

- About an hour north of Rome in the Umbria region of Italy is the very picturesque town of Orvieto. Like so many of the towns of Italy, at the very heart of Orvieto is a beautiful Catholic church.
- And within this beautiful Catholic church in the heart of Orvieto is the famed Corporal of Bolsena. A corporal, you may recall, is the square white cloth, placed on the altar, upon which the Eucharist rests during Mass.
- The Corporal of Bolsena is famous because it is stained with blood from a Eucharistic miracle that occurred in the village of Bolsena in 1263.
- A traveling priest from Germany was passing through that village while on pilgrimage to Rome, and while a pious man, this priest had some serious doubts about transubstantiation and the true presence of our Lord in the Eucharist.
- While offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in Bolsena, blood started to seep from the Host just after the priest spoke the words of Consecration. The blood was so profuse that it soon covered his hands and spilled onto the corporal.
- Confused, the priest stopped Mass and then asked to be taken to the nearby city of Orvieto, where Pope Urban IV was staying at the time. Upon hearing the priest's story, the Holy Father began an investigation to determine the authenticity of the miracle.
- Once the Holy Father ascertained all the facts, he had the corporal brought to Orvieto in a grand procession and placed it in the cathedral where it remains on display to this day.
- For the past couple of weeks, our Gospel reading has come from John 6, which provides much of the Church's scriptural background for our belief in the Eucharist.
- In today's Gospel we hear about the Jews who are murmuring against Jesus for saying that He is "the bread that came down from Heaven."
- They know Jesus, they've watched Him grow up, they know His parents. So for them, to hear Jesus say that He has come down from Heaven, and that He is the bread sent by God, is scandalous! How could this be? Is this not Jesus, the Son of Joseph?
- Of course the Jews are relying solely on their physical senses to make this determination that Jesus is nothing more than a carpenter's son.
- Although they have just witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fish, as well as countless other miracles, they refuse to look upon Jesus with the eyes of faith. Rather, they choose to limit themselves to the myopia and fallibility of human knowledge and experience.
- It is a sad consequence of that Fall that we humans often doubt. Even though God gives us the great gift of faith at our baptism, in our sinfulness, it is not always easy to be strong in faith, especially when our senses cannot confirm or deny a truth for us.
- Yet as Christians it is so very important that learn to rely not solely on our physical senses, which are easily deceived, but on our spiritual senses as well.
- It is so very important that we train ourselves to see with the eyes of faith, for it is only when we walk by faith and not by sight that we can see things as they truly are.
- While every human knows that there are visible realities that we can perceive with our physical senses, as Christians we know that there are also invisible realities that are knowable to us only through faith.
- So for example, while we cannot see it or touch it or drive to it, while it has no attributes that are accessible to our physical senses, as Christians we all know and believe that Heaven truly exists. It is a truth written on our hearts that we believe by faith.

- And much of our Faith is like this! Our belief in the Trinity, the angels, the intercession of the saints, the efficacy of the sacraments, and so on are all things that we cannot prove with our senses, but that we must believe by faith.
- Note well that the lack of empirical evidence doesn't make these realities any less true. In fact, as Catholics we know by faith that the invisible realities of our faith are more real than the visible realities!
- Central among these matters of faith for us Catholics is our belief in the Eucharist. While our senses cannot perceive any change taking place in the bread and wine as the priest says the words of consecration during Mass, we know by faith that the bread and wine do, indeed, become our Lord's body and blood.
- And every once in a while, in order to bolster the belief of the faithful, our Lord allows a miracle – like the Eucharistic miracle of Bolsena – to occur. Miracles like this remind us that our faith is not a collection of pious myths, but rather that what we believe is believable.
- Yet we cannot depend on these miracles. We must make the choice to believe. And this choosing to believe without any confirmation from our senses is an exercise of faith.
- But keep in mind that faith is not a matter of believing something irrational or illogical. To the contrary, faith is a matter of submitting our intellect and will to God. As Hebrews 11:1 tells us: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
- Thus, true faith is never blind. It's simply a matter of trusting in our Lord and what He has revealed. It's a matter of cooperating with the grace that God has given us. Thus, while faith is a supernatural gift from God, it is also something we must choose to exercise.
- At its heart, our faith is rooted in our relationship with Jesus. The stronger our relationship with the Lord, the stronger our faith will be. Thus, faith is not something that God gives to some and not to others; faith is accessible to everyone. But we must be willing to be in relationship with God and to humbly submit ourselves to Him.
- It's important that we choose to exercise our faith because it is our faith in Jesus that leads us to eternal life. As Jesus tells us today: "whoever believes has eternal life."
- So, truly, my friends, if you fear that your faith is weak, then look to strengthen your relationship with Christ through prayer and the worthy reception of Holy Communion.
- Several years ago a study revealed that only          of Catholics really believe in the True Presence in the Eucharist. This is sad not simply because it means that most Catholics have a defect in faith. It's sad because it means that most Catholics don't really know our Lord!
- And in failing to believe in the Eucharist, we miss out on graces important to our salvation! The Eucharist strengthens us and prepares us for Heaven. It joins us in closer union with our Lord, and it forgives our venial sins. The Eucharist is how Jesus shows His love for us.
- Every time we come to Mass and are presented with Holy Communion, we respond "Amen!" Amen means: "I believe." So ask yourself: do I really believe? Do I believe that the Eucharist is truly the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ?
- And if you do believe, then make it a point to act as if you believe. Ask yourself: do I always behave in a manner consistent with my belief in the Eucharist? For example, do I always genuflect when I pass in front of the tabernacle or do I walk by casually with nary a thought to the presence of my Lord?
- When I come to church, do I dress in a manner that shows my understanding that I am in the Lord's holy presence, or do I just put on what feels comfortable? Am I quiet, reverent and prayerful in church, or do I chat needlessly with those around me?

- Do I take the time to prayerfully prepare myself to receive Holy Communion, making sure I have no un-confessed grave sins before approaching our Lord, or do I receive Holy Communion when I know I shouldn't because I fear what others might think of me?
- Do I receive the Eucharist with great devotion and recollection, realizing that it is the Lord Himself Who is being placed on my tongue or in my hands? And afterwards do I return to my pew and thank the Lord for the graces He has just given to me?
- I ask you to consider these questions not simply to ensure that everyone is following "the rules." I ask you to consider these questions because acting in way that is consistent with our beliefs actually strengthens our faith!
- When we respond to the Eucharist in a way that shows that we do believe it to be the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, our faith in the Eucharist grows, and we grow in holiness.
- My friends, it is our greatest privilege as Catholics to receive our Lord's body, blood, soul and divinity in Holy Communion. It is not merely bread and wine that we receive. By faith we know that the Eucharist is truly our Lord made present for our salvation.
- As we consider this great gift, let us pray for a strengthening of our faith in the Eucharist and in all the divine mysteries of our faith, and let us resolve to exercise our faith with great zeal, charity, reverence, and integrity.