive form found in Rite I] "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving."

Whichever version your priest happens to go with, one thing is left abundantly clear: The Church makes the claim

that the piece of bread being put into your hand at that moment is in some important way the Body of Christ.

How, exactly, do we mean this? Well, that's part of the genius of the Anglican system. Our formularies and liturgies are quite careful not to say exactly how we mean it, which permits a variety of acceptable interpretations and neatly sidesteps one of the greatest and most pressing religious differences in the Western Church from the time of the Reformation to the present: the mode and means of how Christ is present in the Eucharist.

One way to understand this mode is as a memorialist position. This theology suggests that the phrase Body of Christ is a metaphor and that the consecrated bread reminds us to remember Christ's death on our behalf and to nourish ourselves and our faith through this fundamentally mental act of memorial. Another way of understanding takes the identification of the bread with the Body of Christ literally and believes that Jesus is—somehow—truly and fully present in the bread. Different Anglicans have understood the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist in a variety of ways; some advocate a memorialist position, some speak of a purely spiritual presence, and others speak of a real presence. Still others explain by means of minor nuances how their view differs from transubstantiation, a theory of Real Presence explained by means of Aristotelian metaphysics, which was officially forbidden under the English 39 Articles of Faith.

I'm not going to try to persuade you one way or another; as I said, the prayer book permits quite a range. What I must insist upon, however, is that every one of our Eucharistic prayers includes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper when he tells his disciples, "Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you." These words require every theory of Eucharistic presence be grounded in Christ's own words. There is an

unavoidable continuity between the physical Body, the resurrected Body, and the sacramental Body. Likewise, all of the prayers forge a direct verbal connection between the bread of the rite and the Body of Christ:

Prayer I: "we, receiving [these thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine] according to thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most Blessed Body and Blood" (p. 335).

Prayer II: "bless and sanctify these gifts of bread and wine, that they may be unto us the Body and Blood of thy dearly-beloved Son Jesus Christ" (p. 342).

Prayer A: "Sanctify [these gifts] by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him" (p. 363).

Prayer B: "send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant" (p. 369).

Prayer C: "Sanctify [these gifts] by your Holy Spirit to be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord" (p. 371).

Prayer D: "sanctifying [these gifts] and showing them to be holy gifts for your holy people, the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ" (p. 375).

It is difficult to interpret all these in a purely metaphorical sense; the language seems to recommend something more substantial. The practice of reserving the sacrament—keeping leftover consecrated bread within a special box in the chancel (ambly) or on the altar (tabernacle)—within many Episcopal churches follows the logic of Real Presence. After all, if the bread is only a reminder or a metaphor, there is no reason to put it in a special box.

No matter how we understand it or what the mechanics are, our prayers emphasize that the consecrated bread is the Body of Christ—this is the faith of the Church.

The Church has always taught that the fullness of both the Body and Blood of Christ subsist in each of the elements. That is, the Body of Christ is not restricted to the bread or the Blood of Christ to the wine; to receive one of the elements is to receive the fullness of Christ's Eucharistic presence. Those who cannot drink wine or cannot eat gluten are not thereby excluded from it.

REAL PRESENCES

The classic argument over the Eucharist is about the Real Presence of Christ within it. I can't help but think this is the wrong way of asking the question. It's not: is there a Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist? Rather, I ask: How many modes of Real Presence are we experiencing simultaneously within the Eucharist? Or—to phrase the same question another way—how many dimensions of the Body of Christ and modes of Christ's presence are operative within a given rite?

I argue that, quite frequently, several of these dimensions are active in most anything that we do. As we walk down the street, go to work, or cook dinner, we function as members of the Body of Christ. We are participants—however passively at the moment—of the mystical Body of Christ through the basic fact of Baptism. When we pause with our families to say grace over dinner, we add a further dimension of the pneumatic Body as we unite in the Spirit through the act of prayer. When we pray the Daily Office, we connect to the social Body as well as the mystical Body and the pneumatic Body as we

express prayer as a habit of the Church, whether gathered together or dispersed.

But it is in the Eucharist that we have the greatest possible confluence of the multiple senses of the Body. As members of the mystical Body of Christ, we have been invited to participate within the interior life of the Trinity and to experience the self-offering of the Son to the Father through the Spirit. We physically gather with the social Body to raise our collective voices in praise and thanksgiving. Our spirits mingle in the pneumatic Body as we share in the one Spirit that leads us. We are invited to lift our hearts up heavenward to the ascended Body as we begin our great act of thanksgiving. We receive into ourselves the sacramental Body—however we choose to understand Christ's presence within the elements. And, together, as people gathered from all nations around the meal with God, we foreshadow the eschatological Body when Christ will be all in all and the reconciliation of Creator and creation will be complete.

