



Corpus Christi: The Solemnity of Body and Blood of Christ

Second Sunday after Pentecost

On the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, we give special honor to Jesus, truly present in the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar. As Catholics, we worship the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, both during Mass and outside of Mass. We are encouraged to spend time in prayer before the Lord in the Eucharist. Many parishes offer regular exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance. We may also choose to visit the church at other times to adore the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle.

Why does Jesus give himself to us as food and drink?

Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because he loves us. God's whole plan for our salvation is directed to our participation in the life of the Trinity, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our sharing in this life begins with our Baptism, when by the power of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ, thus becoming adopted sons and daughters of the Father. It is strengthened and increased in Confirmation. It is nourished and deepened through our partic

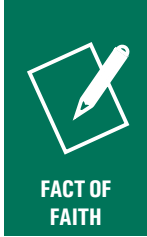


Pope Francis leads Benediction outside the Basilica of St. Mary Major on the feast of Corpus Christi in Rome May 26, 2016 (CNS/Paul Haring)

ipation in the Eucharist. By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist we become united to the person of Christ through his humanity. . . . In being united to the humanity of Christ we are at the same time united to his divinity. Our mortal and corruptible natures are transformed by being joined to the source of life. . . .

By being united to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are drawn up into the eternal relationship of love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As Jesus is the eternal Son of God by nature, so

we become sons and daughters of God by adoption through the sacrament of Baptism. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (Chrismation), we are temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and by his indwelling we are made holy by the gift of sanctifying grace. The ultimate promise of the Gospel is that we will share in the life of the Holy Trinity. The Fathers of the Church called this participation in the divine life "divinization" (theosis). In this we see that God does not merely send us good things from on high; instead, we are brought up into the inner life of God, the communion among



the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of the Eucharist (which means “thanksgiving”) we give praise and glory to God for this sublime gift.

When the bread and wine become the Body of Christ, why do they still look and taste like bread and wine?

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the glorified Christ becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine in a way that is unique, a way that is uniquely suited to the Eucharist. In the Church’s

traditional theological language, in the act of consecration during the Eucharist the “substance” of the bread and wine is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the “substance” of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the “accidents” or appearances of bread and wine remain. “Substance” and “accident” are here used as philosophical terms that have been adapted by great medieval theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas in their efforts to understand and explain the faith. Such terms are used to convey the fact that what appears to be bread and wine in every way (at the level

of “accidents” or physical attributes—that is, what can be seen, touched, tasted, or measured) in fact is now the Body and Blood of Christ (at the level of “substance” or deepest reality). This change at the level of substance from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is called “transubstantiation.” According to Catholic faith, we can speak of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist because this transubstantiation has occurred (cf. Catechism, no. 1376).



The introduction of this article is taken from the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers, Revised Edition* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007) 146.

The articles “Why does Jesus give himself to us as food and drink?” and “When the bread and wine become the Body of Christ, why do they still look and taste like bread and wine?” are excerpts from *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers*, which was produced by the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and was approved by the full body of bishops at their June 2001 General Meeting.

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