

## **“Discovering the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist”**

*Lenten Witness Talk by Matt Selby  
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In June of 2010 at the age of 24 I found myself for the first time in my life at a Catholic Mass. I was raised as a faith-filled Evangelical Protestant and Catholicism was still quite foreign to me at the time. I had all the typical stereotypes and misperceptions of Catholics. In fact, my full-time job at that time was doing Protestant missionary work. I would lead teams on short-term mission trips to the Middle East in order to spread the Gospel. One of our target audiences for conversion was Catholics because we didn't consider them to be true Christians. All that to say, when I attended my first Mass at the Cathedral of St. Paul in Minnesota, I felt like a fish out of water. My wife, Anna, and I had been dating at that time for just a few months. She had been raised Catholic and invited me to come to Mass with her. I obliged, thinking at the time that I would try to convince her to leave the Catholic Church and become Protestant. Spoiler alert: that plan backfired!

As I sat through my first experience of Mass, I became extremely frustrated because I didn't know what to do or what to say. Everything was so foreign to me. Thankfully, I didn't give up. Even though I left that first Mass angry, I was curious enough (and in love with Anna enough) to come back. It just so happens that the first Mass I ever attended was on the Feast of Corpus Christi, when the Church celebrates in a special way the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Much to my surprise, that first Mass was just the beginning of a journey that would lead me down a path of many unexpected encounters with Jesus in the Eucharist.

It wasn't long before Anna invited me to go with her to a young adult evening of serving the elderly at a Catholic care center run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. After some time of interacting with the residents, we went to the chapel to participate in a Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration. I had never even heard of Eucharistic Adoration before. In fact, had I known what it was, I probably wouldn't have agreed to participate because I would have thought Catholics were adoring (i.e. worshiping) what was just a piece of bread in my mind. When nuns exposed the Blessed Sacrament in a monstrance on the altar I remember thinking, *I wonder what that is for? I guess it's just a nice decoration.* I then proceeded to spend that hour in prayer. It was one of the most intimate experiences of prayer in my life. I felt closer to Jesus that night than I had been in years. I couldn't explain it at the time but now I know that it was because Jesus was present there in the Eucharist.

As my journey continued, I began to seriously wrestle with the teachings of the Catholic Church on the Eucharist. I read books by Catholic authors, I listened to talks, I studied the Scriptures, and I searched the internet. What I found surprised me. I discovered that the Catholic teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is evident in Scripture. Passages like the Bread of Life Discourse in John, chapter 6, and the Last Supper narratives support this teaching. I had read these passages hundreds of times before but had never stopped to look at them through the lens of the Catholic Church's teachings. I also discovered that the early Church Fathers clearly taught the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. I was becoming more curious.

While studying the teachings, I was also continuing to experience the Real Presence. Anna signed up for an hour each week at a Perpetual Adoration chapel. Being the good boyfriend I was, I decided to go with her (mostly to impress her!) even though the time was from 1:00-2:00 in the morning! I remember spending many of those times (while trying to stay awake!) wrestling with the teaching of the Real Presence. My prayer would be something like this, "God, if that really is you in the host—if you are truly present here—please show me."

Through my research I was becoming more and more intellectually convinced of the teaching but it was in October of 2010 that God answered my prayer. I was at Mass at Holy Hill, a Catholic shrine in Wisconsin and ironically the place where Anna and I had met at a friends' wedding almost two years previous. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist at that Mass, when the priest elevated the consecrated host, it was as if God said to me, "I am present here." I can't explain it but I just knew at that point that Jesus is fully and truly present in the Eucharist. Much more studying and wrestling with the teachings of the Catholic Church would follow but I knew at that point that God was calling me Himself in the Eucharist in the Catholic Church. That following Easter, I was blessed to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church and receive for the first time the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. I am forever grateful to God for leading me to the table where I could encounter His real presence in the Eucharist.

Jesus invites us all to encounter Him in the Eucharist. Do you recognize Him in the breaking of the bread? Will you open your heart to receive Him and allow Him to transform your life?