

I have shared with you before that I wouldn't be a priest, I wouldn't even be a Catholic, if it were not for the Eucharist. Before entering RCIA in the fall of 2008, I was not looking forward to the extra trips in Medford to go to Sunday Mass so I thought about going to the Protestant church three miles from my house instead. That church explicitly stated that they did not believe in transubstantiation which is the change from bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. Among Protestant communities, there is a range of beliefs from no transubstantiation—no change—to something close to—but not quite exactly—what we as Catholics believe. We believe that from the moment of consecration onward, the substance of the host and the wine is no longer bread and wine but truly the flesh and blood of Jesus. Jesus is truly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the smallest particle of the host and in the smallest drop of the precious blood and his presence never leaves. The outer appearance doesn't change, but the inner reality does change. That is why the Eucharist is called a mystery and we can only come to believe in it through faith and prayer. When I discovered that the Protestant church down the road from my house did not believe in the doctrine of the Eucharist, I found myself in the same place as Saint Peter at the end of the bread of life discourse. When many of Jesus' disciples found the Bread of Life teaching to be too hard, they left. Jesus turned to those who remained and asked if they were going to leave too. Peter replied, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." If I was going to be a follower of Jesus it could only be in the place where his true presence resides. Right here. That's why I entered RCIA, became Catholic, and eventually became a priest.

Having been reminded of my own story—or perhaps having heard it for the first time—maybe now you understand why I am so protective of the Eucharist. He called me to be a priest—in spite of my objections and arguments as to why I should not be one. Jesus entrusted himself into my hands—which makes me very uncomfortable—and then he wants me to entrust himself into your hands. Do we realize the humility it required of Jesus—who is God incarnate—to entrust his body into the hands of his unworthy creatures? What does it say about us when we profane or hurt that same body? Jesus gives us his precious Body and Blood as food so that we can have eternal life—let us treat that Body and gift with the reverence it is due.

Food. The Bread of Life. Our daily bread. I am not sure that goes quite for enough. A couple weeks ago I was in Mount Angel for the annual priest retreat.

The leaders of the retreat were an Irish nun, Sister Briege McKenna and a Spanish priest, Father Pablo Escriva. They described the Eucharist and what happens to us when we receive it in a way I had never thought of before, but it makes total sense. We know that the Eucharist is Jesus' Body and Blood. We know that blood is necessary for life. What happens to people who are seriously wounded in battle? They receive a blood transfusion. We have all been seriously wounded in the very real spiritual warfare going on around us all the time, whether we realize it or not. We need a blood transfusion. When we come to Mass and receive the Eucharist, we get that transfusion and the blood donor is Jesus himself. Jesus' body and blood is not just food, it is life itself.

Let us make time today to thank Jesus for this gift he has given to us...a gift which we cannot live without.