

BEHOLD THE BODY OF CHRIST

6 June 2021

CORPUS CHRISTI

The Body of Christ continues in humanity...



CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY CENTRE
Encountering God • Healing Hearts • Empowering Lives

“To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible”

(Thomas Aquinas)

Catholics believe that the **bread and wine** physically remain the same, it is **transformed** beyond human comprehension into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This is called Transubstantiation.

“While they were eating, He took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it He broke it, gave it to them and said, “Take, this is my body.” Then He took the cup, and giving thanks He gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:22-24).

There is an old Chinese story about Fact, Faith, and Feeling, three men walking on a wall. Fact goes first, Faith second, and Feeling third. As long as Faith keeps his eyes focused on Fact, all three stays on the wall and make progress. But as soon as Faith takes his eyes off Fact and turns around to see how Feeling is doing, Faith falls off the wall, and Feeling follows, while Fact walks on. The point of this little story is obvious: The object of our Catholic faith is not feeling but fact, not subjective experience but objective truth. When faith is rooted in facts, it much easier to stay on track.



The Catholic Church teaches that the communion wafer and the altar wine are transformed and really become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Eucharist. Have we met anyone who found the Catholic doctrine to be a bit hard to 'swallow'? If so, we shouldn't be surprised. When Jesus spoke about eating His flesh and drinking His blood in John 6, Jesus' words met with less than an enthusiastic reception. *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* (John 6:52). *"This is hard saying, who can listen to it?"* (John 6:60). In fact so many of His disciples abandoned Him because of this. So Jesus asked His 12 if they too would like to walk away. It is interesting that Jesus did not run after the others and say, *"Don't go - I was just speaking metaphorically!"*

The Church has recognised over one hundred eucharistic miracles, many of which occurred during times of weakened faith and doubt in the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the tiny host. A well-known Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano took place in the 8th century. A priest who had doubted the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist, was celebrating mass, and at the consecration, saw that **the Host had changed into flesh**. The wine had changed into blood; clotted and separated into 5 different sized clots. The priest then admitted his former doubts to the stunned parishioners. The news spread quickly, and the faithful came from all over to view the miracle, which to this day has retained the same dimensions. What does consuming the Body of Christ mean for us? *You are what you eat*. If you eat junk, high cholesteric fatty foods, your health deteriorates. If you eat healthy, natural, nutritional foods, your health improves. *You are what you eat*. Do we become like Jesus, after we 'eat Him'? This saying is good news as we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, because it is on this day that we reflect on the marvellous gift of the Eucharist. Our belief is that when we eat the bread and wine of the Eucharist we take into ourselves the very life of Christ.

How do we receive the body of Christ? Nonchalantly? Disbelievingly? Hesitantly? Irreverently? Routinely? Mechanically?

In the country of Ethiopia during the three years of famine, from 1984 to 1986, over one million Ethiopians died of hunger. And during that terrible time, the late Cardinal Basil Hume (1923-1999), Archbishop of Westminster Cathedral in London made a pastoral visit there. And upon his return to England, he told the following story and these are his words:

Hunger

On one occasion, I boarded a helicopter that flew me to a mountain settlement high up in the hills where people were starving and waiting for food, food which perhaps was never to arrive. When I stepped out of the helicopter, a little boy of ten ran up to me and took my hand. He wore only a loin cloth around his waist. The whole time I was there, he would not let go of me. "As we walked around the settlement, he never spoke a word. But whenever we stopped to greet a group of people, he raised his free hand and pointed to his mouth and, with the other, he lifted mine and rubbed it gently up and down his cheek. I was terribly moved. Here was an orphan boy, lost and starving, who had managed with two simple gestures to express our deepest hungers as human beings, namely our hunger for food and our hunger for love. I have never forgotten this incident and, to this day, I wonder if that little child is still alive. I do remember, however, that as I boarded the helicopter to leave this tragic place, I turned back and looked down and saw the boy standing there, gazing up at me with eyes of sadness and reproach.





