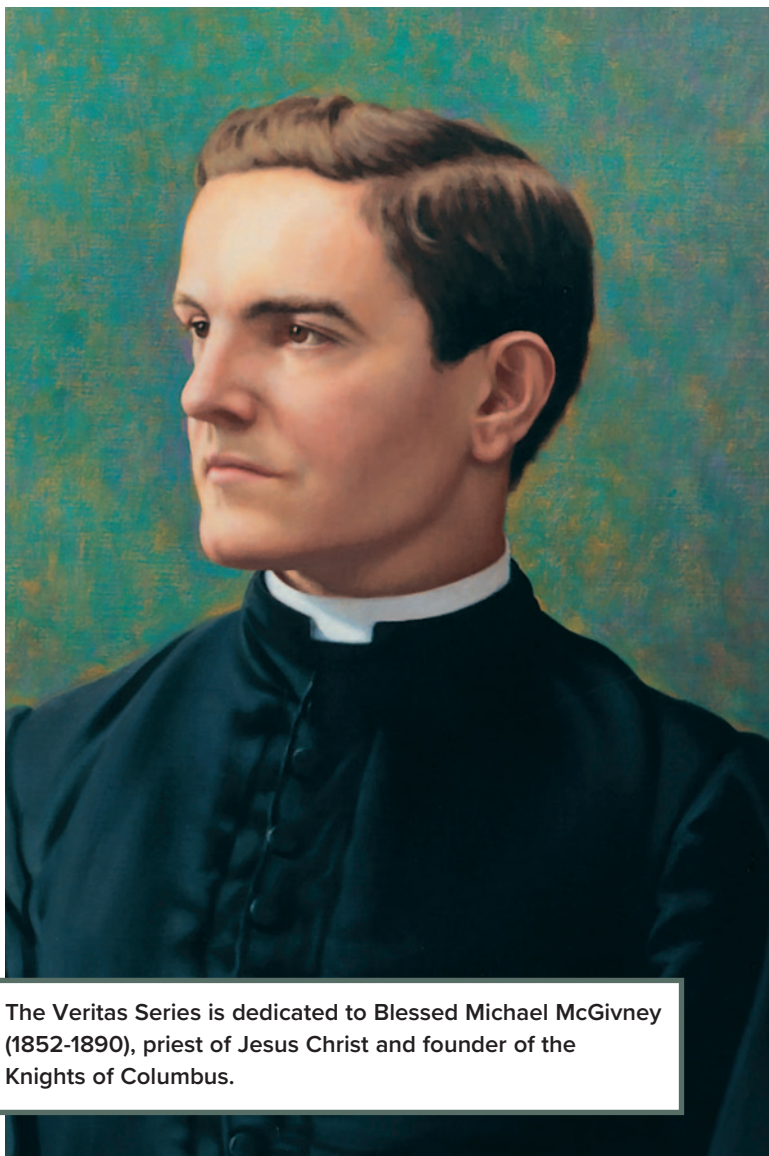




The Eucharist: Sacrament and Sacrifice

Father Giles Dimock, O.P.



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The Eucharist: Sacrament and Sacrifice

by
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INTRODUCTION

At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47)

This theologically rich paragraph of the Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican Council II sums up the major aspects of the mystery of the sacrament and sacrifice of the Eucharist that it is the purpose of this little pamphlet to unpack. The major themes found in this concise, polished quotation on the institution of the Eucharist, the history of its structure, sacrifice as applied to this mystery, Christ's Real Presence, communion with Him, and the adoration due Him in this presence—provide a framework for discussion, while the sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church and the sound theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) provide guidance. St. Thomas Aquinas, “The Angelic Doctor” and a Dominican saint, is known not only for his brilliant theological insights regarding the mystery of this sacrament, but also for his great love for the Eucharist and for his great devotion to Christ present in this sacrament. He composed the Mass and Office for the solemnity of *Corpus Christi*. He also chose the psalms and readings from Scripture and composed the hymns *Pange Lingua*, *Adoro Te Devote* and the sequence *Lauda Sion* for this Mass. He treated how Christ is present in this sacrament with rare theological penetration and at great length.

