

SERMON 227: PREACHED ON THE HOLY DAY OF EASTER TO THE *INFANTES*, ON THE SACRAMENTS

Date: 414-415†1

You are yourselves what you receive

I haven't forgotten my promise. I had promised those of you who have just been baptized a sermon to explain the sacrament of the Lord's table, which you can see right now, and which you shared in last night. You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, what you ought to receive every day. That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ.†2 That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle says, *We, being many, are one loaf, one body* (1 Cor 10:17). That's how he explained the sacrament of the Lord's table; one loaf, one body, is what we all are, many though we be.

In this loaf of bread you are given clearly to understand how much you should love unity. I mean, was that loaf made from one grain? Weren't there many grains of wheat? But before they came into the loaf they were all separate; they were joined together by means of water after a certain amount of pounding and crushing. Unless wheat is ground, after all, and moistened with water, it can't possibly get into this shape which is called bread. In the same way you too were being ground and pounded, as it were, by the humiliation of fasting and the sacrament of exorcism. Then came baptism, and you were, in a manner of speaking, moistened with water in order to be shaped into bread. But it's not yet bread without fire to bake it. So what does fire represent? That's the chrism, the anointing. Oil, the fire-feeder, you see, is the sacrament of the Holy Spirit.

Notice it, when the Acts of the Apostles are read; the reading of that book begins now, you see. Today begins the book which is called the Acts of the Apostles. Anybody who wishes to make progress has the means of doing so. When you assemble in church, put aside silly stories†3 and concentrate on the scriptures. We here are your books.†4 So pay attention, and see how the Holy Spirit is going to come at Pentecost. And this is how he will come; he will show himself in tongues of fire. You see, he breathes into us the charity which should set us on fire for God, and have us think lightly of the world, and burn up our straw, and purge and refine our hearts like gold. So the Holy Spirit comes, fire after water, and you are baked into the bread which is the body of Christ. And that's how unity is signified.

Now you have the sacraments in the order they occur.†5 First, after the prayer,†6 you are urged to lift up your hearts; that's only right for the members of Christ. After all, if you have become members of Christ, where is your head?†7 Members have a head. If the head hadn't gone ahead before, the members would never follow. Where has our head gone? What did you give back in the creed? *On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father*. So our head is in heaven. That's why, after the words *Lift up your hearts*, you reply, *We have lifted them up to the Lord*.

And you mustn't attribute it to your own powers, your own merits, your own efforts, this lifting up of your hearts to the Lord, because it's God's gift that you should have your heart up above. That's why the bishop, or the presbyter who's offering, goes on to say, when the people have answered *We have lifted them up to the Lord*, why he goes on to say, *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*, because we have lifted up our hearts. Let us give thanks, because unless he had enabled us to lift them up, we would still have our hearts down here on earth. And you signify your agreement by saying, *It is right and just* to give thanks to the one who caused us to lift up our hearts to our head.

Then, after the consecration of the sacrifice of God, because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice, which is indicated by where that sacrifice was first put, that is the sign of the thing that we are;†8 why, then after the consecration is accomplished, we say the Lord's prayer, which you have received and given back. After that comes the greeting, *Peace be with you*, and Christians kiss one another with a holy kiss. It's a sign

of peace; what is indicated by the lips should happen in the conscience; that is, just as your lips approach the lips of your brothers or sisters, so your heart should not be withdrawn from theirs.

So they are great sacraments and signs, really serious and important sacraments. Do you want to know how their seriousness is impressed on us? The apostle says, *Whoever eats the body of Christ or drinks the blood of the Lord unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord* (1 Cor 11:27). What is receiving unworthily? Receiving with contempt, receiving with derision. Don't let yourselves think that what you can see is of no account. What you can see passes away, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but remains. Look, it's received, it's eaten, it's consumed. Is the body of Christ consumed, is the Church of Christ consumed, are the members of Christ consumed? †9 Perish the thought! Here they are being purified, there they will be crowned with the victor's laurels. So what is signified will remain eternally, although the thing that signifies it seems to pass away. So receive the sacrament in such a way that you think about yourselves, that you retain unity in your hearts, that you always fix your hearts up above. Don't let your hope be placed on earth, but in heaven. Let your faith be firm in God, let it be acceptable to God. Because what you don't see now, but believe, you are going to see there, where you will have joy without end.

NOTES

†1. This date is my compromise between those proposed by two authorities who are usually in perfect accord: Fischer, who suggests 412-413, and Kunzelmann who favors 416-417. The sermon, though primarily on the eucharist, explains all three “sacraments of initiation”: baptism, confirmation, and eucharist.

†2. Evidently the sermon was preached just before communion, after the great eucharistic prayer, or canon of the Mass.

