

Catholic

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REAL PRESENCE IN THE EUCHARIST

In the Gospels, Jesus says, "This is my body" and "This is my blood."
What does that mean to each of us?

BY JEFFREY D. VONLEHMEN

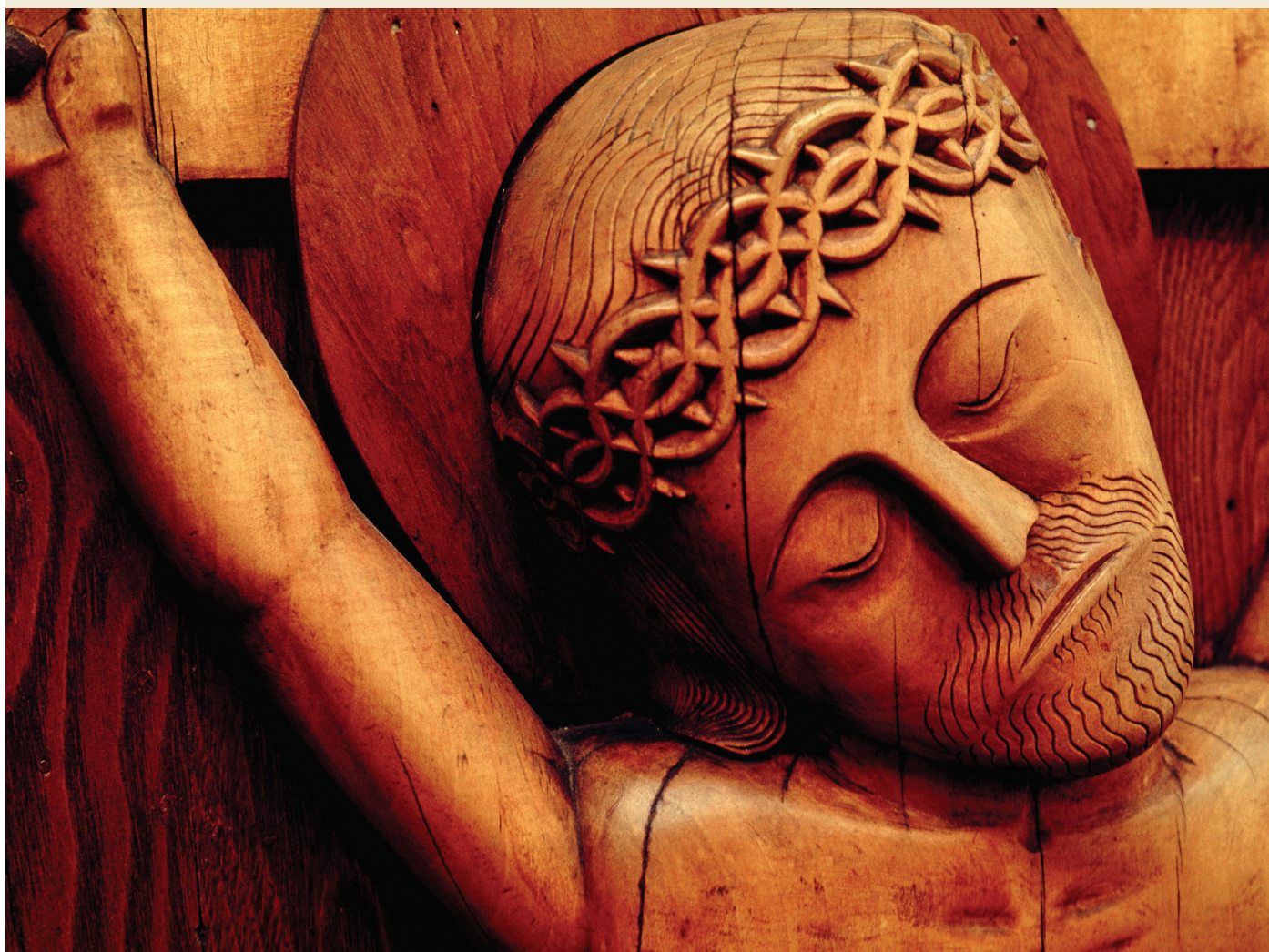


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How is Jesus present in the Eucharist? Most of us, at one time or another, find ourselves either asking that question or trying to explain the mystery for someone else. Catholics believe that the Body and Blood of Jesus are present in consecrated bread and wine. We do not say the Eucharist is *like* the Body and Blood of Jesus, but that it *is* the Body and Blood of Jesus. In the gospels, Jesus says, “This is my body,” and “This is my blood.” That is strong language. It is language Christians have sought to understand for many centuries.

In the Eucharist, we proclaim the Mystery of Faith. And it is a mystery! But the mystery of the kingdom of God and the Eucharist is meant to be obvious although it cannot be reduced to human logic. Sometimes, what is most obvious is most overlooked.



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I invite you to look at the obvious—our *ordinary human experiences*—to help make sense of the Eucharist and Real Presence. Why does it make sense for Catholics to believe in what traditionally has been called *transubstantiation* (the changing of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ)? Why is it important to say that the Eucharist is a concrete encounter of the *community* with Jesus and not just a spiritual thing between an individual and God? In our own human experience, we can discover why real presence and the body-and-blood presence of Christ are important to us and to God.

FLESH-AND-BLOOD RELATIONSHIPS

We often think of spiritual as invisible. But who wants an invisible relationship with a loved one?

Consider this example. A father leaves work early on a weekday, drives five hours to another city to be present at his son's college basketball game, and then drives home the same night. The father arrives home about 5 AM, catches an hour of sleep, then goes to work.

He does this often. Perhaps it would be enough to tell his son over the phone that he is thinking about him and cheering and praying for him. But think how much more it means to the child that his father is not just there in spirit—he is there in flesh. He is providing a *real presence* for his son. What a big difference!

When we love someone, we want a concrete relationship, and the loving Spirit of God always seeks a body-and-blood relationship with us. That's what we celebrate in the Incarnation at Christmas and in the death and resurrection of Jesus on Good Friday and Easter. The Spirit dwells in us so we might experience God, who wants a real relationship with us.

**God wants a body-and-blood relationship with us,
and this concrete relationship is made possible in Christ.**