

Liturgical Catechesis; Homily 7  
“The Mass & Sacrament” or “Transubstantiation”

Having looked at the four movements of the Liturgy of the Eucharist (to take, bless, break and give) and then having looked even more closely at the Great Prayer of Blessing, I want to focus even more closely on the *effect* of the blessing.

First, to begin, Jesus speaks metaphorically throughout the scriptures. He says he is the way, the light of the world, the gate for the sheep, etc, but in these sayings, none of those who hear him take him literally. However, when he says, “I am the living bread come down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” They object, questioning how he could give them his flesh to eat. Those who were there took him literally, when they never had before. And Jesus stresses again, “my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.” And the scripture tells us that many of his disciples turned back because of this, and Jesus reiterated to those who remained that the words he had spoken, about his flesh as true food, were spirit and life.

Second, he never hands the disciples a gate or a candle and says, “I am this gate” or “this light is my light.” However, as he prepares for his death, he does take bread and wine and says, “this is my body... this is my blood.” He made a clear connection between the “taking, blessing, breaking and giving” and his death upon the cross. He does not say “like my body;” he says “this is” and that his disciples should do the same in his memory. In other words, “do this” [do what I just did, i.e., “take, bless, break and give” to change bread and wine into my body and my blood)] “in remembrance of me” [remembering my one-time saving death and resurrection].

Third, this belief is the belief handed down from the Apostles. Around the year 55, St. Paul stresses it is not a “symbolic” memorial but a *real* memorial when he says “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27).

And this same faith is seen in the early Church. Around the year 100, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote, “I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ.”

Or around 150, St. Justin Martyr wrote,

“For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus.”

Or around the year 180, St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote,

“If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could he rightly take bread, which is of the same creation as our own, and confess it to be his body and affirm the mixture in the cup is his blood?”

Or around the year 350, St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote,

“Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master’s declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm.”

Or around the year 400, St. Augustine wrote,

“What you see is the bread and chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; faith does not desire instruction.”

...And these are but a few...

Thus, the Church has always handed on what was handed down to it. We believe that bread and wine are changed, not by the power of the priest, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Recall from our first Sunday in this series - Jesus is the sacrament, the Church is a kind of sacrament, and Christ through the Church offers seven sacraments. It is Christ who changes it into himself; the priest simply acts in the person of Christ the head.

But also note that we do not believe that this change is perceivable by *any* human senses. Taste, touch, smell, sight... all of these perceive only bread and wine - the outward perceivable characteristics appear to be bread and wine. Run any chemical analysis, try a DNA test - to all perceivable, measurable realities it will seem to be bread and wine.

However, by the power of Christ’s command and the Holy Spirit, they have ceased to be bread and wine. It is ***NOT that Christ dwells in the bread and wine***; it is that ***what appears to be bread and wine is now his body and blood*** that he gives to us, as he did for his disciples that Last Supper. The inner reality, the substance of the thing, has changed, and this change “is something that ‘cannot be apprehended by the senses,’ says St. Thomas, ‘but *only by faith*, which relies upon divine authority” (no. 1381). That it ***is*** Christ is not perceivable ***except by faith***. By faith, ***and by faith alone***, we know it is really and truly him - body, blood, soul and divinity.

As a Church, we recognize a ***real presence***, which is ***not symbolic***, but we also recognize that this presence is not perceivable to the human senses; it is ***perceivable only by faith***. Thus, it seems symbolic - at best - to others who do not share our faith). The catechism states, “the Church knows that the Lord comes even now in his Eucharist and that he is in our midst. However, his presence is veiled” (no. 1404). Simply put, we believe that Jesus meant what he said, “this is my body... this is my blood,” and we believe that as the Son of God he has the power to make it happen as he said.

Thus, we also long for his return, when the veil will cease, when we will see God face to face. And we acknowledge and pray for this each and every Sunday too, “as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

Like some of the disciples in the Gospel of John, we might say, “this teaching is difficult.” And like those disciples, we might have to face the questions, “Does this offend you? Do you also wish to go away?”

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