

God's presence transforms us

It was something I had done literally thousands of times before. I was purifying the sacred vessels at Mass, carefully wiping the crumbs of the Eucharistic Bread, the Body of Christ, into the chalice. It happened to be the Feast of the Epiphany. This was the day we celebrated the Wise Men following the star to find Christ.

I was thinking of Christ as that "Star." Suddenly, it occurred to me that what I was doing was pouring "star dust" into the chalice. I then was further inspired to realize that that is exactly what we do at every Eucharist, at every Mass. As each of us receives a host, a particle of the consecrated bread, the Body of Christ, each of us consumes star dust. We become what we eat. We become the Body of Christ.

For many of us Christians, the idea of becoming God seems like a foreign concept. Yet, that is exactly what the saints and mystics and the Scriptures have been trying to tell us. The great St. Augustine put it so well: "God became human that humans might become God." St. Basil, the great Eastern saint and mystic wrote: "We have become what was otherwise impossible. We have become God."

Most us, myself included, have spent years of our lives with a far different understanding. We see God, separate from us, and "out there." We try to live good lives. If we do, we go to join God "out there" or "up there." If we don't succeed, we go even lower. We go down there!

Life, then, becomes a trial of proving ourselves to God. We try to do good things for God. We try to earn our way to heaven.

But Jesus was saying something very different. He had come into history to be with us. Heaven doesn't start later. Heaven starts right now as we allow God's presence inside us. Heaven, union with God, begins now. It's not us doing good things to prove ourselves to God. Rather it is allowing God to work through us!

Jesus said it so clearly: "The Father and I will come and make our home in you." We are the home of God, the chalice, the monstrance, the ciborium. We are the sacred vessels who hold the presence of God. St. Paul put it so poetically when he wrote: "We are earthenware jars who carry this treasure to make it clear that the power

comes from God and not from us.” It is not we who proclaim ourselves as God, as would seem to be the Original Sin, of Adam and Eve, eating the forbidden fruit to be like God. It is rather God coming to us to make us God.

For most of us, it’s easier to believe in inanimate objects such as bread and wine becoming God than to believe that we are becoming God. As the priest prays the words of consecration, as the power of the Holy Spirit is called down upon these humble creations, the elements cannot resist the consecrating power of God. We humans, however, can resist. We can so fill ourselves with things other than God, with things of the world, that God is crowded out.

That’s the reason we repeat the Eucharist, why we attend church week after week, so that we can repeatedly be fed by bread that has become God so we can allow ourselves to be transformed into God’s presence. Wouldn’t our churches be mobbed if people really understood the process of becoming God? We don’t go to church just to be good. We go to church to become God, and then to act and think as God acts and thinks. Jesus promised us that we would do greater things than he had done!

If you want a final ‘proof’ of what I’m talking about, allow me to quote the second letter of St. Peter, the first pope: “The divine power of Christ has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety, through knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. By virtue of them, he has bestowed on us the great and precious things he promised, so that, through these, you who have fled a world corrupted by lust might become sharers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:3-4).