

Today's Gospel should cause each of us to ask ourselves this question... "If we had lived at the time of Jesus and had been among his disciples, would we have been counted among those who left Jesus or among the apostles who remained?"

We are truly blessed to be able to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Holy Communion! Pray that we never... ever take such a gift for granted!

Over the past 13 centuries, God has given us many Eucharistic miracles to help strengthen our faith in this Most Blessed Sacrament.

I want to tell you the story of the first recorded public miracle concerning the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

It was the year 700 AD, in the Italian village of Lanciano.

There was a priest – a monk – who experienced recurring doubts regarding the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. One day he was celebrating Mass for the people of the village and his doubts resurfaced during the Consecration.

After he said the words of institution, the sacred host, one just like what we will offer in today's Mass, changed both in substance... and in actual appearance... into the flesh of Christ.

And the wine also changed both in substance ... and in appearance into the blood of Christ.

All present witnessed this miracle. And praise be to God, the miracle persists even to this very day so that we too can be witnesses to this miracle... so that our doubts, like those of the priest at Lanciano, can be erased.

In the 1970's, Pope Paul VI agreed to allow scientists to test this preserved host of flesh. It was confirmed by scientists to be human heart muscle. And the blood was also determined to be human blood, Type AB, the same as that recovered from the Shroud of Turin.

At today's Mass, the bread and wine offered will undergo a change of substance.

The bread and wine will become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The appearances of bread and wine will remain, but the substance will be Christ, whole and entire. The tiniest particle of the Sacred Host is the whole Christ. The smallest drop of the Precious Blood is the whole Christ.

But in this miracle of Lanciano, God allowed the bread and wine to become the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in both substance AND appearance.

The wine, when changed into the Precious Blood, formed 5 globules of varying shapes and sizes. During one examination carried out in the past, each globule weighed exactly 15.85 grams. But even more amazing, when added together, they all weighed... in total... 15.85 grams. Two globules weighed the same as one. All weighed the same as one. This is a great miracle, a gift from God to strengthen our faith.

Yet it has been reported in recent years that many Catholics no longer believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But Christ demands that we do believe.

In today's first reading, Joshua places a choice before the Israelites... choose to serve God or not. And in today's Gospel, Jesus demands the same... receive Him as the living bread come down from Heaven or not.

For the past few weeks, we have been following the Bread of Life discourse in John's Gospel.

It builds up to this choice. We are either to humbly believe and receive Jesus or we reject Him. We are to eat His flesh and drink His blood or we will not have life in us.

Choose life or choose death.

This is a hard teaching. It was so hard a teaching for the Jews of Jesus' day, that many who had become His disciples left him and went back to their former way of life.

Notice that Jesus did not say to them, "I am only speaking symbolically, you misunderstand me, come back." No, He meant what he said, He knew that they understood Him correctly, and He let them go away.

He then turned to the Apostles and asked them if they would go also. And Peter replied, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus Christ is really, truly, substantially and physically present in the tabernacles of our Churches. In a few moments He will be present upon this altar. The sacrifice of Calvary will be made present to us.

That is what makes this space sacred space. That is why you bless yourself with Holy Water, recalling your baptism, upon entering this Church and genuflect before entering your pew. That is why the priests, deacons, and altar servers, if they are not carrying sacred objects, genuflect at the foot of the Sanctuary. That is why lectors and the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion genuflect when they come forward.

We all reverently and respectfully acknowledge the unique presence of our Lord... here... in this church... in our midst. This is what makes our churches different from other Christian worship space.

As we continue with Mass today, let us keep in mind who has chosen to be with us today... truly present to us today. If we believe in His Real Presence... and if we are free from mortal sin and properly disposed, let us receive Him in Holy Communion and allow Him to transform and sanctify us. And then let us go forth to share Him with those who need Him in their lives.

And if any doubts linger, let us turn to our Lord and say with the Apostle Peter, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."