



Sixth and last excerpt from  
**The Real Presence of  
Jesus Christ in the  
Sacrament of the Eucharist**  
*Questions & Answers*

#6

*This text is the sixth and last of six excerpts from The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions & Answers. Additional excerpts may be found at [www.usccb.org/publishing](http://www.usccb.org/publishing).*

### 15. Why Do We Call the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist a “Mystery”?

The word “mystery” is commonly used to refer to something that escapes the full comprehension of the human mind. In the Bible, however, the word has a deeper and more specific meaning, for it refers to aspects of God’s plan of salvation for humanity, which has already begun but will be completed only with the end of time. In ancient Israel, through the Holy Spirit God revealed to the prophets some of the secrets of what he was going to accomplish for the salvation of his people (cf. Am 3:7; Is 21:28; Dan 2:27-45). Likewise, through the preaching and teaching of Jesus, the mystery of “the Kingdom of God” was being revealed to his disciples (Mk 4:11-12). St. Paul explained that the mysteries of God may challenge our human understanding or may even seem to be foolishness, but their meaning is revealed to the People of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25, 2:6-10; Rom 16:25-27; Rev 10:7).

The Eucharist is a mystery because it participates in the mystery of Jesus Christ and God’s plan to save humanity through Christ. We should not be surprised if there are aspects of the Eucharist that are not easy to understand, for God’s plan for the world has repeatedly surpassed human expectations and human understanding (cf. Jn 6:60-66). For example, even the disciples did not at first understand that it was necessary for the Messiah to be put to death and then to rise from the dead (cf. Mk 8:31-33, 9:31-32, 10:32-34; Mt 16: 21-23, 17:22-23, 20:17-19; Lk 9:22, 9:43-45, 18:31-34). Furthermore, any time that we are speaking of God we need to keep in mind that our human concepts never entirely grasp God. We must not try to limit God to our understanding, but

allow our understanding to be stretched beyond its normal limitations by God’s revelation.

### Conclusion

By his Real Presence in the Eucharist Christ fulfills his promise to be with us “always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “It is the law of friendship that friends should live together. . . . Christ has not left us without his bodily presence in this our pilgrimage, but he joins us to himself in this sacrament in the reality of his body and blood” (*Summa Theologiae*, III q. 75, a. 1). With this gift of Christ’s presence in our midst, the Church is truly blessed. As Jesus told his disciples, referring to his presence among them, “Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it” (Mt 13:17). In the Eucharist the Church both receives the gift of Jesus Christ and gives grateful thanks to God for such a blessing. This thanksgiving is the only proper response, for through this gift of himself in the celebration of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine Christ gives us the gift of eternal life.

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. . . . Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. (Jn 6:53-57)

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

**1** How does the mystery of the Eucharist shape the way in which you live out your faith?

**2** The Eucharist is a blessing to the Church. How do you respond to this blessing? In what ways do you demonstrate your thanks and praise to God in your daily life?

**3** According to John's Gospel, when we eat and drink of the Body and Blood of Christ, we have life within us. In what ways has this reality affected how you see and act toward yourself? See and act toward others?

**4** How do you show your response of thanks and praise to God for the gift of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist outside of the Mass?

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