



REAL PRESENCE

PART I

The *Logos* (Word of God) is manifested within all creation to differing degrees: the beauty of a sunset, the truth of a mathematical equation, the goodness of virtuous living. [1] Through the *Logos*, God reveals himself. The incarnate *Logos*, Christ, is the fullest revelation of God that we can encounter on earth. Christ, the Divine *Logos*, instituted all the Sacraments as the privileged bearers of his presence. This very presence is communicated via the Sacraments in accord with differing degrees of participation, but its fullness is manifested in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is not simply symbolic of Christ's body and blood; it is his real Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in their entirety. Robert Sokolowski beautifully sums up this doctrine: "The Eucharist is the sacramental extension of the Incarnation." [2] As the Fathers at Vatican II pointed out, Christ is indeed present in a variety of ways — in the very intelligibility of the universe, in the gathered assembly at Mass, in the reading of the Scriptures, in the person of the priest — but he is "really, truly, and substantially" present, that is to say, present in a qualitatively different way, in the Eucharistic elements.

Sacraments, according to St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), are types of signs, since they point to something that lies beyond them, namely, the sacred power that flows from the passion of Christ. They are composed of a material element — oil, water, bread, wine, etc. — and a formal element, embodied in the words that accompany them. Thus, baptism is a sacred sign involving the pouring of water and the uttering of the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the words specifying the sacred power of Christ operative in and through the water.

Sacraments are not only signs of grace, but actually the instrumental causes of grace. The saving energy of Christ's cross flows, as it were, through these sacred signs, much in the way that the power of the builder flows through the saw that he employs or the authority of the general is made manifest in the soldiers whom he commands. Their function is not merely to display Christ's divine life in a

[1] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *Introduction to Christianity*, (1968, Ignatius, San Francisco), p. 151-52.

[2] Robert Sokolowski. *Christian Faith and Human Understanding*, (2006, CUA, Washington D.C.), p. 72.



form that can be sensed or felt, but they are themselves, through the power of the Holy Spirit, conduits of God's grace flowing from the pierced side of Christ. [3]

Whereas the other sacraments contain only the power of Christ, the Eucharist uniquely contains Christ himself, in the full reality of his presence. As the embodiment of Christ himself, who took on a human nature and surrendered his life as a sacrifice for the redemption of humanity, Vatican II called the Eucharist the "source and summit of the Christian life" (LG 11).

Nevertheless, since the Eucharist is difficult to understand, many disputes about it have arisen throughout the Church's history. The writings of many of the Church Fathers support belief in the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Origen, Ambrose, Augustine and others agree that the word of Christ is the necessary condition for changing the bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood. However, as time progressed, more technical questions arose as to *how* the Eucharistic change occurs. Berengarius of Tours (999-1088) challenged belief in the Real Presence. Berengarius claimed that there is an essential difference between the historical body of Jesus, born of the Virgin and now reigning in heaven, and the "body" that appears sacramentally on the altar. He thought Christ's presence within the bread and wine was not physical, but that a virtue or spiritual power was added to the elements at the consecration. (Martin Luther argued the same viewpoint many centuries later.) The theory of Berengarius was met almost immediately with strenuous opposition, leading to a synod in 1059 where the theology of Berengarius was condemned based on John 6 and the writings of the Church Fathers.

Even when Jesus first introduced the idea of eating his Body and drinking his Blood to receive eternal life, many disciples could not accept this idea literally due to the abhorrent nature of his statements. Throughout the Old Testament, we can find numerous explicit prohibitions against the eating of flesh and blood. For example, the Mosaic law itself in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy states: "It shall be a perpetual statute through your generations, in all of your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood" (Lev. 3:17), and "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat" (Deut. 12:23).

[3] Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *God is Near Us*, (2003, Ignatius, San Francisco), p. 43.

The Israelites linked the blood with the “life” that came from God and belonged to God, so it was off limits to man. So it’s no wonder that many could not accept this teaching.

When some in the crowd quarreled and questioned Jesus’ words (John 6:52), he did not soften his speech or describe it as metaphorical. Rather, Jesus clearly says, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). In that statement, he maintains the potency of his rhetoric by doubling down and using an even stronger Greek word for “eat,” which translates as “gnaw” in English. After many desert him, he asks his closest disciples if they will also leave (John 6:67). Although Christ’s teaching is difficult and hard to accept, Peter’s faith in the Lordship of Jesus (John 6:68) also grounds his faith in *all* that Jesus says.

Jesus also said: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I have life because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me” (John 6:56-57). For Christians, Jesus is not simply a wise teacher by whose words one abides; rather, Jesus is a power in whom we participate, a field of force in which we live and move and have our being. In his master metaphor, St. Paul speaks of the body of Jesus of which baptized people are members (1 Cor 12:12-31). The rhetoric just cited implies an intensely organic relationship between the Father, Jesus, and the Church, the third deriving its life from the second who derives his life from the first. We must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord because that is the way that we come to participate in him and thus, finally in the life of the Father. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, we find equally vitalistic language: we are much more than followers of Jesus; we are grafted onto him as branches are grafted onto a vine (John 15:1-11).

