

## **THE EUCHARIST IN THE PLAN OF SALVATION**

"God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share His own blessed life. For this reason . . . God draws close to man" (CCC 1). Out of the pure and unselfish love that is His very essence, God created the universe so that we could exist and enjoy His love forever. To this end, He revealed Himself to the whole world through a "Chosen People," established a covenant of love with them, revealed His law to them, sent them prophets, and, finally, fulfilled His covenant by sending His eternal Son, who was born, lived, died, resurrected, and ascended so that we could be saved from sin and united to God. Jesus Christ the Son of God continued His presence and work among us by appointing apostles and establishing the Church, His "Mystical Body." God did all this for one reason: for the love-union with us that is achieved most perfectly in this life in the Eucharist.

Its origin

The Eucharist rests on the authority of Christ, who instituted it (Lk 22:14-20). "Faithful to the Lord's command the Church continues to do . . . what He did . . . ." (CCC 1333). Those who reject what the Church teaches and does, whether they know it or not, really reject what Christ teaches and does; for the Church's creed, cult, and code - her theology, liturgy, and morality - are all in His name, who said to the apostles, "he who hears you, hears me" (Lk 10:16). The Eucharist has

always been controversial and divisive, as was Christ. This is supremely ironic, for the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity with Christ and, through him (the "one bread"), with His whole Body the Church (the "one body").

## **ITS HISTORY**

"From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord's command. Of the Church of Jerusalem it is written: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers . . . '(Acts 2:42; CCC 1342).

"From that time on down to our own day the celebration of the Eucharist has been continued, so that today we encounter it everywhere in the Church with the same fundamental structure. It remains the center of the Church's life" (CCC 1343).

"If from the beginning Christians have celebrated the Eucharist, and in a form whose substance has not changed despite the great diversity of times and liturgies, it is because we know ourselves to be bound by the command the Lord gave on the eve of His Passion: 'Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24-25; C 1356).

## **ITS IDENTITY: CHRIST REALLY PRESENT**

As a sacrament, the Eucharist has a double aspect: it is both a sign and the reality signified by it, both a remembering of the past and a making-really-present: "When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present" (CCC 1564).

Here the three meanings of "present" come together: Christ in the Eucharist is 1) present, not absent, but really here; 2) present, not past, but happening now; and 3) presented as a gift (a "present"), really given; offered, not withheld.

Christ is "present in many ways to His Church" (CCC 1373) but "[t]he mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species [forms, appearances] is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as 'the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend'<sup>201</sup> [St. Thomas Aquinas]. In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.' . . . [I]t is presence in the fullest sense . . . Christ, God and man, makes Himself wholly and entirely present" (CCC 1374).

## **ITS RELATION TO THE CROSS**

Christ offered Himself once for all on the Cross. He said, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30). The Eucharist does not repeat this sacrifice, but re-presents it to the Father. The sacrifice that was accomplished on Calvary is offered again in each Mass. It can be offered now only because "it is finished," perfected, "a perfect offering."

"In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which He gave up for us on the Cross, the very blood which He 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' " (Mt 26:28; CCC 1365). We know this is true because Christ said so:

"This is my body which is given for you," and "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20).

The Eucharist is not merely an image or symbol of Christ's sacrifice; it is Christ's sacrifice. "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: 'The victim is one and the same: the same [Christ] now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different.' ' . . . in the Mass, the same Christ who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar

of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner . . . " (CCC 1367)

Christ on the Cross of Calvary 2000 years ago and Christ on the altar of your local Catholic church today are the same person. The Christ we meet today in the Mass is the Christ of history, for He is "Jesus Christ; the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8). Christ is not divided by time.

Christ is also not divided by space or limited by matter. "Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species [consecrated bread and wine] and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ" (CCC 1377).

The practical consequence of this fact is that we can and should have the same attitude to the Eucharist that we would have to Christ Himself if He were visibly present as He was to His Apostles: the same attitude we would have had if we were standing under the Cross as He was offering His life blood for our salvation.

## **TRANSUBSTANTIATION**

God performs a miracle in each Mass. In fact, there has never been a miracle as great as this anywhere on earth for 2000 years. And it happens in every Catholic church every day!

"It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but He who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered" (St. John Chrysostom; CCC 1375).  
"This change is not like natural changes, but is entirely supernatural, and effected by God's power alone" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae III, 75,4).

Such a miracle is beyond the power of man, but not beyond the power of God. " . . . Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist [Gn 1], change existing things into what they were not before? . . ." (St. Ambrose; CCC 1375).

Reason says it is possible. But faith says it is actual. Why do Catholics believe this astonishing fact - that what seems to all human perception to be ordinary bread and wine is in fact the body and blood of God incarnate? Because Christ said so! "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly His body that He was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of

the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change in the whole substance [being, essence] of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation" (Council of Trent in the sixteenth century; CCC 1576).

"The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist . . ." (CCC 1377). Since they remain for about 15 minutes in the human body after being swallowed, we should spend this time in prayer, thanksgiving, and adoration, and not quickly turn to worldly occupations.

## **WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST**

"The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist . . . adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful and carrying them in procession" (CCC 1378).

If the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist were not true, this would be the most monstrous idolatry: bowing to bread and worshipping wine! And if it is true, then not to adore is equally monstrous.

Eucharistic adoration has transformed many lives and parishes. Pope John Paul II said, "The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease" (CCC 1380).