

Over the years, Catholics have argued about everything under the sun. We've argued about the Pope, about Mary, about weddings, funerals, and whether or not to light up Wrigley Field. But in our history, the one thing we have argued about most is the Eucharist. We fought about how to receive it (in the tongue or on the hand), about what goes into it, whether to stand or kneel, whether to share the cup. We fought over who should distribute it, whether to sing or be quiet, and if it's for sinners or saints. What an irony that the sacrament of unity causes so much division!

However, there is one point about the Eucharist that we never argue about, and that's what it is. From the beginning it has been clear that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus. That's one of the most central doctrines in the Church. It has never changed and it never will. We will never change our belief that at Mass, bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. That is the faith which unites us.

Has the Church lost its respect for the Eucharist? Some would say so. They say we used to worship the Eucharist at Benediction more than we do now. That may be true, but first, before Benediction, we must know and love the Mass. At Mass we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ. That's primary. Worshipping his Body and Blood is secondary. This has always been true, but in benediction we used symbols which could have confused us. We lit more candles for Benediction than we did for Mass; we genuflected on both knees instead of just one. We showed the host in a monstrance often more ornate than a chalice. We used symbols which distracted us into thinking that worshipping the Eucharist was more important than eating and drinking it. Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you."

Showing reverence for the Eucharist has never gone out of style. I'd like to suggest three ways to show how much we love the Body and Blood of Christ.

First, prepare for Mass. Some people read the Scriptures or at least the Gospel before coming to Church. This gives them a head start on hearing the Word of God. We still fast before communion, one hour without taking food or flavored drinks. Some people extend their fast so that the Eucharist becomes their first food of the day.

Second, receive communion reverently. Never grab at the host, or rush in the line. Remember that we come to communion like beggars with our hands uplifted and our mouths open. St. John Chrysostom says when you receive communion in the hand, make a throne with your hands to receive your king. When the hymn is announced, find your page and join in the singing. This is something we often don't do well, but it's so important that we try. Music is a sign of our unity, just as communion is.

Finally, thank God for the Eucharist. Stay for the end of Mass. Spend the time after communion in thanksgiving to God for this gift which is greater than life itself.

Together we can put away the arguments of the past and let the Eucharist show our communion, our oneness in the Lord, our unity with one another.