

Theology of the Real Presence

"I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine placed upon the altar are, by the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration there is present the true body of Christ which was born of the Virgin and offered up for the salvation of the world, hung on the cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that there is present the true blood of Christ which flowed from His side. They are present not only by means of a sign and of the efficacy of the sacrament, but also in the very reality and truth of their nature and substance."

The Real Presence – When it comes to the teachings of the Church, there is no greater polish for the gem of orthodoxy than the grit of heresy and it is from that grit that we have this gem from Pope Gregory VII and the heresy that these words were written in response to was looking to take those two words, real and presence, and separate them. Those in the heresy could not bend their reason in line with Jesus' reality in the bread and wine believing instead that Jesus would only come down to earth again at the last judgement. They argued loudly that it can only be a symbolic or spiritual presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and not a real or physical one. Any of this sound familiar? It's the same animal that appeared at the protestant reformation and has even shown signs of working its way into the Church to this day. Unfortunately for that theory, to have presence alone causes everything to fall apart and does something I would rather not do to Jesus... more on that at the end.

So then – Real Presence – how do we know both to be true and inseparable? I struggled with this talk for the better part of the last two weeks and ultimately it was not because of too little to say but because there is so much to say on this. Ultimately, the voice in my head won as he kept hitting me on the forehead with – stick to basics – so I will and I will leave the many wonderful documents the Church has produced to elaborate on this topic for you all to read after this and I will stick with what originally convinced me and continues to sustain me in faith of this reality: Its true because Jesus said so.

Even though I said the heretics could not do this, for sake of explanation, I am going to break those words apart and handle them separately before showing why they cannot be separate – the reality and the presence. And I am also look at it through the source aside from the magisterium – the Gospels – since in order to see it in the proper light and in the way the heretics are presenting it, we cannot look at magisterial teaching – if they agreed with it there would be no heresy. Now I do not want to go too deep into this as next week's talk will focus more specifically on the Eucharist throughout the scriptures but I need to at least work with the main message of a few passages from the gospels to show that the truth of this is not something we can mess with because it was not of our making but of God's.

The reality: *Jesus is truly and fully present in the Eucharist* – The bread changes in substance to the body of Christ and the wine to His blood and we receive him completely – and if that was not enough, this same substance is the same Jesus that walked the earth in the 1st century and the same Jesus we consume in the Eucharist is the same Jesus that will be there at the final judgement. Yesterday, today and forever,

this is truly Jesus and every part of him. Period. And this is truth because Jesus tells us straight up that it is so.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that He is the bread of life, the bread that comes down from heaven and that bread is His flesh for the world. When the people gathered questioned how He was going to give His flesh for them to eat, He elaborated further on it – Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have eternal life. This was too much for many and they left. Only a few remained and when Jesus asked them if they too wanted to leave they replied – to where shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. Even though they did not fully understand what Jesus meant, they knew that it was important and that it would lead to the good and they followed Him by that faith.

He then shows us what that looks like at the last supper – In the Seder meal that he and his disciples celebrated in the upper room, Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, “Take and eat, this is my body” – this bread would have been the second of three pieces of unleavened bread pointing to the second person of the trinity in our understanding today. That particular piece would be broken in half and wrapped in linen and hidden from sight and then found and “raised” by the youngest in the family, invoking in our minds Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. The head of the household would then break that bread further and pass it around to all there - Jesus giving himself for all in His presence. The chalice that He raised as He said, “this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many,” would have been the third chalice of wine in the meal, the cup of blessing that signified the blood of the lamb at the first Passover – the blood that when sprinkled on the doorposts of the houses would tell the angel of destruction to Passover the house, the blood that ultimately freed them from the slavery from Egypt is now the blood of the Lamb of God, poured out for many to free us from the slavery to sin.

This in itself should be enough, but what underlines this truth even more is what is not in these scripture passages – and explanation. In many of the gospel passages that are hard to understand, there is an explanation that follows to clarify either when Jesus is alone with His disciples or when the narrator speaks up and clarifies things by saying something like “Jesus said meaning...” In both of these examples, there is no such explanation – even as all those disciples walked away from him because that saying was too hard, he did not change that truth to keep them.

Presence: *Jesus is truly present to us in the Eucharist.* When we think of presence, we think of a personal relationship between two people. We are present to someone or someone is present to us when we are aware of them and they of us. This presence can transcend space and time – we can think of a distant relative and we are with them in spirit.

Where we come into a problem with the Eucharist as Jesus’ presence only is that it does not require someone to be truly there but instead stresses and intimacy of mind and heart, (making this an easy way to wrap our minds around the Eucharist even though it is incomplete at best) yet we were told by Jesus that he is fully present in the Eucharist and will always be with us to provide for us and in a subtle way the scriptures speak of this as well.

Theology of the Real Presence

In the feeding of the thousands we see the foretaste of the Mass – a simple offering has been miraculously changed in order to feed thousands to satisfaction. Jesus breaks the bread and hands it to His disciples who then give it to us and in the end, there are more leftovers than the original offering. This shows not only Jesus' great love for us, an overflowing and over abundant love, but it also speaks to something else – the continuation of this meal. When there are leftovers in my house, that means I will eat that meal another day – the leftovers in the Gospels show that same reality, that not only have those present been fed to satisfaction, they have a promise that they will be fed again of this overabundant and everlasting gift and if that were not enough, Jesus flat out tells us that he will be with us always at the end of the Gospel of Matthew.

These examples should say it all, but there is one more dynamic that helps us understand the relationship of the Reality and the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist - an understanding of who Jesus is that ensures that Real and Presence must be together and that this must be both/and rather than either/or.

Jesus is both Human and Divine. When we say that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist we normally follow that by saying – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Yet the bread and wine are only taking on the substance of His Body and Blood. It is not directly that we receive His Soul and Divinity. We get the Soul and Divinity of Christ through the hypostatic union of Christ's humanity and divinity since they are inseparable from each other. Christ is fully Human and fully Divine and cannot be separated, therefore the Eucharist cannot only be the spiritual presence of Christ lest we diminish His humanity and therefore divide Christ. We cannot have one without the other since he is fully both.

And from that understanding, He being the one and only God, who made us and knows us and loves us to beyond even the point of excess by giving Himself to us completely to strengthen us, it only makes sense that he would provide for both our spiritual and human needs - we are both body and spirit. We are not just a spirit in a disposable body but both spirit and body and we need the strength and healing God provides for us for our entire being not just a part of it. And in order for us to be consumed completely into the Love that God has for us He has to be present for both our body and our spirit because...

Real Presence.

Both together or nothing at all.

The whole Christ, truly, really, and substantially contained in Holy Eucharist

That is who we are looking at in the monstrance.

“The Reality of Christ in the Eucharist therefore is no figure of speech. It is no fanciful rhetoric. It is, in the clearest words that can be expressed, the Incarnation extended into space and time. It is literally the Emmanuel made flesh - the God-man who is here and now living in our midst.”