

Body and Blood of Christ
June 26, 2011

During Mass last Saturday I was offering the Cup of Precious Blood to folks coming up for Communion – something I've done thousands of times,...But this time – maybe because I knew I'd be preaching on the Body and Blood of Christ this weekend - I found myself more closely watching the people of all ages, shapes and sizes, as they came up to receive the bread and the wine,...And I remember wondering, "When we take that little host of bread into our mouth, ...when we take a sip of wine from the cup...are we fully aware, fully conscious of what is happening at that moment?...Do we appreciate the awesomeness of what we are experiencing? ...I mean here's Jesus, the Son of God, our Risen Savior,...the Christ, ... the Lamb of God,... coming to me – a sinner – coming in the most intimate, most powerful way. ...Is my heart filled with gratitude for this incredible gift from our incredible God out of His incredible love for us?...Man, I wish I could tell you this is how it is with me every time I receive Communion...I can't. ...It's not even close...I suspect that's how it is with many of us, huh?...Maybe that's why the Church in her wisdom has given us this special Sunday every year to focus more intently on this mystery of our faith - Jesus Christ fully present in the Eucharist ,...the bread and wine truly becoming His Body and Blood.

It isn't that we don't believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Euch...Most of us do...Right? About 2/3 of Catholics believe it, according to people who keep track of these things...That means 1/3 of us don't...And if we add our Protestant brothers and sisters, then there are millions of Christians who do not believe that Jesus meant what He said at the Last Supper and what the priest repeats at the consecration: "This is My Body, given up for you; This is My Blood, shed for you."...They take Jesus' words to be symbols or metaphors... even though IN all for accounts of the Last Supper – Mark, Matthew, Luke and 1Cor – Jesus says the exact same words:"This is My Body.... This is My Blood."...Then we have Chapter 6 of John's Gospel- part of which we just heard – where Jesus over and over refers to Himself as the bread of the Eucharist: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Of course, it all boils down to faith – doesn't it?...Oh, there are theologians who try to explain how it all happens, but the words they use are so mystifying and so hard to grasp that reading or listening to them would cure your insomnia...You know, there are some important things that simply cannot be explained...Gravity, for instance...Or some UFOs...Or the socks that disappear from the laundry. ...or why our adult children never pick up a check...or LOVE...Who can explain love - why my wife has stuck with me for almost 48 yrs...& vice versa?...Why would anyone make a lifetime commitment to another flawed human being without some guarantee beforehand?...Doesn't make sense. ...Can't be explained....So, why do we need an explanation of how Jesus can get into the Bread and Wine so that they completely change into His Body and Blood,...even though they still look and taste like Bread and Wine, ... and scientific tests would say the same thing?...We just don't know how it works,...and why should we care?... If we can accept a God who created a universe out of nothing,...who parted the Red Sea, and brought the dead back to life,...and can do pretty much anything He chooses, ...we can accept a God who comes to us in consecrated Bread and Wine...We can believe it even though we can't explain it.

The Roman Catholic church also believes that Jesus is here with us at Mass in other ways. ...He comes to us in the Liturgy Of The Word, especially in the proclamation of the Gospel...He is present in the priest on the altar who stands *in persona Christi*...in the person of Christ...And Jesus is present in the assembly of the faithful,...we who are gathered here to worship,...as He promised: "Whenever two or more are gathered in my name...there I will be."...But the most powerful, most personal, most transforming way Jesus comes to us is in the Eucharist as His precious Body and Blood...So when we come to celebrate Mass, Jesus is right here for us and

with us and in us...And yet, so often, His presence doesn't impact us the way it should...Maybe we're heavily weighed down with cares and concerns, things going on in our lives...Maybe we're distracted: "Look at her...Can you believe the way some people dress for church?"...Maybe we're annoyed by something we read in the bulletin...Maybe we're thinking about that cookout we're going to later,... "Did I make enough potato salad?"...Even when we are trying to stay with it – singing the songs, saying the responses, praying the prayers,...maybe it's become so routine to us that our bodies and voices might be engaged, but our minds and hearts are far away....It's like what Jesus said about the Pharisees in Mk 7: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

My friends, we can't allow our hearts to be far from the one who has made Himself so available to us...We can't allow this mind-blowing miracle - Jesus coming into our bodies, hearts and souls - we can't allow this to ever become routine...Because if we do, we will miss out on the gifts of healing, strengthening, and transformation that God offers us in the Eucharist...It'd be like saying, "Thank you anyway, God ...I don't need you right now."...Are any of us doing so well that we can't use God's help?

