



REAL PRESENCE

PART II

The Church professes in faith that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a real presence. This means that “the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ, is truly, really and substantially contained in the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist.”[1]

The presence of Christ is real, but it is not empirically verifiable. This mysterious concept can be better understood with a little insight borrowed from Aristotle’s natural philosophy, which St. Thomas Aquinas used in his writings. Aristotle argued that the most basic metaphysical reality is primary substance, an intelligible substrate that lies “underneath” the various accidents or outward appearances of color, shape, size, position, and so forth. So while the secondary qualities of the bread and wine — color, shape, size, aroma — remain unchanged, their underlying, and essentially invisible, substances are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Why can we believe this? Because Christ said so (John 6:49-57). If Christ is Lord, then what he says *is*. In the biblical reading, God’s word does not so much describe as it *achieves*. Thomas Aquinas gave a more philosophical expression to this notion when he said that God does not know things because they exist (as we do) but rather that things exist because God knows them. In the book of Genesis, we hear that creation occurred through a series of divine speech-acts: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light ... God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear.’ And so it happened ... Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures ...’ And so it happened.” (Gen. 1:3, 9, 24). God is not describing a preexisting state of affairs; he is, through his speech, bringing things into being.

Now that very word by which God creates the cosmos became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth: “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). This means that Jesus is not simply a holy man whose words describe God; he is himself the divine Word which affects what it says. Jesus calmed the raging storm with his words; he raised Lazarus from the dead by speaking, “Lazarus, come out!”

[1] Council of Trent (1562), Session 13, can. 1



Again and again, the Gospel writers show us how Jesus' words are efficacious and transformative, producing what they pronounce. Again and again, they present Jesus himself as the incarnation of the creative word of Genesis.

The night before he died, Jesus performed his most extraordinary word-act. Gathered with the twelve for a Passover supper, he "took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples, he said, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Matt. 26:26-28). If he were an ordinary prophet or teacher, these powerful words, spoken the night before his death, would have burned themselves into the consciousness of his followers and carried enormous symbolic resonance. But Jesus was not one prophet among many; he was the incarnate Word of God. Therefore, his words had the power to create, to affect reality at the deepest possible level. Since what he says is, the words, "this is my body" and "this is my blood" effectively change the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. Like all divine utterances, they produce what they say.

With the eyes of faith, we can see how the priest, acting in the Person of Christ, speaks Christ's very words at the consecration, and these words make Christ's presence real in the Eucharist. The priest repeats the words of Christ, and by divine power, the bread and wine, at the deepest level of their reality, are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

In 1208, Pope Innocent III used the term "transubstantiation" for the first time in an official document, when discussing the use of water and wine at the Eucharist. He remarked that some hold the water to be "transubstantiated into blood" in the process of consecration. Seven years later at the Fourth Lateran Council, the term is employed again: "Jesus Christ, whose body and blood in the sacrament of the altar are truly contained under the appearances of bread and wine, the bread having been transubstantiated into the body and the wine into blood by the divine power" (Fourth Lateran Council [1215], Canon 1).

St. Thomas Aquinas addressed the intellectual challenge of faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. [2] Following Aquinas, Bishop Barron explains that the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist can be understood in reference to a “participation metaphysic.” A “participation metaphysic” is an understanding of reality in which the natural and the supernatural, the finite and the eternal, God and creation, exist in relationship with one another. A distinctly Christian view of this dynamism insists that the relationship is meant to be one of communion and love. The Sacrament of the Eucharist anticipates the transformation at the end times where Christ will be “all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23), while still maintaining the integrity of each creature apart from the Creator.

This most privileged sacrament is necessary for the fullest possible participation in the divine life. Inasmuch as we participate in the Eucharist, we participate in Christ’s death and Resurrection. This communion with Christ enables us to share communion with one another, which is the foundation and condition for the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ. The Real Presence unites the Church and thereby makes us signs of Christ in the world.

[2] St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, III. q. 75.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What makes the Eucharist unique and above the other Sacraments (CCC 1324, 1326, 1374)?



2. What is transubstantiation (CCC 1376 and 1412-13)? What is required to accept the doctrine of transubstantiation (CCC 1381)?

3. Why is the Word of Christ, spoken by the priest at the consecration, enough to ensure the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (CCC 1375)?

4. How does receiving and communing with Christ through his Body and Blood support the unity of his Mystical Body, the Church (CCC 787-789, 1396)?

