

***Interview with Fr. Angel Perez-Brown***

**What has your experience been with the Eucharist?**

As a child, my parents did not go to Church. However, I was baptized when I was 20 days old. My first Communion and Confirmation were rushed because they were part of the program at the Catholic school I attended. Because of this I was distant from the Church growing up. I was invited to a Catechesis of the Neocatechumenal Way (a group which is focused on Christian initiation) and then I began going to Church. I remember that I just began taking my relationship with God more seriously after a while, since initially I was attending Church mostly for social reasons (I liked to hang out with other young people and wanted a girlfriend). Then 2 years laters I began to have doubts about taking Communion because I did not believe that the host and the wine were really the body and blood of Jesus Christ. I kept going but did not take Communion. Somebody noticed and asked me why. I told him why I did not take Communion and he told me to confess, to keep taking Communion even if I did not believe but that I should ask God to enlighten me about His Presence. A couple of weeks later when the priest said, “This is my body,” a thought came to my mind: God made the universe by His Word and now He is saying, “This is my body.” If I don’t believe in the real presence, I should not believe anything else. Then I was 100 % convinced that God was then in my hands- my sins came to my mind, and I felt unworthy and began to cry. How could God have such love for me that He’d come to me. My relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist was forever changed. Many a times, I have felt that God speaks to me through the Eucharist.

Years later, now as a seminarian, I went to Mass in Texas. The priest presiding gave a decent homily, but he was rushing through the Mass. I did not like the way he placed the items on the altar. I judged him for not being pastoral, but it seemed to me that he was just performing a duty. When I awoke from my thoughts, I was receiving Communion. It clicked; I was paying attention to the wrong things. I had my way of seeing things, but then I realized that even if things were not as I would like them to be, God is present and that’s all that counts. I still believe that it is wrong to go through the Mass rushing or having the stole outside the chasuble, but for all intents and purposes, it was a valid Mass and thus Jesus Christ is still present.

Then, as a priest myself during Covid, I was touched by the fact that when many people heard that we were having the Mass, they would drive hours to come here to receive the Eucharist. They would come from Wyoming, Denver, Colorado Springs, etc. To receive the Eucharist was as important to them as it was to me.

**What is your favorite Eucharistic miracle?**

I am moved by the saints in Africa who were asked, “If you knew that we’d kill you for coming to the Eucharist, why did you come?” They answered, “because we cannot be without it.”

My favorite miracle is the one that involves a priest who did not believe that the host would turn into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As he was celebrating the Mass, during the words of consecration, the host became flesh and bled before his own eyes. The host is still preserved.

**What message would you like to give your parishioners?**

I would like everyone to have an experience of love in the Eucharist -not just an emotional experience, not looking for tears or anything fabricated by our own efforts but a certainty that God is here and that He’s here loving me although I don’t deserve it. The experience I had helped me become a priest. I don’t have the same experience at every Mass although I wish I did. However, I know that at every mass He is present, and we have the chance to be united to Him as He passes from death to life. I believe, indeed, that the real presence of Jesus is not a mere static reality meant for contemplation alone, but rather a dynamic force that brings us from our spiritual death, due to sin, to eternal life with the Father; from hatred and division to forgiveness and communion, from a place of judgement and condemnation to mercy and justification, from a place of loneliness and despair to the certainty of the love of a God who chooses to come down to us to bring us up with Him forever.