

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom



Advent and The Eucharist #1 – Hope

In years past, we have reviewed the four main themes of Advent – Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. This year, we would like to explore these themes again; however, we would like to pay particular attention to the relationship between these virtues and the Eucharist.

First, we will focus on the virtue of Hope and the Eucharist. We will use the virtue of Faith to help us learn more about Hope. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author states, “*Faith* is the realization of what is *hoped* for and evidence of things not seen.” [Heb 11:1, emphasis added] This statement ties the virtues of Faith and Hope closely together. Faith is both a *response* and an *aid* to our Hope.

Let’s take a look at this verse from the Letter to the Hebrews in more detail as it pertains to Hope and the Eucharist. For what do we Hope? Our Faith teaches us that our ultimate Hope is that one day we will enjoy the blessings of Heaven. The greatest of these blessings is that we will experience the Presence of the Lord. After all, that is the very essence of Heaven – to be in the Lord’s presence. “To live in heaven is ‘to be with Christ.’ [...] For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom.” [CCC 1025]

If Faith is “the realization of what is hoped for,” then being with Christ here on earth is, to use a colloquialism, “a little slice of Heaven.” When we receive the Eucharist, we are most intimately present to Christ and He is most intimately present to us, as we receive Him into our bodies and become one with Him through the Sacrament.

If Faith is “evidence of things not seen,” then we also experience this element of Faith through the Eucharist. During the Mass, we are allowed to experience the Mystery of the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The physical elements of the bread and wine remain, but our Faith teaches us that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. “Could not Christ’s word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before?” [St. Ambrose as quoted in CCC 1375]

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Hope is defined as “the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.” [CCC 1817]

At the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Christ makes a promise to His disciples, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” [MT 28:20] The Eucharist is the fulfillment of this promise in the most substantial and consistent way. Every time we celebrate the Mass, every time we receive the Eucharist, we are reminded of Jesus’ Real Presence with us, and our Hope is confirmed.

As we begin this Advent season and look forward in Hope to the Presence of Jesus through the Incarnation and to His Presence at the “end of the age,” let us remember our Faith – that He is truly Present to us in a real and sacramental way at each Mass – in the Eucharist.