

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS 101

The Real Presence of Christ

There is a lot of confusion among both Catholics and non-Catholics regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Most of the confusion comes from our lack of knowledge regarding the ancient concept of remembering. When modern people talk about “remembering,” they usually mean that they have mentally called into the present something that happened in the past. There is another kind of remembering, however; and it is crucial for our understanding the Eucharist.

In the Gospel of Luke and the first letter to the Corinthians we hear Jesus instruct the Apostles to celebrate the Eucharist in “remembrance” of Him.¹ The English language is so very limited. Often, we have only one word to convey multiple ideas from the Greek language used in the New Testament. These two passages are one example of that problem. The Greek word used in these three instances is “ἀνάμνησις” (anamnesis). This is a different kind of remembering than we are familiar with. It is a very Biblical kind of remembering. The Jews in the Old Testament would have been familiar with this kind of remembering, especially for the celebration of their Feasts. Remember, the Last Supper took place in the context of a Passover celebration which employed this unique kind of remembering. Unlike the kind of remembering we are used to, ἀνάμνησις invites us to let the present become part of the past.

This is what the Jewish Feasts are all about. For example, when Jews celebrate the Feast of Passover, they don't merely remember what happened thousands of years ago. Instead, they allow themselves to be drawn from the present moment into the past reality of the saving action of the Passover. This is a radical kind of remembering; it is experiential and real, not merely mental.

This is how we celebrate and experience the Eucharist. Jesus' disciples would have understood His mandate as not merely remembering the sacrifice He was offering, but to *participate* in it frequently. In the words of Paul, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). In this way, Christ is truly and really present in the Eucharist, as we are drawn-back two thousand years into the Last Supper and Calvary events.

When we say that Jesus Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, and that the Eucharist is His Body and Blood, we do not mean that the Eucharist should taste like flesh and blood. When we celebrate Mass we are not quietly hoping that the Eucharist becomes literal, human flesh and blood. Even if it did, it would be no more the real presence of Christ than when it still looks and tastes like bread and wine. In fact, Christ's true Presence in the Eucharist is far truer and more miraculous than it being human flesh and blood, because the Eucharist is not intended to remind us that Jesus Christ was fully human, but rather, that He loves us more than we can ever imagine! Jesus' True Presence in the Eucharist is grounded in our being drawn spiritually into the saving action of Christ on Calvary. Christ's true Presence in the Eucharist is not a remembrance of flesh and blood, but of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and sacrificial service.

¹ “Then [Jesus] 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’” (Luke 22:19). “After [Jesus] had given thanks, [He] broke [the bread] and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in **remembrance** of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in **remembrance** of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).