

## Homily Corpus Christi Yr A 2023: Belief in Real Presence a Test of Faith

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In our first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, Moses speaks of how God tested the faith of the Israelite people as they wandered through the desert for 40 years.

How did he test them? He fed them with manna - bread from heaven, which they found on the surface of the ground each day.

The Israelite people had to put their faith in God's word, that He would sustain them with daily bread for 40 years. And God was faithful to His word.

In the Gospel today, from ch. 6 of John's Gospel – called the "Bread of Life" discourse – Jesus makes clear that the manna which fed the Israelites was a symbolic foreshadowing of the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus says: "I am the *living* bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

By this teaching, Jesus was testing the faith of His disciples. They had already been with Him for three years. Jesus had taught them many things, but this was the *real test* of their faith.

St. John the Apostle tells us that upon hearing this, they ask: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus responds: "Amen, amen [truly, truly] 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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

We can well imagine how this sounded when they heard this teaching of Jesus for the first time: to put it bluntly, it sounded incredible.

In fact, almost all of Jesus' disciples then walked away. They would follow Him no more.

Was Jesus only speaking symbolically here? No. Those who walked away clearly understood that Jesus was speaking literally; and this is precisely why they left Him. They would no longer be His disciples.

And Jesus let them go. Why? Because He was speaking literally; He meant what He said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood; and His words, which we can consider a prophecy, were fulfilled at the Last Supper, when Jesus took bread, blessed it, and said, "Take and eat, this is my body"; and then took wine and said, "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The same blood that Jesus shed on the cross on Good Friday, He gave His Apostles to drink at the Last Supper.

The Church, infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit who came at Pentecost, has always believed that Jesus was speaking literally when He said, "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven"; and when He said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood if we want to be raised up on the Last Day, in bodies glorified.

How do we explain our belief in this great mystery, which many people who call themselves Christians, deny? That the bread and wine, after the words of consecration said by the priest, by the power of the word of God, working through the priest acting *in persona Christi* (in the Person of Christ), truly become Christ's Body and Blood – and not just a symbol of His Body and Blood?

We explain this great mystery of our faith, this greatest of miracles – the changing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus that happens at every Mass – through the doctrine of *transubstantiation*: the *substance* of the bread and wine change into Christ's Body and Blood, while the *appearance* of the bread and wine remain – which allows us to receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

And in order to strengthen our belief in this great mystery, God has, many times over the centuries, performed an additional miracle: the appearance of the bread or wine has also visibly changed into flesh and blood.

We call these events Eucharistic miracles. The first and most well-known Eucharistic miracle took place in Lanciano, Italy, back in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, at the Church of St. Longinus (the Roman centurion who thrust his spear through Christ's side and Heart).

During Mass, the priest, whose faith in the Eucharist was weak, doubted Christ's Real Presence while saying the words of consecration. The Host visibly turned to flesh as he held it in his hands, and the wine visibly turned into blood.

The Host turned flesh and blood in the chalice were preserved in the church and venerated by the faithful ever since - you can go and see them today; or you can do a google search and see it and read about it.

Fast-forward 12 centuries. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bishop permitted scientific experiments to be performed. A small slice of the host turned flesh, and a sample of the blood, were tested, by scientists from the World Health Organization, without telling from where the samples came.

The results: the flesh was found to be the myocardium, the middle and thickest layer of the heart wall. Scientists could tell from the heart sample that the man's body had undergone great trauma (e.g., scourging).

Most astounding of all, the myocardium was living flesh, as if cut out of living human being – even though this was more than 1,200 years later. The Host-turned-flesh was not hermetically sealed; it should have lost all its properties of living flesh, and disintegrated over time.

Examination of the blood revealed that it had all the qualities of freshly shed blood – which normally breaks down in a short time if exposed to the open air; and the blood type was AB – which matched the blood found on the Shroud of Turin, the burial cloth of Jesus.

Back in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the miracle took place, the blood in the chalice had coagulated, into five globules. The scientists who tested the blood found that the weight of the globules of blood was the same, whether they weighed one, or three, or all five – again, defying any scientific explanation.

Another famous Eucharistic miracle is that at the Church of St. Stephen in Santarem, Portugal, near Fatima.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a woman with marital problems consulted a witch, who told her she would help her if she would bring to her a consecrated host. The woman after receiving communion, spit out the Host into a handkerchief, but while walking to the witch's home, noticed that the handkerchief was bloody. The Host had turned to flesh. The next day she brought the Host turned to flesh to the local bishop, who ordered it placed in a monstrance in the church, where it remains to this day.

I saw up close this Eucharistic miracle on three occasions.

Still another Eucharistic miracle took place in a church in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1996. That Host turned to flesh, and was preserved in the church for a few years; then it likewise sent off to a laboratory to be tested, without telling the scientists its origin.

The test results were similar to the Eucharistic miracle at Lanciano, Italy: the flesh was found to be heart tissue from the myocardium, and the heart showed signs of severe trauma to the body.

Also, the tests showed that the flesh was living flesh, as if cut out of living man – and this was more than three years after the Host had turned to flesh.

And like the miracle at Lanciano, the Host-turned-flesh was not hermetically sealed; it should have disintegrated over time.

One of the scientists who performed the experiment was so astounded that he converted to the Catholic faith.

Significantly, in the Eucharistic miracles when the Host has visibly turned to flesh, and scientific tests were performed, all reveal that the flesh is from the heart – we believe, the Heart of Our Lord.

Why might this be? I think it's because the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the most perfect symbol of Jesus Christ's love for us: both divine and human love, because He is both God and man in one divine Person.

On this coming Friday, the Friday after the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, based upon the request that Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1675.

In what is known as the "Great Revelation" of June, 1675, Our Lord uttered these famous words to St. Margaret Mary:

*Behold this Heart, Which has loved men so much, that It has spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming Itself, in order to testify to them Its love; and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude by reason of their irreverence and sacrileges, and by the coldness and neglect which they show Me **in this Sacrament of Love.** (Emphasis added.)*

What is the Sacrament of Love to which Jesus refers? The Most Holy Eucharist. With these words Jesus reveals to us the marvelous truth that **His Sacred Heart is in this Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar**; and further, and that His Heart is offended because of the ingratitude, irreverence and sacrileges He receives in this Sacrament of His Love.

Jesus is always present in the tabernacle, waiting for us to worship and adore Him in this Most Blessed Sacrament. And so many people fail to show their love of Jesus, which reveals, I think, a lack of faith.

Many years ago I read a story about Mahatma Gandhi, the former leader of India. He met with a group of Catholics, who were trying to persuade him to convert to the Catholic faith, and to belief in the Eucharist.

After listening very patiently to these Catholics tell him about the miracle of the Eucharist, and how Jesus is really Present there, in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, Ghandi responded in these words: *“I would very much like to believe what you tell me. But I do not believe that you Catholics believe what you say you believe about Jesus in the Eucharist. You see, if I really believed that the Eucharist is Jesus, my Lord and my God, I would crawl on my belly to church every day to worship and adore him.”*

These words from a pagan should move our hearts to a deeper devotion to Our Lord’s Real Presence in the Eucharist; they should move us to spend time in worship and adoration of Jesus, in conversation with Our Eucharistic Lord, heart to Heart, especially when the Jesus in the Eucharist is exposed on our altars.