

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, commonly called Corpus Christi. Today we celebrate our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

If you were present for our First Communion Liturgy, you heard me ask the first communicants if the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Christ or only a sign or symbol of the body and blood of Christ. They, of course, responded that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Christ. However, recent surveys show that many adult Catholics no longer believe that the bread and wine really become the body and blood of Christ.

As we heard in today's Gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus said, "*This is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant.*" Jesus spoke Aramaic. In a talk at St. Meinrad, Lutheran theologian Joachim Jeremias argued that the Aramaic words Jesus would have used did not have a symbolic meaning. In other words, they could not mean, "This is a sign or symbol of my body. This is a sign or symbol of my blood." What does it mean to say that the Eucharist is really the body and blood of Christ? What is the meaning of Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist?

Obviously, bread and wine do not physically become the body and blood of Christ. They certainly maintain the appearances of bread and wine. Even if we placed them under an electron microscope or subjected them to chemical analysis, they would still have all the physical properties of bread and wine. How, then, can they really be the body and blood of Christ?

They become the body and blood of Christ sacramentally. Those of us who are older learned a classical philosophical explanation of Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist. We learned that the substance, or reality, of bread and wine is changed into the substance, or reality, of the body and blood of Christ while retaining the accidents, or appearances, of bread and wine. This mystery or miracle we call transubstantiation.

In reality, we all spend our entire lives trying to make sense of our lives. This includes our faith. We spend our entire lives trying to make sense of our faith, of what we say we believe.

Let me suggest an explanation of Real Presence that makes sense to me. Physical food and drink nourish us because as they are digested, they become part of our body, part of us. For this to happen, we have to eat and drink. In other words, I cannot make part of me something that is outside the boundaries of my body. My soul, my spirit, my being, is limited by my body.

Jesus, however, is not limited by his body. In the words of consecration, Jesus identifies the bread and the wine with himself, with his body and blood: "This is my body.... This is my blood." In other words, he extends his soul, his spirit, his being, to the bread and wine, transforming them sacramentally into his body and blood.

My brothers and sisters, we believe that at every Eucharist, the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present among us. In perfect love, Jesus offered his life to God for us. Joined to his sacrifice on the cross, we, the body of Christ, are called and empowered through the Eucharist to give ourselves in love to God and others: "*Greater love than this no one has than one lay down his life for his friends*" [Jn. 15:13].