†3. Presumably he means pagan myths; but possibly also various popular superstitions or naive misconceptions about the sacraments or the Holy Spirit.

†4. When we read the scriptures aloud, the books of the illiterate?

†5. He is going on to talk about the Mass, from the preface onward. So here by “sacraments” he seems to mean the successive stages of the eucharistic prayer, beginning with the exchange between celebrant and people which opens the preface; here each utterance appears to be a “sacrament.”

†6. What we now call the intercessions, or prayers of the faithful.

†7. We have to remember that *membrum* in Latin still meant primarily a limb or organ of the body, whereas in English it is the metaphorical sense of “member” that has become the ordinary meaning: member of an organization, institute, or society.

†8. The text is overloaded and corrupt here. As far as “because he wanted us to be ourselves his sacrifice” all is plain. Then it continues—I leave out variously suggested punctuations—*quod demonstratum est ubi impositum est primum illud sacrificium Dei et nos id est signum rei quod sumus*. I have simply omitted *Dei et nos* after the second *sacrificium*. I am guessing that “where the sacrifice was first put” refers to the offertory, and that this somehow indicated that the offerings represented the people's offering of themselves.

For the same doctrine that we are also the sacrifice or victim being offered in the Mass, see *The City of God*, X,6.

†9. Notice how his thought does not linger on the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, but passes straight to the ultimate meaning of the eucharist, the ultimate grace signified by Christ's body and blood in the sacrament, namely the unity of the body of Christ which is the Church, and our living incorporation into it. He doesn't deny the real presence, as was later thought by, for example, some of the Protestant reformers. But he knows that it is only, so to say, the middle stage of the sacrament, what Saint Thomas Aquinas calls the *res et sacramentum*, the thing signified by the visible celebration, which is itself also the sacrament, that is the sign, of a further thing. It is this further thing, what Saint Thomas calls the *res tantum*, the ultimate thing or grace signified, that always interests Augustine. And the grace of the eucharist is the unity of the body of Christ and our participation in it. The real presence of Christ under the

appearances of bread and wine has the same place in this sacrament as the baptismal character has in baptism: a kind of half-way stage, or middle level, in the sacramental mystery of grace.

SERMON 228: ON EASTER DAY TO THE PEOPLE AND THE *INFANTES*

Date: uncertain†1

The older faithful exhorted to give a good example to the newly baptized “infantes”

1. After all the hard work of last night, I mustn't detain you with a long sermon, because even if the spirit is willing, still the flesh is weak;†2 all the same, though, I do owe you a sermon. All these days after the passion of our Lord, during which we sing to God with *alleluia*, we keep in joy as feast days until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven as promised.†3 And of these days, the seven or eight we are in at the moment are earmarked for telling the *infantes* about the sacraments they have received.†4 A short while ago they were called “Askers”; now they're called “Infants.” They were called askers, because they were agitating their mother's womb, asking to be born. They are called infants because they have just now been born to Christ, having previously been born to the world.

What ought to be growing strongly in you has been started afresh in them; and you that are already the faithful must set them good examples which can help them to make progress, not bad ones that may cause their ruin. Being newly born, you see, they look to you to observe how you live, who were born a long time ago. That's what we all do, when born of Adam's line; first we are babies, and then, once we've begun to notice the habits of grown-ups, we watch out for things to imitate. And since the younger follows where the elder leads, it is to be hoped that the elder will proceed along a good road, or else by following along a bad one younger and elder may perish together.

And so you, brothers and sisters, who are after a fashion, in virtue of your age, parents of rebirth, I am addressing you and urging you so to live, that you may rejoice with those who imitate you and not perish with them. A person newly born observes one or other of the faithful who's a drunkard; what I'm afraid of is that he may say to himself, “Why is that guy one of the faithful, and yet he drinks so much?” He observes one or other of the faithful who's a money-lender, a stingy giver, a harsh exactor of interest, and he says to himself, “I'll do that too.”†5 He's told, “But you're a believer now, don't do it; you've been baptized, been born again, your hopes have changed radically, your morals should change too.” And he answers, “Why are So-and-so and Such-and-such believers, then?”

I don't want to say any more; I mean, who could run through the whole list? That's why, my dear brothers and sisters, when you live bad lives, you that are already believers, you will have a bad account to give to God both about yourselves and about these new Christians.

The “infantes” exhorted to model themselves on good Catholics

2. I am now going to address them, telling them to be grain on the threshing-floor, not to follow the chaff which is whirled around by the wind, and with which they would be lost; but to stay put on the floor with the weight of charity,†6 so that they may eventually reach the kingdom of immortality.

