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The Mystical Body of Christ

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(Domestic Exhortation, Jesuit Seminary, Toronto, Nov. 1951.)

The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ refers to a concrete union of the divine Persons with one another and with man and, again, of men's union with one another and with the divine Persons. Because it is a doctrine that envisages things as they concretely are, it has all the complexity, all the stout articulation and delicate ramification of concrete reality. Because it is a single doctrine, its many elements, its manifold differentiations, its comprehensive network of relations, have to be apprehended all at once in a single view. Finally, because it is a supernatural doctrine, the relevant viewpoint for that single view is the viewpoint of God Himself, so that, while from books and lectures one can learn many things about the Mystical Body, still it is only in prayer and contemplation that one comes really to know it and to appreciate it.

In search, then, of such knowledge and appreciation, let us leave to classes and hours of study the exploration of the Mystical Body in its fullness and let us take as a simple clue, as a guiding thread through the labyrinth of wealth, the single but basic and familiar theme of love. Upon that theme there are many variations, but we shall consider only five. Since unfortunately a man can think or speak of only one thing at a time, each of the five variations will be considered separately. But at once I would ask you to be on the watch for the relations, and connections, and dependences that blend and fuse all five into a single doctrine with its centre in Christ Jesus our Lord, at once true God and true Man.

First, then, there is the love of the Eternal Father for his Eternal Son. As the Father is God, so also the Son is God. This love, then, is the love of God for God. Moreover, it too is God, God the Holy Ghost, who is the infinite love proceeding from the infinite loveliness of God.

Secondly, there is the love of the Eternal Father for his Son as man. For the second person of the Blessed Trinity possesses two natures; he is both God and man. A moment ago we considered the love of the Father for the Son as God. Now we ask about the love of the Father for the Son as man. Because the Son has two natures, we might conclude that the Father has two loves, an infinite love that is the Holy Ghost for the Son as God, and a lesser love for the Son as man. On the other hand, because the Son is the same person in both his divine and human natures, one might argue that the Father has but a single love, the Holy Ghost, for the Son whether as God or as man.

To resolve this doubt, the gospels present us with a tableau. At the beginning of his public life, Jesus was baptized by John at the Jordan and as he came out from the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven was heard testifying to the Father's love, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Son as man is still the Father's beloved Son and the love is still

the Holy Ghost. Such is the stupendous corollary of the Incarnation. Because God became man, the love of God for God became the love of God for man. Because love is for a person, when God became man, when the Word was made Flesh, divine love broke the confines of divinity to love a created humanity in the manner that God the Father loves God the Son.

This is the truth that theologians express by saying that the sanctifying grace of Christ was infinite. For as you know, God's love is for the loveliness that He himself produces and sanctifying grace is the loveliness conferred upon a creature beloved by God. Since then the love of the Eternal Father for Christ as man is the love of God for God, the sanctifying grace of Christ, though finite as an entity, is infinite as a grace.

Thirdly, there is the love of Christ as man for men. It is the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the love of a human will, motivated by a human mind, operating through human senses, resonating through human emotions and feelings and sentiments, implemented by a human body with its structure of bones and muscles, flesh, its mobile features, its terrible capacities for pleasure and pain, for joy and sorrow, for rapture and agony. It is the love of the Good Shepherd, knowing his own, known by his own, and ready to lose his life for them: Greater love than this, no man hath, than to lay down his life for his friend. It is the love of a man with a mission in the world, the high mission of teaching truth: For this was I born and for this came I into the world that I might bear witness to the truth. It is the love of a man with an incomprehensible, an incommunicable secret. How can a man announce that he is God. Yet Christ was God. To shout that secret from the housetops was to make himself a fool. To confide it to his friends was to mystify them. To affirm it before the court of the Sanhedrin was to earn himself the penalty of an atrocious death for blasphemy. It was a frustrated love: Quae utilitas in sanguine meo. What is the use of living and dying for men who will not believe, or if they believe, do not love, or if they love only half-heartedly. Can love be love and not give all? Can Christ's love give all and be happy about it, when not met by the same total selfsurrender in the beloved? But do men? do we?

Fourthly, there is the love of the Eternal Father for us. At the Last Supper our Lord prayed to his heavenly Father for all who were to believe in him. He prayed that all be one, as my Father in me and I in

Thee, that all be one in us. I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be completely made one, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me and that Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved me.

Thou hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me. The words are startling. For we know the love of the Father for the Son. We know that that love is God the Holy Ghost. We know that that love of the Father for the Son as God was extended to the Son as man. Is it true, then, the Father loves us as He loves his own Son? Is it true that the sanctifying grace that belongs to Christ is communicated to us? Is it true that the divine loveliness making the humanity of Christ beloved of the Father also is bestowed upon us? The answer is given by the gospel "Thou hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me." For Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan, not to obtain grace for himself, but to provide an outward manifestation of the inward effect upon us of baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

As the Eternal Father loves the Son as God with the love that is the Holy Ghost, as He loves the Son as man with the same love, so also does He love his adopted sons with the same love and highest gift, the Holy Ghost. "In the fullness of of time God send his Son to redeem those under the law and to give us an adoptive sonship. Because then we are sons, he sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying out within us, Abba, Father."

