

*A treatise to receive the Blessed Body of our Lord sacramentally and virtually both, made in the year of our Lord, 1534, by Sir Thomas More Knight, while he was prisoner in the Tower of London, which he entitled thus as followeth: To receive the blessed body of our Lord, sacramentally and virtually both.*

They receive the blessed body of our Lord both sacramentally and virtually which in due manner and worthily receive the blessed sacrament. When I say "worthily" I mean not that any man is so good, or can be so good, that his goodness could make him of very right and reason worthy to receive into his vile, earthly body that holy, blessed, glorious flesh and blood of almighty God Himself, with His celestial soul therein, and with the majesty of His eternal Godhead, but that he may prepare himself, working with the grace of God, to stand in such a state as the incomparable goodness of God will, of His liberal bounty, vouchsafe to take and accept for worthy to receive His own inestimable precious body into the body of so simple a servant.

Such is the wonderful bounty of almighty God, that He not only doth vouchsafe, but also doth delight to be with men, if they prepare to receive Him with honest and clean souls, whereof He saith, *Delitiae meae esse cum filiis hominum* . (My delight and pleasures are to be with the sons of men). And how can we doubt that God delighteth to be with the sons of men when the Son of God, and very almighty God Himself, liked not only to become the Son of Man (that is to wit, the son of Adam, the first man) but, over that, in His innocent manhood to suffer His painful passion for the redemption and restitution of man.

In remembrance and memorial whereof He disdaineth not to take for worthy such men as wilfully make not themselves unworthy to receive the selfsame blessed body into their bodies, to the inestimable wealth of their souls. And yet of His high sovereign patience, He refuseth not to enter bodily into the vile bodies of those whose filthy minds refuse to receive Him graciously into their souls. But then do such folk receive Him only sacramentally, and not virtually, that is to wit, they receive His very blessed body into theirs under the sacramental sign, but they receive not the thing of the sacrament, that is to wit, the virtue and the effect thereof, (that is to say, the grace by which they should be lively members incorporate in Christ's holy mystical body), but, instead of that lively grace, they receive their judgment and their damnation.

And some such, by the outrageous enormity of their deadly sinful purpose, in which they presume to receive that blessed body, deserve to have the devil (through the sufferance of God) personally so to enter into their breasts that they never have the grace after to cast him out, but like as a man with bridle and spur rideth and ruleth an horse, and maketh him go which way he list to guide him, so doth the devil by his inward suggestions govern and guide the man, and bridle him from all good and spur him into all evil, till he finally drive him to all mischief, as he did the false traitor Judas, that sinfully received that holy body, whom the devil did therefore first carry out about the traitorous death of the selfsame blessed body of his most loving Master (which he so late so sinfully received) and, within a few hours after, unto the desperate destruction of himself.

And therefore have we great cause, with great dread and reverence, to consider well the state of our own soul when we shall go to the board of God, and as near as we can (with help of His special grace, diligently prayed for before) purge and cleanse our souls by confession, contrition, and penance, with full purpose of forsaking from thenceforth the proud desires of the devil, the greedy covetise of wretched, worldly wealth, and the foul affection of the filthy flesh, and be in full mind to persevere and continue in the ways of God and holy cleanness of Spirit, lest that (if we presume so unreverently to receive this precious margarite , this pure pearl, the blessed body of our Saviour Himself, contained in the sacramental sign of bread) that like a sort of swine rooting in the dirt and wallowing in the mire, we tread it under the filthy feet of our foul affections, while we set more by them than by it, intending to walk and wallow in the puddle of foul, filthy sin; therewith the legion of devils may get leave of Christ so to enter into us as they gat leave of Him to enter into the hogs of Genezareth , and, as they ran forth with them and never stinted till they drowned them in the sea, so run on with us, (but if God of His great mercy refrain them and give us the grace to repent), else not fail to drown us in the deep sea of everlasting sorrow.

Of this great outrageous peril, the blessed apostle Saint Paul giveth us gracious warning where he saith in his first epistle to the Corinthians : *Quicumque manducaverit panem et biberit calicem Domini indigne, reus erit corporis et sanguinis Domini* . (Whosoever eat the bread and drink the cup of our Lord unworthily, he shall be guilty of the body and blood of our Lord). Here is (good Christian readers) a dreadful and terrible sentence, that God here (by the mouth of His holy apostle) giveth against all them that unworthily receive this most blessed sacrament, that their part shall be with Pilate and the Jews, and with that false traitor Judas, with God reputed the unworthy receiving and eating of His blessed body for a like heinous offense against His majesty as He accompteth theirs that wrongfully and cruelly killed Him.

