

Eucharistic Adoration at St. Patrick: The Real Presence

Article 2

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As we begin our regular Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Patrick, we should remind ourselves of the basic Catholic doctrines involved in this devotion. In this article I will reflect on the teaching about the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

This doctrine describes, first and foremost, the Presence that takes place at each Mass in the Eucharistic bread and wine, consecrated with the words Jesus himself used at the Last Supper. We believe that this Presence of the Lord is Real, not just symbolic. To use an old phrase: he is truly present, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

At Mass, Christ is present *as offering himself to the Father* in the continuing (eternal, always occurring) sacrifice. Thus, the Mass is the very same sacrifice that Jesus offered on the Cross: the sacrifice of himself. It is the way in which, through the signs of eating and drinking, we are made present to and join with him in that one everlasting sacrifice.

This is important for our understanding of Eucharistic Adoration. In Catholic faith, the bread and wine are truly transformed. They *become* the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord. Hence, these elements retain that Presence even when the Mass is over and the Body of the Lord is reserved in the tabernacle. Jesus does not come and go but remains with us in the consecrated Bread. It has *become* the Lord and does not cease to be so.

I will have more to say in subsequent articles about the relationship between the Mass and Adoration. I will also reflect on the historical development of Eucharistic Adoration. For now, let's reflect more fully on that doctrine of the Real Presence.

What does the Bible say about the Eucharist? Matthew, Mark, and Luke report the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. In all three gospels Jesus pronounces over the bread, "This is my body," and over the wine, "This is my blood." He then commands us to "do this" in remembrance of him.

In the Gospel of John, the sixth chapter is crucial. There Jesus repeatedly tells us that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink indeed. He also says that the one who eats and drinks his flesh and blood has life in him. Some of his followers, understanding this literally, could not accept it. They walk away from him *and he does not stop them or correct them*. He only turns to the disciples and asks if they too will leave him. Peter answers for us all, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

We should also examine 2 Corinthians 11:27ff. After recounting the institution of the Eucharist in the same words the gospels use, St. Paul says that those who eat and drink of the Eucharist "unworthily" or "without discerning the body" are "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." How can this be understood apart from faith in the Real Presence of the Lord in Holy Communion?

Many Christians who worship in the traditions of the Protestant Reformation do not accept the teaching on the Real Presence. This is consistent with the modern inability to accept the very real presence of God in our lives. God is no distant "entity" who disdains to be near us.

Rather, consistent with the Incarnation of Jesus in the womb of Mary, God is with us and near us and in us in a very real manner, not just symbolically.

Over the centuries, the Church developed various ways of teaching and explaining the Real Presence, while continuing to hold that it is a great mystery. Borrowing some terms from Greek philosophy, theologians taught that the very “substance” of the bread and wine are “transformed” into Christ. Thus, we use the term “transubstantiation,” a big word that only says this: the bread is no longer bread and the wine no longer wine, although they still “appear” to be so. They are truly and really the Lord with us, offering himself to the Father, and communing with our very souls.

In view of all this, it is difficult for me to understand how some consistently absent themselves from Mass. Harder still is it to understand how some leave the Catholic Church, thinking that it is more important to have contemporary music or emotional worship services than it is to partake of the very Presence of the Lord offering himself to the Father and to us in Holy Communion. He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” He did not say, “Find a worship service that is humanly pleasing to you.”

For two thousand years, the Catholic Church has followed the command of the Lord at the Last Supper and we will continue to do so until he comes again.