



Exploring the “Real Presence” of Jesus to Children

In the United States, the First Communion is usually celebrated sometimes between the first and fourth grades, most often in grade two, when children are ages 7- or 8-years old. Children this age are in what Piaget, called the “concrete operational” stage of development. They see and understand things in the concrete, black and white terms. They have some difficulty thinking in the abstract or understanding symbolism. It can be a challenge to offer direct, concrete explanations of abstract concepts like transubstantiation and why Jesus would offer himself up for us as food.

One way to accurately but simply explain transubstantiation to a child is to say, “When we celebrate the Eucharist, God changes the bread and wine so that they become Jesus, Himself. It still looks and tastes like bread and wine, but it is really Jesus disguised as bread and wine. He comes in the form of bread to remind us of His Body, and the form of wine to remind us of His blood.” We can explain why Jesus gives himself as bread and wine by saying, “Jesus wants to be very close to you. He wants to become part of you and you to become part of him. The Eucharist helps us be more like Jesus.

Remember that a child’s understanding of the Eucharist will unfold and grow over time. Children need a solid assurance that God comes to us in a special way in the Holy Communion and that what happens is much more than what we see. This will plant the seed they need to keep learning about Jesus’ greatest gift to us - the gift of Himself.

Transubstantiation - the change by which the bread and wine used in the Sacrament of Eucharist become not merely as a sign or figure, but also in reality the body and blood of Christ. This action takes place during the Consecration of the Mass.