

Dear Brothers and Sisters



The Real Presence

The small town of Anxanum is located on the beautiful Adriatic coast of Italy, exactly half way between San Giovanni Rotondo - where Padre Pio lived, and Loretto - the shrine of the Holy House of Nazareth. Anxanum has existed since ancient times, but its name was changed to 'Lanciano' at the beginning of the Christian era. The Roman centurion who thrust the lance into the side of Jesus, piercing the tip of his heart, from which he shed blood and water, was from

this town. Thus, the town's name was changed to 'lance' or 'Lanciano.'

The church in the center of Lanciano was served for many centuries by Basilian monks; but in the eighth century one of the monks was beginning to have doubts of faith, particularly with his belief in the Real Presence of in the Eucharist. One morning, while celebrating Mass, these doubts were in his mind as he was saying the words of consecration "This is My Body. This is My Blood." But then something happened. He remained fixed to the spot, with his back to the people, and could not continue with the Mass. The folks behind him began to wonder what was happening when the monk turned to them and invited them to the altar. At the words of consecration, he had witnessed the host turn into living flesh and the wine change into live blood, which coagulated into five globules.

The miracle of Lanciano is still visible today. Each year many thousands of pilgrims travel to the town to witness the sacred species which are preserved in a reliquary in the church there.

In 1971, some 1300 years after the miracle happened, scientific tests were performed by Odoardo Linoli, professor in anatomy, pathological histology, chemistry and clinical microscopy, and Ruggero Bertelli, a professor of the University of Siena. They concluded that the flesh is real human flesh and the blood is real human blood; the flesh consists of muscular tissue from the heart, and both flesh and blood were free of any preservatives.

We don't need to go to Lanciano to witness the Eucharistic miracle, because it happens here in Woodcliff Lake every time, we celebrate the Eucharist in our parish.

Today is the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ when, together with the Universal Church, we specifically acknowledge and pray to the Real Presence of Jesus in the sacred species of his Body and Blood.

We owe this Solemnity to St. Juliana, a young woman from Belgium, who had a great devotion to the Eucharist. She had a vision in which she saw the church in the form of a full moon, but with one dark spot. This blemish, she understood, was the absence in the Church of a feast dedicated to the Real Presence. We celebrate the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, at the Mass of the Last Supper, but that occurs during Holy Week, and the beginning of the Paschal Triduum, and the emphasis on the Real Presence can be lost amidst everything else that is happening liturgically. Thus, today's Solemnity was established and set on the Sunday after the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. We have celebrated Pentecost, the Trinity, and now rejoice in the Real and abiding Presence of Christ with us. May the Eucharist be, for each of us, the source and summit of our Christian life.

Fr. Sean