

SACRAMENTAL LIVING - FOLLOW ME

As Jesus called his first disciples, he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Jesus calls each of us in this same way, to not only follow his teachings but also to help bring others to know him as well. There is no more extraordinary way to encounter Jesus than in the Eucharist, where we believe him to be truly present—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

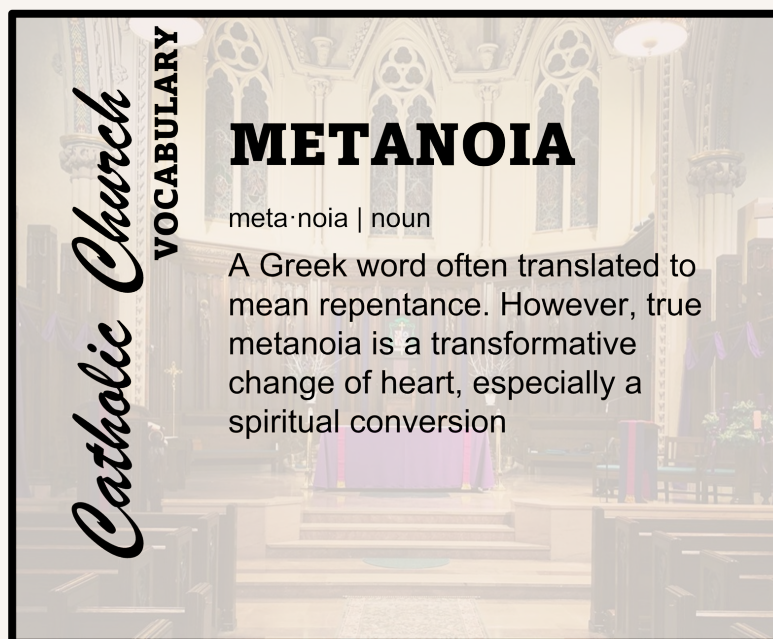
We need look no further than the Bread of Life discourse (John 6) to see the reality of this teaching. There, Jesus makes abundantly clear that unless we “eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, 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” (John 6:53-56).

However, despite Christ’s teaching, a national survey published by the Pew

Research Center in 2019, uncovered the following about Catholics and their understanding of the Eucharist:

"Half of Catholics in the United States (50%) correctly answer a question about official church teachings on transubstantiation – that during Consecration, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. The other half of Catholics incorrectly say the Church teaches that the bread and wine used in Communion are just symbols of the body and blood of Christ (45%) or say they are not sure (4%)" (US Religious Knowledge Survey | Pew Research Center).

Without us helping individuals experience *metanoia* in regards to the Eucharist and the celebration of Mass, we risk future generations not embracing the amazing reality that in the Mass, Christ's saving sacrifice on the Cross is re-presented - made present once again for us - giving us the sanctifying grace we need. For this reason, the Church calls the Eucharist the source and summit of the Christian life.



Pictured: Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption Fall River

In his 2003 Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Pope John Paul II explained the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist:

"The sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which – in the words of Paul VI – 'is called 'real' not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were 'not real,' but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present'." (15).

He goes on to teach in the same encyclical that what needs to be at the heart of all seeking to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is an acceptance of faith that cannot be explained, one that goes beyond our human comprehension: "Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*," St. John Paul II states, "a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith, as is often brought out in the catechesis of the Church Fathers regarding this divine sacrament:

"Do not see – Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts – in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church which was approved by Pope John Paul II on June 25, 1992 underscores the teaching of this truth within our Catholic faith. In Section 1333 of the Catechism, one finds this about the Eucharist:

"At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood."

We can be assured of the validity of this important teaching, given to us by Jesus and upheld for over 2000 years by word and tradition. Again, turning for verification in the Catechism:

"By the Consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1640; 1651)"

(Catechism of the Catholic Church – The sacrament of the Eucharist, 1413).



Source: Francois Lochon—Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

By first receiving the Eucharist - the true presence of Christ in real and substantial matter - we are transformed into the Body of Christ, the Church. Without it, we cannot be the individuals, the Catholics, nor the Church God calls us to be. In a phrase, the Eucharist is essential to discipleship, and therefore to evangelization. Therefore, we must make a priority the evangelization of Christ's Eucharistic presence, which we encounter at Mass and then live out as Church in society by being "commissioned" to go out at the end of Mass.

To this end, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a 3-year Eucharistic Renewal Project for our country beginning in June 2022 and featuring three implementation steps on the diocesan, parish, and national levels. As a Diocese, we'll be participating, and I invite all people to take part in this Eucharistic Renewal for our Church.

MISSION STEPS

- Regularly attend Mass
- Share with the others, especially those away from Mass, the importance the Eucharist holds in your life.
- Set a time for regular Eucharistic Adoration daily or weekly to increase Eucharistic devotion. Each parish should offer expressed devotion to the Eucharist, especially with its great tie to fostering and birthing priestly and religious vocations.
- Intentionally reach out to the faithful to help them recognize the importance of attending Mass. It is not about full pews or collection baskets, but of experiencing the mystical Body of Christ—the Eucharist.
- Help young people in our parishes and Catholic schools encounter the Real Presence by ensuring that they have ready access to the Eucharist and through evangelizing with the examples of saints, such as Bl Carlo Acutis, and through Eucharistic miracles.
- Help individuals refocus on the Real Presence by initiating specific study, preaching and devotional practices, with special attention to inviting those who have been away from the Eucharist. Each parish should look for opportunities that will work best in their community.
- Plan for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Eucharistic Revival Project, which our Diocese will be participating in. The diocesan phase will begin June 2022, with the parish phase set to begin June 2023.