

How can God be present in a tiny host?

Some time ago, a street-corner preacher who knew how to make religious truths come to life was faced by a hostile crowd.

1. "How," one of them demanded, "is it possible for bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ?" The preacher looked calmly at the stout questioner for a moment and answered, "You have grown somewhat since you were a child and have more flesh and blood than you had then. Surely, if a human body can change food and drink into flesh and blood, God can do it too."

2. "But how," countered the heckler, "is it possible for Christ to be present in his entirety in a small host?" The preacher glanced up at the sky and down at the street before them and answered, "This city scene and the sky above it is something immense, while your eye is very small. Yet your eye in itself contains the whole picture. When you consider this, it won't seem impossible for Christ to be present in his entirety in a little piece of bread."

3. Once more the heckler attacked. "How, then, is it possible for the same Body of Christ to be present in all your churches at the same time?" The preacher's answer: "In a large mirror you see your image reflected but once. When you break the mirror into a thousand pieces, you see the same image of yourself in each of the hundred fragments. If such things occur in everyday life, why should it be impossible for the body of Christ to be present in many places at once? Just tell me, what isn't possible for God? [Harold Buetow in *God Still Speaks: Listen!* quoted by Fr. Botelho.]

Depending on what poll you look at (*are the polls real?*) Reportedly anywhere from 30-60% of American Catholics don't believe that. They think the communion is symbolic or some means of bringing Christians together on a spiritual level. Who knows if it's just confusion with how the question was being asked, fear of answering it wrong, or just sincere doubt that plagues a number of people that is making their answers different from professing what the Church teaches - that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine... *really*.

But perhaps with widespread disbelief over all sorts of things, with people having experienced broken trust, broken promises themselves... where everyone of us can point to someone or something that has happened in our lives that has left us wounded - we see that all of that has had a deteriorating effect which has made us ask *what is real* anymore? Perhaps that is fueling these statistics. That is part of the reason we feel the absence here of so many of our family members, friends, neighbors... our brothers and sisters in Christ at this Mass.

For you and I, who are here today. Who are here to participate in this Mass. Who are here to receive Jesus' body and blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. Who may even be dealing with our own doubts, our own misgivings, our own struggles, our own questions of *what is real* - but have responded to that prompting of the Holy Spirit who encouraged us to be here despite all of that - that act in itself shows *what is real*.

We are being real in sharing our hearts with the Lord.: What is troubling them; what is causing them to doubt; what is tempting them to move in directions that don't seem or feel right. We are being real when despite all the confusion and attacks- we've gathered together with others who have similarly overcome their own pains and difficulties and we have come looking for a *real, true encounter with Jesus Christ*.

What we find is that we encounter the same Jesus Christ, who also suffered real pains, real difficulties, the real Passion, the real Cross... We receive the same Jesus Christ who overcame those horrific things and rose from the dead... we receive under the appearance of bread and wine what Pope Francis

explained as "Christ's presence among us... which demands that the power of love overcomes every wound."

As we consume Him, His expectation is that we become what we receive. That we become Eucharist ourselves when we go out from this place back into a world suffering from so much confusion, so much brokenness, so desperate for the Love of God revealed to be made real for them

Every time we follow Jesus' example - when we give of ourselves. When we lay down our lives for Him and His Gospel. When we allow His voice to direct our lives, upset our plans, present new dreams in the place of the old ones we once valued so highly. When we come to a much deeper, greater trust in Him than we've ever had for anyone, anything else in the world. Then the Eucharist, God's very presence which we receive is not only *real* in our teaching, but *real and evident* in each of our lives... and begins to renew, to heal, to transform a broken world with the *real* loving presence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, Bread of Life: Brennan Manning, an American Franciscan priest, tells this story of his mother, a lady in her mid-seventies in Brooklyn. Mrs. Manning's day centered on her daily Eucharist. Because she began her voluntary stint at a drug detoxification center each morning at 7:30 AM., the only Mass she could reach was at 5:30 AM. Across the road from her lived a very successful lawyer, mid-thirties, married with two children. The man had no religion and was particularly critical of daily Church-goers. Driving home from a late party at 5 am one January morning, the roads glassy with ice, he said to his wife: "I bet that old hag won't be out this morning", referring to Mrs. Manning. But to his shock, there she was on hands and knees negotiating the hill up to the Church. He went home, tried to sleep, but could not. Around 9 am he rose, went to the local presbytery and asked to see a priest. "Padre," he said, "I am not one of yours. I have no religion. But could you tell me what you have there that can make an old woman crawl on hands and knees on an icy morning?" Thus, began his conversion along with his wife and family. Mrs. Manning was one of those people who never studied deep religious books, never knew the big theological words, but she knew what it is to meet Jesus in Holy Communion. Jesus Christ is the bread of life. What more could we want? (Sylvester O'Flynn in *The Good News of Mark's Year*; quoted by Fr. Kayala). L/21

Once upon a time in a summer resort parish there was a deacon from the seminary who was assigned to help out during the summer rush. He was a nice enough young man, though a little shy and kind of conservative. On a very hot Sunday he lost his temper with the way people dressed. None of the men wore a coat and tie. None of the women wore dresses and stockings the adults came in shorts and polo shirts, the women even in sleeveless dresses. The kids appear in swim trunks and t-shirts and bare feet, some of the teenage girls even wore t-shirts over their bikinis. The young man shouted at them, have you no respect for the Body and Blood of Christ? How dare you desecrate the Eucharist with such inappropriate clothes? If you go out for dinner tonight, won't you dress up for your hosts? If people should come to your house for dinner, wouldn't you be deeply offended if they came in swimsuits? Why shouldn't God be offended by your lack of reverence? What makes you think that God's house is a cabana on the beach? The people were a little surprised but they figured he didn't really understand. Besides, they thought they had a lot of respect for the Body of Christ? They had come to receive it, had they not? At supper that night the wise old monsignor (who appears frequently in these stories) said to him, you have a good point but have you ever gone to Mass in a church near a European resort? There's hardly anyone there. At least our people come. They may look a little sloppy sometimes. Yet I believe that God loves them no matter how they're dressed. (Father Andrew M. Greeley)