

How can I know that the Eucharist is really the Body and Blood of Christ?

This question is an excellent one – one that is at the heart of the Catholic Faith. And it is an answer that should be on the tip of every Catholic's tongue. There are several simple ways to answer this important question.

The first simple answer is because Jesus said so. We are fortunate that Jesus himself definitively answers this question. Matthew's Gospel is unequivocal in this regard (Mt 26:26-28) – ²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, **“Take and eat; this is my body.”** ²⁷Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, **“Drink from it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.”** [New American Bible (NAB)].

These statements are indisputable and reinforced in Mark's Gospel (14:22-24) – ²²While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, **“Take it; this is my body.”** ²³Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them and they all drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, **“This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.”** [NAB].

These statements are again reemphasized in Luke's Gospel (22:19-20) – ¹⁹Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying **“This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me,”** ²⁰And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”** [NAB].

Many Protestant theologians take issue with the literal meaning of Jesus' statements in these Gospels, saying Jesus was using symbolic language. But once again Jesus pinpoints what he means in John's Gospel (6:53-58) – ⁵³Jesus said to them, **“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. ⁵⁴Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. ⁵⁷Just 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.**

⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” ’ [NAB].

Now for many skeptics, these statements were made 2000 years ago and could be subject to misinterpretation. So for those not yet convinced, let us examine the second simple answer - the direct written testimony of more recent individuals who were exceptionally close to the Eucharist. Hundreds of years after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, several Saints (St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Theresa of Avila, for example) all testified to the reality of the Eucharist being the Body and Blood of Jesus. For example, Aquinas said, "O precious and wonderful banquet that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! Could anything be of more intrinsic value? Under the old law it was the flesh of calves and goats that was offered, but here Christ himself, the true God, is set before us as food." Again skeptics claim that these testimonies are those of persons from unenlightened ages past (although most academics regard Aquinas as the greatest religious scholar in history). So let us look at even more recent testimony.

A third simple answer is the well documented testimony from persons in the last century. A specific example is the testimony of Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska. Her close devotion to the Blessed Sacrament led to her exposure to the Divine Mercy of Christ in Jesus himself, as documented in her diary and conversations with her confessor. Skeptics site Faustina's visions as the hallucinations of a poor and sickly girl during the traumatic pre-World War II era in Poland. So are there any witnesses to the divine nature of the Eucharist alive today?

A fourth simple answer from persons alive today would come from someone you may know. Have you ever asked a priest or religious about their experiences in the presence of the Holy Eucharist? Some of today's priests have had visions of radiance, luminesce and tactile sensations of the Body of Christ during epiclesis. ("In the epiclesis, the Church asks the Father to send his Holy Spirit . . . on the bread and wine, so that by his power they may become the body and blood of Jesus Christ and so that those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1353).

Ask someone you know who spends much time in the presence of the Eucharist if they have had any unusual indication of the Godly nature of the Blessed Sacrament. Do not be surprised if you encounter a first-hand witness of the miraculous nature of the Eucharist. Better yet, devote yourself to Eucharistic adoration and being in the presence of the Eucharist and you might become a first-hand witness yourself.