Dear Friends,

We celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ this weekend and I thought it might be helpful for us to look at the benefits we receive when we come to Holy Communion. I would encourage you to read paragraphs 1391-1398 of the CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH for more information.

HOLY COMMUNION AUGMENTS OUR UNION WITH CHRIST – That word "union" is so rich in meaning. We think of the union of husband and wife in marriage as perhaps the most intimate of all human unions. But what can be more intimate than a union with Christ in his humanity and divinity? When we come to Holy Communion and receive his body and blood, soul and divinity, his life is powerfully and intimately united with ours. In the Sacrament of the Eucharist we share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity. His life commingles with ours; our lives commingle with his. The Eucharist is a union of humanity and divinity; a union that is eternal.

HOLY COMMUNION SEPARATES US FROM SIN – Perhaps we might think we're strong enough to prevent sin from happening in our lives. And we can. However, we need all the help we can get. Holy Communion wipes away the venial or lesser sins we commit in our daily lives. We hear these words in the penitential rite: "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life." This prayer is an absolution for venial sin. By receiving the Body of Christ, who is the mercy of God made flesh, all those annoying little sins are washed clean. However, before that can happen we need to say, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." We need to be humble and penitent, we need to be contrite.

Because Holy Communion augments our union with Christ, it naturally helps to preserve us from mortal sin. Because the Eucharist fosters an intimate relationship with Christ, it also makes it more difficult for us to break away from him by mortal sin. Mortal sin kills the loving relationships we have with Christ, the Church and each other. When we choose to be fed with the Eucharist, and to enter into that loving union with Christ, we will naturally choose to avoid those sins that separate us.

THE UNITY OF THE MYSTICAL BODY: THE EUCHARIST MAKES THE CHURCH – When we are baptized we are united in faith and we grow into becoming the Church. We have another name for the Church; it is The Mystical Body of Christ. That word "mystical" means a mysterious type of union. This is what God seeks with and for us. We, too,

seek to know that kind of unity with God. Through the Eucharist the intimate union we have with Christ is nourished, it grows deeper and stronger. The Eucharist enables us to live as God's holy people in the world.

THE EUCHARIST COMMITS US TO THE POOR – I have long held that it must be an abuse of the Sacrament of the Eucharist for me to be fed and nourished by the Body of Christ while, at the same time, ignoring the hungers of other people. The Eucharist is something far greater than a private meal meant to bring healing and peace to my individual soul. It is something far more than a protection from and prevention of sin. When we receive the Body of Christ we are committing ourselves to caring for the needs of the poor in the same way Christ commits himself to taking care of us.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE UNITY OF CHRISTIANS – Our Church experiences a tremendous amount of diversity and division. Land boundaries, different languages and customs, differences in the ways we see how things ought to be in the Church, differences in the ways we interpret Scriptures, Tradition, doctrines and dogmas all seem to foster more discrimination and segregation than unity. This diversity is good because it brings color, dialogue and vibrancy to the life of the Church. We must remember, though, it is the Eucharist that makes us all members of the mystical Body of Christ and so there must be a profound sense of acceptance and tolerance of each other. The Eucharist will always lead us to being merciful rather than vengeful, welcoming rather than segregating, at peace with each other rather than at war.

We see the Eucharist as the "Source and Summit of Christian life." The Eucharist is the most important sacrament we receive. We are richly blessed by the mysterious union we share with the Body of Christ in Holy Communion. This feast is a celebration of what we receive, and it is a celebration of who we are: we are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, united forever in his love.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel