

Real Presence in the Eucharist

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The subject of the Real Presence in the Eucharist came up during a lunchtime conversation. I am always a bit surprised to hear Catholics question what to me is a central tenet of our faith. I am reminded that unity of faith may be more an ideal than a reality. The question was left unanswered, but caused my reflection on what I really believe, and why, and what difference it makes in my ministry.

Some weeks ago I sat with my second-grade catechist to review plans for the First Eucharist Retreat that was coming up. She had been studying Fr. Larry Mick's book on worship during Lent, and she said, "You know, I just don't think they get it!" I laughed and responded somewhat spontaneously, "I don't think any of us really get it!"

On Holy Thursday, as we celebrated the institution of the Eucharist at the Mass of the Lord's Supper, I found myself gazing at the mural on the wall above the altar, a representation of the Trinity present at the Crucifixion. The image of God the Father is represented by the old, bearded man (an image I don't particularly favor), who is surrounded by a glowing circle of light. For the first time I saw the image of a host radiating its light from the Father, through the Holy Spirit, to the body of Christ on the

Cross. The image reached out to me with a power that invited me into the mystery, not only of the event (the Crucifixion) or the idea of a triune God, but of the ongoing Real Presence of Jesus Christ in our lives every day through the Eucharist.

A Dominican sister who works in our region recently commented, “You know, we get so busy with the work, we don’t have time for the Gospel!” As we busy ourselves with plans for celebrations of First Communion, May Crowning, and end-of-year details, how often do we take the time to reflect on this most sacred of mysteries, Christ’s presence in the bread and wine we receive? Do I, like Cleopas and his friend, recognize him in the breaking of the bread? Does the reality of the Real Presence in the Eucharist empower my life and ministry?
