

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS ON THE EUCHARIST AS A STRENGTH OF FAITH

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Abstract

This paper attempts a theological reflection on the Eucharist, with the aim of reawakening interest in daily participation at Eucharistic celebrations. With the gruesome attack on persons during the Eucharistic celebrations, a lot of fear and questions have gradually led to a decline in mass attendance. Despite the challenges, it must be noted that the Eucharist gives meaning and purpose to our everyday existence, putting us in constant communion with God, so the fear and terror, pain and sorrow cannot be compared to the union we have with Christ at each Eucharistic celebration. Using the analytical and expository method, this work tries to delineate basic truths as it pertains to daily participation at Eucharist celebrations and its consequent effects upon the lives of individuals. This piece concludes that the Eucharist is the remedy for terror as well as the source for the reign of peace and tranquillity. We must all come to an appreciation of this august sacrament with the eyes of faith.

Keywords: Eucharist, the Last Supper, Sacrificial Banquet, The Word, Communion.

Introduction

The Church in Nigeria, in recent times, has been at the receiving end of many uncoordinated attacks against religion by radical elements of society either to intimidate Christians or to diminish their activities. Particularly glaring and disturbing was the gruesome murder of Reverend Father Joseph Gor, Reverend Father Felix Tyolaha, their Catechist and sixteen (16) other Christ's faithful,

including little children, during the celebration of the Holy Mass in the morning of Tuesday, 24th April, 2018 in Mbalom, Markurdi Diocese. The rippling effect of this singular event on the faith of the local Church in Markurdi has surely gone beyond the locality. Ever since this gruesome attack, many persons have been scared to go for morning Mass. Others may even have questioned the efficacy of the Eucharist and the actual presence of Christ. Regardless of the emotional background of these questions, one cannot but recognize an urgent need to recall and proclaim once again, the truth of the Eucharist as handed down by Christ himself. That is why this paper, which, for the most part, consists of a series of short theological reflections on the Eucharist, is vitally important. It is an attempt to remind ourselves that the Eucharist is unquestionably the self-offering of Christ to the Father; it is his sacrifice. It is the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Admittedly, it can be very hard to see the Eucharist as described above, especially in difficult times like our own. Nonetheless, what we need right now is the peace, the joy, and the power of the Holy Spirit as well as the medicine and healing of faith, not ruling out what the government should be doing to promptly and responsibly protect all her citizens, especially the most vulnerable. In the meantime, let us ask our Father in heaven to send us afresh the Holy Spirit to console us, defend us, protect us, deliver us from evil. In addition, let us implore our heavenly Father to rekindle in us the fire of his divine love, and to reopen our eyes to see the beauty and the wonders of his goodness and faithfulness everywhere, in the Church, and especially in the Eucharist.

Clearly, right now, our faith is being tested, and our deep conviction about the Eucharist is under heavy pressure, given the present circumstances. But we cannot afford not to longer believe firmly in the Eucharist, which is central to all the teachings of the Church. Faith, which has always done great things in the lives of the saints (cf. Hebrews 11), is as important as the air we breathe. That is why, even in very difficult times, “if faith does not take on new life, deep conviction and real strength from the encounter with Jesus Christ, [everything we do and hope to accomplish may yield little or no fruit at all]”¹.

We need the Holy Spirit today more than ever to help us to pray in these most difficult times. We cannot forget that whenever we pray as Christians, we do not pray alone. The Holy Spirit does come to our aid, particularly in our weakness (Romans 8:26-27), in these senseless and very depressing times, because the Lord our God is always faithful (2 Timothy 2:13).

The Eucharist is a mandate, an obligation that one has to understand correctly. When Jesus Christ said, at the Last Supper, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19), he empowered his disciples and subsequent generations of followers to do what he did that night. Thenceforth, the Eucharist became their responsibility and a very special privilege. The Eucharist is not a mere human invention. In fact, it is doing what Jesus Christ did, and has commanded his disciples to do, in his memory: namely,

- 1) to offer to the Father the sacrifice that he made of his life for us sinners, and for the whole world;
- 2) to take bread and wine for the sacrifice, not an animal;
- 3) to say over the gifts of bread and wine a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to the Father; then, 4) to break the bread, rip it, and
- 4) to give it, share it, and have it eaten by his disciples (by those who believe in it).

