

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
Sunday, June 2-3, 2018

When I was young I didn't get sacraments. It didn't make sense to me that things like bread and wine could become something else, or that we were somehow changed for having received them. After all, we usually don't look or feel any different after receiving Holy Communion. A few experiences changed my point of view.

Some years ago, I was working in the psychiatric unit of a hospital with patients whose chemical imbalance in their brains left them severely depressed and unable to regulate their thoughts. Later, while caring for my parents at the end of their lives, they too became unable to communicate, unable to reason or reflect on an idea, or even pray. The insights of scripture seemed unavailable to people who cannot read, listen or think. Thank heavens the Catholic church gives us word *and* sacrament!

Another experience helped my appreciation of the Eucharist. I attended an ecumenical worship service at a non-Catholic church. There was a "communion service" where bread was broken and shared. I was surprised to see what happened next. When crumbs of the bread fell to the ground, no one did anything. The minister of the church later told me the crumbs were just left for the housekeeping staff to vacuum up the next day. Why? Because it was not the real presence of Jesus Christ and they knew it. Despite their love for each other and for God, there was only *word*, no *sacrament*.

This, of course, is not true of the Eucharist that we receive here at St. Joseph's at every Mass. We know the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ and we treat it as such. This is what the early Church believed from the beginning – that God became incarnate in the flesh in Jesus and that the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ. Few Christians doubted the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist until the 1600s and the protestant reformation. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is why, if even a crumb of a host is dropped, it is treated as what it is, the body of Jesus himself. We would never leave behind the smallest piece of the Eucharist any more than we would abandon the body of Jesus.

God gives us a means of grace through sacraments – the physical stuff of the material world – oil, water, bread, wine – used as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual divine grace. We partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ and we become the Body of Christ in the Church. We become participants in Christ's redeeming work. Our participation makes us one. Our suffering is made redemptive in Christ.

All this is a *mystery* for sure – not like a mystery in a novel that is ultimately solved, but a *theological mystery*, a truth beyond our understanding. Thank heavens we don't have to understand the Eucharist to benefit from it. What an amazing God we have that gives of himself so totally and completely for each of us.

I still don't get all the theology about sacraments, but I do get that they are important. When times are hard – when we just don't understand why things happen the way they do – let us cling to sacraments, especially the Eucharist, food for our spiritual journey.

What has happened in your life that increased your need, or your desire, for Christ in the Eucharist? When did it happen and who was involved? If it made a difference in your life, perhaps you would find joy in sharing that story with someone close to you today. Maybe they need to hear it.

Jesus, thank you for the gift of yourself. Help me to appreciate your real presence in the Eucharist at Mass here at St. Joe's. Let me always receive you worthily.

Rob Sgambelluri