

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel is the climax of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. In today's Gospel, Jesus specifically mentions eating his flesh and drinking his blood: "*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.*"

Evidence that Jesus literally meant what he said is found in next Sunday's Gospel: "*Then many of his disciples who were listening said, 'This saying is hard; who can accept it?'*" [Jn. 6:60]. Understanding the meaning of what Jesus had said, many of his disciples were scandalized. Jesus, however, did not back down or try to explain away his teaching: "*As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him*" [Jn. 6:66].

These passages affirm the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In other words, the Eucharist really is the Body and Blood of Christ. The Church's explanation for the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is called transubstantiation. Transubstantiation means that the substances of bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ while retaining all the appearances of bread and wine. This is because Jesus' Real Presence is a sacramental presence.

As most of us know, many Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. However, belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist has to be more than words. We have to live it. We live it by making our attendance at Sunday Eucharist a priority, by being here when Mass begins and staying until it ends, by not chewing gum in church, and by participating actively in the Eucharist. If we do these things, we will not only profess faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but we will also witness faith in the Real Presence of Christ.

The other theme in today's Gospel is communion. When we receive the Eucharist, we often refer to it as receiving Holy Communion. Jesus conveyed this sense of Holy Communion when he said, "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.*" Receiving Holy Communion deepens our union with God. However, receiving the Eucharist also deepens our unity with one another as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*" [I Cor. 10:17]. In other words, when we receive the Eucharist we deepen both our union with God and our unity with one another.

Today's reading from Proverbs invites us the banquet of wisdom. We believe that Jesus, the Word of God, is the Wisdom of God. One of our challenges as Christians is to invite others to Sunday Eucharist, including sometimes our own family members, Catholics who may no longer attend, and non-Catholics. However, the challenge goes deeper. We also need to make our celebration of the Eucharist inviting. One of the first things we can do to make the Eucharist more inviting is by growing our attendance at Sunday Eucharist, especially among our younger parishioners. The second thing we can do to make our Sunday Eucharist more inviting is by active, enthusiastic participation in praying, singing, and smiling.

My brothers and sisters, today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians calls us to not only live our belief in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist but also to live the Eucharist. Among the qualities Paul lists is giving thanks always and for everything. The word *Eucharist* means thanksgiving. When we celebrate the Eucharist, we thank God for all that we are and have and especially for the gift of Jesus who makes all love possible.