

Corpus Christi and Real Presence

June 6, 2021, Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)

Gospel of Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Fr. John

Most of us have probably heard the story of the little girl, who, when her mother put her to bed one night and then turned out the light and left closing the bedroom door, began to cry. When the mother, re-entered the room to find what the matter was, her daughter told her that she was frightened to be alone in the dark. Her mother then tried to assure her that she was not alone but that Jesus was there. The little girl replied, 'I know that, but I want someone here with skin on!'

This might be a fitting story on a Sunday which the Church has designated as the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, commonly referred to as Corpus Christi.

Just as the little girl needed her mother's physical presence to comfort her, so we are also in need of feeling Christ's presence especially in times of great distress.

As Catholics we have always had a strong tradition of believing Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. The Mass itself has centred around the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Further to this, various devotional rites like Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction have grown up around reverencing these elements.

However, I sometimes wonder about the way many Catholics approach an understanding of Christ's 'real' presence.

Several years ago a poll was taken among U.S. Catholics that claimed that only about 30% believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Now, at first, that might seem quite disconcerting. But then it begged the question about how the word, 'real' was interpreted and understood.

The debate on what's 'really real' has been contested countless times over the centuries by theologians, philosophers, scientists, psychologists, and mystics among others. And I suppose if someone were to ask you that question, you would have your own understanding. Is the Eucharist simply an **object** of pious devotion?

The little girl in the story, was not satisfied simply being told that Jesus was present. She needed the physical assurance of her mother's loving presence.

For the last fifteen months, since the present Covid pandemic began, all of us, to one degree or another have had to deal with the lack of 'in-person' encounters and gatherings. That lack of physical presence has resulted in an isolation which, in some cases, resembled something like the solitary confinement that you might find in a prison. And despite the technologies that were available to at least some of us via Zoom meetings or live streaming, there was something missing. And while the wonders of this 'virtual reality' are remarkable and it may satisfy much of our intellectual and rational needs, yet it didn't fulfill our social and spiritual needs as human beings.

For the first 1200 or so years of Christianity, people didn't really question the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was in the realm of a spiritual mystery something beyond that of human comprehension and yet something that could touch the human heart and penetrate the deepest levels of our being. Our need to be loved and to be assured that we are not alone.

Maybe in the light of the news this week of all those unmarked graves of children in residential schools - children who were taken from their families and forced to live in an institutional environment, we might come to realize that people will not recognize the presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine if they have not experienced him in the love and concern of the community in which they live.

It might be said that to the extent that we do not love another, as Christ has taught us, we do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharistic bread and wine either.

The context of the Last Supper, as recorded in the gospels, was the Passover meal that Jesus and his disciples were commemorating.

It involved food and drink - symbols of hospitality.

It involved people coming together.

It involved words that underlined the significance of what was taking place.

And it involved being sent out to practice what was celebrated.

All these elements are tied into Christ being present to us in **all** the levels of reality which we experience.

Ultimately, what it all comes down to is not some physical, philosophic, or psychological analysis of consecrated bread and wine but a deeply shared conviction that where two or more are gathered in Christ's name - he is indeed present - with skin on!