So you then, brothers and sisters, you, sons and daughters, you, the new offspring of mother Church, I beg you by what you have received to fix your eyes on the one who called you, who loved you, who went looking for you when you were lost, who enlightened you when you were found; and not to follow the ways of the lost, for whom the name of “faithful” is just a mistake; I mean, we're not asking what they are called, but whether they fit their name. If they have been born, where is their new mode of life? If they are of the faithful, believers, where is their faith? I hear the name, let me also recognize the reality.

Choose for yourselves the ones to imitate; those who fear God, who enter the church†7 of God with

reverence, who listen carefully to the word of God, commit it to memory, chew over it in their thoughts, carry it out in their actions; choose them for your imitation. And don't let a little voice say to you, "And where are we to find such people?" Be such people yourselves, and you will find such people. Like always sticks to like; if you live an abandoned sort of life, only abandoned people will attach themselves to you. Start living a good life, and you'll see how many companions surround you, what a wonderful brotherhood you can rejoice in. Finally, you can't find anyone to imitate? Be the sort of person someone else should imitate.

Sermon on the eucharist

3. We owe a sermon at the altar of God today to the "infants" about the sacrament of the altar.†8 We have explained to them about the sacrament of the symbol, or creed, on what they ought to believe; we have explained about the sacrament of the Lord's prayer, how they ought to make their petitions; and about the sacrament of the font and baptism.†9 But about the sacrament of the sacred altar, which they have seen today, they have as yet heard nothing. Today they are owed a sermon on this subject. That's why this sermon has to be short, both because of the hard work it is for me, and because of their edification.†10

NOTES

†1. No scholars suggest a date, though one suggests the Sunday after Easter, rather than Easter Sunday itself. I don't quite understand how he would explain the first sentence in that case. The general tone suggests to me a middle to late date; say about 420.

†2. See Mt 26:41.

†3. See Acts 2:33.

†4. Literally, "for the sacraments of the Infants." But he cannot mean for giving the sacraments to the Infants. because that has already been done. Hence my longer paraphrase.

†5. A sin that has rather dropped out of the official Christian list of "don'ts" in the last few centuries. And so we have the astonishing, the appalling situation of "third world debt"; and while everyone agrees it is a serious problem, nobody—at least among the creditors in the first world—seems to think there is any wickedness or moral obliquity involved. It's all a matter of finance and economics, sciences that are not considered to have anything to do with ethics, let alone with the gospel. In this matter of the sin of usury, the medieval Church, with all its blind spots, was streets ahead of our contemporary Church today.

†6. It is a favorite idea of Augustine's that love (good or bad) on the moral and spiritual plane is what weight is on the material plane; it carries persons to their proper places. Commenting on one of his favorite texts, *You have disposed all things in measure and number and weight* (Wis 11:20), he says in the *Confessions* (XIII, 9, 10): *Pondus meum amor meus*: "my weight is my love/ my love is my weight."

†7. Here I think he must mean the church building.

†8. At the same service as this sermon was preached at? And does "at the altar of God" mean immediately before communion, as suggested in note 2 to Sermon 227? Again questions without answers, at least here.

†9. Note the very wide use of the word "sacrament."

†10. That is, if this sermon goes on any longer, there will be no time for the sermon on the sacrament of the altar, which they need for their edification.

SERMON 228A: FRAGMENT IN THE COLLECTION OF BEDE AND FLORUS ON ROMANS 6 FROM A SERMON ON THE LORD'S RESURRECTION

Baptism is a dying and being buried with Christ, and rising with him to newness of life

*As for his dying, he died to sin once; while as for his living, he lives for God. So you also then, think of yourselves as dead indeed to sin, but living for God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:10-11). This is the sacrament in which these here are being baptized,†2 and in which they experience the setting of the old life, and initiate their entry into the new. Which is why Paul also says, *We have been buried, therefore, together with him through baptism into death; so that just as Christ rose again from the dead, in the same way we too might walk in newness of life* (Rom 6:4).*

Let us acknowledge that we too, through this sacrament, have died to sin with Christ, and are living in Christ to justice. On his cross there is the pain of those who have confessed their sins; in his burial the relief and rest of those who have been absolved; in his resurrection the life of those who have been justified.†3

NOTES

†1. Quite how a fragment like this can be dated, as it is by Suzanne Poque, I am not sure. The evidence, presumably must be external.

†2. Taking the present tense of *baptizantur* seriously, I infer that the sermon was preached just before the baptism of the neophytes; probably at the Easter vigil, but possibly at Pentecost.

†3. Literally “the life of the just.” I think my expansion of the phrase is justified, to balance the other two sections of the sentence.

