

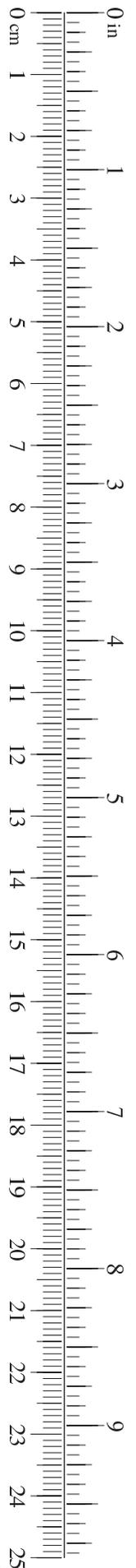
CHAPTER 5

PARTNERSHIP WITH CHRIST

MUCH more might be written that would throw helpful light on the nature of the Mystical Body of Christ, considered in its total aspect; but we must pass on to consider the mystery—for it is a mystery—from the point of view of the individual Catholic, since it is his spiritual life and partnership with Christ that is our main concern in this book. It is by baptism that one is made a member of this Mystical Body of Christ. The ancient ceremonies used in the administration of this sacrament, in which the neophyte was completely immersed in the water to come forth regenerated in a newness of life, have a very real significance. Our Lord Himself did not wait long in His public life before warning us: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* (John 3:5) Baptism, then, is a rebirth, but it leaves the roots of the old life still within us, so that really it is only the beginning of a process of putting off the old man and putting on the new, which will only reach its normal and natural end with our death.

If we have lived properly—indeed, one might say, if we have died properly—throughout our life, we go straight to heaven after death. If not, then the work of our transformation and renewal must be completed in purgatory or else eternally regretted in hell as no longer possible. Its very impossibility then, in fact, *is* hell. St. John the Baptist sums up the whole process in a few words: *He must increase, but I must decrease* (John 3:30). St. Paul frequently speaks of “putting on Christ.” In fact one cannot help noticing the almost excited eagerness of this inspired writer, carried away as he is by his vision of the magnificence of God’s plan, searching for words and multiplying images in his endeavour to express some shred of the wonders of Christ. Uninspired pens may be pardoned if their efforts to express it lack clarity.

By this rebirth of baptism we are made living members of the Body of Christ, sharing in all its riches, in His merits and His



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