

The Body and Blood of Christ

As Catholics we believe that Jesus is really and personally present to us in the broken bread and shared cup of the Eucharist. And although we believe that Christ is present in the Scriptures, the assembly and the ministers of the Church, we hold that Christ's presence under the form of bread and wine is one filled with the greatest intimacy and uniqueness.

The Eucharist is not intimate and unique because it is magic. It's not intimate and unique because we gaze upon the elements. The Eucharist is intimate and unique because earthly signs are transformed by God's love, and are consumed in faith. As we eat and drink these elements Christ becomes part of us, and we come alive in Christ.

In the fifth century Saint Augustine taught his people that if they truly loved the Eucharist they would become what they eat. The same is true for us today. By receiving into our hands the bread—blessed and broken, the cup—poured and shared, we say “Amen” to becoming the same in Christ: blessed, broken, poured out, and shared in love. We commune with God and God with us in the Eucharist so that just as earthly gifts are transformed into Christ so through us will be the entire world, and all things in it.

There is a huge and important difference between grace and magic. One is a trick for show. The other is the power of love, which expresses itself in faith, hope, and service.

In a profound poem French Jesuit Didier Rimaud challenges those of us who love the Eucharist to see it linked to the liberation begun in the Exodus, consummated in the Resurrection and working in our world today.

In remembrance of you,
We take the bread of Easter in our hands,
This Bread do we consume:
It does no longer taste of bitter herbs,
It is the bread of a land promised us
where we shall be set free.

In remembrance of you,
We take the wine of Easter at our feast,
This wine do we hold dear.
It does no longer taste of bitter springs,
nor of dark salty pools.
It is the wine of land promised us
where we shall be made whole.

In remembrance of you,
From exile we return.
In remembrance of you,
We walk across the sea!

No wonder the early Christians called the Body and Blood of Christ, ‘food for the journey’. May this Eucharist strengthen and embolden us to help God liberate and transform the world through how we spend our lives and share our faith.

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