Some years ago, before I was ordained a deacon, I was bringing weekly Communion to a friend - only in his 50's – who was spending his final days at home after a long battle with cancer...I remember how every time I held up the host for him and said "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world; happy are we who are called to His supper,"...every single time, whether he was having a good day or a bad day,... Bob would close his eyes and smile as he prepared to receive the Lord. ...It's as if he was imagining Jesus standing right there in front of him and his smile showed how very happy he was that Jesus was there...For Bob, Holy Communion was anything but routine...He greeted His Savior with a smile,...And as he fed on the Body of Christ, Bob was given the strength for his final journey.

If Jesus was up here standing at the altar, appearing to us like He did to His apostles in the Upper Room,...I'll bet most of us would be running up to the altar excited and eager to get close to Him and touch Him and talk to Him...Well, Jesus isn't standing up here, so we can't connect with Him physically. ...But we should still be eager to connect with Him spiritually, Eucharistically...And I think we can help this happen if we come to Communion – like my friend Bob - with our eyes closed,...not totally - because we don't want to risk a pile-up in the aisles - but just enough so we are seeing NOT through the eyes on our face but through "the eyes of faith,"... With eyes of faith,...instead of seeing the priest or deacon or Eucharistic Minister giving us Communion,...we might see an image of Jesus giving us His Body,.. Jesus giving us His Blood,...Jesus giving us Himself...That's really what's happening...Though His Body and Blood, Jesus gives Himself to us ...to heal us,...to strengthen us,...to change us...This is a precious moment of spiritual connection between us and the Lord Jesus,...during which we might whisper to Him what healing we need at that moment: physical, emotional, spiritual...We might whisper to Jesus where we need strength to resist temptation or to help us get through a difficult situation...We might whisper to Jesus asking Him to help us change those things about ourselves we know God wants us to change...And after we receive His Body and Blood ...we can go back to our pew and continue talking to the Jesus who is now with us, within us, ...thanking Him for this magnificent gift of the Eucharist...Thank you, Lord Jesus...Thank you.

But you know, just saying thank you is not enough...Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much,...much will be required."...We have been given much: the gift of the Eucharist, the Real Presence of Jesus Christ within us...And when we leave here we are to take the Christ within us to the places and people out there that need Him as much as, if not more than we do...Jesus wants to be out there and **WE'RE THE ONES WHO HAVE GOT TO TAKE HIM THERE!...**

Jesus wants to be in our homes, in our families, in the workplaces where we earn our daily bread... Jesus wants to be with all the lonely, all who are anxious or afraid, all who are losing hope...Let's take Him there! ..

Jesus wants to be with the poor and the struggling,... all who need helping hands and hearts... He wants to be with the aging, the sick, the dying, all who need caring and comforting. Let's take Him there!...

Jesus wants to be everywhere that racism and prejudice divide us and keep people from being treated justly... J.s wants to be everywhere that stubborn hearts refuse to forgive and to ask forgiveness...Let's take Him there!...

And you young people,...Jesus wants to be in your schools, on the school buses, on the playing fields, in the malls, everyplace where you spend time together...you have to take Him there! ...

J wants to be everywhere that human life is considered inconvenient and dispensable. Let's take Him there!.

Ok, wrapping it up...We come here in faith...We are fed, nourished, strengthened by the Eucharist, the Body & Blood of Christ. ..We carry the Eucharist within us out into the world...We become Eucharist ministers to the world. ...so that the miracle of Jesus Christ present here at Mass doesn't end when we walk out that door...It's up to us to make sure that doesn't happen...May the Lord help us carry out our ministry. AMEN.