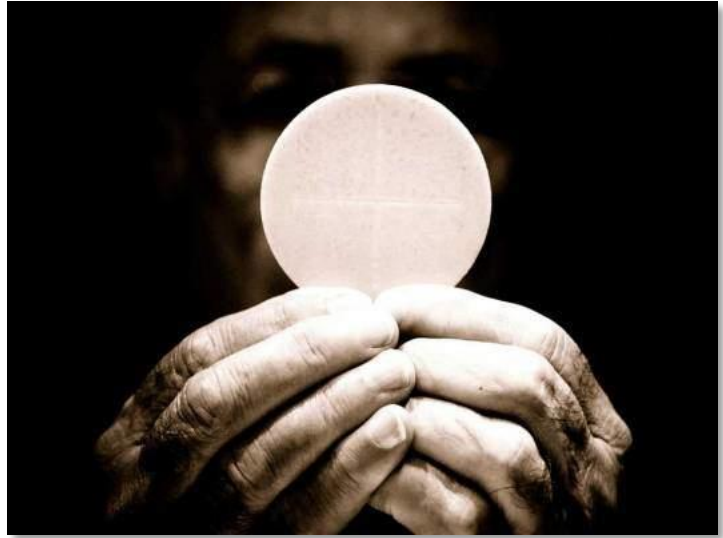


John 6.51-59 Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

The people then disputed among themselves saying, *'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'* They are reacting to Jesus' promise, *'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'* We probably should not be surprised by this response because it seems that many Catholics of today ask much the same question with a similar negative response. I say this because of these findings in a poll of Catholics in the United



States just last year. In answering questions about the Church's teaching that the Eucharist is the real and true presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, that is, that at the consecration of the Mass, Jesus becomes truly and actually present under the appearance of bread and wine; although they still look, feel and taste like bread and wine, they are no longer bread and wine but the very presence of Jesus' body and blood.

Here are some of the findings, and although they are of Catholics in the United States, I have no doubt the results in Canada would be much the same. Here are the results, and you may find them shocking. "... a new Pew Research Center survey finds that most self-described Catholics don't believe this core teaching. In fact, nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (69%) say they personally believe that during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion 'are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.' Just one third of U.S. Catholics (31%) say they believe that 'during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.' Here is another statistic. Among "...the most observant Catholics – those who attend Mass at least once a week... roughly one-third (37%) don't believe that the Communion bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ..." That is our reality as we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Each of us must ask the critical question, do I believe Jesus' promise that he gives us his very presence in this sacrament?

The gospel writers left no doubt about Jesus' intention. All four report Jesus' institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, but it is John who gives us the most detailed; it is from John that we hear today and we begin part way through his Bread of Life Discourse. We hear Jesus say, *'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and*

the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' In these two sentences Jesus gives us the what, the why and the result of the Eucharist. The what is his body, his *flesh*; the why is *life of the world*; the result is to *live forever*. His listeners were not convinced so Jesus becomes more emphatic, going into greater detail and using emphatic language.

Why would we not believe Jesus? Isn't his message clear enough? *'Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in them.'* Four times Jesus speaks of his 'flesh and blood'; is that an accident, or is he making a very deliberate point? Where in these words do we see any reference to symbols? Which words indicate that Jesus was making allusions? If we believe Jesus' words elsewhere in the gospels, why would we not believe them here? Without any question the Catholic Church believes and teaches that Jesus meant exactly what he said.



He gave us his Body and Blood in the Eucharist because he wanted to continue to be present to us just as he was when physically present while living on earth. He wanted to continue to nourish us, to strengthen us, and to inspire us to imitate him in loving God and our neighbour. There is no greater means to lead us into the life of Christ than the Eucharist. Haven't we missed it during these last few months? Didn't we long to be together again to celebrate Christ's presence among us? So this morning we give thanks for this precious gift as we once more invite Jesus into our lives; after all, he is the way, the truth and the life.

Fr. Charlie