

The Eucharist

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." ~ John 6:53-56

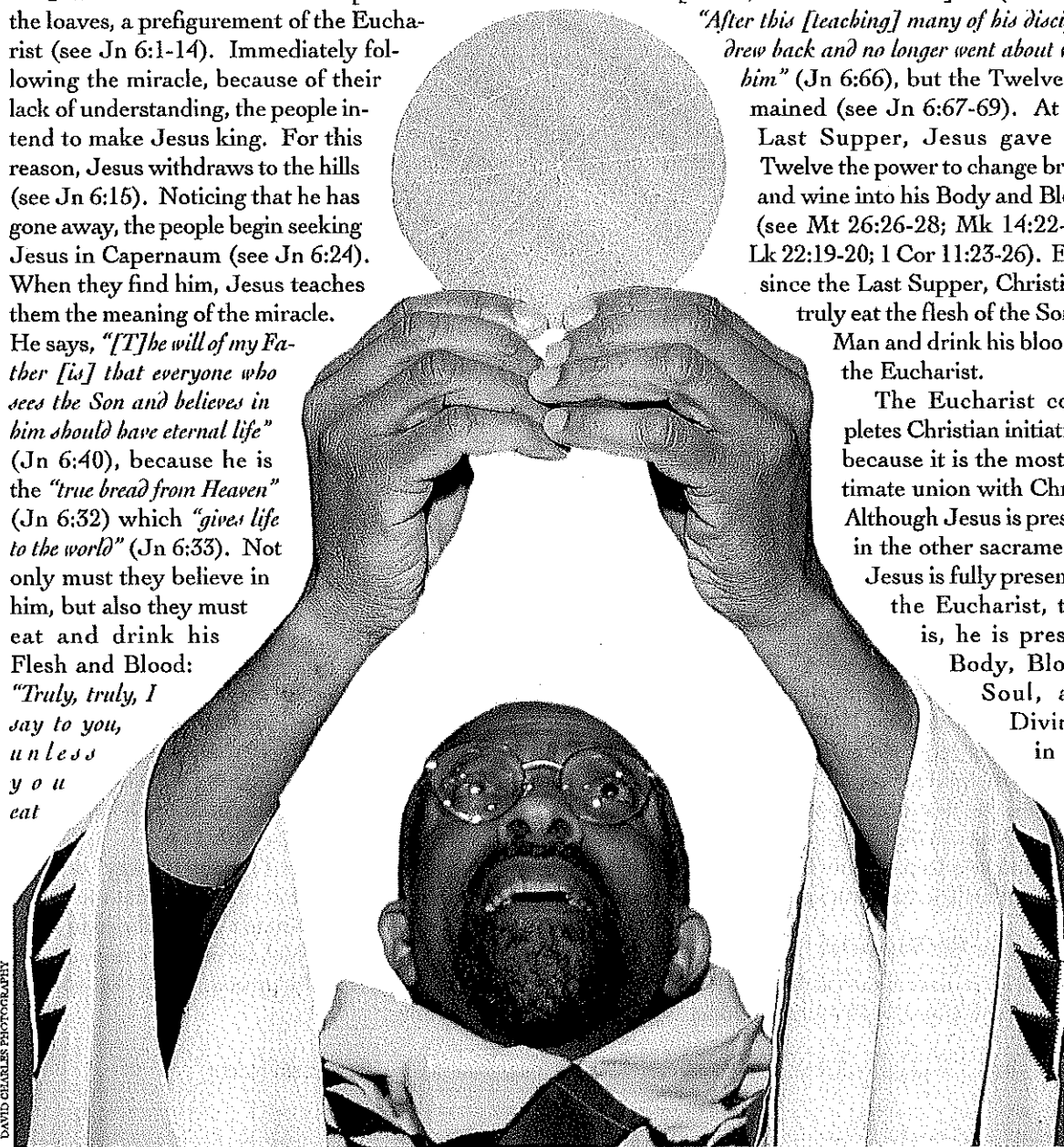
IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, chapter six contains one of the most explicit teachings on the Eucharist made by Jesus. The chapter begins with a miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, a prefigurement of the Eucharist (see Jn 6:1-14). Immediately following the miracle, because of their lack of understanding, the people intend to make Jesus king. For this reason, Jesus withdraws to the hills (see Jn 6:15). Noticing that he has gone away, the people begin seeking Jesus in Capernaum (see Jn 6:24). When they find him, Jesus teaches them the meaning of the miracle. He says, "[T]he will of my Father [is] that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" (Jn 6:40), because he is the "true bread from Heaven" (Jn 6:32) which "gives life to the world" (Jn 6:33). Not only must they believe in him, but also they must eat and drink his Flesh and Blood:
"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat

the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (see beginning verses). Those who heard the teaching said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to [that is, believe and follow] it?" (Jn 6:60).

"After this [teaching] many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (Jn 6:66), but the Twelve remained (see Jn 6:67-69). At the Last Supper, Jesus gave the Twelve the power to change bread and wine into his Body and Blood (see Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-23; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Ever since the Last Supper, Christians truly eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist completes Christian initiation, because it is the most intimate union with Christ. Although Jesus is present in the other sacraments, Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist, that is, he is present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the

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Eucharistic species (the consecrated bread and wine). For this reason, the Eucharist is called the Real Presence. Also, for this reason, the Eucharist is the source and summit of all Christian life, a participation in the life in Heaven given to those who believe in him while he is still on earth. In other words, every aspect of the Christian faith leads toward and flows from this sacrament, which is nothing other than Jesus himself. In his love, God also gave to us the Third Commandment, "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day." This commandment, which in Pope John Paul II's words is "a defining and indelible expression of our relationship with God" (*On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy* 13), is transferred in the New Covenant from the sabbath (the seventh day, or Saturday), to the Lord's Day (Sunday) because Sunday was the day when Jesus rose from the dead. We therefore recall God's saving works by honoring the "new day of creation," the weekly Easter. Participation in Sunday Mass is obligatory — a participation which is necessary for the People of God to live as God created them and to praise him rightly as he deserves to be praised. Furthermore, through the Holy Spirit, this required Sunday participation has also become the first precept of the Church, "You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor"¹ (CCC 2042) (see handout on The Sabbath and Sunday Worship).

Names for the Eucharist

The sacrament of the Eucharist is known by several different names, each revealing some aspect of the

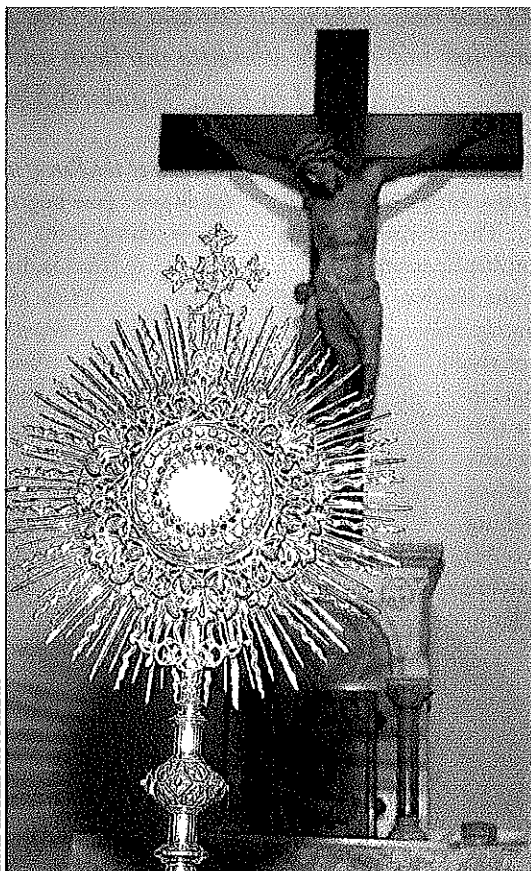
sacrament. The name "Eucharist" is drawn from the Greek word *eucharistein*, meaning "to give thanks." This word is found in two of the Last Supper accounts, the Gospel of Luke and St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, a related Greek word *eulogein*, meaning "to bless or praise," is used. Since the Eucharist is celebrated as a community, the celebration is sometimes referred to as the "Eucharistic Assembly."

The name "Lord's Supper" references both the Last Supper and the Heavenly Banquet. During the Last Supper, Jesus first instituted both Holy Orders and the Holy Eucharist when he took, broke, and blessed the bread and wine and instructed the apostles to do this in memory of him (see Lk 22:19-20). The Heavenly Banquet anticipates "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rv 19:9), when the entire family of God will all be present in glory.

The name "Breaking of the Bread" points to the fact that the Eucharist is prefigured by the Jewish Passover meal that also had a "Breaking of the Bread." When Jesus appeared to the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, it was not until he broke the bread that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Lk

24:31). This name was also used by the first Christians (see Acts 2:46; Acts 20:7, 11).

The names "Holy and Divine Liturgy" or "Most Blessed Sacrament" state the truth that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. It is the sacrament to which all other sacraments lead, because Jesus is really present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.



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*"Christians truly eat
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in the Eucharist."*

¹ Cf. Codex Iuris Canonici, cann. 1246-1248; Corpus Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, can. 880 § 3, 881 §§ 1,2,4

The name "Sacrifice of the Mass" emphasizes that in the Eucharistic celebration, Jesus' sacrifice of his Body made "once for all" (Heb 10:10) time and all people is truly present. In other words, when we participate in the Eucharist, we join Jesus at the cross. Scripture also uses the names "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Ps 50:14; Ps 116:17), "spiritual sacrifice" (1 Pt 2:5).

The name "Holy Communion" tells the reality that in the Eucharist, we unite ourselves with Christ and his Body (the Church) whose members are in Heaven, Purgatory, and on earth.

Last, the most common name "Holy Mass" or "Mass" comes from the ancient Latin closing words of the priest: *Ita, missa est* ("go, you are sent"). We hear in English, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord," and these words send the faithful into the world to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ and to take the charity which comes from our communion with Christ to the world (see Mt 28:18-20).

The Eucharistic Celebration

The celebration of the Eucharist was made possible by Jesus himself when he instituted Holy Orders and Holy Communion at the Last Supper. Particularly, through the institution of Holy Orders, every priest acts *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"; see handout on *In Persona Christi*), and so Jesus and his Paschal mystery are made present every time Mass is celebrated.

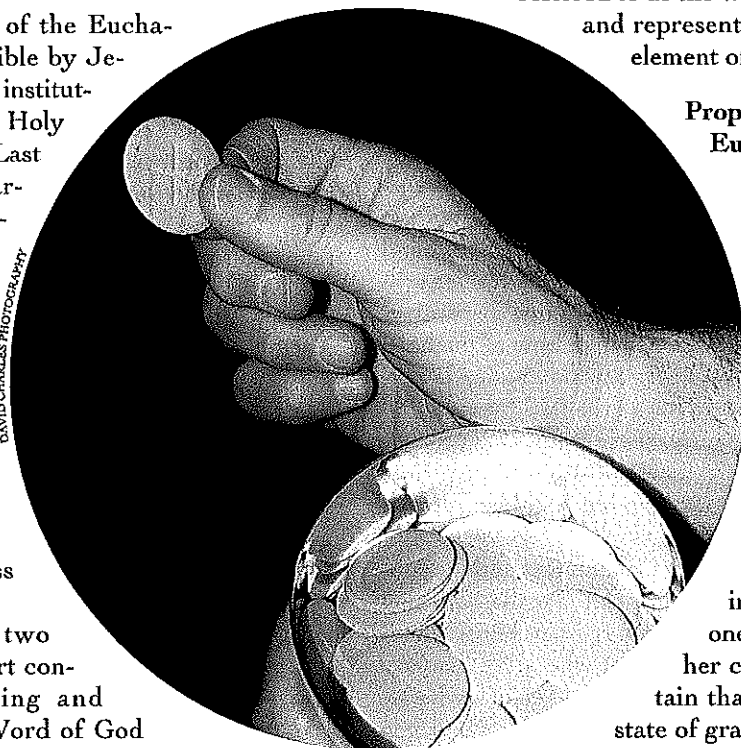
The Mass has two parts. The first part consists in the reading and preaching of the Word of God and the second in the celebrating of the Eucharist. After the preaching, the faith-