SERMON 228B: ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS ON EASTER DAY

Date: uncertain†1

The sacrament of our time is the body and blood of the priest himself

1. You have all just now been born again of water and the Spirit,†2 and can see that food and drink upon this table of the Lord's in a new light, and receive it with a fresh love and piety. So I am obliged by the duty I have of giving you a sermon, and by the anxious care with which I have given you birth, that Christ might be formed in you,†3 to remind you infants†4 of what the meaning is of such a great and divine sacrament, such a splendid and noble medicine, such a pure and simple sacrifice, which is not offered now just in the one earthly city of Jerusalem, nor in that tabernacle which was constructed by Moses, nor in the temple built by Solomon. These were just *shadows of things to come* (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1). But *from the rising of the sun to its setting* (Mal 1:11; Ps 113:3) it is offered as the prophets foretold, and as a sacrifice of praise to God, according to the grace of the New Testament.†5

No longer is a victim sought from the flocks for a blood sacrifice, nor is a sheep or a goat any more led to the divine altars, but now the sacrifice of our time is the body and blood of the priest himself. About him, indeed, it was foretold so long ago in the psalms, *You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Ps 110:4). While that Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, offered bread and wine when he blessed our father Abraham, we gather from reading about it in the book of Genesis.†6

Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross; in the cup what flowed from his side

2. So Christ our Lord, who offered by suffering for us what by being born he had received from us, has become our high priest for ever, and has given us the order of sacrifice which you can see, of his body that is to say, and his blood. When his body, remember, was pierced by the lance, it poured forth the water and the blood by which he cancelled our sins. Be mindful of this grace as you work out your salvation, since it is God who is at work in you, and approach with fear and trembling†7 to partake of this altar. Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup what flowed from his side.

You see, those old sacrifices of the people of God also represented in a variety of ways this single one that was to come. Christ himself, I mean, was both a sheep, because of his innocence and simplicity of soul, and a goat because of *the likeness of the flesh of sin* (Rom 8:3). And whatever else was foretold *in many and diverse ways* (Heb 1:1) in the sacrifices of the old covenant refers to this single one which has been revealed in the new covenant.†8

By the eucharist we are changed into the body of Christ

3. And therefore receive and eat the body of Christ, yes, you that have become members of Christ in the body of Christ; receive and drink the blood of Christ. In order not to be scattered and separated, eat what binds you together; in order not to seem cheap in your own estimation, drink the price that was paid for you. Just as this turns into you when you eat and drink it,†9 so you for your part turn into the body of Christ when you live devout and obedient lives. He himself, you see, as his passion drew near, while he was keeping the passover with his disciples, took bread and blessed it, and said, *This is my body which will be handed over for you* (1 Cor 11:24). Likewise he gave them the cup he had blessed and said, *This is my blood of the new covenant, which will be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt 26:28).†10

You were able to read or to hear this in the gospel before, but you were unaware that this eucharist is the Son. But now, your hearts sprinkled with a pure conscience, and your bodies washed with pure water,†11 *approach him and be enlightened, and your faces will not blush for shame* (Ps 34:5). Because if you receive this worthily, which means belonging to the new covenant by which you hope for an eternal inheritance, and if you keep the new commandment to love one another, then you have life in yourselves. You are then, after all, receiving that flesh about which Life itself says, *The bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world*; and *Unless people eat my flesh and drink my blood, they will not have life in themselves* (Jn 6:51. 53).

You are beginning to receive what you have begun to be, provided you do not receive unworthily

4. So then, having life in him, you will be in one flesh with him. This sacrament, after all, doesn't present you with the body of Christ in such a way as to divide you from it.†12 This, as the apostle reminds us, was foretold in holy scripture: *They shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24). *This*, he says, *is a great sacrament; but I mean in Christ and in the Church* (Eph 5:31-32). And in another place he says about this eucharist itself, *We, though many, are one loaf, one body* (1 Cor 10:17). So you are beginning to receive what you have also begun to be, provided you do not receive unworthily; else you would be eating and drinking judgment upon yourselves. That, you see, is what he says: *Any who eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But people should examine themselves, and in this way eat of the bread and drink of the cup; for those who eat and drink unworthily are eating and drinking judgment upon themselves* (1 Cor 11:27-29).

You receive worthily, if you keep the leaven of charity

5. You receive worthily, however, if you avoid the yeast of bad doctrine, in order to be *unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth* (1 Cor 5:8); or if you keep hold of that yeast of charity, which the woman hid in three measures of flour until the whole of it was leavened.†13 This woman, you see, is the Wisdom of God, who came through the virgin in mortal flesh, and who, having repaired the wide world after the flood

through the three sons of Noah, disseminated her gospel throughout it, as in three measures until the whole should be leavened. This “whole” is what is called *holon* in Greek where, if you keep the bond of peace, †14 you will be “in accord with the whole,” which in Greek is *catholon*, from which the Church is called “Catholic.”

