

## **Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ - 2020**

Dt 8:2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Cor 10:16-17; Jn 6:51-58

We all have the experience of our senses fooling us. We have been the victim of optical illusions, we hear things wrongly, we get sensations of something crawling on our skin, but there is nothing there. Our senses tell us what is there, but they can be fooled and give us wrong information. Some people will remember the TV commercials for Parkay margarine where the tub of spread spoke to people eating it saying “Butter.” Whatever it was made out of (which was not butter), its taste and texture was so much like butter it would fool some people’s senses. Today it is possible to drink something that looks, smells, and tastes like orange juice, only to find out that through advanced food science, there is no part of an actual orange in it! This is similar to what we experience after the bread and wine on the altar are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus - it still looks like bread and wine, tastes like bread and wine, feels like bread a wine. But Jesus tells us very clearly and without question, this is not what it is anymore - these elements keep the same molecular structure as bread and wine and so make our sense organs send our brain the same information that bread and wine does - yet it is actually and mysteriously something else. Why does God do this? Let’s look at two of Jesus’ statements from the Gospel.

STATEMENT 1: *My flesh is true food, my blood is true drink.* What did Jesus mean when he said this? Some people think he must have been talking metaphorically - “Well when you receive the Eucharist, it helps you to mentally connect to God *as if it* was his physical presence.” or “It is just a *symbol* of Jesus’ body and blood.” or “Eucharist is nothing more than us sharing a meal in unity.” Although the Eucharist does help us to move our minds to God, and it is symbolic of the unity of the church, and it is a meal of community - when Jesus spoke these words it is clear that he was telling us it is something else as well. We know that he meant “body and blood” *literally* (and not metaphorically or symbolically) because of what happens in the passage after the reading we heard today. We are told that the disciples said: *This saying is hard ... who can accept it, and as a result many of the disciples returned to their former lives and no longer followed him.* To make them say “who can accept this” and then have a group of them decide that they can’t follow him anymore and leave, gives us the indication that those that heard him knew he was speaking *literally* about this body and blood - his physical essence. St. Paul in our second reading reassures all of us who struggle at times to believe this mystery: *Is not the*

*bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ, is not the cup a sharing in the blood of Christ?*

Paul perhaps had to say this to help reassure those, who like many of us, believe this mystery in a deep place in their heart, but their brain gets in the way and points out the mismatch between the faith in the heart and what the body's senses tell us.

STATEMENT 2: *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.* Jesus gives us his physical presence to consume so that Jesus becomes a part of us - like food becomes part of the tissues in our body as it is incorporated in our body. We become more and more united to the Body of Christ when we actually take his physical presence inside our own bodies. This is something that we cannot do outside the Eucharist and it is one of the great reasons to come to receive the Eucharist as often as we are able. We are able to encounter God in a unique way: a physical presence that we can touch. We are able to take the physical presence of God within us in a way that it permeates our whole body and soul. Since seeing and tasting this physical presence would be distasteful and difficult for us, Jesus fools our senses so we can receive him without distraction. On top of this, the illusion challenges us to move closer to accepting Jesus in our minds as we struggle with this mystery over and over again. A thing like this that calls us to reach towards Jesus in faith helps to strengthen that faith, and build our relationship with Jesus.

Just as we heard in the first reading that God gave manna as food for the journey of the Israelites, Jesus gives us a new type of food - his own body and blood that sustains us on the journey that we are undergoing as we travel to our inherited kingdom in heaven. What a great gift! Instead of a food that gives physical energy to the body that will one day die, this food gives us nourishment for our soul - and a nourished soul gives us the strength to encounter all that faces us in life - what's more, it gives us a greater hunger and a thirst for God.

To paraphrase St. Thomas Aquinas speaking about the mystery of the Eucharist:

Hidden presence of God, whom I worship and receive,  
This outward shape and form secretly contains you, human and divine,  
But as much as I try, my body cannot sense you there.

Sight, touch, and taste - these can be deceived  
But I believe whatever God the Son has said, he would not deceive me  
As I contemplate your hidden presence, grant what I thirst for -  
To behold your glory in heaven for evermore.