THE EUCHARIST - ITS JEWISH ROOTS

Jesus, the Jewish Rabbi, celebrated the Passover for the twelve, who were Jews as well. For them, this memorial of the Exodus, the freeing of God's holy people from the slavery of Egypt, was not just a

remembering of a past event, but was the reliving of an event of their sacred history, and of their deliverance by the same God who was with them now. Hands were washed, cups of wine blessed and drunk, bread broken and passed about, the symbolism of the foods explained, and the paschal lamb eaten in an atmosphere of celebration, joy and festivity. In blessing and distributing the bread at the beginning of the Last Supper, Jesus gave the bread new meaning, saying "...Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt 26: 26; Mk 14: 22; Luke 22: 19). At the end of this Passover meal, a cup of wine was blessed with a particularly solemn blessing "...This is my blood...which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26: 27-8; Mark 14: 24; Luke 22: 20). The Lord Jesus gave that a new meaning as well, as He linked their Passover supper with the crucifixion that was to come the next day. In this way, Christ established "the new and everlasting Covenant" (Luke 22: 20) with the twelve apostles, who represent the new people of God, and He replaced the old covenant made with the twelve tribes of Israel. Christ did this, not as a memorial of the Exodus of old, but to create a new Exodus from the slavery of sin. The gift of the Last Supper was a new Passover from death to the life of the new Paschal Lamb, Jesus. Even today, this is done "in remembrance of me" (Luke 22: 19 and 1 Cor 11: 25), and as a memorial of the Lord Jesus, the new lamb, the victim slaughtered for the sins of all. St. Paul shows the meaning of this when he says "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the chalice, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11: 26). In the Eucharist, Christ is made present until He comes in glory.

There is some scholarly discourse about whether the Last Supper was a Passover meal at all because, although the synoptic Gospels all present it as such, the Gospel of John shows Jesus, the true paschal lamb, dying on the Cross while the lambs are being slaughtered for the Passover yet to be celebrated. In John's accounting, therefore, the Last Supper could not have been the Passover. It has traditionally been held by scholars that John was more concerned with paschal symbolism than with historical detail when he composed his Gospel account. However, as Pope Benedict XVI noted in his Holy Thursday homily in 2007,

there is also the possibility that the Lord and his disciples followed the liturgical calendar of the Essenes, which was different than that of Jerusalem. In any event, paschal symbolism was in the air, and its fulfillment in Christ is proclaimed by St. Paul as he says “For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5: 7).

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The first Christians followed the Lord’s instruction to “do this in memory of me” and they did so on Sunday, the Lord’s Day (see Acts 20: 7; Rev 1: 10), the day He rose from the dead. It is likely, however, that the first Jewish Christians also kept the Sabbath. The Passover ceremonial, which the Lord used at the Last Supper, was celebrated only on that feast, and would not have been the ceremony that the Jewish Christians used each week. Instead, the Sabbath meal, or *chaburah* (friendship meal), would have been used. These ritual meals included a blessing and distribution of bread at the beginning, followed by the meal proper, and ending with a solemn blessing over the Cup of Blessing. That this structure was used in the early Church seems attested to by the late first century document, *The Didache*. Indeed, there is reference to this type of meal in St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthian Christians when he complains about the selfishness and drunkenness in the Eucharistic celebration of the Church of Corinth (1 Cor 11: 20-23). This may be one of the reasons the meal proper was dropped from the Eucharistic celebration; although perhaps significant were the great numbers of gentile converts to the faith. Fr. Jungmann, the great Jesuit liturgist, states that ancestors in the faith were clear that the essential elements were the prayers over the bread and wine which changed them into the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, the dropping of the meal proper in the middle of the rite was of little consequence. As Christians moved into the Gentile world, (through the missionary journeys of St. Paul), where there was no Sabbath observance and the Lord’s Day was just another working day for pagans, the Eucharist was celebrated early in the morning. Pliny the Younger, writing to the emperor Trajan, reports that the Christians sing hymns

to Christ at sunrise. This is commonly understood as a reference to the Eucharist.

St. Justin, in a document written to explain Christian beliefs and practices to the emperor (c. 155), describes the reading of the Prophets and then the “memoirs of the Apostles” (the Gospels). The bishop instructs the gathered faithful, and all arise and pray. Bread and wine are brought to the celebrant, who makes a Eucharistic prayer “according to his ability,” which suggests that at that time the celebration was extemporaneous, though based on certain well known themes (*Apology* I, 65-66). Justin describes the Communion of the “eucharisted,” or consecrated, bread and wine, and speaks of the deacons taking it to those absent (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1345). Clearly, by 155 AD, the basic structure of the Eucharist, as it is known today, is evident. Moreover, approximately sixty years later, St. Hippolytus composed a model Eucharistic prayer to be used by the celebrant; this prayer is today’s second canon of the modern Roman Rite.

In the middle of the third century, the liturgical language of the Church changed from Greek to Latin. Furthermore, the development of Gregorian chant and the near universal facing East for the Mass gave shape to the early Roman Rite, especially as codified by St. Gregory the Great. This classic Roman Mass was purified at the time of the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century; it was further rearranged and adapted at the Second Vatican Council of the mid-twentieth century. The liturgical reform of the Mass at Vatican II is the ordinary form of the Roman Rite today. Pope Benedict XVI’s recent personal intervention has restored the pre-Vatican II rite of the Mass, which is now called the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite.