NOTES

†1. In note 14 below I suggest that we have a possible indication for a date before 411. Some scholars question the sermon's authenticity. There is nothing obviously un-Augustinian about the content; if the preacher was someone else, then he was clearly a devoted disciple. There is, perhaps, a certain lack of that spontaneity, that sparkle and occasional flash of brilliance which one has come to associate with Augustine; but not even he could be at the very top of his form all the time. I think it must be regarded as genuine until the contrary is much more convincingly proved.

†2. See Jn 3:5.

†3. See Gal 4:19.

†4. He actually says “your infancies,” *infantiam vestram*, as a kind of title. In this case I cannot think of a suitable English equivalent.

†5. This passage does rather suggest that the newly baptized “infants” already knew a considerable amount about the eucharist, and that the so-called “discipline of the secret” was scarcely more than a pious fiction.

†6. See Gn 14:18-21.

†7. See Phil 2:12-13.

†8. So far he is talking indistinguishably about the sacrifice of the cross and the eucharistic sacrifice—which is as it should be.

†9. He usually says, when discussing the reception of the eucharist, that it differs from ordinary food in that it doesn't turn into those who eat it, but on the contrary, they become what they eat. But here, by “this” he evidently means only what nowadays would be called the eucharistic elements, or the species or appearances of bread and wine. As for turning into the body of Christ when you live good lives, in the context of talking about the eucharist I think he means that living good lives is a condition of receiving the sacrament fruitfully; or as he would put it, of really receiving the body of Christ in order to turn into the body of Christ.

†10. In all likelihood this, from the words “while he was keeping passover,” was the formula of consecration in the African Church, as it was in the Spanish Church of the time—and perhaps still is in what is called the Mozarabic rite.

†11. See Heb 10:22.

†12. He is linking, rather cursorily and without much clarity, the two basic images of the Church as the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

†13. See Lk 13:21. Notice how happy he is with a double symbolism for yeast, as indeed for practically anything. For the same interpretation of the woman putting yeast in three measures of flour, see Sermon 111, 2, last paragraph.

†14. See Eph 4:3. By the bond of peace he means very precisely communion with the Catholic Church, not breaking away in schismatic movements, like the Donatists. This may possibly indicate a date before 411, because after that date there was less, if any, temptation to Catholics to join the Donatists.

FAITHFUL

Date: 405-411†1

The bread and wine on the altar become the body and blood of the Word, which he made us into as well

1. What you can see here, dearly beloved, on the table of the Lord, is bread and wine; but this bread and wine, when the word is applied to it, becomes the body and blood of the Word. That Lord, you see, who *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1), was so compassionate that he did not despise what he had created in his own image;†2 and therefore *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14), as you know. Because, yes, the very Word took to himself a man, that is the soul and flesh of a man, and became man, while remaining God. For that reason, because he also suffered for us, he also presented us in this sacrament with his body and blood, and this is what he even made us ourselves into as well.†3

Call to mind what this created object was, not so long ago, in the fields; how the earth produced it, the rain nourished it, ripened it into the full ear; then human labor carried it to the threshing floor, threshed it, winnowed it, stored it, brought it out, ground it, mixed it into dough, baked it, and hardly any time ago at all produced it finally as bread. Now call yourselves also to mind: you didn't exist, and you were created, you were carried to the Lord's threshing floor, you were threshed by the labor of oxen, that is of the preachers of the gospel.†4 When, as catechumens, you were being held back, you were being stored in the barn. You gave in your names; then you began to be ground by fasts and exorcisms. Afterward you came to the water, and you were moistened into dough, and made into one lump. With the application of the heat of the Holy Spirit you were baked, and made into the Lord's loaf of bread.†5

Be one yourselves, in the same way as you can see the bread and wine have been made one

2. There you have what you have received. So just as you can see that what has been made is one,†6 mind you are one yourselves too in the same way, by loving each other, by holding one and the same faith, one and the same hope, an undivided charity. When the heretics†7 receive this sacrament, they receive what is a testimony against themselves; because they insist on division, while this bread is a sign of unity. So too the wine was there in many grapes, and has now been concentrated into a unity; it is one in the pleasant taste of the cup, but only after the pressure of the wine-press. And you, after those fasts, after the hard labors, after the humiliation and the contrition,†8 have now at last come, in the name of Christ, into the Lord's cup, so to say; and there you are on the table, and there you are in the cup. You are this together with us; we all take this together, all drink together, because we all live together.†9

Explanation of the rite of the Mass from the preface onward

3. You are about to hear what you also heard yesterday; but today what you heard is being explained to you and also what you answered—or perhaps you kept quiet when the answers were given, but you learned yesterday what you should answer today. After the greeting that you know, that is, *The Lord be with you*, you heard, *Lift up the heart*.†10 That's the whole life of real Christians, *Up with the heart*; not of Christians in name only, but of Christians in reality and truth; their whole life is a matter of *Up with the heart*. What does *Up with the heart* mean? Hoping in God, not in yourself; you, after all, are down below, God is up above; if you put your hope in yourself, your heart is down below, it isn't up above. That's why, when you hear *Lift up the heart* from the high priest,†11 you answer, *We have it lifted up to the Lord*. Try very hard to make your answer a true one, because you are making it in the course of the activity of God;†12 let it be just as you say; don't let the tongue declare it, while the conscience denies it.

