

Eucharistic Miracles

As Catholics, we believe that the bread and wine at Mass truly become the body and blood of Christ. Sometimes this may seem hard to comprehend when the Eucharist still looks, feels, tastes, and smells just like bread and wine. Our faith gives us the belief that the actions and words that Christ instituted at the Last Supper during the first Eucharistic celebration are true. In Matthew's gospel we read, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Mt 26:26-28) Setting aside scripture though, there is documented, compelling evidence from around the world that proves that the Eucharist has literally changed into the body and blood of Christ at Mass.

In the Church of San Francesco in Lanciano, Italy, the miraculous flesh and blood of Christ are on display for people to visit. The miracle begins like this – in the 8th century, there was a priest who was having doubts about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. As he was presiding at Mass and saying the words of consecration, he actually saw the bread and wine transform into real human flesh and blood. The Church approved this miracle after an investigation was launched by the local bishop. In 1971, scientific evidence was performed on the flesh. It was concluded that the flesh was from cardiac tissue and that the blood was fresh, containing no preservatives.

It makes sense that the flesh would be from a cardiac tissue as the heart is the core of our bodies. The heart is the symbol of love just as we know that Christ is love in the Eucharist. The love that Jesus has for us is beyond measure but he made sure that we would be able to partake in the Eucharist at Mass to feel that love.

Another Eucharistic miracle was witnessed in Orvieto, Italy in the 13th century. Once again there was a priest who was celebrating Mass but who also was having serious doubts about transubstantiation. He questioned whether Christ was truly present in the Eucharist. After this priest consecrated the host, this same host started to bleed into the corporal that had been placed on the altar. The priest felt very sinful after that and immediately went to confession to ask for forgiveness for the doubt he had been experiencing. The corporal is an object of veneration and still on display today in the Cathedral of Orvieto.

Again in the 13th century there was another incident of a miracle involving the Eucharist. There was a woman and her husband living in Santarem, Portugal. The woman found out that her husband was acting unfaithful to their marriage vows. She decided to seek out a sorceress for help. The sorceress told the wife that the fee for her services would be a consecrated host. So the wife went to St. Stephen church to Mass and received the Eucharist on her tongue. She removed the Eucharist before consuming it and placed it in her veil. As she approached the door to leave the church, the host started to bleed. She took the bloodied host home and placed it into a trunk. During the night, a light shown from the trunk as reminder of the miracle. The woman knew that she needed to repent for her wrong doing so she went the next morning back to the church to confess to the priest. He came back to her house and retrieved the bloodied host and took it back to the church. An investigation of this miracle ensued and was approved by the church. The church, which is now named the Holy Miracle Church, still houses the miraculous host on display today.

In the 18th century in Siena, Italy, a theft took place in the Church of St. Francis. It was August 14, 1730 as the Catholics were celebrating the eve of the Assumption at a festival. While the festival was taking place, a ciborium filled with hundreds of consecrated hosts was stolen from inside the church. Two days later in another church in Siena, someone noticed something unusual hanging out from the collection box. Upon opening the box, the priests discovered the missing hosts covered in dirt and cobwebs. They were cleaned off and placed in a new ciborium to be taken back to St. Francis. Ordinarily, the priest would consume the defiled hosts but instead he left them to deteriorate on their own. In the course of the next few decades, the opposite occurred. Within the miracle of it all, the hosts did not deteriorate but instead looked fresh. Almost 300 hundred years later, the hosts can be viewed in this same state in the Basilica of St. Frances in Siena, Italy.

Pope Francis is very familiar with one Eucharistic miracle that took place in the 20th century in Buenos Aires, Argentina. On August 18, 1996, Fr. Alejandro Pejet was presiding over evening Mass when a woman came up to him afterwards. She let him know that there was a host at the back of the church that had been disposed of on a candleholder. Since the host was defiled, the priest did not consume it. He, instead, placed it in the tabernacle in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in a container filled with water. The priest opened the tabernacle a little over a week later on August 26 to find that the host had changed into a bloody substance. He immediately informed, then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio who instructed him to have professional photos taken of the host. All of this remained a secret for several years as the host stayed in the tabernacle and increased in size. In 1999, Cardinal Bergoglio decided to have it analyzed. Dr. Castanon, in front of the Cardinal's representatives, took a sample from the host and sent it to New York. He did not tell anyone what the sample was from as he did not want to taint the analysis.

A well-known scientist and forensic pathologist examined the sample and determined that it had come from a fragment of a heart muscle found in the wall of the left ventricle. It contained human DNA from real flesh and blood. He also discovered that the heart must have been alive when the sample was taken as there were a large number of white blood cells. These white blood cells would only be alive in a living organism and would die shortly after being placed in a container of water. The doctor was also able to determine that the heart had been under significant stress. The human had likely taken a beating on the chest due to the fact that the tissue had been penetrated by the white blood cells. The doctor was finally told the truth that the sample was actually a consecrated host that had been placed in water over three years ago. He had no scientific answer regarding how this could have happened and described this as a mystery beyond science's comprehension.

Now moving on to the 21st century in Chirattakonam, India, we see another Eucharistic miracle. Eucharistic adoration was taking place at St. Mary's church. Unexpectedly, the priest noticed three red stains manifested on the Eucharist in the monstrance. Not knowing what to do he took the host and placed it back in the tabernacle. A few days later he went back to examine the host again and noticed that the red dots now had arranged themselves into the face of a man – possibly Jesus. He had a photographer come quickly to take pictures of the host.

All of these Eucharistic miracles give us visible signs that can help to take away any doubt that we may have about Christ and his presence in the Eucharist. Through our faith in God, we come to believe that his extraordinary action gives us the mystery of the

Eucharist where he is truly present. We are reminded that Jesus' presence is real and not symbolic. He is love for us in the Eucharist and desires to save us. As each Mass is celebrated, we are seeing a re-presentation, or making present, of the Paschal mystery which shows us to our salvation.

God continuously calls us to conversion. It is through the Eucharistic miracles that he is attempting to bring our faith alive. There is an understanding that Jesus is the real presence in the consecrated host. As we see these outward signs, we realize that Jesus is trying to tell us of his saving grace. Many people have found faith in God because of these signs as well. Above all the Eucharistic miracles show us that Jesus truly did give us spiritual food and drink in his glorified body.

As we return to scripture in John's gospel, we read: "Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.'" (Jn 4:48)