



The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

Sample Homily

Everyday Paradise

Back in the day when we could travel freely, many of us went on vacation to some sunny tropical beach. And we have gotten so relaxed and refreshed that we've thought "wouldn't it be great if we could stay here forever? If we could live in paradise for the rest of our lives?" But eventually, talking to the "locals" you start to realize that they too have jobs and families and responsibilities and in fact, they rarely go to the beach to just relax. If you live in paradise, it often becomes just normal and no longer special.

As Catholics, we too live in paradise, but often take it for granted. We have something very special right here in our midst and we often forget its importance. We have the Eucharist. We have Christ, fully present, body, blood, soul, and divinity here among us.

Surveys show that many people who identify as Catholics do not believe or at least understand the dogma of the real presence, so it's important occasionally to remind ourselves of the nature of this great gift of God to his church. What do we mean when we say the Real Presence?

Our Holy Scriptures tell us that bread and wine are not mere symbols. Jesus clearly describes in the gospels the bread and wine as being his body and his blood. St Paul says this also in his letters. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see that the early church celebrated the breaking of the bread from the very beginning. 100 years later, Justin Martyr describes the Eucharistic celebration. At that time, Christians were persecuted, often accused of being cannibals because they said they ate of the body and drank of the blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. When captured by the Romans did they say no it's just a symbol, a recollection, a party with friends? No, they died because they knew the Eucharist was more than a reenactment. It was and is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

Throughout the next 2,000 years the church has passed on this belief, this knowledge that in the Eucharist the essence of the bread and wine are changed, transubstantiated, into this enduring presence of Christ. Many of us believe and know this to be true. It's why we are here. It is most often why people become Catholic - to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. But this leads us to a few questions:

Isn't God present in all the world? Why here, why the Eucharist? Yes, God made the world and is present in his creation. Here at mass, he is present in the people attending, the word being proclaimed, and in his priest. But the presence of Christ in consecrated bread and wine is his presence par excellence. A highpoint, the summit of all presence. All these other ways Christ is present point towards this supreme sacramental presence.

The scriptures talk of Bread and Wine - are we receiving only half now that we can't partake of the chalice? No, because half of Infinity is still Infinity. You can't divide Christ, just like smaller pieces of the Eucharist contain the fullness of the divine presence, so too when we are only able to receive one species - the bread or the wine, we still receive all of Christ. And hopefully, someday soon, we'll once again be able to joyfully receive both bread and wine.

But the most important question is: Why would God do this? Why give us himself in the Eucharist? The all-powerful God that created the immensity of the universe is beyond our comprehension. God, who created the world out of love, has, since the beginning of time, been reaching out to his creation, his children. God therefore humbled himself to become human in Jesus. Jesus humbled himself even further to become one with the most common parts of our everyday lives: bread. Chris Stefanic says it well when he says: "If God came to us in all his power, it would be like sitting right in front of a nuclear explosion. No way you would survive it. So instead, he comes to us in all his love and humility." God comes to us as normal, everyday Bread, out of love, to be one with us, to sustain us.

And the more everyday and seemingly normal something is, the more likely we are to take it for granted. We miss its significance. Just like those people who live in Paradise yet drive by the beautiful beaches and never pause to take a good look, to let it change them once again. We are here today, present in this community, hearing his Word. As we come forth to receive the full presence of Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Gift of the Eucharist, may we once again see the beauty and depth of God's presence. May we lovingly accept this vision and enjoy this taste of paradise.