

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B

How many times have I told you? If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times. Most of us have heard those words from our parents, as we grew up. Those of us who are parents, have probably used them ourselves. Jesus is being more gentle and loving, in His words from sacred scripture today. But the message is basically the same.

If we believe the words from the gospel of John, I don't recall Jesus using the word "symbolic" at all. "Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you."

And just in case we are still unclear what Jesus means, he further states, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." Those words are not symbolic.

He is speaking to us about Eucharist. At each Mass we are taken back to the Last Supper. We are there. Through our prayers as a community of believers, the prayers of the priest, and the intercession of the Holy Spirit, that small wafer of bread, and that cup of wine, are substantially changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Theologians and scholars have been trying to unravel the mystery of the Eucharist since the Passover meal at the Last Supper. And it would be easy for me to stand here and tell you that Eucharist is a Divine mystery, and a matter of faith.

I know that some find it difficult to believe that bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Jesus. From a purely human perspective, I can understand those doubts. We don't see any change in the bread or the wine. There is no difference in the taste. The bread still tastes like bread. The wine still tastes like wine.

It flies in the face of logic to say that the bread and wine change into the Body and Blood of Jesus, despite no change in appearance. From a scientific perspective it is flawed to say that a change has occurred.

To help us believe, from time to time, God has allowed visible miracles of the Eucharist to occur. In the year 1263, a priest from Prague was on his way to Rome. He was making a pilgrimage, asking God for help to strengthen his faith. He was having doubts about his vocation.

Along the way he stopped in a town called Bolsena, 70 miles north of Rome. While celebrating Mass there, as he raised the host during the consecration, the bread turned into flesh, and began to bleed. The drops of blood fell onto the small white cloth on the altar, called the corporal.

The Church investigated and authenticated this miracle. The following year, Pope Urban IV instituted the feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus; the feast of Corpus Christi. And that blood-stained corporal may still be seen today, in the Basilica of Orvieto, north of Rome.

So how do we as every day Catholics, approach, and try to understand the Eucharist? With deep awe, and reverence, would be a good way to start. When we enter church, do we bow to the Blessed Sacrament before we are seated?

During Mass, do we prepare ourselves to receive the miracle and gift of the Eucharist. If we believe the words during the penitential rite, or the Lord have mercy; our sins are forgiven. If we believe the words we say during the Lord's prayer, our sins are forgiven.

If we truly believe, during the sign of peace, that we are forgiving those who have hurt us; we are freed from that pain. And when we say the words before Communion, "Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word, and I shall be healed," if we truly believe that, we are healed; we are made worthy.

When we leave our seats to receive the Eucharist, are we reverent? Or are we waving at friends and patting people on the back? Maybe we're checking out what so & so is wearing? Do we bow profoundly, in homage to our God, before we receive the Eucharist?

When we return to our seats to kneel, are we thanking God for His gift, and praying that it helps us to become more like Him? Or are we getting caught up with friends and family, and wondering when the priest is going to sit down, so that we can finally sit down too?

Do you rush out of church after Communion, because you have some important task to do, or because you think you've fulfilled your obligation? Or do you stay and sing the Recessional hymn, in thanks for all that has just taken place.

I say these things, not to be judgmental. I say these things in the hope that we all search our own hearts. And that we ask God to give us a better understanding of the "source and summit of our Catholic faith", the sacrament of Holy Eucharist.