You Are What You Eat

The popular saying “you are what you eat” usually refers to the connection between our diet and our physical health. Yet, we believe that essentially the same principle takes root physically and spiritually in the Eucharist. When we receive Communion, the priest or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion holds up the consecrated bread and says, “The Body of Christ.” While this speaks to Christ’s full presence in the Eucharistic species, we also know that by consuming the Bread we become the Body of Christ.

By offering ourselves in the liturgy and receiving Christ’s Body during Communion, we become, as the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II says, “a holy temple of the Lord . . . a dwelling place for God in the Spirit” (2). We are called to let the Body of Christ take root in our bodies, both physically, as the cells from the consecrated Bread are absorbed into our cells, and spiritually, as we absorb Christ’s love and desires into our hearts and minds. This leads us to be, as the Constitution tells us, “formed day by day into an ever more perfect unity with God with and each other” (48). In this way, we express Christ in our lives and manifest Christ to others, becoming the Body of Christ in the world.

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we pray that God sends his Spirit not only to transform the bread and wine, but also to transform the people sharing in Christ’s Body and Blood. Locate a Missal, and find this part of the prayer in each of the four main Eucharistic Prayers. This part is located about one paragraph after the Memorial Acclamation, and starts in the following ways: “In humble prayer we ask you . . .” (Eucharistic Prayer I), “Humbly we pray that, partaking . . .” (Eucharistic Prayer II), “. . . grant that we, who are nourished . . .” (Eucharistic Prayer III), “. . . grant in your loving kindness . . .” (Eucharistic Prayer IV). Compare the four versions of this prayer. Note the similarities and differences in the language. What are we praying will happen as a result of being nourished by Christ’s Body and Blood?