And because this very thing of your having the heart up above is something that God, not your own capability, bestows on you, when you have said that you have your heart up above, the high priest continues

and says, *To the Lord our God let us give thanks*. What should we give thanks for? Because we have our heart up above, and unless he had lifted it up, we would be lying on the ground.

And from there we come now to what is done in the holy prayers which you are going to hear, that with the application of the word we may have the body and blood of Christ. Take away the word, I mean, it's just bread and wine; add the word, and it's now something else. And what is that something else? The body of Christ, and the blood of Christ. So take away the word, it's bread and wine; add the word and it will become the sacrament. To this you say, *Amen*. To say *Amen* is to add your signature. *Amen* means "True" in English. Then comes the Lord's prayer, which you have already received and given back. Why is it said before we receive the body and blood of Christ? Because if, as is the case with human frailty, our thoughts have turned perhaps to something that they shouldn't have done, if our tongues have poured out something they ought not to have done, if our eyes have looked at something they shouldn't have, if our ears have listened with more pleasure than was proper to something they shouldn't have; if by any chance we have contracted any of that sort of thing from this world's temptations and the frailty of human life, it's all wiped clean by the Lord's prayer, where it says, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12), so that we may approach without any anxiety; otherwise we may eat and drink what we receive to our own condemnation.†13

After that comes *Peace be with you*; a great sacrament, the kiss of peace. So kiss in such a way as really meaning that you love. Don't be Judas; Judas the traitor kissed Christ with his mouth, while setting a trap for him in his heart. But perhaps somebody has unfriendly feelings toward you, and you are unable to win him round, to show him he's wrong; you're obliged to tolerate him. Don't pay him back evil for evil in your heart. He hates; just you love, and you can kiss him without anxiety.

It's only a few things that you've heard, but they are important ones. Don't treat them as cheap because they are few, but as dear because they are weighty. Also it would be wrong to overload you, or you wouldn't remember what's been said.

NOTES

†1. The Maurists only have this sermon as a short fragment, preserved by Bede and Florus; in fact as a chain of scattered fragments—every other sentence, as it were, from sections 1 and 2. The sermon's authenticity has been questioned; the only solid reason I can surmise for this from the sermon itself is the fact that in section 3 below the preacher refers to the celebrant of the eucharist (himself, presumably) as the *sacerdos*, the high priest: a usage I have never come across before in Augustine's writings. In a similar context in Sermon 227 he speaks of the *episcopus vel presbyter qui offert*, the priest or presbyter who offers. For less tangible reasons of style and tone, I am hesitantly inclined to share the doubts about the sermon being genuinely one of Augustine's. If it is not, though, then it is one of a very faithful disciple of the master, someone like Caesarius of Arles.

†2. See Gn 1:26-27.

†3. This text illustrates very well how Augustine in his eucharistic theology is unequivocally "realist" in stating the reality of Christ's presence in the sacrament—"this bread and wine becomes the body and blood of the Lord"; and yet he never lingers, as later theology and devotion have done, on that real presence, but goes on immediately to reflect on what the real presence itself means or signifies: namely our unity with him, and in him with each other, in being ourselves the body of Christ. This is the ultimate grace of the eucharist, the ultimate thing signified; what scholastic theology calls the *res tantum* of the eucharist. The real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated species of bread and wine is what that same terminology calls the *res et sacramentum*: the reality signified by the sacramental sign of bread and wine, which is itself the sacrament, that is the sign, of the ultimate reality, the *res tantum*, namely our communion in the body of Christ, and thus the unity of the body of Christ, which is his Church. It is the fundamental, definitive concept of the sacraments being essentially *signs*, or if you prefer the word, symbols, rather than merely things, that has faded away almost to nothing in the Catholic consciousness, so strong, in a one-sided way, has been the stress on sacramental realism. And so we can get, in a Lesotho hymn in honor of

the blessed sacrament, the following erroneous and deeply misguided statement: “Truly 'tis a matter of reality,/ It is not a sign and memorial;/ No, it is he himself/ Who has come to me out of love” (*Lifela tsa Bakriste*, 32, verse 4). To which one can only say, “Accentuate the positive, but eliminate the negative, and your statement will be not only pious but correct.” †4. See 1 Cor 9:9. Corn was threshed by oxen dragging a heavy sledge, with iron teeth in it, a *tribulum*, round and round over the sheaves on the threshing-floor; it still is in communities where combine harvesters are not available, or feasible. See Sermon 111, note 17.