A COMPARISON OF THE TWO FORMS OF THE ROMAN RITE

Since, with Pope Benedict XVI’s *motu proprio Summorum pontificum*, the opportunity to experience the extraordinary form of the Roman Rite of the Mass will be more common, it might be useful to explore the two forms side by side to help the reader recognize the

common pattern that is present in both the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the Mass. The ordinary form is usually celebrated facing the people, and the extraordinary form is usually celebrated facing East, or toward the crucifix and tabernacle. In the entrance rite of the ordinary form a hymn is sung or an antiphon recited followed by the Greeting and a Penitential Rite which is concluded by the Opening Prayer. On Sundays, feasts and solemnities, this prayer follows the Gloria. In the extraordinary form, the altar servers answer the Latin responses to the priest's prayers at the foot of the altar. Sometimes the congregation joins in the Latin responses. The priest ascends the altar to say the Introit (unless it is sung at a High Mass) then the *Kyrie* and Gloria. He concludes with the Collect or Opening Prayer. In the extraordinary form of the rite, the *Dominus vobiscum* (the Lord be with you) is said before the Collect.

In the Liturgy of the Word, the readings in the ordinary form of the rite are done at the ambo (pulpit), and on Sunday there are three: Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel, with the Responsorial Psalm in response to the first reading. After the Gospel there is a homily followed by the Creed. The Liturgy of the Word is concluded with the General Intercessions (the Prayers of the Faithful). In the extraordinary form of the rite, the Epistle and the Responsory (also called the Gradual) are read in Latin on the Epistle side of the altar, and the Gospel is read on the Gospel side (at a High Mass these may also be chanted). The sermon follows, and the Creed is said or sung on Sundays. There are no Prayers of the Faithful in the extraordinary form of the Mass.

In the ordinary form, after the General Intercessions, the gifts are brought forth (in procession on Sunday) and prepared. The Eucharistic Prayer is then prayed aloud by the priest: one of the four regular Eucharistic Prayers, or perhaps one of reconciliation. Acclamations are sung or said and after the Amen, the Our Father prepares the congregation (along with the Sign of Peace) for Communion which is usually received standing.

In the extraordinary form of the rite, the gifts are prepared immediately after the Creed, and the Eucharistic Prayer is always the Roman Canon (the first Eucharistic Prayer). It is prayed quietly in Latin, and bells are rung before, during and after the Consecration. The Our Father is recited or sung by the priest in Latin, and after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), all is readied for Communion, which is received (after a *Confiteor*) kneeling and on the tongue.

After Communion, both rites conclude quickly with a final prayer, blessing and dismissal *Ite Missa Est*, from whence comes the name Mass. The ordinary form of the rite often concludes with a hymn, while in the extraordinary form the priest reads the Last Gospel (St. John's Prologue) as a thanksgiving at the conclusion of the Mass.

THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

The Eucharist is a many-faceted mystery, and it is the treasure of the Church: the Lord Jesus Himself is sacramentally present. Clearly, the Church wishes to protect this mystery and to explain it by sound theology insofar as possible. The two major themes as proposed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are the Mass as the Sacrifice of the Cross made present and the Real Presence of Christ in this sacrament.

SACRIFICE

The Jewish notion of memorial is the re-living of a past event. So the Passover celebration, in some way, participates in the events of the past as something that is real and present right now. As they celebrate the sacrificial meal, their belief is that the God who freed them from slavery in Egypt, and brought them through the desert to the Promised Land, is with them now to deliver them and will be with them in the future. Therefore, when Jesus said "Do this in memory of me," He did not mean "when you do this, think of me," but that His people are to do this as a living memorial of Him. Since the Last Supper on Holy Thursday anticipated Good Friday, "My blood which will be shed for

you,” and further, since Good Friday is completed by Easter and the Resurrection, all of these events are aspects of the same mystery. The Lord was establishing a sacrificial meal that would make present the mystery of the Cross (both His death and His resurrection) in a sacramental way, just as the Passover meal makes the Exodus present for the Jewish people. So this “Sacred Banquet” would make the new Exodus of the Lord Jesus from death to life really present for His followers in the Church. Again, St. Paul makes this clear when he says “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1 Cor 11: 26). By participating in His sacrifice and offering one’s self in union with Him, and by eating His Body and drinking His Blood, Christ Himself is received into one’s life, heart and mind. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the separate consecration of the bread and wine symbolizes the death of the Lord, for when a body is separate from its blood, death is the result. But it is the risen Lord Who is with us in this mystery, both Paschal and Eucharistic, as Pope John Paul II taught in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2). Pope Benedict XVI teaches that the Mass is a making present of the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the Resurrection; Christ present is the sacrificed Lamb who renews “history and the whole cosmos” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 10).

