

# Bodies offer means of communion

Fr. Dale Launderville, OSB/CNS

Experiences of hunger, loneliness and illness make us very much aware that we are embodied beings. We cannot ignore our need for food, companionship and community. Nor can we overlook our limitations and vulnerabilities.

Our bodies remind us that we are creatures who have received the gift of life from the Creator. And when we experience a limitation, it is an invitation to recognize that our lives have abiding meaning only insofar as we stand in a loving relationship with God.

In difficult times, people may want to escape and leave behind mortal bodies that weigh them down. But God fashioned us from the dust and breathed life into us (Genesis 2:7). And later texts of the Old Testament, such as Daniel 12:2 and 2 Maccabees 7:23, proclaim that God will awaken or give the breath of life back to the faithful after they die. Life after death is imagined to be embodied life in some form.

The New Testament evangelists accent the physical dimension of Jesus' resurrection by saying that he ate fish (Luke 24:42-43) and that Thomas examined the wounds in his hands and side (John 20:27). Howev-



Bill Wittman/CNS

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er, the evangelist John testifies that the resurrected Jesus came into the locked room where the disciples were hiding without opening the doors (20:26). Thus Jesus' resurrected body is both continuous with his earthly body, yet different.

St. Paul indicates that a transformation also will happen to the bodies of Christians when we die: The physical body will be raised as a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44). Just as a seed dies in the ground and germinates to bud forth as a plant, so the physical body will continue in a new form in the next life (1 Corinthians 15:36-37, 53-54).

The body is a living, dynamic gift from God. It offers us the possibility to come into communion with God and other human beings. A handshake, an embrace, a kiss and a smile are common ways that we express our relationships with others.

Without a body, we could not be part of a human community.

By being born as a human and then raised bodily after his death, Jesus reveals to us that as the glorified Christ he has an enduring bodily dimension that remains essential in his communication with us.

So, in the Eucharist, when we eat his body and drink his blood, we are brought into an intimate, life-giving union with God: not only a spiritual union with Christ, but also a bodily communion.

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## FaithAlive!

This month's adult-education package examines centuries-old theological and philosophical debates about the human body. At times, the body has been viewed as a threat to the soul, but Christ's Resurrection tells us that the body has a place in the fullness of time.

### Food for Thought

Several current TV series encourage participants to "trade-in" their bodies — or at least their faces — for new ones. Perhaps these programs, in their own ways, hope to celebrate the human body. But instead they seem to send a mixed message about the human body.

Christian tradition says the body deserves the greatest respect. Throughout history some considered the body a curse or inconvenience. But Christ's incarnation makes a statement: The human body is good. It can be misused; nonetheless, it was intended as a gift of God.

### Faith in the Marketplace

Earlier this year, Faith Alive! posed this question to readers around the country: When you are tired, run down, how do you refresh your spirit?

#### Selected reader responses:

"I take a break and say a little prayer." — Kathy Glass, Hanover, Md.

"I go on retreat." — Father Perry Kenaston, Hoonah, Alaska.

"I attend Mass or take up some spiritual reading because this helps me to step away and look at things in a different way. A personal retreat can also be helpful." — Anne DeVeaux, Johnson City, Tenn.

#### Lend us your voice:

An upcoming edition asks: What does the church in your community do that confronts the realities of poverty?

If you would like to respond for possible publication, please write: FaithAlive! 3211 Fourth St. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.

### Want more Faith Alive?

More material from this edition (No. 23) — plus editions not available locally in print — can be found at [www.CatholicCourier.com](http://www.CatholicCourier.com). Click on the Faith & Family tab under the Catholic Courier.com logo, then select Faith Alive! at left.

## Faith, exercise refresh body and soul

Louise McNulty/CNS

The headline in the employee newsletter read: "Mind-body connection. Employee loses inches and finds inner peace."

With the article was a small "before" picture of a gray-haired, overweight man with a shy smile at the annual Christmas party. He'd been with the company 10 years, so everyone recognized him.

But there also was a larger photo of a smiling, dark-haired, trim man leaning against an outdoor gazebo. For those who hadn't seen him since his transfer to another office, the "after" picture was that of a stranger.

The story explained that a little more than a year ago the man, suffering from asthma and low blood sugar, was tired and moody, and this affected his job performance. At this point he ran across his senior-high-school picture. With that earlier image of himself as motivation, he decided it was time for a change.

Following a sensible, low-fat diet, he lost 90 pounds and went down 10 pants sizes. As a result, he also shed his health problems and negative attitude.

He said in the article that the change was not just physical, but a spiritual renewal that made him feel like an entirely new person.

His story reminded me of a friend who experienced a similar physical and spiritual rejuvenation.

Overwhelmed by the demands of a family, a part-time job and helping her husband renovate their house, Sue found herself increasingly impatient with her children, quick to anger and overly sensitive to criticism. She wasn't sleeping well, was gaining weight and caught every virus that crossed her path.

At Mass she was too distracted by overseeing her children's behavior to pay attention.

One of her neighbors started going to yoga classes. This system of physical/mental exercise sounded like a good way to revitalize her weary body and soul. Then one weekend Sue went to church alone. Relaxed, she listened to the homily and readings, and realized she didn't need yoga. She had everything she needed in her faith.

If she took the commandments seriously, she wouldn't be gluttonous, envious, despairing, rude or de-

manding. She'd have Lent to jump-start her once a year. If she kept holy the Sabbath, she could fit more relaxation and family time into her life.

Sue found that when she felt tired, standing tall and squaring her shoulders got more oxygen into her lungs, improved her attitude and increased her alertness. When she was mentally stressed from work, she tackled physically demanding household jobs — rearranging furniture or joining her husband in cleaning the garage or tearing out carpeting.

If a family situation made her unreasonably angry, Sue let off steam by taking a brisk walk or run.

When tempted to eat her way out of stressful situations, she'd ask God to be her chocolate — the crutch she often used to relieve depression. She'd ask God to share her problem. And believing that God was helping her carry the burden, she said, made her sense of relief almost palpable.

I saw Sue recently. She said that since she is physically more active and mentally more meditative, she stresses less and feels better.

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