

This saying is too hard; who can accept it? (Jn 6:60)

Last year, a new study led by the Pew Research Center revealed that only one-third of Catholics in United States agree with the Church that the Most Holy Eucharist is actually the Body and Blood of Christ. And in words of Bishop Robert Barron, “this should be a wake-up call to all of us in the Church -bishops, priests, religious, lay people, catechists, parents, everyone- that we need to pick up our game when it comes to communicating even the most basic doctrine of the Church.”

Indeed, this is a very alarming and serious issue, since this is one of the most fundamental truths about our faith: that we are a Eucharistic Church. And this dogma of our faith is not an optional doctrine for us to believe. For as the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* from the Second Vatican Council states, the Most Holy Eucharist is “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.” (*LG* no. 11) So, the question that comes up is, what has happened? How did we reach to this point where only one third of the Catholic Population of this Country believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist?

From the perspective of Bishop Barron, which I adhere to, this is a clear sign of our failure in Catechesis; on the passing on of our faith to the new generations. The teaching on this Sacrament is clear: “At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.” (CCC 1323) In this sense, what we celebrate in every Mass is what Jesus has commanded us to do through the apostles. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “...at the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood.” (CCC 1333) So faithful to the Lord's command “...the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion: *He took bread...*, *He took the cup filled with wine...*” (CCC Ibid), and in a way surpassing our understanding, the material sign of bread and wine, become the Body and Blood of Christ.

This sacrament, then, is not merely a symbol, as many people nowadays think. As it is attested in the Gospels, the same Jesus is the one who said literally to his

disciples, *this is my body, this is my blood* -same words that we hear the priest repeats at every Mass- not a symbol or a representation of them. For this reason, the author of the fourth Gospel -St. John- reports that after Jesus delivered what we know as the bread of life discourse (Cf. Jn 6:22-71) where Jesus clearly states “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (Jn 6:53) many left him, for it was hard for them to believe (Cf. Jn 6:60).

It is the same Jesus who tells us that the sacrament of his body and blood is not just a symbol but a sacramental reality. After the priest pronounces the same words used by Jesus at the last supper, *this is my body, this is my blood*, what our senses perceive as bread and wine, become the body and blood, the soul and divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In other words, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained under the eucharistic species of bread and wine. (Cf. CCC 1374) So, this is what we have to teach, what we have to remember ourselves and pass onto the future generations. And it is true, as it happened to the same Jesus. Many will find this doctrine hard to believe, but we have to do our part, and present the truth as it is.

So, if all this is a teaching that comes directly from the Gospel, from Jesus himself, why are there so many brothers and sisters who don't believe it? I think St. Augustine give us a very good answer to this: “If you believe what you like in the Gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.” Every time I heard someone is having surgery, I see a great act of faith from the part of the patient who places his life in the hands of the surgeon. Every time someone takes an airplane, I see also a great act of faith from the part of the traveler who places his life in the hands of the pilot. Why then we cannot believe in the teachings of the One who promises eternal life; in the One who is the way, the truth, and the life; in God?

It is time, then, to let God be God. It is time to recognize him and trust in his lead, in his teachings, and his promises, not only those who are easy to accept, not only the one-half that is nice, but the fullness of the truth, which for us is not simply an idea, nor a set of teachings, but a person: Jesus Christ. So, next time we come to Mass or find ourselves in front of the tabernacle, let us remember that we are before not a mere symbol, but before the real presence of the Lord of lords, the King of kings, your savior, the savior of the world. The way we behave interiorly and exteriorly will be not only a sign of our belief in the real presence of Jesus in this Most Sacred Sacrament, but also a way to help others to recognize that this

sacrament is not only a symbol or representation, but the real presence of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

Vivat Jesus!

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