

The Body and the Blood



Jonathan Knox

July 26, 2005 – Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne

Christ gave to His Church seven sacraments, visible channels of invisible grace. They are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and matrimony. Of these, the Holy Eucharist is most excellent.¹ This pre-eminence exists because the consecrated bread and wine become the true body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church teaches that the Eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice, the one sacrifice of the cross, now offered in an unbloody manner.² To better appreciate this mystery, for no man can fully understand it, we must look to the Old Covenant figure of the Eucharist. The Passover was a commemoration of the ‘passing over’ of the angel in Egypt and the Exodus that followed. The Jewish people were to sacrifice a lamb, strike the blood on their doorposts, and eat unleavened bread.³ Saint Paul makes plain the connection between old and new, the Passover lamb and our Lord, to the Corinthians.⁴ The fact that Christ instituted the celebration of the Eucharist on the first day of Passover also shows the connection between the two sacrifices.

¹ *Council of Trent, Session XIII, Chapter III*

² *Council of Trent, Session XXII, Chapter II*

³ *Exodus 12:3-8*

⁴ *1 Corinthians 5:7*

The Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell of the institution of the Eucharist. All quote Jesus calling the bread His body and the wine His blood of the new testament. He does not say “this represents, but is not.” Something that represents something “is not” what the represented item is; it *is* the symbol. He says, “This is my body.” Jesus did often use figurative language. However, when he does use this language, the author includes a note saying that he was speaking of something else. This is true in all of His parables. Another time He uses symbolic language is when He calls His body the temple. St. John includes a note so the readers know that “He spoke of the temple of His body.”⁵

One very persuasive passage of Scripture in favor of the Real Presence is in John 6. Again, we see no indication of figurative language. On the contrary, Christ says six times that we must “eat His flesh” or something very close to that. He even tells us “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”⁶ Along with the use of “Verily, verily” in verse 53, this language is urging us to believe what He saying, not to take it symbolically.

The Jews in Capernaum did not take Jesus’ teaching very well. In verse 52, “the Jews strove among themselves” and His disciples call it “an hard saying” in verse 60. Jesus replies by asking them if this saying

⁵ *John 2:19-21*

⁶ *John 6:55*

“offends” them. The Greek word here is *skandalizei*. Our English word scandalize comes from this. Thayer and Strong define this verb as “to cause to stumble, to put a stumbling-block/impediment in the way.” Jesus saw this teaching of His to be an impediment to those that would believe! If He meant them to take His words symbolically, then why didn’t He clarify this? Quite the opposite, He says His flesh is true food.

We find another passage to look at in 1 Corinthians 10. Verse 16 says, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” The word to look at here is ‘communion.’ The Greek word for communion is *koinoonía*, meaning partnership, participation, or fellowship. The literal translation is joint participation, but the translators chose to use words such as fellowship, communication, and contribution (when it was a joint contribution.) In most other verses where this word appears, we can translate it as a joint partaking, or participation. In verse 17, we see another word for ‘partakers.’ Verse 18, however, uses the word that *koinoonía* comes from. This word means a sharer or a partaker.

The context surrounding this word lends more support to the idea that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. This part of St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians deals with their idolatry. He rebukes them for partaking in the consumption

of sacrifices to devils.⁷ In verse 18, he uses the Jewish people as an example. The priests offering the sin offering would eat it in the holy place of the tabernacle⁸. Back to 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us that those that eat the sacrifices are partakers of the altar. The word for partaker is very closely related to the word used for communion in the previous verses. In fact, translated to English literally, they would read partaking and partakers. This use of the same word to describe both the Old Covenant sacrifice and the Eucharist shows how the sacrifices of old foreshadow Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The connection does not stop there, though. This sacrifice of Calvary is that which the Corinthians celebrated at the table. The Jews could not partake of the sacrifices of idols, since they were bound to the One to whom they made sacrifice. Just as well, the Corinthians were not to partake of the sacrifices of devils, since they were bound to the One whose sacrifice they celebrated at the altar.

The next chapter, 1 Corinthians 11, gives the Pauline account of the institution. His account is very similar to St. Matthew's. Again, Christ does not say "this represents." I have a serious problem when people try to change the meaning of Sacred Scripture to their own liking. Especially so when people do it so an odd or even unnatural sounding teaching becomes a

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:21

⁸ Leviticus 6:25-27

sugar coated, easy-to-accept idea. To those that say this doctrine is impossible, I welcome you to Christian theology. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all accepted the Trinity: three persons in one God. They all accepted the Incarnation and Virgin Birth: God becoming man and being born of a mother but no human father. Then there is the Resurrection: bodies of men and women who died 8,000 years ago, some being cremated, some being spread over the sea, made whole and alive! Tell me now; what is the difficult teaching?

Continuing to verse 26, we see that whenever we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, we show/proclaim the death of the Lord. To proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes is ‘to make known throughout.’ What is the death of the Lord? The sacrifice at Calvary is. For the next verse to make any sense, the Lord’s Supper must be thought of as a sacrifice. Paul tells the Corinthians that whoever partakes unworthily is “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”⁹ Instead, they are supposed to examine and judge themselves. The Catholic Church teaches that this means that you cannot be knowingly guilty of mortal sin that has not been sacramentally confessed.¹⁰

St. Paul goes on to say that whoever takes Communion unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself. Verse 30 shows us that many people

⁹ *1 Corinthians 11:27*

¹⁰ *Canon 11, Session 13, Council of Trent*

became ill and died. Why would this severe penalty exist? Because those that did not partake worthily were not “discerning the body of the Lord.”¹¹ The word ‘discern’ comes from the Latin *discernere* meaning to set apart, separate. St. Jerome in his Vulgate Bible used the similar word *diudicans* meaning “to judge between parties/decide.”¹² Those that did not partake worthily were not determining the Lord’s body. They were not recognizing the difference between a meal and communion with Christ.¹³ They failed to see that Christ was truly present in the Eucharist.

The teaching of the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament has met shock, disbelief, and scorn over the centuries. First, the Jews in Capernaum did not believe. Later, the Corinthians, among others, did not treat holy the “blood of the testament.”¹⁴ In recent history, Protestant reformers and ‘rational’ modernists have flatly denied this doctrine. I pray that you will see the Eucharist for what it truly is: the Body and Blood, soul and divinity, of Our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Almighty God bless you.

¹¹ *1 Corinthians 11:29*

¹² <http://catholic.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookup.pl?stem=diudic&ending=>

¹³ *See also: 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 34*

¹⁴ *Hebrews 10:29*