

In our second reading, Saint Peter wrote: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” Peter had something very specific in mind as a “reason for your hope”: the gospel of Jesus Christ and his Passion, Death, and Resurrection is the reason for hope. Tonight however, I think we can all give at least one other reason for hope: This group of young people who will be receiving their first Communions. You are bringing great joy to your families and giving us all a reason to hope in the future. Any time anyone receives any of the sacraments, it is a time of rejoicing and a reason for hope.

For almost two thousand years, in different ways according to the times, the Church has rejoiced in the addition of new members to the family and body of Christ. It is through Baptism that we are made children of God and without baptism none of the other sacraments can take place; baptism is the gateway sacrament—but it is through the Eucharist that we are physically made members of the body of Christ. Why am I making that distinction?

Years ago, on Saturday mornings, there were a series of short educational cartoons on tv called ‘Schoolhouse Rock!’ I mostly hated them because they got in the way of Scooby-Doo and the Superman/Batman cartoons, but some of them were kind of catchy and there was one in particular that reminded kids that “You are what you eat” so eat healthy, nutritional food.

We are what we eat. When we receive Holy Communion, whether it is for the first time or the millionth time, we are not eating a little white wafer. That might be what it looks like and tastes like, but that is not what we are eating. When we consume the Eucharist, we are receiving the body and blood of Jesus. In John’s gospel, Jesus referred to himself as the Bread of Life and he said that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink and that when we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we will have eternal life. That teaching—called the bread of life discourse set the stage and made a promise which was fulfilled later at the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and wine, gave thanks, blessed them and then gave them to his disciples saying “this is my body and this is my blood; eat and drink them and do this in memory of me.” You will hear those words later on during the consecration. Listen for those words because it is at that time that a miracle takes place. Although we cannot see the change, what makes the bread bread and the wine wine miraculously changes and those substances become the body and blood of Jesus. There is a technical term for that change—transubstantiation—which means that substance—the inner reality of the

bread and wine—is changed into the body and blood of Jesus. So it is not bread and wine that you are going to receive; it is the flesh and blood of Jesus.

Since we are what we eat, when we receive the Eucharist, we become part of Jesus' very own body, we become more like Jesus. I am sure that is going to raise questions; that is good because when we think we have all of the answers, then we stop looking and when we stop looking, we stop growing. We need to keep asking those questions because it is by asking those questions that we enter into deeper conversation with Jesus and we get to know him better and better.

Going back to the original theme of hope. Jesus gave us the sacraments as physical but mysterious signs of his presence with us. Every time someone receives any of the sacraments, it is a sign of their faith in Jesus' promises to be with us always and it is an expression of hope that some day we will see him face to face in heaven. So, congratulations on your first Communions. For those who are making their 10th, 100th, millionth or whatever number of Communion...may this bring us one step closer to becoming more and more like Jesus.