

He is here

Just six more days! This has been a 16 year journey for me and now it is only six more days before I am ordained a priest of Jesus Christ. Wow. I've been reflecting on the ordination rite and the key moment is the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration. The bishop will lay his hands upon my head in silence which signifies the giving of the Holy Spirit. Then he will say a prayer of consecration and at that exact moment after it is finished, I will be a priest.

I am not just excited about that moment, but I am excited for what is going to happen seven days from now because seven days from now I will be able to say my first mass. I have been doing some practice masses and imagining what it would be like to say my first mass and it strikes me: wow, Jesus will be right here in my hands. God will radically abandon himself to come down in the form of bread and wine, veiled by the appearance of bread and wine.

But this grace to receive God is not reserved for me. God desires to move from my hands into your heart. What a magnificent mystery! That is what we celebrate today in the Feast of the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Jesus: Jesus is here.

One of the Benedictine monks at the monastery in BC would tell the story of a tour he gave of the Abbey Church to a group one day. He explained all the symbolism in the Church. Then he came at last to where the Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament, was reserved and he said that this was where Jesus was contained. Then one woman said, "if Jesus was really in that tabernacle, I would walk 100 km on my knees from my house to this place just to see him."

What an interesting mixture of belief and unbelief! Belief because I think this lady is sincerely saying I would do anything to see Jesus Christ in the flesh, Jesus who is Second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Word of the Father through whom all things are made, the Alpha and the Omega, the one who was crucified for me! I think many of us would travel sea or sky, wind or rain just to catch a glimpse of the God-man.

But the amazing thing is that he IS here! The thing is as Catholics we can hear it with our heads but the full depth of its truth does not reach our hearts.

St. Jean Vianney is one of the greatest priests of all time. He is the patron saint of priests and a model for priests as someone who heard confessions for hours and

people from all over the world would go to confession with him. During mass, he would preach but as he got older his homilies began to be the same. He would simply go up to the ambo, point to the tabernacle and say: *il est la! Il est la! He is there!* And he would begin to weep which caused the people around him to weep. *Il est la! He is there!*

St Jean Vianney didn't just know it in his head, he knew it in his heart, and his love for the Eucharist spread like a fire to those who heard him speak. He knew the fundamental truth that St. Paul tells us today that this bread is not merely bread. The Eucharist is not a symbol or a model or a figure. Jesus did not say "This is like my body", "This is a symbol/metaphor of my body". No! As St. Paul hands on to us the words of Jesus who said "This IS my body".

But to the world and even to other Christians it sounds like the height of insanity. Worshiping a piece of bread? The Eucharist is either the worst form of lunacy and/or idolatry OR it is true. But we know it is true because the one who says, "This IS my body", is Truth itself. St. Cyril of Jerusalem says: "Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie."

Seeing, touching, tasting, are in thee deceived

How say'st thy trusting hearing? That shall be believed;

What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;

Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.

So since it is true that "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'" (CCC 1374), then everything changes. Every piece of host, every fragment, every tiny crumb is seen differently.

Fr Mike Schmitz tells this story of how he saw his friend eating the crumbs off of the floor in the sanctuary because several small pieces of the host had fallen on the floor and nobody picked it up. So Fr. Mike went up to him and said, "Dude, that's weird! Why are you eating crumbs off of the floor?"

Then his friend told him about a period in China's history called the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 where the government began persecuting Catholics. And so these policemen came into a Church one day and arrested this priest and imprisoned him in a room beside the Church with guards. Then the guards went into the tabernacle and threw the ciborium or container holding the blessed sacrament and threw it on the ground. The priest was horrified at the disrespect and the desecration of the Eucharist and so he prayed and kept vigil with Jesus on the floor.

Yet in the middle of the night the next day, he saw a small figure darting among the shadows from the guards. There was this little Chinese girl who saw the hosts thrown on the floor so she came back. She was taught that she had to prepare herself for the Eucharist and back then she could only receive on the tongue. So she knelt for one hour in prayer and then bent forward to receive Jesus on her tongue. Then she would run away. She came back and did it again for 31 more days until the last day when there was only one host left but when she received that last host, a guard saw her and beat her to death.

So, Fr Mike's friend said, "you ask me why do I eat those crumbs off the floor? That's why."

Fulton Sheen was so inspired by this story he made a promise to pray in front of the blessed sacrament for a whole hour each day. In effect, what Fr. Mike's friend is saying is that either she died for a 32 pieces of stale bread or she died receiving Jesus Christ. Either those pieces of bread on the floor are just ordinary bread or it is actually the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ worth risking my life for. Either Jesus is truly present in the host or I have sacrificed family, money and I have wasted the last 16 years of my life just to hold up a piece of bread. Or it is true and I am holding the greatest treasure ever in my hands and in my heart.

The Eucharist is either the height of insanity or it is true.

My brothers and sisters, we know this is true. Jesus' word is good and it is true. Il est là! He is there! It changes everything. It changes the way we dress because we are now in the presence of the king of kings. It changes the way enter into this Church. We genuflect to this king, we bend the knee because he is here. Even when we receive the Eucharist we need to make sure we get every single fragment because God is humbly contained even in those little pieces! You might

wonder why it takes me a little longer to clean the paten or the plate. The reason is because I want to get every single crumb because Jesus is here. Sometimes you will even see priests pinching their thumb and index finger because they don't want to drop any fragment of the Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, on this feast of Corpus Christi, latin for the Body of Christ, let us remember one thing: Jesus is here and he will be here. How will you respond to his presence?