But the Eucharist is not only something that Jesus Christ has commanded his disciples to do in his memory. He himself is present in his Church in all liturgical celebrations, totally and continuously offering himself to the Father in thanksgiving and praise, and is particularly present in the Eucharistic species, as a unique expression of the very special love of God for mankind.

The Holy Eucharist is fundamentally about sharing in the immortal life of God who gives his people hope that nothing can take away from them. It lifts the eyes and hearts of God’s people beyond the veil; the stronghold of sin and death, the scourge of division and hatred. The uplifting of the eyes and hearts of the people of God enables them to journey enthusiastically and confidently towards their Fatherland in heaven in spite of all the disturbing and terrorizing activities of some violent men, women and children. The unchanging light of the Gospel message

contributes greatly in combating the existing problems of our own country and of the world at large such as greed, gross disrespect for human life, violence and destruction. The Eucharist equips his people to do this battle effectively.

This is why for some people the celebration of the Holy Eucharist gives life and meaning to their day. It is not therefore uncommon to find many Catholics who begin their day, regardless of their occupation, with attending Holy Mass. They are right. We should never intend to miss the Mass, nor should we allow anything to stop us from going to Mass.

1. The Celebration of the Holy Eucharist: The Reenactment of the event of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday and the sacrifice of Good Friday.

The Eucharist is a unique celebration in that it is a reenactment of what Christ did at the Last Supper and of his sacrifice on the Cross on Good Friday. Even though they are distinct, they are nonetheless the same sacrifice of Christ.

What the Church does when the validly ordained priest and the people of God are celebrating the Holy Eucharist is truly a continuation and commemoration of the Last Supper. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is the means by which Christ and his Body the Church continues to perform the rite of the Last Supper; prepare the Last Supper, and eat the Last Supper, the unique event through which Christ wanted to be remembered. Christ wanted to be remembered as one who had a Passover meal with his apostles and gave them his own body to eat, and his own blood to drink under the appearances of bread and wine, for the forgiveness of sins.²

In the water and blood that came out of his pierced side on the Cross, we the new people of God are generated. The water symbolizes Baptism, while the blood symbolizes the Eucharist. This is why, far from being like grass, or as deserving to be wasted, which is how some people have erroneously come to perceive us, we Christians are the most precious of all of God's creation, precisely because we are the body of Christ. "Behold my Son, in whom I am

well pleased”. The blood of Christ washes away our sins. And God has forgiven us in Christ.

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist commemorates Christ the most loving person the world ever knew, and it reminds us that deep seated sins are paid for. Actually, our sins are paid for by no other than Christ himself, with his own precious life. Thus, in the celebration of the Eucharist we remember Christ who has established a new and eternal covenant, who has given his own blood for our sins, once and for all.

2. Christ is the food eaten, the victim (the lamb) of the sacrifice

Another attentive look at the Eucharistic celebration shows that it consists of the actions of Christ which are identical with his actions at the Last Supper in the Upper Room: at the Last Supper, Christ presides; He takes bread and gives thanks, gives it to his disciples, saying, “Take this, all of you and eat of it; this is my body”. The bread truly became the body of Christ, and the wine truly became the blood of Christ, while the appearances of bread and wine remained unchanged. This is what is called transubstantiation³.

3. Christ Himself is the Priest

Christ the Priest continues in every age to give the faithful his true body and blood for eternal life through the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharistic celebration is “an action of Christ the priest and of His Body which is the Church, [and] is a sacred action surpassing all others; no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy by the same title and to the same degree”.⁴ This is because Christ himself is the “High Priest of the New Covenant; it is he himself who presides invisibly over every Eucharistic celebration”⁵ ensuring a perfect and unparalleled celebration. In the Eucharistic celebration the bishop or priest represents Christ. He acts “in the person of Christ the head (*in persona Christi capitis*) [,] *presides over the assembly, speaks after the reading, receives the offering, says the Eucharistic prayer*”.⁶ He does all of these in the name of Christ, and he is ordained to carry-out these functions over which Christ himself presides.