On the Cross, Jesus offered Himself as a holocaust, a total sacrifice, to the Father. Adam of old ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, sinning by his disobedience to God and in his obedience to Eve, who was seduced by the serpent (Gen. 3: 6). Jesus is the new Adam who obeys the Father “even to death on a Cross” (Phil 2: 8). Christ hanging on the tree of the Cross, undoes Adam’s disobedience, while Mary, the new Eve, stands underneath the Cross offering herself with her Son. This bloody sacrifice was offered to the Father by His Son, the great high priest, “once to take away the sins of many” (Heb 9: 28). This was a favorite quotation of the Reformers, who saw the Eucharist as nothing more than a memory of a past event. They thought that Catholic teaching saw each Mass as an attempt to add to the one, all sufficient and infinite sacrifice of the all-perfect Man-God.

Such teaching would be blasphemy if it were the case, but it is not, and this idea is neither the Catholic understanding nor doctrine. Rather, the Church “commemorates Christ’s Passover and it is made present: the sacrifice of Christ offered on the Cross... remains ever present” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1364).

ST. THOMAS AND TRENT

Because it was not contested in his day, St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* is able to settle the question of the Mass as a sacrifice in one brief statement (*ST III*, q. 83, a. 4). St. Thomas sees Christ offered up on the Cross historically, and that sacrifice is capable of bringing salvation. In the Mass, that same sacrifice is offered in memory of His death. It is not simply a psychological remembrance, but a living memorial as made clear by the collect St. Thomas quotes: “Whenever the commemoration of this sacrifice is celebrated, the work of our redemption is enacted.” (see CCC, 1364 and *Lumen Gentium*, 3). St. Thomas sees Christ as the great high priest, immolating Himself as the victim, in each sacrifice of the Mass, as He did on the Cross. The Council of Trent (1562) taught that in the Mass “the same Christ who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner.” Thomists maintain that the sacrifice of the Cross and that of the Mass are specifically and numerically the same; only the manner of offering is different. St. Thomas and the Council of Trent simply hand on the Catholic tradition, as founded on the witness of the New Testament, the *Didache*, the Fathers of the Church, such as Sts. Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, Augustine, and many others. The Catechism teaches that “the sacrifice Christ offered remains ever present” (CCC 1364) because the offering of the God-Man, Christ, is eternal. However, the faithful need to be put in touch with this sacrifice, to enter in and offer themselves *with* Christ, and so exercise their royal priesthood. Each person needs this sacrifice and its fruit now, and so the Mass is offered daily. It is not celebrated for God’s sake, but for the sake of His people.

Redemptionis Sacramentum stresses that, while the Eucharist is a sacred meal, it is primarily and “pre-eminently” a sacrifice (38). Catholics believe that the sacrifice of the Mass is the same sacrifice of the Cross, to which the Mass neither adds nor multiplies. As John Paul II states in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, “It is a sacrifice in the strict sense” (13) and it applies to the people of today the reconciliation which Christ won once and for all humankind in every age (12). Nor does His sacrifice remain confined to the past, since “all that Christ is—all that He did and suffered for all men and women—participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times” (11). What once happened in history is now made present in mystery.

THE REAL PRESENCE

The *Constitution on the Liturgy* of Vatican II speaks of various modes of the presence of Christ in the Liturgy: in the community, in the Word proclaimed, in the priest acting in the very person of Jesus Christ, in the Eucharistic species and in the Sacraments (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). The Jews of old believed that God was with them in the Temple, but when the Temple was destroyed, and most of them deported to Babylon, their prophets taught that wherever ten Jews got together (a *minyan*) to hear the Word of God, then the presence of God (the *Shekinah*) was with them. The Lord Jesus then builds on this tradition by reducing the number from ten to two or three in the verse of Matthew referenced above: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them.” At Mass, the modes of the presence of Christ are unfolded: first in the assembly of the faithful, then in the priest presiding, and in the Word proclaimed, all of which culminates in the deepest presence of all, Christ, who is really present in the Eucharistic species. This presence is called *real* to underscore that the sacrifice is not just symbolic. The Eucharist is not only a symbol. The bread and wine begin as symbols of the Lord’s Body and Blood and then become His very Body and Blood! At Mass, Christ’s sacramental presence is intended, not as an end in itself, but so that His people

might “take and eat,” “take and drink,” and in doing so be transformed so as to become more fully the mystical Body of Christ, the Church.

This doctrine, found in the New Testament and in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, may have been formalized differently in various eras, but the doctrine has not changed. St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107), a disciple of St. Polycarp (who was, in turn, a disciple of the Beloved Disciple, St. John), said “...the bread is the flesh of Jesus, the Cup, His blood” (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 7: 1). St. Justin Martyr (d. 165) said “Not as common bread and common drink do we receive these [elements]; but in like manner as Jesus Christ, our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood... so likewise ... the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word ...and from which our flesh and blood...are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.” (*First Apology*, 66). The last word belongs to St. Augustine (d. 411): “that bread you see on the altar... is the Body of Christ. That chalice... is the Blood of Christ” (*Sermon* 227).

