

Homily for Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 18/19th, 2022

By Deacon Richard Hay

When I felt the call to join the church, which happened 35 years ago next month, very quickly the eucharist became a focal point as I began attending Mass with Margo and our young daughter Melissa. Watching others process up to the priest or eucharistic minister to receive the Holy Eucharist started a fire in me that I did not expect. I wanted to receive this same precious gift, to receive the same grace that is provided to us by the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

It really was a desire that could only be fulfilled by receiving Christ through the Eucharist.

On this solemnity we acknowledge and reflect on the real presence of Jesus Christ in the simple elements of the Eucharist – bread and wine – that are consecrated on the altar at every Mass. Not symbols, not representations of the body and blood of Christ but the real presence of Jesus.

In today's readings there is a beautiful thread woven between all of them about the bread and wine.

Starting in Genesis, we hear how Melchizedek used bread and wine to bless Abram after his great victories. The bread and wine were considered the first-fruits of the land, and were offered in sacrifice as a sign of recognition of God the Creator. Today, the priest will refer to the gifts of bread and wine as *fruit of the earth*.

The thread continues into the second reading as we hear Saint Paul, in a letter to the church in Corinth, recall the words Jesus used at the Last Supper.

We hear Jesus's words as He broke the bread - His body - and then offered the cup of wine - His blood - and told the apostles that *As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes again*.

We witness the power of those words each time the Mass is celebrated - those elements we first heard of in Genesis with Melchizedek and Abram and then Saint Paul wrote about, are the same elements we continue to see transformed on the altar. While they may look like bread and wine on the outside - after their consecration by the priest their substance becomes the true presence of Christ.

A couple of years ago, a study was released that showed two-thirds of Catholics believed that the bread and wine used at Mass were not the real presence of Christ but rather symbols of His body and blood.

The survey goes on to reveal that most Catholics who do not believe the bread and wine are the true presence of Jesus Christ also do not know the Church's teaching on transubstantiation. In the simplest of terms, transubstantiation is what happens when the priest prays the words of consecration and the substance of the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ - yet still appear as just bread and wine.

Even more concerning from the survey, among those who know this central tenant of our faith, one in five reject the idea of the real presence of Jesus in the substance of the bread and wine.

Over the more than 2,000 years of our Church's history, we often turn towards saints in matters like this to find understanding.

Here are just three examples about the true presence:

St. Thomas Aquinas, a doctor of the church, wrote that "The Eucharist is the sacrament of love: it signifies love, it produces love. The Eucharist is the consummation of the whole spiritual life."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem boldly proclaimed that “Since Christ Himself has said, ‘This is My Body,’ who shall dare to doubt that it is His Body?”

The patron of our diocese, St. Augustine wrote that “What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ, and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; yet faith does not desire instruction.”

In other words, these three saints, and there are others, tell us that the true presence of Jesus in the elements of bread and wine is a belief in the love that God the Father and his Son Jesus had for us – a love so strong that God the Father gave up His only Son for our sins.

Then we hear Jesus’s own powerful words – *This is my body*.

Finally, St. Augustine reminds us that faith in this matter does not require instruction – just belief. It just takes a little faith. Of course, faith is hard sometimes and needs to be reinvigorated – recharged.

So the bishops of the United States having seen the results of this survey decided there is a need for a Eucharistic Revival and that revival kicks off this weekend.

Over the next three years, you will see information which will begin on the diocesan level, followed by a year at the parish level and then a National Eucharistic Congress will be held in honor of the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Then it will be time to become missionaries, sharing the gift of our Eucharistic Lord with others.

Even though that is a couple of years away, we can already begin evangelizing our own belief in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist by sharing it with those we know who might be struggling with this aspect of our faith. By the way, it is OK to struggle with our faith at times – it happens to me and many others – but we should also not persist in our disbelief.

Like Jesus said to Thomas when he appeared to the twelve, *Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.* Jesus is talking to all of us right there.

It can be challenging to “prove” things like the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist because as one of the great mysteries of our faith, we will never completely understand it until it is fully revealed by God the Father. Until then, it requires faith on our part.

We can build that faith by participating in the sacraments that are available to us such as receiving the Eucharist as often as we can – more than once per week if possible. Or maybe coming into the church here during the week and sitting with Jesus, who is in the tabernacle, to be close to his true presence in the Eucharist. We can also take any of these doubts into the sacrament of reconciliation to receive spiritual guidance on how to increase our faith in this great mystery. Then, just keep repeating those steps.

In Today’s gospel from St. Luke, this abundance and ability to receive and experience Jesus in the Eucharist is shown in the feeding of the five thousand. Initially we hear the apostles doubt about being able to feed this massive crowd.

Jesus removes that doubt by what he does next – a miracle.

Through His prayer and blessings, Jesus sanctifies the gifts of bread and fish. As they distribute the food to the crowd, there is more than enough to feed everyone and still have twelve wicker baskets of leftovers.

What a beautiful example of the abundance Christ gives us in the gift of the Eucharist. It is from the abundance of Christ's love for us that we receive this precious gift – one we can receive in abundance ourselves.

Through our own encounters with Jesus in the Eucharist, we all have the opportunity to be changed profoundly.

This change is possible because the power that is within the Most Precious Body and Blood of our Lord is His real presence.

No signs – no symbols – but truly Jesus's body, blood, soul, and divinity.