

Readings for the Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
Extraordinary Form

Romans 6: 3-11

Brethren, are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Mark 8: 1-9

In those days when there again was a great crowd without anything to eat, he summoned the disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will collapse on the way, and some of them have come a great distance." His disciples answered him, "Where can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them here in this deserted place?" Still, he asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" "Seven," they replied. He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then, taking the seven loaves he gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd. They also had a few fish. He said the blessing over them and ordered them distributed also. They ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets. There were about four thousand people.

Communion with his Death

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Romans 6: 3-11 / Mk 8: 1-9
Ave Maria Catholic Church, July 17, 2022 – Fr. David M. Vidal

The reading of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans explains the meaning of Baptism. Today's gospel leads us to the scene of the multiplication of the bread. That will be a prelude to Jesus' discourse on the bread of life. Then, Jesus proclaims to all who are present that the one who eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life.

Today, the liturgy introduces two sacraments for our meditation—the Sacraments of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The word sacrament (*sacramentum* in Latin) corresponds to the Greek word *mysterion* (that we translate as mystery).

In theology, mystery expresses a hidden reality that the human mind cannot discover unless God reveals it. There is something invisible in the sacraments that the human eye does not perceive. The mystery is only discovered through faith.

In Baptism, the human eye only perceives water, but faith reveals the cleansing of the soul. In the Eucharist, the human eye only sees the white host, but faith reveals Jesus, who is truly, really, and substantially present. In the sacraments, something is seen and felt with the senses, but there is also a hidden reality that surpasses the sensory perception.

In one of his writings (*These are the Sacraments*), the Venerable Fulton Sheen explains the hidden and mysterious aspects of the sacraments with a couple of examples. He explains that a handshake is a kind of sacrament because there is something seen and felt, namely, the clasping of hands, but there is something mysterious and unseen, that is, the communication of friendship. Likewise, a kiss is a kind of sacrament that reveals the physical contact of the lips but also includes the mysterious and unseen affection for the other.

The worldly man stops at the physical contact; the spiritual man also perceives the mystery and the invisible spiritual reality. Why is the worldly man shortsighted? Archbishop Fulton Sheen provides the answer: "*The world is full of poetry: it is sin which turns it into prose.*" The sinful man cannot grasp spiritual realities.

The sacraments are sensible signs. We see and touch the water and the white host; however, there is a hidden and mysterious reality that our senses do not grasp and is truly present. The sacraments bring "divine life" or "grace" to us.

The Son of God took our human nature and died for our sins on the wood of the cross to bring us a higher life: "*I have come so that [you] may have life and have it more abundantly*" (John 10:10). Jesus brings life. For this reason, he commanded his apostles to

baptize and to celebrate the Eucharist in his memory. The sacraments are not inventions of the Church but Jesus's gifts.

Baptism gives us sanctifying grace, making us children of God as the first fruit of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. The Eucharist gives us the author of grace himself, God with us, Jesus.

Through Baptism and the Eucharist, we enter into communion with Christ. We participate in his life, and we also participate in his death.

According to Saint Paul, the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Jesus's death, is buried with him, and rises with him:

This is what we heard today in the reading: *“Brethren, are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life,”* (Rom 6:3-4; also see Col 2:12).

Through Baptism, we “put on Christ,” (Gal 3:27). We die to sin and are born to grace, the beautiful life of grace.

Likewise, through the Eucharist, we enter into communion with Jesus's life. In one of his sermons on the Eucharist, St. Augustine exhorts: *“Eat life, drink life: you will have life, and it is complete life,”* (*Sermo CXXXI. I, 1*).

The Eucharist is the summit of the whole Christian life. Using the words of St. Thomas Aquinas: *“The Eucharist is the culmination of the spiritual life and the goal of all the sacraments,”* (*Summa Theologiae, III, q. 66, a.6*).

Then, Venerable Fulton Sheen explains: *“Communion is first of all the receiving of Divine Life, a life to which we are no more entitled than marble is entitled to blooming. It is a pure gift of an all-merciful God who so loved us that He willed to be united with us, not in the bonds of flesh, but in the ineffable bonds of the Spirit.”*

Now, communion implies not only “receiving” divine life. Communion is a union of love, and all love is reciprocal. There is no one-sided love. Because of this, there is another aspect of communion.

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul teaches that communion is not only an incorporation to the “life” of Christ, but it is also an incorporation to his “death.” We read: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes,”* (1 Cor. 11:26).

Then, communion implies not only a “receiving” but also a “giving.”

Saint Paul encourages us to *fill up in our bodies the sufferings which are lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body*, (Col. 1: 24). That is our share. We must bring a spirit of sacrifice to the Eucharistic table; we must bring the mortification of ourselves, the crucifixion of our egoism, the death of our concupiscence, and the daily crosses patiently carried.

This is what the sacraments bring to us: communion with Jesus’s life and death. This is a tremendous gift, but at the same time, this is an enormous responsibility. Living in Christ means dying a little every day while we search for a life that will never end.

Let us go beyond what we see, touch, and feel. Let us discover the mystery of our incorporation into Christ. Let us understand that living in Christ means to be in communion with his life and death. Amen