5. What is anticipated when we celebrate the Eucharist (CCC 1402-1405)?

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PART II



1. **What makes the Eucharist unique and above the other Sacraments (CCC 1324, 1326, 1374)?**

Answer: The Eucharist is unique and above the other Sacraments because it contains that towards which all the other Sacraments tend — Christ himself in his entirety: body, blood, soul and divinity. When we receive the Eucharist, we are united with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life when “God will be all in all” (I Cor. 15:28).

2. **What is transubstantiation (CCC 1376 and 1412-13)? What is required to accept the doctrine of transubstantiation (CCC 1381)?**

Answer: Transubstantiation is the doctrine that the substance of bread and wine changes into the Body and Blood of Christ as the priest says the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper. The appearance of bread and wine do not change, but the underlying substance of them does change, so our senses cannot apprehend this transformation. Trusting in divine authority — through faith — we can comprehend this change.

3. **Why is the Word of Christ, spoken by the priest at the consecration, enough to ensure the transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (CCC 1375)?**

Answer: A priest, by virtue of his ordination, is in the Person of Christ and, when he speaks the Word of Christ, the bread and wine are transformed by the power of this Word. The Word of Christ coming through the priest causes this transformation because it is the Divine Word of God himself.

4. **How does receiving and communing with Christ through his Body and Blood support the unity of his Mystical Body, the Church (CCC 787-789, 1396)?**

Answer: Christ said, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (John 6:56). The Eucharist is God’s chosen means by which we commune with Christ, and by communing with Christ we indirectly commune with all those who participate in the Body of Christ, the Church. This communion with Christ is called the Mystical Body, a living community gathered around Christ and united in him, with him, and through him.

5. **What is anticipated when we celebrate the Eucharist (CCC 1402-1405)?**

Answer: In the Eucharist, a “pledge of the life to come” is given to us. The Eucharist anticipates heavenly glory, which is living in communion with Christ eternally. Christ is the heavenly glory, but his glory is veiled in the Eucharist. We wait for the day when it will be unveiled at the Second Coming when “every tear will be wiped away.” This is the great Christian hope celebrated at each Eucharist.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1324 The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

1326 Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all.

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."

1376 The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "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 of the whole substance 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."

1412 The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: "This is my body which will be given up for you.... This is the cup of my blood...."

1413 By the consecration the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial

manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1640; 1651).

1381 "That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that 'cannot be apprehended by the senses,' says St. Thomas, 'but only by faith, which relies on divine authority.' For this reason, in a commentary on Luke 22:19 ('This is my body which is given for you. '), St. Cyril says: 'Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie.'"

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived;
How says trusty hearing? that shall be believed;
What God's Son has told me, take for truth I do;
Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing true.

1375 It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament. The Church Fathers strongly affirmed the faith of the Church in the efficacy of the Word of Christ and of the action of the Holy Spirit to bring about this conversion. Thus St. John Chrysostom declares:

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.

and St. Ambrose says about this conversion:

Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed.... Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature.

787 From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings. Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: "Abide in me, and I in you.... I am the vine, you are the branches." and he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

788 When his visible presence was taken from them, Jesus did not leave his disciples orphans. He promised to remain with them until the end of time; he sent them his Spirit. As a result communion with Jesus has become, in a way, more intense: "By communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation."

789 The comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered around him; she is united in him, in his body. Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ. "One Body"

1396 The unity of the Mystical Body: the Eucharist makes the Church. Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body - the Church. Communion renews, strengthens, and deepens this incorporation into the Church, already achieved by Baptism. In Baptism we have been called to form but one body. The Eucharist fulfills this call: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread:"

If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond "Amen" ("yes, it is true!") and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, "the Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true.

1402 In an ancient prayer the Church acclaim the mystery of the Eucharist: "O sacred banquet in which Christ is received as food, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace and a pledge of the life to come is given to us." If the Eucharist is the memorial of the Passover of the Lord Jesus, if by our communion at the altar we are filled "with every heavenly blessing and grace," then the Eucharist is also an anticipation of the heavenly glory.

1403 At the Last Supper the Lord himself directed his disciples' attention toward the fulfillment of the Passover in the kingdom of God: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist she remembers this promise and turns her gaze "to him who is to come." In her prayer she calls for his coming: "Maranatha!" "Come, Lord Jesus!" "May your grace come and this world pass away!"

1404 The Church knows that the Lord comes even now in his Eucharist and that he is there in our midst. However, his presence is veiled. Therefore we celebrate the Eucharist "awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ," asking "to share in your glory when every tear will be wiped away. On that day we shall see you, our God, as you are. We shall become like you and praise you for ever through Christ our Lord."

1405 There is no surer pledge or dearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth "in which righteousness dwells," than the Eucharist. Every time this mystery is celebrated, "the work of our redemption is carried on" and we "break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death, and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ."