

Catholic Conversations

Heaven and the Kingdom of God

There is no doubt that this world is a mess and often appears to be getting worse. Because of this fact, some folks throw up their hands, give up on this world, and can't wait to get to heaven where things will be much better.

— — —

Jesus would have us focus on being energetic and compassionate citizens of the Kingdom of God as well as on getting into heaven.

— — —

The Kingdom of God, the Incarnation, and the Eucharist are intricately intertwined.

The Gospel writers agree that the Kingdom of God, the enfleshment of the divine life in human form, the Incarnation, is not something to be admired from the outside, but rather an energy in which to participate.

... Jesus nowhere in the Gospels urges his followers to worship him, though he insistently calls them to follow him. One of the surest ways to avoid the challenge of the Incarnation ... is to engage in just this sort of pseudo-pious devaluation. But the Gospels want us, not outside the energy of Christ, but in it, not wondering at it, but swimming in it.

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the vine onto which we are grafted like branches, and he compares himself to food which we are to take into ourselves. These beautifully organic images are meant to highlight our participation in the event of the Incarnation, our concrete citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

It was the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart who commented that the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth long ago is of no interest and importance unless that same word becomes incarnate in us today.

And Now I See, Robert Barron, page 4.

If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table! It is your own mystery that you are receiving! You are saying 'Amen' to what you are; your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith.

When you hear 'The body of Christ', you reply 'Amen'. Be a member of Christ's body, then so that your 'Amen' may ring true! ... Be what you see; receive what you are.

St. Augustine, *Sermon 272 on the Nature of the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, pp 300-301.

The mystery of God taking on concrete flesh, which Christians call the incarnation, isn't a simple thirty-three-year incursion of God into human history in the person of Jesus. It's more. God took on flesh in Jesus, but the incarnation didn't end when Jesus ascended back to the Father after his resurrection. The incarnation is still going on. God is still taking on concrete flesh in this world. Where?

In the Christian scriptures, the term the body of Christ is used to refer equally to three things: the historical body of Jesus, the body of believers, and the Eucharist. Each of these is referred to as the body of Christ. Each is the body of Christ. For instance, when Saint Paul refers to either the community of believers or the Eucharist, he never intimates that they are like Jesus, that they replace Jesus, that they are symbolic representations of Jesus, or even that they are a mystical presence of Jesus. Each is equally called the body of Christ, each is that place in our world where God takes on concrete flesh. God still has skin in this world, in the Eucharist and in the community of believers. The incarnation is still going on. The word is still becoming flesh and living among us.

Excerpt From: Rolheiser, Ronald. *Our One Great Act of Fidelity*. Doubleday, 2011-06-14.