"Calling down the Holy Spirit . . . transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ by means of the same words spoken at the Last Supper."

ful are invited to present their needs to God in prayer. Next, the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Presentation of the Gifts. The gifts are bread and wine because they are ancient symbols of God's creation which call to mind many Old Testament images, among which is the offering of the priest-king Melchizedek (see Gn 14:18-20). They are brought forward, sometimes in procession by the faithful as a sign of thanksgiving to God for the goodness manifested to them in the abundance of his creation. After receiving these gifts, the priest begins the Eucharistic Prayer by offering these gifts in the name of all those gathered and the whole Church to God the Father. Then, by calling down the Holy Spirit, he transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ by means of the same words spoken at the Last Supper: "Take this all of you and eat it; this is my body given up for you. Take this cup and drink from it; this is my blood shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins; do this in memory of me." These words are referred to as the words of consecration and represent the most important element of the Mass.

Proper Reception of the Eucharist

"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27), which is known as a sin of sacrilege. In order to receive Jesus in the Eucharist in a "worthy manner," one must examine his or her conscience to be certain that he or she is in the state of grace, that is, free from all deadly sin. Those who are aware of deadly sin in their own lives must first re-



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ceive absolution in the sacrament of Reconciliation. For those who come to Mass with venial (lesser) sins, a proper disposition of contrition and the faithful praying of the Introductory prayers (penitential) are all that is required to be properly prepared. One also prepares to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus by observing the one-hour fast before Communion, spending time in prayer immediately before Holy Communion, and through a daily life of prayer and Christian witness. Thus freed from all sin and strengthened by prayer, the faithful may receive the Eucharist. They are

obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, but they can receive whenever they participate in the Mass. The Body and Blood of Jesus may be received either on the hand (making a "throne" for the Lord) or the tongue. Some prior act of reverence — genuflecting, bowing, or making the Sign of the Cross — must also be done, keeping in mind the appropriate etiquette (not "lording it over others" or prolonging the Communion line disruptively). In the United States, a simple bow of the head prior to receiving the host and the chalice is recommended as the norm for all the faithful (see Phil 2:10). Most importantly, these signs of reverence should reflect an interior disposition of gratitude and adoration for Jesus who has humbled himself to become bread for us to eat.

This coming up to Holy Communion and the subsequent "Amen" is the "altar call" for the believing Catholic. In this "altar call," it is Jesus himself (acting in the person of the priest) who gives his very Body and Blood to be taken inside each one who receives him following their affirmation of faith: Amen ("I believe").



"The consecrated bread and wine are our spiritual food."

given of all sin. This release from sin enkindles in us charity and a greater love for God, strengthening our spiritual life so that we practice virtues and give Christian witness. In turn, we become even more like Christ and find it more difficult to sin in the future. This cycle of spiritual growth is continuously repeated as the image of Christ is made more visible in the heart of every Christian who properly receives Jesus in this sacrament.

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17), that is, when we receive Holy Communion, we are not only intimately united with Christ, but also with his Body, the Church, the family of God. In other words, in the Eucharist, we are more intimately united to each other. Furthermore, since we are all united with Christ, we share in his mission together. In Christ, we are to go out to all the nations and teach them all that Jesus commanded (Mt 28:18-20) so that they might also be united to the family of God in Baptism and eventually feast at the heavenly marriage supper of Christ and his Church.

