



PO BOX 271227 + Flower Mound, TX + 75027 + 1-800-803-0118 + www.dritaly.com

Really Present in Priest and People

Understanding the Mass, Part III

by: Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Ph.D.



Whether they're Catholic or not, whether they understand it or not, most people have heard the term, "the real presence," and know it has something to do with what Catholics believe about the Mass. Indeed, the Church teaches that Christ is really present in the Eucharist — and present in at least four different ways. Today we will look at two of them.

First, Christ is present *in the congregation*. Jesus said He's there whenever two or three are gathered in His name (Mt 18:20), and usually the Sunday Mass congregation numbers more than two or three! Even when it's hard to see Christ in our fellow Mass-goers, He's really there. People may arrive distracted and preoccupied, but as they enter that church they're no longer just scattered individuals, but members of Christ's body. Whether conscious of it or not, they're being drawn together into the Body of Christ.

At Mass we deepen our communion with the whole Church, as well as with the Lord. That's what the sign of peace is about. Though sometimes viewed as a trendy idea inserted into the Mass around 1970, the sign of peace is really a recovery of a practice of the early Church. It recalls what Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24: "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift." The sign of peace is not so much intended as an opportunity for back-slapping fellowship as a sign that we hold nothing against anyone. It means we renounce all bitterness, resentment, and jealousy as we come as one body to receive the Lord together.



Often, our conscience is clear about not having committed any sins against the people in the congregation. We haven't backed into someone's car and not informed them, nor have we defamed anyone or robbed or defrauded them. But along with sins of commission, it's important to take note of our sins of omission.

PO BOX 271227 + Flower Mound, TX + 75027 + 1-800-803-0118 + www.dritaly.com



In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul upbraided the Corinthians for what they were *failing* to do. Apparently, there were rich members of the congregation who were oblivious to the needs of the poor members. They'd eat a magnificent meal while the poor sat there hungry and thirsty, and afterwards rich and poor would all come together to celebrate the Eucharist. That's seriously wrong, Paul told them. In fact, "that is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (1 Cor 11:30).

"Discerning the body," as Paul put it — discerning the fact that the community is Christ's body in a very real way — is a serious matter. Christ is present in our fellow worshipers at Mass, and what we do or don't do to the least of them, we do or don't do to Christ (see Mt 25:40, 45).

Second, Christ is present at Mass *in the person of the priest*. It's not a question of whether the ordained minister is an exciting preacher or a particularly holy person. Many of our priests are in fact inspiring in holiness and powerful in their preaching. Others are not. But the good news is that Christ's presence doesn't depend on the priest's personal virtue. Christ makes Himself present through the charism that the priest has been given through ordination. This is one of the reasons that the Catholic priest wears vestments when he celebrates the Eucharist: it signifies that he's acting in the person of Christ, not in his own person.



Actually, Jesus is the only priest. Thomas Aquinas put it straightforwardly: "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only his ministers" (*Catechism*, par. 1545). The ordained priest is an icon or image of Christ. Through him, Jesus makes His priesthood present in a very special way.

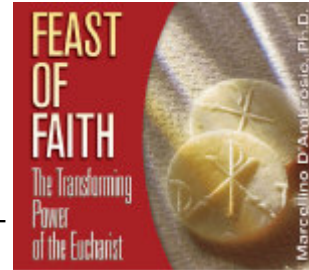
If you're happy with your parish priest, if his celebration of the Mass moves you, that's a tremendous blessing. Thank God for him! If he's less than inspiring and somehow makes it harder for you to pray, then pray for him. Priests have an awesome responsibility and a very difficult job. All of them deserve our loving support.



One of the things I love about St. Francis of Assisi is that he never took pot-shots at the clergy. In an age of widespread clerical corruption, Francis always thanked God for being able to receive the sacred Body and Blood from the hands of a priest, whether worthy or unworthy. More effectively than denunciations, Francis's loving example brought about a change in priests, calling them to greater virtue and deeper life in Christ.

This article is the Third Part of a Three Part series on Understanding the Mass, visit www.dritaly.com to read PART I and PART II.

Feast of Faith - The Transforming Power of the Eucharist



Pope John Paul II has decreed a special "year of the Eucharist" beginning this month. Make the most of this opportunity with "The Feast of Faith," an enlightening, four-part adult faith formation series (on 2 CDs, 2 Audio Tapes, 2 VHS, or 2 DVDs) guaranteed to unlock the life-changing power of the Eucharist in your life. Be sure to order the Feast of Faith Workbook, you may view it online, to get the most out of this amazing Eucharist Series!

Part One – Sacrifice – discusses how the Mass is a true sacrifice, the “re-presentation” of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross.

Part Two – Real Presence – The uniqueness of Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist is contrasted with the other ways he is present in the world. Out need to be properly prepared to receive Jesus in the Eucharist is discussed in...

Part Three – Preparation – we need to have more faith, more appetite, more repentance, and more forgiveness. Finally...

Part Four – Adoration – explains the meaning and purpose of Eucharistic adoration and offers practical ways we can spend time before our eucharistic Lord in a way that transforms our lives. This is a must-have series for RCIA and Parish Adult Faith Formation.

[Feast of Faith DVD - \\$44.95](#)

[Feast of Faith – CD - \\$19.95](#)

[Feast of Faith – Audio Tape - \\$19.95](#)

[Feast of Faith – VHS - \\$39.95](#)

[Feast of Faith Workbook - \\$5.95](#)



Don't forget to purchase the study guide specifically designed to facilitate this process for individuals, study groups, and religious education classes. It is chocked full of quotes from Scripture, Church teaching, and great saints on the meaning and power of the Eucharist.

Bring [Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio](#) to your Parish to celebrate The Year of the Eucharist with all day [Feast of Faith: The Year of the Eucharist Seminar Retreat](#) or two night [Feast of Faith: The Year of the Eucharist Parish Mission](#). Please call 1-800-803-0118 or e-mail info@crossroadsinitiative.com to schedule your event today!