

## This Is My Body

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Years ago, before I became a Catholic, going to Mass with my wife, I would comment to her on how those “hypocrites” would rush out of Mass (usually before the dismissal) and race out of the parking lot. Naturally, in my best superior attitude, I would comment on how *they* (those hypocrites) *had just received the Lord and how meaningless it seemed*. (Oh those days of being perfect.) Even after I became a Catholic I felt a greater sense of “holiness” because I still stayed until after the final hymn ended. Then, suddenly, out of the blue, Fr. Ray gave a homily on why we shouldn’t judge others, *not even those who leave Mass early*. The gospel reading that particular Sunday was from Matthew and we were challenged not to judge other people, not to look at the speck in their eye and ignore the plank in our own. (Matt. 7:1 - 5) So, I began to think more about the correlation of my attitudes and beliefs in relationship to my actions. I found some consolation in the words of Fr. Ray, when he reminded us that *they, nor are we*, are not hypocrites, but that *they, as we*, are simply sinners and Christ came to forgive sinners.

At the beginning of every Mass, we are invited to remind ourselves of our own sinfulness so that we can be more mindful of God’s great love in forgiving our sins. In all human history, there have only been two people free of the burden of sin, Mary and Jesus. Mary’s sinless life is by grace and Jesus’ is by the fullness of knowledge. In our human life, we have moments that are graced through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we receive blessings and have limited knowledge, but we are still sinners. We are all in need of God’s forgiveness. For this perpetual condition of our mortal lives, we have two remedies. We can go to a priest and offer a confession for serious offenses and (*not or*) we can come to Mass and receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. Through the sacrament of confession we are made whole again, freed of the burden of sin, but whole only in the sense of our humanity and its relation to sin. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ we receive the forgiveness of sins also. Yet the Eucharist is much more than an alternative means of restoration, Eucharist is an invitation into the mystical body of Christ. We not only receive Christ in the Eucharist, we become Christ through the Eucharist.

In preparation of the gifts at the altar, while the priest is offering the bread that will become the body of our Lord, the deacon pours water into the wine and prays that through the mingling of the water and wine that we may come to share Christ’s divinity as he shared our humanity. It is as the old adage proclaims, we become what we eat. But do we become Christ? Do we behave any differently? Do we walk out of church a different person than the one who entered? At the consecration the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is a reality, a truth and so to the believer and non-believer alike, the Host is still the Body of Christ. Whoever receives the Host, receives Christ’s Body, believer or non-believer alike. The Host is not consecrated through the belief of the receiver, but through the order of priesthood. Thus, what we do with that new life, that new level of being, is up to us, individually. We can choose to leave Mass fixated on our being in union with God, we can leave Mass glad that it’s over and we can get on with the rest of the weekend, or we can leave Mass determined to share that same Eucharist we received with others by being Christ to them.

My accepting the need to quit judging other people’s faith is instrumental in my journey in the Catholic faith, but it is the communal aspect of becoming one with Christ and one in Christ that opens the doors of my heart. As a Church, we are called to become a unified society. We are to be more than unified in beliefs, teachings and faith; we are to be unified also in our actions. The greatest reverence to receiving the Body of Christ is to live a changed life. We really give true witness to the Eucharist when we show others, through our actions that receiving Christ in the Eucharist, makes a difference in our own lives and the way we behave.