

JOURNEY TO OUR FATHER

FULFILLING HIS DIVINE WILL ON THE PATH TO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Discerning and Living the Authentic Faith and Moral Teachings of the Catholic Church in Our Modern World

RECOGNIZING THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST

By James P. Wasel

"I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD" (MT 28:20)

After His mortal course on earth had ended, Jesus desired to return to His Father, but without leaving us. How marvelously His divine wisdom brought this about in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar! If He had remained in the splendor of His glorified body, our eyes would not have been able to bear it, and we would not have dared to approach Him. In the Eucharist He covers His splendor with the sacramental veils. He might have veiled Himself beneath other appearances; but He preferred the appearance of bread to make us understand that He is the "Bread of life. . . comes down from Heaven,. . . which gives life to the world" by divinely nourishing our souls. To the appearance of bread He added the appearance of wine to make us understand that the Eucharist is a complete banquet and that Mass is the Sacrifice of Calvary continued.

In order to give Himself to us, He hides Himself, no longer under the veils of mortal flesh, but under the appearances of bread and wine. He descends from His throne in Heaven to dwell in poverty and to be worshipped in simplicity, so that He may be visited by all and give Himself even to the poorest sinner. He lays aside even the dignity of man and becomes in appearance helpless, entirely at the disposal of man. It is His delight to be with the children of men. What wealth is hidden beneath the thin, white veils of bread! The Sacred Host appears so frail and small, yet in its sacred sanctuary we see with eyes of faith our very God, our hidden God!

CHRIST INSTITUTED THE EUCHARIST

Jesus proposed the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist to His disciples a full year before He died. The sixth

chapter of St. John's Gospel is concerned primarily with Christ's preparation of His disciples for the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

The morning after Jesus had miraculously fed the multitude, the people came to Him again. They hoped that He would repeat His miracle and again satisfy their hunger. He told them, "I assure you, you are not looking for me because you have seen signs but because you have eaten your fill of the loaves." (Jn 6:26)

Then He sought to lift their thoughts above earthly nourishment, by speaking to them of spiritual food for the soul. "You should not be working for perishable food but for food that remains unto life eternal, food which the Son of Man will give you;" (Jn 6:27)

The Jews then asked what they should do to obtain this spiritual food. Jesus taught them that they could obtain it by believing that He was the Messiah and Son of God, whom the Father had sent and who alone could give them this food. They cried out in delight, "Lord, give us this bread always." They still thought that this heavenly food was some wondrous bread, something like the manna from Heaven that fed the Israelites in the desert.

He continued, "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." (Jn 6:51) When the Jews argued among themselves, asking, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52) Jesus pointed out that His words are to be taken literally. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; (Jn 6:53) he who eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn 6:54) For my Flesh is food indeed, and my Blood is drink indeed. (Jn 6:55) He who eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood abides in me, and I in him. (Jn

6:56) As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. (Jn 6:57) This is the Bread which came down from Heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this Bread will live forever." (Jn 6:58)

In these words prefaced with "Truly, truly," Jesus stresses the repetition of the ideas of flesh and blood, of eating and drinking. St. John states that many of the people declared that this doctrine was too hard to believe. "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (Jn 6:60) He also states that "many of His disciples drew back and no longer went about with Him." (Jn 6:66) But Jesus did not call them back to make a correction as if they had misunderstood Him. He let them go. He was ready to allow even the Apostles to depart if they refused to believe in Him and His word, for He asked them, "Do you also wish to go away?" (Jn 6:67) Simon Peter therefore answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that You are the Holy One of God." (Jn 6:68-69)

More than a year had passed since Jesus had promised to give us the wondrous living Bread from Heaven. He must suffer and die in order to give us life eternal. But He did not wish to depart from this world without leaving behind a remembrance of His love for us. In His great love for mankind, Jesus found a means to make us all spiritually rich and to remain with us to the end of the world. By the institution of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, He gave us Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

There is a significant reason our Lord chose the feast of the Passover for the institution of the Blessed Sacrament. The Israelites had longed to be freed from the slavery of Pharaoh and to depart from Egypt. At God's command, the father of every family was to sacrifice a lamb without blemish, and, with his family, he was to eat its flesh. Then he was to sprinkle the side posts and the door posts of his house with the blood of the lamb. All houses that had been sprinkled with the blood of the lamb were spared by the destroying angel of the Lord, but the firstborn of every family of the Egyptians was killed. In grateful memory of this event, the Israelites celebrated the paschal supper each year.

