



# The Real Presence: Part 2

At the end of the Bread of Life discourse in John 6, we see the crowds leave in droves over Jesus' teaching. When Jesus asked His apostles, "Do you also want to leave?" Peter, speaking as he so often did for the Twelve, answered with great honesty: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of everlasting life." (Jn. 6:67-68)

Peter was basically saying, "Jesus, we have no idea what you are talking about... We have no idea how we are supposed to eat your flesh and drink your blood... We don't get it... but we trust in you."

The Apostles must have talked about it amongst themselves later. They must have wondered: what is this all about? But they always came back to the last line of Peter's response to our Lord.. Jesus has "the words of everlasting life." He is the Son of God. We don't get it, but where else are we going to go? Lord, we believe even though we don't understand because we believe in you.

Fast forward to the Last Supper and we find that this wasn't something abominable; it wasn't cannibalism. "This," He had said, "is my Body." It had been bread, it still looked like bread – tasted, felt, smelled like bread – but it was not bread any more. What they received was the Body and Blood of Christ. That same Eucharist they received from the sacred hands of our Lord is what we receive at every, single, Catholic Mass.

How can this be? Well, the Lord is reasonable. Since He desires that we actually receive His flesh and blood, He has made it so this can be done in a manner that is not repulsive to human sensibilities. So, God does what He does best: He works a miracle. At every Catholic Mass a miracle occurs on the altar by which bread and wine cease being bread and wine, while maintaining the same appearance so that it is then reasonable for us to consume them.

This is the reality which the Church points to by the teaching of transubstantiation. We hold a metaphysical, sacramental worldview. This is, in small part, to say that we hold that every thing has a substance - an essence - that is what a thing really is. Substance is deeper than what can be sensed by outward appearances alone. These outward appearances, instead, are referred to as "accidents". We each have substance and accidents. So, too, do things like bread and wine.

We can bake various kinds of bread. Yet, despite the differences in appearance, taste, smell, or consistency, we know them all to be bread. Likewise, a person may change a vast assortment of their outward appearances. Yet, we know that person to still be that person. If we pause and honestly reflect on our lives we can recognize, even if only intuitively, that there is something in each of us, and in the physical items around us, that transcends mere outward appearances alone yet is integral to our being. This is substance.

Transubstantiation is a Latin word that simply means that there is a change in substance; that at a Catholic Mass the substance of the bread and wine are changed into that of the Body and Blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the hands of a Catholic priest.

What the bread and wine really are change to what Jesus really is. While they may still look, feel, and taste the same, after consecration it is no longer true to call them bread and wine, for that is no longer what they really are.

Now, if you're not a believer you might be thinking, "You're trying to tell me that there is some kind of mystical slight of hand going on? It looks like the thing it was but it really is something else?"

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And if you are a believer you might be asking yourself, "How in the world am I supposed to sell someone on this? I have faith, but how do I make someone who doesn't believe understand that I am not crazy for believing this, let alone appreciate it?"

Now, in most cases, the accidents - or appearances - of a thing reveal the substance of that same thing. For the most part, appearance and reality coincide.

But experience tells us that there are times when they don't. The stars in the night sky are a good example. We look up into a beautiful starry sky and we trust that what we are seeing is actually there...right? Wrong. We are actually looking at the past. Given the amount of time it takes for the light of a star to get to our eyes on earth we are actually seeing where that star once was.

Another more basic example is someone who gives a bad first impression. They may seem like a jerk, but in reality they're not. Maybe they just had a death in the family, lost their job or got into a car accident...or maybe they're just having a bad day. They really are a wonderful person but they seem otherwise in that moment. Things aren't always what they seem.

So, here is the thing: Jesus Christ shared Himself to be the Son of the living God in the Gospels, who was foreshadowed in the Old Testament. We believe that all things that exist came to be through Him. Jesus commissioned His Apostles, and their successors - and by virtue of this their priests - so that the bread and wine consecrated by the Catholic priest at Mass truly become His Body and His Blood; so we can truly "do this in remembrance" of Him as Jesus commanded.

If the creative and all-powerful Word of God, who in the beginning simply spoke a Word and it was made from nothing, says that His flesh and blood really are true food and drink - that He is really present in the Eucharist - then He is. Ultimately, belief in the Real Presence is dependent on belief in Jesus Christ. Do we take Him at His word?

As Catholics, we believe that the same Jesus who walked the earth 2,000 years ago - who healed the sick and raised the dead, who opened blind eyes and deaf ears, who forgave sins and preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God - is as present at every Catholic Mass in the Eucharist as He was 2,000 years ago when He walked the earth.

The Eucharist is not a symbol nor a metaphor; a mere reenactment of the Last Supper. Jesus isn't present alongside the bread and wine at Mass, nor is Jesus simply "spiritually present". The Eucharist is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. In it, Jesus' saving sacrifice on the cross becomes present once again (re-present) here and now for us. It is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that "I am with you always, until the end of the age". (Mt. 28:20)

That is why the Second Vatican Council stated that "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life." (LG, 11) It is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith." (1327)

What can be more important on Sunday than Mass? Because in the Eucharist, heaven truly touches down to earth and we are united with the one, true God, who is over all and through all and in all: Jesus Christ our Lord. (CCC 1326, 1331, Eph 4:6)

This is good news - amazing news! Let's not keep the news to ourselves.