

First Communion
April 19, 2009
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Faith in the Eucharist

Acts 4:32-35
Psalm 118
1 John 5:1-6
John 20:19-31

What is faith? According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, faith is a “firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust.”¹ The letter to the Hebrews describes it in these words, “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Regardless of how we define faith, we know that it is something extremely important in our lives. In fact, we use faith many times each and every day.

One of the places that we use faith the most is the grocery store. Grocery stores are full of packaged products. Most of the time, we cannot see what is actually inside the package. Instead, we read the outside of the box and *believe* or *trust* that what the package is saying is contained inside is *actually* what is inside. This is faith! There is absolutely no *proof* that the box isn't lying to us. Yet, thousands of people grocery shop every day without ripping open every package they pick up. They simply believe that what is being told them is true and once they've experienced it to be true, their faith grows even stronger.

If we are willing to exercise this much faith in a food company that hasn't been around for very long, how much more should we be willing to faithfully believe what has been handed on to us by the Apostles about Christ's Presence in the Eucharist! It is not a \$.10 cardboard box telling us to believe, but rather, two thousand years worth of dedicated Christians who have come to know Christ's Presence in the Eucharist. It would be a horrible injustice for us to believe the packages at the grocery store, yet ignore what Jesus Christ and thousands of saints are telling us about the Eucharist! And, what are they telling us?

During the Last Supper, Jesus connected the Passover meal, with its unleavened bread, to His Presence.

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”

-Luke 22:14-20

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>

Not only did Christ call us and challenge us to believe that He is fully present in the Eucharist, but saints for two thousand years have done the same. Saint Justin Martyr, who lived in the 2nd century, wrote, “The food over which thanksgiving has been offered through the word of prayer which we have from him... [is] the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh.”² Saint John Chrysostom, in the 4th century, wrote, “For what is the bread? The body of Christ. And what do they become who partake of it? The body of Christ.”³

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived in the fourth century, challenges us with his words of faith asking—

When [Christ] has spoken and says about the bread, “This is my Body,” who will have the nerve to doubt any longer? And when he affirms clearly, “This is my Blood,” who will doubt, saying that it is not his Blood? Therefore do not consider them as bare bread and wine; for, according to the declaration of the Master, they are Body and Blood.⁴

Each time we go to Communion, we are invited by God to have faith; to have faith that what we have heard about the Eucharist—namely, that Christ is fully present in It—is true. It is true not because we can prove it, but because Christ and those whom we trust have told us. This is faith. And, if we can be people of great faith at the grocery store, how much more important is it for us to be people of faith at Mass?

I want to thank all of the teachers, parents, grandparents, and extended family members of our First Communicants. It is because of your own faith and your willingness to share with these children what you have chosen to believe yourselves that they are here today, ready to receive Christ’s Presence in Holy Communion. May God bless you for your willingness to share your faith and may all of these children be blessed in a special way as they receive the Eucharist for the very first time!

² St. Justin Martyr, *Apologia I*, 62.

³ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 24*, on 1 Corinthians, 157.

⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures 23.15*, in Bettenson, *Later Christian Fathers*, 46.