

Mary Thevesita Sister.  
The Mystical body..  
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**THE  
MYSTICAL  
BODY  
OF  
CHRIST  
IN  
LESSON  
FORM**

FOR STUDY CLUBS  
AND  
CAMPUS USE

**I AM THE VINE**



**YOU ARE THE BRANCHES**



## **AIMS**

1. To give a practical resumé of the doctrinal and moral implications of the Church's teaching on the Mystical Body.
2. To show what impact this teaching should have on everyday actions, love of neighbor, and social problems.
3. To further awareness of the interdependence of the members of the Mystical Body upon one another, and their dependence on Christ the Head.
4. To indicate how liturgical worship is a unifying force that admits no social or racial discrimination.
5. To point out how every vocation and occupation in life has its place and is intended to contribute its share toward the effective functioning of the Mystical Body.

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**THE  
MYSTICAL  
BODY  
OF  
CHRIST  
IN  
LESSON  
FORM**

FOR STUDY CLUB  
AND CLASSROOM USE

BY  
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physical bodies, for in Christ's Mystical Body each member retains his own personality, his own free will with power to resist the Head—a power not possessed by the cells in a physical body; their one and only function is to work for the good of the whole body. In the Mystical Body the cells work for the good of the whole also, but at the same time they work for their own individual good. The two are inseparable.

The misuse of free will enables some individuals in the Church to be bad. No man is forced always to do what is good because of membership in the Mystical Body. We must not carry the analogy between Christ's Body and our physical bodies too far.

Still the Mystical Body is not simply a *moral* body, like the government of the United States or like the Boy Scouts or some other club whose members have only a common purpose as a bond of unity. True, the members of the Church do have a common purpose, but that is not all. Over and above this common purpose, they have the Holy Spirit as their bond of unity in much the same way that the soul is the unifying force in a physical body. God established the Mystical Body, and any of its activities performed under the impact of sanctifying grace become thereby supernaturalized. This makes it superior to all human organizations.

St. Paul compares the Mystical Body to the physical body because both of them are organisms. The human body is one organism fed by the same bloodstream flowing through every organ to the remotest fingertips, touching each cell. Yet these millions of cells when taken corporately (united in one whole) make up the whole body called *you*. Each cell in your body is nourished by your blood and in its turn helps in its own particular way to build up the entire body—to make it grow. If some of these cells become diseased, your whole body suffers, as you know from the experience of a toothache or an appendicitis. Each tiny cell, with its own particular work for itself and for the common good, helps to form one vast harmonious whole, pulsating with life and energy.

Now these cells, all living in a way their own life, yet really

participating in the life of the whole body, are a very good figure of us as members of Christ's Mystical Body. Christ, the Head, and we, the members, share the same life — sanctifying grace (the life of God in us). This makes the Mystical Body an organism, although we are not God even when we share the divine life and are real members of Christ's Body. This is a mystery. But we do derive our supernatural status and energy from this Body, while retaining our own separate existence. We cannot possibly exist supernaturally apart from it, because it supplies us with the bloodstream of our supernatural life — the life of God (sanctifying grace). Therefore, whatever good works we perform are done by the strength coming through this Body. To remain united to this supernatural bloodstream (sanctifying grace) is as important as plugging in the cord of a vacuum cleaner or a washing machine, so that the current of electricity can supply the power to work. An essential difference, of course, lies in our possession of a free will to resist or break the source of power, something a machine cannot do.

### DISCUSSION

1. Read the account of St. Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1–22) and re-state its principal points.
2. Who is really harmed by those who harm a Christian? Explain your answer.
3. Describe the Body of Christ on earth. What is it called? What is its work?
4. How do the cells in the Mystical Body differ from those in a physical body? In what ways are they similar?
5. What do clubs like the Boy Scouts have in common with the

Church? What more does the Church have? Why is the Church superior to all other organizations and organisms?

6. Why is the Church an organism, not just an organization? Are we God when we share in His life? What is the divine life in us commonly called?
7. Can anyone exist supernaturally, or perform any supernaturally meritorious good work without being connected with the Mystical Body? Prove your answer. How do we stay connected to the Mystical Body?
8. Give examples of how a Catholic student living up to the implications of the Mystical Body acts like St. Paul after his conversion; and how one not practicing Christian principles imitates Saul in regard to his family, his teachers, other students, people of other nationalities and races.

## THE MYSTICAL BODY--

### A DEFINITION

The Mystical Body is a real union of Christ with the members of His Church, that is, with all those who are baptized and united in the same faith (believing all the doctrines of the Church in the same way), having the same worship (holy Mass and the seven sacraments), and under the same government (the Pope as the visible representative of the invisible Head, Christ).

One becomes a member of the Body at baptism when faith, hope, and charity (the theological virtues) are infused (poured) into the soul; but one must also share the same faith, worship, and government in order to be a real member.

The Head of the Mystical Body is Christ, the Son of God, God and Man.

The Soul of the Mystical Body is the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The bloodstream of the Mystical Body is sanctifying grace (the life of God in us).

We see, therefore, that "mystical" does *not* mean unreal, or imaginary, or invisible, or unknowable. It means *a reality with visible and invisible elements*.

Having created man with visible and invisible elements (body and soul), God the Creator continues to use this combination in dealing with him, for man more readily understands something resembling his own nature. Every sacrament has an *outward sign* (visible element) which gives *inward grace* (invisible element). As with man, so with the sacra-

ments: the invisible is hidden within the visible, but is no less real because of this. Christ's divinity (invisible), too, was hidden within His humanity (visible).

The Mystical Body is another application of the same principle. The visible and invisible must *both* be present, or the *whole* is not there.

Beginning with the Protestant Revolt, the Church stressed its *visible* elements to counteract the heresy that Christ instituted only an *invisible union* — "by faith alone." In our own day, when the Communists stress the brotherhood of man as an *external* form of union, the Church more forcefully proclaims its doctrine of *invisible union* through sanctifying grace and the Holy Spirit. It must always be kept in mind, however, that *both* types of elements are *essential* in the union of the Mystical Body, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The *visible* elements in the Mystical Body are:

- 1) The unity between the people and Christ in His visible successor, the Pope;
- 2) The unity in the external profession of the same faith, the same worship, and the same government;

The *invisible* elements are:

- 1) The unity of Head and members through the divine virtues of faith, hope, and charity infused at baptism;
- 2) The Holy Spirit, who, as the Soul of the Mystical Body, unites Christ and His social Body into the whole Church.

## DISCUSSION

1. Name and explain the four requirements for real membership in the Mystical Body.

2. What does a person receive with sanctifying grace at baptism?
3. Who is the Head of the Mystical Body? The Soul? What is its bloodstream?
4. What two kinds of elements are present in the Mystical Body? Why are both kinds of elements necessary?
5. Which type of element is sometimes very imperfect? Why doesn't God "do something about it"? Read the parable of the wheat and the cockle (Matt. 13:25-30).
6. Name some invisible things in our daily lives that we accept as real without questioning the fact.
7. Give examples of how people usually pay more attention to the visible than to the invisible. Which is more important? Why?

## MEMBERSHIP IN CHRIST'S BODY

All the people in the world are either real or potential members (cells) in the Mystical Body of Christ:

- 1) *Real* members are all those who are baptized and are united in the same faith, the same worship, and the same government.
- 2) *Potential* members are those who could become real members if they took the required steps. (Just as a piece of bread and butter is potentially a part of your body, but not a *real* part until you eat it, so the potential members are waiting to be incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body, to strengthen it and make it grow, at the same time benefiting personally from their membership in it.)

Protestants and other non-Catholics who are in sanctifying grace can be saved, but they are NOT members of the Mystical Body — the Church Militant. This can be more easily understood if we picture the Mystical Body, the true Church of Jesus Christ, as a huge ship. All the passengers are baptized and united in the same faith, the same worship, and the same government. Attached to the ship by a rope is a lifeboat with a person in it. The person is in sanctifying grace (possesses God's life), but he is not a *real* member because he lacks one or more of the four requirements listed above. The rope is his desire to belong to the true Church of Christ and live up to its teaching, if he could discover it. It is possible for him to reach the port of heaven if he doesn't let his rope

break, but he is not a part of the Body on board the great ship unless he climbs in by fulfilling *all* four requirements.

The real members or cells are cut off from the Church (excommunicated) by:

- 1) heresy — not accepting all the doctrines as taught by the Church (for all members must be united in the same faith, which means believing ALL the doctrines in the manner in which the Church teaches them).
- 2) schism — not recognizing the Pope as the visible head of the Church (for all members must be united in the same will, which means obeying the one shepherd to whom Christ has committed His flock on earth). The “national” and “orthodox” churches are schismatical.
- 3) apostasy — giving up the faith completely, after having been a real member. People who deny their faith during a persecution, or in order to get a job or some other advantage, are apostates.

