

## Jesus is in the Room

### Homily for Corpus Christi

June 10-11<sup>th</sup> 2023

#### *What is the Eucharist?*

The Catholic Church has always believed and taught that Jesus Christ is really, truly present in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This makes the sacrament of the Eucharist the greatest of all sacraments. Here's how the Catechism puts it:

*"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" (#1374).*

That means that the Eucharist is not just a symbol of Christ's presence. A symbol points to a reality. Like the paschal lamb in the Old Testament pointed towards the lamb of God in the New Testament, Jesus Christ; the Manna of the Old Testament, was a heavenly food pointing towards its fulfillment in the Eucharist. Like an exit sign on the freeway points towards a road or a town. Most non-Catholic Christians believe that the Eucharist is like that, just a symbol of Christ's presence, not the real thing.

But as Catholics we know that Christ is not just symbolically present in the Eucharist, he is truly, really present. (Orthodox Christians also believe this.) That's what makes the Eucharist a sacrament, instead of just a symbol. This is why St Paul, in today's Second Reading, calls Holy Communion a "participation" in the body and blood of Christ. And this is why Jesus himself, in today's Gospel Reading, repeats six times - SIX times - in just seven verses, either explicitly or implicitly that his flesh is real food and his blood is real drink.

Every time an ordained priest pronounces the words of consecration at Mass - when he says "this is my body... this is my blood" - Jesus himself, in a mysterious, sacramental way, becomes truly present under the appearances of bread and wine. This is what Jesus taught, and this is what Catholics have believed since the very dawn of the Church two thousand years ago.

#### *How it happens?*

And so, every time Mass is celebrated, whether on a battlefield, in a hospital, in the jungle, or right here in our parish church of St Peter's a real miracle occurs. Just as Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, at every Mass he turns bread and wine into his own body and blood. Only God can do that kind of thing - only God can perform miracles.

That's why although we know that it happens, we don't understand exactly how it happens. Theologians can only describe what happens. They call it "transubstantiation." This

means that during the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine are changed into Christ's body and blood, but the appearance of bread and wine remains the same.

Many times throughout the history of the Church God has allowed other miracles to take place to remind us of the reality of the central miracle of the Eucharist. There are documented cases of consecrated hosts (the host is the small piece of bread used during the Mass - after it is consecrated by the priest, it becomes a consecrated host, the Eucharist)

- that have begun to bleed,
- that have turned into flesh,
- that have been miraculously preserved in the midst of devastating fires.

Miracles like these, of which history is full, are just reminders of the main miracle that occurs every day: Christ turning bread and wine into his body and blood.

### ***How do we react to the Eucharist?***

This miraculous presence of Christ explains why we give so much reverence to this greatest of all the sacraments, the Eucharist. We use precious metals for the vessels used at Mass. We decorate our churches with beautiful and valuable art, because here in the church building, in the small box called the tabernacle, our Lord is present, accompanying us and interceding for us in the Eucharist 24/7. We celebrate first Holy Communion with splendor and joy. We always genuflect when we cross in front of the tabernacle. We hold processions every year in which the Eucharist is carried in honor through the streets of a city or a community, just as any other king is honored by his subjects. We dress respectfully and elegantly when we come to Mass, because we are coming to worship and receive our Lord who will truly become present once again. We never receive Holy Communion without having been to confession, if we have committed a mortal sin, because every mortal sin is a rebellion against the very Person we receive in Holy Communion - Jesus Christ himself. Whenever we are inside the Church, we speak in a quiet tone of voice, out of respect for Christ's presence and out of courtesy towards those who wish to pray. We hold special hours of prayer and adoration of the Eucharist, to honor and thank our Lord, and to bring all our needs before him. We celebrate our Masses with beautiful music, beautiful vestments, incense, candles, and many other details that allow us to express our faith and gratitude to Christ who has loved us so much that he has decided to stay with us, really present in the Eucharist, until the end of time. All of this is part of our rich heritage as Catholic Christians, and it all flows from Christ's true presence in this sacrament.

### ***We need our Manna***

Why did Jesus decide to give us the Eucharist? He wanted us to know that he is really here, Jesus Christ is in the room. He wanted to extend his incarnation into every corner of the world, into every cranny of history. That's how much he loves us. We are human beings, body and soul, and so we need to know Jesus Christ's presence not just spiritually, but also here- and-now, in this sacrament. He knew we would need a place, a real physical place, where we could go to speak to him, heart-to-heart, in good times and bad. We also need Christ's own strength to help us fight bravely against temptations and stay faithful to God's will in our lives. Through the

Eucharist, we are mysteriously present at the very sacrifice that Jesus made on Good Friday, and so at every Mass we can unite our own sufferings and sacrifices to his. In today's First Reading, Moses reminded the Israelites of how God took care of them during their forty-year pilgrimage through the desert to the Promised Land. God fed them every day with manna from heaven - a miraculous food that kept them going. Just so, God feeds us with this bread of eternal life, so that we will grow stronger and stronger in our Christian faith, until we are strong enough to cross over into the eternal Promised Land of Heaven.

So today, let's thank him for this amazing gift, and when we receive him in Holy Communion, let's promise Jesus we will never take him for granted, as we lovingly receive and adore him.