

Meditated mystery: The Institution of the Eucharist

Fruit of the mystery proposed: a greater love for Jesus in the Eucharist

This 1st Saturday of October marks the 900th anniversary of the Eucharistic miracle of Bettbrunn in Germany. We will therefore meditate on the Eucharist, the true summit of Christian life and of the 1st Saturdays of the month. The Holy Curé of Ars said: *"All the good works combined [in the entire history of the world, editor's note] do not equal the sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, and the Holy Mass is the work of God."* This unfathomable mystery of the Eucharist, instituted by Our Lord on Holy Thursday evening, could be meditated on throughout a lifetime. Today, we will begin by simply asking ourselves the question: what is the Eucharist or Holy Mass really? We will highlight two fundamental aspects:



1/ The Eucharist, sacrifice. It is the bloodless renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross. That is to say, Our Lord offers himself once again as a victim for our salvation. Why? Although the sacrifice of the Cross at Calvary is total, complete, and sufficient for our redemption, Jesus, in His infinite goodness and love, wanted to make this sacrifice present and real at every Mass (without suffering or death). At each Eucharist, the renewal of His sacrifice once again repairs the sins of men committed every day. The apparition of June 13, 1929, to Sister Lucia of Fatima illustrates this perfectly. She saw above the altar the chalice and the host with Jesus crucified just behind it (see image opposite). Thus, at the consecration, we ourselves are truly at the foot of the Cross with the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Through the Father through the ministry of the priest, the faithful also have an important role that is often overlooked. They do not just unite themselves interiorly to Christ's sacrifice. Together with the priest, they **offer Christ's sacrifice to God**. This is a major act that may seem strange, and an explanation is necessary here. Any offense against an infinite God is de facto infinite in nature. Yet we are mere finite, imperfect creatures, and it is therefore impossible for us to repair our sins ourselves: it is Christ, the Son of God, who came to repair them. This is the whole mystery of Redemption. But through baptism, we have become members of the mystical body of Christ. Thus, despite our imperfect state as creatures, we will be able, at the consecration, to offer God a perfect sacrifice, that of Christ Himself. God thus receives just reparation, and as a result, through the merits of Jesus Christ, we will be saved and obtain eternal life.

Here we touch upon one of the splendors of the Eucharist, so far removed from notions of a simple "meal," "assembly," "praise," or even "commemoration." We are in the reality and greatness of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who offers himself again out of love for us. And given the importance of this truth, the Council of Trent was very clear on this point: *"If anyone says that in the Mass a true and authentic sacrifice is not offered to God (...) If anyone says that the sacrifice of the Mass is only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, or a simple commemoration of the sacrifice accomplished on the cross: let him be anathema."*

2/ The Eucharist, sacramental communion. Here we meditate on the most beautiful of the seven sacraments because it is the only one that contains Our Lord Himself: Christ is there with His body, His blood, His soul, and His divinity. As we know, this sacrament is characterized by the change of substance (transubstantiation) of bread and wine into the body and blood of Our Lord. Just like the apostles on the evening of the Last Supper, we do not see this change of substance with our senses. This change is invisible to human eyes and, moreover, impossible according to natural laws. Each Eucharist is therefore **a miracle** that requires an **act of faith** on our part: despite our senses telling us otherwise, our intelligence and our soul tell us that the bread and wine have truly become the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The reason for this act of faith required at every celebration of the Eucharist can be found in the Gospel. After doubting Jesus' Resurrection (and therefore doubting His real presence), Saint Thomas

found himself face to face with Him a week later and saw Him truly present through his senses. Then Jesus said to him, "*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (Jn 20:26). God, who desires our happiness, asks us at every Mass to believe without seeing.

Finally, we can consider a second aspect of communion. As we have already emphasized, we are members of the mystical body of Christ. By instituting this sacramental communion during the Eucharist, Our Lord thereby materializes our belonging to His mystical body. Thus His words in the Gospel are fulfilled: "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.*" (Jn 6:56). In his book *The Most Holy Sacrament*, Saint Peter Julian Eymard explains: "*All Christians scattered across the face of the earth are members of the mystical body of Jesus Christ, so He, who is its soul, must be everywhere, spread throughout the whole body, giving life and sustaining it in each of its members.*"

The admirable characteristics of the Holy Eucharist that we have just seen—sacrifice, sacrament, and communion—show its importance and its eminently sacred nature. Our attitude, both interior and exterior, must therefore be in accordance with such an unfathomable reality. St. John Eudes sums up in one sentence how we should behave: "*The Sacrifice of the Mass is something so great that it would take three eternities to offer it worthily: the first to prepare for it, the second to celebrate it, and the third to give proper thanks for it.*"

Preparing for it... The greatness of the Eucharist requires us to prepare our whole being, that is, our body and soul. The body is prepared through Eucharistic fasting and a respectful attitude. The soul is prepared inwardly through contemplation. We must empty our minds of earthly thoughts, distractions, and resentment towards others. Before offering the sacrifice of Jesus, let us remember His words: "*So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*" (Matt 5:23-24) Finally, in silence, let us prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus with love and gratitude.

Celebrating it... How much respect should we have for Jesus, both in our souls and in our outward behavior! Here we can better understand the words of Saint Paul: "*Whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*" (1 Cor 11:27). That is why, in order to receive Communion, our soul must be in a state of grace (without mortal sin). As for our outward attitude, should we not ask ourselves how we should receive the Holy Host? A bishop, author of the book *Corpus Christi*, recently explained that taking Christ without any sign of adoration, standing with Him in our hands "*as if we were taking a piece of candy*," clearly trivializes the Eucharist and inevitably leads to a loss of the sense of the sacred. Let us take advantage of this meditation to reflect in all conscience on this important question.

Thanksgiving... Let us note that the physical presence of Jesus in us lasts about fifteen minutes, after which time the Holy Host is physically absorbed by the body and the real physical presence of Christ disappears. And what do we do during those fifteen minutes? Do we keep Him company as we would a person we love above all else, or do we forget Him after a few seconds? Do we remain with Him in the church while He is within us, or do we rush off to chat? Here too, let us reconsider our attitude after Communion.

To make a holy and pious communion, let us not forget that we have an incomparable helper: the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was the first to receive the body of Jesus at the Incarnation. Better than anyone else, she knew how to keep Him company, love Him, and talk to Him at that moment. Pope Benedict XVI showed us the way: "*May the Virgin Mary, the Eucharistic Woman, introduce us to the secret of true adoration. Her humble and simple heart was always focused on the mystery of Jesus, in whom she adored the presence of God and His redeeming Love.*"

So, before each Communion, let us ask Our Lady to help us better understand the greatness of the Eucharist; to help us keep company with her Son Jesus during those fifteen minutes when He is within us. She is our Mother and she will give us all the graces we need to achieve this.

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