The Church Fathers tried to find ways to express the extraordinary change that takes place in the Eucharist. They coined terms with the prefix *trans-*, (e.g. *transselementation*, *transfiguration*), which implies a process or a change from one thing to another. The term *transubstantiation* was first used by Stephen of Bruges (c.1140), but the roots of this term go back to the ninth century monastery of Corbie in France. The abbot of Corbie, Paschase, wrote a book on the Eucharistic presence of Christ. His approach to the mystery was so realistic that it hardly distinguished between the fleshly, physical, bodily presence of Christ as He was on earth, from His sacramental presence in the Eucharist. One of his fellow monks, Ratram, answered this volume with one of his own, in which he made use of some very spiritual texts of St. Augustine which he said supported an almost exclusively spiritual Eucharistic presence perceived only by faith. His influence was very much felt by Berengar of Tours (1010-88) who saw Christ's presence as principally symbolic, and claimed to simply echo the theology of St. Augustine. However, this position did not go

unchallenged, and Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, held that the Eucharist was not a symbol, but the true Body of Christ. Out of this controversy new terminology—in particular the words *substance* and *accident*—arose and began to be used.

The teaching of the Church is that the *substance* of the bread and the wine change in their deepest reality and become the Body and Blood of Christ, although the *accidents* (or appearances) of bread and wine remain. So the elements have the same texture, taste and color as before, but their deepest reality is only Christ. In other words, the deepest being of the bread and wine changes substantially, but their outward appearances remain unchanged. The Eucharist still tastes like bread, looks like bread, crumbles like bread, or looks and tastes like wine, but is no longer so. The Eucharist simply is Christ. This change is not just accidental, as when a puppy grows into a dog, or a child becomes an adult; rather, just as the food a person eats becomes a part of his substance to fuel his physical being, so the substance of bread and wine becomes the substance of Christ which nourishes spiritually. However, as St. Augustine says, unlike other food, which nourishes by becoming physically part of the one who eats, the Eucharist instead changes those who receive it, so that they become a part of this heavenly food, the Body of Christ.

The terms *substance* and *accident* were used in the solemn definition of transubstantiation of Lateran Council IV in 1215. The Church saw this doctrine as the clearest way that human reason has discovered to explain how the substances of the elements can change, while external accidents can remain the same. In the face of various Protestant positions on the Eucharist, the Council of Trent solemnly defined this doctrine:

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 (CCC, 1376).

Martin Luther believed in a “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist, as Lutherans do today. However, he also believed that the presence is not permanent, but is only a passing presence at the Consecration and Communion. *Consubstantiation*, where the substances remain the same, and somehow the presence of Christ is included, was explained by Luther using the example of the heat from the fire coming into the poker. Most Protestants, however, followed Zwingli, who saw the Eucharist only as a symbol, or Calvin, who saw the Eucharist only as a pledge of salvation. Therefore, Protestants view the Eucharist very differently than the Catholic Church who does not accept these approaches to explaining the mystery of the Eucharist. The Orthodox Churches also have the same belief as Catholics.

THE CONSECRATION

One mark of controversy between West and East is whether it is the words of Institution (the Consecration formulas) or the Epiclesis, the prayer that calls down the Holy Spirit, which changes the elements of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The West holds that this is accomplished by the Institution narrative and the East believes it is accomplished by the Epiclesis. The Epiclesis was originally a prayer calling on the Spirit to unify the Church, which then developed to become the explicit invocation of the Spirit to consecrate the elements. This is seen in the ancient Eucharistic Prayers of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom where the Epiclesis comes after the words of Consecration. The West, however, focused on Christ's words as quoted by St. Justin Martyr and St. Ambrose, both of whom quite explicitly taught that the Word (Christ) acts through the words of the Consecration and that belief in the change is demonstrated by adoring the host and the chalice as they are held up by the priest immediately afterwards. After 1054, the hardening of the schism between East and West saw the East saying that it was *only* through the

Epiclesis that the elements changed and the West stressing *only* the words. Pope Benedict XVI in *Sacramentum Caritatis* (13) reiterates that transubstantiation is the action of the Holy Spirit working through the words of Christ in the canon and in the Epiclesis, or invocation of the Spirit. He points out that the change of the elements is oriented toward individual transformation, and as the Body of Christ. In receiving the sacramental Body of Christ, one becomes more the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. All the new Eucharistic prayers of the Latin rite have two epicleses: one calls down the Spirit to change the elements, and one asks that the Spirit draw together in unity all who have fed on the Body of the Lord, to make them one in the Church. Interestingly, in the ancient canon of Addai and Mari used by the Assyrian Church of the East, there are no explicit words of Institution. However, a recent clarification from the Holy See states that, although not concisely placed, the words are dispersed throughout the most important passages of that Eucharistic Prayer.

