

433 The Holy Eucharist most fully manifests and creates our communion both with God and with others. All who have communion with Christ become "one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (*Rom 12:5*). In other words, we become one Church. "Because there is one [Eucharistic] bread, we who are many are one body [of Christ], for we all partake of the one bread" (*1 Cor 10:17*). We profess this same truth in the Anaphora of Saint Basil the Great when we ask God to "unite all of us who share in this one bread and cup with one another into the communion of the one Holy Spirit." Saint John of Damascus teaches:

Participation is spoken of; for through it we partake of the divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in his flesh and his divinity: [at same time] we have communion and are united with one another through it. For since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ.<sup>326</sup>

#### *1) The Eucharist Is the Body and Blood of Christ*

434 At the Mystical Supper (Last Supper), Jesus Christ reveals the unfathomable mystery of his Body: in the Incarnation he received a body from the Virgin Mary, and in the Eucharist, he offers it to his disciples as nourishment, so that in the Church all humanity and all creation may become his Body. Saint John Chrysostom explains the gift of Christ at the Mystical Supper, rephrasing, as it were, the words of Christ: "I have willed to become your brother. For your sake I shared in flesh and blood, and in turn I give to you the flesh and blood by which I became your kinsman."<sup>327</sup>

435 the Divine Liturgy is the memorial, the continuance, of the Mystical Supper: "Accept me this day, O Son of God, as a partaker of your Mystical Supper."<sup>328</sup> Just as Christ offered the apostles Communion in his Body and Blood at the Mystical Supper, so at the Liturgy he offers us Communion: "When, therefore, you see the priest delivering [the supper] unto you, account not that it is the priest that does so, but that it is Christ's hand that is stretched out."<sup>329</sup> *The Communion of the Apostles*

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<sup>326</sup> JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4, 13: PG 94, 1153.

<sup>327</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily, 46, 3: PG 59, 261.

<sup>328</sup> Liturgicon, *The Divine Liturgy of our Holy Father John Chrysostom, Prayer Before Holy Communion*.

<sup>329</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3: PG 58, 507.

icon, as also the icon of the Mystical Supper, depicts that which takes place at the Liturgy: Christ is offering the Communion of his Body and Blood to his apostles, who represent all the faithful. At the Liturgy, before Communion the priest prays: "Deign to give to us with your mighty hand your most pure Body and precious Blood, and through us to all the people."

436 At the Liturgy, Christ offers us, as he did the apostles, a communion not of simple bread and wine but of his true Body and Blood. "The bread and the wine [of the Eucharist] are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!) but the deified body itself of the Lord."<sup>330</sup> The Church solemnly confesses and teaches that at the Liturgy we receive the true Body of Christ—a guarantee of the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ.

In order then that we may become this not by love only, but in very deed, let us be blended into that flesh. This is effected by the food which He has freely given us, desiring to show the love which He has for us. On this account He has mixed up Himself with us; He has kneaded up His body with ours, that we might be a certain One Thing, like a body joined to a head. For this belongs to them who love strongly<sup>331</sup>

437 The fact that we receive the actual Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is the pledge of hope in the resurrection of our bodies:

How can [the Gnostic heretics] say that the flesh, which is nourished with the Body of the Lord and with his Blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of [eternal] life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or cease from offering the [Gifts] just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion ... Our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.<sup>332</sup>

## 2) *The Heavenly and the Earthly*

438 As two natures—the divine and the human—are united in Christ, so also in the Eucharist "the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly."<sup>333</sup> John

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<sup>330</sup> JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4, 13: PG 94, 1148.

<sup>331</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 46, 3 PG 59, 260.

<sup>332</sup> IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against Heresies*, IV, 18, 5: PG 7, 1027.

<sup>333</sup> IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against Heresies*, IV, 18, 5: PG 7, 1027.