

Do Catholics Really Turn People Away from Christ's Table?

John-Mark Miravalle – 2023-11-30

John-Mark Miravalle gave his 4th talk to TASTE entitled "Do Catholics Really Turn People Away from Christ's Table?" During this talk, he clearly articulated why people may feel unwelcome and judged when they are not invited to Christ's table. Then, with his professorial wit, he artfully intertwined family stories, analogies, theology, and humor to correct misperceptions of Catholic exclusivity. His unique presentation style enabled him to make his key points clear, compelling, and memorable — a true gift to both his seminarian students and our TASTE community!

CHRIST IS IN THE TABERNACLE — Before getting into the main portion of this talk, John-Mark posed the question "How do we know that Christ is in the Tabernacle?" The simplest answer is because our Lord told us so. In John 6, Jesus said that He was going to give the crowd bread from heaven and that "He" is the bread from Heaven. Not only did He say that they were to "eat Him," but then He even described the eating with more graphic language using a word that means to "gnaw" on His flesh! And if that was not enough, He said that they were also to drink His blood! Based on this, some turned around and began to leave. This is where many Protestants say that our Lord was just speaking figuratively. Given parts of the Bible are metaphorical and others are not, how do we know when Jesus is speaking figuratively? The answer is easy. When a metaphor is misunderstood, a responsible speaker clarifies with non-metaphorical language — and this is exactly what Jesus did just 3 chapters earlier when He was talking to Nicodemus and said that no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again. When Nicodemus misunderstood the metaphor and thought Jesus meant reentering into his mother's womb, Jesus immediately clarified that one must be born of water and spirit. Yet here, when many of his disciples who were listening said "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" and even began to leave, Jesus did not clarify. Why? Because he wasn't speaking metaphorically... So how can the Eucharist, which still looks like bread and wine truly be the Body and Blood of Christ? John-Mark gave an example where all the appearances stay the same, but the essence of the object changes. If a dog lays down and dies, all appearances remain the same (its color, size, weight, and even position). Yet it is no longer a live dog on the floor, but is now a corpse. So although the object was significantly changed, the appearances remained the same. This is what happens in the Eucharist except it is the opposite. Instead of something dying, it comes to life in spite of all the appearances remaining the same. This change is not some irrational or illogical thing. It's what we see happening in nature and Christ assures us it also happens in the Blessed Sacrament since God can change something in its essence without changing its appearance. Bottom line, we need to take Christ's words in the Bread of Life Discourse (John 6) seriously!

PROBLEM / MISPERCEPTION — Many people feel that the Catholic Church is exclusive about who we give Communion to and it comes off pretty strong. If you have ever had a Protestant friend that you brought to church and had to explain that they they should not receive communion or if there's someone who has been away from the church for a really long time and you recommend they go to confession before receiving, it can be very awkward. They may say: What kind of church is this? Didn't Jesus welcome sinners to his table? Who are you to judge others? Who are you to set the standards for who can come to Christ's table? My Jesus wants everyone to come to his table. He is inclusive. These are fair questions that deserve solid responses. In doing so, we ourselves may even come to a greater appreciation of the Eucharist that we may be taking for granted.

WE SHOULD NOT RECEIVE THE LORD WHEN WE HAVE BETRAYED HIM — John-Mark said those who are conscious of being in mortal sin should not present themselves for Communion. Recall venial sins **WOUND** relationships and mortal sins **KILL** relationships. While this distinction is not relevant before one sins, it becomes very relevant afterwards since we need to consider how badly we treated the other one in the relationship and what is it going to take to make things right. He gave an example of a spousal relationship where minor offenses could easily be cleaned up with a simple apology, yet a true betrayal like adultery would require a much more significant response. The spouse who committed adultery should not engage in sexual intimacy with their spouse until the relationship can be restored. By extension, if you are conscious of having betrayed your relationship with Jesus, do not engage in the supreme gesture of intimacy, which is receiving His body and blood into yours. Both of these examples present a **lack of integrity** which can also be seen when a friendship is on the rocks and yet in public, the other person attempts to make it seem ok. It would be more appropriate to do whatever it takes to make the relationship right **BEFORE** you pretend that it is right. And this is why we should go to Confession before receiving Communion. So, if the Church tells you that something is gravely wrong — and that you should go to Confession before you receive Communion — why would you not trust that? Why would you trust the Church to give you Jesus, but not trust the Church to give you the truth about Jesus and what He wants for us?

