

Corpus Christi

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Our Gospel is from St. John where Jesus gives us his most clear and plain teaching on his real presence in the Eucharist.

The reason that the Eucharist is the fount of our life and also the summit of our life as Christians, is because the Eucharist is not *something*, the Eucharist is *someone*, namely Jesus himself. We believe that in the Eucharist, Jesus is truly, really present, his body, blood, soul, and divinity. Now the question is why do we believe that? The simple answer is: because Jesus told us.

If you have grown up Catholic, you've gotten used to the idea of eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus. But to his first listeners - this would've been unbelievably shocking.

So when the Jews take what he's saying literally, Jesus doesn't back down. He doesn't say "no, no, no, you misunderstood me. He actually makes his statement more concrete. Then at the Last Supper, Jesus shows his Apostles how to bring about his real presence under the appearances of bread and wine.

Sometimes non-Catholic Christians say "why do you Catholics make so much out of the Eucharist?" The answer is simple, because Jesus himself said that if you want to remain with him and have him remain with you, you need to receive his body and his blood in the Eucharist. This is what we do because - just like his apostles, we - as his disciples - want him to remain, to stay with us.

Jesus presence in the Eucharist challenges human understanding, logic, and reason. If you ignore the hundreds of Eucharistic miracles (a topic for another day) his presence cannot be known by the senses, but only through faith.

The true presence of Jesus in Holy Communion wasn't invented in the Middle Ages. The leaders of our early church warned us that by relying only on our senses, we will only see bread and wine. Only 10 years after the Apostle John's death, St. Ignatius wrote that the Eucharist *is* the flesh of Jesus, and this was the understanding of all the early Christians - a belief that they got from the apostles themselves.

Today we heard Jesus compare his body and blood to the manna from the Old Testament. If you haven't heard of the Eucharist as the New Manna, just look at the Old Testament, which is exactly what the first reading is about for today. It's all about the Exodus and it's all about the manna from heaven. The manna was God's divine provision that he used to take care of his people so that he was with them every day, even though they were in the wilderness and they were hungry and thirsty and were being tempted and tested.

The bread that God gave them was not ordinary food. Did you ever hear people say that "the manna was just some natural substance or something like that." Moses was a shepherd out in the desert for 40 years, but when he sees the manna, he and the people say "What is this stuff? We have never seen this before." Because it was miraculous bread from heaven.

This Eucharistic theme continues in our second reading from 1st Corinthians. St. Paul says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" St. Paul says quite clearly that the bread and the cup are real "participations," but the Greek word there (*koinōnia*) sometimes gets translated as communion, but it means a real reception of his body and his blood - to have His life in us. I hope all of us believe that.

But in today's world, close to 70% of Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. For the majority of Catholics today, the Eucharist is merely a symbol of

Jesus, and the Mass is merely a collection of like-minded individuals gathering to remember his life.

To me, this looks like spiritual disaster. But the Church has withstood scandals, divisions, diseases, doubts throughout our very human history. But today we seem to confront all of them, all at once. How will Jesus heal, renew, and unify the Church and the world? He heals, renews, and unifies his Church with the Eucharist that's given to us today.

It is the Eucharist that gives us the ability to live out a Christian life the way Jesus taught us. The Eucharist gives us perseverance to fulfill our daily responsibilities - responsibilities for our family, our work, our community, and our world. The Eucharist maintains our energies on our long journey back to God as we journey through this desert, this valley of tears, our present crazy world, where we feel like we're in some wilderness and we're hungry and thirsty and we're being tempted, and we're being tested.

The Eucharist is also medicine for the soul - a medicine that can respond to our every weakness. A medicine that no cable news show, no politician nor big pharma can deliver. Without this medicine, we can be easily infected with too many disordered attractions to money, power, pleasure, or fame.

The Eucharist we receive at Mass isn't just a remembrance or a memorial, it's not just a sign, it's not just a meal, it is miraculous bread from heaven, given to us under the appearance of food and drink so that we might have eternal life. Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer