



The real crisis of faith in Catholic ranks today is the crisis of disbelief in the Eucharist. The most dramatic reason for this is the same as what happened when Christ first announced that He would give us His Body and Blood to eat and drink as described by St. John. You recall that many people who had until then been devoted to Christ began first to wonder, then to murmur, and finally doubting, left His Company. This has always been so since this mystery of faith was first announced to the world.

Let us focus on two features of this mystery: first reflecting upon the Eucharist as **Reality** and secondly as **Presence**.

What is this Reality to which the Church strongly directs our attention? To be real is not to be imaginary or illusory, not to have "it" existing outside ourselves nor as a figment of our imagination, nor solely as an idea in our own minds. Is this Reality simply God? We cannot say that that is so, because God was in the world from the moment He made it. He would have been in the world even if there had been no Eucharist. He was in the world before He instituted the Blessed Sacrament. This Reality is God present in a different special way. The essence of what we believe here is that God is present as *man*.

The Eucharist began with the Incarnation, in the womb of Mary. Except for her there would be no Jesus and without Him there is no reality to speak of, in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is unqualifyingly Jesus Christ! Our faith tells us that Christ, true God and true man is present on earth as He is present in Heaven. We know the Ascension was no make-believe but Catholics also believe that Christ is now present on our altars as a living human being, whose divinity assumed our nature.

He is completely, identically, numerically, the same Jesus Who was born of the Virgin Mary, Who will judge us on the last day, and Who we hopefully will see in glory forever afterwards. In common with some sincere Protestants we believe that Christ is in heaven but that He is truly also on earth.

Scripture tells us that the night before Jesus died, He gave His Apostles, His successors on earth, the power to do what He did at the Last Supper - change bread and wine into *Himself*. This is Catholic Faith: it is what **Reality** means.

Presence is not an easy word to define. In a manner of speaking we say one thing is present to another if it is near to it but strictly speaking only rational, intelligent human beings are present to each other. In proximity - yes, but also someone having a relationship with someone else - an awareness of their being there.

What can we say about Christ abiding with us in the Eucharist? Are we always present to Him in the sense that He is always aware of us?

Yes. If Presence is "thereness". Christ is always there with the fullness of His humanity and the plenitude of His divinity. He is there independently of whether we think of Him or not. This is Catholic Truth.

As the Council of Trent defined it; in the Eucharist is the *TOTUS CHRISTUS*, the whole Christ, with all that makes Him what He is. His sense of reality is independent of our awareness of Him. It is the adversatives of our faith that really spell the difference between what we believe and how we live.

Is Christ in the Eucharist in another sense present to us?

No. To live out what the Church teaches and what Christ intended us to do when He instituted the Blessed Sacrament, He should be not only physically present to us but spiritually in our minds and hearts. Some people take Eucharistic devotion for granted. They seem to act as though Christ being here on earth, should do something for them like miraculously infusing their minds with a mystical light or giving them some mystical experience.

Really we are supposed to do something for Him! We must make His Presence real to us. Making Him spiritually present to us is our part in responding to the mystery of the Eucharistic Covenant. Being with us, Christ promised a



miraculous effusion of grace, on condition that we do our part. We must act with our minds and with our wills, thinking of Him present in the Blessed Sacrament not that that will make Him present but that our thinking starts our becoming aware of His Presence with us.

It is just religious common sense, to freely decide to reflect about Christ's being with us in the Eucharist. We must make that mental effort if we are to grow in Eucharistic devotion, which the Church considers essential for all Christian living and the foundation of a life of perfection. But to make the reality of the Lord's Presence spiritually effective we must make Him present in our wills. If two persons spacially separated by thousands of miles or millions of years each wants what the other wants they are present to each other not only by their mental awareness but by the strongest bond that can unite one spiritual being to another - the bond of love.

Returning to the Eucharist, we ask, what does the Eucharistic Christ want from us in order that we be united with Him in spirit, in our wills and in our minds? He wants us to practice the things He taught us. First the virtues He practices in the Blessed Sacrament.

First perfect *humility*. In the Eucharist, Christ not only hides His divinity which He did during His visible stay on earth but He even hides His humanity. We see and taste the elements that seem to be just bread and wine, but our faith tells us that they are neither bread nor wine but Jesus. St. Paul calls this the *kenosis*, God emptying Himself, not revealing the fullness of Who He is. God wants us to cultivate a corresponding humility. We shudder at what that demands of us. A humility that constantly means our gifts, talents, and abilities are to be hidden. This we call the sacrifice of recognition, than which there is none greater, especially when there is much to sacrifice.

In the Eucharist Christ practices great *patience*, remaining in our midst even when we are indifferent to His Presence, unlike St. Margaret Mary who would spend hours unable to tear herself away from the Blessed Sacrament. Let us remember Christ's complaint to her "that

which pains Me most is the coldness and indifference of My consecrated religious to the Sacrament of My Love". Thinking of the growing number of convents without chapels, of Priests casual in handling the Sacred Hosts, is it any wonder that Christ complained and continues to complain, asking those of us who have the faith to see beyond the veils of sense and realize that God is really present and act accordingly. He wants us to be patient in uncomplaining endurance of pain, realizing that often the most poignant pain is not of the body but of the spirit.

In the Eucharist Jesus practices *generosity*. Being among us in His humanity for one reason only: to bestow on us those blessings which faith tells us are available only through His human nature. Christ can show us the way to the Father because He is a human being. It is through this

Humanity, depending on our faith that He opens up to us the vastness of His divinity. He wants us to be correspondingly generous to others by giving, never asking nor expecting anything in return. Giving ourselves, our likes and dislikes offered up in order to be of help to others, whom He told us the night He instituted the Sacrament, are put into our lives to love and help: an index of how much we love Him.

Let us ask our Eucharistic Lord to help us understand Who He is, Who is in our midst and how we may grow in our awareness of His Presence among us, recognizing that beyond this awareness, by uniting our wills: His and ours, giving ourselves to, for, with and through Him as He so generously does with us, that we please Him - thereby anticipating the day when there will be no more sacramental veils between God and us. That will be Heaven! The Eucharist unveiled for our eternal Love.

