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# CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE MASS

A SERVICE OF CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

## ISSUE

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In what ways is Christ present in the Mass?

## RESPONSE

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At Mass Christ is present in the priest, in sacred scripture, in the congregation, and in the Eucharist. Among these, Christ's presence in the Eucharist is preeminent.

## DISCUSSION

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In its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Second Vatican Council addresses the different ways Christ is present in the liturgy:

To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," but especially in the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word since it is He himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised "Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also affirms the distinctive and preeminent presence of Christ in the Eucharist:

"Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us," is present in many ways to his Church [Rom. 8:34]: in his word, in his Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name" [Mt.18:20], 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).

The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments, for it is "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." In the most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained.*" "This presence is called 'real'—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present" (no. 1374).

Because the Eucharist is Christ, Vatican II describes it as the source and summit of the whole Christian life (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11), and that is why it is the preeminent mode of Christ's presence in the liturgy. The whole of salvation history is bound up in His Eucharistic Presence.

## RELATED FAITH FACTS

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Norms for Eucharistic Adoration with Exposition  
St. Augustine's Real Faith in the Real Presence  
Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist  
Smells, Bells, and Other Liturgical Odds & Ends  
Constructively Addressing Liturgical Abuse

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## FURTHER READING

CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

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