

Has anyone here ever gone surfing—not on the internet but in the ocean? I wanted to learn to surf when I lived on the coast but never got around to it. Watching Olympic surfing from Tahiti has made me want to move back to the coast and give it a try. What does this have to do with anything? Regardless of the faith backgrounds of those Olympic surfers, they have something they can teach us about the Eucharist, specifically about one of the ways we most commonly refer to the Eucharist: communion.

What does the word “communion” mean? Is it just the act of coming to Mass, receiving the Body of Christ and then getting on with our day—all done as quickly as possible? The dictionary definition of “communion” is “the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level.” The Latin root—*communio*—means “mutual participation.” So, obviously, there is more to communion than just “receiving communion” and going on with our normal routine. The catechism tells us that receiving the Eucharist bears fruit. It tells us that what “material food produces in our bodily life [nourishment, growth, good health, strength], Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Lord...preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion.” The Eucharist can give us strength to fight against sin. It also strengthens our charity towards and unity with each other. Put as simply as possible, receiving the true body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus in Holy Communion makes us more like Jesus.

Do you feel like Jesus? Is that what we see going on around us? I am not talking about out in the world but within the church, even within our own families and parish communities. Referring to today’s second reading, are we kind to one another, compassionate, and forgiving of one another as God has forgiven us in Christ? Or do we often find ourselves struggling with bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, reviling and malice? Why? If we want to experience the promised fruits of Holy Communion, perhaps we need to learn how to surf.

Olympic gold medalist Kauli Vaast grew up in Tahiti surfing the very spot where the Olympics were held. He had seen and knew and probably surfed every mood and form of that wave. He also knew the pain of getting wiped out by it. The commentators said something similar about all of the surfers: it was as if they had a supernatural connection to the ocean, as if they understood it, as if the ocean was speaking to them. Remember the dictionary definition? Communion is the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings,

especially when the exchange is on a mental or spiritual level. How did those surfers attain this level of mutual participation with the ocean? It wasn't just by dipping their toes in the water and going home. They learned it by spending hours upon hours in the ocean, completely immersed in their environment, learning about the characteristics of the waves and anything else the ocean could "teach" them.

That is what communion is and that is the type of relationship Jesus wants with each one of us. When we receive the body of Christ, Jesus becomes immersed in us—actually that is also what the incarnation is. God became man so that man can become more like God. Jesus becomes part of us so that we can become a part of him and more like him. If we are not experiencing those fruits, perhaps the reason is that we are not allowing ourselves to be immersed in Jesus.

How do we immerse ourselves in Jesus? There are a number of ways but let's start with the basics. The best starting place is in the word of God as presented in the scriptures, especially the gospels. Immersing ourselves in the gospels means engaging with them by asking questions, by noticing how we respond to certain passages and asking ourselves why we are responding in that way. When we come across something that confuses us we should try to understand what is going on; often the answer can be found elsewhere in the Bible. Think about how little kids are always asking questions about even tiny details. We should be asking those same types of questions to Jesus. "Why did you do that? Why did those people say that? What does that mean? What did you do there?" It is okay to bug Jesus with those types of questions. When we immerse ourselves in the scriptures we are immersing ourselves in Jesus because both are the word of God and then we can apply that to our lives.

Easy, right? Probably not, but what part of "take up your cross daily and follow me" sounds easy? The Eucharist is going to give us graces and unite us to Jesus automatically because it is his flesh and blood. But if we want those graces to bear fruit, we have to help them to grow. We have to slow down and learn to listen to Jesus—through the scriptures, through prayer, through the rosary, through the lives of the saints, through the teachings of the church. True Communion with Jesus in this way will help us to grow in true communion with each other, but it takes time and it takes work. We can't just dip our toes in the water and go home. We have to immerse ourselves in the ocean and let Jesus teach us to ride the waves.

Jesus wants a relationship with each one of us which is deeper than any other relationship we can have with any other person or thing in all of creation. It is natural for there to be wipeouts along the way, but if you let him, Jesus will be there to pick you up and rescue you. Are you willing to take a risk on Jesus? By giving you his body and blood, Jesus has already shown he is ready and willing to take a risk on you.