Sins other than these do not cause loss of membership, but mortal sins paralyze the cells that commit them, and because the life of God leaves them when they commit mortal sin, we say they are *dead* members, but, nevertheless, still members. They are still a part of the Body, although a hindrance to it, just like a paralyzed arm. However, this paralysis, unlike that of the human body, can be cured through the sacrament of penance or through an act of perfect contrition with a desire for confession, for then sanctifying grace — God’s life — returns to it. When this life is within it, the member can no longer be dead or paralyzed. This can be easily understood from the experience of a foot that has “fallen asleep.” When the blood returns to its usual course of circulation (slowly and painfully!) the foot gradually “wakes up” to life again and becomes a useful member of the body.

However, if a member of the Mystical Body unfortunately happens to die without having regained sanctifying grace, he

is cut off from the Mystical Body (amputated) and goes to hell, because the bloodstream (God's life) cannot reach him anymore.

Venial sins weaken the cells and, consequently, the whole Body. They break down resistance gradually, just as a cold makes a person more likely to get pneumonia or some other serious disease.

### DISCUSSION

1. Name and define the two types of members in the Mystical Body.
2. How can a potential member be saved? Is such a one a member of the Mystical Body? Prove your answer.
3. In what three ways can real members be cut off from the Mystical Body? Define each and give examples. Can one lose membership in the Mystical Body through any other sin?
4. What are the effects of mortal sins (excluding those that cause loss of membership) on members of the Mystical Body?
5. How can a dead member become a living member again, that is, how can the paralysis be cured? What happens when a member dies without the life of God? Why?
6. What does venial sin do to the individual cell and to the whole Body?
7. How should real members treat potential members? What obliges them to do that? How did they merit the gift of faith when others do not have it? What are some reasons that might account for the fact that only 5 out of every 100 Negroes in the United States are Catholic?

## DUTIES OF MEMBERS

The Mystical Body came into existence when Jesus died on the Cross. "The Church sprang full-born from the pierced side of Christ on the Cross," states Pope Pius XII's encyclical on the Mystical Body. It assumed a new phase and began to flourish on Pentecost Sunday when the Holy Spirit, its Soul, entered it. Now in carrying out the work of His redemption, Christ wishes to be helped by the members of His Body. Dying on the Cross, He left to His Church an infinite treasury of graces; but when those graces come to be distributed, not only does He share this task of sanctification with His members, but He wants it in a way to be due to their action.

Or, to put it differently, we have a twofold obligation: first, to make ourselves robust cells in the Body, and secondly, to work constantly for the health and growth of the whole Body by doing all we can, directly and indirectly, to cause new cells to come forth, and to strengthen those already in. Pope Pius XI said, "As every Christian has received the supernatural life which circulates in the veins of the Mystical Body of Christ . . . so he *must transfuse* it to others who do not have it [either dead or potential members] or scarcely possess it [weak Catholics]."

First of all, then, how do we get and keep the supernatural life in ourselves? Christ instituted and left for us a sacramental system which provides for every supernatural need of men. The sacraments correspond to events in man's natural life:

<i>Supernatural</i>	<i>Natural</i>
Baptism . . . . .	Birth
Penance . . . . .	Doctor's care
Holy Eucharist. . .	Food for health, an increase of life and strength
Confirmation . . . .	Maturity, gaining new powers
Extreme Unction .	Help at death, completing and perfecting life
Matrimony . . . . .	Reproduction, potential new members
Holy Orders . . . . .	Administrators, teachers, mediators

With each reception of a sacrament the floodgates are opened and divine life flows from the Sacred Heart of Christ into the member. Using this sacramental system, therefore, the real members are able to keep themselves strong, supernaturally healthy cells.

However, they may not stop there. The Holy Father, as quoted above, insists we "*must transfuse*" this life. We may not keep it just for ourselves. We know that in medical science a blood transfusion injected into the arm brings renewed life and energy to every part of the body, no matter how far each part may be from the actual point of the injection. So it is in Christ's Mystical Body. Every reception of the sacraments is a transfusion of divine life into the whole Body through the member receiving it; likewise, every Mass in which we participate, every prayer we say, every good work we do is an injection of new and vigorous life into the entire Mystical Body. This means that we thus benefit not only ourselves and those we love and pray for and know personally—the members of our family or of our parish—but also every living member of Christ, from the jungles of Africa to the frozen Arctic!

Nor is it necessary that we be conscious of this, or make such an intention. The effect is automatic, helping the whole Body when we do good, weakening the whole Body when

we do evil, in much the same way as human cells in the physical body affect each other. If a boil develops on the arm, it is healed sooner if the other organs of the body are well. A healthy stomach promotes healing faster than a sickly one, though the stomach does not know that it is of any use to the sick arm.

In the same way an increase of sanctifying grace — God's life — in a member of the Mystical Body makes all people throughout the world spiritually stronger to overcome evil and to do good, even though this member never thinks of them nor prays for them directly. Likewise, just as a headache or a toothache weakens the whole body and makes a person "feel sick all over," so a sinner makes it harder for all members of the Mystical Body to be good. No deed, no matter how secret, is hidden in its effects on the Mystical Body any more than hidden heart-trouble can keep the effects from appearing throughout the body.

In addition, sinners also hurt Christ, for, since He is the Head of the Body, anything that hurts any part of the Body hurts Him, too. If we prick a finger, the voice speaks through the mouth in the head to utter the expression of pain, "Ouch!" The head feels whatever any part of the body feels.

The most effective means of grace-transfusion is liturgical prayer, that is, prayer officially offered by the members of Christ's Body united with Christ, their Head. This is also called the "Christ-Prayer," for when we worship God in the liturgy, we are acting not as individual cells, but as members of the Body. We are like Christ's hands folded in reverence while the Head bows itself in prayer, or like the fingers touching the beads as the divine lips murmur the sacred words. The Father sees and hears His Son in whom we are hidden as parts, for liturgical prayer is Christ's own voice ascending from His members on earth to His Father's throne in heaven.

The climax of our union with Christ is the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Mass, during which we are directly and most intimately united to our Head when we receive Holy Communion. The Mass is the greatest liturgical prayer. (The two

next in importance are the sacraments and the Divine Office.) Christ offers Himself and all His members to the heavenly Father. The priest acts in the Person of Christ, in the whole Body, and in every member. Through the priest all unite in offering the holy Sacrifice.

## DISCUSSION

1. When did the Mystical Body originate? When did it begin to function? Read the Lesson for Pentecost Sunday from your missal.
2. What did Pius XI mean when he said that we must "transfuse" the supernatural life we have?
3. How does Christ in His Church, through the sacramental system, give life and strength supernaturally to His members? Show how this is done in each sacrament.
4. What part of the Mystical Body is affected when we receive Holy Communion? Do we personally get more from it than the other members?
5. Could you explain how our receiving Holy Communion or assisting at Mass could prevent a soldier in training from committing a mortal sin, or a corporation farmer from abusing a migrant worker today? What should this encourage us to do? Is a real member of the Mystical Body ever really "helpless" in regard to improving the deplorable social conditions in some parts of the world? Explain.
6. How do sinners hurt Christ? What is the most effective means of grace transfusion? Why?
7. Define liturgical prayer and name the three chief forms. What is the climax of our union with Christ? Why?
8. Give examples of how the information you gathered in this lesson should be a help to you when you are tempted to sin or to be discouraged because you find it hard to persevere in good.

## **CHRIST IN HIS MEMBERS**

Just as Christ uses our voice in speaking to His Father in liturgical prayer, so also He wants to use other parts of our bodies (our physical organs) for carrying on His work. Thus He desires that at every moment we let Him act through us. There is a definite job to be done wherever we are. He cannot be there physically to do it Himself, but He wishes to do it through us — to use our feet to reach places where He could not otherwise go; to use our hands to do works of charity which otherwise must be left undone; to use our tongues to speak a message which shall otherwise be left unsaid; to use our hearts to offer sympathy which He otherwise cannot offer. He has become dependent on our physical organs! What a mystery that God should become dependent upon the very creatures to whom He gave every physical organ! But such is His plan according to His love. He wants us to share in His work, His work of redeeming men — even ourselves. As St. Paul says: “To fill up those things which are wanting in the passion of Christ.” The work must go on until the end of time when the Mystical Body shall be complete; but now we must allow Him to do the job through us, to draw out and distribute what He won on Calvary.

How do we know what He wants to do through us? He has ways of letting us know: (1) through inspirations — ideas to do good; (2) through our conscience — which tells us to do good and avoid evil; (3) through the commands of those over us — parents, teachers, employers, civil authority — for

He Himself has placed them, or allowed them to be placed, over us as visible representatives of Himself.

At the Last Supper Christ made clear the interdependence of Head and members when He said: "I am the Vine and you are the branches." Can a vine produce fruit without branches? No more than a tree trunk can bear delicious apples. But neither can the branches bear fruit without being nourished by the trunk. As soon as they are cut off, they die.

