

Transubstantiation

My son, who made his First Holy Communion this spring, had a very upsetting experience. His friend, who attends a different parish and who also was making his First Holy Communion, said to my son, "Oh, it's just bread and wine." My son was crushed, because he has been taught that Holy Communion is the Body and Blood of Jesus. I reassured him of the truth, but am I missing something?

— An ACH reader

The upsetting experience your son had, and the poor, erroneous catechesis his friend received prompted our Holy Father to write his recent encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church).

As Catholics, we firmly believe that the real presence of Christ is in the Holy Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) asserts, "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it. For in the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself, our Pasch and the living bread which gives life to men through His flesh—that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit" (No. 5). For this reason, the Council referred to the Holy Eucharist as the source and summit of the whole Christian life (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 11).

Our belief in the Holy Eucharist is rooted in Christ Himself. Recall the beautiful words of our Lord in the Bread of Life Discourse in the Gospel of St. John: "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If

giving, for three days later our Lord rose from the dead conquering both sin and death. Yes, the perfect, everlasting covenant of life and love with God was made by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This whole mystery is preserved in the Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacrifice of the Mass. We too take unleavened bread and wine, two sources of nourishment. By the will of the Father, the work of the Holy Spirit, and priesthood of Jesus entrusted to His ordained priests, and through the words of consecration, that bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Yes, the bread and wine do not change in characteristics — they still look the same, taste and smell the same, and hold the same shape. However, the reality, "the what it is," the substance does change. We do not receive bread and wine; we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. We call this transubstantiation, a term used at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and asserted again by our Holy Father in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (No. 15). Therefore, each time we celebrate Mass, we are plunged into the whole everpresent, everlasting mystery of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter, and share intimately in life of our Lord through Holy Eucharist.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, our Holy Father highlighted these very points: "At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal Triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper, and to what followed it. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place, beginning with the agony in Gethsemane" (No. 3).

Moreover, in and through the Holy Eucharist, our Holy Father teaches that we can contemplate the face of Christ because He is truly present: "To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize Him wherever He manifests Himself, in His many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of His Body and Blood. The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by Him she is fed and by Him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a 'mystery of light.' Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: 'their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.'" (No. 6).

The Catholic Church has always cherished this treasure. St. Paul wrote, "I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and after He had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper, He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' Every time then you eat this bread and drink this cup, you

proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes!" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

During the days of Roman persecution, to clearly distinguish the Eucharist from the cultic rite of Mithra and to dispel Roman charges of cannibalism, St. Justin Martyr (d. 165) wrote in his *First Apology*, "We do not consume the Eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilate of its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of His own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving."

Later, the Council of Trent in 1551 addressed the heretical views of the Reformers. Remember Zwingli and Calvin believed that Christ was present only "in sign;" Luther believed in consubstantiation whereby the Eucharist is both body and blood, and bread and wine; and Melancthon believed that the Eucharist reverts back to just bread and wine after communion.

Straight Answers from Fr. William Saunders

anyone eats this bread he shall live forever, the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. Let me solemnly assure you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me" (John 6:51, 53-57). Note that none of this language is symbolic — Jesus meant what He said. Moreover, even when there was grumbling and objections, and even after some disciples abandoned our Lord because of this teaching, Jesus nowhere said, "Oh please, stop. I really meant this symbolically." Our Lord stood by His teaching.

The meaning of Bread of Life Discourse becomes more clear at the Last Supper on the first Holy Thursday. There, Jesus gathered His apostles to share what was literally His last supper. According to the Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus took unleavened bread and wine—two sources of basic nourishment. He took bread, blessed it, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the apostles, saying, "Take this and eat it; this is my body." He took the cup of wine, gave thanks, gave it to His apostles and said, "All of you must drink from it for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." If we extracted the words of consecration recorded in the Last Supper accounts of the gospels and distilled them, we would have the words of consecration used at Mass. (Cf. Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; and Luke 22:14-20.)

Think of those words! Jesus was not just giving to the apostles blessed bread and wine. He was giving His whole life — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. He was giving His very self. How true that was! The next day, Jesus' body hung upon the altar of the cross. His blood was spilled to wash away our sins. As priest, He offered the perfect sacrifice for the remission of sin. However, this sacrifice was not death rendering but life

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Trent's Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist specified, "In the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the appearances of those perceptible realities. For there is no contradiction in the fact that our Savior always sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven according to His natural way of existing and that, nevertheless, in His substance He is sacramentally present to us in many other places."

Therefore, no faithful, knowledgeable Catholic would say that the Holy Eucharist is just bread and wine or even just symbolizes the Body and Blood of Christ. Yes, we pray for grace that we may believe more strongly each day in this precious gift of Christ Himself. Perhaps we should dwell on the words of Thomas Aquinas in *Adoro Te Devote*, "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."

