

As we all hopefully know, Advent is a season in which we prepare for the coming of Jesus. He comes to us in three ways. The first half of advent reminds us to stay awake and be alert for Jesus' return in glory at the end of time. The second half of advent prepares us to remember and celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas. The third coming of Jesus isn't directly tied to advent but it is the one Archbishop Sample has asked all priests to preach on this year: Jesus coming to us body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist.

This approach to advent is in conjunction with the National Eucharistic Revival currently underway in the United States. If you want to know more about the background on the revival, there is a link on the parish website; I have mentioned it before and don't want to spend time on it today.

I have already shared with you the importance of the Eucharist in my own conversion and call to the priesthood. I am not going to go into detail about it again today. There is one thing I haven't shared with you though: the exact quote which sparked my personal Eucharistic devotion.

The conversation went something like this. I was riding in the passenger seat of my work truck headed up the West Fork Smith River outside of Reedsport, trying to stay awake so my partner, Pat, wouldn't punch me to wake me up; he hated it when his passengers fell asleep in the car. It was around Easter time and something came up about going to church. He was a semi-practicing Catholic; I was a barely practicing Presbyterian. For some reason he mentioned the Eucharist and that Catholics believe it is the true body of Jesus. I asked him where you guys came up with that bizarre idea. Here comes the quote. Pat shrugged and told me: "It's in the Bible." At that point he stopped the truck and I jumped out and started my two-mile hike up Beaver Creek to count steelhead. The next time I was home visiting my parents, I found my mom's Bible and looked up the place where Pat told me to find the Eucharist: John, chapter 6.

Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. 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. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” Then there were the words of consecration spoken at the Last Supper, but I’ll come back to that on another weekend.

Believe it or not, for me, it was as simple as that. There are tons of books and other writings and speeches about the Eucharist, but for me, my friend’s words: “It’s in the Bible” followed by the words of Jesus himself were all it took. Why was it so easy for me to accept that? Maybe it was because spending 95 percent of my waking hours out in God’s creation seeing some pretty awesome stuff oriented me in such a way that I had no internal resistance to other miracles. If God’s words can create everything that exists, why can’t His words change bread and wine into his flesh and blood? I also think that where the Eucharist was concerned, I didn’t have a preconceived world view that contradicted what the church taught. It would be several more years before I went through RCIA and entered into full communion with the Church. The problem wasn’t the Eucharist; it was me. There were things the Church taught that did not correspond to my own personal view of the world. I had to learn the lesson that I was the one who had to humble himself and adapt to the Church and the teachings of Jesus and not the other way around. When I finally got over myself, the Eucharistic foundation had already been laid. I’ll share with you the quote that finally forced me to become Catholic.

The weekend before RCIA was supposed to start in Medford, I was at home in Applegate thinking my life would be a lot easier if I just went to the Applegate Community Church three miles from my house. I checked their worship schedule on the website and also found their statement of belief. They very clearly stated that, for them, Holy Communion was purely symbolic; they did not believe in Jesus’ True Presence in the Eucharist. That quote triggered my memory of this quote, again from John chapter 6: “Then many of Jesus’ disciples who were listening said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, “Does this shock you?...As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are

convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” I knew that if I was going to be a practicing Christian, I had to go to where the body of Christ is truly present. Right here. That is why I am Catholic. That is why I became a priest and why I remain a priest even when I sometimes don’t want to. It is also why I am so protective of the Eucharist, especially during Communion when I give you guys that reminder about the proper way to receive the Body of Christ.

We will continue to focus on the Eucharist for the rest of the Advent season. Here are a few questions to reflect on this week. When was the first time you remember truly believing Jesus is present body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist? What feeds your faith? If you struggle to believe—that is okay. It was easy for me; it is not that way for everyone. If you struggle to believe, what are the obstacles to your faith? Ask Jesus to help you climb over those obstacles. He’s ready to help you because he is very eager for you to meet him in a whole new way.