



HOSPITALITY

Acting as Christ the Shepherd, a parish committed to stewardship is a true community of faith that welcomes, honors, and involves every person in the life and work of the Church, acknowledging the blessing of our richly different backgrounds and experiences.

“A Biblical Walk Through the Mass”

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Part 3 of 4: The Real Presence of Jesus

So we have seen the Mass as a sacrifice. Now let us turn our attention to a second key aspect of the Eucharist: how it contains the real presence of Jesus. The Catholic Church teaches that although Christ is present to his people in many ways—in the poor, in his Word, in the sacraments, and in the prayer of two or more gathered in his name—he is uniquely present in the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Through the Eucharist, “Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present” (CCC 1374).

The Eucharist is not merely a symbol of Jesus. Nor is Christ only spiritually present in some vague way in the bread and wine. At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and wine and said, “This is my body ... This is my blood.” Unlike other Christian communities that view the Eucharist merely as a sacred symbol or “reminder” of Jesus, the Catholic Church affirms that when the priest at Mass recites these words of Jesus’ at the moment of consecration, the bread and wine on the altar are changed into Christ’s Body and Blood. They are no longer bread and wine. The theological term used to describe this change is transubstantiation, which expresses how, by the consecration of the bread and wine, “there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood” (CCC 1376).

This change, however, is not a chemical one. All the outward, sensible appearances of bread and wine remain. The Host still looks like bread, tastes like bread, and feels like bread. And the chalice contains what to all the senses appears to be ordinary wine. The chemical structures of bread and wine remain the same. But

underneath these appearances, Jesus’ Body and Blood is really present in the Eucharist.

When Jesus himself taught about the Eucharist, he used language with a profound realism to describe how we will partake of his Body and Blood. Not only did Jesus speak at the Last Supper of the bread and wine being his Body and Blood (“This is my body ... This is my blood”), but when he gave his most extensive teaching about the Eucharist, he said we must really eat his flesh and drink his blood. So important was the partaking of his actual Body and Blood in the Eucharist that he taught,

Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. (John 6:53-56)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, an early Christian theologian, exhorted Christians to trust in Jesus’ words about the Eucharist really being his Body and Blood: “Do not see in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise.”

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

One of the biblical titles for Jesus is Emmanuel, which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Jesus is the divine Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. And he so desired to remain close to us that he gave us the gift of his sacramental presence in the Eucharist. He thus continues to be Emmanuel—God with us—in each and every Mass celebrated throughout the world. We should never take this gift for granted. The most amazing event in the universe takes place at every Mass: the Son of God himself comes upon our altars and dwells in our midst!

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