

## In communion with the Lord

Physical presence is great, but it is not everything. It does not always produce the intimacy we long for. In fact, people can be sitting side by side without being really present to one another. On the other hand, though, people may be separated by a great distance and yet be very much present to one another. In a sense, that is what the “Real Presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist is all about. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, not in the physical sense but in a mode beyond our understanding. The concept of “Real Presence” refers to the belief in the actual presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist. During the consecration of the bread and wine by a priest at Mass, there is a transformation known as *transubstantiation*, where the substance of the bread and wine changes into the actual body and blood of Christ while retaining the appearance of bread and wine. We call it the real presence because it is presence in the fullest sense. Body and blood in this context stand for the whole person of Jesus.

This is precisely the issue addressed by Jesus in the gospel reading for today (John 6:51-58). He speaks about himself as the living bread that came down from heaven, emphasizing the importance of consuming his flesh and blood for eternal life. The expressions ‘to eat his body’ and ‘to drink his blood’ should not be taken with crude literalism. The substance of the bread and wine changes into the actual body and blood of Jesus, but their appearance remain the same. To receive the gift of the Eucharist is to receive the Lord himself.

Of course, an act of faith is required, but for those who believe that God is present in all things and in all places, his unique and special presence in the Eucharist ought not to be a big problem. Besides, we have the word of Jesus: “This is my body... this is my blood.” When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus comes to each of us personally, and we are able to enter into a deeper intimacy with him. We are not merely in communication with him, but in holy communion with him, and by extension, in holy communion with one another. This is one of the important reasons why we should go to Mass frequently. It is a constant opportunity to partake in the divine life of Christ, deepen one's communion with God and one another, and to receive the grace and sustenance needed for the Christian journey.