

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord
Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
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C'mon, admit it; we've all been there: You're in the checkout line at the grocery store; as you're placing your groceries on the belt, you can't help but see the latest tabloid headline! Many times, that headline is absolutely astounding and unbelievable, such as:

- Man's 174-mph sneeze blows wife's hair off!
- Snake with human head found in Arkansas! Or my favorite,
- Severed leg hops to hospital! Accident victim's runaway leg is reattached in 7-hour operation!

Well, I have one more astounding and unbelievable headline for you:

According to a 2019 Pew Research Center Study, less than 1/3 of Catholics in America believe in the **Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist!**

You might wonder, as did I, how such a large number of self-professed Catholics do not believe in one of the most foundational doctrines of the Catholic faith. I suggest that there are at least two causes for this:

1. Individuals have not been properly catechized in the faith, or
2. They have lost their faith and have subjected their faith to human reason.

I've recently come across anecdotal evidence of the second possibility in an article which focused on a young woman, named Toni, who, along with her seven siblings, was raised in a traditional churchgoing Catholic family. Toni was educated in and accepted, as faith, the doctrine of the real presence. However, as an adult she has changed her view on transubstantiation, in which during Mass the bread and wine are turned into the body and blood of Jesus. Toni said, "It's like Santa Claus...we sort of know he doesn't exist, but you still believe in the spirit of the giving." Toni now claims that "It's pretty impossible to me that millions of churches across the world have the actual body of Christ. The bread is sanctified, it's consecrated by [the priests], those living the word, breathing the word, teaching the word. That's good enough for me." Toni has used her human reason to override her faith. She has convinced herself that the mystery of the Real Presence just cannot be. And she's not alone.

To address this crisis of faith, the American bishops have proclaimed a three-year National Eucharistic Revival. We are currently in the second year of that revival, which will culminate next July 17-24 at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, the first in 83 years. To better catechize and prepare the faithful for the upcoming National Congress, our Bishop Johnston has asked all clergy throughout the diocese to preach on the Eucharist, during the next year, on the first Sunday of every month.

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In today's Gospel, Peter, James and John are provided with a preview of the glory that belongs to Jesus after his death and resurrection. (His Transfiguration could be compared to the "coming attractions" that we see at the movie theatre.) During the Transfiguration, Jesus' face "shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light" and, from within "a bright cloud," God the Father proclaimed "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." These elements—the bright light, the cloud and the voice—were known to the Jewish

people in Old Testament-times as a sign of the special presence of God, which is referred to as “shekinah” (sha•KEY•nah), derived from Hebrew verb “shachan,” meaning “to dwell or abide.” This shekinah (sha•KEY•nah) of the Transfiguration is prefigured in Old Testament passages of Moses and the burning bush and the cloud on Mt. Sinai, among others; not to mention the vivid description of God, the Ancient One, that we heard in today’s first reading from the prophet, Daniel.

Unlike Peter, James and John, who climbed to a “high mountain” to initially experience shekinah (sha•KEY•nah), we have the opportunity, every time we attend Mass, to receive the Eucharist, “the source and summit” of the Christian life which Jesus instituted at the Last Supper when he told the apostles, “This is my body...this my blood...Do this in memory of me.” He didn’t say “this is “kinda sorta like my body and blood” or “this is symbolic;” he said “THIS. IS. MY. BODY.” When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus dwells in us and as Blessed Carlo Acutis, the 15-year old millennial said, “The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus, so that on earth we will have a foretaste of heaven.”

And, on this side of heaven, receiving the Eucharist is as close as we’ll get to what Peter, James and John experienced on that high mountain.