



As you go forth from Mass, is Jesus still with you? Is he really and truly present? As we mentioned previously, our Catholic faith teaches us that the Real Presence of Jesus remains in the Eucharist until the outward appearances of the Sacred Host and/or Precious Blood cease to be those of bread and wine as they are absorbed by our bodies. While there are different opinions on how long that actually is, most agree it is around 15 minutes. No doubt, that is a great reason to try and plan for a time of thanksgiving after the Mass. As we go forward, it is also great to keep in mind that, in a very real way, we are tabernacles with Jesus inside us during that time.

Imitating Mary in Receiving Communion

Edward Sri offers thoughts for meditation through the words of Pope St. John Paul II. Sri reminds us that when we have the Real Presence of Jesus in Communion, we are very much like Mother Mary with Jesus in her womb: “John Paul II noted a profound connection between Mary carrying Jesus in her womb and the person receiving communion. In a sense, we become like Mary every time we receive the Eucharist. ‘Mary lived her *Eucharistic faith* even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that *she offered her virginal womb for the Incarnation of God’s Word.*’ For nine months, Mary had the body and blood of Jesus within her. At Mass, we receive the sacramental Body and Blood of our Lord. ‘At the Annunciation, Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord’s body and blood’” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, pp. 142–3, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 55).

As Sri notes, St. John Paul II went on to reflect upon what learning about the Mass and receiving Communion would have been like for Mother Mary. “What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James, and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: ‘This is my body which is given for you’ (Lk 22:19)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb!” Sri writes, “John Paul then beautifully drew out the unique meaning Holy Communion would have had for the Blessed Virgin: ‘For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers...’ What a profound insight! Imagine Mary preparing herself to be reunited with her Son in this way. Imagine the loving attention she gave to Jesus in every Holy Communion. What a joy it must have been for her to have her Son dwelling within her again! May Mary be a model for us in the way we receive the Eucharist. Let us pray that we may ardently welcome Jesus in every Holy Communion as Mary received her Son. May the Eucharist cause our hearts to beat ever more in unison with Christ’s as Mary’s heart beat perfectly with his” (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, pp. 142-3, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 56).

Bearing Jesus’ Presence As We Go

So beautiful! What a wonderful and rich meditation to think about as we recall with joy that Jesus is within us. While certainly more lighthearted, a similar realization comes from one of the funniest saint stories I have come across when reading about the Mass and the Eucharist. Fr. Stefano Manelli recounts that St. Philip Neri had two altar boys with lighted candles go to accompany a man who had left church right after Communion (*Jesus Our Eucharistic Love: Eucharistic Life Exemplified by the Saints*, p. 46). Can you picture it? How about the expression on that man’s face?! Of course, it may have been a corrective to the man to help him realize he shouldn’t be leaving Mass early. But it also really drives home the joyful realization that after Communion, Jesus is truly present with us for a time. As that man was walking forth from the Mass, St. Philip Neri had the altar boys carry candles because it was a Eucharistic Procession! If we could regularly have that realization of Jesus truly present with us after Communion, how different would our conversation and activity be as we go forth from Mass? How would we greet those we encounter? How would we navigate through the parking lot? What activities would we do next after Mass? How would we talk with those we encounter? May a greater realization of the gift of Jesus within us strengthen us to honor his presence in how we show his love!