

The Eucharist

"And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.' And likewise the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'" (Lk 22:19-20)

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Think of the human experience of two people who love each other, and yet are forced to part. They would

like to stay together forever, but duty – in one form or another – forces them to separate. They are unable to fulfill their desire of remaining close to each other, so man's love – which, great as it may be, is limited – seeks a symbolic gesture. People who make their farewells exchange gifts or perhaps a photograph with a dedication so ardent that it seems almost enough to burn that piece of paper. They can do no more, because a creature's power is not so great as its desire.

What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us. He will go to the Father, but he will also remain among men. He will leave us, not simply a gift that will make us remember him, not an image that becomes blurred with time, like a photograph that soon fades and yellows, and has no

meaning except for those who were contemporaries. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he is really present, with his body and blood, with his soul and divinity.

Christ is Passing By, 83

The miracle of the holy Eucharist is being continually renewed and it has all Jesus' personal traits. Perfect God and perfect man, Lord of heaven and earth, he offers himself to us as nourishment in the most natural and ordinary way. Love has been awaiting us for almost two thousand years. That's a long time and yet it's not, for when you are in love time flies.

I remember a lovely poem, one of the songs collected by King Alfonso the Wise. It's a legend about a simple monk who begged our Lady to let him see heaven, even if only for a moment. Our Lady granted him his wish and the good monk found

himself in paradise. When he returned, he could not recognize the monastery – his prayer, which he had thought very short, lasted three centuries. Three centuries are nothing to a person in love. That's how I explain Christ waiting in the Eucharist. It is God waiting for us, God who loves man, who searches us out, who loves us just as we are – limited, selfish, inconstant, but capable of discovering his infinite affection and of giving ourselves fully to him... .

«This is a miracle of love. *This is truly the bread for God's children.* Jesus, the first son of the eternal Father, offers us himself as food. And the same Jesus is waiting to receive us in heaven as *his guests, his co-heirs and his fellows, for those who are nourished by Christ will die the earthly death of time, but they will live eternally because Christ is life everlasting.* (...)

«... Jesus hides in the blessed Sacrament of the altar because he wants us to *dare* to approach him. He wants to nourish us so we become one single thing with him. When he said, Apart from me you can do nothing, he was not condemning Christians to ineffectiveness or obliging them to seek him by a difficult and arduous route. On the contrary. He has stayed here with us, he is totally available to us. (...)

When we meet together around the altar to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass, when we contemplate the sacred host in the monstrance or adore Him hidden in the tabernacle, our faith should be strengthened; we should reflect on this new life which we are receiving and be moved by God's affection and tenderness... .

For me the tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place

where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as Martha, Mary and Lazarus. That is why I rejoice when I stumble upon a church in town or in the country; it's another tabernacle, another opportunity for the soul to escape and join in intention our Lord in the Sacrament.

Christ is Passing By, 151-152

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