This is true, too, of the members of the Mystical Body and the Head. We, united with Christ through membership, throbbing with the same life (sanctifying grace increased through liturgical prayer and good works), bear the fruits which gain merits for us and redeem the world with Christ. Christ, united with us, has physical organs with which to act, branches through which He can produce fruit.

Knowing that He wants us to allow Him the freedom of action in us, how can we do evil — stealing, cheating, striking, writing lies or evil words, damaging property — with the very hands He wants for acts of justice and charity! He wants to use our tongues to speak kind words, truth, good advice, consolation, defense of the absent — the very things He said with His physical tongue when He walked the earth. How can we use that tongue for lies, uncharitable or jealous or sarcastic remarks, swearing, using the name of God, indecent language, or slanderous remarks about people of other races or nationalities! Aren't we, in a certain sense, suppressing Christ within us? For it is not He who speaks when we speak evil or acts when we do evil; it is our evil inclinations which have, by our free will, forced Christ to be inactive while evil holds sway.

Our free will has power over Christ in us; it can say *yes* to what He wishes, or it can turn Him down and go its own evil way, for Christ acts in everyone, even in the wicked. In the good, He has the freedom of action; in those who commit venial sins, He is suppressed — alive, but His activity is repeatedly obstructed. One who has sinned mortally is dead to Him; those spiritually dead need our help to regain divine

life — sanctifying grace. We must hate sin, but treat the sinner with the sympathy, interest and love that God had toward us when we were dead to Him.

### DISCUSSION

1. How does Christ get His work done on earth, now that His physical body is in heaven?
2. In what three ways does Christ let us know what He wants to do through us? Define each of the three and give examples of each.
3. In what words did Jesus give us the doctrine of the Mystical Body? When?
4. Explain the meaning of the comparison of the Mystical Body with the vine and the branches.
5. What holds the upper hand in us when we do evil?
6. What effect does venial sin have on Christ's action in us? What effect does mortal sin have on Christ's action in us?
7. In the light of these facts, what would you say to a Catholic who would declare he has the right to discriminate against people because they do not take care of their home and property?

**SUGGESTED PRACTICE:** See how many good deeds you can do to people you consider "bad," in sympathy for Christ who is (as you suppose) suppressed or dead in them.

**FUNCTIONAL  
INTERDEPENDENCE  
OF THE MEMBERS**

The human body is composed of colonies of cells that work together for a common goal. Heart cells perform an important job, but they are vastly different from liver cells, which are occupied with an equally important task.

In more visible form, we have the eyes, which bear no resemblance to the ears in either appearance or work — yet how essential both are to the well-being of the body! The foot cannot see, but it can go places, carrying the head, which seldom gives thought to the agent of this service, unless movement is impeded because of some functional disorder.

It is only in a paralyzed body that the hand refuses to move when the brain sends its order through the central nervous system; nevertheless, it is inconceivable that even in a paralyzed body the hand, being unable to move and, therefore, refusing to pull down the shade, should insist on providing the lungs with oxygen — the function of the nose!

We know that this is impossible in the human body because the parts, as well as the individual cells which compose them, have no power to resist the will of the head; but this is not true of the cells in the Mystical Body, as has been pointed out before. Each of us as real cells (members) retains free will which can be directed either to coincide with or to oppose the will of the Head.

The will of Christ, the Head, is made known to us through

our conscience, through inspirations, and through the commands of our superiors. However, when we consider our conscience as directing the will, it is necessary to add that the person must have a *right* conscience and be informed as to the facts involved; that is, he must be equipped to face reality. When he actually recognizes his limitations, looks at them squarely, and makes the best of what he has without exaggerating or minimizing his abilities, his opportunities, and his efforts, his conscience points the way to accepting the will of the Head of the Body in which he functions, without the painful experience of attempting to tackle a job for which he is not suited.

On the physical level, the hand does a good job of picking up things, scrubbing floors, writing the words dictated by the mind; the heart pumps the blood to sustain the body; the eyes admit light, and the ears, sound. It is for these functions that they are made, and if they should try to perform the work of some other organ or occupy some other position, they would be utter failures.

The analogy is clear. Each member of the Mystical Body is also intended as an instrument for performing a definite function in the social Body of Christ. For this he possesses the requirements. If, being dissatisfied with the limitations of his abilities and unwilling to accept them and their consequences for him, he attempts to perform a job for which he lacks the equipment, he becomes like the hand which tries to do the work of the nose, or the foot which rebels at being always at the bottom and insists on exchanging places with the head.

