

elements in such a way that he pulls them toward himself. He subjects them to himself.

A miraculous change occurs which we call “transubstantiation.” But note: the King of Glory does not descend in order to “enter” the bread and wine. No, instead of his coming down, he draws the essence of the elements to where he is, at the right hand of the Father. The risen Lord draws the inner reality of the bread and wine in all celebrations of the Mass unto himself and indeed into himself. Thus he maintains his own bodily unity.

In other words, Jesus Christ himself is not changed into the essence of the elements of bread and wine. Rather, the essence of those elements is changed into him.

Consider the Sacred Host and the Precious Blood on a Catholic altar. We can see the Hosts being distributed and the Precious Blood being consumed. What we see happening to the Hosts and the Precious Blood happens not to the substance of those elements, but to the accidents, the appearances. It is the accidents that we see consecrated, handled, broken, multiplied in many ciboria on many altars in churches around the world. The substance of all the Hosts, all the Precious Blood, in all the world is the one Body and Blood Soul and divinity, of the one risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Always remember: Jesus Christ does not come down from heaven to enter the substance of these elements. Jesus Christ in heaven changes the substance of these elements into himself, while leaving their appearances unchanged. That is the miracle of transubstantiation.

Conclusion

In any non-Catholic church, you can hear Jesus Christ proclaimed, often quite powerfully. In any non-Catholic church, you can be invited to commit your life to Jesus Christ. In almost any non-Catholic church you will find warm human fellowship. All of these, of course, you should find in any Catholic church.

But in no non-Catholic church (excepting the Eastern Orthodox) can you receive Jesus Christ himself, Body and Blood, Soul and divinity. Because of the lack of apostolic orders for their ministers,

none of the non-Catholic communion services is the Eucharist. Therefore, in no non-Catholic church can you be literally united with Jesus Christ.

I shall never forget the exclamation of a theologian, himself a convert, as he thought about the Eucharist and the priesthood: “that man,” he said in a hushed tone, speaking of his priest, “can put God in my mouth!”

This most precious of privileges, this most intimate of all person-to-Person unions, is available to you only in Christ’s one true Church. Rejoice! And do something else. Go about your life, carrying out your individual apostolate, with the words of Jesus ringing in your ears: “From him who has been given much, much will be expected.”

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Jesus Gives Himself to Us: Transubstantiation

Fr. Ray Ryland

One of the post-communion prayers in the Eucharistic liturgy makes this petition: “Lord, by our sharing in the mystery of this Eucharist, let your saving love grow within us. Grant this through Christ our Lord.” Notice the italicized words. We pray and say things like this so often in our liturgy we tend to take them for granted. Take another and closer look at what Jesus Christ does in this great mystery of the Eucharist.

Start With the Incarnation

Ponder these astounding words from the prologue to the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God...And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...” (John 1:1, 14a) Sacred scripture is telling us that Almighty God has become part of the material world. And all for the purpose of working out our salvation through the human nature (body as well a soul) of his divine Son.

Now that Christ has been raised in glory, through his transfigured human nature God mediates to us the salvation Christ has won for us. God acts on us in an intimate, person-to-person way. Our contact with God is a spiritual reality made possible by God’s grace and by our response to that grace in faith. And so for all persons who have faith in Christ, he makes himself spiritually available to them.

But in his infinite love for us, Jesus Christ has chosen to do far more than be simply spiritually available.

In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ Gives Us Direct Contact

With His Human Nature

Think of your senses: Hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, tasting. You can hear or see or smell something, but our sense of hearing or seeing or smelling is detached from its object. You are not in

direct physical contact with what you hear or see or smell.

Touching is different. We come into direct contact with something by putting our fingers or our hand on that object. Tasting is a form of touching, but with a very great difference. Tasting – eating – actually brings about a union between ourselves and the object of our tasting (eating). What we eat literally becomes part of us.

Now this is deeply significant: the central act of the Catholic religion is an act of feeding on particular food. Jesus wants us to be united with him through faith, of course. But through his Church he has provided for much more intimate contact with himself. He has given us food – the Eucharist – through which he gives us his very self. At the Last Supper he said of the elements, “this is my body,” “this is my blood.” (Matt. 26:26-28).

Jesus Christ gives us himself under forms of bread and wine. In all the other sacraments, Jesus uses physical means through which he gives us his grace: the water of baptism, the oil of the anointing, and so. But in the Eucharist, the physical means Jesus uses themselves become Jesus Christ himself.

Only God himself could fully explain the miracle of the Eucharist, but the Holy Spirit enables his Church to describe the miracle, in her doctrine of transubstantiation.

Transubstantiation

To describe what happens in the Eucharistic action, the Church uses two basic concepts. The first is “substance”: the inner essence of something: what it really is at the core of its being.

The second is “accidents” (or we might use another word, “appearances”): the qualities of a thing which we can experience by one or more of our senses.

As an example of “accidents,” take a book. You can see its shape, its weight, its color. You might even imitate a toddler and tear out a page and chew on it to test its flavor. What you can see or feel or taste are the “accidents,” the “appearances” of the book. But the essence of this object is book.

In the Eucharist, the appearances of the bread and wine remain unchanged. The essence of the

bread and wine is totally changed. Their essence is changed into the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church calls this change “transubstantiation.” The change is both miraculous and unique.

We human beings can change both the inner essence (“the substance”) of something and its appearances (“the accidents”). By cooking, we can change wheat into bread. IN its essence it is no longer what; it is bread. It no longer looks like what: the appearances (“the accidents”) are changed.

We human beings can change the appearances of something without changing the substance.

We can freeze water so that it no longer looks like water, but it’s still water. We can transform water into steam so that it no longer looks like water, but it’s still water.

But here is something impossible for us: we can never change the inner essence (the “substance”) of something without changing its appearances (the “accidents”). Only God can do that. That’s exactly what he does in the consecration of the Eucharist. God changes the substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood, soul and divinity, of Jesus Christ. But the accidents, the appearances of bread and wine remain unchanged.

Here is the miracle, enacted by God at every Catholic altar. The Blessed Sacrament does not merely give us a spiritual presence of our Lord. This Sacrament gives us the actual flesh and blood of the risen Christ to be our food, to become literally part of us.

Two Articles of Faith Regarding Our Lord’s Eucharistic Presence

First of all, the Church teaches that the bodily presence of the risen and ascended Christ is in heaven, where “he is seated at the right hand of the Father.” Over 1500 years ago Pope Leo the Great proclaimed, “The Son of God entered into the lowliness of this world, descending from his heavenly throne yet not leaving the glory of the Father.” While the Eternal Word was on earth in his humanity – being born of a virgin, teaching, preaching, healing, suffering and dying on the Cross – the Eternal Word in his divinity was at the same

time governing the universe with the other Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

The Church also teaches that Jesus Christ – Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity – is truly present in the Eucharist. Jesus Christ is present in each of the many hosts in a single ciborium. One ciborium may contain many hosts, but that ciborium will contain only one bodily presence of Christ. Jesus Christ is present in all the ciboria in all the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches in the entire world. Jesus Christ is fully and completely bodily present in each part of each host. When the host is broken, Jesus Christ is fully present in each part of the host, in each visible particle of the host. No matter how many hosts there are, entire or broken, in all of them there is only one bodily presence of the Lord.

How Can We Reconcile These Two Truths?

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ is now “seated at the right hand of the Father” in heaven. The Church teaches that Jesus Christ is now present in the Eucharist, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. How can this be?

Start with the fact that all things are subject to Christ at this moment and until the end of time. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matt. 28:18) “For he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet... For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” (1 Cor. 15:25, 27) “...in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Col. 1:16-17)

Jesus Christ directs all things, all persons, without limiting their freedom of choice, shaping the future Kingdom of God. The way in which he exercises his dominion varies according to the nature of his creatures, whether human or animal or inanimate.

At the consecration in the liturgy, through the power of his Spirit, Christ the King directly touches the substance (the inner essence) of these elements of bread and wine. He touches the substance of these