By that adoptive sonship, by the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit by the infusion of sanctifying grace into our souls, we are born again. Our sins are forgiven, we are made just in the sight of God, we become his friends, his children, and heirs of the kindom of heaven. There is implanted within us a new principle of a higher life and from it there flow the infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Ghost.

That ~~k~~ new and higher life is not lived in isolation. For it is the life of the member of Christ and it flourishes in us in the measure that we are united with Christ. He is the vine and we are the branches. As branches wither and die, when separated from the vine, so are we without the life of grace, when separated from Christ. As branches flower and fructify when united fully with the vine, so too do we, when united fully with Christ. As the living Father has ~~en~~ send me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, the same shall live by me. He that eateth My Body and drinketh My Blood... He that abideth in Me and I in him.

As you know, there is not a perfect analogy between an organic body and the Mystical Body of Christ. The members or parts of an organism have no distinct existence of their own: what your hand does, you do, for your hand is not something for itself. But the members of the Mystical Body have a distinct existence of their own: so that your deeds are your own and on the day of Judgement not Christ but you shall render an account of them. Again, the member of an organical body is not for the hands or the stomach, but both hands and stomach are for the body. But in the Mystical Body, the members are not for the Body, but the Body is for the members, the members are for Christ, and Christ is for God. All things are yours; but you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

But, if in the Body of Christ, we remain ourselves, we do not remain our own. As the Spirit of Christ is given to us, so we are given to Christ. For whether we live, we live to the Lord; whether we die, we die to the Lord; so that whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. You are not your own, for you have been bought for a high price.

Since we are not our own, we have to renounce ourselves and die to ourselves. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." "Amen, amen, I say to you unless the seed falling to the ground die, itself remaineth alone. If it die, it brings forth much fruit." - "Who loves his life in this world, will lose it; and who hates his life in this world, will keep it unto eternal life." - As St. Paul told the Colossians: "You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

As he wrote to the Romans: " You are buried with Christ by baptism; you are engrafted upon the image of his death; you have died with Christ." As he wrote to the Galatians: " Those who are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscence." As he wrote to the Corinthians: "The charity of Christ drives us on. For we reckon that if one has died for all, then all are dead; and Christ has died for all, so that those that live, live no longer for themselves but for him who has died and risen again!" As he testified of himself: "By the law I have died to the law, that I might live to God. With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live, not I, but Christ liveth in me."

But <sup>what</sup> does it mean that Christ lives in us? It means more than I know or can say. But at least it means that the life of grace within us does not come to us by nature, that is the free gift of God, that properly it belongs to Christ, the natural Son of God, the immediate beloved of the Father. Again, it means that though we live that life, still we live it by renouncing ourselves and by dying to ourselves to live to Christ and with Him and in Him and by Him. It means that the perfection of that life is being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, that it surpasses our comprehension and our wisdom, that we cannot live it on our own in the light of our own good common sense but only in the light and through the direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is sent, is given to us by the Father and by the Son and who dwells within us. It means that the goal and final end of that life is the beatific vision, a vision that was Christ's by right from the first moment of his conception, a vision that will be ours inasmuch as suffering with Christ we shall be glorified with Him.

Besides the love of the Father for the Son, of the Son for us, of the Father for us, there is another love. It is the charity of God diffused in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.

As St. Paul wrote to the Romans: " Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? In all this we are conquerors, through him who has granted us his love. Of this I am fully persuaded: neither life or death, no angels or principalities or powers, neither what is present nor what is to come, no force whatever, neither the height above us nor the depth beneath us, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which comes to us in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The same charity, Reverend Fathers and Dear Brothers, of which St. Paul wrote has been given to you by the same Holy Spirit. It is the supernatural virtues infused into the will by the omnipotent power of God both on the reception of baptism and in the forgiveness of mortal sin in confession. It is a virtue that is increased with every increase of sanctifying grace in your souls. It is a virtue that has been given you in an abundant measure, for it led you to follow the counsels of Christ in the Society of Jesus and it has enabled you to persevere in that calling. But also it is an exception among the virtues, for other virtues stand on the golden mean; one can be excessive in prudence or justice, in fortitude or temperance; but charity cannot be excessive, for it regards not the means but the final end. Hence the great commandment is to love God with all one's heart and all one's soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength. And the second is like unto the first, to love one's neighbor as oneself, to love one another as Christ has loved us, toward the fulfilment of Christ's prayer at the Last Supper: "I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be completely made one in us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me and that Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved me."

Let us all join our Lord in that prayer. He ever lives, interceding for us; and his prayer now is as it was at the Last Supper.

Let us join with Him, for where ever two or more are gathered together in my name, he said, there I am, in the midst of them. We are gathered together in his name.

Let us ask each for himself and each for all that His grace and His love growever greater within us, to an ever more complete renunciation of ourselves, to an ever fuller acknowledgement that we are not our own but His, to an ever profounder joy that the Infinite Love that was extended from the Son as God to the Son as man, has been extended through his passion and death, through his Church and his Sacrements, to us.

Let us ask not only for ourselves but for all his Mystical Body, that all its members be alive with the life of grace, that in our agè, so blotted with anxiety and suffering, the number of saints totally given to God be multiplied, that the Mystical Body grow enormously to include all men in accord with the universal salvific will of the divine Father.