Neither the location nor the limitations of a part of the body make its function useless or dishonorable. In the same way any work done by a member of the Mystical Body is not unrelated to the status of the Body as a whole. The important thing is that we do the work well for which we are intended, as indicated by our qualifications and opportunities. It is the person that is the bearer of dignity and the busy housewife who devotes most of her time to washing children's clothes —

and faces — may be working on a far loftier plane than a schoolteacher who instructs their minds. For, through grace, the one may be working on a supernatural level, the other may not.

Not everyone has the talent for a college education leading to professional careers. Failure to face reality — and accept it — results in striving for heights which are unattainable, and sometimes ends in mental breakdown. Mental illnesses are actually the creating of an imaginary world by the patient's mind. It is easy to begin this process by imagining one has more intelligence than he really has, refusing to accept the fact that he has limitations which disqualify him for a given function in society, blaming others for the failure, and ending in disillusionment, frustration, and the hospital.

On the other hand, facing reality does mean working to capacity. It means discovering what one is fit for, preparing for it, and doing it.

That the function of every member of Christ's Body is dignified and worthwhile can be readily proved by the fact that the truly successful members of society who have become canonized saints possessed such a variety of occupations and intellectual abilities. St. Maria Goretti was a little farm girl with no education; the Little Flower dropped out of school at thirteen; St. Bernadette found it hard to learn enough to be allowed to receive her first holy Communion; St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas were the master-minds of their times; St. Sebastian and St. Fabian were soldiers; St. Louis was a king; St. Bridget of Sweden was a mother; St. Albert was a teacher; St. Luke was a doctor; St. Joachim was a father; and on and on goes the list of individuals in the unity of the Mystical Body who have attained success.

To rock the cradle and dust the floor is as honorable and holy a function as to perform a delicate brain operation or to write a book — provided that is what one is equipped for and does the job well, united with the Body of Christ through sanctifying grace and a good intention. Such a one is herself satisfied, is loved by others, and is rewarded by God.

As members of the Mystical Body, however, we have further reason for accepting cheerfully and with resignation to God's will the place in life He indicates to us through our talents, opportunities, and limitations. Christ continues to live His life on earth in His members. He walks again in those who carry Him in their daily work. He continues the work of His carpenter's shop in Nazareth through the hands of those who do manual labor; He helps Mary clean up the house through those who sweep and mop the floor, through those who clean the streets and the alleys; He listens to the Doctors in the Temple in those who study; He continues to instruct in those who teach or preach; "He is subject to them (His parents)" in all who obey; He cures the sick in those who tend to the physical needs of others; He spends His last night in prison again in those who are confined; He is scourged, spat upon, and crowned once more in those who are abused and mistreated; He renews His sacred passion in the suffering and the dying.

Christ was the Redeemer from the first moment of His conception. Every act He performed as He developed and grew was an act of the all-perfect God redeeming the world. Every phase of His earthly life was a part of His redeeming act: His learning to use tools, His work in the shop, His preaching, and His miracles, and finally the climax in His passion — each day, each moment He redeemed.

Just as every part of the life of the physical Christ was of equal dignity and pleasing to God, so also every function of every member of His Mystical Body is of equal dignity and worth in continuing to apply the merits of Christ's victory, provided only that it is the function for which the member was intended and that he has a good intention, while united to Christ as a living member of His Body. Success lies not in *what* is done, but *how* it is done, and how it fits into God's plan.

## DISCUSSION

1. Why is it that parts of a healthy human body cannot disobey the will, but the members of the Mystical Body can disobey the Head?
2. How does a member of the Mystical Body know the will of the Head?
3. How can conscience sometimes mislead one?
4. What is meant by "facing reality"? Why is it essential to happiness and success? How do the worldly define success? What is your definition?
5. How can inability to face reality lead to mental illness? To unhappy individuals and homes?
6. How can a high-school student find out his qualifications and limitations? When do teachers and counsellors hesitate to tell him the truth?
7. What lesson can we learn about the importance of following the right vocation and occupation from the comparison with the parts of the human body?
8. How do the saints show us that every function in the Mystical Body is honorable and that a member can become a success regardless of which job he is doing? What is the deciding factor?
9. Make a list of the factors that you think make a person happy in the world and prepare him for heaven, and a list of those which you think make one unhappy and give him a hard time preparing for heaven.
10. Which part of Christ's life is usually considered most important in His work of redeeming the souls of men? Was this the "most dignified" period, judging by the standards of the world? Is it possible that the world still makes such mistakes in judging the lowly — even apparently "degrading" — work that some people do? Give examples.
11. Is it a shame to be a delivery boy rather than an office clerk or a doctor, if that is all one has the ability for? Is it a shame

to be a delivery boy when one has the talent and opportunity to be a lawyer? Why?

