

THE EUCHARIST

A Reflection by Bishop Roger L. Kaffer



Recently while driving an old priest to a Confirmation dinner, he made a remark I had never heard before, immediately recognized as true, and have thought of it almost daily since. He said: "Every Mass is a greater act than the creation of the universe." Why? Because in the creation of the universe, you have creatures. But in every Mass you have the creator!

The late Pope John Paul II said the same thing in his marvelous encyclical on the Eucharist: "The most holy Eucharist contains the church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself."

Jesus promised the Eucharist the day after the spectacular miracle of feeding 5,000 people with a few loaves of bread and two fish; and he fulfilled that promise at the Last Supper. The reaction of those He had fed? Disbelief – and rejection! "How can this man give us His flesh to eat, His blood to drink?!" Is it cannibalism? John tells us (Chapter 6): "From that day on, many walked no more with Him." Apparently all left except the Apostles, because "Jesus turned to the twelve and said: 'Will you also go away?'" In other words: "Boys, take it or leave it!" Simon Peter, who had learned his lesson the night before (when Jesus walked on water, and so did Peter – until he began to doubt) replied: "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life, and we have come to know and to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."

It is impossible to change bread and wine into His body and blood! Just as it is impossible to change water into wine, but Jesus did, at Cana! And Peter saw Him! It is impossible to raise the dead back to life. But Jesus did that too, with the son of the widow of Naim, the daughter of Jairus, and later, with Lazarus. And Peter saw Him! It is impossible to cleanse leprosy on the spot, to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and make the paralyzed walk. But Jesus did that. And Peter saw Him! "So if Jesus impossibly says He'll give His flesh to eat and His blood to drink, I don't know how He'll do it – but He will!" So Peter replies: "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life, and we have come to know and to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God!"

Suppose just for a minute that Jesus was wrong, and He could not change bread and wine into His body and blood. Then He was wrong and Jesus knew it, or He was wrong and Jesus didn't know it. It has to be one or the other. If it was wrong and Jesus knew it, he was a liar! If it was wrong and Jesus didn't know it, he was a fool! But God could not allow a liar or a fool to work miracles (as Jesus did) and to fulfill prophecies (as Jesus did) to prove lies or foolishness. So I cannot accept Jesus as a liar, and I cannot accept Him as a fool! So I cannot accept that what He said was false. The only logical alternative is to accept it as true. And I do! Not because I understand how He does it! I don't! I have been saying Mass every day for over fifty years, and I do not understand how the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ! But I believe that it does – because Jesus Christ said so – and He's no liar! And He's no fool!



The Apostle Thomas was absent on Easter Sunday when Jesus came. He refused to believe that Jesus had risen, and said: "Unless I see with my eyes the print of the nails, put my finger into the place of the nails, and lay my hand in His side, I will not believe." The following Sunday Jesus called his bluff and came again. I personally don't believe Thomas even touched Jesus, because St. John tells us that when Jesus spoke to Thomas, Thomas said: "My Lord and my God!" Thomas didn't see my Lord and my

God! He saw a man with holes in His hands, feet and side. He knew by faith it was my Lord and my God!

And when the priest holds aloft the host and we say: "My Lord and my God!" we don't see my Lord and my God, either. We see what looks like a wafer of bread. But we know it's my Lord and my God, because Jesus Christ said so – and He's no liar, and He's no fool!

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From the days of St. Paul to the days of Pope John Paul II, that's what we Catholics have always believed!

"...The cup of blessing that we bless – is it not the sharing of the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break – is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?..." (I Cor10:16)

"...They [heretics] abstain from the Eucharist...because they do not believe that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins and who the Father in His bounty raised up again." (St. Ignatius of Antioch c.110 A.D.)

"...We do not receive these as ordinary food or ordinary drink; but as by the word of God, Jesus our Savior, was made flesh and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also the food which has been blessed by the word of prayer instituted by Him, and from which our flesh and blood by assimilation are nourished is, we are taught, both the flesh and blood of that Jesus Incarnate." (St. Justin, Martyr, c.150 A.D.)

"...The seeming bread is not bread, though sensible to taste, but the body of Christ; and the seeming wine is not wine, though the taste would have it so, but the blood of Christ." (St. Cyril of Jerusalem, c. 348 A.D.)

"...How many now say, I would wish to see His form, His shape, His clothes, His shoes. Lo! You do see Him, you touch Him, you eat Him. And you indeed desire to see His clothes, but He gives Himself to you, not to see only, but also to touch and eat and receive within you..." (St. John Chrysostom c. 388 A.D.)

"...Sight, touch and taste are each in thee deceived; hearing alone safely is believed..." (St. Thomas Aquinas c. 1344 A.D.)

Why? Because it looks like bread, feels like bread, tastes like bread! But by faith we know it isn't bread but the body of Christ. And how do we know that? Because Jesus promised: "The Bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (John 6:51), and he fulfilled that promise at the Last Supper: "This is My body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of Me." (Luke 22:19). "Do what?"

"Do what I just did."

"What did you just do?"

"Changed bread and wine into my body and blood."

"Do you mean we're supposed to change bread and wine into Your body and blood?"

“I mean just exactly that!”

And remember: Jesus Christ was no liar, and Jesus Christ was no fool!

No wonder John Paul II says the “Fiat” of Mary and our “Amen” at Communion both affirm belief in the real presence of Jesus!

He points out (as did Paul VI in “*Mystici Corporis*”) that worship of the Eucharist outside Mass is strictly linked to it, and is directed towards Communion, both sacramental and spiritual. And says that pastors are responsible to encourage and to practice Eucharistic Adoration.



Then he says: “It is pleasant to spend time with Him, to lie close to His breast like the beloved disciple (Cf. John 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in His heart. If in our

time Christians must be distinguished above all in the “art of prayer”, how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the most holy sacrament? How often, dear brothers and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!”

It was a personal thrill to me that the very first quotation from the Second Vatican Council used by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on the Eucharist was what I have always maintained was my very favorite quote from all of the 16 documents of Vatican II: The Eucharist is “The source and the summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* #11 which is also repeated in #5 from Vatican II’s document on the life and ministry of priests: “The Eucharist is the source and the summit of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.”)

In giving retreats to bishops, priests, deacons and their wives, and laity, I always recommend: “Get people in touch with Jesus in the Eucharist, and then get out of the way – He’ll take over!” “The Gospel is not a mere abstraction! The Gospel is a person: Jesus Christ!” (John Paul II, Oriole Stadium Homily, 1995).