

Belief in the real presence of God in the Eucharist is central to our Catholic faith. God is present here in this tabernacle, body, blood, soul, and divinity. That is why we pay such reverence to the sanctuary. We bow before we approach. We keep a respectful silence when we enter the church, partially out of deference to those who are praying but mostly because we are entering the presence of God. The red lamp is not a signal to show us where the tabernacle is located, it is a reminder that God is physically and spiritually here in this place and we are in His presence.

But even from the very beginning there were those who could not accept this teaching, and fell away. They left Jesus, and went back to their old ways. They understood the words of Our Lord but they found it a “hard saying.”

And Jesus let them leave; He did not call them back to explain that He was speaking symbolically or metaphorically as He had done in the past. He let His words stand. He is the Bread of Life. And the bread that He gives is His flesh for the life of the world.

Someone once said there are only two kinds of Christians in the world, Catholics and fallen away Catholics. Today, 2000 years after Christ established the Sacrament of the Eucharist, giving us the true food of His Body and Blood, there are more than 38000 denominations of fallen away Catholics.

It is understandable why this teaching is so hard to accept. We have become a people who, for the most part, need to see in order to believe.

But as Our Lord admonished St. Thomas, “blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe.” Sometimes it is necessary to surrender our intellect to our faith. When Jesus told His followers that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood if they were to have true life, many left. And Jesus turned to the twelve and asked if they were going to leave as well. Peter spoke for them all. Do you remember his response?

“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

It is unlikely that Peter understood how Christ could give us His body to eat but he was willing to surrender to God and receive this great gift.

And that is what we celebrate today, God’s great gift to us, His Body and Blood present in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

To help us surrender and believe, God has from time to time allowed visible miracles of the Eucharist to occur. Blessed Carlo Acutis documented over 100 such miracles, 5 of which have occurred in the last 26 years.

In October of 1995, on the last day of his trip to America, John Paul II was scheduled to meet with the seminarians at Saint Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore Maryland. It had been a long day and the pope was supposed to simply greet the seminarians while they stood outside on the steps. But John Paul had other ideas and proceeded through the

ranks of the young men and into the building. He headed toward the chapel to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

You can imagine the panic as the security people jumped to check all the rooms and hallways to secure the area for the safety of the pope. This included bringing in dogs that were trained to locate people. They swept the halls, offices and classrooms and then went through the chapel. When the dogs reached the tabernacle, they began to whine and point. They refused to leave until their handlers called them away. The dogs were convinced they discovered someone there.

Of course we know the person they discovered was the person of God Himself.

More recently: On October 12, 2008 in the parish church of Saint Anthony in the town of Sokóška, Poland, a consecrated host fell to the ground during communion. The priest, saw a spot on the host and presumed it was dirt and placed the host in a vasculum. A vasculum is a small container of water which is placed near the tabernacle, it is there for the clergy to cleanse their fingers after distributing communion. We have one here in our church.

When the priest went back to check on the host he saw that the spot he had presumed to be dirt had changed color, it was now red and looked much more like a blood clot.

Two scientists were called in to study the host, Professor Maria Elbieta Sobaniec-Šotowska and Professor Stanisław Sulkowski. Both

had global reputations as specialists in pathological anatomy. As a control, Professor Sulkowski was not told where the sample came from.

Both scientists reached the same conclusion, the sample they examined was neither a clot, nor blood... it was human cardiac muscle tissue (heart tissue) and it was still alive. Every Eucharistic miracle tested in the twentieth and twenty-first century has yielded the same results when examined by medical experts.

This time, due to the advanced equipment used, the scientists were able to determine that the cardiac tissue was joined to the surrounding host in an inseparable manner. It was as if the “bread” had suddenly transformed itself into “body.” The most advanced laboratory in the world with the most sophisticated equipment, could not artificially recreate such a thing.

Even more recently a similar miracle, with similar results, occurred in Legnica, Poland, on Christmas Day in 2013.

Jesus promised us He would remain with us unto the end of the age. The Eucharist is how he does this. He is here present with us always, not just spiritually but physically. It is not a symbol or a token it is a Sacrament, a mystery of Christ’s real presence.

We are so accustomed to the Eucharist that it is easy for us to forget that two miracles occur at every mass. First, during the words of consecration, the substance of the bread and wine are changed,

transubstantiated, into the body and blood of Christ. Christ becomes truly present in them.

Second, although the substance of the bread and wine has changed, they retain their appearance. They still look like bread and wine but under that appearance Jesus is truly present.

Through the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus gave us His own body and blood offered for our salvation. It was necessary for Him to do this in order to establish the New Covenant and fulfill the promises made to us by God.

Covenant is really what we are talking about today. Today we tend to think in terms of contracts. But where contracts are an exchange of goods and services, a covenant is an exchange of persons. A contract builds business relationships, but a covenant builds families.

When Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the Israelites, he was symbolizing God's desire to make them His family, His blood relations.

In the New Covenant Jesus elevates and transforms this symbol into an extra-ordinary reality. In the New Covenant we truly become one with His Body and Blood. When we have made ourselves worthy to receive communion, the grace imparted to us allows us to become more and more like Jesus, and more and more pleasing to God the Father. Through this Sacrament we receive God into ourselves and become one with Him. Sharing in the Eucharist is the highest point of union with

the Lord. Jesus told us, “he who eats my flesh abides in me and I in him.” (John 6:57) The nourishment we receive from the Eucharist empowers us to live ever more completely in the likeness of the Son.

This is what the word communion means, “to be one with.” St. Paul tells us that if we receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord in a unworthy manner, we put our souls at risk. This is why there is so much controversy over those who publicly reject the teachings of God, on subjects such as abortion, and euthanasia, and yet present themselves for Holy Communion.

A survey undertaken last year revealed that 70% of Catholics do not believe the teaching I have just explained, the teaching of the Church that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. The United States conference of bishops is meeting this month, and they are divided over whether or not this is the best time to promulgate a teaching document on the subject. But without it, without constant and definitive teaching, from all of us who know and accept what God has revealed to us through His Church, it is no wonder that so many of the faithful are confused.

At every mass, we re-present the sacrifice of the cross. We make it present. We are not simply remembering something that happened long ago, the sacrifice on the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are the same event, it is only offered in different ways.

We are consecrated to God as a living sacrifice. We are called to pledge our lives to Him and to renew our promise to live by the words of His

covenant and to be His servants. “All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.”

Two hundred years ago a Spanish lieutenant arrived in this valley. He saw the splendor of God’s creation in the land around him. Everywhere he looked there was wildlife as far as the eye could see. They all lived here undisturbed and the beauty of the valley moved Lieutenant Moraga to name it after the most beautiful thing he could think of, he called it Sacramento, Spanish for the Blessed Sacrament.

We live in a valley that reminds us of God’s love for us every day. May Jesus in the Eucharist always be the very center and heart of our church, the center and heart of our faith, the center and heart of our parish, and the center and heart of the lives of each of us.