

Corpus Christi 2009
Back to the Basics Part 2

Last week was Trinity Sunday and I used my homily for that feast day to review some of the basic elements of what Catholics believe about the Trinity, about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Today I want to do something like that again this week as we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

As I said at the masses I celebrated last week, I hope this homily wastes everyone's time. Hopefully everything I say today is stuff that everyone here already knows and agrees on. I'll be thrilled if my homily today ends up being completely unnecessary.

But I'm going to go ahead and give it because I'm not completely convinced that will be the case.

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is celebrated so that we can focus our attention on the great truth that in the Eucharist we receive the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ. In the gifts of Holy Communion Jesus Christ is really and truly present. This is a basic and a foundational Catholic teaching.

Many of you might have heard about the results of some surveys which indicated that a majority of practicing Catholics don't accept this truth, thankfully there were some serious flaws in how those surveys were conducted, but even better conducted surveys do indicate that a small but real percentage of Catholics simply do not have an adequate understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.¹

¹ A 2001 article from Commonweal Magazine discussing these surveys can be found at this link <http://tinyurl.com/mnkp8w>

The fact that anyone who regularly attends mass, the fact that anyone who received any sort of Catholic education or instruction at any point in their life, can fail to accept this teaching is a tragedy.

So as a help, and as a challenge, to anyone here who does not believe that the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and as an aid to those who do but who could use some further encouragement or instruction, or maybe some help in knowing how to better explain this truth to others, I want to say a few things about Christ's real presence in the Eucharist.

At the Last Supper Jesus said "This is my body" (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and "this is my blood" (Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:24). Not "this looks like my body", not "this symbolizes my body", not "this should remind you of my blood", but "this is".

About 20 years after that St. Paul wrote a letter to the Christians living in the Greek city of Corinth where he told them:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:23-:25

A little bit later in this same letter St. Paul goes on to say "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27), and "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor 11:29).

St. Paul is telling us that receiving communion unworthily is sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord.

How can you sin against what isn't there?

Following Jesus and following St. Paul the Church has always taught this.

What we eat in Holy Communion looks and tastes like bread, but it isn't.

What we drink looks and tastes like wine, but it isn't.

Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist. At mass we do not eat bread, we do not drink wine, we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a foundational Catholic belief, and acceptance of this truth is absolutely essential when it comes to being Catholic in any truly authentic sort of way.

It's hard to see how someone can fail to accept the truth of Christ's presence in the Eucharist and still consider themselves Catholic in any meaningful sense of the word.

God is calling upon all of us to accept with faith what he has truly given us in the Eucharist.

May we have this trust in him, may we take him at his word, and accept the reality of the great gift that we have been given, Christ's Body and Blood offered to us in the Eucharist.