12. Define sophistication, convention, and status. Why are these considered indications of "success" in our society? Are they really? Prove your points.
13. Do you know anybody who lacks health, wealth, or fame and is a "success" anyway because he is happy? Or one who possesses any combination of these three and is not a "success" because he is not happy?
14. How would you explain to a high-school student that he has no reason to be frustrated upon discovering that his I.Q. will make it impossible for him to be a dentist, like his father, on which he and his family had planned since he was a child?
15. What would you say to a person who would remark to you about someone: "He'll be nothing more than a garbage collector when he grows up"?

**SOCIAL IMPORTANCE****OF THE****MYSTICAL BODY**

The doctrine of the Mystical Body is very important socially, for we are united not only to Christ, but also to each other. We cannot be isolated. As we have seen, every act of ours, good or bad, leaves its effects on everyone else indirectly, for it strengthens or weakens the entire Mystical Body by decreasing or increasing the bloodstream, sanctifying grace — God's life. The member performing the act is affected directly by it; others indirectly. In helping others I am really helping myself, for we are one Body.

If God had answered Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He would have said, "Yes!" In helping my brother, I help Christ Himself; in neglecting or shunning or harming my brother, I am neglecting or shunning or harming Christ Himself, for He said, "Whatsoever you have done unto these, the least of My brethren, you have done it to Me." "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *Me*?"

The more we condemn minority groups, e.g., Mexicans, Chinese, Negroes, Indians, as being unfit for living among whites — the longer the list of their defects, physical and moral, which we enumerate — the more we put them into the class of "the least brethren" of Christ, and the more clear is our responsibility.

How we have treated others — the works of mercy — will be the norm of judgment at the end of the world when the

just Judge shall pay every man his due to the last penny. He will judge us according to how we served Him or were unkind to Him in other people—the “least,” the dirtiest, the meanest—His brethren! According to St. Matthew (chapter 25) Jesus foretold that He will say to those on the right: “Come, you blessed of My Father . . . ,” and to those at the left: “Depart from Me, you cursed . . . ,” for “. . . whatsoever you have done unto the least of My brethren, you have done it unto Me.”

Here are some suggestions for serving Christ in the least of His brethren. Add some of your own, especially practical for yourself personally.

### Corporal Works of Mercy

1. Feed the hungry
  - a) Do not waste food (then you won't have to buy so much; food will be more plentiful, therefore cheaper, and more people will be able to afford more).
  - b) Do not complain about food.
  - c) Prepare a meal for Christ in your hungry neighbor.
  - d) Give food to a beggar or to a poor family. (Christ did not say, “Feed the hungry who deserve it.” It is NOT for us to judge whether to give; even a drunken beggar, most undeserving, must be fed, for he is hungry—and certainly *the least* of Christ's brethren. Christ will repay us as if He had been visible to us when we served Him in this beggar. A giver never loses.)
  - e) Do not patronize places that underpay their employees, and let the employers know the reason why.
  - f) Be informed on matters concerning job discrimination and use your influence wherever possible, at least to convince others where possible how unjust it is.

2. Give drink to the thirsty
  - a) To a coal-shoveler or other workman.
  - b) To guests.
  - c) A coke to some poor child.
  - d) To a member of the family on a hot day.
  - e) To your big sister when she is ironing.
3. Clothe the naked
  - a) Take care of your clothes (for the same reason as not wasting food, given above).
  - b) Dress modestly (clothe Christ in yourself).
  - c) Respect others' clothes, perhaps less becoming than yours.
  - d) Empty your closet of things you never wear anyway. Give them to some poor person or to some organization that will distribute them.
4. Harbor the homeless
  - a) Convince someone of the injustice of refusing to house couples with children (no room in the inn for the Christ Child even today).
  - b) Do all in your power to convince others of the injustice of segregation, and give a home to Christ in the person of some unwanted foreigner if he should move into your neighborhood.
  - c) Sit next to a colored person in a bus (make him feel at home).
  - d) Invite a poor or friendless person for a visit or a meal to your home.
  - e) Give up your bus seat to someone.
5. Ransom the captive
  - a) Write to servicemen.
  - b) Visit a prisoner.
  - c) Prepare a meal, freeing for a short time the usual captive of the kitchen (mother).
  - d) Help someone with his work so he can finish sooner

and have more time for relaxation.

- e) Make a timid person feel at home, especially someone who feels out of place because of race or nationality.
  - f) Cheer up the lonely.
  - g) Fight prejudice, such as calling other nationalities or races unkind names.
6. Visit the sick
- a) In hospitals, especially in "the county" where so many are friendless and lonely.
  - b) The friendless sick at home, or invalids.
  - c) Old people who can't get around very well.
  - d) Send cards to the sick, especially to shut-ins and the forgotten.
7. Bury the dead
- a) Attend funerals.
  - b) Be prayerful and quiet and respectful to the dead at a wake. Don't make it an opportunity for a social gathering.
  - c) Volunteer to be a pallbearer.
  - d) Contribute to funeral expenses if the family is poor.

### Spiritual Works of Mercy

1. Admonish (warn) sinners
  - a) Give good example (in conversations, by being on time for Mass, by praying reverently in church, and remembering grace at meals).
  - b) Learn your religion so you can speak up intelligently when someone can be helped by it.
2. Instruct the ignorant
  - a) Befriend those who have just moved into your neighborhood.
  - b) Contribute to the missions.
  - c) Send courteous letters of protest to companies with

bad advertising. (Perhaps they don't know better — at least they won't know people don't like it unless you tell them.)

- d) Adopt a missionary — to pray and sacrifice for, or to help financially, if you are able.
  - e) Pay for a boy's education in a seminary.
  - f) Distribute Catholic literature.
3. Counsel the doubtful
- a) Do right, so others will get courage by watching you.
  - b) Learn your religion so you can point out errors to others charitably.
  - c) Take people to a priest if you can't answer their questions, or get the answer from him.
4. Comfort the sorrowful
- a) Go to a wake.
  - b) Send a note of sympathy.
  - c) Contribute toward a Mass for the dead.
5. Bear wrongs patiently
- a) Don't think of revenge or spite.
  - b) Don't justify yourself when accused.
  - c) Don't rationalize.
  - d) Don't be envious if someone gets a position you think you deserve.
6. Forgive all injuries
- a) Don't talk about those who hurt you.
  - b) Pray for those who have done you harm, and try to do them a good turn.
  - c) If you find it hard to forgive, pray: "Dear God, please make So-and-so as good as I am," and it will become easier.
7. Pray for the living and the dead
- If you follow the missal at Mass you will fulfill this

work of mercy, for there is a prayer for the *living* before the consecration and one for the *dead*, after the consecration.

“He who shares (corporally or spiritually) feeds three: himself, his hungry neighbor, and Me.”

In the light of the Mystical Body, we see we **MUST** love one another. It is not a matter of *choice*, but of *obligation*. This raises the practical problem: How do I know I love my neighbor?

There are two standards which determine whether we have a *minimum love*: (1) if we wish the person no evil. For instance, we are not allowed to wish that immigrants or underprivileged people remain in slum areas; this is wishing them evil.

2) if the person should happen to be in need and we are able to help him, we would do it. We are not required to *feel* any love for our neighbor. It's a matter of **WILL**.

A second problem: How are we *obliged* to treat members of other races and nationalities? *Answer*: The same way we treat persons of our own race or nationality under the same circumstances and conditions; to be more exact, the way we would treat Christ under the same circumstances. For example, a Chinese bus-driver must be treated in the same manner as a white one; a Mexican student, the same as a white one; a colored co-worker, the same as a white co-worker; a Jewish storekeeper, the same as one of our own nationality in the same position.

## DISCUSSION

1. Why is the doctrine of the Mystical Body so important socially?

2. In what quotation does Christ identify Himself with the people with whom we live?
3. What will be the standard of judgment at the end of the world?
4. Go through the list of practices after each work of mercy. Which do you think are most practical? Suggest others which you consider practical for one of your age and occupation.
5. What are the two standards by which we judge whether we have a minimum love for our neighbor? How does this compare with the ideal attitude toward a neighbor as indicated by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37)?
6. How must we treat people of other races and nationalities? How serious is this obligation?
7. In the light of what you have learned about relationships in the Mystical Body, explain how you are more closely related to a Negro in sanctifying grace — God's life — if you are also a sharer in this life, than you are to your own blood-brother if one of you possesses grace and the other is a dead member.

Pamphlets containing the full text of the encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ by Pope Pius XII may be obtained from the Paulist Press, 401 West 59th St., New York, N.Y.

A presentation through the use of 16 diagrams of the doctrine of the Mystical Body is given in **UNION IN GOD THROUGH THE BODY OF CHRIST** by Rev. Edward Reichgauer (available from: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., sixty cents). This booklet treats at greater length the theology and the Biblical texts related to the Mystical Body.

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