

Here are some words of Frank who I had the privilege of getting to know several years ago:
“As a convert to the Catholic Church, one of the first aspects of Catholicism I had to understand and accept – was the teaching on the Eucharist.

As a Baptist in my teen years, we treated the Eucharist as a symbol and not the real body of Christ.

As I was thinking about joining the Catholic Church, I was directed by a Catholic friend to read Christ’s teaching of the Eucharist to his Disciples as found in each of the Gospels.

Teachings like: “Take and eat: this is my body. Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant.” (Mt. 26).

Or: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven: whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (John 6)

As I read those passages, I came to the obvious conclusion that Jesus was not speaking symbolically – He meant that the bread and wine were truly his body and blood.

As this realization sunk in, so many other Catholic teachings began to make sense, but it was the recognition that the Catholic Church taught the true doctrine of the Eucharist that opened the way for me to convert.

I share this with you, Frank wrote – because as Catholics we must believe truly and deeply with all our hearts that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ. This belief will allow us to more fully appreciate the blessings and gifts we have in Holy Communion.”

Yes, as Frank puts it so well, we Catholics believe in the Real Presence, Christ’s real presence, in the Eucharist. We believe that once a priest speaks the words of consecration:

“make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Euch. #2) ---

Christ is then present, soul and divinity -- and remains present – in that bread and wine, now become the very body and blood of Christ.

How does that happen? Oh, much like the doctrine of the trinity we considered last weekend – we can compare and contrast the words “transubstantiation” or “consubstantiation” to explain it, -argue the philosophical differences between substance and accidents, -even use a big word like – concomitance, to understand what we are receiving, -but no matter what words we use, they will always fall short, because the Eucharist it is a mystery – and once again, it is more important that we get caught up in the mystery – and the Eucharist’s ability to change us more and more into the image and likeness of Christ – then for us to expend time and energy trying to understand the mystery – we can leave that up to the sacramental theologians, who know their Greek and Latin much better than we do, and who, after all -- get paid ---to give us some understanding of it all. . .

Because we believe in the Real Presence – because we believe that Jesus remains in the Eucharist once it is consecrated – in our Catholic Churches we have Tabernacles.

In the earliest years of Christianity, the consecrated bread was kept in a tabernacle so it could be brought home to be given to those not able to be present at the liturgy because of illness.

It was also consumed by the faithful during the week to keep them connected to the Eucharist and the community they celebrated with – as there was, at that time, no daily celebration of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist in Tabernacles at first served only very practical purposes. It wasn't until the 11th century or so that many of the faithful began to adore the Blessed Sacrament apart from the Mass. At first the custom was to worship the host reserved in the tabernacle. Eventually, some came to practice the devotion with the tabernacle doors open. Later still, solemn exposition of the host, in a monstrance, so it could be seen -- became the norm.

The practice spread through Europe and culminated in the establishment of the Feast of Corpus Christi – Latin for the Body of Christ – in 1264. The feast we celebrate today as the Body and Blood of Christ.

And so Eucharistic Adoration, as we will practice it after this Mass – is to be seen as an extension of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which occurs in every Mass:

“Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb,” we pray.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament flows from the sacrifice of the Mass and should serve to deepen our hunger for Communion with Christ and the rest of the Church.

Pope Francis had this to say about the Eucharist:

“Jesus stresses that he did not come to this world to give something – but to give himself, his life – as nourishment for all those who have faith in him.

“Every time we take part in the Holy Mass and nourish ourselves with the Body and Blood of Christ, the presence of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit acts in us, it molds our heart, communicates to us interior attitudes that are translated in behavior according to the Gospel.

“The Eucharist is the spiritual life-blood of the Christian because in receiving it we consume the glorified body of the Risen Lord, whose life then transforms us, elevates and empowers us to become like him.

And as for Eucharistic Adoration, Pope Francis says:

“Jesus speaks in the silence of the mystery of the Eucharist and reminds us each time that following him means going out of ourselves and making our lives not something we possess – but a gift to him and to others.

Pope Francis says the question we must always ask before, during, and after Eucharistic Adoration is:

Do I allow myself to be transformed by Christ?”

So we adore Christ today in the Eucharist first of all – as we celebrate Mass and Receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

We can adore Christ before and after Mass – or anytime we have access to the Church – just by spending quiet time before the Tabernacle.

And in a special way today, at the end of Mass, we will expose the Blessed Sacrament in the Monstrance – and you are invited to spend up to an hour before this presence of Christ – allowing him to transform you --- more and more into his image and likeness!