

Half-Truth
Week #4 (Corpus Christi)
June 3rd 2018

Half-Truth Explored: *"The Holy Eucharist is just a symbol."*

This is the fourth week of our series Half-Truth. We are looking at thoughts in our culture that are half-true, but not completely true. They are kind of sort of right, but not completely correct.

Through this series we are acknowledging the true parts and then seeking to present the whole truth as best understood by our faith.

This coincides with some feasts in our Church that are reminders of some key truths of our faith.

Three weeks ago we celebrated the feast of the Ascension.

That week we confronted
this half-truth **that there are many ways to God.**

We said that is true if you mean
that many religions express some truth
about God and reality
or if you mean that there
are many ways to experience God.

You can experience God through nature or art
or prayer or meditation.

That is all true.

The whole truth is that Jesus is the only
way back to a right relationship with God.

Here is what Jesus said,

*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me. "*

John 14:6

Jesus claimed that he was the only way
back to a right relationship with God
the Father.

Two weeks ago we celebrated *Pentecost*
and looked at the half-truth
**that you don't need a Church
to have a relationship with God.**

This is true if you mean the Church in terms of a building.

However, the Bible primarily describes the Church as the people of God.

We said you need Jesus to get to God the Father and you need the Church to get to Jesus.

We only know about Jesus through the Church, through the community of believers.

Last week, we looked at this statement **that all religions are the same.**

That's true if you mean all religions attempt to answer the same questions.

All religions attempt to describe God and what is the very basis of reality and how we should live.

That is true,

but a cursory look at religions shows that while they all ask the same questions, they come to very different answers.

We looked at the basic doctrine of the Trinity, which says there is one God

in three divine persons.

The conclusion we came to is that this doctrine explains something we know intuitively.

Intuitively we know that love is the highest value

and that's because God is a community of love.

The half-truth we want to confront today is one that is not so much in our culture, but one that exists with Christians.

It is an important element of our Catholic faith.

I want to acknowledge

that many people who come to our Church who are Christian but not Catholic.

I see many of you here each week

with your spouse and your children

and I am so glad that you feel comfortable here

The topic we are dealing with today

you might not agree with

and I may or may not change your mind.

That's all ok.

As we said last week,

naming different points of view
and being honest about them strengthens
and does not hurt relationships.

I am glad you are here,
even if you don't agree with
the Catholic viewpoint on this subject.
I hope after today
you at least better understand it.

The half-truth is that Eucharist is a symbol.

Now it is true that it is a symbol.
All the sacraments are symbols.

The textbook definition of a sacrament is
"an outward sign
instituted by Christ to give grace."

So a sacrament
is something Jesus gave us
as a way to give us grace or his power.

A sacrament is a sign or a symbol.
Sacraments are these physical signs
to show what God wants

to do for us spiritually and in our souls.
As human beings we are composites
of physical and spiritual.
Both your body and soul are good.
Some people think that the body
is bad and the soul is good,
but that is not what Christianity teaches at all.
In fact, God uses very physical
and concrete things
to give us his grace and life to our soul.

Each sacrament has physical signs
of what God wants to give to us spiritually.

For example, water is the key sign of baptism,
that is because in Baptism
God washes our souls clean of original sin.

So the Eucharist which we receive
each week is meant to be a sign
or symbol of what God wants to do for us.

It is a sign that he wants to nourish us
and provide for us.

Just as your body needs food and nourishment, taking the Eucharist reminds you that your soul needs to be fed as well.

So if anyone says Eucharist is a symbol. That is true, **but it is only half true.**

To get to the whole truth we are going to look at a passage from Mark's Gospel, which we just read.

I noted earlier that the sacraments were instituted or started by Christ.

We are going to look at when and how Jesus instituted the Eucharist.

In looking at the story we'll see it brings us to the full truth of its meaning.

So Mark writes,

12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him,

"Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

Mark 14: 12

This is important.

To understand communion fully, you need to know that Jesus instituted the sacrament at a Passover meal.

Jesus was Jewish and he had a Jewish understanding of the Passover.

Passover celebrates God delivering the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years.

Then one day God calls Moses to lead the people out of slavery. Moses goes to Pharaoh and says,

¹ ... 'Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.'

Exodus 8: 1

This is often forgotten
but in the beginning God
just want the Israelites
to be able to worship him.

The pharaoh said, “No.
I’m not giving up all my free labor.”

So God through Moses sends all
these plagues to Egypt,
to make them feel the pain
for the wrong their doing.
It is an unfortunate truth of life
that often we don’t change
as we should change until we feel pain.

So God sends plague after plague.

All this disrupts the Egyptian economy
and brings pain.
However, Pharaoh remains obstinate.
He will not allow the Israelites
to go and worship God.
So then God must send the final plague.

The final plague was the death of the firstborn child and of all animals in the land.

To protect the Jewish people God instituted Passover.

God through Moses told the Jewish people select an unblemished male lamb, sacrifice, smear the blood over the wood of their doorpost and then they had to eat the lamb.

All this needed to be done to protect their firstborn, and this including eating the lamb. You had to eat the lamb that had been sacrificed on your behalf to benefit from its death, so the angel of death would Passover your home.

After the night of Passover and the death of his own son, the Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt.

He tells them to leave and get out of his sight.

It was the celebration of Passover,
this sacrifice and a meal
that initiated the Exodus
and freed the Jews from slavery.

Jesus was born about 1,500 years
after the Exodus.

When Jews at this time celebrated the Passover,
it wasn't like the way we celebrate holidays
or events.

When we celebrate the **July 1st,**
we might think of our
the British North American Act of 1867,
and its founding Fathers
but we don't think of ourselves
as reliving or participating in the event.
We just remember it.