ST THOMAS AND CONTEMPORARY THEORIES

The terminology of *substance* and *accident* were used, and indeed transubstantiation defined, in 1215 well before St. Thomas Aquinas was born in 1225. While renewed interest in Aristotle's philosophy caused a greater interest in his thought, it cannot be said (as is often asserted today) that transubstantiation is only a Thomistic explanation, and that a more modern theological approach is needed for contemporary culture. Pope Paul VI dealt with this question in *Mysterium Fidei*, (1965) and pointed out that certain terms, like "nature" and "person," and "substance" and "accident," which have been employed to explore the Trinity and Christology, have been "adapted to all men of all times and all places" by the work of the Church (24). While theologians may develop new approaches, Paul said, they have no right to discard the technical terms of the defined dogma of transubstantiation, although they may elucidate it further. Thus the mystery of the Eucharist may not be explained *only* by means of new theological concepts of transignification or transfinalization,

which stress the meaning and the purpose of this sacrament, respectively (11).

Finally, St. Thomas' writings on the Real Presence teach that the whole Christ is present in the species of bread and wine "in the manner of a substance," both physically there in Heaven, and substantially here in the sacrament. When the host is broken, one does not injure Christ's Body, because He is present here not merely physically, but substantially, more like a glorified body, which is physical and yet has qualities beyond the physical. So the risen Lord is here, enfleshed spirit, "His Body and Blood, soul and divinity," as the Council of Trent says, a dynamic, personal presence. He is present in both species in the truth of the sacrament, as St. Thomas would say, Body and Blood in the bread and Blood and Body in the wine, concomitantly, or concurrently, because the whole Christ cannot be separated. As Thomas lay dying, he professed his faith in this great mystery as the Eucharist was held up before him:

I receive you the price of my soul's salvation: all my studies and my labors have been for love of you. I submit all that I have written to your holy Church in whose obedience I now pass from this earth.

COMMUNION

While one may not possess the wholehearted devotion of St. Thomas when receiving the Lord in the Eucharist, there are conditions that allow a worthy reception of Holy Communion. First, an examination of conscience to discern whether or not one is free of mortal sin before receiving Christ in Holy Communion is imperative, for, as St. Paul said, "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor 11: 29). Serious, or mortal, sin (1 John 5: 16) kills the life of God, or grace, in the soul and requires sacramental confession before one can receive Holy Communion. Practicing Catholics are not normally in a state of mortal sin. For sin to be mortal it must involve grave matter, (a serious

thing), sufficient reflection, (knowledge and due consideration), and full consent of the will. If any of these three elements is lacking there is not mortal sin. Moreover, ignorance and lack of freedom can lessen the seriousness of sin. Venial sins (light sins) do not keep the Faithful from Communion, but they dampen the fire of charity in the soul. The regular confession of venial sins, while not obligatory, is highly recommended as an effective way of growth and healing (CCC 1458). Furthermore, Communion with the Lord is communion with His Church, and implies an acceptance of all of the teachings of His Church as Christ's own. For this reason, those in public life who have publically dissented from Catholic teaching and morality ought not to receive Holy Communion.

The fast before the reception of Communion, which, in the past, required that one take nothing except water after midnight, has now been reduced to a one hour fast from solid foods and liquids, other than water and medicine, before receiving Communion. (The hour is computed as one hour before Communion, rather than for the beginning of Mass.) In case of illness, the fast may be reduced or even eliminated, if necessary (canon 919). The Faithful are encouraged to receive "our daily bread" worthily as often as they attend Mass, and just as all Catholics are obliged to come to Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, so the Church commands all Catholics to receive at least once a year during the Easter season (canon 920). This obligation is coupled with the obligation to confess grave sins at least once a year (canon 989).

As to whether Communion is received in the hand, an early Christian practice, or on the tongue, a medieval practice, is for the individual to decide. The Bishops of the United States have decided that, after having made a slight bow, the Faithful are to receive Communion while standing. However, the Holy See has made it clear that those who choose to kneel are not to be denied Holy Communion. Furthermore, the Holy Father has decided that those who receive Communion from him will receive on the tongue while kneeling,

perhaps to underscore both the legitimacy of this practice and the need for reverence.

In the early Church, Communion was always under the species of both bread and wine, as it is today in the Eastern rites of the Church. Luther called for a return to this practice, but it became associated with other erroneous doctrines of his, and therefore was not accepted. Four hundred years later, Vatican Council II allowed Communion under both species at Mass on certain occasions, according to the judgment of the local ordinary. The official list of occasions for Communion under both species has gradually expanded since that time. In the United States, the 2002 Instruction from the USCCB entitled Norms for the Celebration and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America states that Communion under both species may be given at any time as long as there is no danger of profanation of the sacrament or that the rite would be too unwieldy to carry out (24). The Council of Trent taught, following St. Thomas Aquinas, that the whole Christ is received under either species; the 2002 General Instruction makes it clear, however, that both species is “a clearer form of the sacramental sign” (14).

