

Do you recall what getting ready for a date, or homecoming or prom, or maybe even what your wedding day was like - getting dressed, seeing your date or spouse for the first time...? For me, each thing - from getting dressed to the flowers to the meal to the dance itself - was an expression my affection for the girl I was dating at the time. They were just different ways of showing it. In a sense, the same is true about how Christ makes himself present to us. Christ makes himself present in a variety of ways, each one simply a different way of showing himself to us.

### **I. Present in Assembly & Minister**

From our discussions last week, I think it would be easy now to see how Christ is present wherever members of Christ’s body gathers, for as Christ himself said, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20).

Thus, when we come together, we remind ourselves that it is Christ who first reached out to us in the waters of baptism. At the entrance into the church building are often little bowls of blessed water. Most of us, upon arriving, reach out and touch the water, making the sign of the cross and saying “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The water and words remind us that we were first joined to Christ’s saving death and resurrection... we were first connected to his mystical body... we were first brought into the faith family... we first entered the Church... at our baptism where the power of his saving cross washed over us in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The sign of the cross is a constant reminder of what Christ has done for us.

Gathered together as Christ’s mystical body, Christ also makes himself visible in both head and members. Older Catholics may recall the old Latin phrase used to describe the priest, who acts *in persona Christi*, or as it translates “in the person of Christ.” What they might not realize is the phrase is more accurately said *in persona Christi capitis*, or as it translates, “in the person of Christ, the head” (c.f., no. 1548). Thus, I would suggest we can also speak rightfully as you, the faithful as acting *in persona Christi corpus*, or as “in the person of Christ, the body.” For example, the Catechism says “Not only is [the Church] gathered around [Christ]; she is united in him, in his body” (no. 789). Thus, united together in this celebration, we reflect the mysterious union of Christ and the Church, so that, united together, what happens is both an action of Christ, by which Christ pours out grace, and an action of the Church, by which we give glory to God. This is also why, since the Second Vatican Council, much more emphasis has been placed upon “meeting and greeting” people before Mass in many parishes. By our baptism into his body, we are called to welcome each member as Christ would welcome them. Or, one could also say, by our baptism into his body, we are called to welcome each member as we would welcome Christ. Christian hospitality, especially here at Mass, is a duty and a privilege by virtue of our baptism

### **II. PRESENT IN THE WORD**

God also wishes to make his love visible to us by speaking with us, by using our

language and our words to speak to our hearts. In the beginning, out of love, God spoke and brought the world and everything in it into being. Then, out of love, God spoke to Abraham and Moses and the Prophets. But then, out of love, God spoke the fullness of love to us. This Word became flesh and dwelt among us;

Christ is the Word of God spoken for all ages (cf., John 1:1-18, Heb 1:1-3, Rev 19:13, no. 101-104). Thus, the Catechism says, “the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body” (no. 103) and recalls in the words of St. Jerome that “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (no. 133). Therefore the Church encourages us to read the scriptures frequently (no. 133).

We believe that the Word of God is incarnate and living (no. 108). Thus, the scriptures are not simply “read” to us at Mass, where we’re encouraged to sit in the pew and read along. The Word of God is to be proclaimed! Thus, Christ speaks his living word to us through a member of his body, and we are invited - not to passively read along - but to actively listen to the living word. This requires a great deal of effort by the one who proclaims the word and those who receive the word; to really listen takes a lot of energy. Then, having heard the Word of God, our hearts respond in thanks and praise - “Thanks be to God!” and “Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ!”

### **III. PRESENT IN THE MYSTERY OF THE ALTAR**

Present in the assembly, head and members, present in the living Word of God, Christ also makes himself present in the mystery of the altar. Now, as we will go into this mystery in some more depth in the later weeks, I’m not going to say much more about it now.

### **IT IS REAL PRESENCE**

Christ is “really” present in many ways. The catechism says Christ is present, in his word, in his Church’s prayer, ‘where two or three are gathered in my name,’ in the poor, the sick and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But ‘he is present... most especially in the Eucharistic species’ (no. 1373).

Each and every way is *really* a means of experiencing Christ’s presence; one is not more or less “real” than the other. Thus, in no. 1374, the Catechism says, “this presence [in the Eucharistic species] is called ‘real’ - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too....”

In the Eucharist, we see how Christ is present in us who are one body, for we all partake of the one bread and one cup (c.f., 1 Cor 10: 16-17). In the Eucharist, we also see how Christ is present in the Word (c.f., in 1:1), whose words are spirit and life (c.f., Jn 6:63), and who still speaks to us. In the Eucharist, we see Christ who said, “. . . my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (Jn 6: 55-56).

Like in dating, holding hands together, the conversations together, and the meals together are different expressions of the same love. So too, Christ expresses his love for us, and his presence to us, in different ways - in the gathered, in those who minister, in Word, and most especially in the Eucharistic Species.