It is easy to get stuck in binaries. For a long time, the argument focused around the exact nature of the bread and wine: Was he really there or wasn't he? In more recent years, the focus has changed to a fixation on the worshipping assembly as the Body of Christ to the relative exclusion of other meanings. Instead of proposing a narrow set of mutually exclusive binaries, it seems to me that we engage in the spirit of the Eucharist most fully when we experience it as a solemn and holy game of hide-and-peek where we keep our eyes out, ever attentive, ever watchful, to locate the presence of Christ within it in a way that we had not expected or suspected before.

Furthermore, I suggest that our liturgies ourselves point us to this perspective. Within them we find deliberately interwoven, intentional ambiguities, double-meanings, and turns of phrase designed to call to mind the many

simultaneous modes of Christ's presence. One of the reasons I love the Rite I liturgies is the way these Eucharistic prayers subtly reinforce the aspect of the mystical Body while making explicit reference to the sacramental Body. It begins most overtly in the Oblation of Eucharistic Prayer I when we ask that "we, and all others who shall be partakers of this Holy Communion, may worthily receive the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son Jesus Christ, be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction, and be made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him" (p. 336). The theme appears again in the Prayer of Humble Access, where we ask: "Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us" (p. 337). It appears once more in the post-Communion prayer—but not alone. Perhaps in recognition that an overemphasis on this aspect can lead to an unhealthy individualist attitude of "just Jesus and me," the post-Communion prayer deftly ties this aspect to three others. Here's a section of the prayer:

...we most heartily thank thee for that [A] thou dost feed us, in these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and dost assure us thereby of thy favor and goodness towards us; [B] and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical Body of thy Son, [C] the blessed company of all faithful people; [D] and are also heirs, through hope, of thy everlasting kingdom (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 339).

Starting with [A], the prayer invokes the sacramental Body that we have just received. Then in [B], the mystical Body is brought in. However, this is immediately qualified and diverted from an individualistic focus in [C] with a nod toward the coexistence of the mystical and social Bodies.

Finally, this chain concludes in [D] with a move toward the eschatological Body.

The other Eucharistic prayers are equally as rich in meaning. If we have an expectation that there is only one place where the Body can be, one form in which it can be found, and one mode through which we can experience it, we close off a host of potential meanings and insights concerning the nature of God and God's interaction with his creatures.

¶

THE EUCHARIST AS A GIFT TO THE CHURCH

As we move into and through the Christian life, there is an order—a progression—through which we pass. Not all do it the same way, of course, but history and experience have shown that there is a regular channel that the Church has identified as the ordinary path of the means of grace. In this channel, some experiences of the Body of Christ are more foundational than others; there is a logical order. If one mode of the Body of Christ should be selected to hold the primary place among the rest in our experience as Christians, it should be the mystical. The mystical Body is the means by which we as individuals are plugged into the life of God, are welcomed into the interior dialogue of the Trinity, and, in that connection, are united to our fellow brother and sister believers without regard to time and space, becoming heirs of the hope of the ultimate victory of love and life in the final consummation. Our entry into the mystical Body serves as the great gateway into the full experience of life in God. The writings of the New Testament emphasize the rite of Baptism because it is the means revealed for achieving this connection. Matthew's grand ending pushes this point home as it encompasses the mystical, social, pneumatic, and eschatological Bodies in the words of the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:19-20).

Baptism stands as our point of entry into the mystical and the social Bodies of Christ. The other sacramental rites proceed from and assume the mystical Body as a foundation for everything else.

The Eucharist did not appear one day, out of the blue, in the middle of a Galilean sidewalk. Rather, it is a rite that was bequeathed to the Church. It was given to the mystical Body as a deliberate act enacted by the social Body. The sacramental Body of Christ is given context as an act of the social Body on behalf of the mystical Body as a sign of and for the eschatological Body.

As the Church, we don't own the Eucharist; it is not ours. And yet, we are called to be stewards of it, meaning that we should faithfully celebrate it under the conditions in which it was given to us. It is an act of the Church that provides grace for the Church as the Body of Christ to be transformed more completely into the Mind of Christ. Outside of the Church, and outside of the company of the baptized, it loses a host of meanings because the multiplicity of Bodies participating within the rite are not present in the same way.

