

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

God's love for us is poured out in the sacrament of the Eucharist, where Christ is truly present for us, giving us life and healing.

The Roman Catholic Church has consistently held fast to the belief in the Real Presence. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all sacraments tend." In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." "This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

— The Catechism of the Catholic Church: paragraph 1374

In many ways, Our Lord, is calling us to worship and receive Him in the Eucharist. He speaks this desire in many ways: through the Pope and the Magisterium of the Church, in the Bible (Jn. 6), through his Blessed Mother in approved Marian apparitions, through the testimonies of Saints and Martyrs, through Eucharistic miracles, through Church approved messages given by Jesus by Divine Revelation, through our souls who long for Jesus in Communion, and through our suffering world which is in much need of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Transubstantiation

To identify what takes place in the consecration at Mass, the Church has come to employ the term "transubstantiation" (trans = change, Substantiation = of substance). Because of its importance for understanding the Real Presence, this term deserves some explanation.

There are two kinds of changes which, things can naturally undergo. They are called accidental and substantial changes. In an accidental change, something remains substantially the same, but its accidental or non-essential properties are transformed. Thus when a block of marble is carved into a statue, the marble remains marble, but its shape and form are changed.

In a substantial change, the former substance ceases to exist and becomes something else. Thus, when food is eaten, its substance is changed; it becomes part of the organism which consumes the food.

In transubstantiation there is a unique substantial change. The essence or substance of bread and wine ceases to exist, while the accidents or sensibly perceptible properties of bread and wine remain. This kind of change has no counterpart in nature; it belongs to the supernatural order.

What actually occurs? The substance of what was bread and wine is replaced by the living Christ. Although the external qualities of bread and wine remain, their substance is no longer on the altar. It is now the whole Christ, divinity and humanity, soul and body, and all the bodily qualities that make Christ, Christ.

The Eight Ways Christ is Present in the Church

Pope Paul VI distinguished no less than eight ways in which we may speak of Christ being somewhere present:

- **He is present** in the Church when it prays, since it is Christ who prays for us and in us, and to whom we pray as to our God. This is the sense in which we believe that where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, he is there in the midst of them.
- **He is present** in the Church when it performs its works of mercy, not only because we do to Christ whatever good we do to his brethren, but also because it is Christ, performing these works through the Church, who continually assists the faithful with his divine love.

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- **He is present** in the Church in its pilgrimage of struggle to reach the harbor of eternal life, since it is he who through faith dwells in our hearts and, through the Holy Spirit, whom he gives, pours his love into our hearts.
- **He is present** in the Church as it preaches his Gospel, since the Gospel which the Church proclaims is the word of God. It is preached in his name, by his authority, and with the assistance of his grace.
- **He is present** in the Church as it governs the people of God, since the sacred power inherent in the Mystical Body comes from him. As shepherd of shepherds he is present in the pastors who exercise the power conferred on them as successors of the apostles.
- **He is present** in the Church when it offers in his name the Sacrifice of the Mass, and he is present to the Church whenever it administers the sacraments.

Christ is present in all these ways because he is active in our regard, and his influence is experienced by those to whom **He is present**.

- **He is present** uniquely, however, in the Real Presence – a presence that is different from all the foregoing. It is the physical presence of Christ in our midst, no less truly than he is now present at the right hand of his Father. Consequently "this presence is called *real* – by which it is not intended to exclude all other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence *in the fullest sense*. It is a substantial presence of which Christ, the God-man, is wholly and entirely present." If we could make a graphic comparison, there is as much difference between Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament and his presence elsewhere on earth as there was between his presence among his disciples when he appeared to them on Easter Sunday night and his presence before and after the appearance.

Graces Received from Receiving the Eucharist

Christ's death on the cross originally merited the graces to redeem the world, but Christ now actually confers those graces. The sacrifice of the Mass is the channel by which those graces are communicated. We believe the sacrifice on that first Good Friday is re-enacted or re-presented in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. Christ's blood was shed only once -- physically.

Moreover, for our purpose, the Mass is a sacrament which pours numerous graces on the human family. What kind of grace does the sacrifice sacrament of the Eucharist confer?

The grace of propitiation for sin. Propitiation means obtaining graces from God that will make up for, amend and expiate the ravages of sin. The grace of obtaining mercy from God, who removes more or less of the guilt incurred by our sins. Guilt is the loss of divine grace. The word guilt is so common in our language, we had better know what we mean by guilt. In Catholic terms it is not merely a declaration by a court of someone being found guilty of breaking a law. Nor is it merely a psychological emotion or feeling of anxiety. Thus Sigmund Freud was not only a non-believer in a personal god yet, after a lifetime of clinical practice, Freud said he had yet to meet a single client who was not troubled by the sense of guilt. This may be the foundation of psychological disorders, but it is not the guilt of which we are speaking here. Guilt is the loss of grace. And the sacrifice sacrament of the Eucharist restores more or less of that lost grace.

- The grace of repentance and true interior sorrow for our having offended God.
- The grace of remission of the sufferings that are due to us because we have sinned.
- The grace enlightening our minds which have been darkened by sin. Sin and darkness go together throughout the bible and throughout human history.
- The grace of strengthening our wills to do good and avoid evil, because our own wills have been weakened by sins.
- The grace of obtaining grace for others, especially the grace of conversion for hardened sinners and the grace of conversion to the true faith for those who may never have even heard the gospel effectively preached to them.
- The grace of inspiring and enabling us to make out of love for God. A sacrifice is the surrender of something precious to God. How generous can you be? The most demanding sacrifice -- the most difficult we are called to make -- is to surrender that most precious creature that happens to have your name. How we love that creature and not want to give it up! But we can do so with the graces found in the sacrifice sacrament of the Eucharist.