

REFLECTIONS ON THE MASS: THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

By Karen Pourbabae

The Church teaches that Christ is present in the Eucharist in four unique manifestations, as Marcellino D'Ambrosio writes in Exploring the Catholic Church. To have a richer spiritual experience as we attend Mass, we can reflect on these ways we can see Christ surrounding us.

First, Christ is present in the congregation which is the Body of Christ as His Word states in Mathew 18:20.

Second, Christ is present at Mass in the person of the priest who is considered an icon or image of Christ. Thomas Aquinas stated, "Only Christ is the true priest, the others being only His ministers." (CCC1545) Through our priests, Jesus makes His priesthood present in a special way. Called, chosen, and ordained, we honor Christ's special ministers as they serve Him and His body.

Third, the Lord is present in the Word of God. The Liturgy of the Word isn't just an academic religious lesson. In the readings, the Lord desires to speak to each of us personally. He gives us spiritual food, often challenging us in some specific area of our lives. If we are attentive to the Word, something will touch our heart and provide an impetus for change.

The final manifestation of Christ is in His Body and Blood, present to us under the signs of bread and wine. St. Thomas Aquinas shares that in all other sacraments, Jesus gives us His grace, while in the Eucharist He gives His whole self, His divinity and humanity. The transformation of bread and wine happens in the same way Mary's virginal conception did... through the power of the Word and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. This change is called "transubstantiation", meaning the underlying essence or substance has changed. Christ is present and we receive Him into ourselves as we partake in Holy Communion, nourished and ready to live for Him!

Dear Jesus,

When I come to Mass, open my spiritual eyes to Your presence all about me in Your Body—the people and the priest. As I listen to the Word, may I always hear Your special message to my heart, so I may change and grow into Your likeness. I thank you for the gift of Yourself in the bread and wine, which becomes divine nourishment for my spirit and body that I may live for You and walk in Your way. Amen.