

Many years ago, I took a trip to Montreal. I wanted to see the St. Joseph Oratory which had been recently inaugurated. I wanted to see it, and I wanted to pray there. It was only a few blocks from my hotel, so on Sunday I walked over to attend Mass. As I arrived, I was amazed by the architecture, but then I noticed there were many details that were not finished, including the fact that there were no pews. I guess they had not had time to install them yet, so people sat in the type of folding seats you find in a banquet hall. I felt disappointed. I was looking forward to a beautiful church, but here I was in what looked like an auditorium. Then I saw the small altar of repose with its tabernacle and a red sanctuary light. Suddenly, it felt OK. The Blessed Sacrament was there and that made everything better. It made me feel as if I was in a finished Church.

A church building may be beautiful. The church may have amazing statues, pictures, etc, but for a Catholic, what makes a building a church is the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. You might say, "But Father, it is the people that make up the Church." And although this is true, because Jesus said "wherever two or three are gathered in my name I am there," there are degrees of experiencing the Presence of the Lord. We can experience God in the beauty of nature, but we have a greater experience of the Lord in Sacred Scripture, and we have the deepest experience of the Lord in the Eucharist. The Eucharist fills us and sustains us every time we receive communion. That is what it means to be a Catholic. We are people of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The feast we celebrate today is a yearly reminder of that awesome gift. It reminds us to respect this gift, to revere it. When we come into a church, we pay our respects to the Divine Presence of Jesus in the Tabernacle; we stop eating and drinking for an hour before receiving communion as a sign of respect for Him who we are about to receive. Before we receive communion, we stop and reflect on what it is that we are about to do. Just before receiving communion we express our faith when we respond with an Amen to the words "the Body of Christ". That is a statement of faith; we believe we are receiving the real presence of Jesus. After receiving communion, we pray to the Lord within us. The reception of the Eucharist is sacred.

Unfortunately, many Catholics fail to understand the value of communion. Many are more concerned with receiving the ashes on Ash Wednesday once a year, than with receiving communion every Sunday. Many also go away from the Catholic Church looking for an experience of Jesus in other Christian groups like the Evangelicals, and yet, they forget that they can actually have Jesus in us when they receive communion.

We are Catholics because of the Eucharist and without it we are not even Church, because the Church is the Body of Christ. The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord reminds us of who we are, who is present in the Tabernacles of our churches, and what we believe in, every time we receive communion. The current pandemic has helped highlight how important it is for us, and how we feel without it. May this feast of the Body and Blood of Christ help us cherish the Eucharist more and more for the rest of our lives.