



Sacraments 13/35: Introduction to the Sacrament of the Eucharist

We come now to the Eucharist, the “Source and Summit” of our lives. It is the “source” from which we get all of our strength and grace to face life’s demands and grow in holiness. It is the “summit” towards which our lives are aimed: preparation for the eternal banquet in heaven.

As in all Sacraments, we are reminded that “grace builds on nature”; it does not replace it. The natural meaning of the action is raised to a supernatural. The natural meaning in the Eucharist is found in its reality as food and drink and in the fact that we are gathered for a meal. God chose the most universal foods in the world at that time: bread and wine. When we eat, we take the nutrients into our bodies for growth and health. The meal aspect should not be ignored, however. When we gather for holidays, wedding receptions, graduation parties, and funeral luncheons; there is always the meaning of the celebration attached to the food. Through the grace of the Sacrament, this natural meaning receives a supernatural meaning. The basic bread and wine is transubstantiated into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It is now our food and drink for eternity. The spiritual nutrients we receive transform us into Jesus. Remember the old food commercials: “You are what you eat.” As we receive Communion, we become Jesus. The celebratory nature of festive meals remains as well: the whole Mass is built around this idea. After all, the first Mass at the Last Supper was celebrated at a Jewish festival meal: the Passover.

The ritual action of the Mass at the Last Supper is found in the Gospels (Mt 26:26-30, Mk 14:22-26, Lk 22:14-22), and in the writings of Paul (1 Cor 11:23-26):

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

These passages show us how we celebrate, but John 6:22-59, the “Bread of Life Discourse,” shows us the reality of what we are celebrate, not the “symbolic” presence of Jesus, but the “Real” Presence:

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever. (Jn 6:48-58)

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Essentials of the Eucharist