The paschal lamb was a type, or example, of the true paschal lamb, Jesus Christ, who allowed Himself to be slain as a sacrificial lamb on the Cross. He thereby freed us from the slavery of Satan. By His Blood, He willed to preserve us from eternal death in Hell and to lead us into the promised land of Heaven. Jesus and His Apostles were gathered around the table to partake of the paschal lamb. Jesus said to His Apostles, "I have ear-

nestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Lk 22:15) Unleavened (yeastless) bread, such as the Jews were obliged to eat at the paschal supper, lay in a dish upon the table. There was also on the table a cup of wine. St. Mark describes what happened: "And as they were eating, He took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my Body.' And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And He said to them, 'This is my Blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'" (Mk 14:22-24)

CHRIST GIVES PRIESTS THE POWER OF CONSECRATION

Jesus Himself performed the first Consecration at the Last Supper. Now, by the will of Christ, His priests perform the miracle of changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ each time they offer Mass, because they have received that wondrous power from Him. Ever living in His Church, the Savior performs the miracle of Consecration over and over by associating with Himself a man whom He has consecrated and made His priest. He makes use of the voice of this man, of his heart -- marked with the image of the Heart of Christ in the holy priesthood -- and of his consecrated hands.

At the Last Supper, when Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me," (Lk 22:19) He meant, "Do as you have seen and heard me do. I have changed bread and wine; so you also should change bread and wine. I have offered my Body and Blood in sacrifice; you, too, should do the same. I have given my Flesh and Blood in Holy Communion; so you also should give my Flesh and Blood to the faithful as nourishment for their souls." With this command, Jesus gave the Apostles and their successors -- and them alone -- the power to do what He had done, for without power they could not fulfill His command.

After the Savior had left them, the Apostles faithfully did what Jesus had commanded and empowered them to do. They changed bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, thus offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice in holy Mass, and gave Holy Communion to the faithful. Jesus had willed to leave a memorial of Himself not only to the Apostles but to all who were to believe in Him and love Him. The Apostles, knowing the purpose Jesus had in mind, continued to ordain worthy men to be bishops and priests and conferred upon them the power of consecration.

The two greatest powers of priests are those by which they forgive sins and change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Just as the power to forgive sins would be needed in all generations, and so

was transmitted to others by the Apostles, who were the first bishops of the Church, and handed on again by their successors as bishops, so has the power to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ been transmitted to priests down through the generations. Jesus promised, "I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20)

The priest exercises the power to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ only during the Mass. He himself can never grasp the sublimity of this power. He calls God back to earth again because through him the Incarnation has once again been renewed. He actually holds the Creator in his hands. The Church has always believed and taught that through holy Ordination the priest obtains the mighty power that puts him on the level with the Apostles to whom Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me." They exercise the power of consecration only "in the person of Christ Himself."

THE BREAD AND WINE BECOME CHRIST'S BODY AND BLOOD

When Jesus, the Son of God, said, "This is my Body. . . . This is my Blood," the bread became His Body, and the wine His Blood. Jesus said just what He meant and meant just what He said. Thus Jesus prepared the people by His promise of the Eucharist. This was the teaching of the Church for fifteen centuries. In the sixteenth century, during the Protestant Reformation, a doctrine was introduced which denied that Christ meant what He said, but claimed that He intended something altogether different. Protestant churches generally interpret Christ's word to mean not "This is really my Body," but something like "This represents me" or "The repetition of this action will remind you of me." Some hold that at the moment of Communion only, while the bread and wine are still present, Christ, too, is present by faith, together with the bread and wine. But great violence must be done to the texts in order to get these meanings, which our Lord never intended.

The Apostles and the early Christians understood the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper as He really meant them, that is, in the literal sense. St. Paul, referring to the drinking of the consecrated wine, which was common in those days, and the eating of the consecrated bread says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16) Lest there be any doubt that he was referring to Holy Communion as the real and actual Body and Blood of Christ, he says, "Whoever, therefore, eats

the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. (1 Cor 11:27-29)

JESUS ABIDES WITH US IN THE EUCHARIST

At the Consecration, the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ; we know this only by faith in Jesus Christ, God Himself, who is able to do anything He wills, but cannot deceive us. Our Lord is present whole and entire even in the smallest portion of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of either bread or wine, just as our soul is present whole and entire in the smallest portion of our body. Jesus remains present in the Holy Eucharist as long as the appearances of bread and wine remain.

