



From Bishop Anthony Randazzo to the clergy and people of Broken Bay, in preparation for the Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Year of Hope, 2025

“The Gospel Is the Body of Christ”: A Call to Participation in the Eucharist

Each Sunday, we gather at the altar as one Body in Christ, drawn into the divine mystery where heaven touches earth. We hear the Word proclaimed, we offer our prayers, and we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet amid the sacredness of the liturgy, a question stirs our hearts: Are we truly participating in the Eucharist, or merely present?

Saint Jerome, one of the greatest biblical scholars of the Church, offers us a striking reflection that pierces through routine and indifference. In his *Commentary on the Psalms*, he writes:

“For me, the Gospel is the Body of Christ; for me, the holy Scriptures are his teaching. And when he says: whoever does not eat my flesh and drink my blood (Jn 6:53), even though these words can also be understood of the [Eucharistic] Mystery, Christ’s body and blood are really the word of Scripture, God’s teaching. When we approach the [Eucharistic] Mystery, if a crumb falls to the ground we are troubled. Yet when we are listening to the word of God, and God’s Word and Christ’s flesh and blood are being poured into our ears yet we pay no heed, what great peril should we not feel?” (cf. Homily 74 on Psalm 147)

Saint Jerome’s words bring us face to face with the gravity and beauty of the Eucharist, not only as a sacrament received at the altar but also as a mystery proclaimed in the Word of God. At the celebration of the Mass, both the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are essential to our communion with Christ. Together, they form one act of worship that draws us into the Paschal Mystery.

The Word as Flesh

In our Eucharistic celebrations, we sometimes unconsciously separate “hearing” from “receiving.” We may sit passively through the readings, waiting for the moment of Communion, forgetting that Christ is already coming to meet us in the Scriptures. Saint Jerome reminds us that when the Gospel is proclaimed, it is not merely a story or lesson, it is the living Christ speaking to His people. His Word, like His flesh, nourishes and transforms.



When we listen attentively to Scripture, we open our hearts to conversion. Jesus told Satan in the desert, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4). At Mass, we receive that Word from the mouth of God, poured into our ears, as Jerome says. If we approach the altar with reverence for the consecrated host, how much more should we approach the readings with attentiveness and humility, prepared, and receptive?

Reverence Beyond Ritual

We are rightly distressed if a host is dropped or a chalice spilled. We genuflect, we kneel, we silence our mobile phones. But what of our interior disposition? Saint Jerome’s challenge is clear: we should be no less reverent when the Word is proclaimed. If we allow our minds to wander or dismiss the homily as unimportant, we may be ignoring the voice of Christ calling to us.

The Church teaches that when the Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 21). Participation in the Mass begins with listening deeply, with ears, heart, and will. This is not a passive act, but one that demands intention and openness. Reverence for the Eucharist is not limited to our actions at Communion, it begins the moment we leave our homes setting off towards the church, when we greet our brothers and sisters even in the car park, when we enter the church building, in our singing, in our silence, and it continues through every part of the liturgy.

Participation as Transformation

The Bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) emphasized the need for “fully conscious, and active participation” in liturgical celebrations (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14). This is more than physical presence or everyone ‘doing something’ during the liturgy. It is the act of allowing ourselves to be drawn into the life of Christ. We bring our lives, our often-unseen joys, our sorrows, and we lay them on the altar in the visible gifts of bread and wine. We are not spectators of a sacred drama; we are participants in a divine offering.

Each time we participate in the celebration of the Mass, we are invited into a deeper union with the Blessed Trinity, through the life, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This union is not only sacramental but also scriptural. The Word prepares our hearts to recognize Him “in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35). In the encounter with the Word, we are pierced like those who heard Peter’s preaching at Pentecost: “they were cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37). Only then can we truly approach the altar of the Lord, changed and ready to be nourished by His real Presence.



A Eucharistic Life

Our participation in the Eucharist must extend beyond the walls of the church building. If we are truly nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, both in Word and Sacrament, we are sent forth to live Eucharistic lives. We become, as Saint Augustine says, what we receive: the Body of Christ in the world (cf. Easter Sermon 227). The same reverence and attentiveness we show at Mass shapes our daily lives, in how we think, how we speak, how we serve, how we love, how we forgive.

When the liturgy concludes, we are not dismissed from worship but sent to continue it: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” We carry within us the Word we have heard and the Lord we have received. Active participation is not an obligation to be met, but a grace to be lived.

Heeding the Word of God, Honouring the Blessed Sacrament

Saint Jerome’s exhortation is as timely today as it was in the early Church. We are always at risk of becoming too comfortable, too casual, with the sacred. Yet the Eucharist is no ordinary meal, and the Scriptures are no ordinary words. They are Jesus Christ himself, speaking and giving himself to us.

Let us approach every Mass with renewed reverence, not only for the consecrated bread and wine, but for the Word that is Christ’s own flesh poured into our ears. May we never treat casually what God offers so lovingly. And may our participation in the Eucharist, in both Word and Sacrament, be fully conscious, and life-changing.

+ Anthony Randazzo

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay