

Gratitude and Reverence

Corpus Christi/The Body and Blood of Christ

June 7, 2026

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When listening to people who have either left the Catholic Church or are considering it, I am always impressed by the thing they miss the most or would miss the most. It is the Eucharist. I find it surprising because the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, has traditionally been the reason for division. Way back in the early Church, the Gospel of John says the people quarreled when Jesus said, "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." By the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, there was even more fractioning caused by their understandings of the Eucharist. To this day, some churches have backed away from celebrating the Eucharist altogether as part of their worship service.

As Catholics, we have always been a Eucharistic church, celebrating it weekly, if not daily. We have always held a strong interpretation of today's Gospel where Jesus says, "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 them." While this certainly sounds strange to those who have never experienced Holy Communion (remember the early Christians were accused of cannibalism!), for those of us living in a Catholic worldview, it

makes perfect sense. In the Eucharist, we know that Christ is really present among us.

The theologian Matthew Fox, who himself had trouble remaining in the Catholic Church, in very Eucharistic imagery emphasizes the sacredness of the flesh. Following the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas, he calls our attention to two qualities in particular: gratitude and reverence. In his book *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, he writes, "gratitude and reverence heal. They redeem. They cure us of diseases of soul and mind and heart and body." (44). Perhaps the reason why so many of us love the Eucharist is precisely because the sacred flesh of Christ teaches us the importance of gratitude and reverence in our own lives. The very word 'Eucharist' means thanksgiving and after communion each of us is encouraged to make our own prayer of thanksgiving. Reverence means showing respect. When we approach the altar, we know that something mysterious is taking place. In a world of so much ingratitude and disrespect, gratitude and reverence heal and redeem.

The Eucharist still has great value for us.

What does the Eucharist mean to me and how would my life be incomplete without it?

As we continue with this mass, let us not be ashamed of our teaching of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ. In it, we learn to show gratitude and reverence. It is our healing and redemption. No matter how close or far we feel from the Church, may we always long for a place at this Eucharistic table.