There are voices within the Church that urge the communion of the unbaptized as a sign of hospitality. It is hard to be against hospitality. And, indeed, we never should be. However, there is more present and at work in the Eucharist than simply that. The mystical Body is the foundational Christian reality that sheds light upon everything else that we do together. To be intentionally welcoming, our hospitality should focus upon welcoming the curious and the seekers into the mystical Body of Christ. They should be

given the opportunity to perceive the context of the Eucharist for themselves—to see it as a culmination of Real Presences that bind us deeper into the life of God into which we were planted in Baptism.

Saint Augustine, the fourth-century Bishop of Hippo, offered an invitation to the Eucharist in one of his sermons that captures the mechanics at work here. In speaking with reference to the Eucharist elements, he exhorts his listeners: “Be what you see; receive what you are!” He invites them, as the gathered Church, to receive the Eucharistic elements, then to enact the victory of life and love. He invites them to receive the sacrament, then to be the Church, to be the consecrated—set apart—Body and Blood of Christ in and for the world. This is the Eucharist’s true home; this is where it makes sense.

PERCEIVING THE BODY

With physical fitness, checking yourself in the mirror is not—cannot be—your sole means for assessing progress. Sure, it can be one metric among many. That is, if you’re looking at how your shape changes over time, you can assess certain things. You can get a sense of how weight loss or gain is going (although a scale is a more objective measure). You can see if you’re making progress with certain muscle groups (although a measuring tape is a more objective method). It can help give you a sense of proportion. So, yes, there is value. And, again, it can be an effective motivator.

However, it can’t tell you about your heart health. The mirror can’t tell you about your lung health. It can’t tell you about your own fitness over and against other people’s health. And I say this as a guy who has watched many people far less lean than myself blow past me at mile eleven of a race. Going

strictly off of looks, I would have judged myself to be in far better shape. But where the sneakers meet the road, I learn otherwise to my chagrin. When we put it in these terms, it seems obvious that other measures and motivators ought to be in on the game.

So how do we assess the spiritual fitness of the systems we’re in? If we take the Body of Christ seriously, what kind of things ought we be concerned about?

As in physical fitness, it’s easy to get sucked into judging by appearances. How is the Body doing? Well, our congregation, our local outpost of the social Body of Christ, must be doing great because it looks good on Sunday mornings!

Really?

I’m going to suggest that appearance—how things look, how things seem to be going—is only one part of assessing spiritual health.

No matter what it looks like, we must ask: How is it functioning? Is your local experience of the social and mystical Body of Christ being the Body of Christ in all of its potential dimensions in a wounded world? Is it manifesting Christ’s care to the marginal and the forgotten? Is it caring for those within it and those outside of it? Is it forging connections to bring other people, other communities into the pneumatic Body as you pray and work and witness together? Is your community baptizing new people into the mystical Body? Is it enriching the connection into the deeper life of God through provision of the sacramental Body and Blood? These are important measures of the functional fitness of the Body of Christ.

Is the Body of Christ as a community growing and inhabiting more deeply the Mind of Christ?

And is your individual spiritual journey contributing to that growth and benefiting the whole Body? Are you doing

your own thing for your own reasons by your own self, or is your journey simultaneously an act of service to those around you, building up the Body in all of its facets?


These are the questions we need to consider as we perceive the Body as it manifests around us and within us.

CONCLUSION ON THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is the main event in the liturgical life. This is the moment when the local worshipping community embodies and enacts the Body of Christ more fully, more completely, than any other time in its life together. The Eucharist is the sacrificial meal of reconciliation, Christ's own great self-offering to the Father. In the proclamation of the Gospel and in the meal at the altar, we are invited to take in Jesus through all our senses and to be converted—spiritually, emotionally, physically—into the God who calls us to be reconciled to himself and to the whole creation. As we are reconciled, we experience the corporate dimension of this sacramental reality when we truly reconcile with those around us and extend that reconciliation to those who have not heard its Good News.

NOTES

- 1 General Convention passed a resolution in 2015 allowing a Eucharist of this type to be conducted at a principal service if the text has been approved beforehand by the bishop.
- 2 Mark 7:25-30.
- 3 *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 338. The final option is found only in Rite I.



AFTERWORD

