

Brothers and sisters,

Our sacramental focus this week is on the Eucharist, which comes from the Greek word which means “thanksgiving”. This is one of the many beautiful things about being Catholic: we don’t merely give thanks to God once each year, but instead we offer the sacrifice of Thanksgiving each and every day! I sure hope this is at least a part of your regular Sunday worship, offering thanks to God while you’re here at Mass.

There is so much to say about the Eucharist/Holy Communion, so there will be other columns reserved for further teaching and/or review. For now, we’ll keep to our focus on the Sacrament as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.

The outward sign of Holy Communion, of course, is the appearance of bread. We know by faith that there is no more bread when the Eucharist is consecrated, but it still appears as though we are eating bread (and drinking wine). What does ordinary bread do? Well, it feeds a person and gives him/her the sustenance needed to live. This points to the deeper reality at play beneath the surface, which is the Body and Blood of Jesus feeding those who receive Communion and giving us the sustenance needed to excel in living the Christian faith. After all, Jesus says in John 6, *“Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you.”* His Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist gives us life! While it may seem like we’re only eating bread, we know that there is a far greater reality happening within our souls.

Yes, brothers and sisters, we believe that Jesus wasn’t merely speaking symbolically when he said, *“This is my body,”* and *“This is my blood of the covenant,”* at the Last Supper. Going back to John 6, we have the very strong words from Jesus quoted above, but also many other instances in that chapter, such as, *“My flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed.”* We might be tempted to think the understanding of the Eucharist is one of those sacraments that are less clearly given to us in the Gospels, but Jesus is very clear. I also will be very clear: Anyone who doesn’t have this is missing out in a tragic way.

If, then, it’s true that we consume the Flesh and Blood of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, you can already imagine the incredible grace given to us. It allows us to share oneness with Jesus (Co-union), which means sharing above all in his supernatural love for the Father and for the people around us. St. John Chrysostom said this in the fourth century: “The Eucharist is a fire that inflames us, that, like lions breathing fire, we may retire from the altar being made terrible to the devil.” Boom. We need to give thanks for this most incredible and precious Gift.

May the Lord give you his peace!
Fr. Bryan