Christ knows the deepest desire of the human heart: the possession of the fullness of the divine life (John 6:26-27). But Christ does not just know this — he is himself the fulfillment of our deepest desire (John 6:49-51). His charity compels him to offer himself as the flesh upon which we feast, so that we may possess the fullness of life (John 6:53). And in literally eating his sacramental Body and Blood, we participate in the fullness of his life. Therefore, we are sanctified and readied for eternal life in the Father through our communion with Christ’s divine life in the Eucharist.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. In what varied ways is Christ present in the world and within the Church?
What differentiates Christ's presence in the Eucharist from his presence in these other ways (CCC 1373-1374)?

2. What is a Sacrament (CCC 1116 and 1131)? Who instituted the Sacraments?

3. What are the results of receiving the Sacraments, and why are the Sacraments important (CCC 1127-1129)?



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- 1. In what varied ways is Christ present in the world and within the Church? What differentiates Christ's presence in the Eucharist from his presence in these other ways (CCC 1373-1374)?**

Answer: Christ, as the Divine *Logos*, is present throughout all of creation because he is the fount of all being. The recognition of truth, beauty, and goodness in all beings is an indirect recognition of the *Logos*. However, the Church, the chosen vehicle of Christ's salvation, manifests the *Logos* in its fullness. The Sacraments are the privileged means by which we participate in the Divine *Logos*. The Eucharist is above all the Sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the Sacraments tend" (ST III, q. 73, a. 3). The whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the Eucharist. He is entirely present.

- 2. What is a Sacrament (CCC 1116 and 1131)? Who instituted the Sacraments?**

Answer: The *Catechism* defines the Sacraments as the "signs of grace by which the divine life is dispensed to us" and also as the "powers that come forth" from the Body of Christ. They are the work of the Holy Spirit through the Church, bringing recipients into the divine life of the New Covenant. Christ himself instituted the Sacraments.

- 3. What are the results of receiving the Sacraments, and why are the Sacraments important (CCC 1127-1129)?**

Answer: Reception of the Sacraments confers grace upon all who receive them in faith. They bring one into the divine life regardless of "the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God" (ST III, q. 68, a. 8). The Sacraments are essential for participation in the divine life and for eternal salvation, since they transmit the grace of the Holy Spirit.

- 4. Read the "Bread of Life" discourse in John 6:28-66, and explain in your own words why the Church does not interpret the Eucharist as just a symbol. Pretend you are explaining this to someone who is not Catholic.**

Answer: In John 6:28-66, Christ's description of himself as the Bread of Life reflects a realism that he never refutes. He maintains the realism of his description even as some of his disciples abandon him. He even turned to his closest disciples and asked them if they also wanted to leave. If he were speaking metaphorically, he would have clarified himself as he did in other cases.

5. Why were the Eucharist and the Passion both difficult for the Apostles to accept? What are “stumbling blocks” to accepting them today? (CCC 1336; Isa. 55:8)?

Answer: Both the Eucharist and the Passion and Death of the Lord are mysteries that can only be accepted through faith. For the Apostles, these mysteries were difficult to accept because Christ’s words about the Eucharist and about his Passion did not make sense according to human understanding. When Jesus said that you must eat his body and drink his blood, his followers were aghast at the thought and could not believe he meant it literally. In addition, the Apostles believed Jesus was the Messiah, their Lord and the new King, so they could not accept that he would have to die brutally as a criminal. They even doubted his Resurrection until they encountered Jesus personally afterwards. Today, these mysteries are “stumbling blocks” for many as well because God’s ways are not our ways. Only through the eyes of faith can they be accepted.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1373 "Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us," is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name," in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But "he is present . . . most especially in the Eucharistic species."

1374 The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species 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." 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." "This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

1116 Sacraments are "powers that comes forth" from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are "the masterworks of God" in the new and everlasting covenant.

1131 The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.

1127 Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. the Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit. As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.

1128 This is the meaning of the Church's affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: "by the very fact of the action's being performed"), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that "the

sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God." From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.

1129 The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. "Sacramental grace" is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament. the Spirit heals and transforms those who receive him by conforming them to the Son of God. the fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.

1336 The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, just as the announcement of the Passion scandalized them: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" The Eucharist and the Cross are stumbling blocks. It is the same mystery and it never ceases to be an occasion of division. "Will you also go away?": The Lord's question echoes through the ages, as a loving invitation to discover that only he has "the words of eternal life" and that to receive in faith the gift of his Eucharist is to receive the Lord himself.

John 6: 28 – 66

28 So they said to him, “What can we do to accomplish the works of God?”

29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent.”

30 So they said to him, “What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?”

31 Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

32 So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

34 So they said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

36 But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe.

37 Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me,

38 because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me.

39 And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day.

40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day.”

41 The Jews murmured about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven,”

42 and they said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

43 Jesus answered and said to them, “Stop murmuring among yourselves.

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day.

45 It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.

46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

47 Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

48 I am the bread of life.

49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died;

50 this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

52 The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?"

53 Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.

55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

57 Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

59 These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

60 Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?"

61 Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you?"

62 What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

63 It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

64 But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him.

65 And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."

66 As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.