

The
Holy Eucharist
Explained



(Thirteenth Edition 75,000)

Our Sunday Visitor Press
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THE HOLY EUCHARIST

"I am the living bread, which came down from heaven."—John vi. 51.

I. CREDIBILITY OF THE EUCHARIST.

According to Catholic teaching the Eucharist is a sacrament which contains the true body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine.

The non-Catholic who hears this point of belief enunciated for the first time is inclined to wonder how Catholics can be brought to believe so extravagant and incredible a doctrine. And we answer him by saying that the doctrine of the Eucharist is seemingly incredible only to one who is unprepared to believe it either because of prejudice, or because the doctrine has never been properly presented to him. How many facts of nature, and how many accepted facts of history are more extravagant, but fail to elicit our surprise because we have often heard them stated? When scientists teach things seemingly credible, we say, "I believe," without trying to investigate. If we were only half as ready to believe the truths of faith on the authority of God Almighty Himself, there would be little difficulty about mystery. A religion coming from God, a religion supernatural, must possess some truths (the surprise is that there are not more) that finite man cannot see through. What if you heard for the first time what astronomers teach concerning the number and magnitude of the heavenly bodies; that there are millions of other worlds, thousands of times larger than our own; that the sun is 100,000 times larger than the whole earth and 93,000,000 miles distant from it?

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Would their teaching be easier of acceptance than the teaching of the Church concerning the Eucharist? What if you heard for the first time the story of God becoming man, living on earth for thirty-three years and dying a malefactor's death for His creatures? Would not such a fact be more difficult to accept, than after granting it, to believe as we do concerning the Eucharist? Yet all Christians must believe this fact of history. The most stupendous facts, like those mentioned, cease to be astonishing and unreasonable to one who has grown accustomed to hear them stated, and Catholics find less difficulty in accepting the Eucharist than in assenting to many of the declarations of science. We all believe that God became man. But it should be more difficult to believe this than after accepting it, to believe that He went one step further and became food for our souls.

Is it a sign of over-credulity to accept what was the constant and universal belief of Christians for 1500 years? To accept what three-fourths of all the world's Christians believe today? To believe what there is stronger Scriptural authority for than any other point of Christian belief?

Only the small minority of Christians, the one-fourth, do not believe as we do, and they form the more recently founded denominations. The old Christian sects of Asia, the Copts, Syrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Nestorians, Eutychians, as also the Greek and Russian churches (not to say anything of the large number of Episcopalians) believe as do Roman Catholics in this matter, and present a very strong argument in our favor, antedating Protestantism, as they do, by 1000 years.

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Supposing, therefore, that you are in a suitable frame of mind to listen to an argument, I shall call your attention to several other considerations which help greatly towards the acceptance of the Catholic belief in the Holy Eucharist:

1. God is infinite in His every perfection; therefore His love is infinite; therefore, we cannot conceive of His love going too far; therefore it did not go too far when He instituted the Eucharist. Of His love God Himself says: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer. xxxi. 3). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." (John iii. 16). And this Son of God expresses the infinity of His love in these strong words: "As the Father hath loved Me, so I have loved you." (John xv. 9). God the Father certainly loved the Son with an infinite love, and Christ says that His love for us is just as limitless. And St. John speaking of Christ's love, says: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end," i. e., to the last limit love could go.

2. Not only is God's love infinite; it is also a *personal* love. "I have loved *'thee'* with an everlasting love; I have redeemed *'thee'* and called *'thee'* by name; *'thou'* are mine. 'Christ loved *'me'* and delivered Himself up for *'me.'*" So many of Christ's parables, notably those of the "Good Shepherd," "Good Samaritan" and "Prodigal Son" lay stress on the *personal* nature of God's love for us. Human love is personal, and Christ compares His love to human love: "Can a mother forget her child? * * * Even so I shall not forget thee." Now perfect and personal love must tend to union with the object loved.

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3. But the difficulty which perplexes you is probably the following:

What is there about man that can so attract God to him and elicit such extraordinary love from God?

Well, I grant that mere natural perfection in a creature, even if that creature were the highest angel, could not elicit God's infinite love. But when God created the first man He did not only endow his soul with natural perfections, but clothed it with a supernatural beauty, made it a partaker of His own divine nature, so that He was drawn by necessity to love it. And if from the time of man's fall this supernatural endowment is withheld from the human soul at its creation, it is imparted to it later by a divinely instituted rite of the Church, so that the soul of every Christian who is free from grievous sin is most attractive to God; it becomes His "delight to be with the children of men."

