Over the course of four decades, I have visited many non-Catholic Christian churches. There I have enjoyed many positive experiences of worship services and inter-faith dialogues. Perhaps what has struck me most positively occurs at Communion. In all of these Christian churches, person after person approaches Communion with great reverence, humility and piety. This behavior reveals an apparently deep faith-filled mind and heart. This universal respect for the Eucharist I have witnessed in Baptist churches in North Carolina, in Calvinist churches in Western Michigan, in Lutheran and Methodist churches in Maryland, in Anglican churches in England and Jerusalem, and in the Russian Orthodox Church at Red Square in Moscow. This same pattern takes place in every Catholic Church throughout the world on every continent.

Joyfully, there exists worldwide respect and reverence for the Eucharist. Sadly, while Catholics and Orthodox believe in the sacramental presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, Protestants disagree even among themselves whether this presence is real or spiritual, or symbolic or merely memorial. Within a few generations of Martin Luther's separation from the Catholic Church, Protestants were teaching 200 different and contradictory explanations of the Eucharist: what it was, how it happened, when it happened, and how long the presence lasted.

Catholics, how might you explain our belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? … May I suggest that our belief is supported by the same three-legged-stool on which the Church bases all of her teachings: Scriptures, Tradition, and the Magisterium, which means the official teaching office of the Catholic Church.

The Scriptures. All three synoptic gospels present these or similar words of institution from the last supper: “this is my body, take and eat it. … This is my blood. Take and drink it.” John’s gospel regarding the Eucharist reports that many of Jesus’ disciples replied, “this is a hard saying. Who can accept it?” And many disciples departed from Jesus. Today’s second reading from St. Paul expresses belief in the Eucharist, immediately following a paragraph in which Paul instructs and even scolds the people about how they are to act in church.

Tradition. From the earliest years, Church fathers and Christian communities have proclaimed belief in the real presence. St. Ignatius of Antioch in 110 AD, writes, “I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible.” (Letter to the Romans 7:3) And Justin Martyr at Rome, Irenaeus at southern France, Clement of Alexandria, Egypt, all of whom wrote in the 2nd century, all proclaimed the real presence as opposed to the heretical Gnostics and Docetists, who taught only a spiritual or memorial presence.
From the earliest centuries, Christians described the Eucharist in various ways: bread of life, bread of eternal life, bread of angels, holy bread, sacred meal. Since day one, Christians by way of tradition have believed in the real presence of Jesus in the Communion banquet.

Church Teaching. Throughout history we have had many catechisms to teach the faith clearly. The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, presents that the Eucharist “as the source and summit of the Christian life,” and that Catholics are to attend Mass each Sunday.

If I might conclude on a personal note. A few years ago, a thousand miles from here one of my golfing acquaintances left the Catholic church to join a Bible-based Protestant church. One day, we were chatting, and I broached the topic of why he had changed churches. He replied that he was seeking a “more personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” I listened with an open mind and heart. I knew that the church which he joined did not believe in real presence, so I said, “Jesus says in the Bible at the Last Supper, “this is my body, this is my blood. ...take and eat it. Take and drink it.” No closer experience of a personal relationship with Jesus occurs than when we receive the sacramental body and blood of Jesus.” We Catholics should be overflowing with joy because of our personal relationship with Jesus experienced in the Eucharist, as St. Irenaeus says, “Become what you receive.”