†5. His brief explanation of the sacraments of initiation in these terms, like that of all the Fathers, both Latin and Greek, presupposes the order baptism, confirmation, first communion. This is indeed the theologically correct sacramental order. Is it not time that the Latin Churches started taking it more seriously, and putting confirmation back in its proper place before first communion, as the most suitable preparation for first communion?

†6. Was there just one loaf of bread on the altar, even at this stage of the Church's history? Or was unity signified by all the small loaves the faithful had brought being piled in one heap on one dish? This seems more likely. The Latin Churches were not yet using unleavened bread for the eucharist.

†7. He means primarily the Donatists.

†8. The exercises through which the catechumens and the *competentes* were put, especially perhaps the exorcisms, but also their always being sent out of church before the Mass of the faithful began, and finally, no doubt, their having to strip naked in order to be baptized, must have been very humbling, if not exactly humiliating in the harsh sense of that word. Augustine records somewhere in the *Confessions* his astonished admiration of what he considered the humility of the distinguished rhetorician Victorinus Afer publicly confessing his faith, in the “giving back” of the symbol by the *competentes*, when he became a Christian in Rome (*Confessions* VIII, 2, 5).

†9. “We” being, presumably, both clergy and older faithful.

†10. Augustine's liturgy has it in the singular, *Sursum cor*, instead of the plural of the Roman formula, *Sursum corda*.

†11. *A sacerdote*. In Patristic times the word *sacerdos*, priest, was almost invariably applied only to bishops, never—or hardly ever—to the presbyters whom we now call priests (the English word “priest” deriving from “presbyter”). So to avoid the reader thinking that it refers to priests in the sense in which we now use the word, it has to be translated “high priest.”

This usage, to the best of my knowledge, is so untypical of Saint Augustine that it does provide a ground for questioning the authenticity of this sermon.

†12. *Apud acta Dei*—a very strong way of describing the eucharist; it refers above all, one assumes, to the divine act of changing the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

†13. See 1 Cor 11:29.

SERMON 229A: PREACHED ON HOLY EASTER SUNDAY

Date: 410-412†1

What you receive is what you are; what you see on the altar is the sacrament of unity

1. You that have been born again to new life, which is why you are called “Infants”; you above all that are seeing this only now, †2 listen to what it all means, as I had promised you. Listen also, you the faithful, who are used to seeing it; it's good to be reminded, or forgetfulness may creep up on you. What you can see on the Lord's table, as far as the appearance of the things goes, you are also used to seeing on your own tables; they have the same aspect, but not the same value. I mean, you yourselves are the same people as you used to be; you haven't brought us along new faces, after all. And yet you're new; the same old people in

bodily appearance, completely new ones by the grace of holiness—just as this too is new. †3

It's still, indeed, as you can see, bread and wine; come the consecration, †4 and that bread will be the body of Christ, and that wine will be the blood of Christ. This is brought about by the name of Christ, brought about by the grace of Christ, that it should continue to look exactly like what it used to look like, and yet should not have the same value as it used to. You see, if it was eaten before, it would fill the belly; but now when it's eaten it nourishes the spirit. Now when you were baptized, or rather just before you were baptized, I spoke to you on Saturday about the sacrament of the font in which you were to be plunged; and I told you, what I don't think you have forgotten, that baptism had, or has, the same value as being buried with Christ, as the apostle says: *For we have been buried with Christ through baptism into death, so that just as he has risen from the dead, so we too may walk in newness of life* (Rom 6:4). Well, in the same way I must now put to you and impress upon you what it is that you have received or are going to receive, and this not from my own ideas, or my own presumption, or any human arguments, but again on the authority of the apostle.

Here you are then; listen very briefly to the apostle, or rather to Christ speaking through the apostle, to what he says about the sacrament of the Lord's table: *One loaf, one body, is what we, being many, are* (1 Cor 10:17). There you have it all; I said it in a moment. But you must weigh the words, don't count them. If you count the words, it's short enough; if you weigh them, it's tremendous. *One loaf*, he said. However many loaves may be placed there, it's *one loaf*; however many loaves there may be on Christ's altars throughout the world, it's *one loaf*. But what does it mean, *one loaf*? He explained very briefly: *one body is what we, being many, are*. This is the body of Christ, †5 about which the apostle says, while addressing the Church, *But you are the body of Christ and his members* (1 Cor 12:27). What you receive is what you yourselves are, thanks to the grace by which you have been redeemed; you add your signature to this, when you answer *Amen*. What you see here is the sacrament of unity.