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MEDITATION OF THE DAY

The More That Is Given

While I was about to go to Holy Communion, it seemed that I was being thrown wide open like a door being flung open to welcome the arrival of a dear friend; but after his entry it is shut tight. So my heart was alone with him alone, with God. It seems impossible to relate all the effects, feelings, leaping delight, and festivity it experienced.

If I were to speak for example of all the times of happiness and pleasure shared with dear friends in the world, I would be saying nothing (comparable to this joy); and if I were to add up all the occasions of rejoicing in the universe, I would be saying that all this amounts to little or nothing beside what, in an instant, my heart experiences in the presence of God — or rather, what God does to my heart, because all these other things flow from him and are his works.

Love makes the heart leap and dance; love makes it exult and be festive; love makes it sing and remain silent as it pleases; love grants it rest and enables it to act (which are nothing other than new activities done for God); love possesses it and gives it everything; love takes it over completely and dwells in it. But I am unable to say more because if I wished to relate all the effects that the heart experiences in the act of going to Holy Communion, and also at other times, I would never finish saying everything. It is sufficient to say that Communion is a room and mansion of love itself.

SAINT VERONICA GIULIANI

Saint Veronica Giuliani († 1727) was a Capuchin nun at Città di Castello, Italy.

The Eucharist

Sacrament and sacrifice

Earlier this year Pope John Paul II issued his fourteenth encyclical letter, "Ecclesia de Eucharistica," to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary as pope. One of the recurring themes of his twenty-five-year pontificate has been the self-gift of Jesus and the hidden mystery of *our* self-gift to God and one another in return. On more than one occasion he has reminded us that the choices we make shape our lives. We can choose to be filled, a fruitless task that keeps the focus on self, or we can choose to make our lives a gift, pouring them out, so to speak, in service of those who are in need. Pope John Paul II clearly sees the Eucharist as the center point of a life freely given for others.

In grade school I learned that the Eucharist is both a sacrament and a sacrifice. As a sacrament, the bread and wine point to a deeper reality: this sacred meal makes us one with Christ and one another. But the Eucharist is also a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross at Calvary. This perpetual self-gift of Christ for our salvation is an invitation for us to do the same.

At a time when Catholics in the United States grow more discouraged with continuing reports of scandals and a widening rift between faith and practice, John Paul II prophetically affirms that it is the Eucharist which builds up the Church. I believe his vision is sorely needed today.

It has long struck me that one of the reasons the Eucharist may not have this energizing effect in our lives is because we fail to enter into the sacrament *and* the sacrifice. To enter into the sacrament, the sacred meal, requires us to look deeper than we are accustomed to doing. We are connected to those sitting in front and behind us, even if we don't know their names. This bond requires great respect for others, even though we might not like the way they dress. Our hopes, our burdens, our failures, our dreams, are not that different. Pope John Paul II invites us to see that this Jesus whom we receive, receives us and our neighbor as well.

To enter into the eucharistic sacrifice demands a death. There is no sacrifice without a dying. When the Israelites brought a sacrifice to the Temple (an animal or a grain offering), they did not get it back when they left. It was killed, burned, or poured out. Likewise, when we bring ourselves to the sacrifice, we cannot simply take ourselves back and walk away. Something has to be relinquished. If we come to the sacrifice carrying anger, hatred, fear, or shame, we cannot go home with it. It takes a real dying to risk forgiving, loving, trusting, or receiving.

Pope John Paul II did not choose to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary by receiving gifts and honors, though he will be hard-pressed to avoid them. Instead, he gave us a profound reflection on the Eucharist as the gift poured out for our salvation by Christ, who challenged us to "do this in memory of me."

Eucharist Articles

Questions

Transubstantiation

The Eucharist-Sacrament & Sacrifice

The More That Is Given

Read *Transubstantiation* first, then *The Eucharist*, finally *The More That Is Given*. Answer the questions that relate to each article.

1. Who is the author of *Transubstantiation*?

2. "For this reason, the Council referred to the Holy Eucharist as...

3. Where do we find Jesus's beautiful words in the "*Bread of Life Discourse*?"

4. "By the will of the Father, the work of the Holy Spirit, and priesthood of Jesus entrusted to His ordained priests, and through the words of consecration, that bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Yes, the bread and wine do not change in characteristics-

However, the **reality**, "**the what it is**", **the substance does change**.

5. Therefore, each time we celebrate Mass, we are plunged into....

The Eucharist, Sacrament and Sacrifice

6. What is the name of the encyclical on the Eucharist that Pope John Paul II wrote for the 25th anniversary of his becoming pope?

7. What does JPII clearly see the Eucharist as the center of?

8. "To enter into the Eucharistic sacrifice demands... _____."

9. "If we come to the sacrifice carrying anger, hatred, fear, or shame, we cannot go home with it. _____"

10. Who wrote "*The More That is Given*"? _____

11. What does the saint say we experience in Holy Communion that causes the heart to leap and dance, exult, be festive, sing, grants it rest, and enables it to act?