And therefore to the intent that we may avoid well this importable danger, and in such wise receive the body and blood of our Lord, as God may of His goodness accept us for worthy (and therefore not only enter with His blessed flesh and blood sacramentally and bodily into our bodies but also with His holy Spirit graciously and effectually into our souls), Saint Paul, in the place afore-remembered , saith: *Probet seipsum homo, et sic de pane illo edat, et de calice bibat* . (Let a man prove himself, and so eat of that bread and drink of that cup). But then in what wise shall we prove ourself? We may not go rashly to God's board , but by a convenient time taken before we must (as I began to say) consider well and examine surely what state our soul standeth in.

In which thing it will be not only right hard, but also peradventure impossible, by any possible diligence of ourself to attain unto the very full, undoubted surety thereof, without special revelation of God. For as the scripture saith: *Nemo vivens scit, utrum odio vel amore dignus sit* . (No man living knoweth whether he be worthy the favor or hatred of God). And in another place: *Etiamsi simplex fuero, hoc ipsum ignorabit anima mea* . (If I be simple , that is to say, without sin, that shall not my mind surely know). But God yet in this point is of His high goodness content if we do the diligence that we can to see that we be not in the purpose of any deadly sin. For though it may be that, for all our diligence, God (whose eye pierceth much more deeper into the bottom of our heart than our own doth) may see therein some such sin as we cannot see there ourself – for which Saint Paul saith: *Nullius mihi conscius sum, sed non in hoc justificatus sum* . (In mine own conscience I know nothing, but yet am I not thereby justified) – yet our true diligence done in the search God of His high bounty so farforth accepteth that He imputeth not any such secret lurking sin unto our charge for an unworthy receiving of this blessed sacrament, but rather the strength and virtue thereof purgeth and cleanseth that sin.

In this proving and examination of ourself which Saint Paul speaketh of, one very special point must be to prove and examine ourself and see that we be in the right faith and belief concerning that holy blessed sacrament itself: that is to wit, that we verily believe that it is, as indeed it is, under the form and likeness of bread, the very blessed body, flesh and blood of our holy Savior Christ Himself, the very selfsame body and the very selfsame blood that died and was shed upon the cross for our sin, and the third day gloriously did arise again to life and, with the souls of holy saints fette out of hell, ascended and styed up wonderfully into heaven, and there sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and shall visibly descend in great glory to judge the quick and the dead, and reward all men after their works. We must (I say) see that we firmly believe that this blessed sacrament is not a bare sign, or a figure , or a token of that holy body of Christ, but that it is (in perpetual remembrance of His bitter passion that He suffered for us) the selfsame precious body of Christ that suffered it by His own almighty power and unspeakable goodness, consecrated and given unto us.

And this point of belief is, in the receiving of this blessed sacrament, of such necessity and such weight with them that have years and discretion that, without it, they receive it plainly to their damnation. And that point believed very full and fastly must needs be a great occasion to move any man in all other points to receive it well. For note well the words of Saint Paul therein: *Qui manducat de hoc pane, et bibit de calice indigne, judicium sibi manducat et bibit, non dijudicans corpus Domini* . (He that eateth of this bread and drinketh of this cup, unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment upon himself, in that he discerneth not the body of our Lord). Lo, here this blessed apostle well declareth that he which in any wise unworthily receiveth this most excellent sacrament receiveth it unto his own damnation, in that he well declareth by his evil demeanor toward it, in his unworthy receiving of it, that he discerneth it not, nor judgeth it, nor taketh it, for the very body of our Lord, as indeed it is. And verily it is hard , but, that , this point deeply rooted in our breast should set all our heart in a fervor of devotion toward the worthy receiving of that blessed body. But surely, there can be no doubt, on the tother side, but that, if any man believe that t is Christ's very body and yet is not inflamed to receive Him devoutly thereby, that man were likely to receive this blessed sacrament very coldly and far from all devotion if he believed that it were not His body but only a bare token of Him instead of His body.

But now, having the full faith of this point fastly grounded in our heart, that the thing which we receive is the very blessed body of Christ, I trust there shall not greatly need any great information farther to teach us, or any great exhortation farther to stir and excite us, with all humble manner and reverent behavior to receive Him. For if we will but consider, if there were a great worldly prince which for special favor that he bare us would come visit us in our own house, what a business we would then make, and what a work it would be for us to see that our house were trimmed up in every point to the best of our possible power, and everything so provided and ordered, that he should by his honorable receiving perceive what affection we bear him and in what high estimation we have him, we should soon by the comparing of that worldly prince and this heavenly prince together (between which twain is far less comparison than is between a man and a mouse) inform and teach ourself with how lowly mind, how tender loving heart, how reverent humble manner we should endeavor ourself to receive this glorious, heavenly king, the king of all kings, almighty God Himself, that so lovingly doth vouchsafe to enter, not only into our house (to which the nobleman Centurio knowledged himself unworthy ) but His precious body into our vile, wretched carcass, and His Holy spirit into our poor simple soul.

