

First Holy Communion – May 2, 2026 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 10:00am – 650 words

When we go on a long road trip, we have to make a plan for what we will eat before we arrive at our destination. So we either pack a cooler with food perhaps for lunch, or we think about stopping at a restaurant along the way. Either way, we provide for the needs of our bodies. But what about our souls? It turns out that they have a need for nourishment also. And that nourishment is not something we can buy in a store or a restaurant. No, it must be given to us – given to us by God himself. The Holy Eucharist is what nourishes our souls.

God pre-figured this to his chosen people, Israel, in the Old Testament, as we heard in the first reading. They were on a journey to the Promised Land and found it difficult to get enough food for everyone. They were hungry and remembered the olden days when they lived in Egypt as slaves but always had food to eat. So they grumbled and complained to God, and he gave them the manna from heaven, which was something like flakes or crumbs of bread that they could gather and eat. Thus he fed them on their journey to the Promised Land.

But what happened in the Old Testament in a physical way happens to us here and now, living in New Testament times, in a spiritual way. We take many journeys throughout our lives and we pack lunches or stop for food. But we know that we have a final destination and that it is not here: we are on a life-long journey to heaven. To get there, we have to have a soul that is alive and strong – which means that it needs to be nourished. The Holy Eucharist, as I said, is the food, the nourishment, that God gives us for this most important journey.

Yes, Jesus said in the gospel, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” He gives us himself under the form of a sacrament as food for our journey to eternity. Through the physical act of eating, he nourishes us spiritually by sharing with us his own life, which he offered for our sake. Raised from the dead, he is alive forevermore, and if we approach Holy Communion with the right dispositions, he makes us alive forevermore, too.

The children who are making their First Holy Communion today have learned about the Real Presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. And to them, I want to make a suggestion. What do we do when the priest holds up the host or the chalice after the consecration? We adore; we worship. But part of that can be a prayer or even an act of faith. When I hold up the host, I say in my heart, “I believe that you are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament”; I make an act of faith. Some people say quite simply, “My Lord and my God!”

I encourage you to form a similar habit, if you have not already. Whenever you are at Holy Mass and the priest elevates the Eucharist, tell Jesus that you believe that it is truly he. And let’s ask God that he will continually strengthen our faith in the Real Presence; that we will look forward to receiving Holy Communion always, and that we will prepare our hearts for it well by making good use of Confession too. If we form good habits, we will experience how the Lord strengthens us in spirit with this food for our journey to heaven – and so we will prepare well for all the good things that await us there in the company of Jesus, Mary, and all the saints and angels.