

Holy Eucharist, according to the Book of Common Prayer 1979, is the sacrament commanded by Christ for the continual remembrance of his life, death, and resurrection, until his coming again. It is the Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (hence "Eucharist") by which the sacrifice of Christ is made present, and in which he unites us to his one offering of himself. (BCP, page 857)

No where in our catechism does it say anything about flesh and blood. The real stuff. The nonmetaphorical stuff. The stuff that the gospel mentions in the very first sentence. The stuff that made the Jewish authorities and some of Jesus' followers go "ewwww – gross". The stuff that, frankly, gives me the willies.

This teaching is indeed difficult.

It's been bothering theologians for millennia. Richard Hooker and Thomas Cranmer arm wrestled over this teaching. Cranmer spoke of the presence of Christ's body and blood associated only with the administration of the sacrament. Theologians call this "receptionism".

Cranmer wrote the theology into the eucharistic prayers of the 1552 and 1549 prayer books. Hooker leaned toward the transformation of the elements during the eucharistic prayer.

Articles of Religion, established by General Convention in 1801, establishes the via media:

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ. . . . only after (an) heavenly and spiritual manner. (page 873)

Episcopalians, therefore, do not understand the Eucharist as transubstantiation (the change of the substance of Bread and Wine) or consubstantiation (the coexistence of the substance of Bread and Wine with Body and Blood), but recognize that 'something of mystery' has happened by and through the Holy

Spirit that allows the everyday elements of life to become something divine. And, we are invited to take these divine elements into our very selves.

In the blog “Sacred Space,” the Jesuit authors comment that for the Hebrews, “flesh and blood” meant the “whole person”. Therefore, there is little else that reveals the intimacy into which Jesus calls our relationship to be with him. He invites us to “take him into ourselves and become one with him.” (john-6:51-58)

Now, we can play academic games with Eucharistic Theology all day. But, if there’s anything I learned about theology from EfM it’s that we need to ask the questions “what do I believe?” and “what difference does it make?” or “what do I do because of what I believe?”.

As you are aware, we practice “an open table” with regard to who receives the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. There’s no need to sign a creedal statement, swear on a stack of Bibles, or present your baptismal certificate. We do this out of hospitality. We also do this because we have come to understand that there

are several ways people come to faith. Limiting their access to the sacraments doesn't help...as if we can limit the Holy Spirit from acting in someone's life.

For those who have received communion here for the first time, you will have your stories to tell about that experience. I hope you do share them because I know they are amazing.

I have to admit, mine was a little less than spectacular. After 3 years of memorizing the entire catechism and being told how amazing it was to take communion, I could barely contain my excitement for the week after my confirmation. It was only then that we could march up to the altar rail and be a part of the 'big church'.

When I lifted the white, paper-thin, wafer in my hand to my tongue, it was like magic. The wafer stuck to the roof of my mouth in a micro-second. That sip of wine from the chalice didn't help at all. I was forced to walk piously back to my pew licking the wafer off the roof of my mouth like a dog with peanut butter.

"That's it?" I asked God. "This is what I was so excited for?"

I'm sure the Holy Trinity had a good laugh over that one.

What I've come to realize over the last 40+ years of participating in the giving, blessing, breaking, and taking of communion is that this Sacrament is so much more than a wafer and a sip of wine or a theological debate. It is about invitation, participation, inclusion, and community. You may have an extraordinary experience upon your first communion, but it is the experience over time that transforms you. Participating in communion regularly helps you become aware of the love that surrounds you every day.

I went through wafer withdrawal early in my 20s. I'd just gotten married. I'd left my high Anglo-Catholic upbringing and the daily Eucharist offered by the campus ministry. My new parish church did Morning Prayer twice a month. I didn't dislike Morning Prayer. It just didn't give me what I needed. I needed to be fed. Not metaphorically fed, either. I needed that wafer and that sip of wine and everything it had become for me.

I believe the bread and wine were tangible signs that Jesus abides in me and that I could therefore abide in him. Because I believe this, I always know I am home.

My colleague the Rev'd Michael Marsh wrote, "We consume (Christ's) life that he might consume and change ours. We eat and digest his life, his love, his mercy, his forgiveness, his way of being and seeing, his compassion, his presence, and his relationship with the Father." There is quite a lot packed into this foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet to come. (Blog – InterruptingtheSilence.com – 8/20/2012)

So come to the table. Eat and drink. Be fed with holy food. And as you do, remember there are people starving out there. Invite them home to dinner.

Amen.