

The Eucharist: *How is Jesus 'Present' in the Eucharist?*

When we think about the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we need to appreciate first the way in which God was present to the people of Israel. In the Book of Exodus, we are reminded that the Ten Commandments were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was considered to carry the presence of the living God: "There I will meet you and there, from above the cover, between the two cherubim on the ark of the covenant, I will tell you all that I command you regarding the Israelites" (Ex. 25: 22) Then the LORD said to Moses: I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not" (Ex. 16: 14). And so for the people of Israel, the presence of God was among them in the ark of the covenant and in the manna that God provided for their nourishment.

In the New Covenant, the presence of the living God is manifest in the person of Jesus. In the Bread of Life discourse Jesus says: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn. 6: 51). And only a few verses later he says: "This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever. (Jn. 6: 58). The new covenant, then, is marked by the very presence of the living God in the flesh, and through that flesh we are invited to share in divine life with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Catechism offers a very concise definition for us: "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as 'the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.' 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' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

The Catechism acknowledges that Jesus is really present in the Church in a variety of ways, but that he is substantially present in the Eucharist, in the bread and the wine. That understanding comes from the teaching and awareness that the simple gifts of bread and wine are substantially changed through the work of the Holy Spirit and the prayers offered at the Mass, and because of that, it is called transubstantiation, that is, something has really changed and become something new, in this case, the real, substantial presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

One of the major challenges for us today is the erosion of belief among our own Catholics in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and an understanding of the real substantial change that occurs in the sacrament, noted above, transubstantiation. In recent surveys by Pew Research Center in 2019, the data showed that only one third of Catholics believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist, and that the majority believe the bread and wine are only a symbolic presence. While it is certainly discouraging to see that data, it should give us motivation to pray, teach, and evangelize even more about the sacred gift God provides to us in the Body and Blood of his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are blessed at Our Lady of Good Counsel to have a tabernacle that reminds us of all these elements that are connected to 'covenant', 'passover', 'and presence' when we see the tabernacle in the shape of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark held the Ten Commandments, the presence of God, the Covenant. Our tabernacle, in the spirit of the New Covenant, holds the true presence of Jesus in His body, blood, soul and divinity. He is with us!

Reflection Questions

What do you believe about the Eucharist, namely, do you believe Jesus is truly present in His body, blood soul and divinity?

Why is this teaching and truth of the faith so difficult to believe?

How can you grow in awareness and understanding of Jesus as truly present in the Eucharist?

Resources

For additional reading, please see the Catechism of the Catholic

Church:

The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.