

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The best traditions in the Church have always been very careful in the language they use about how Jesus is present in the Eucharist. We are not cannibals. We are not eating Jesus' liver, brain and bones.

In the Catechism when it speaks of the Eucharistic real presence, it never refers to "Jesus" but always to "Christ." The distinction matters. The Eucharist is a Sacrament of Easter. It is the glorified, risen Christ who is wholly and truly present under the form of bread and wine at the Eucharist.

Popular piety and legends that speak too explicitly about the physicality of the Eucharist have not helped us have sensible thinking. As a Catholic I believe that Christ, raised by God from the dead, is truly and personally present to me in the Eucharist. How—is a question that misses the point of the gift.

Chapter six of John's Gospel is a discourse on the Eucharist. It is also, and at the same time, a discourse about Jesus' passion and death and our mission to follow in his way. For Jesus, the new Moses, not only gives bread to the people, but also in his passion, death and resurrection he gives us himself. This is why the Church has always linked the events at Easter with the celebration of Eucharist.

Why have we been given this unique gift? The Eucharist is not meant to be a feast for a privileged few. It's not a private devotion. It's not meant to be something that only assures us of our own particular salvation. It is meant to be something that empowers all Christians to go out and transform the world with love and goodness for Christ's sake.

The Church has always linked what we do *away* from the Eucharist with what we celebrate at it. This doesn't mean that all of us can rush out and feed the world's poor. It does mean that most of us can assist other groups or people who do precisely that. And it does mean that when we think about who we will vote for as political leaders, we ask about their platform in relation to those in our country and world who are suffering the most. The former General of the Jesuits, Fr Pedro Arrupe once said, "If there is hunger anywhere in the world, then our celebration of the Eucharist is somehow incomplete everywhere in the world."

Sometimes we can think of the Eucharist as a magical act. Jesus counters such a notion in today's gospel when he tells us that he gives us himself "for the life of the world." The Eucharist does not turn us into cannibals; it's meant to make us radicals, radically committed to all God's people everywhere.

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