The Living Bread

Jesus says to the people who come to Him hungry...Hungry for what? Hungry for another miracle, another multiplication of loaves. Jesus said, *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever”* (John 6:51). The bread that Jesus will give them is not just food for the body but food for their hearts and food for their souls. This bread brings everlasting life, for He is speaking of the teaching that comes from God Himself. He is speaking of something much more. It is the gift of His very self. He comes to us and will never leave us. He will be with us always.

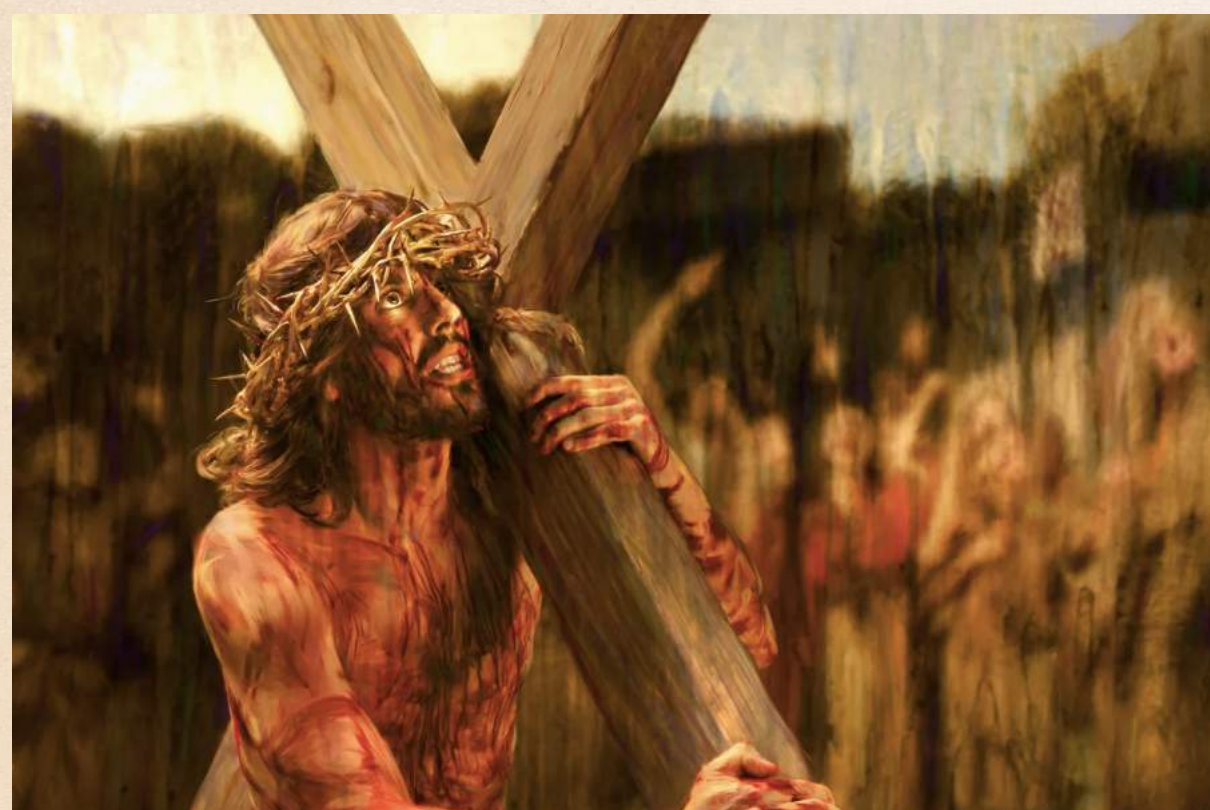
At the Last Supper, he says, *“Take and eat. This is my body”*, (Matthew 26:26) means, in the language that He was speaking, *“This is me. This is my own self which is to be broken for you.”* He means His death on the cross. And then He takes the wine. And the wine which He blesses, He offers and He says these words, *“This is my blood which is poured out for each and every one of you”*, (Matthew 26:28) means, He lays His life down for us. Now, these are the same words that we use whenever we gather together for the Eucharistic celebration of Holy Mass. As Jesus told us, *“Whenever you do these things, do them in remembrance of me”* (Luke 22:19).

To eat this bread then is to receive Jesus into our lives and into our hearts where He becomes one with us and makes us one with Him, uniting us with His Father and the Holy Spirit. This is why we call the Eucharist a Holy Communion, a communion of mutual and everlasting love.



Saving the World

Such lovely, lofty words, so full of hope and promise. It's almost enough to help us forget the pain, the pain of the hungry boy, and the shame of the kind Cardinal Basil Hume, he who would carry with him, all his remaining life, the sad and reproachful look in the little boy's eyes. No, the Cardinal could not stay, but neither would he forget. And wherever he went, he would tell the story of what he himself had witnessed: the hunger and the boy who, in the moment of great anguish and distress of his people, reminded the Cardinal of life's terrible truth - without bread and without love, we cannot survive. Jesus has taken both the bread and His love and transforms them into His Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. And when we partake of God's bread, we must also remember the hunger of the people of the world and how, each day, in our cruel and apathetic society, a society of plenty, yet so many hundreds of them perish. And if, in our anger, we might be tempted to ask, "*Where is God? Does He not care?*" God, who lives in the cries of His hungry children, responds in the words Jesus spoke to Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, "*If you really love me, then feed my sheep*" (John 21:17).



We are not to worry about ourselves so much, but we should indeed show concern for the poor, especially the children, who go to bed hungry, the people who feel hopeless, the people who feel lost and abandoned. We are always to remember them and, in remembering them, that is when we receive the body and the blood of Jesus, because that is where God is. He is one with them in their pain and suffering.

There was an outspoken woman, who gets into a lot of trouble, for criticising the church services. So someone asked her, why does she go to church at all. And she speedily, without hesitation, said, "*I go for the bread, the Body of Christ.*" On this Solemnity of Corpus Christi, let us bring the issues of our life, whatever they may be, to the Table of Plenty. Let us bring the things that trouble us, the things that hurt us, the things that we are afraid of, all the things that preoccupy our minds, most of all for an end to the pandemic.

Let our 'Amen' be our affirmation that the bread and wine will become for us the Body and Blood of Christ, as we extend our hands to receive communion, let our 'Amen' be the affirmation that the Risen Jesus is becoming our food and drink. *We are what we eat.* So let us rejoice today. In this marvellous gift of the Eucharist we become courageous people, sharing in the very strength of Christ. In this holy meal we become confident people, sharing in the very power of the Risen Christ that always provides us with hope for tomorrow -

A hunger for life, a hunger for love, even a hunger for eternity.

Our "Holy Communion" is, therefore, directed to transforming our life into Him who is Love itself. We cannot simply eat the Lord's body the way one eats a piece of bread. We can only receive Him by welcoming Him into our whole life, which means welcoming Him into our hearts and our actions. In giving us the bread of life, Jesus does not offer temporary nourishment, He gives us His body and blood, the nourishment that will give eternal life. The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is the Lord's call to us to be nourished by the divine life we receive, and to become His presence for the life of the world.

Reflections

The name Mass comes from the Latin missa, which means to “go forth” and is taken from the final words of the concluding rite. “And in the Eucharist, the Lord makes us travel His path, that of service, of sharing, of gift, and what little we have, what little we are, if shared, becomes wealth, because the power of God, which is that of love, descends into our poverty to transform it.” (Pope Francis)

- How can we bring Christ to the world today?
- What are the greatest needs that you see in your everyday life? Empowered with the love of God in the Eucharist, what will you do to help meet those needs?
- Where do we go when we need help with trust? Friends? A Priest? Books? To the Holy Spirit? To Mass and Holy Communion?

