



Handouts

Archbishop Mark Coleridge – Series on Mass

The Last Supper

Now it can be tempting to think of the Mass as a kind of role play of the Last Supper but it's much more than that.

It's not just remembering something that happened once upon a time. It's remembering with such power, in fact in the power of the Holy Spirit, that what we remember becomes present.

So that the words of Jesus are spoken by the priest. Again, the priest doesn't have words of his own to speak.

He says: 'Take this all of you and eat of it, for this is My Body'. He doesn't say: 'for this is the body of Jesus'. This is My Body.

So, it's the word of Jesus being spoken through the priest over the bread and over the wine. This is My Body. This is My Blood.

And, what we believe, is that the word of Jesus here and now, not once upon a time, the word of Jesus has power enough to take bread and wine and transform them into the Body and Blood of Jesus crucified and risen.

So that the whole mystery of His death and resurrection, the whole event of His death and resurrection are present here and now, not just once upon a time.

So that just as the breath of God transformed a lump of soil to become the human being, just as the breath of God became the power that transformed the early Church from a cringing crowd into a powerful missionary community, so too the breath of God, the word of God spoken into the bread and wine, transform the bread and wine to become much more.

And, in transforming the bread and wine, the promise is made of the transformation of everything. Of us, our lives, all that we've brought with the bread and wine, even the cosmos itself will be transfigured.

St Paul says the creation itself groans in a great act of giving birth. So that just as the bread and wine represents so much more so too when we speak about the Spirit's transforming of bread and wine, we're looking to the final transformation of everything by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Again, it was the Spirit, the breath, breathed into the corpse of Jesus that raised Him from the dead. So bread and wine are raised from being just bread and

wine. And that becomes the promise that everything will be raised into the fullness of life in this great act of giving birth.¹

Bishop Barron on The Mass

The Reality of Christ within the Eucharist—the Son of God willingly enduring an unjust, terrible death to share his Body with his people that they might rise into eternity with him—*that's* a lot to take in.

Indeed, for many of Jesus' followers in the first century, the people who actually knew him and had seen his workings and heard his teachings, it was too much. Scripture tells us that when Jesus spelled out his plan and purpose, it drove many followers away. It's worth re-reading here:

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 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 quarrelled 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.”

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, “This saying is hard; who can accept it?”

Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him.

And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.”

As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him.

Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?”

¹ <https://brisbanecatholic.org.au/articles/the-mass-series/#transcript-part-10-liturgy-of-the-eucharist-eucharistic-prayer-part-1>

Simon Peter answered him, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:47-58, 60, 64-69)

What we have here is Jesus’ own testimony to the certainty of his Eucharistic Presence. He gives us the doctrine straight up, not presenting it as a parable nor engaging in metaphor. It is the word without dressing or equivocation: **“My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”**

The early followers of Jesus were not the only people to have a problem accepting this. Many Catholics have had the experience of being asked—by Christians who often profess that every word in Scripture ought to be interpreted literally—how we can possibly believe that bread and wine can become *anything* else, much less God’s own Flesh and Blood.

As Bishop Barron emphasizes, during the Eucharistic Prayer the priest’s narration of the Last Supper moves from a third person retelling to a First Person proclamation when the celebrant, acting *in persona Christi*, in tones **Christ’s own words**.

You or I could stand in front of bread and wine and repeat Christ’s words but the bread would never become more than bread, and the wine would remain only wine. The specific action of the priest, working within the prayerful formulas of the liturgy and speaking in his capacity as an apostolically ordained “stand in” for Christ, brings the power of Christ himself into the words, and brings God’s own creative power of consent—the almighty “Let it be” —into the moment.

When it is Christ speaking the words through the priest called to represent him *in persona Christi capitis*, then the words become the Reality. “This is the foundation of the Church’s insistence on the Real Presence,” says Bishop Barron. “We’re not dealing with symbolism here. Rather, we’re dealing with the Incarnation of the Creator God whose Word constitutes reality.”

The Council of Trent affirmed that this transformation happens, this Presence occurs, **by the power of the words spoken**. The words of Jesus as God become reality. “Daughter, your faith has healed you...” and a woman is healed. “Lazarus, come forth,” and a dead man walks out of his tomb. “Little girl, arise,” and a child returns to her family. When the Second Person of the Trinity says, “You will be with me in Paradise,” there is cause for rejoicing because it is an assured reality.

When he says, “Behold your Mother,” his mother becomes our own. So, when his representative at the Mass speaks the words, “This is my Body...” we may trust in it.

“God’s Word creates. God’s Word makes things happen,” Bishop Barron says, invoking the promise made through the prophet Isaiah:

Yet just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
And do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
Giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats,
So shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
It shall not return to me empty,
but shall do what pleases me,
achieving the end for which I sent it. (Isa 55:10-11)

Conclusion

By his Real Presence in the Eucharist Christ fulfils his promise to be with us "*always, until the end of the age*" (Mt 28:20). As St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "It is the law of friendship that friends should live together. . . . Christ has not left us without his bodily presence in this our pilgrimage, but he joins us to himself in this sacrament in the reality of his body and blood" (*Summa Theologiae*, III q. 75, a. 1). With this gift of Christ's presence in our midst, the Church is truly blessed. As Jesus told his disciples, referring to his presence among them, "Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Mt 13:17). In the Eucharist the Church both receives the gift of Jesus Christ and gives grateful thanks to God for such a blessing. This thanksgiving is the only proper response, for through this gift of himself in the celebration of the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine Christ gives us the gift of eternal life.

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. . . . 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. (Jn 6:53-57)²

² The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers Produced by the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and approved by the full body of bishops at their June 2001 General Meeting. The text is authorized for publication by the undersigned. Monsignor William P. Fay General Secretary, USCCB

Pope Francis said that when receiving the body and blood of Christ, Christians receive the assurance of the presence of Jesus, “who makes himself our traveling companion, he enters into our affairs, he visits us when we are lonely, giving us back a sense of enthusiasm.”

Giving himself in the Eucharist, “the Lord gives meaning to our lives, our obscurities, our doubts,” the pope said. “And this meaning that the Lord gives satisfies us. This gives us that ‘more’ that everyone is looking for, which is namely the presence of the Lord.”³

³ [https://therecord.com.au/news/local/liturgical-formation-renewal-program-we-go-forth-from-the-eucharist-to-serve-the-needs-of-our-brothers-and-sisters-says-sr-kerry/Seek nourishment, satisfaction in Eucharist, says Pope Francis](https://therecord.com.au/news/local/liturgical-formation-renewal-program-we-go-forth-from-the-eucharist-to-serve-the-needs-of-our-brothers-and-sisters-says-sr-kerry/Seek%20nourishment,%20satisfaction%20in%20Eucharist,%20says%20Pope%20Francis) By Junno Arocho Esteves

