

CHRIST'S TRUE PRESENCE IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST



As everyone knows, and hunger pains won't let us forget, our physical bodies must be nourished regularly to sustain life. Likewise, our spiritual souls must be nourished by God on a regular basis with the sacred food of Christ Himself—the holy Eucharist.

We believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist because we have His words recorded in Scripture that speak to this fact. God has given us additional help—physical evidence—to grow in our belief of the reality of the Real Presence of Jesus in the holy Eucharist through a number of extraordinary events. The Catholic Church has documented a number of eucharistic miracles. A miracle is a supernatural event, a clear sign given by God, that surpasses the powers of nature in order to witness to some truth and arouse greater Faith.

The first eucharistic miracle of the Catholic Church occurred in the town of Lanciano, Italy, in the year 713. A certain priest was versed in the sciences of the world but not fully immersed in the things of God. He had been plagued by doubts whether, when the priest prays the words of consecration, the bread and wine are actually changed into the body and blood of our Lord, and whether our Lord remains truly present in the holy Eucharist. One day at Mass, when he prayed the words of consecration, the host was miraculously changed into flesh and the wine into blood. The monk was awestruck. Weeping joyously, he called the parishioners to come up to the altar and explained that God Almighty, to confound his unbelief, desired to reveal Himself to us in a visible way! He said to them, “Behold the flesh and blood of our most beloved Christ.” Those who witnessed the miracle soon spread the news throughout the surrounding area.

Shortly after, the archbishop ordered an investigation and, eventually, the miracle was certified and the elements were sealed in a special reliquary. In 1970 Pope Paul VI permitted a series of scientific studies, resulting in these findings: The flesh is of a human heart and the

blood is also of human origin and is type AB. There were no traces of preservatives and no deterioration had taken place. Rather, the elements continue to have the same properties as fresh human blood and flesh and are now more than 1,300 years old.

The beauty of the miracle occurring at each Mass—that Jesus becomes really, truly present under the forms of mere bread and wine—grounds our faith and reflects the words our Lord spoke: “I am the Bread of Life. He who feeds on my Flesh and drinks my Blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my Flesh is real food and my Blood real drink. He who feeds on my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me, and I in him.” (Jn 6:35, 54-56) We must, therefore, never forget that when we participate at Mass, we witness a miracle, and through the reception of holy Communion we share in the divine life of our Savior. Jesus dwells within our heart.

After first watching the DVD entitled “This is My Body; This is My Blood; Miracles of the Eucharist” about the miracle of Lanciano and nine other eucharistic miracles, I came to believe more deeply the reality of Christ's presence in the holy Eucharist. It helped me to understand better what the Church has always taught: that we are truly receiving Jesus Christ. This is no small matter—what an incredible gift from God! Being united with Jesus fulfills our greatest need and desire as God created us to be in communion with Him. It is important to note that we won't always have a special “feeling experience,” but as we remain faithful in receiving Jesus sacramentally, we will eventually come to know, in a deeper way, that the holy Eucharist is indeed the Lord. Even when feelings are lacking, faithful recipients testify that everything just goes so much better in life having encountered Jesus in this deep, personal union—the essence of communion. This is friendship at its deepest level.

Jesus instituted the holy Eucharist during the Last Supper because He wanted to remain with us always and to make us sharers in His life. When Jesus spoke about giving His body and blood, many of His followers



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left Him because they said, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat? ... This is a hard saying.” (Jn 6:52, 60) Jesus’ hearers clearly understood that He was speaking literally, not figuratively. In other words, the Eucharist is not merely a symbol!

Jesus did not say, “No, no, don’t leave! You misunderstood.” In John’s Gospel, chapter 6, Jesus repeats the same words several times. The Eucharist is His body and His blood. Jesus taught that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood if we are to have everlasting life. (cf. Jn 6:53-54)

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?

God created the entire universe through His Word. What God says comes to be. We need to stand in awe at the power of God’s Word. During the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the priest empowered to repeat the words of Jesus, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. The appearance of the bread and wine does not change, while the substance does change into His body and blood. A necessary distinction to help us understand better is an appearance, also referred to as an “accident,” is what something looks like, while a “substance” is what something is. The appearance, or accident, remains the same while the substance changes. The appearance of the bread and wine still look, smell and taste the same as before, however, the substance of the consecrated bread and wine has been changed to the sacred body and precious blood of Jesus, the Lord.

“Transubstantiation” is the name the Church gives to this change in substance. “Tran” means to change and “substantiation” comes from substance. Transubstantiation designates the miraculous change of the bread and wine into the eucharistic body and blood of Christ. Transubstantiation indicates that through the consecration of the bread and the wine there occurs the change of the entire substance of the bread into the body of Christ, and of the entire substance of the wine into the blood of Christ—even though the appearances of bread and wine remain. Our eyes see bread and wine; our eyes of Faith see the hidden reality of Jesus’ body and blood.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist ‘the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained.*’ This presence is called ‘real’ ... it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes Himself whole and entirely present.” (CCC #1374)

Belief in the true presence of Jesus in the holy Eucharist is a matter of Faith, expressed well in the words we sing during benediction. “What our senses fail to fathom, we grasp through faith’s consent.” (St. Thomas

Aquinas) Let us never forget the miracle we witness in the celebration of each Mass. God gives Himself fully to us as we receive Him in Communion. He desires to bring us into oneness with Himself through this feeding and nurturing that takes place in holy Communion!

Our Lord knows that this incredible miracle of the holy Eucharist is hard for us to comprehend. The Scripture passage of the father who seeks out Jesus to heal his possessed son is helpful. The father says to Jesus, “If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus replied, “All things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; please help my unbelief.” Jesus then cast the demon out of the boy, and he was completely healed. (cf. Mk 9:17-29) Jesus is saying that what is necessary is faith. And yet, we always need

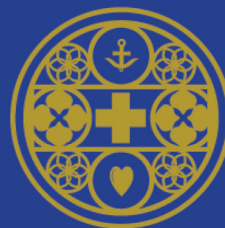
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to be strengthened in faith, especially when doubt creeps in. The words of the father, “I believe; please help my unbelief,” are something simple to remember and pray each time before receiving holy Communion.

When we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving the resurrected, living Christ. We are bonded to Him, transformed by Him and strengthened to live with greater

charity toward our neighbor.

There are mysteries that we will never fully understand in this life. Their revelation awaits our full communion with God in heaven. St. Cyril urges us: “Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since He is the Truth, He cannot lie.” Let us humbly thank our Lord, from the depths of our hearts, for this incredible gift of Himself to us! †



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