

The Explanation of the Mass

The Epiclesis

After the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy...), the Eucharistic prayer continues with the Epiclesis. Etymologically speaking, the word means, “call upon,” “invoke upon,” and refers to the priest invoking the Holy Spirit to descend upon the gifts.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal expresses the meaning of Epiclesis in this way: “by means of particular invocations, the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ’s Body and Blood, and that the spotless Victim to be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it” (GIRM, 79).

The Eucharistic Prayer III reads, “Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise... And so, Father, we bring you these gifts. We ask you to make them holy by the power of your Spirit, that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ...”

The priest, placing his hands over the gifts, invokes the Holy Spirit so that, just as He brought about the incarnation of the Son in the Virgin Mary’s womb, He may descend now upon the bread and wine, bringing about the transubstantiation of these gifts, offered in sacrifice, converting them into the Body and Blood of Christ (cf. Heb. 9:14, Rm 8:11 and 15:16). In the Eastern Rite churches, this is the moment of transubstantiation, while in the Latin Rite it is in the words of Christ Himself, “This is my Body.” In any case, the liturgy has always united, in both the East and the West, the passage from the institution of the Eucharist with the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we can clearly see how the Eucharist is a continuation of the In-

carnation of the Lord. Just as by the power of the Holy Spirit, in a virgin's (Mary's) womb, the Word became Flesh, likewise in this moment, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of a virgin (the Church), Christ becomes present in the Eucharist.

The Holy Spirit appears as the Sanctifier, the One who "sanctifies" the gifts. The same Spirit that gave life to Jesus' body in the resurrection, now transforms the gifts into "the Bread of Life."

In all the Eucharistic prayers, there is a second epiclesis, a second invocation of the Holy Spirit, called "communion epiclesis". This invocation calls upon the Holy Spirit to form the mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church: "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (III; cf. II and IV).

"By the power of the Holy Spirit," Christ becomes Incarnate, transubstantiation turns bread into the sacred Body of Christ, and the baptized are transformed into the mystical Body of Christ, the Church of God. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who, in a very particular way in the Eucharist, forms the Church, and He "calls it together in unity".

All these mysteries are also stated by Saint Paul in very explicit terms. If Eucharistic bread is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 11:29), so is the Church the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12). Therefore, "because the bread is one, we too, though we are many, are one, as we all participate of this same bread." (1 Cor 10:17). Christ, in the Eucharist, is the One who unites all the faithful in one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32), forming the Church.

In accordance with all this, every time that Christians celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice, we renew, through the Blood of Christ, the Covenant that unites us with God, and that makes us his beloved sons. We renew the Covenant with a sacrifice, like Moses in Mt. Sinai or

Elijah on Mt. Carmel.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit enables the Church to offer Herself with Christ, united to Him and His sacrifice, to the Father. Thus, the petition of the Eucharistic Prayer III: “May He [the Holy Spirit] make us an everlasting gift to you...” The Eucharist is the sacrifice of the Entire Christ, the Head and its members. Thus we should offer our lives every day to the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

In the Eucharistic celebration, we are able to see how the entire Church and each member of the faithful enters into communion with the Trinity. The work of salvation is work of all the Trinity together and in the Mass, the Father is praised for His gifts of Creation, the Son is present in the mystery of Redemption, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes one and offers herself with Christ in the sacrifice of adoration.

Our Masses truly hold such a great treasure! How many profound realities are ignored or seen as “boring”! Let us ask the Lord to help us learn and live the mystery of glory and praise that takes place in our Eucharistic celebration.

Transubstantiation

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

Somewhere near the center of the crisis in the Catholic Church today is confusion about the meaning of the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Pope Paul VI recognized this crisis before the close of the Second Vatican Council. He identified the two principal errors about the Real Presence that were already current in his day. The errors were capsulized in two words, "transfinalization" and "transsignification."

Transfinalization is the view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist that the purpose or finality of the bread and wine is changed by the words of consecration. They are said to serve a new function, as sacred elements that arouse the faith of the people in the mystery of Christ's redemptive love.

Transsignification is the view of Christ's presence in the Eucharist which holds that the meaning or significance of the bread and wine is changed by the words of consecration. The consecrated elements are said to signify all that

Christians associate with the Last Supper; they have a higher value than merely food for the body.

Both transfinalization and transignification were condemned by Pope Paul VI in the encyclical *Mysterium fidei* which he published in 1965.

Transubstantiation is not an outmoded concept of medieval scholastic philosophy. It is an article of faith defined by the Council of Trent as the "wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and the whole substance of the wine into the blood" of Christ.

The term transubstantiation is taken from the Latin words *trans* (change) and *substantia* (substance). This term was incorporated into the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. However, its antiquity goes back to the early Greek Fathers of the Church who used the word *meta-ousiosis*. Literally, this means change of one *ousia* or being—that of bread and wine—into another *ousia* or being, that of Christ's living body and blood.

As understood by the Catholic Church, transubstantiation means that the whole substance of bread and wine cease to exist at the consecration at Mass. What we must be very clear about is that it is the whole substance of bread and wine which becomes the whole humanity of Christ. It is not only that the substance of bread and wine becomes the substance of Christ's body and blood. No. The substance of bread and wine becomes everything which makes Christ Christ.

Normally we speak of the substance of anything as that which makes a thing what it is. With transubstantiation, however, the substance of bread and wine becomes everything which Christ is. After transubstantiation, the physical properties of bread and wine remain. But the "itness" or "thingness" of bread and wine ceases to exist. What had been the substance of bread and wine now becomes the whole Christ, in the words of the Council of Trent, the *totus Christus*.

Is Christ, therefore, present in the Holy Eucharist with everything that makes Him who He is? Yes. In other words, it is not just the substance of Christ's humanity which becomes present on the altar through transubstantiation. It is Jesus Christ whole and entire.