4. And on man's part there is an irresistible longing for union with God. Pious people would rather die a thousand times than be separated from God by grievous sin; and should such separation occur they are unhappy until peace and union with God are established again. Even the errors of paganism testify to the naturalness of man's longing for union with God; what else did their temples to the "unknown" God, their sacrifices to appease the deity, mean?

God, having constituted Himself man's last end, placed within man's breast a craving for union with Himself; and hence He must needs grant man what he made it natural for him to crave for.

5. Though the Jewish religion was very imperfect as compared to the perfect religion of Christ, yet

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members of the former had closer union with God than adherents of the latter, if Christ is not personally present among Christians. See the constant nearness of God's presence with the Jews in the "cloud" and in the "pillar of fire," which were always with them on their journey to the Promised Land. In their communion service they had a living reality, whose flesh they ate, viz., the spotless lamb. And their daily prayer was that the Emmanuel—God with us—might come in person.

God came, but God (Jesus) gone from us again would not satisfy the heart of man. Why should the Christians of all times not have "God with them" on their way to the real Promised Land—Heaven? Jesus looked backward to by Christians would mean no more than Jesus looked forward to by the Jews. As far as faith is concerned it would not mean as much, for it would be easier for us to believe that God had come to earth after having palpable proof of it, than for people who lived before His coming to believe that He would thus condescend to unite Himself to human nature.

Jesus was for all—for all time; "Jesus Christ yesterday, today, and the same forever." "Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxiii., 20).

To believe this is so natural that at Protestant revivals, "union with Jesus" is the cry; "come to Jesus;" "put on Jesus" is the invitation. The "Salvation Army" preacher on the street corner has the same message.

Ardent love cannot bear separation, and it wants the conscious presence of the object loved.

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The natural relationship of Christ to the Church (the Church is called His spouse) demands this real presence where the Church is. Christ is the "Head of the Body—the Church." Therefore He should be actually present with the Church.

II. SCRIPTURE BASIS.

a—THE PROMISE.

But I stated that no doctrine of religion is more strongly supported by scripture than that of the Eucharist, so let us open the Holy Book, and first at the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. In this chapter we read of two astonishing miracles wrought by our divine Savior, viz., the "multiplication of the loaves" and His "walking on the waters." Then of His promise to give His followers a heavenly food which would be His own flesh and blood.

Here our non-Catholic reader might say: "Not quite so fast; Protestants explain our Savior's words in a different manner." I know they do, but have patience and I shall prove to you that their interpretation is utterly false.

If non-Catholics say that our Savior is speaking of the necessity of faith in Him, of a spiritual eating of His flesh and blood, I answer that He insists on faith in His divinity, so that there will be no room for the objection "*how*" can this "*man*" give us His flesh to eat? He wrought the *two miracles* on the same occasion before a large multitude of people *in order* to prepare their minds for the acceptance of the promise. The Jews wanted another proof of His divinity—v. 30, 31, "*What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee; our fathers did eat manna in the*

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desert, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" The occasion could not have been more favorable for the promise of the Eucharist in the sense Catholics accept it, hence our Lord says: vv. 32 and 35, "*Amen, amen, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. . . . I am the bread of life.*" These words were not at once understood by His hearers, for in v. 41 we read, "*The Jews then murmured at Him because He said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.*" A plain statement of His real meaning was now called for and our Savior presents it: Vs. 48ff., "*I am the bread of life; I am the living bread which came down from heaven; and the bread which I will give is MY FLESH for the life of the world.*"

The Savior's hearers understood Him as we Catholics do and began at once to ask the question which Protestants do: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" There could be no question about the "how," if they believed Him to be God, but our Lord could not wilfully deceive them; He must either tell them what He spoke figuratively and explain the figure as He did on other occasions, or He must lay stress on the literal sense of His words. What does He do? He emphasizes by oath the literal, plain meaning of His words: Vs. 53ff., "*Then Jesus said unto them, Amen, amen, I say unto you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you, for my flesh is meat indeed (Latin, vere, 'in reality,' the very opposite of figurative), and my blood is drink indeed,*"—in reality. "*He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him.*"

The Jews then understood Christ's first utterances

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as Catholics do, and the Savior reiterated the same statements more clearly, so that they could be understood in no other manner. But how did the disciples, those who knew Him better, understand Him?

Precisely the same as the rest, as v. 60 shows: "*Many, therefore, of His disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying, and who can hear it?*" Jesus permitted many of them to leave Him because of their unwillingness to believe as Catholics do: "*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him.*" (v. 66). Yea, so necessary did Christ consider the admission of His Real Presence in the Eucharist that He would rather lose the very apostles than to have them hesitate to believe, so "*He said unto the twelve, Will you also go away?*" (v. 67). Whereupon St. Peter made a profession of faith in the teaching of Christ as Catholics understand it.

b—THE INSTITUTION.

This promise of the Eucharist a whole year before **its** institution seems to have been made so that the apostles would not be surprised when Christ would later communicate Himself to them. After the promise made so solemnly and with such strong words the apostles must often have looked for the fulfillment, which took place at the last supper and is recorded by three evangelists and St. Paul in words the very plainest.

It was the night before Jesus died, when He surely was serious and would speak plainly; and here are his clear words according to the different evangelists: "*And whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke, and gave to His disciples, and said:*

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Take ye and eat, this is my body. And taking the chalice, He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins.” (Matt. xxvi. 26, 27, 28).

“And whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessing, broke and gave to them, and said: Take ye, this is my body. And having taken the chalice, giving thanks, He gave it to them. And they all drank of it. And He said to them: This is my blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many.” (Mark xv. 22-24).

“And taking bread, He gave thanks and broke, and gave to them, saying: This is my body which is given for you. In like manner the chalice also, after He had supped, saying: This is the chalice, the new testament is my blood, which shall be shed for you.” (Luke xxii, 19, 20).

St. Paul tells us that he received a special revelation on this matter from the Lord and speaks of it in these words: *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke and said: Take ye and eat; this is my body which shall be delivered for you; this do for a commemoration of me. In like manner also the chalice, after He had supped, saying: This chalice is the new testament in my blood.” (1 Cor. xi. 23-25).*

All these four inspired writers say that Christ pronounced over the bread the simple words: *“This is my body,”* and SS. Luke and Paul tell how Christ added the words, *“which shall be delivered (given) for you,”* viz., the very body not (bread) which was to be offered

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on the Cross. And of the chalice, St. Luke quotes Christ as having said, "the blood, which will be *shed* for you."

LITERAL MEANING.

A contention frequently made by Protestants is that the Bible needs no authorized interpreter, that the average individual is able to fill that office well enough, since the Scriptures are plain. But what advantage follows from the Scriptures being plain, if their evident meaning be rejected?

The words of Christ, whereby the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist is supported, are the plainest of the whole Bible. And if the only one clear meaning which they can have be rejected, any other construction placed on them can be no more than a surmise. Catholics are sometimes accused of leaving Scripture to prove a doctrine, but who leaves Scripture in this case?

The promise of the Eucharist was made in clear words, but the words by which the sacrament was actually given to us are even more clear. Read Matt. xxvi. 26, 27, 28; Mark xiv. 22-24; Luke xxii. 19, 20; St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 23-26.

No comment on these words could render their meaning more clear, and hence instead of comment, there is room for only one consideration, viz.:

Does our Savior mean what He actually says?

Compare the Lord's words at the last supper with the words of promise. They harmonize so well; after hearing the words, "The bread which I shall give you is my flesh," and the other strong words of the promise a year previous, the Apostles were not surprised at the words, "Take ye and eat, for this is my body," espec-

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ially since Jesus said to them, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." From that time on the twelve must surely have wondered why the Master was not giving them the "bread of life, the *living* bread which came down from heaven," His own self. His last night on earth was come; if He should not execute His promise now, when would He? And could a more favorable time have been chosen by the Master? He was about to die; a last will to His disciples and followers was in order; as a God of infinite love He would bequeath no little thing. Speaking of His love on that night St. John says, "Having loved His own, who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

He had already done what was inconceivable when He as God united Himself to human nature; He was making ready to do another inconceivable thing, to undergo the shameful and painful ordeal of crucifixion. With these surprises of God's love before us it is easy to conceive of Him as the Lover of souls, taking one more step to unite Himself *personally* with souls so dear to Him, and for whose salvation He was ready to pay any price.

On that night Jesus would not speak figuratively; in fact, He had told the Apostles a short time before that He would never more speak to them in parables. Would the Great Teacher deceive us in His last will and testament concerning a matter of such tremendous importance? For what a vast difference between being actually present in the Eucharist and not being present!

Members of a particular sect might take for granted that Jesus meant to say, "This *signifies* my body,"

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but besides this being a far-fetched interpretation, how are they positive that one of the other 200 interpretations given to the four little words (by those who reject the literal meaning) is not correct?

But do the Evangelists leave any room to question the real meaning of Christ's words?

Not the slightest; on the contrary, they strongly emphasize the literal meaning of the words, "This is my body; this is my blood," and their language could escape the notice only of such people as are not open to conviction. For instance, St. Luke quotes Christ as saying, "This is my body, *which is delivered for you,*" "this is my blood, *which shall be shed for you,*" i. e., the very body that would be sacrificed and the very blood that would be shed for them on the cross. St. Paul quotes Christ the same as Luke. Then in the tenth chapter, sixteenth verse of the first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul supposes his hearers to understand the Eucharist to be precisely what we Catholics believe. He asks them this question, "The chalice of benediction which we bless, *is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?* And the bread, which we break, *is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?*" Again, if Christ's real living body and blood were not present in the Eucharist, the following language of St. Paul's same epistle would not be intelligible: verses 27, 28, 29 of chapter xi., "Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord *unworthily*, shall be guilty of the *body and blood* of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice, for he that eateth and drinketh *unworthily*, eateth and drinketh *damnation* to himself, *not discerning the body of the Lord.*" How could one

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eat bread and drink wine *unworthily?* and especially, how could one be actually *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord* by eating bread and drinking wine, no matter how sacred? How could the crime be so serious as to merit damnation? The reason the unworthy communicant eats damnation is, as St. Paul declares, because he does "not discern the *body* of the Lord." How could he, if it were not there? If Christ did not give His real body and blood to His Church, His followers would have a far less perfect figure of Himself than did the Jews before His coming. They had the paschal lamb, a living victim whose real flesh was eaten and whose real blood was shed, yet we do not hear that the Jews were threatened with damnation for eating the paschal lamb unworthily.

Even the most skeptical non-Catholic will admit that at the Last Supper Christ instituted a new rite, and enjoined a new practice on his followers. In establishing the same can it be supposed that He would have used words whose real meaning would not be comprehended?

With the words: "Do ye this in commemoration of me," Christ commanded the Apostles to do the same thing that He had just done. Were they to receive a command whose import they did not grasp? That they understood Christ as Catholics do today is evident from the words of St. Paul quoted above (1 Cor. x. 16 and xi. 27-29). And conclusive arguments can be adduced to show that the successors of the Apostles to whom their authority and powers were transmitted, believed precisely as Catholics do today.

In the first place the Greek Church and all the Christian sects of Asia, which are older than Protes-

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tantism by 1,000 years, believe as we do. Hence such must have been the prevailing belief of Christians during the first centuries. Secondly, writings that come down to us from close successors of the Apostles clearly state the belief of the early Church, and show it to be identical with ours of today.

History is replete with instances where the great doctors of the Church in the early centuries combated new teachings of heretics, but when did the belief in Christ's Real Presence become an innovation, and who was the heretic that first preached it? No one attempted to deny the Real Presence during the first thousand years of Christianity, and when in the eleventh century Berengarius denied it, he was quick to withdraw his denial, for the whole Christian world condemned him and at least fifteen councils anathematized him. The so-called Reformers of the sixteenth century were the first to question the meaning of Christ's plain words; so who were the innovators, they or Catholics? Luther in several works (e. g.: *Epis. ad. Argent.*; *Def. verb. Dom.*; *In Parv. Cat.*) defends the real presence against the Zwinglians, who taught the figurative presence. And the authorized catechism of the Church of England declares that "the body and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken." Hence it is modern Protestantism which has changed.

To summarize:

There is only one object of priceless value in this world; it is the human soul created according to God's own image. For it God entertains an infinite and personal love. Therefore He is pleased to be united to it by a personal union. After uniting Himself to human nature in the Incarnation, our Emmanuel, Jesus

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Christ, promised to unite Himself to each individual follower, to be to him the "bread of life." The Jews, whom He addressed, understood Him to promise His real flesh and blood; Christ's disciples understood the same; the Apostles understood the same. And these Apostles accepted the Savior's words at the last supper in their literal sense, so did their immediate successors and all Christians for fifteen centuries. The early Christians risked their lives to receive holy communion; martyrs died in defense of the Eucharist; millions of virgins have rejected all other loves and lovers to love only Jesus in the Eucharist. Three-fourths of the world's Christians today believe in the real presence. Could it rest on a more solid foundation?

All Christians could not be in error; otherwise, Christ's Church would have utterly disappeared from the earth. But all Christians for fifteen centuries believed the Eucharist to contain the true body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, Under the appearances of bread and wine.