The body of Christ is made one by the harmony of charity

2. So now, because the apostle suggested very briefly to us what this is, let's look at it a little more carefully, and see how it comes about. How does bread come about? It's threshed, ground, goes from the mixing of the dough to the baking; in the mixing it's purified, in the baking it's made firm. †6 This is what you have become. Where or when was your threshing? †7 It consisted in the fasts, the Lenten observances, the vigils, the exorcisms. You were being ground when you were being exorcised. Dough isn't mixed without water; you were baptized. Baking is troublesome, but useful. What is your baking, after all? The fire of trials and temptations, without which this life cannot be lived. But how is it useful? *The oven tests the potter's jar, and the trial of tribulation just men* (Sir 27:5).

But just as one loaf is made from single grains collected together and somehow mixed in with each other into dough, so in the same way the body of Christ is made one by the harmony of charity. And what grains are for the body of Christ, grapes are for his blood; because wine too comes out from the press, and what was separated one by one in many grapes flows together into a unity, and becomes wine. Thus both in the bread and in the cup there is the mystery, the sacrament, of unity.

The words of the preface of the Mass explained

3. As for what you heard at the Lord's table: *The Lord be with you* is what we say both when we greet you from the apse, †8 and as often as we pray; because this is what we need, that the Lord should always be with us, because without him we are nothing. As for what sounded in your ears, notice what you say at God's altar. You see, we are somehow or other questioning you and admonishing you, and we say, *Up with the heart*. Don't put it down below; the heart rots in the earth; lift it up to heaven. But *up with the heart*, where to? What's your answer? *Up with the heart*, where to? *We have it lifted up to the Lord*. You see, this business of *up with the heart* is sometimes good, sometimes bad. How can it be bad? It's bad in those people of whom it is said, *You cast them down, while they were exalting themselves* (Ps 73:18). *Up with the*

heart, if it isn't to the Lord, is an act not of justice, but of pride. And that's why, when we say *Up with the heart*, because *up with the heart* can still be a matter of pride, you answer, *We have it lifted up to the Lord*.

So it's a matter of condescension, not elation; and because it's a matter of condescension that we should have the heart lifted up to the Lord, does that mean we have done it? That we have been able to manage it all on our own? That we have lifted up the earth which we were right up to heaven? Perish the thought! He did it, he condescended, he put out his hand, he stretched out his grace, he caused what was down below to be up above. That's why when we said *Up with the heart*, and you replied *We have it lifted up to the Lord*; to stop you claiming the credit for having the heart lifted up, I added, *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God*.

These are brief mysteries, but great ones. I call them brief, but they are great in their meaning and effect. †9 After all, you say these things very quickly, and without a book, and without a reading, and without long discussion. Remind yourselves what you are, and in whom you ought to persevere, so that you may attain to God's promises.

NOTES

†1. Compared with Sermon 229, this one displays an *extempore*, off-the-cuff quality entirely characteristic of Augustine. Does this very authenticity here strengthen the doubt about authenticity there?

†2. They had seen it, or most of them had, the previous night, after being baptized and confirmed at the Easter vigil. But perhaps there were several of the newly baptized who for reasons of poor health, or old age, or extreme youth, had not stayed on for the rest of the all-night vigil, but had gone home immediately after being baptized and confirmed.

†3. Baptismal transformation, which makes us new creatures, a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), compared very boldly and significantly to eucharistic transubstantiation (a word Augustine didn't know), thus giving the eucharistic mystery an even more profound significance.

†4. His word is *sanctificatio*.

†5. The Latin reads *Hoc panis corpus Christi*; but *hoc panis* is a fearful solecism, *hoc* being neuter and *panis* masculine; which one could ascribe to a copyist's carelessness, but not, I think, to Augustine's Latin. So one can either emend *Hoc* to *Hic*, which would give the sense, "This loaf is the body of Christ"; or leave out *panis*, as I prefer to do. He is amplifying the meaning of the "one body" he has just mentioned. A copyist or reader can easily have been a little puzzled and have added *panis* as a comment in the margin, from where it could be brought by another copyist into the text.

†6. These last two processes are analogous to baptism and confirmation; the flour is "purified" when mixed into dough, because water is added—which is more evident in the Latin word *consparura* with its basic sense of sprinkling. His saying that by being baked the bread is made firm, *firmatur*, is the only allusion we have in this sermon to "confirmation." A little lower down he will give the baking the moral sense of "testing in the fire of tribulation." In Sermon 229 he (or his impersonator) interpreted it as being baked by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

†7. In the Latin these two sentences occur in the reverse order. So the first interrupts, with no obvious sense, the answer to the question. It could perhaps be regarded as a marginal gloss on the immediately preceding account of bread-making, which a copyist then inserted in the wrong place.

†8. Where the bishop's throne was.

†9. Reading *magna effectu* (which I have "double translated" as "meaning and effect"), instead of the text's *magna affectu*, which would mean something like "great in feeling," which would hardly be to the point.