By Leon Bent -

This little known feast is far more important, solemn and doctrinal, than lesser festive Commemorations and Liturgical Celebrations that, are given much more prominence. “Corpus Christi” if properly understood, lived and proclaimed, reinforced with charisms, grace and faith, is a sure path to sainthood. The context and cradle for this crucial feast is Christ’s ‘Sacramental’ Oblation.

The 1.285 billion Catholic Church’s official doctrine is that every Mass is a ritual “re-enactment” or “perpetuation” of Our Lord’s one bloody sacrifice on Calvary. St. Peter Julian Eymard, Founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, confirms: The Eucharist is the “crowning act of Christian worship” and the “holiest act of religion”. The Holy Eucharist, Vatican II tells us, is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (Lumen gentium, no. 11; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1324).

**The Symbol of Bread - It’s Rich History**

As we bring our bread to the altar, we realize that it has come a long, long way to this table. This is the bread which sustained the Israelites in their flight to freedom; it is the bread which nourished Elijah on his journey to the mountain of God; it is the bread which Jesus multiplied
to feed his hungry people in the desert; it is the unleavened bread of the original Passover Meal (Ex.12:1-8; 11-14); it is also the festive meal of “remembering” (CCC1356/57/58; 1 Cor.11:24-2); it is the bread which Jesus blessed at his last meal; it is the Body of the Risen Lord; the food for Passover; the bread of “awesome beginnings” (Fr. Anthony de Mello: Sadhana, A Way to God; Wellsprings, a Book of ..... Painful endings, awkward in-betweens, and awesome beginnings); it is unlike any other bread we have ever known. We eat any other bread, so that, it may become like us; we eat this bread (the Eucharist), so that, we may become like it. We take it, we bless it, we break it, and we share it again, just as Jesus did; it is the unleavened bread of the Passover. This ancient journey of the bread adds a new depth, a new richness, and a more-than-personal resonance to our life. It is one of the ways in which God begins to speak to his people again.

Why is the Bread and Wine Transformed?

St. Thomas said the Eucharist is the one instance of change we encounter in this world that is exactly the opposite. The appearances of bread and wine stay the same, but the very essence or substance of these realities, which can’t be detected by a microscope, is totally transformed. What was once bread and wine are now Christ’s Body and Blood. A handy word was coined to describe this unique change. Transformation of the “sub-stance”, what “stands-under” the surface, came to be called “transubstantiation.”

What makes this happen? The power of God’s Spirit and Word! After praying for the Spirit to come (epiklesis), the priest, who stands in the place of Christ, repeats the words of the God-man: “This is my Body, This is my Blood.” Sounds to me like Genesis 1: the mighty wind (read “Spirit”) whips over the surface of the water and God’s Word resounds. “Let there be light” and there was light. It is no harder to believe in transubstantiation than to believe in Creation.

But why did Jesus arrange for this transformation of bread and wine? This is so, because he
intended another kind of transformation. The bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ which are, in turn, meant to transform us. Ever hear the phrase: “You are what you eat?” The Lord desires us to be transformed from a motley crew of imperfect individuals into the Body of Christ, come to full stature.

Our evangelical brethren often speak of an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus. But I ask you, how much more personal and intimate can you get? We receive the Lord’s body into our physical bodies that we may become him whom we receive! Such an awesome gift deserves its own feast. And that’s why, back in the days of Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis of Assisi, the Pope decided to institute the Feast of Corpus Christi.

Transubstantiation and Real Presence

The “breadness” and “wineness,” so to speak, are changed into the living Jesus, true God and true man, whole God and whole man; not symbolically or metaphorically! The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states, “The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring:‘…by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread, into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation’” (CCC, 1376). Catholics worship and adore these elements because they are the very person of Christ himself. “The Real Presence is the real Jesus!” (cf. Sacramentum Caritatis). “Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts and asks to come in, not just for a moment, but forever” -Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI.

The meaning of the original Passover and its renewal in the future days of the Messiah is summed up in the promise to Abraham, “I will be . . . a God to you and your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7). In like manner is Jesus present to us, in the Eucharist, today!

In his historic encyclical The Mystery of Faith, Paul VI goes into great detail to show that, transubstantiation produces a unique presence of Jesus Christ on earth. The Real Presence is
unique because “it contains Christ Himself” (Mysterium Fidei, September 3, 1965).
The classic expression of faith in the total and permanent Real Presence was drafted by Pope Gregory VII in a Eucharistic Creed that leaves no room for compromise. “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” (Council of Rome, February 11, 1079). St. Thomas Aquinas observed, Christ is not quoted as saying, “This bread is my body,” but “This is my body” (Summa Theologiae, III q. 78, a. 5).

**Faith is an Essential Ingredient**

This kind of presence corresponds to the virtue of faith, for the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ cannot be detected or discerned by any way other than faith. That is why St. Bonaventure affirmed: “There is no difficulty over Christ’s being present in the sacrament as in a sign; the great difficulty is in the fact that, He is really in the sacrament, as He is in heaven. And so believing this is especially meritorious” (In IV Sent., dist. X, P. I, art. un., qu. I). On the authority of God who reveals himself to us, by faith we believe that which cannot be grasped by our human faculties (cf. Catechism, no. 1381).

Indeed, Transubstantiation is the central dogma of the Catholic Church! However, it can be proved solely by reference to the sources of faith, namely, Scripture and Tradition, together with the infallible Magisterium of the Church.

**Conclusion**

Now, this final, factual flourish! Corpus Christi celebrates the Transubstantiation and Real Presence of Jesus, while making sacred space and lending heavenly grace, for the adorableness of the Eucharist -the centerpiece of Catholicism! Oh! What august and awesome, mysticism and mystery! It’s time we bask in the warmth of God’s provision.
And, this gold nugget! The Eucharist, then, is the fountainhead of manifold blessings and a fruitful source of holiness! To believe this truth, is to be a ‘deep person’, a ‘self-actualized’ (A. Maslow) believer, a well that never runs dry (Isa.58:11), a perennial wellspring within, welling up to eternal life (Jn.4:14), and a faith-imbued and spirit-filled Disciple! (cf. Lk.14:26).

Let us pray that our belonging to Christ be profound and real, going beyond all of the turbulence that exists on life’s surface. May Christ’s very life flow through us, building up the Body of Christ, that is, the Church!

We need a call to conversion to a firm belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Primarily then, we are in need of a renewed appreciation of the Mass: Save the liturgy, Save the World!

Be a thoroughbred Catholic after a Fire-in-the-Belly, Eucharistic- Encounter, Hearts-Burning Within, Close-Communion, with the Real Jesus!

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Corpus Christi: Fullness of Catholicism