

The Communion Rite: Receive What You Are

At Mass, right before the distribution of communion, if you were asked to point to the Body of Christ, where would you point, toward the altar, or toward the Congregation? St. Augustine, one of the great teachers of our faith who lived in the fourth century, spoke about the intimate connection between the Body of Christ we receive *from* the altar and the Body of Christ that comes *to* the altar. He said *If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's Table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery.* Most people think of the mystery of the Eucharist in terms of the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. But the greater mystery is really our *own* transformation into the Body of Christ, begun at our baptism! The core mystery of the Eucharist lies in the connection between the *sacramental* Body of Christ and the *mystical* Body of Christ that we are as Church. In the first thousand years of the Church's history, when Christians spoke of the mystical body of Christ they meant the Sacrament of the Eucharist. When they spoke of the real presence of Christ, they meant the Community of Believers, the Church. In the past thousand years we have reversed that language so we talk about the sacramental body as the real presence, and the Church as the Mystical Body. The reality is that these two forms of Christ's Body and real presence are so closely linked that we can interchange their names. St. Thomas Aquinas, another of our great teachers of faith (13th Century) taught that the goal of the Eucharist is the unity of the Church. Christ did not give us the Eucharist simply for the sake of doing the miraculous feat of turning bread and wine into his body and blood, but to transform *us* fully into his Body. So, in church, right before communion, you would have to use *both* hands to point *both* to the altar *and* the Congregation as the Body of Christ.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about. Contact our Council for Catechesis at tkautza@saintmaryhc.org.