

The Body of Christ

To receive the presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic host is to receive the presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic community. The following story, shared by Maria Woods, illustrates this twofold experience of communion.

The words 'Body of Christ' hold special meaning for me. About twenty years ago I started going to 9:05am Mass after I dropped five of my six children to school. My three year old daughter, Jacinta, attended Mass with me, and not always to pleased to do so. Whilst awaiting the Mass to finish, she would sing out in a loud voice, 'Mum, when is the body of Christ?' When she heard the priest saying 'The body of Christ' while distributing communion it was the signal for her that Mass was almost over and we could soon leave.

We used to just nod and say hello to the regular Mass goers, not really getting to know anybody. However after a few days of my daughter singing out 'Mum, when is the body of Christ?' three older parishioners who sat in a nearby pew asked me what she meant. I explained to them about her impatience for the Mass to finish. That started a wonderful friendship. Frequently I would have a coffee in the local shopping centre with these three senior parishioners and they would buy Jacinta an ice-cream. More reason for Jacinta to ask 'When is the body of Christ?'

Over the years our friendship grew. These three parishioners knew all the comings and goings in my life, my husband, children, work, and so on. Their faith and prayer life always amazed me. I have had much illness, more operations than I can count. Each time I had an operation it would always be very important for them to know what time the surgery started and when it would finish. They would pray the expected length of the surgery.

Then as my children grew up and came to do their HSC, these three elderly parishioners would phone the day before each exam and ask 'What time is the exam?' I would reply 'Between 9 and 12', 'between 2 and 4', or whatever. They would sit and pray for two or three hours during that exam. Needless to say, six children by six subjects by three hours amounted to a lot of praying time.

My three friends are now very elderly, one in a nursing home. As a minister of holy communion it is my great joy and privilege to bring them the Lord in the Eucharist. 'The body of Christ': beautiful words for a beautiful friendship. •

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