

First Holy Communion Mass – May 7, 2022 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham (including St. Rose children) – 10:00am – 680 words

I'm very happy to welcome all of you here for this First Holy Communion Mass, and especially our young people who have been preparing themselves very diligently for this wonderful day, to receive Jesus for the first time in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I thank in a special way you parents, who have encouraged your children to take this important step, as well as our catechists led by Mrs. Barbara Doran, and the Dominican Sisters and other teachers at Saint Rose Academy; we know that these children have learned very well what this special moment is all about, thanks to the efforts of all.

When God created everything in the very beginning of time, he said “Let there be light” – and suddenly, there was light; his word is powerful. He speaks, and incredible things happen. So when Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Lord, took bread and wine and said, “This is my Body”, “This is my Blood”, they, in that moment, immediately stopped being bread and wine, and promptly became his Body and Blood. When God speaks, incredible things happen. And as Jesus said in the gospel we just heard, his “flesh is true food”, and his “blood is true drink”; he did this incredible thing to nourish us with his own life.

Thus you have all learned about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. Since the Eucharist really is Jesus, well, that's a really big deal. That is why we genuflect toward the tabernacle, where the Eucharist is kept safe. That is why we have the red lamp burning in the sanctuary, to remind us that Jesus is truly there in the tabernacle. Frankly, that is why we have such a beautiful tabernacle, because our Lord deserves nothing less. And that is why we try to make our worship as beautiful as possible, from the sacred vestments, to the music, to the way that we all dress and act – all of it is for Jesus!

And that is why we must also keep our souls beautiful, since he enters into our body and soul when we receive him in Holy Communion. Therefore, you prepared yourselves in that way, too. Not only have you been learning about what the Eucharist is, but also about what Confession is – and many of you have had several opportunities to go to Confession, to prepare well for this wonderful day. Confession is such a great gift, because through it, God cleanses us again and again of our sins; he washes away all the spiritual dirt from our souls. More than that, he gives us his peace, so that we can meet him with peaceful hearts.

The first reading took us back to the Old Testament, to God's holy people who wandered through the desert for forty years before they could enter the Promised Land – and how God strengthened them through their journey with a mysterious bread called “manna”. We are on a journey, too – through our life in this world to the Promised Land of Heaven. And God gives us, his holy people now, food for our journey in the form of bread. But our faith tells us that, because God's powerful word has been spoken over it by the priest, it is no longer bread at all: it is Jesus himself. It is his body, blood, soul, and divinity.

Yes, the Most Holy Eucharist is God's gift to strengthen us for all that he wants us to do on our journey through this world – and Confession makes us worthy to receive this holy gift. Confession and Communion, in fact, are like the two wings of a bird – let's call it an eagle – that help us to soar, to fly high through life. How wonderful, that you can all begin flying high thanks to these great gifts from Jesus. If I had to guess, today would be something like my 8,425th Holy Communion (and I guess I've been to confession about 1,100 times) – but I still remember my first. I hope you will always remember this day too!