

The Catholic religion is a religion of the body as much as of the soul. While it is true to say that Jesus died to save our souls, it is truer still to say that He died to save the whole of our being, body and soul. We don't just believe in the resurrection of the soul, but of the whole person, body and soul. And that ought not to be news to us. Yet sometimes you get the impression that people today, including Catholics, believe that God only created the soul. The rest of material reality, including the body, is just not part of the equation. You see it in the attitude which says that anyone can do what they like with their body, and even with the bodies of others.

The problem with this attitude is that treating the body as you please necessarily has a bad effect on the person's own soul. The abuse of a child, rape, torture, the full spectrum of addictions: we all know that these and other such things create profound spiritual and psychological suffering, with scars which can often never be healed. In other words, no matter how much the media and the social elite want us to believe that bodily behaviour is indifferent, or a matter of personal whim, the truth is that body and soul are profoundly and inseparably united. Abuse of one always involves abuse of the other. Respect and true love of one always involves respect and true love of the other.

This shows forth the beautiful truth that the human being, body and soul, exists from the moment of conception. The body is not a container into which the soul is later placed, as if the box is made first and the gift inserted later. Our bodies and souls are rooted in each other because they came into existence together.

What I am saying ought to be obvious, self-evident common sense. And yet at different times in human history, including today, trends of thought have emerged which claim to know better. Thankfully, they come and go, as will today's attempts to separate and even oppose body and soul - but not without first wreaking havoc in the lives, the bodily and spiritual lives, of countless individuals, families and societies.

We need to reclaim the body for the soul, for the sake of the peace and integrity of every human being. We also need to reclaim both body and soul for Christ. Today's solemn celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ not only offers us an opportunity. It enjoins on us the solemn obligation first and foremost to work and pray personally for a greater coherence in the way we live in our own bodies and souls and how we treat the bodies and souls of others.

It is our faith that when we receive the Eucharist, Christ gives Himself to us Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - in other words, in the profound inner union of his entire humanity and of his entire divinity. In return, we cannot limit ourselves merely to giving to Him at the moment of Holy Communion some fleeting pious thought. The risk is that we give him nothing at all, if our reception of the sacrament is nothing but a formality, a habit or even an act of vanity intended to impress other people. At the reception of Holy Communion, the only sincere response from us is to offer our entire being, body and soul, back to Christ.

Indeed, since His gift of Himself is the fruit of his entire life of loving service to save us from sin and death, our response must in fairness be the same: not just body and soul, but our entire lives, warts and all. Love for love, loyalty for loyalty, joy for joy, whole self for whole

self, even more profoundly than between husband and wife. When, therefore, we say “Amen” to the words, “The Body, the Blood of Christ”, we are giving expression in faith both to the magnitude of the gift being given to us and, at the same time, to our real will to reciprocate in kind by committing our entire lives to Christ. It is like the “I do” between spouses at the altar, only its reach is deeper and vaster.

The attempt to separate body and soul will not be overcome merely by reciting the Catechism to people, or even by teaching them the beautiful theology of the body of Pope St. John Paul II, of which you may have heard. It can only be overcome by living witness. Only values that are effectively lived out can attract people away from the anti-values in which so many are steeped physically, psychologically and spiritually. Only living witness takes the truths and brings it to life.

The power to witness is already in us by virtue of our confirmation, but it is given a weekly and even daily boost in the worthy, deliberate, conscious, faith-filled and loving reception of the Holy Eucharist. But be careful. Neither the grace of confirmation nor the grace of the Eucharist is magic. Grace will always bring us to Gethsemane before it brings us to Paradise. Grace, the active power of Christ, first requires of us the “agony”, the fight, the struggle of taking the right decisions. You can hand a son a hefty fortune, but unless he actually takes the decision to work with it and follow that decision through, you might as well have thrown it in the bin. Grace always places us before a choice. As Jesus himself knew from Gethsemane, the terms of the choice are always only and ultimately these: “Not my will, but thine be done.” Not, “thy will be discussed and debated”, but “thy will be done.”

But we have to know what it is we are choosing. If reception of the Eucharist is only about walking away feeling good for a few hours, we are taking seriously neither the sacrament nor ourselves. Feeling good is fine, but it is only authentic if it is the result of gratitude for the immense gift received and of the commitment to keep working in your life to live the commandments of Christ in both body and soul. The religion of the body and soul, the sacrament of the body and soul, offer us the sure path to deal with the demands of body and soul in a way that brings us the peace and joy of salvation. To the degree we live that, the splendour of the truth about the body will shine upon the world around us and draw others to the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ.

If we can pass to one another the common cold, a sign that our bodies are all interlinked, then we can pass to one another the witness of our common and eternal destiny: to be raised from death in the body; to be united eternally in the Mystical Body of Christ in the glory of the saints; and to gaze upon the glorious Risen Body of the Lord. As the New Adam, he took that body from the immaculate flesh of the Virgin Mother, the new Eve, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Glorify God in your body. Glorify Him in the Body and Blood of Christ, and you will be glorified by Him in your body as well as being glorified by Him in His Risen Body. As He himself promised: anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live for ever.