What diligence can here suffice us, what solicitude can we think here enough, against the coming of this almighty king, coming for so special gracious favor, not to put us to cost, not to spend of ours, but to enrich us of His, and that after so manifold deadly displeasure done Him so unkindly by us, against so many of His incomparable benefits before done unto us? How would we now labor and foresee that the house of our soul (which God were coming to rest in) should neither have any poisoned spider or cobweb of deadly sin hanging in the roof, nor so much as a straw or a feather of any light lewd thought that we might spy in the floor, but we would sweep it away.

But forasmuch (good Christian readers) as we neither can attain this great point of faith, nor any other virtue, but by the special grace of God, of whose high goodness every good thing cometh - for as Saint James saith: *Omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum, de sursum est, descendens a Patre luminum* . (Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, descending from the Father of lights) - let us therefore pray for His gracious help in the attaining of His faith, and for His help in the cleansing of our soul against His coming, that He may make us worthy to receive Him worthily. And ever let us of our own part, fear our unworthiness, and on His part trust boldly upon His goodness if we forswore not to work with him for our own part. For if we willingly upon the trust and comfort of His goodness leave our own endeavor undone, then is our hope, no hope, but a very foul presumption.

Then, when we come unto His holy board, into the presence of His blessed body, let us consider His high glorious majesty, which His high goodness there hideth from us, and the proper form of His holy flesh covereth under the form of bread - both to keep us from abashment, such as we could not peradventure abide if we (such as we yet be) should see and receive Him in His own form such as He is, and also for the increase of the merit of our faith in the obedient belief of that thing (at His commandment) whereof our eyen and our reason seem to show us the contrary.

And yet, forasmuch as, although we believe it, yet is there in many of us that belief very faint and far fro the point of such vigor and strength as would God it had, let us say unto Him with the father that had the dumb son, *Credo, Domine, adjuva incredulitatem meam* . (I believe, Lord, but help Thou my lack of belief), and with His blessed apostles, *Domine, adauge nobis fidem* . (Lord, increase faith in us). Let us also with the poor publican, in knowledge of our own unworthiness, say with all meekness of heart, *Deus propitius esto mihi peccatori* . (Lord God, be merciful to me sinner that I am). And with the centurion, *Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum* . (Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come into my house).

And yet with all this remembrance of our own unworthiness, and therefore the great reverence, fear and dread for our own part, let us not forget on the tother side to consider His inestimable goodness, which disdaineth not for all our unworthiness to come unto us and to be received of us.

But likewise as at the sight or receiving of this excellent memorial of His death (for in the remembrance thereof doth He thus consecrate and give His own blessed flesh and blood unto us) we must with tender compassion remember and call to mind the bitter pains of His most painful passion, and yet therewithal rejoice and be glad in the consideration of His incomparable kindness (which in His so suffering for us to our inestimable benefit He showed and declared toward us), so must we be both sore afraid of our own unworthiness, and yet therewith be right glad and in great hope at the consideration of His unmeasurable goodness.

Sain Elizabeth, at the visitation and salutation of our blessed Lady (having by revelation the sure inward knowledge that our Lady was conceived with our Lord), albeit that she was herself such as else (for the diversity between their ages) she well might, and would have thought it but convenient and meetly that her young cousin should come visit her, yet now, because she was mother to our Lord, she was sore amarvelled of her visitation and thought herself far unworthy thereto, and therefore said unto her: *Unde hoc, ut veniat mater Domini mei ad me?* (Whereof is this, that the mother of our Lord should come to me?) But yet for all the abashment of her own unworthiness she conceived thoroughly such a glad blessed comfort that her holy child Saint John the Baptist hopped in her belly for joy, whereof she said: *Ut facta est vox salutationis tuae in auribus meis, exultavit gaudio infans in utero meo* . (As soon as the voice of thy salutation was in mine ears, the infant in my womb leapt for joy.)

Now like as Saint Elizabeth by the Spirit of God had those holy affections , both of reverent considering her own unworthiness in the visitation of the mother of God, and yet for all that so great inward gladness therewith, let us at this great high visitation, in which not the mother of God, as came to Saint Elizabeth, but one incomparably more excelling the mother of God than the mother of God passed Saint Elizabeth doth so vouchsafe to come and visit each of us with His most blessed presence that He cometh not into our house but into ourself - let us (I say) call for the help of the same Holy Spirit that then inspired her, and pray Him at his high and holy visitation so to inspire us that we may both be abashed with the reverent dread of our own unworthiness and yet therewith conceive a joyful consolation and comfort in the consideration of God's inestimable goodness, and that each of us, like as we may well say with great reverent dread and admiration, *Unde hoc, ut veniat Dominus meus ad me?* . (Whereof is this, that my Lord should come unto me?) and not only unto me but also into me, so we may with glad heart truly say at the sight of His blessed presence, *Exultavit gaudio infans in utero meo* . (The child in my belly - that is to wit, the soul in my body, that should be then such a child in innocency as was that innocent infant Saint John - leapeth, good Lord, for joy).