INTERCOMMUNION

In general, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches see intercommunion as the sign of full unity: doctrinally, hierarchically and morally. For this reason, both churches discourage intercommunion. Often, Protestants see intercommunion as a way of achieving unity; considering the many divisions in Protestantism, it seems not to have worked.

Because the Orthodox are so close to the Catholic Church, preserve the vast patrimony of the apostolic faith, have valid orders and celebrate a valid Eucharist, Catholics may, on certain occasions and with ecclesial permission, receive Holy Communion in their Churches. Catholics may never receive in a Protestant church because Protestants do not have Orders in the Catholic sense, and their celebration of the

Eucharist is not a valid sacrament. Even high Episcopal services, which seem so Catholic, are doubtfully valid because Anglican Orders are not accepted by the Church. One may, however, attend the services of other Christians from ecumenical motives, e.g. to learn and to pray for common causes. Orthodox “Christians, separated in good faith from the Catholic Church, who spontaneously ask to receive the Eucharist from a Catholic minister and are properly disposed” may do so according to canon 844 §3 of the *Code of Canon Law* and as further explained by Pope John Paul II in his 2003 encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (45). Protestants usually may not receive Communion at a Catholic Mass, because to do so implies that they are at one with the Catholic Church, hold the same beliefs as she does, and, in other words, are Catholic. However, in grave necessity (e.g. wartime) and if the bishop agrees, the sacraments (Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick) may be given to those Christians who hold the Catholic understanding of these sacraments, who approach freely and are rightly disposed (canon 844 §4). Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and some Methodists, are more likely to be in this situation because they have a sacramental tradition that is closer to the Catholic Church’s teaching in these matters.

THE FRUITS OF COMMUNION

Holy Communion is the *esca viatorum*, the food for wayfarers en route to the heavenly homeland. To receive the Eucharist is to receive Christ, the Bridegroom, Friend and Lord of all, who, besides giving Himself, also gives, through the sacrament of His Body and Blood, the full power of His grace. St. Thomas, in his *Summa Theologica*, says that reception of Holy Communion cleanses venial sin from the soul, that temporal punishment due to sin (in purgatory) is remitted, and that the Eucharist strengthens against committing sin in the future (III, q. 80). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1391-3) speaks of Communion as deepening the “intimate union with Christ Jesus.” As He, Himself, said “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them (John 6: 56). The *Catechism* repeats the effects

listed by St. Thomas and concludes that the Eucharist builds the Church, for its members, “though many, are one body” (1 Cor. 12: 12). St. Thomas would concur, for he saw the reality of the grace that had been given through the Eucharist, for the sake of unity, to the Church. This is the underlying reason for the Church’s teaching on intercommunion. Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* quotes St. Ephrem: “He called the bread His living Body and He filled it with Himself and His Spirit.... He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit” (17) and the Holy Father goes on to stress the Eucharist as building the communion of the Church (see Chapter 2).

EUCCHARISTIC RESERVATION AND ADORATION

Because Catholic doctrine holds that the Real Presence of Christ remains uncorrupted in reception and is not a mere passing presence, it has been the custom from earliest times to reserve the Blessed Sacrament. Tertullian (d. 225) attests to the practice of the Eucharist being kept in the home, so that fathers could give daily Communion to their families. St. Justin Martyr (d. 150) describes deacons taking the Eucharist to the ill and imprisoned. The document *Holy Communion and Eucharistic Worship Outside Mass* explains how the present approach derived from early Christian practice:

The primary and original reason for the reservation of the Eucharist outside Mass is the administration of viaticum [Communion for the dying]. The secondary [reasons] are the giving of Communion and the adoration of Our Lord Jesus Christ present in the sacrament. The reservation of the sacrament for the sick led to the praiseworthy practice of adoring this heavenly food that is reserved in churches. This cult of adoration has a sound and firm foundation, especially since faith in the real presence of the Lord has as its natural consequence, the outward, public manifestation of that belief (II, § 5).

