

# Christ in Us Goes Beyond a Physical Union with Him

By Bishop David J. Malloy

As noted in previous columns, the Church in the United States is currently undertaking a three year program of Eucharistic revival. That means a revival of our faith in the Eucharist in the widest sense.

As we have seen, we must begin with the most fundamental Catholic understanding of the reality of the Eucharist. That is, while retaining the external manifestation of bread and wine, after the priest pronounces the words of Jesus at the consecration of the Mass, the bread truly becomes Christ's body and the wine His blood. That is the test of our faith which is at the heart of the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Pope St. Paul VI, in his 1965 encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (The Mystery of Faith), reminded the faithful that there are various ways in which Christ remains present to the Church and to the world. He specifically cited the presence of Jesus when the Church prays, when the Church is engaged in acts of mercy and charity, and when the Church preaches and acts to rule and govern us by Her sacred power entrusted to Her by Jesus. (NN 35-37).

But lest it be argued that calling the Eucharist the True Presence contradicts or demeans the presence of Jesus in all of these aspects of the Church's life, Pope St. Paul had a famous explanation. He said, "This presence is called "real" not to exclude the idea that the others are "real" too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man." (N. 39).

This teaching highlights the reason for the initiative of the Eucharistic revival. In the Eucharist the presence of Jesus is something unique. It is the source and summit of our faith.

It might even be said that all of the other ways that Jesus is present in the Church draw their reality from their connection to the Eucharistic presence of Jesus.

This explains the emphasis that the Catholic Church places on attendance at Sunday Mass. How could we know that in the special manner of His True Presence we have access to God in the world and not participate in it?

Further, there is the question of what happens in us when we worthily receive the Eucharist. Because we are not receiving in the host and the chalice mere bread and wine that only symbolize or remind us of Christ's presence, we truly receive Him.

The presence of Christ in us, then, goes beyond a physical union with Him. In that act of receiving holy Communion worthily, the God of all power and glory joins Himself to our souls. In effect, each time we receive holy Communion, Christ uses the occasion to change us more and more into His image. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." (Rm 8:29). It is only our own sinfulness that impedes this transforming power of God's love.

The truth of Jesus's true presence, our personal relationship with Christ in the Eucharist, our charity toward Jesus in our needy brothers and sisters, these are the heart of our Eucharistic renewal. What a gift is the Eucharist. What a further gift is our Catholic faith in the True Presence of Jesus.