



## EUCCHARIST AS TOUCHSTONE

By Richard Rohr

I believe that the primary healing of human loneliness and meaninglessness is full contact with full reality itself, especially in its concrete forms (instead of just ideas and concepts). But, as T. S. Elliot said in the *Four Quartets*, “[Human]kind cannot bear very much reality.” What human existence often prefers is highly contrived ways of avoiding the real, the concrete, the physical. We fabricate artificial realities instead, one of which, I’m sad to say, is religion itself. So Jesus brought all of our fancy thinking down to earth, to one concrete place of incarnation—this bread and this cup of wine! “Eat it here, and then see it everywhere,” He seems to be saying.

If it’s too idealized and pretty, if it’s somewhere floating around up in the air, it’s probably not the Gospel. We come back, again and again, to this marvelous touchstone of orthodoxy, the Eucharist. Eucharist, in the first physical incarnation in the body of Jesus, is now continued in space and time in ordinary food. Note how John ([6:53-66](#)) almost embarrassingly keeps insisting on the fleshly physicality of it all! And “many left Him and stopped going with Him” ([John 6:66](#)). It is still an embarrassment of sorts, so we high churches surround the scandal with all kinds of pretty gold and lace and candles.

Adapted from [Eucharist as Touchstone](#) ([CD](#), [MP3](#))

Prayer:

***Eucharisteo. I give thanks.***

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The mystery of Eucharist clarifies and delineates Christianity from the other religions of the world. We have many things in common, but Christianity is the only religion that says that God became a human body; God became *flesh*, as John's Gospel puts it ([1:14](#)). Our fancy theological word for that is the Incarnation, the enfleshment. *It seems that it is much easier for God to convince bread of what it is than for God to convince us.* Incarnation is scandalous, shocking—cannibalistic, intimate, sexual! He did not say, “Think about this,” “Fight about this,” “Stare at this;” but He said “Eat this!” A dynamic, interactive event that makes one out of two.

If we did not have the Eucharist, we would have to create it; sometimes it seems that outsiders can appreciate it more than Christians. As Gandhi said, “There are so many hungry people in the world that God could only come into the world in the form of food.” It is marvelous, that God would enter our lives not just in the form of sermons or Bibles, but in food. God comes to feed us more than just teach us. Lovers understand that.

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ENCOUNTERING CHRIST ENGAGING CULTURE EMANCIPATING THE OPPRESSED





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The hiding place of God, the revelation place of God, is the material world.

You don't have to put spirit and matter together; they have been together ever since the Big Bang, 14.6 billion years ago (see [Genesis 1:1-2](#) and [John 1:1-5](#)). You have to get on your knees and recognize this momentous truth as *already and always so*. The Eucharist offers microcosmic moments of belief, and love of what is cosmically true. It will surely take a lifetime of kneeling and surrendering, trusting and letting go, believing and saying, "How could this be true?" Gandhi also said, "If I really believed what you believe, I wouldn't get up from my knees." The only trouble is that many fervent Christians kneel before the Eucharistic Body of Christ but not the Human Body of Christ that Paul brilliantly describes ([1 Corinthians 12:12-26](#)). Remember, it is much easier for God to transform bread than to transform people, and the bread is for the sake of the people.

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When we start making the Eucharistic meal something to define membership instead of to proclaim grace and gift, we always get in trouble; that's been the temptation of every denomination that has the Eucharist. Too often we use Eucharist to separate who's in from who's out, who's worthy from who's unworthy, instead of to declare that all of us are radically unworthy, and that worthiness is not even the issue. If worthiness is the issue, who can stand before God? Are those who receive actually saying they are "worthy"? I hope not. It is an ego statement to begin with.

The issue is not worthiness; the issue is trust and surrender or, as Thérèse of Lisieux said, "It all comes down to confidence and gratitude." I think that explains the joyous character with which we so often celebrate the Eucharist. We are pulled into immense gratitude and joy for such constant and unearned grace. It doesn't get any better than this! All we can do at Eucharist is kneel in gratitude and then stand in confidence. (Actually, St. Augustine said that the proper Christian posture for prayer was standing, because we no longer had to grovel before such a God or fear any God that is like Jesus.)

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*Christ is the bread, awaiting hunger.*

~ St. Augustine

Eucharist is presence encountering presence—mutuality, vulnerability. There is nothing to prove, to protect, or to sell. It feels so empty, naked, and harmless, that all you can do is be present. The Eucharist is telling us that God is the food and all we have to do is provide the hunger. Somehow we have to make sure that each day we are hungry, that there's room inside of us for another presence. If you are filled with your own opinions, ideas, righteousness, superiority, or sufficiency, you are a world unto yourself and there is no room for "another." Despite all our attempts to define who is worthy and who is not worthy to receive communion, *our only ticket or prerequisite for coming to Eucharist is hunger.* And most often sinners are much more hungry than the "saints."

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Jesus says, "If you eat this bread you will live forever" ([John 6:51](#)). You're indestructible, as it were. You see, if I live by the momentary identity that others give me, that's what dies when I die, and I'm left with nothing. Your relative identity is what passes away. When Jesus says He's giving Himself to you as the "bread of life" and "If you eat this bread you will live forever," he's saying, "Find yourself in Me, and this will not pass or change or die. Eat this food as your primary nutrition, and you are indestructible."

You learn to live in what Thomas Merton would call the True Self—who you are, and always have been, in God. Who you are in God is who you forever are. In fact, that's all you are, and it is more than enough. Everything else is passing away. Reputations, titles, and roles do not determine our identity. As Paul puts it, "I live no longer; not I, but God lives in me" ([Galatians 2:20](#)). When I hand out the bread I love to say to the assembly, "You become what you eat. Come and eat who you are!"

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This absolute touchstone, this body and blood of Christ, is a place we must come to again and again to find our face, to find our name and our absolute identity in God. It takes years to sink in. It is too big a truth for any one moment, too grand and wonderful for our small hearts and minds.

And so we keep *eating this mystery* that is simultaneously the joy of God and the suffering of God packed into one. (Some see the body-bread as the joy and the blood-wine as the suffering). All we can do is be present, because we cannot ever rationally understand this. When the two presences meet, then we have what Catholics brilliantly call "the Real Presence."

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