4. Two Great Moments: The Word and the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic celebration is divided into two major parts, namely, the liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These two major parts are related and are “so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship”,⁷ for Jesus Christ is the Word proclaimed and the Eucharist received in the Eucharistic celebration. The Second Vatican Council teaches that Christ is both present in the Eucharistic species and through the Word.⁸ The Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist are one and unbroken action of Christ who came into the world not to be served but to serve and offer himself for the salvation of the world.

In the Liturgy of the Word, it is Christ himself that is proclaimed, and he it is who speaks. “[W]hen God speaks through the many inspired words of the Bible, he communicates to us his one Word, his Son”.⁹

5. Eucharistic Mission and Unity

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Christ, the food of eternal life, effects an ongoing transformation in the faithful and draws them together in the one sacrament of love and unity by giving to them one bread and one cup, his own body and blood. Then he sends forth his Church into the world to preach and celebrate this mystery of salvation,¹⁰ so that “[f]rom listening to the word of God, faith [will be] born [and] strengthened (Rom. 10:17); in the Eucharist the word made flesh [will continue to give] himself to us as our spiritual food”.¹¹ The Word of God that is read, proclaimed, listened to and accepted in the heart is not separate from the Liturgy of the Eucharist since it is the same Christ who speaks in the Liturgy of the Word, gives himself as the word of eternal life, and who, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist offers himself as the Bread of eternal life: “Indeed, the word which we proclaim and accept is Word made flesh (John. 1:14); it is inseparably linked to Christ’s person and the sacramental mode of his continued presence in our midst”.¹²

The Second Vatican Council teaches: “In his Church he [Christ] instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about”.¹³ The bishop, priest and the entire faithful are united in the Eucharistic

celebration. There is one shepherd, one cup, one bread, one sacrifice, one truth, one way, one purpose, one savior of the world, one redeemer of mankind, namely, Jesus of Nazareth who draws all men and women and children to himself. One can see here vividly why Christ commanded that this sacrament of his body and blood be celebrated in memory of him, and in memory of the Church too, for the Church is His Body. In this celebration, one can see clearly the real nature and definition of the Church.

6. The Holy Eucharist as a Memorial

We get to understand better the Eucharist and appreciate it more as a memorial when we realize that in the Jewish custom “all memorial is done in obedience to God’s command”¹⁴. For instance, the feast of the unleavened bread (the Pesach/Passover: Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Numbers 9, Deuteronomy 16, Ezekiel 45, Joshua 5, 2 Kings 23, 2 Chronicles 30 & 35, and Ezra 6), the feast of weeks, also known as feast of Ingathering, a convocation of and call at Sinai to holiness: Exodus 19: 1-6, 34:22, Numbers 28:26, Deuteronomy 16:10,16), and the feast of Booths (Sukkoth) and the day of Assembly (Azaret) (Leviticus 23, Deuteronomy 16, Numbers 29:35, Nehemiah 8:18, 2 Chronicles 7:9, and Ezekiel 43:27). They were all observed in obedience to God’s command.

The Eucharist is an order to do this in memory of Jesus Christ. But the Eucharist goes deeper than that, for whenever the Church celebrates the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist as a memorial, she does not only fulfill Christ’s command, namely, “Do this in memory of me”, but also Christ himself is present, doing what he did on the night he was betrayed – i.e., the rite and prayers are his. This means, among other things, that the Holy Eucharist is not just a remembrance or *anamnesis* of past event of the Lord’s passion, death and resurrection, and his glorious return, but rather is “the sacramental re-presentation”¹⁵ reenactment of the saving event of Christ.¹⁶ He took bread (as now he takes bread), said the prayer of thanksgiving (as he does now), broke the bread (and he breaks it now), and gave it to his disciples (as now he gives it to his disciples), and said, Take this all of you, and eat of it. This is my body ... This

is my blood. It is all happening right now, thanks to *ritusetpreces*, i.e., the rite and prayers (SC 48).

The Holy Eucharist as a memorial is not just the recollection of an event but really a reenactment of what happened about two thousand years ago. “It joins together the past and the present: What happened in the past is happening now”.¹⁷ A reenactment is a privileged moment in this perpetuity of his death, the forgiveness of sins, the redemption, the reconciliation and restoration of the world to the Father. The people of God re-live that very moment of salvation in the course of the celebration of the Eucharist when they participate in the rite and prayers, actively, consciously, and fully (SC 47 & 48).

Furthermore, the Eucharist reminds the faithful of their liberation from slavery to sin and death, and the peace and love Jesus brings to the world. Bouyer makes the comprehension of Liturgical «memorial» even clearer, saying:

It [i.e., the memorial] in no way means a subjective, human psychological act of returning to the past, but an objective reality destined to make something or someone perpetually present before God and for God himself... it is an institution, we may say, established by God, given to his people and imposed on them by him, in order to perpetuate forever his salvific interventions. Not only will the memorial assure the faithful subjectively of its permanent effectiveness, but above all it will assure this very effectiveness through a pledge which they can and must represent to him, a pledge of his own fidelity.¹⁸

The people of God are expected to celebrate and respect this memorial, because it will not only shape their lives but it will guide and guard them.

7. The Holy Eucharist as a Sacrificial Banquet

The Eucharist is also a banquet that has the nature of a sacrifice. G. Dalman observes that in the Jewish practice, “Every meal, especially when bread was used, was looked upon as sacrificial...”¹⁹ Always or for the most part, the time of meals for the Jews was time of thanksgiving, praise, worship of God, for he gives bread to the

hungry, and protects the widow and the orphan. The Eucharist is sacrificial banquet not only because of the bread that is offered in the celebration, but also because it is an offering of Christ's own body and blood on the sacred altar.²⁰ It is a sacrifice of Christ's body and blood in an un-bloody manner. It is a celebration of the one and supreme sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It celebrates the anamnesis of his death on the Cross²¹ and of his resurrection from the dead and of his ascension into heaven.

There is no new sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is unique. In the Eucharist what is celebrated is the sacramental memorial (anamnesis) of Christ's sacrifice... It is neither the mental recollection of a past event nor a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all for our salvation. It is the sacramental or liturgical celebration of that which took place once for all in the past in order that the present community of believers can participate in its redemptive reality.²²

None of this would make sense without faith, by means of which, like eyes, Christians perceive very profound and great things. Faith, like a heart of flesh, makes them able penetrate and understand things of divine nature, including the mind of God. Let us go back to talking about the Eucharist as a unique sacrifice.

The Eucharistic celebration paints for us, as it were, a vivid picture of the passion of Christ. It plays out for every generation of believers the unique drama of our salvation, is "the sacramental sign of Christ's sacrifice [on the Cross]";²³ and is "... the perfect sacrifice that imparts definitive reconciliation on the altar of the Cross on Golgotha. No one partakes of its fruit of salvation who still clings directly or indirectly to the old order of salvation, fraught with shadows, which is henceforth wholly useless".²⁴ The sacrifice of Christ is not only in and of itself perfect but also it demands that those who appreciate it and celebrate it live a new way of life, a sacrificial life, a reconciling life of selfless love.

Among the ancient Greeks there existed a nexus between sacrifice and banquet as two important aspects of the same event. D.

E. Smith, writes: “Indeed, the two were so closely connected that a sacrifice *without* a feast had to be specifically defined as a “banquetless sacrifice”.²⁵ “Similarly among the Esan people of Edo State almost every sacrifice to the gods was made in the context of a meal. The gods were offered some of the meal and wine symbolically, while the people ate and drank merrily.... It was like dinning with the gods”.²⁶

Our Lord talked about the coming of the kingdom as a great banquet, as a wedding feast (Matthew 22). His Last Supper with his disciples points to that final banquet.²⁷ The celebration of the Eucharist brings the faithful here and now to that promised banquet feast of the lamb, in which the goal of salvation history will be definitively perfected.

To sum up, in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the Church celebrates (in the context of a sacrificial banquet and in an un-bloody manner) the death of Christ on the Cross and his victory over sin and death, once and for all. In it, Christ the priest, the altar, and the victim offers thanksgiving and praise to God his Father, our Father for the salvation of the world. Understanding the Holy Eucharist this way, that is, as a perfect indication and full expression of the love of God in Christ for the whole of humanity, the Eucharist in fact gives Christians power that nothing in this world can take away from them. It gives them immortality. And it gives them the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to desire heaven and eternal life. The Eucharist shapes them into living witnesses of the Gospel of Christ, and of the world to come, that is, the kingdom of God, which is already among us (Luke 17:21).

8. The Eucharist as an Offering

The Eucharist as a sacrificial banquet already connotes the idea an offering. Christ offers himself freely and completely to God the Father through the ministry of the ordained priest.²⁸ “No one takes my life from me. I lay it down, of my own accord. No one takes it from me” (John 10:18). Besides, Christ is always present wherever the Eucharist is celebrated not only in the person of the ordained minister, but also in the proclaimed Word, and in the praying assembly, but especially in the Eucharistic species.²⁹ In the

Eucharistic celebration, Christ offers himself to his heavenly Father as a sacrifice of praise, for the forgiveness of sins. And he gives his own life, his body and blood to his people as food of eternal life.³⁰ When Christ took bread, said the blessing and said: “This is my body”, and then took wine and said the blessing and said “This is my blood”. He transformed ordinary bread and wine into his own body and blood, keeping intact the appearances of the bread and wine, so that his disciples would be able to eat of it and drink of it.

This change of the substance (i.e., the transubstantiation) of the bread and wine is continued and sustained in the Church through the action of the ordained priest, during the Eucharistic celebration, when the ordained priest invokes the Holy Spirit to infuse the bread and wine. He appeals to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine and change them into the true body and blood of Christ³¹. And that is what really happens. The bread and wine change into the true body and blood of Christ, respectively., the presentation of gifts in the Eucharistic celebration is incomplete without the giving of self, without the submission of one’s entire life to the will of the Father who so loved the world that he gave to the world his only Begotten Son. And his Son, in turn, gave himself, that is, laid down his life for the salvation of the world. There is no greater love than that.

9. The Eucharist as Communion

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has it that “the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed toward the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us”.³² This communion, (which is Jesus) that the faithful receive, effects a transformation because he, the lamb of God, takes away the sins of the world and at the same time gives to the faithful the grace to live a good and holy life.³³

Paul uses the word *koinonia* for the Lord’s Supper to signify communion that connotes a close relationship, a unity, and harmony among the people of God. He writes: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ?”³⁴

These questions are rhetorical. Paul firmly believes that the Eucharist unites and forms the new people of God into Christ's body, into communion, wherein the full mystery of Christ finds expression. In other words, the Eucharist forms Christians, the new people of God into one body, one spirit in Christ.

The Eucharist enables and encourages peoples of different cultures and different backgrounds to profess one faith in the one and same Lord Jesus Christ, who feeds his sheep with the Word of God and with his own body and blood, without any discrimination whatsoever. Recall the men that he chose to be his disciples, the men with whom he celebrated the Last Supper. They were from many different backgrounds. Therefore, in that single act of thanksgiving Jesus the one great Mediator united what is earthly with what is heavenly, that is to say, the sheer goodness of the Father with the needs of his people.