As emphasis on the Real Presence outside of the celebration of Mass grew, there was an evolution in the ways in which the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. At first, when kept only for the ill, it was most likely kept in the sacristy with the sacred vessels and sacred books. In the early medieval period, it began to be reserved in prominent wall cupboards or ambries with decorated doors in the wall of the sanctuary, not unlike the small niches used for the sacred oils. Another popular medieval way to reserve the sacrament was to suspend it over the altar in a dove-shaped pyx, which represented the Holy Spirit. In the later Middle Ages, often towers with spires were built near the altar, and the Blessed Sacrament was kept within. In the Counter-Reformation period, tabernacles began appearing on the altar itself. The Dominicans of Florence, Italy encouraged this practice, as did St. Charles Borromeo in Milan. This became the standard practice until the Second Vatican Council. The popularity of Mass facing the people made keeping the sacrament on the altar difficult, so other modes of reservation appeared, including some of the more ancient ones previously mentioned. Tabernacles were placed on pedestals in the manner of medieval sacrament towers; in the style of ambries they were placed in the back wall of the sanctuary; they were sometimes moved to special chapels in the cathedral tradition; or they were placed on side altars. The last two solutions proved to be the least satisfactory, since the centrality of the tabernacle, with the atmosphere of silent prayer it generated, was given short shrift. As a result, Catholic churches often became nothing more than noisy assembly halls. The present *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* leaves the Diocesan Bishop to determine whether the Blessed Sacrament should be reserved “in the sanctuary, apart from the altar of celebration...not excluding on an...altar no longer used for celebration [i.e., the high altar], or in some chapel suitable for the faithful's private adoration and prayer and which is organically connected to the church and readily visible to the Christian faithful” (315). Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2007 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum caritatis*, recommends a prominent place in the sanctuary, as long as the celebrant's chair is not placed directly in front of the tabernacle.

However, the Holy Father leaves the final judgment of the placement of the tabernacle in a particular church to the Diocesan Bishop (69).

The growing sense of awareness of Christ's Eucharistic presence affected not only the architecture and mode of reservation, but also the devotional life of the people. Berengar of Tour's denial of Christ's presence in the Eucharist sparked a desire to see the consecrated host and adore it, which, in turn, led to the medieval practice of elevating and adoring the host after the consecration at Mass; the custom of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament started at this time, as well, and the consecrated host was put in a crystal reliquary so it could be placed on the altar and adored. In the Counter- Reformation period, these vessels were often designed as a sunburst, to illustrate the sacramental presence of Christ, Who is the "Light of the World" (John 9: 5). The vessels were called monstrances from the Latin verb *monstrare*, which means "to show." Eucharistic adoration, exposition, Holy Hours, Benediction (a blessing bestowed, using the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance), were downplayed by liturgists after the Second Vatican Council, out of an unfounded fear that this devotion would become more important than the Mass in the minds of the people. There is now, however, a renaissance of this type of contemplative prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Highly encouraged by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, this particular approach to prayer seems to attract young people, for example at World Youth Day events and Youth 2000 retreats. Some have suggested that the young, so inundated with sound and noise, in the form of MP3 players, cell phones and computers, are drawn to silent prayer. Likewise, because they are so visually saturated with videos, television and the Internet, they are drawn to the visual beauty created when gazing on the Sacramental Lord in a setting of flickering candles, incense, and other signs and symbols which create an atmosphere of prayer.

Typically, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed (put in the monstrance) with song and incense. There may be readings from Scripture, hymns, a homily, a part of the Liturgy of the Hours and,

especially, silence. Individuals are free to pray as they will, but public prayer that is not focused on Christ and His presence should not be said. Prayers to Our Lady or the Saints may be said before or after, but not during, exposition. The recitation of the Rosary, however, is encouraged by the Church, as this is a meditative prayer which considers all of the mysteries of Christ's life (including Our Lady's part in them). After some time, (typically an hour), exposition concludes with a hymn, incensation and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament given by a priest or deacon. If no clergy are present, the appointed extraordinary minister simply reposes the sacrament (i.e. puts it back in the tabernacle) without any blessing.

ESCHATOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

In *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict teaches again that adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy (66). In the Beatific Vision, God's people will simply "be" before Him; Eucharistic Adoration is a preparation for that reality. Heaven is described in many ways, but perhaps the most beautiful is the glorious scene depicted in the Book of Revelation (5: 6-14) where the Lamb of God, slain and yet standing is on His throne, is accompanied by the four and twenty elders in adoration, laying their crowns before Him and singing "Worthy is the Lamb ... to receive...honor and glory..." (Rev 5: 12). Scott Hahn, in his book *The Supper of the Lamb*, repeatedly makes the point that the Mass is the eschatological, heavenly reality come to earth. Because the saints and angels worshiping the Lamb on His throne in heaven are present at each Mass, the liturgy is a "cosmic" reality which joins heaven and earth. Our Lady, the Apostles, the martyrs, confessors, virgins, pastors and all the saints who have gone before us form the "great cloud of witnesses," (Heb 12: 1) and join together with the Church in praising the Lamb of God. Echoing Christ's words at the Last Supper: "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" (Matt 26: 29), the

Church strains towards this fulfillment at each celebration of the Mass, crying out “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22: 20). As the Catechism teaches:

There is no surer pledge or clearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and the new earth...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 forever in Jesus Christ” (1405).

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"Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response."

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
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