

Mystical Body of Christ

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ~ Romans 12:4-5

GOD'S people are not only a people called

together by Christ but also are united in Christ. This unity in Christ establishes both a bond among the People of God with each other, as members are united in a physical body and with Christ as *"the head of the body, the church"* (Col 1:18), as a physical body is united to its head. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, Christ mystically unites each member to himself, enabling each to proclaim this mysterious reality: *"it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"* (Gal 2:20). We refer to the Church in its relationship to Christ as the Mystical Body: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5). We are united to Christ especially in our Baptism when we are buried into his death and share in the glory of his Resurrection (see Rom 6:4), and in the Eucharist, when Jesus sacramentally abides in us, and we in him (see Jn 6:56).

In a mysterious way, Christ and his Church together make up a single unity, the "whole Christ." Because of the union in Christ of the People of God, the sufferings and joys of each member of the Church affect the whole Mystical Body: *"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"* (1 Cor 12:26). We share, too, in the sufferings of the Head *"in order that we may also be glorified with him"* (Rom 8:17). And yet the Church is also seen in the intimate union with Christ that is symbolized by the Bridegroom caring for the Bride as for his own body (see Eph 5:25-30).

The Holy Spirit, working through the Body, produces in us good works, growth in virtue, and ho-

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liness of life, in a shared journey toward salvation. Individual gifts (also called "charisms") are diversified among the members of the Church, who nevertheless are equal in the dignity of their Baptism, united in charity, and serve to build up the entire Mystical Body: *"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness"* (Rom 12:6-8). Each member is to accept and

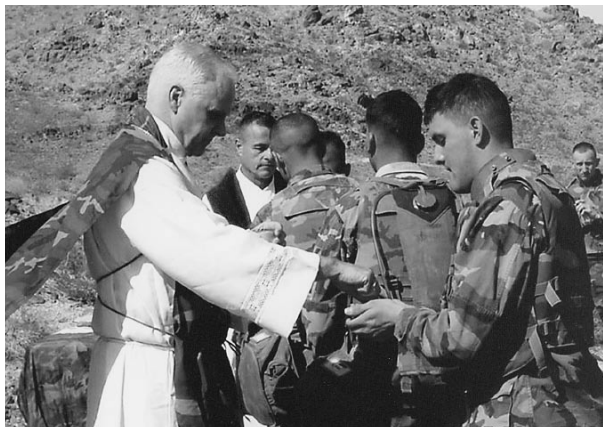
use his or her gift not with pride but with gratitude, submitting to the Church in humility so as to pursue the common good and not individual power, recognition, or glory.

While all share the same call to holiness, the way this call is lived out is different according to one's personal vocation or state in life. Some are called to follow Christ in marriage, others in the single life, and still oth-

ers as *"eunuchs [that is, virgins] ... for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven"* (Mt 19:12). Whether as priests, as those in the consecrated life as religious brothers and sisters (nuns), as husbands and wives, or as single persons, all members of the Mystical Body are necessary for the life of the Church and are bound together by the Spirit so *"that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another"* (1 Cor 12:25). For *"there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ... it is the same God who inspires them all in every one"* (1 Cor 12:4-6) for the good of the whole Body, the Church.

(CCC 787-801, 872)

COURTESY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE FOR THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA



Reception of Holy Communion by a soldier from Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA