

Missionary Commentary

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 25, 2024

Sunday Readings

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18
Psalm 34:2-3, 16-21
Ephesians 5:21-32
John 6:60-69

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

Believing in Christ's True Presence

Our Gospel today continues reading chapter six of John's Gospel, the "bread of life" chapter. Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist in his body and blood, humanity and divinity, under the form of bread and wine. This real presence flows from Christ's total self-gift on the cross; his presence effects communion with His Church through His body and blood.

Personal Experience. Some years ago while I served in Saint James Parish in Cateel, Davao Oriental (located in Mindanao, southern Philippines), I had a powerful experience from an unexpected source that reminded me of Christ's Eucharistic presence. It involves Catalino, a man of about thirty years who only had the mind of a five-year-old child. He liked to be around the parish rectory; no one objected to his presence. He was friendly, liked to talk to everyone, and never caused any disturbance.

Catalino would often ask me for some bread, cookies, or crackers, especially if he saw me come home from the nearby bakery. He normally was present at Mass and would always reverently go to communion. One day, after I was in the parish for some months (to satisfy *my* doubts), I decided to ask: "Catalino, when you are in Church and go to get something to eat, what is that? Is it a special cookie or cracker?" Immediately, he responded to my question: "Oh no, Father. *That's Jesus!*" There and then, all my doubts were resolved; I had no more reservations about giving communion to Catalino! In fact, I was humbled at his genuine expression of faith!

A Child's Faith. Another true story is that of a five-year-old boy who consistently attended Sunday Mass with his family. At such a tender age he already understood the core teaching of the Church. One Sunday, when the congregation began approaching and receiving the Eucharist at communion time, the boy loudly said to his parents: "Hurry, Mom and Dad, let's go get some Jesus!" Indeed, out of the mouth of babes, profound wisdom is spoken!

Catholic Faith in the Real Presence. The two narratives just presented clearly manifest the consistent faith of the Church: we believe that in the celebration of the Eucharist, bread and wine become the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of an ordained priest. The whole Christ is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine. This is what the Church affirms when she speaks of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist.

This consistent faith of the Church reflects Jesus' words in the Gospels: "This is my body, which will be given for you" (Luke 22:19). "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever. The bread that I will give is my flesh for

next page

continued from previous page

the life of the world” (John 6:51). The words Jesus spoke were very clear to the Jews, because they “quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’” (John 6:52).

One may ask: “Are the consecrated bread and wine merely symbols of Jesus’ presence? In everyday language we use the word “symbol” to describe something that points beyond itself to something else. For Catholics, the transformed bread and wine are the *true* Body and Blood of Christ, not mere symbols. This true presence of Christ remains, even after the celebration of the Eucharist is completed; Christ’s presence is not somehow lost after the Mass.

The Church carefully guards the “sacred species” of the Eucharist in its tabernacles. She also promotes personal visits to Christ-in-the-Blessed-Sacrament as well as Benediction, Eucharistic processions, and *Viaticum* for the sick and infirm. All these devotions are based on the fact that Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. Such is the beautiful, consistent faith of the Church.

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18 — This reading from the book of Joshua, who led the Israelites into the promised land of Palestine, tells of how at Shechem (Central Palestine) they renewed their covenant with God. We renew our covenant with God as we celebrate the Eucharist.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 34:2-3, 16-21 — This psalm reflects profound gratitude for the Covenant and the Promised Land; thus, we are invited to “taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”

Second Reading

Ephesians 5:21-32 — Here Saint Paul is writing to the Ephesians; in this “Queen of the Epistles,” he reflects on the Mystical Body of Christ. Christian marriage is to manifest authentic, sacrificial, purifying love—symbolic of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church.

Gospel

John 6:60-69 — Today’s Gospel concludes John’s lengthy “bread of life” chapter. Some had difficulties accepting Jesus’ teaching that he truly feeds us with his body and blood in the Eucharist; many left his company. Yet, we affirm that ours is a Eucharistic Church; this means we regularly receive Christ in Holy Communion.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James Kroeger, author of
[Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#)
(Orbis Books – 2023), which recently won First Place from the
Catholic Media Association in the category for “Books on Pope Francis.”

**Please pray for the missions.
May God bless you in all the ways you Go Forth...!**



Go Forth ... is a service funded by the Catholic Communications Campaign and USCMA, a community of faith leaders engaged in networking, formation, and advocacy for God’s mission. All who serve God’s mission are welcome. Learn more at www.uscatholicmission.org or call 202-832-3112.

