



The Eucharist and Sanctity

What Do We Believe?

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On the answer to what do we believe depends in large measure whether we shall only know about sanctity or also attain it, whether holiness will remain only an idea or whether we shall actually become holy. What a difference!

The simplest way to express what Christ asks us to believe about the Real Presence is that the Eucharist is really *He*. The Real Presence is the *real Jesus*. We are to believe that the Eucharist began in the womb of the Virgin Mary; that the flesh which the Son of God received from His Mother at the Incarnation is the same flesh into which He changed bread at the Last Supper; that the blood He received from His Mother is the same blood into which He changed wine at the Last Supper. Had she not given Him His flesh and blood there could not be a Eucharist.

We are to believe that the Eucharist is Jesus Christ – simply, without qualification. It is God become man in the fullness of His divine nature, in the fullness of His human nature, in the fullness of His body and soul, in the fullness of everything that makes Jesus Jesus. He is in the Eucharist with His human mind and will united with the Divinity, with His hands and feet, His face and features, with His eyes and lips and ears and nostrils, with His affections and emotions and, with emphasis, with His living, pulsating, physical Sacred Heart. That is what our Catholic Faith demands of us that we believe. If we believe this, we are Catholic. If we do not, we are not, no matter what people may think we are.

Our faith is belief because we do not see what we believe. We accept on Christ's words that all of this is there, or rather, here in the Holy Eucharist. Faith must supply what, as the *Tantrum Ergo* sings, "the senses do not perceive." And faith must reveal what the mind by itself cannot see. Let us never forget this phrase, first in Latin, *lumen fideism*, the light of faith. Faith reveals, faith discloses, faith enlightens, faith empowers the mind to see what the mind without faith cannot see.

Strange as it may sound, when we believe in the Real Presence, we believe in things twice unseen. We see only what looks like bread and wine, tastes and smells like bread and wine, and yet we are to believe that behind these physical appearances is a man. Faith number one. And we are further to believe that behind the unseen man is God. Faith number two.

Is it any wonder the Church calls the Eucharist, *Mysterium Fideism*, the Mystery of Faith? Those who accept the Real Presence accept by implication all the cardinal mysteries of Christianity. They believe in the Trinity, in the Father who sent the Son and in the Son who sent the Holy Spirit. They believe in the Incarnation, that the Son of God became man like one of us. They believe in Christ's divinity since no one but God could change bread and wine into His own body and blood. They believe in the Holy Catholic Church which Christ founded and in which through successive generations is communicated to bishops and priests the incredible power of making Christ continually present among us in the Blessed Sacrament. They believe, against all the betrayals by the Judases of history and all the skepticism of Christ's first disciples, in an unbroken chain of faith ever since Peter replied to Christ's question whether he and his companions also wanted to leave the Master. What a chance Christ took. "Lord," Peter looked around, "whom shall we go to?" (And he spoke for all of us.) "You have the message of eternal life, and we believe, we know, that you are the holy one of God."

There is a prayer in the Coptic Liturgy that I think perfectly answers the first question we are asking. "What do I believe when I believe in the Real Presence?" The prayer goes as follows, a little long, but worth it:

"I believe and I will confess to my last breath that this is the living bread which Your only-begotten Son, our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ, took from our Lady and the Queen of Mankind, the holy, sinless Virgin Mary, Mother of God. He made it one with His Godhead without confusion or change. He witnessed before Pontius Pilate and was of His own free will condemned in our place to the holy tree. Truly I believe that His Godhead was not separated from His manhood for a moment, not even for the twinkle of an eye. He gave His body for the remission of our sins and for eternal life to those who partake of this body. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is in very truth that body. Amen."

That is your faith and mine.

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