A Brief Theological Evaluation

There are other salient points about the Eucharist to pay attention to. But one may deem particularly interesting the following: In the Eucharistic celebration, the Church continues to remember the marvels of God, and continues to celebrate his great love for mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord, and she continues to ask to be sanctified and to be "brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit."³⁵ It is right and fitting not only to give thanks to God for his goodness and love, but also to live *appropriately, fittingly* and *consistently* as children of God in this world that appears ever hostile to the Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, supplies the grace needed for the new life in Christ, and at the same time the Holy Spirit binds the faithful together as one in Christ.³⁶

A. The Holy Eucharist as a Sacrament

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrament that "actually brings about the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor. 10:16)."³⁷ It is through the Spirit that the Eucharist becomes communion with God³⁸ and with the faithful. It is through the power of the Spirit that "[t]he Eucharistic sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful

with Christ through Communion”.³⁹ Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist draws all the faithful who receive it into a dialogue of love and service. When the Eucharist is being celebrated one can see that, there is “a reflection of this eternal dialogue of love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit”⁴⁰, and one can appreciate how it is, in the Holy Eucharist, that we enter into divine intimacy with Jesus.

By active, full and conscious participation in the Eucharist the faithful become a holy people, and they grow in holiness, in faith and in unity, and are being knitted into one body of Christ, one spirit in Christ, into a people who make the mind of Christ their own (cf. Philippians 2:5). This is why it is particularly fitting to call the Eucharista *communio*, the sacrament of unity.

B. Passover Meal of the New Covenant People of God.

The Eucharist is also the new Passover meal. It brings Christ’s faithful together in faith and in practice, in every age and in every continent, and makes them the new people of God, the new people of the new covenant by the sacramental signs and by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration. The visible structure and perennial nature of the celebration of the Eucharist, easily recognizable in and of themselves, form a strong and profound bond among peoples, whose delight has always been the Lord, his new law of love and his mighty but gentle work in their midst – local language and customs, time and place notwithstanding. Hence, whether one goes to the Far East, or to faraway India or to China, to Australia or to Russia or to Ireland, or to Nigeria or Senegal, one would recognize the Eucharistic celebration there, sooner or later, because it has the same structure. The vastly different socio-cultural experiences and backgrounds, the different traditions and local customs of the ordained priests and of the worshipping communities of peoples do not render the Eucharistic celebration incomprehensible. Regardless of time and place, the celebration always begins with “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”, followed by the penitential rite, the *gloria* and/or the *collect*, the readings, and homily. Then follows the presentation of gifts or offertory, the prayer over the gifts, the Preface, the

Eucharistic Prayer, the great Amen, the our Father, exchange of sign of peace, Agnus Dei, Communion, and Post Communion prayer, and almost always ends like this, “Go forth, the Mass is ended” Or: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord by the conduct of your life”. And the people respond, “Thanks be to God”.

Other invariable elements are the materials used, namely, bread and wine. In addition and above all, the words and gestures of the ordained priest, during the blessing and consecration of the bread and wine, are always constant and invariable. The ordained priest appeals to God the Father to send the power of the Holy Spirit on the bread and wine and change them into the body and blood of Christ. And the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ, even though the appearances of the bread and wine remain unchanged.

C. The Transformation of the People of God

The bread and wine are not only change into the body and blood of Christ in the course of the Eucharistic celebration, but also the transformation of the faithful, the disciples of Christ is prayed for: “Grant that we, who are nourished by the body and blood of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer III). It starts with the conversion of the heart. «When the heart is transformed [,] love (*koinonia*, communion) is established».⁴¹ The heart is the garden where virtues can be cultivated, by the help of the Holy Spirit, so that vices may wither and die. When the heart is transformed by the Holy Spirit, it bears fruits of righteousness, holiness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and the fear of the Lord.

D. The Actions of the Holy Spirit in the Faithful

The Holy Spirit is the author of true conversion. It turns the hearts and minds of the faithful toward the Father the Creator of all in heaven and on earth, and to his only begotten Son Jesus Christ,⁴² who takes away the sins of the world. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians are innocent and serene, all the time, like gentle lambs in the midst of wolves. They are a profoundly happy people, who radiate happiness and joy, all the time. Daily they dedicate

themselves to good works among their fellow men and women. The change, the conversion of heart and of morals, may not be immediately evident, but it surely does occur. Take Paul for example: he became a changed man on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Unfortunately, Ananias and others were still afraid of him and of his name because they thought that he was the same Saul that they knew. Saul viciously attacked the Church and persecuted the disciples of Jesus the Way. The Lord brought him to his knees. He became one of the greatest champions of the same cause that he sought to eliminate.

The sacrament of penance and reconciliation offers us another example of how the change of heart can occur, without necessarily showing on the surface. When the priest absolves penitents from their sins, their sins are forgiven. Every so often, however, some penitents still remember their sins, and the scars of their sins still remain, that is, long after the prayer of absolution is said over them. But the truth is that the penitent is indeed a new creation, after the confession, after a good contrition, after the absolution and satisfaction of penance.

E. The Real Presence

The real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist is absolutely true, even though nearly always it takes faith to see it. The Eucharist is the true body and blood of Jesus Christ.

In the Eucharistic celebration, Jesus Christ, in union with the Holy Spirit (who helps his disciples to remember and to implement his teachings), speaks and instructs Christians with the Word of God and feeds them with his own body and blood, while always or for the most part he keeps intact the appearances of bread and wine.

In this consists in part the immortality of Christians, namely, the fact that Jesus Christ who was crucified, died, and rose again, and who dies no more, feeds his disciples daily with his incorruptible body and blood. He and his disciples become one body, one spirit, through the rite and prayers. The other constitutive part of the immortality of Christians is the knowledge, the revelation of the power of God. “To know your power is the root of immortality” (Wisdom 15). Those who know the power of the true

God humble themselves. They do not dare to take a human life, made in the image and likeness of God. They do not play with the name of God, the unquenchable fire. Every day and night, they beg the Almighty, the Immortal to give them of the Spirit to drink, in order to become compassionate as their heavenly Father. As long as they accept Jesus as Lord, they are becoming children of God. They are becoming like Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, the true friend of God, who was and is the face of God, the visible presence of God in the world. "I call you friends", said he, "because I have made known to you everything that I have learned from the Father" (John 15.15).

One can see now how it is that the Church not only offers a Eucharistic prayer, that is, a thanksgiving prayer with Jesus to the Father, she is in fact always a thanksgiving prayer with Jesus to the Father.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the common element of all that we have said about the Eucharist as memorial, as offering, as sacrificial banquet and as communion. In short, Jesus Christ is the Eucharist. He is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is true God and true man. He is the one Mediator between God and man, and between man and man. Therefore, to believe in the Eucharist is to have complete confidence in Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate revelation of the mind of God. He is the absolute truth about God the loving Father. He always acted in complete obedience to the will of God His Father, whom he has also revealed to us as our Father as well (John 20:17).

We have seen that whenever the Church celebrates the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Christ is truly present with his Church, and she fulfils the command given to her by Christ: "Do this in memory of me"⁴³. Paul elucidates this command when he writes, "whenever you eat this bread, then, and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes again".⁴⁴ In carrying out this divine injunction, the Church is in constant communion with Christ, and is receiving eternal life, the fullness of life.

From all that we have seen above, and from all that the Eucharist teaches us daily, it becomes imperative to embrace Jesus Christ and learn from him, who is our Eucharist, the bread of life. We learn from him to live no longer for ourselves, but rather for God alone. Consequently, missing the Holy Mass feels like and is indeed like missing the very source of life itself.

Let us go forward, relying on the help of the Holy Spirit, *consolatory optime, lumen cordium, lux beatissima*, the giver of wisdom and knowledge to draw us nearer to Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God. Furthermore, we have a very deep joy that nothing can take away from us, because alive or dead we belong to the Lord.

ENDNOTES

¹ Benedict XVI, Christmas Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December, 2011.

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⁶ CCC 1348.

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⁸ SC 7

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¹² Benedict XVI, *SacramentumCaritatis...* 45

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- ³⁵ Eucharistic Prayer II.
- ³⁶ Gal. 3:28.
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- ⁴³ Lk. 22:19.
- ⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 11:26.