

Today's Gospel speaks of the crowds that pursued Jesus, hungry for what he had to offer. In this week, an estimated 50,000 Catholics are gathering in Indianapolis for the *National Eucharistic Congress*, also in pursuit of Jesus.

You might recall that back in 2019, a survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center¹. They released results of the survey given to nearly 11,000 Americans who self-identify as Catholic, asking whether they believe that the Eucharist is the True Presence of Jesus or instead, merely a symbol—in other words, just bread and wine.

The results indicated that only 31% of Catholics believe in the True Presence, while 69% regard it as a symbol. It's not clear if participants represented all parts of the U.S., nor is it clear if those polled were practicing Catholics.

The survey also asked those who participated if they know the Church's teaching about the Eucharist and transubstantiation. Around that same time, another survey revealed that among Catholics 40 years of age and under, only 20% believe in the Eucharist, which seems to indicate that unbelief is a growing trend. And probably most of us would surmise that if this poll had been conducted 50 years ago, we would have seen a higher percentage of those who believe in Jesus' True Presence in the Eucharist.

So, lest there be any doubt among us here, let's recall Jesus' words: "*My flesh is true food, my blood is true drink*" (Jn 6:55), and as was echoed by St. Paul (1 Cor 10:16) and the early teachers of the faith, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Justyn the Martyr; and further echoed by the witness of Christian martyrs who died for this belief—let us state clearly what we believe: The Eucharist 1) is a primary source of our communion; 2) it is the sacrificial memorial of Jesus' Paschal Mystery; 3) it is "*the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of (Jesus)...truly, really, and substantially contained*" (CCC, 1374).

But considering the result of the 2019 Pew Survey—that so many Catholics don't know the teaching on the Eucharist, and that ever-more Catholics don't believe what is taught, we might ask: *Does it really matter?* After all, can't you just be a good person, not wishing any harm to anyone or to break society's laws. *So, does it really matter?* Even more, one might wonder that since it's not part of the Creed, maybe belief in the True Presence isn't central to the practice of our Christian faith. *Again, does it matter?* Along with that good question, we might also ask: *What is the cause for this trend toward unbelief?*

Regarding the first question, it does matter—gravely so. Jesus himself said, "*Amen, amen...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you*"...and *whoever does, I will raise on the last day* (John 6:53-54). It seems to matter. And as for what caused this trend, there are numerous causes, but I plan to say more about that in the coming Sundays, as next week, we begin the *Bread of Life Discourse*.

For each one of us here and now, regardless of how strong or not our belief, I believe it's true...

1. that there's some place deep within us that realizes there's more to all this than is visible to the eye and grasped by human reason;
2. that there's something, Someone who created all this, that even the most advanced sciences do not fully understand;
3. that some part of us knows there's more to us than just our bodies and our consciousness;
4. that everyone of us wants and thirsts for something more than we currently know, have and experience, evidenced by the fact that we're never entirely satisfied in this life;
5. that each of us wants there to be something more, something better beyond this life, and;
6. that none of us has a clue how much we are loved.

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>

With all this in mind—in any way these six assertions are true—I further believe that none of us wants to find ourselves on the other side of death hearing God say to us: *You had a chance to know me. I made myself known to you, you even ate and drank...and even more, you had a chance to help your children to know me, but you made other things a priority...You never really knew me, nor wanted what I wanted to give you, and so you may have what you chose to embrace!*

As thousands upon thousands gather in acknowledgement of the gift of the Eucharist, let us assent to our faith. Let us exercise our desire to believe, to know the God who comes to us, who makes Himself known to us, truly alive and present in the Eucharist.