



Eucharistic Miracle Sienna, Italy 1730

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Almost three hundred years ago, people were treating religious celebrations as a reason to have a party and to get a day off of work or school and not so much about the religious part of the celebration. For example, on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, people didn't really think about Mary being taken up body and soul into heaven after she died. Instead, they thought about the parades, foods, and being with friends.

This was the same with Mass, people went to Mass on Sundays out of habit or just to see friends not because they loved God or wanted to be made stronger and holier by the Eucharist. Mass was just the thing to do.

This story begins on the day prior to the Feast of the Assumption of Mary in 1730. All the priests of the town were in one of the many churches in town making celebration plans. That meant that the chapel in the Church of St. Francis did not have the watchful eyes of a priest protecting it. Thieves broke into the chapel and picked the lock on the tabernacle.

Back to the story, the thieves stole the golden ciborium, the container, holding 351 consecrated hosts, the bread that was already fully Jesus.

The priest of St Francis did not discover the theft until the next morning during Mass when he opened the tabernacle to distribute the Hosts during Communion. **Jesus missing!**

A little while later in the day, a parishioner found the lid to the ciborium in the street outside the church. This made the priests worried that someone had sacrilegied Jesus, which means to do bad things to the Eucharist to disrespect Jesus.

The parishioners and priest were so sorrowful and worried that the party part of the feast was canceled. The archbishop ordered public prayers of reparation, which are prayers to apologize to Jesus. At the same time, the police hunted for the thieves.

For three days, just like the three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, the people prayed to make things right with God and that the Hosts would be found.

On the third day, a parishioner in a different church ¹ noticed something white sticking up from the box that collected money for the poor. The parishioner hurried to tell the church priest who in turn hurried to tell the archbishop. As soon as the archbishop's representative arrived, he and several priests opened the collection box and found all 351 consecrated hosts. But, since the box wasn't opened very often, the hosts were covered in cobwebs and dirt.

The priests cleaned the Hosts as best as they could. The archbishop then led a solemn procession, which is a little bit like a serious, holy parade, back to the Church of St. Francis where the town people adored all 351 Hosts in the same way we are loving the one Host in front of us today.

The hosts were saved and not eaten probably because they had been so dirty. But you cannot just throw Jesus away. The Hosts were placed in a safe spot so that nature could break them down. The priests eventually realized that the Host were miraculous because they did not become hard, turn a yucky color, or mold in the way in which nature would normally do with an uneaten host. ²

Quite the opposite happened, the hosts showed no sign of breakdown, decay, or mold. The Hosts stayed as fresh as the day they were baked and even smelled very nice. **Today** the hosts still remain as fresh as the day they were made, almost 300 hundred years ago. It is one of the longest on-going miracles in the world. This miracle created a new heart for the people of Sienna which produced a deep love, respect, and honor for Jesus in the Eucharist.

¹ Church of St. Mary of Provenzano

² "continuing miracle of preservation"