



Exploring the presence of Christ both inside and outside the Mass

Prior to His ascension to the right hand of the Father, Jesus makes us a beautiful promise: “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Since that time, the Church finds Jesus in the midst of His believers, in the proclamation of His word, and in the action of the Sacraments. But She encounters Him most fully in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Jesus’ Eucharistic presence is called “real”—a term that doesn’t imply that His other existences with us are somehow “unreal,” but “to indicate presence *par excellence*, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man” (Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 39). In other words, by the power of God, the priest’s words over the bread and wine at Mass change the substance of these elements into the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus. Unlike the other presences of Christ in the Mass, however, the Eucharistic presence of Jesus remains long after the Mass has ended.

People are present to one another in many ways: in thought, in memory, in bodily proximity, in sympathy. So too with Jesus: His presence in our midst is as real as any other. What a comfort that He remains with us as He promised! For centuries, His saints and faithful have had Christ as a real companion on their journey to the Promised Land.

Questions for reflection:

1. Consider Jesus’ promise to be with us until the end of time. How do you encounter Christ’s presence in your life, especially during Mass?
2. How would you explain to a friend or family member (in your own words, but informed by the Scriptures and the Church’s teaching) the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass and outside of Mass?
3. Pew Study research suggests that 69% of Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. What do you think are some of the biggest obstacles to holding this belief?

Ideas:

1. Consider beginning or joining a study group that learns and prays about Jesus’ Real Presence.
2. Review and renew how the demeanor, dress, and actions of both ministers and laity can express belief (or unbelief) in the Real Presence at Mass.
3. Participate in occasions for Eucharistic adoration or Eucharistic processions to foster belief in the Real Presence.

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Fostering a personal relationship with the Eucharistic Lord

Do you believe Jesus wants a deep, personal relationship of love with you? Do you believe He is at the door of your heart at this moment, and at every moment, longing for you to be united with Him?

Place your name at the beginning of this sentence from the Gospel of John: “[Name], as the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in My love” (John 15:9). Be assured that Jesus means that message for *you* as He declares that He is the Vine and we are the branches. So emphatic is He that in the space of ten short verses He repeats “remain in my love,” or “remain in me,” *seven times*. Notice that He doesn’t ask us to remain *with* Him, but rather to remain *in* Him, indicating the closest possible union. In His Divine nature, Jesus is infinitely capable of entering into deep, one-on-one communion with every single person who has ever lived, or will ever live, all at the same time.

Speaking of Communion, it is in the Eucharist that this invitation is profoundly fulfilled. Indeed, in chapter six of this same Gospel, Jesus declares: “Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood *remains in Me* and I in Him” (John 6:56). We have all heard that passage multiple times at Mass, but have we let it really sink in? It should make our hearts burn with joyful longing!

To strengthen our faith that it is truly the Body of Christ that we receive in Holy Communion, Jesus has worked extraordinary Eucharistic miracles over the centuries, turning the consecrated host into literal flesh and blood. Some of the most striking examples have happened in our own day – in Argentina, Poland, Mexico. In every case, scientific analysis has determined the flesh to be heart tissue, with the rare blood type AB (the same as that found on the Shroud of Turin). In addition, the flesh has continued to exhibit the properties of *living* tissue months and even years after the miracle first occurred, a fact that science is utterly unable to explain.

Is it not clear what Jesus is telling us here? He is saying, “I give you My very Heart, pierced on the Cross and poured out for you. Receive Me, join My Heart to yours.” Let this be our meditation each time we receive Him in Holy Communion. Dear Jesus, *remain in us*, and help us to *remain in You!*

Questions for reflection:

The late Pope Benedict XVI said in one of his Wednesday Audiences: “Faith is first and foremost a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, it is having an experience of His closeness, His friendship and His love.”

1. How would you describe your current relationship with Jesus, and what might you do to nurture it? Consider how you have developed and deepened other relationships in your life.
2. Do you do anything in particular to prepare yourself to receive Holy Communion at Mass and to give thanks afterwards? What might you do?

Ideas:

1. Take time to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, whether at one of the adoration chapels around the diocese (see diolc.org/adoration), or before the tabernacle in your parish church.
2. Make a habit of praying to prepare your heart to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, and of praying in thanksgiving afterwards. For some suggested prayers, visit diolc.org/eucharist/pray.