

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Proverbs 9:1-6 "Forsake foolishness, & advance in the way of understanding."

Responsorial Psalm 34: "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20 "Be filled with the Spirit, giving thanks always & for everything."

Gospel: John 6:51-58 "I am the living bread. The one who feeds on me will have life."

The people who heard Jesus say "I am giving you my flesh and blood to eat" asked: "**How** can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They were asking the wrong question. For centuries people were hung up on that question, and it's one that cannot be completely answered -and it's so often a question that can lead to division and confusion rather than to healing and peace.

Jesus never answers this question, but raises deeper ones. To understand the message of Jesus, we need to pay close attention to the *questions* he raises. The real Gospel question today is "How am I called to *respond* to the gift of Christ's body and blood?" This question is much scarier, but it has the power to make us whole and transform us into messengers of peace.

What do you say when you receive communion - after you hear the words, "The Body of Christ" or "the blood of Christ?" Our response is a simple one, "**Amen.**"

But what does that Amen mean? Literally, it's a Hebrew word that means "So be it" or "I believe." It comes from the same Hebrew root which means faith and rock. But it has much more power & meaning than two simple syllables would imply.

This weekend we celebrated the feast of the Assumption. When we say Amen at Communion we are saying something like what Mary said to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word."

I know a song that reveals an even deeper meaning for our Amen [or Ah-men]:

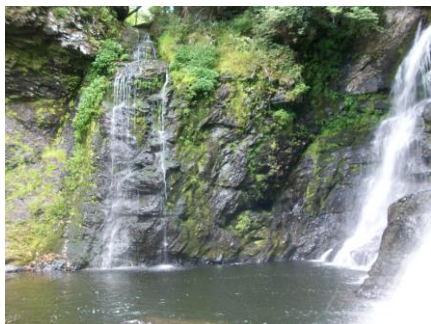
♪ AH-MEN, EL CUERPO DE CRISTO. AH-MEN, LA SANGRE DEL SENOR.

EATING YOUR BODY, DRINKING YOUR BLOOD, WE BECOME WHAT WE RECEIVE, AMEN, AMEN. ♪

"We become what we receive...." That is the punch line. The idea comes from St. Augustine, who once said: "Behold the Body of Christ! See who you are and be what you receive!"

These very words were quoted by Pope Benedict in 2005 [in his Apostolic Exhortation, Eucharistia in Ecclesia].

To really say "amen" to the Body of Christ is to become connected to each other and to creation itself in a network of relationships - held together by Christ himself. St. Francis of Assisi is someone who truly became what he received, and it transformed all his relationships - with the sun, the earth, the water, the sky and all God's creatures.



There is a story that makes that clear: [Story of Francis taming the wolf of Gubbio].



There are several lessons in that story:

1. We are in relationship with all creation as part of our family.
2. Everything is connected and sacred, and can be brought into harmony by the Spirit of God.
3. The way to that harmony is not violence, force or war - as so much of our culture teaches us, it is through compassion, reconciliation & peace.

In a way, when we eat the body of Christ, we eat the Church. I would go even further, when we eat the body of Christ we take on the call of Christ to bring all creation to wholeness. The Holy Spirit transforms simple bread and wine into the living body of Christ **so that we can become the body of Christ for the World.**

In the Eucharistic prayer, I will invite you to celebrate that truth by singing

♪ We are the body of Christ. ♪

We also say that we receive the *Blood of Christ* at Communion. What does that mean? (It can sound kind of gross.)

To really understand what Jesus meant, we need to know that blood is a code word in the Bible, it means life.

To receive or reverence the Blood of Christ is to commit myself to respect and reverence all life - my own life, the life of my human sisters & brothers and the life that exists all around us in creation. That is far from easy.

That is why it has also been said that to drink from the cup is to drink the cross. Did you notice how many times the word "life" or some form of it occurs in today's Gospel? 9 times - count them. When I present the host and the cup at Communion, I say: "Behold the body and lifeblood of Christ, see who you are and be what you receive."

I like to use the word "Lifeblood" because it accurately translates what Jesus meant when calls us to drink his blood.

The Gospel today talks about *eternal* life, and abiding in the life of Christ. That is what we are celebrating on the feast of the Assumption. This feast on August 15<sup>th</sup> is not just about what happened to one woman, it is a prophesy of what we believe will happen to us.

When I ask you in the creed, "Do you believe in the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting." We will all say, "I DO." The Assumption of Mary is also a proclamation that all creation has been taken up into Christ, as her body was.

And this eternal life that Mary lives does not just mean life *after* death, it means life right now. Another way of saying "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life," is "Whoever receives my body and blood in communion shares my life."

Pope Francis is calling us to reverence & respect for all life - not only human lives, from conception to natural death, but the life that sustains all creatures. Christ entered into the created cosmos, and because of that, as Pope Francis writes,

"the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence."

When we say Amen at communion, we commit ourselves to see Christ in one another and in creation and to be Christ for one another and for the earth.

We are called to receive the gift of wisdom the first reading talks about, so we can hear what Christ teaches and see what he sees - that we are connected in a web of relationships with each other and with the whole of creation.

As Pope Francis puts it, "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." (And with brother wolf & sister sheep as well).

We are called to respect and care for the earth itself, because it is a part of Christ, and Christ is revealed through creation.

When we say "amen", we are called to give thanks for our gifts, as Paul writes, and to share them with all our brothers and sisters. We are invited to sing the great canticle of Creatures written by St. Francis - a prayer which is at the heart of the encyclical of Pope Francis, entitled "Laudato Si".

The first words of that letter - Laudato si' mi signore (Praise to you my Lord) are the first words of the poem St. Francis wrote, the one called the Canticle of Brother Sun. Most of us are familiar with it through the hymn, "All Creatures of our God and King."

When we say amen at Communion, we are not only singing this song, we are promising to live what it says. I will conclude with a 20<sup>th</sup> century setting & summary of this canticle:

♪ Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.  
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good. ♪