Now when we have received our Lord and have Him in our body, let us not then let Him alone and get us forth about other things and look no more unto Him (for little good could he that so would serve any guest), but let all our business be about Him. Let us by devout prayer talk to Him, by devout meditation talk with Him. Let us say with the prophet: *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus* . (I will hear what our Lord will speak within me).

For surely, if we set I aside all other things and attend unto Him, He will not fail with good inspirations to speak such things to us within us as shall serve to the great spiritual comfort and profit of our soul. And therefore let us with Martha provide that all our outward business may be pertaining to Him, in making cheer to Him and to His company for His sake, that his to wit, to poor folk, of which He taketh every one not only for His disciple but also as for Himself. For himself saith: *Quamdiu fecistis uni de his fratribus meis minimis, mihi fecistis* . (That that you have done to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to myself). And let us with Mary also sit in devout meditation and hearken well what our Savior, being now our guest, will inwardly say unto us. Now have we a special time of prayer, while He that hath made us, He that hath bought us, He whom we have offended, He that shall judge us, He that shall either damn us or save us, is of His great goodness become our guest, and is personally present within us, and that for none other purpose but to be sued unto for pardon and so thereby to save us. Let us not leese this time, therefore, suffer not this occasion to slip, which we can little tell whether ever we shall get in again or never. Let us endeavor ourself to keep Him still , and let us say with His two disciples that were going to the castle of Emmaus, *Mane nobiscum Domine* . (Tarry with us, good Lord), and then shall we be sure that he will not go from us, but if we unkindly put Him from us. Let us not play like the people of Genezareth, which prayed Him to depart out of their quarters because they lost their hogs by Him, when instead of the hogs He saved the man out of whom He cast the legion of devils that after destroyed the hogs . Let not us likewise rather put God from us by unlawful love of worldly winning or foul filthy lust, rather than for the profit of our soul to forbear it. For sure may we be that when we wax such God will not tarry with us, but we put Him unkindly from us. Nor let us not do as did the people of Hierusalem which on Palm Sunday received Christ royally and full devoutly with procession, and on the Friday after put Him to a shameful passion; on the Sunday cried, *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini* . (Blessed be He that cometh in the name of our Lord), and on the Friday cried out, *Non hunc, sed Barabbam* . (We will not have Him but Barabbas); on the Sunday cried, *Hosanna in excelsis* , on the Friday, *Tolle, tolle, crucifige eum* . Sure if we receive Him never so well nor never so devoutly at Easter, yet whensoever we fall after to such wretched sinful living as casteth our Lord in such wise out of our souls, as His grace tarrieth not with us, we show ourself to have received Him in such manner as those Jews did. For we do as much as in us is to crucify Christ again: *Iterum* (saith Saint Paul) *crucifigentes filium Dei* .

Let us (good Christian readers) receive Him in such wise as did the good publican, Zacchaeus, which when he longed to see Christ and because he was but low of stature did climb up into a tree, our Lord, seeing his devotion, called unto him and said: "Zacchaeus, come off and come down, for this day must I dwell with thee". And he made haste and came down, and very gladly received Him into his house. But not only received Him with a joy of a light and soon sliding affection, but that it might well appear that he received Him with a sure earnest virtuous mind, he proved it by his virtuous works. For he forthwith was contented to make recompense to all men that he had wronged, and that in a large manner, for every penny a groat , and yet offered to give out also forthwith the tone half of all his substance unto poor men, and that forthwith also, by and by , without any longer delay. And therefore he said not, "Thou shalt hear that I shall give it", but he said, *Ecce dimidium bonorum meorum do pauperibus* . (Lo, look, good Lord, the tone half of my goods I do give unto poor men).

With such alacrity, with such quickness of spirit, with such gladness, and such spiritual rejoicing as this man received our Lord into his house, our Lord give us the grace to receive His blessed body and blood, His holy soul, and His almighty godhead both, into our bodies and into our souls, that the fruit of our good works may bear witness unto our conscience that we receive Him worthily, and in such a full faith, and such a stable purpose of good living as we be bounden to do. And then shall God give a gracious sentence and say upon our soul, as He said upon Zacchaeus, *Hodie salus facta est huic domui* . (This day is health and salvation come unto this house), which that holy blessed person of Christ, which we verily in the blessed sacrament receive, through the merit of His bitter passion (whereof He hath ordained His own blessed body in that blessed sacrament to be the memorial), vouchsafe, good Christian readers, to grant unto us all.