The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is true, actual, and miraculous. He can be here and in Heaven and in a thousand places. To the outward senses, He willed to be but a little piece of bread, at the same time living in all the completeness and beauty of His sacred humanity. He makes Himself so small that a child's hand can hold Him, and yet even Heaven itself cannot contain Him. Only His love and His power could work such wonders.

Christ gives us His own Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist, to be offered as a sacrifice commemorating and renewing for all time the Sacrifice of the Cross. In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus becomes present not only to renew the Sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody manner on our altars and nourish our souls in Holy Communion, but also to abide bodily among us by His Real Presence in our tabernacles.

REMEMBER CHRIST'S SACRIFICIAL DEATH IN THE MASS

The Holy Eucharist continues the life of Jesus among us. He comes upon the altar as God and man at the word of a priest, is laid in his consecrated hands and wrapped in the pure, white swaddling clothes of the appearance of bread. All sacrifice did not cease with the death of Jesus on the Cross. He left us the Holy Eucharist as a visible sacrifice, in order to represent continually that which was once accomplished on the Cross, and to apply the fruits of it to our souls. Jesus willed to make His Sacrifice on the Cross ever present in His Church, so He instituted the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at the Last Supper when He offered His Body and Blood for the first time under the appearances of bread and wine. The next

day, on Good Friday, Jesus offered Himself in a bloody manner on the Cross.

In Palestine He was in one place only; now He is everywhere, ready to assist all. He is here, the Son of God with all His divine power and infinite love, to radiate His sacred influence upon our souls and upon the world, to draw all mankind, to be the source of all strength, life, and joy. How many souls are taught, blessed, comforted, and healed! We could not go to Calvary to offer ourselves with Him and thus share in the fruits of His Sacrifice; so Jesus brought Calvary to us. With the thought of Calvary uppermost in His mind, the Savior said to His Apostles, "Take and eat; for this is my Body, which is being given for you. All of you, drink of this; for this is my Blood of the new covenant, which is being shed for many unto the forgiveness of sins. (Mt 26:26-28) "Do this in remembrance of me." (Lk 22:19) Jesus gave us His own Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist and commanded His Apostles to do as He had just done.

Thus through the Mass He continues and renews His Sacrifice on the Cross. All who participate in holy Mass, especially by receiving His sacrificial Body and Blood in Holy Communion, become one sacrifice with Him, thus sharing in the heavenly fruits or merits obtained by His death on the Cross. In Holy Communion He draws to Himself and into Himself the members of His Mystical Body, the Church, in order that He may give them as a sacrificial gift to the Father. Thus, by the great power of His love, He wishes to join us in a living union with His Mystical Body, as one sacrifice, so that that Body may grow until God comes to judge the world.

Offer yourself together with Christ to the Father in deepest humility and with sincerest love. Recall that when you receive Holy Communion, you are partaking of the Sacrificial Body and Blood of the Lord, thus becoming one sacrifice with Him for the glory of God and your own sanctification. He unites Himself to each one of us as the source of all life, strength, light, and spiritual fruitfulness. Hence, Jesus comes first of all to unite us to Himself as members to their Head, in one Mystical Body. All the other fruits of the sacrament flow from this one, which is the most important. This is the chief reason for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

In coming to you in Holy Communion, Jesus wills to fill you with the same Holy Spirit of love with which He is filled Himself. He wishes in this way to make you share in the divine life and to transform you entirely in Himself. (Reverend Lawrence G. Lovasik, "The Basic Book of the Eucharist", Copyright © 1960 Lawrence G. Lavasik; 2001 Raymond L. Lavasik, Available from Sophia Institute Press, 1-800-888-9344)

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RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Our lives here on earth can be described as a constant journey to the home of the Father. The love of our Heavenly Father is ever reaching out for His wayward children and the greatest sign of His love was shown 2000 years ago when He sent His son, Jesus, to show us the way back to the Father.

We show our love for Jesus by doing His will. We do His will by following and living by all the authentic faith and moral teachings of the Catholic Church. Drawing people back to the basic truths about the Catholic faith helps us to be reconciled with our God, and obtain peace, holiness and happiness in this sinful world; and eternal salvation with our loving God in the next world.

"Journey to Our Father" is helping to bring people back to a clear understanding of the basic faith and moral teachings of the Catholic Church, and to develop a closer more loving and holy relationship with their God. All material within our publications is quoted from solid Catholic sources which have an Imprimatur/Nihil Obstat. A copy of the Imprimatur/Nihil Obstat page from each source is available upon request.

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