

## Bread of Life

Having celebrated First Holy Communion with a group of adorable little ones this past Sunday, I was confronted with the annual challenge of trying to explain a profound mystery to children who are at the earliest stages of learning to deal with abstract ideas.

It isn't that the Eucharist or Holy Communion is abstract: It is quite concrete and tangible. But, therein is the challenge: It is so as a wafer of bread and a cup of common wine which, by faith, we believe has been transformed into "the body, blood, soul and divinity" of Jesus Christ. Huh?

Grappling with this proposal from a child's point of view, (and that of most everyone), there is no evident change. It comes as a sheer assertion that the bread and wine are, after the utterance of some words and the enacting of some gestures, the actual body and blood of Jesus! The proposal could all too easily be accepted as "make-believe." *"Yes. I understand! We are making believe together!"* Such might be the disposition of a little child who is quite accustomed to "making believe."

What could I possibly say to redirect or correct such misapprehension? The thought occurred to me that I might place the idea of **"mystery" in opposition to "make believe:"** Make believe is a product of imagination. And what an incredible power we have in our imagination! The kids could readily agree with this. We imagine people who can fly without planes, and individuals who have the strength of giants. Our imagination far surpasses the capabilities which are naturally available to us. But we can't help but turn our imaginary "selves" into characters in comic books and movies; "super" men and "wonder" women abound in works of literature, fables and in summer block-buster cinema.

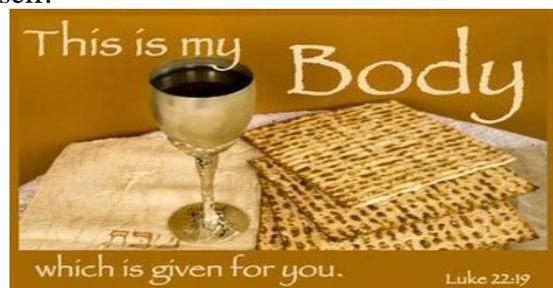
**Mystery is not the same thing as "make believe."** Mystery, in the religious sense of the word, means something revealed by God which remains veiled or somewhat obscure to human beings. I use the analogy of our relationship with the Sun: We can only look at the Sun indirectly and receive its power in small amounts because of our fragile nature. Even at a distance of 97 million miles, it can burn us quite badly. If ever we could reach out and touch the Sun or stare at it directly, it would only be after

we were transformed into a pure energy state, which does not seem to correlate with what we are.

The point is that faith is not based on somebody's imagination, but on a history of God revealing himself to human beings little by little. The God of whom we speak is not one among many gods fashioned out of human imagination, but the One True God and Creator who, in the language of Thomas Aquinas, is the "pure act of existing," or, in the language of the Bible, simply the One who IS, ("I AM who AM!").

Those who are searching for **The One**, are receptive to his self-revelation. Little by little, over the course of thousands of years of human history, we come to know God and he draws closer and closer. And we are transfigured to see more and more.

Holy Communion is the high point of this Divine Revelation. It flows from the great mystery of God coming down to us in human form in Jesus, the Son of God. God, who has need of nothing for himself, so loved us that he "came down" to live among us. And, according to the ritual justice expressed in the worship of ancient Israel, he made of himself the "Lamb of Sacrifice." Like the animals used in the rituals, he made himself---the God-Man--- the sacrificial offering for human sin; the sins of the whole world! Only God could restore harmony to His Creation and reconcile the human family to himself.



At the Last Supper, Jesus left to the Apostles and the Church **the gift of himself** in Holy Communion. Under the signs of the Bread and the Wine, he left the means to communicate or convey his divine life into our lives via the act of eating, drinking and faith. It seems like "make believe," but is it no more a stumbling block that God become a human man! God is personal! God is Love! God wants to be close to us and for us to be close to him! In order for this to happen, we need to be transformed into holy beings, (saints). Hence, "the Bread of Life." Not "make believe," but "mystery!"