WE SHOULD NOT RECEIVE THE LORD WHEN WE DON'T FULLY BELIEVE IN THE EUCHARIST — No one in the Gospels ever benefited from an encounter with Christ when they did not have faith in Him. As an example, John-Mark highlighted an account in Mark 9:14-29, when the father of a child with epilepsy said to Jesus, “But IF you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “IF you can! Everything is possible to one who has faith.” Faith is necessary for healing. Faith is necessary for salvation. If you don't accept that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus is who He says He is, He can't really do much for you and in fact, it might be counterproductive! So too, if you do not recognize that the Eucharist is really the Lord, it is not going to help you, and it might even hurt you...

... While these cases revolve around those who do NOT have faith, what about non-Catholics who do believe in the Eucharist and want to receive our Lord? Referencing the Catechism, John-Mark said that the Catholic Church does allow other Christians to receive the Eucharist with us — but first wants to be sure that they believe the full truth about the Eucharist. CCC 1399 essentially says that given suitable circumstances and the approval of Church authority, giving communion to members of Eastern Churches is not merely possible but is encouraged! CCC 1401 says “When, in the Ordinary's judgment, a grave necessity arises, Catholic ministers may give the sacraments of Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick to other Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church, who ask for them of their own will, provided they give evidence of holding the Catholic faith regarding these sacraments and possess the required dispositions.” Wow! Who knew?

WE SHOULD ACTUALLY ACT LIKE WE BELIEVE IT IS JESUS — John-Mark stressed that we should be careful how and when we receive the Eucharist. Do our actions convey that we take our Lord's word seriously when He says it is really Jesus in the Eucharist? He challenged us to consider what are ways we can remind ourselves that the Eucharist is actually our Lord right there in front of us. If we believe this and really keep this in our forefront, how would we act? John-Mark asked us to remember that in the Old Testament, if you see God, if you touch God, it is a miracle you are still alive because of the energy that is charging and fueling the universe which would go right into your system. So remember it is only by a miracle every time you receive Him, you do not die, and that you are not instantly vaporized by the sheer power of what you are taking into your system! In light of this, we should be reverent in how we approach, how we kneel, how we act when we come into His house and then how long we pray afterwards. Do something so that we don't forget. We do not want to get used to and take for granted the God of Heaven and Earth. Rather, we need to thank Him....

... One of John-Mark's favorite writers, Ronald Knox, has 37 homilies on the Eucharist and each one is a blow away, but he highlighted one in which the four types of prayer (Adoration, Thanksgiving, Petition, and Repentance) was addressed since we can not do any of these very well on our own. We have a hard time adoring God which is why we should look for new ways to be reverent. We don't do a great job of repentance because we can not see how much damage our sins are doing. Our petition is not very good because we do not know what to ask for most of the time. And although we may think we can at least be good at Thanksgiving, we have no idea how much is being done for us at every second and throughout the course of our lives. So thank God we have the Eucharist because it means Thanksgiving and the Eucharist is where we can each say to Jesus, “Would you please help me do these things and would you do these things on behalf of me — would you please **adore God** the way He deserves to be adored, **ask God** for what you know I need, **say sorry** to Him for me because I don't even know everything I need to apologize for, **thank Him** for the generous gifts He offers, So when we receive communion, acknowledge that we are not grateful enough for the precious and intimate gift given to us in the Eucharist. And since we can not thank His Father the way He deserves, when we come up to receive the Eucharist, we can ask our dear Lord to make us more grateful and supplement for our ingratitude because He is so good and deserves so much more from us.

JOHN-MARK BOOKS — John-Mark highlighted his books that would be for sale after the talk or on-line:

- [Why God? Why Jesus? Why the Catholic Church?](#)
- [Beauty: What It Is and Why It Matters](#)
- [How to Feel Good and How Not to: The Ethics of Using Marijuana, Alcohol, Antidepressants, and Other Mood-Altering Drugs:](#)

HIS FAVORITE AUTHORS & BOOKS — John-Mark shared some of his favorite authors and books:

- Ronald Knox's book, [Pastoral and Occasional Sermons](#). The collection of homilies is out of press & very expensive
- Ronald Knox's book, [A Retreat for Lay People](#) or get it for free in digital form on the Universalis App
- Fulton Sheen's Catholic Catechism Series [podcast](#) which includes 50 lessons on Catholic teaching.
- [C.S. Lewis](#) books — General reference to all his books
- G.K. Chesterton's book, [The Catholic Church and Conversion](#).

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