For the Jewish people,
when they celebrated Passover,
they were not just remembering it
but they were living it.

It was real for them.

The rabbis saw each annual celebration

of the Passover as a way of participating in the first exodus.

By taking part in the Passover, you were *in* some mysterious way making present the deliverance that had been won for your ancestors.

In other words, ancient Jewish celebrants did not just remember the exodus, but actively participated in it.

So Jesus tells his disciples to go and prepare a Passover meal.

¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him,

Mark 14: 13

That's interesting because in that culture men didn't carry water. It was considered women's work, so a man carrying water would have stuck out.

Jesus goes on with the instructions,

¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

Mark 14: 14

So the disciples go
and it plays out just as Jesus described it.

Then Mark tells us,

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said,

"Take; this represents my body."

Mark 14: 22

Actually he didn't say that.

He said, *"Take; this is my body."*

He uses the word *is*.

He equates the bread with his body.

and this is important

because of what is missing from the meal,

what is not mentioned at this meal whatsoever

is the lamb.

And that is strange because a lamb

was the main course,

vital for any celebration of Passover.

At the ordinary Jewish Passover,
the entire proceedings revolved
around the body and blood
of the sacrificial Passover lamb.

Here, at the Last Supper,
Jesus did something entirely different.
With his words of explanation,
he shifted the focus away from the body
and blood of the Passover lamb,
and turned it towards
his own body and blood.
Just as the lamb was given up
for the Jewish people to be saved
and you had to eat the lamb to experience
God's power,
now at this time Jesus is saying
that now his body is being given up
for our salvation.
And the bread is his body.
It is his body that is sacrificed
and given up so that we can be saved.

And just as the Jews had to eat the lamb,

so do we need to consume the Lamb of God who is Jesus in communion.

Just as the lamb was slaughtered to save the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, now Jesus goes to the cross to save us from slavery to sin and death.

At the last supper, Jesus says that the bread is his body, which is given up or surrendered for you. Take it and eat it just as you ate the lamb before, now you need to eat this bread, which is his body.

Mark then tells us,

²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This IS my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Mark 14: 23

At a Passover meal,
the cup would have contained wine.
But Jesus does not tell them to drink the wine.
Instead he says it is his blood,
the blood that will be shed for others.
Jesus is equating his blood
with the blood of the lamb.
Just as the lamb's blood
had saved the Jewish people from slavery
and protected the first born,
now his blood will be shed
to save everyone who participates
in His gift of the Eucharist.
Jesus institutes this new Passover meal
and tells us to do it over
and over again in remembrance of him.

Just as the Jewish people believed
that by participating in the Passover,
they were really participating
in the exodus out of Egypt,
we believe you are really participating
in the death and resurrection of Jesus
when you receive the Eucharist.

Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at Passover.

At Passover it was never enough to sacrifice the lamb.

You had to eat the actual flesh of a lamb.

A symbol was not sufficient.

Today is the Feast of Corpus Christi.

The feast is given to us

to reinforce the truth

that what we receive at Communion is truly the body and blood of Christ.

It is not just a symbol,

but truly Jesus:

body and blood, soul and divinity.

We receive Jesus in Communion

because just as the Jewish people

had to eat the lamb

to be saved from Egyptian slavery,

we need to eat the lamb to be saved from sin and death.

It is a symbol, but not just a symbol.

You really do receive Jesus' body and blood.

You eat the Lamb of God,

who takes away your sins.

Just as God created your body to be able to take food and turn it into your flesh and blood through natural means, God is able to take bread and wine and turn it into his flesh and blood through supernatural means.

So what do you do with all this information? Here are a few thoughts.

One, for many of you, aren't convinced.

You would still say you believe it is only a symbol.

It doesn't make any sense that it's Jesus.

That's ok.

I would simply encourage you to pray about it.

Second, I hope you grow in an appreciation for the whole story and depth of Scripture.

There are all these layers and depths of meaning in the Scripture.

The more you read and see connections between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus the more you are going to appreciate how God has been working throughout human history.

I **also** hope that **it** encourages you to come and receive the Eucharist with a greater appreciation for what you are receiving. You are receiving Jesus, body and blood soul, and divinity. When you come to receive Jesus at communion, come focused about what you are really receiving, and for those of you, who out of respect of Communion, out of respect for the Eucharist come up with your hands folded and just receive a blessing, please know that you have my respect. It shows **us** that you understand the significance of what is taking place here each week.

Third, **I hope you** grow in understanding

of what you are present to,
it helps you to make coming here each week
a greater priority.

For some of you, the best way
to take a step forward in faith
would be more regular attendance on Sunday.
You come maybe once or twice a month.
In understanding you are really receiving Jesus,
step it up to attend
once or twice more a month.

Fourth, **I hope you** grow in appreciation
for what Jesus has done for you.
Jesus not only humbled himself
by dying on a cross,
sacrificing himself on the cross,
he humbles himself by coming
in the appearance of bread and wine.
Jesus desires a relationship with you
so much that he makes himself food for you.

Fifth, may you grow in appreciation
for what Jesus wants to do to you.
Just as the bread and wine
are transformed into the body and blood

of Christ,
Jesus wants to transform you
into his Christ like character.
By receiving Jesus,
you are to become like **Christ**.
And in fact that is the greater miracle
than turning bread and wine
into his body and blood.
The bread and wine don't have a will.
They don't fight back.
They don't argue.
You and I we argue.
We struggle to align our will with Jesus' will.
That's one reason
we need to keep receiving Jesus.
We are to become what we eat,
what we consume.