



ADOREMUS 2018 Symposium Presentation

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the eucharist as a sign of the church's unity : "one bread, one body" revisited

My most vivid, and still current, experience of the Eucharist began with my discovery of Jesus in a living way. I had grown up in a practising family of the Church of England but, when I began to look for truth, initially it did not occur to me that this truth might have anything to do with Jesus. It took an encounter with him to put me right.

This encounter came via the Focolare Movement. One result of this was that I was encouraged to go back to my own church and discover its beauty. It is here, in the Church of England, that I began a relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist.

I found how amazing he is. In the Eucharist God in Christ identifies himself with bread and wine so that he can identify himself with me. In other words it is God who, through bread and wine, makes me God (by participation, of course). And not just, as you might say, any kind of God, but the true God who is Jesus, perfectly divine and perfectly human.

And because this God who is Jesus not only comes to me to make me him, but also to the others who receive him, he makes us all him, all one: one God, one Jesus, all together.

The context of my life, however, just as the context of the Church, is that I have to live this wonderful discovery of Jesus-who-makes-us-one in a situation of division. It's very odd; indeed, it's absurd. I receive Jesus in the Eucharist, but I cannot receive him together with all my brothers and sisters of every other church. The One who makes us One is given to us in disunity. Seen from that angle the work of ecumenism is vital. We must heal the Body of Christ on earth, the Church, so that it is fit to receive the One who comes in the Eucharist.

At the same time, however, this very absurdity is a source of grace, because it underscores some of the divine realities, the gifts God hands to us.

To begin with, as you can imagine, it was immensely painful not to be able to receive the Eucharist, except on special occasions, together with my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. The first thing I found was that not being able to receive the Eucharist was a taste of the cross – that very suffering of Jesus' sacrifice made effective in the here and now, as it were re-presented, in the Eucharist. He comes



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to me in the pain. So my exclusion was a chance to share in the pain that generates unity, a contribution to the healing of the Church, Christ's Body.

But then I began to discover other things. I found, for instance, that when I was unable to receive Jesus in the Eucharist at a Roman Catholic celebration, through my relationship with the others who had been to Communion, I was in fact nourished by God. It was all an effect of our love for one another expressed perhaps by a smile of reassurance, a word of solidarity, a listening to one another in conversation, an act of kindness freely given. It was clear to me that what I found I was receiving through the others, namely God who is love, came because they were the living Body of Christ. All that mattered was that I and they both remained in the Gospel life, so that this current of love could be in us, passing from them to me.

Later on, though, I found something more. In the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer we are assured that if in time of sickness, when the sacrament is brought to someone who cannot receive Holy Communion physically, nonetheless, if that person's disposition is one of repentance, faith and thankfulness, (and I quote) 'he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth'. It is spiritual communion. This I have experienced many times when, because of church discipline, I cannot otherwise receive the sacrament. It does not feel the same as when I can actually receive the Lord's Body and Blood in my mouth; but it is the same Jesus who comes to me.

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