

Source and Summit Speech: What the Eucharist Means to Me

Good morning. My name is Katie Popp and I'm an 8th Grade student at Prince of Peace School. Since Second Grade, I've been learning about the Eucharist and how we come together every Sunday to worship at the table of the Lord to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Every time we participate in the Eucharist, we are nourished and strengthened as individuals and as a faith community.

Over the years, I've come to better understand the Eucharist and the role it – and God – play in my life every day. When I was young, I was a very shy child. I didn't have much self-confidence and I preferred to stand outside a group and look in. I was a "watcher" more than a "doer" because it felt safer to me. When I made my First Communion in Second Grade, my teacher explained over and over that not only was God truly with me but he was also in me as I ate the bread and drank the wine. After the consecration, these symbols became his flesh and blood. At the time, I understood the words but I didn't fully understand the meaning of them. I thought a lot about my teacher's words. It wasn't until I took Communion and drank the wine for the first time, that I figured out what those words meant. I felt different and somehow less alone.

This feeling was empowering. Over the years, I believe it has strengthened my personal relationship with God, and given me confidence and even the courage I need to get up here and speak to you today. As I grew from that eight-year-old child, I realized that there was much I could do to help others – and that I truly enjoy helping however I can. Knowing that I'm never alone has allowed me to come out of my shell and grow in self-confidence. It has given me the strength to speak up for things I believe in, and against those that are wrong. This isn't always easy to do, especially when it happens with classmates that have been friends for years. But I know it's the right thing to do, and I remember that helping others is always more important than going with the majority.

My family tells me how proud they are of me for pushing my fears away and for trying new things – things that only a few years ago I wouldn't have done because I would have been too scared or nervous. But knowing that God is with me helps me to push outside of my comfort zone. I'm now a teammate, a member of the Yearbook team, an altar server, school

mass cantor, and much more. I like to look at the positive side of situations, and I like to help people feel better about themselves. There are so many ways of doing this – from complimenting a younger student to thanking a teacher for an interesting class. It recently occurred to me that there are even bigger, more important ways I can help others, not just in my community but in communities around the United States.

This June I will join 50 other teens from Prince of Peace on a weeklong trip to Nashville, where we will work alongside 300-400 other teens from around the US to help improve the lives of low-income families, children and the elderly. This trip is most definitely outside of my comfort zone, but I am excited to see God through a new way of service. It is going to be an opportunity for me to see God in the lives of the less fortunate, and I am excited to experience how people like me can make a big difference in their lives just by doing something simple.

Strength, courage and faith. These words have become a mantra of sorts to me. Every day I think of them and try to live my life using them to help make someone else's better. It turns out that they also make MY life better. My relationship with God has grown and become much more personal. Instead of thinking of God, the Eucharist and my faith as just words in my religion book, I am working to make them come alive – both inside of me and around me. God is more than an abstract idea to me, He is a teacher, a friend and that voice in my head that pushes me to do more – to be more – even when I'm afraid. I'm looking forward to seeing how much stronger I can make that relationship.

I'm also looking forward to the next chapter in my life – high school. While I've enjoyed the past eight years at Prince of Peace and all that I've learned – both academically and personally – I know I'm ready to move on. I'll take all that I've learned here and apply it to the next four years and beyond, confident in the knowledge that where I go, God and my faith also go.

While I am proud of how far I've come and what I've been able to accomplish so far in my life, I know there is much more for me to do. And I know that with God in my corner, I can do it. I look forward to continuing to help others while growing in my relationship with the Eucharist.

May God bless you and keep you in the palm of His hand.

Thank you!