

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this feast of Corpus Christi, it is important for us to re-affirm our belief in the Real Sacramental Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ's Body Blood Soul and Divinity in the Most Blessed Sacrament, and to distinguish our belief from the opinions held by our non-Catholic brothers and sisters.

Many Protestants will say they believe in "The Real Presence" but they probably do NOT mean what we mean when we speak of the "Real Presence." The Catholic Church teaches that at a valid Catholic Mass the substance of the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. The invisible, eternal dimension of the bread and wine is truly transformed. This is called transubstantiation.

A Lutheran or Anglican may claim to believe in the "Real Presence" but they would deny the doctrine of transubstantiation. What do they mean, then, by their use of the term "Real Presence"? Lutherans officially teach consubstantiation which means the spiritual presence of Christ is "with or beside" the bread and wine, but that the bread and wine are not transformed in any way.

Many Anglicans (in the USA Episcopalians) would hold to receptionism. In other words, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ if, and when, a person receives them with faith. Sometimes Presbyterians, Baptists and other Protestants will also say they believe in the "Real Presence" what they mean by this is difficult to discern. Sometimes what they mean is "I feel especially close to Jesus when we have a communion service."

Non-Catholics may protest, "You Catholics say our Eucharist is invalid. That's offensive!" We must understand the concept of sacramental validity. The Catholic Church teaches that for a sacrament to be valid it needs proper form (the words said) proper minister (the person officiating) and proper matter (the physical stuff of the sacrament). If one or more of these is missing it is not a valid Catholic sacrament. This is simply an objective definition. It is not a value judgement on the worth, the reverence or the spiritual intent of non-Catholic worship. In other words, a Lutheran or Methodist communion service may be a worthy, uplifting and inspiring act of Christian worship, but it is NOT a Catholic sacrament. No one should have a problem with this definition because the non-Catholics themselves would insist that what they are doing is not a Catholic sacrament!

While we always rejoice at non-Catholics desire to receive communion it is good to remember that receiving communion is a sign and seal of our unity with the Catholic Church. Non-Catholic Christians should not receive communion at a Catholic Mass nor should Catholics receive communion (or any other sacraments) in non-Catholic Churches. This discipline is not intended to divide and exclude people, but to recognize the divisions that exist in Christ's Body and to properly welcome those who wish to come into full communion with Christ's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker