

Pope John Paul - the Year of the Eucharist.

The Vatican II documents - Eucharist is the "source and summit of our faith"
I thought it would be good for us to reflect briefly on the Catholic belief of
The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In the ancient Church the mass was referred to as the mysterion or mystery.

Mystery is something that is real that cannot be seen.

Magic is something that is not real that can be seen.

(Making an elephant disappear, sawing a woman in half)

These things appear to be happening, but they are not real, they are illusion.

Catholics have always believed the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ.

This is what we call the real presence.

Christ is really present, we simply cannot see him (other than in bread and wine)

The Orthodox Churches also believe this.

Protestants believe many other things.

Some say it is only a symbolic supper.

Lutherans teach "consubstantiation" (body & blood and bread and wine)

Christ is present in his divinity in the gathered assembly

Wherever two or three are gathered

But bread and wine remain bread and wine.

Martin Luther himself even began by saying the meal was only symbolic.

But by the end of his life he stated "the text is simply too strong to say that it is
not the body and blood of Christ.

It is important to note that only at the time of the reformation
did any begin to teach anything else.

And so the Orthodox and Catholics alone believe

it is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ.

Having said that, it is only Catholics who have a devotion to the blessed Sacrament.

Orthodox Churches reserve the blessed sacrament in tabernacles, but only for the sick.

Catholics have had a devotional practice of praying to Christ in the Eucharist outside mass.

This practice dates back as early as the 8th century.

What does "real presence mean?"

Transubstantiation – ordinary bread and wine

Is prayed over using Words of scripture

Outpouring of Holy Spirit through prayers of people

Becomes body and blood

What this means for us is that Christ becomes very really present to us, not only in his divinity,
but also in his humanity. The matter of the Last Supper, bread and wine, transports us back in
time to Nazareth. Through our celebration of the Eucharist we enter into, and become a
part of the great Paschal Mystery, Christ's passion, death and resurrection. We are fed then
by the bread that comes down from heaven, the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ's
risen body in heaven.

Scripture: "This is my body" - Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20;
In the presence of the Twelve apostles
Written 40 years after Christ
1 Cor 11:23-25 - Paul
Not present at the last supper
Earliest written account of the Lord's supper
Written 10-15 years after Christ
John 13:1ff written nearly 60 years after Christ
No words of institution
Instead gives a model of service
Jesus washed feet of disciples
"I have given you a model to follow,
so that what I have done,
you should also do." John 13:15
Consequences of believing in real presence.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. . . . Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself."

These were the very words that Martin Luther said were simply too strong for the Eucharist not be the body and blood of Christ.

In recent centuries the exact interpretation of these scripture passages has come into question as a direct result of the reformation. Sadly, even the reformers do not agree amongst themselves what these words mean. And so, if we want to know what these scriptures truly mean, does it not make sense to go to the source who gave us these scriptures. That would be the Catholic Church, and we did not even form the Canon of Scriptures, known to us as the bible until the 4th century. The books that are in the New Testament, while written in the first century of Christianity, were not officially declared the canon of scriptures for another 200+ years.

So what was the Church teaching about the Eucharist for those first 300 years. To this we can look to the writings of the Early Church Fathers.

Church Fathers – The Eucharist of the Early Christians,
Pueblo Publishing Company, @1978

Didache ca. 90 – “Teachings of the apostles”

Chapter 10:3 *“All powerful Master, you created all things for your name's sake and you have given food and drink to the children of men for their enjoyment . . . Moreover, you have bestowed a **spiritual food and drink** that lead to eternal life, through Jesus your servant.”*

Clement of Rome – ca 95 – Pope

44,2 – Apostolic succession & priesthood

Only those validly ordained can offer the sacrifice of the mass

Ignatius of Antioch – ca 110 – Bishop

Wrote letters to his community on his way to execution

Urged them to remain closely united to Christ and the Church

To maintain the bonds of faith and love,

Under the leadership of the bishop

And around the one altar whereon the one bread,

Which is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ

Is broken in the Eucharist, the sacrament par excellence

“My earthly love has been crucified and there is in me no fire of earthly love . . . I take no pleasure in corruptible food or in the delights of this life. I want the blood of God which is the flesh of Jesus Christ who is the child of David and when I drink I want the blood of Jesus which is his incorruptible body.”

Ignatius also reaffirmed the necessity of apostolic succession.

“Where there is no bishop, or priest or deacon there is no Church.”

Justin – ca 150 – historian and martyr

First Apology – Chapter 65-67

66,2 *“For we do not receive these things as though they were ordinary food and drink. Just as Jesus Christ our Savior was made flesh through the word of God and took on flesh and blood for our salvation, so too (we have been taught) through the word of prayer that comes from him the food over which the thanksgiving has been spoken becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus, in order to nourish and transform our flesh and blood.”*

He wrote this because some pagan religions were beginning to imitate what Christians were doing. These cults, which do not center on the life of Christ, were false religions.

Justin says that we receive the flesh and blood of Jesus “in order to nourish and transform our flesh and blood”

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons – ca 130-200

Clement, Bishop of Alexandria – ca 200

Tertullian – ca 200-220

End of Patristic Age

The doctrine of the real presence of Christ even precedes the doctrine of the Trinity, defined at the Council of Nicea, and the Canon of the New Testament, defined at the Council of Chalcedon.

We have always taught that the Eucharist is the real presence of Christ. So what does real presence mean? Let me give you a few examples.

There is a well in Nazareth that dates back to the time of Christ.

When one visits that well today you can recall that Jesus would have come to this well as a child. The feeling of Christ's presence there is very palpable.

I think of also when I traveled to Rome and entered St. Peter's Basilica. I was able to go down in to the crypt where St. Peter's bones are kept in an ossuary. I remember the very profound sense of being in the presence of the one whose feet were washed by Jesus. The one who denied Jesus, but was also chosen by Jesus as the first pope. I was very really in the presence of the fisherman.

You might have had experiences like this when you have visited the grave of a loved one. Or when you look at the picture of a loved one who lives far, far away from you. I remember visiting a woman in a nursing home. When I entered her room she was sitting looking at the wall smiling. When I asked her what she was doing she said, I am looking at my family, and they are smiling at me. On her wall where snapshots of her family covering the entire wall, and they were all smiling. The pictures were for her a very real experience of being in the loving presence of her family.

This is real presence and this is why Catholics have the devotion of Eucharistic Adoration and praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. There is no place where we get closer to Christ than in the Eucharist. You can go off by yourself in your room and pray and he will be there in his divinity. But in the presence of the Eucharist Christ is with us in both his humanity (body and blood) and soul and divinity.

St. Augustine, in the 4th century wrote these words

"The bread that you see has been sanctified by the word of God
And it is the body and blood of Christ."

In another place he wrote about Eucharistic devotion with these words,
"No one should ever approach the Eucharist without either a prostration
(genuflection) of a profound bow.

We do not sin if we adore him, but, we do sin if we do not adore him.

It was at the Cathedral in Lugo Spain where people began to pray before the Eucharistic presence of Christ in approximately 750 A.D.

The first Eucharistic Procession was on Palm Sunday around the year 1000 A.D. in England.

200 years later, during the 13th Century, St. Francis of Assisi gave us the first 40 hours devotion, commemorative of Christ's 40 hours that he was in the tomb.

In this he promoted veneration and adoration of the Eucharist.

Sacrament / Sacrifice / Real Presence have always been a part of Franciscan spirituality.

Medieval Fathers began using the image of the Ark of the Covenant (Ten Commandments), a covenant sealed with the blood of the Passover lamb, as a sort of prefiguring of the tabernacles in our Churches, the Ark of the New Covenant (sealed with the Body and Blood of Christ, the Lamb of God)

In the 14th Century Sr. Julian of Mt Cornilion received a mystical vision calling for a new liturgical feast honoring the body of Christ, for which she was banished from her convent. She told of this vision to a parish priest, Fr. Jacques Pantaleon. After her death Fr. Jacques thought nothing would ever come of this vision. He went on to be named the Archbishop of Jerusalem. Called to Rome to report to the Pope he arrived only to find that the pope had died while Fr. Jacques was traveling to Rome. The Cardinals who convened elected Fr. Jacques as the next pope, Urban IV (1261-1264). It was then that he knew this vision of Sr. Julian was a message from God and so he instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi as a universal feast for the Church. The timing was important because many were beginning to doubt the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This was just two centuries before the reformation.

Pope Urban asked Thomas Aquinas to write a mass for the feast of Corpus Christi. The hymns Aquinas wrote are still being sung today, Pange Lingua (Down in Adoration Falling).

Transubstantiation – CCC 1373-1377 (read 1374)

The Liturgical Texts

Earliest dated Eucharistic Prayer that resembles ours today goes back to the year 225 and comes from the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus.¹ This is the prayer that was used for the basis of Eucharistic Prayer II

Eucharistic Prayer II

"Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy,
so that they may become for us
the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ"

Eucharistic Prayer I (Roman Canon) – Council of Trent

"Bless and approve our offering:
make it acceptable to you,
an offering in spirit and in truth.
Let it become for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ,
your only Son, our Lord."

Eucharist Prayer III – Vatican II

"And so, Father, we bring you these gifts.
we ask you to make them holy by the power of the Spirit,
that they may become the body and blood
of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
at whose command we celebrate this eucharist."

¹ The Church at Prayer, Volume II, pg. 26-27; A.G. Martimort; The Liturgical Press, @1986

So, why a belief in real presence? What difference does it make?

Flesh and blood relationships are essential to life.

No one wants an invisible relationship with loved ones.

We need to be able to see and hear and touch them.

Infant who lost both parents in a house fire

Trauma moved child into fetal position

Only loving talk and touch of nurses was able to bring child out of self

Father going to son's ball game, at great personal sacrifice.

He could simply call and say I'll be thinking of you.

It means so much more, to both of them, for him to be there.

Mother staying at the bedside of her comatose daughter.

If a father, or a mother, are willing to make such great sacrifice to be with their children, would not our heavenly father also desire such a relationship with the children he has created. This is central to our celebration of Christmas (incarnation) The spirit dwells within us in order that we might experience God and have a real relationship with God.

God wants a body and blood relationship with us. And, as God's children we need that relationship. This relationship is made possible in Christ who became incarnate (enfleshed) in the human race. He then, before leaving this world, left us enduring presence in the form of bread and wine in the Eucharist. Even his last words to his disciples before he ascended to heaven were, "Know I am with you always, until the end of time" Matthew 28:20.

The bread and wine are not simply like the body and blood of Christ, they are the body-and-blood presence of Christ. This is because our relationship is that concrete, that real. Jesus is God revealing himself to us.

One can only truly appreciate this by faithful reception of holy communion, and personal reflection on this great mystery. I urge you to take part in the days of adoration set aside each Monday from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. and Tuesday from 4 - 7:30 a.m.

Believing in the real presence of Christ is not a physical phenomenon.

It is a psychological phenomenon.

You can sit next to a stranger on a bus and say nothing.

There is no real presence between the two of you.

Or, you can call someone in another country and speak with them.

Although you are not physically present there is a real connection, a real presence with them in your conversation.

Remembering a loved one who has died invokes a real feeling in us,

This is a real felt presence.

To be present to another person requires a response on our part, especially when that presence is invisible like God.

This is where Eucharistic Adoration can be such a tremendous blessing to us.

Although we cannot see God, God has chosen a way for us to see Him . . .

In the body and blood of Jesus, who became incarnate and dwelt among us . . .

And who in turn gave us a way to continue to see him . . . the Eucharist.

This then requires a response on our part. For us to most fully experience the presence of God in our life, we can, and should come to worship his body and blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. The consecrated host, enthroned in the monstrance on this altar, is the very real presence of Christ in our midst. We never get closer to God than when in his Eucharistic presence. And so we encourage all of you, if you do not already do so, to make a commitment to worship the Lord in this Holy Sacrament.

This devotion will enrich your experience of the celebration of the mass. It will bring you graces over and above those we receive in the sacraments. It will give you peace, when all the world is crashing down around you. It will give you hope, when all the world seems to be moving towards self-destruction. It will help you to know the love of God as you have never known it before.

In the Words of our Lord in the gospel of Matthew, *"Come to me, all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

Scripture Texts

God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Ready!" he replied. Then God said "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." When they came to the place which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac, and put him on top of the wood on the altar. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. "Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least think to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son (NAB Genesis 22:1-2,9-13).

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel; on the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. This is the Passover of the Lord" (NAB Exodus 12:1-8,11).

Psalms 34:5 Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

Psalms 34:8 O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples 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 my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins (NAB Mt. 26:26-28).

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many (Mark 14:22-24).

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. Then he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you" (Luke 22:14,19-20).

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:23-25).

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers (Acts of the Apostles 2:42).

Early Church documents and writings of the early Fathers

Didache ca. 90 - "Teachings of the Apostles"

Chapter 10:3 "All powerful Master, you created all things for your name's sake and you have given food and drink to the children of men for their enjoyment . . . Moreover, you have bestowed a **spiritual food and drink** that lead to eternal life, through Jesus your servant.

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