(CCC 1322-1405, 1533, 2042, 2835-2837)

Grace of the Eucharist

The principal effect of the Eucharist is an intimate union with Christ. Jesus says, *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"* (Jn 6:56). By receiving Holy Communion, the Christian is physically joined to Jesus — a union in which the believer becomes ever more like him. Thus this union preserves, increases, and renews the grace received in Baptism. The consecrated bread and wine are our spiritual food.

Christians cannot be intimately united with Christ, who was without sin, without themselves being for-

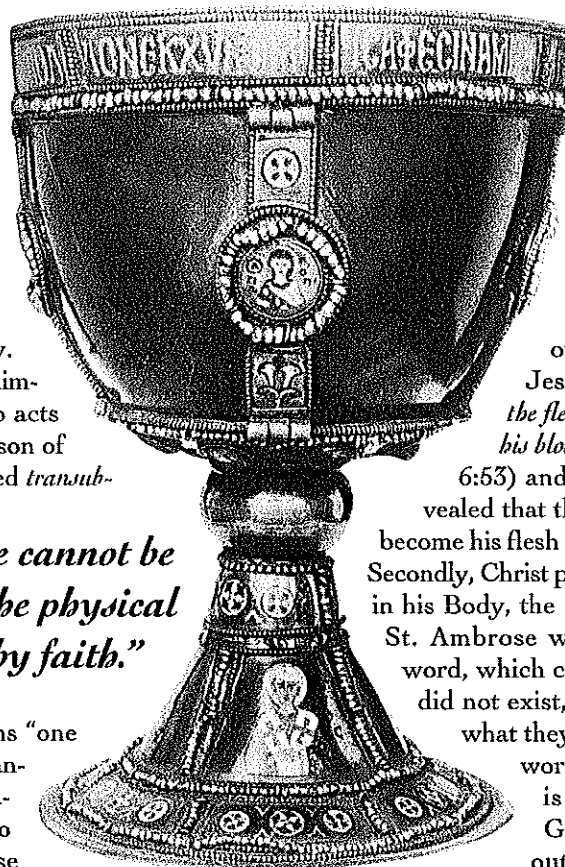
The Real Presence

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which 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 Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. ~ 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

JESUS IS PRESENT in many different ways to his people, but he is most present in the Eucharistic species (the consecrated bread and wine). This presence is called the "Real Presence" because the bread and wine are really and substantially changed into Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. They are changed by Christ himself, through the priest who acts *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"). This change is called *transub-*

"The Real Presence cannot be perceived through the physical senses, but only by faith."

stantiation, a term that means "one substance has changed into another." After the consecration, the bread and wine no longer exist as such, because they have truly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, and will remain so as long as the Eucharistic species exists. Even the smallest crumb or tiniest drop is the Real Presence.



11th century chalice with enamel and pearls

The Church teaches that the Real Presence cannot be perceived through the physical senses, but only by faith; that is, Jesus' presence in the Eucharistic species cannot be scientifically proven or tested. But there are revealed truths (truths that assist our reason) to enable our response of faith. First, Jesus taught that *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* (Jn 6:53) and, at the Last Supper, he revealed that the bread and wine had truly become his flesh and blood (see Lk 22:19-20). Secondly, Christ promised to always be present in his Body, the Church (Mt 18:20). Third, St. Ambrose writes, "Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before?" In other words, if one believes that Christ is the Word through which God creates the entire world out of nothing by saying "Let there be," how much easier it is to believe that he changes the bread and wine into himself. Lastly, throughout the centuries many Eucharistic miracles have occurred. In these miracles, one

is able to physically see that the bread and wine have changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, such as in the Eucharistic Miracle at Lanciano, Italy in the eighth century. Having been kept in a sealed receptacle for 1200 years, the miracle can still be seen today. A hymn written by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century beautifully expresses the Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:

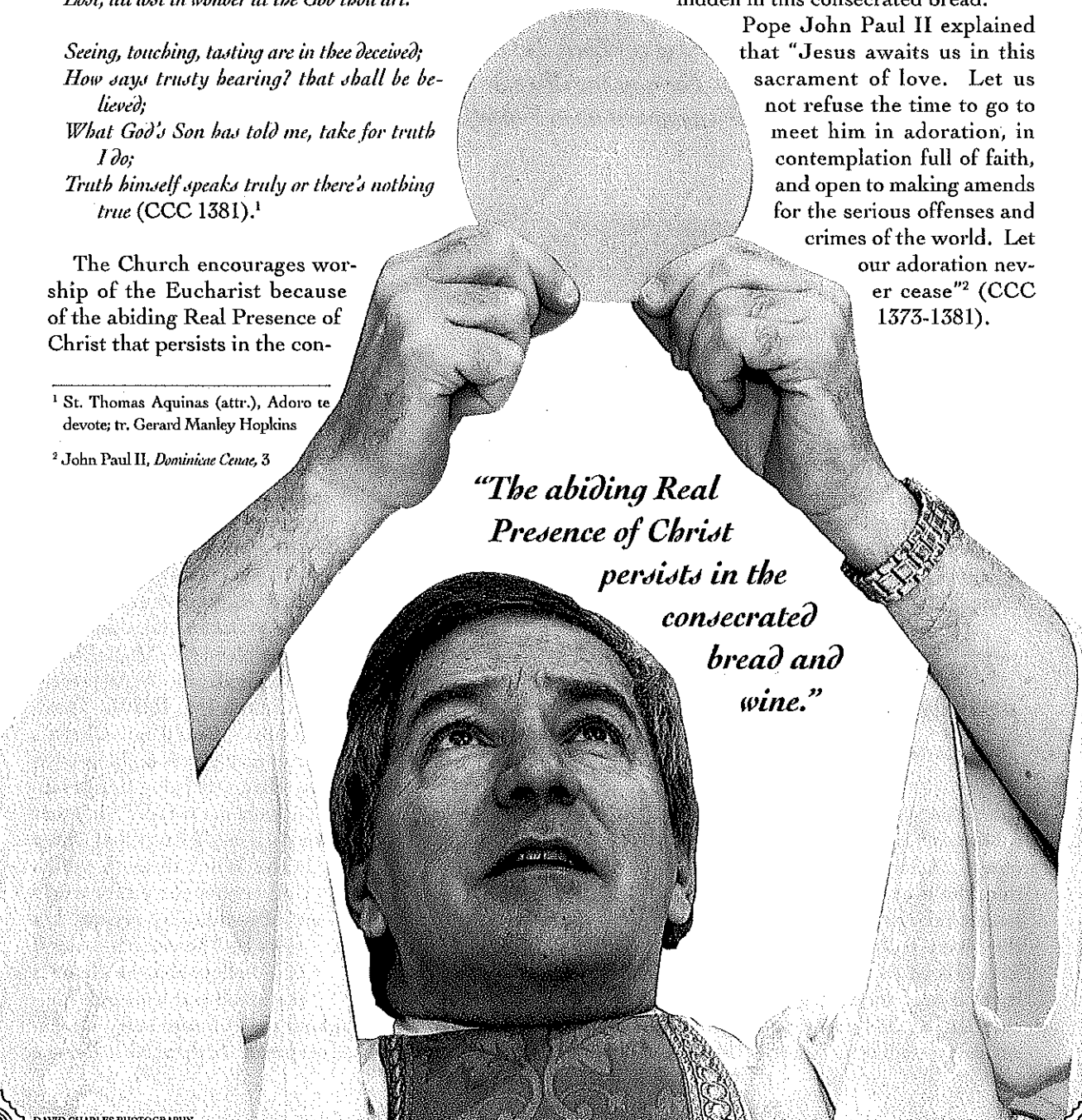
*Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.*

*Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived;
How says trusty hearing? that shall be be-
lieved;
What God's Son has told me, take for truth
I do;
Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing
true (CCC 1381).¹*

The Church encourages worship of the Eucharist because of the abiding Real Presence of Christ that persists in the con-

secrated bread and wine. For practical reasons, only the consecrated bread is reserved and kept in a holy and prominent place in the church (called the tabernacle). This worship of the Blessed Sacrament (the Eucharist) is expressed through our signs of reverence (kneeling, bowing, and the Sign of the Cross) and culminates in the long-standing tradition called Adoration. In Adoration, the Blessed Sacrament is taken out of the tabernacle and displayed on the altar so that the faithful can come and pray and worship in silence before Christ who is hidden in this consecrated bread.

Pope John Paul II explained that "Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease"² (CCC 1373-1381).



*"The abiding Real
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¹ St. Thomas Aquinas (attr.), *Adoro te devote*; tr. Gerard Manley Hopkins

² John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 3

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me an offering; from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall receive the offering for me.... And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." ~ Exodus 25:1-2, 8

THROUGHOUT SALVATION history God teaches us with "shadows of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1) called "types." These types may be people, places, events, and things that have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, that is, the realities suggested by the types have come to pass. For example, the crossing of the Red Sea is a type of Baptism, because just as by faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and were set free, so too, those who pass through the waters of Baptism are set free (see Ex 14; Mt 16:4; Heb 11:29).

Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence

The Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence are types that God used to prefigure the practice of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, which is the keeping of some of the consecrated bread (hosts) in the tabernacle for purposes outside of Mass.

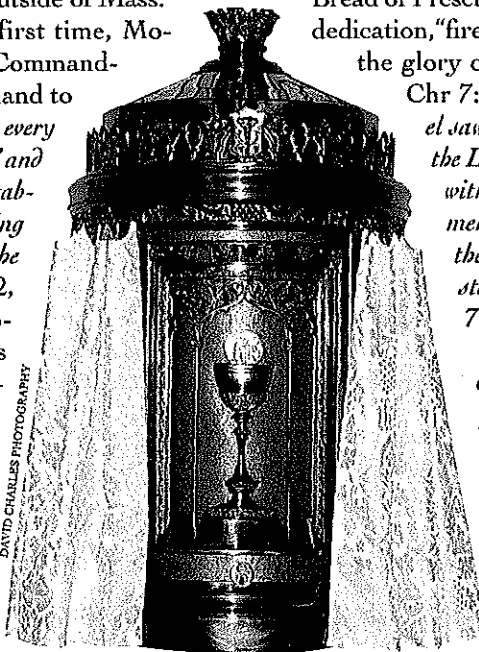
While on Mount Sinai the first time, Moses received not only the Ten Commandments but also the Lord's command to receive an offering for him "from every man whose heart makes him willing" and to make the Lord "a sanctuary... a tabernacle with all its furniture" according to the pattern given to him, so that he "may dwell in their midst" (Ex 25:2, 8-9). Then the Lord tells Moses the "pattern" (Ex 25-31). As part of the pattern of the sanctuary, the Lord also commanded Moses to "set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always" (Ex 25:30; see also Nm 4:7; 1 Kgs 7:48). For the Israelites, bread was a sign of what the Lord had done for them both when he freed them from the Egyptians (see Ex 13:6-9) and when he gave them "bread

"Christ is present as long as the consecrated bread and wine exist."

from heaven" for forty years in the desert (see Ex 16:4-15, 35). In the giving of the pattern, the Lord also tells Moses, "There [in the ark of the covenant] I will meet with you...and I will speak with you" (Ex 25:22). Moses told the pattern to the people of Israel, and they did as the Lord had instructed (see Ex 35:8-39:32).

Thus, the Lord was present among the People of Israel, and traveled with them throughout their many wanderings, until the time of King David. King David "had it in his heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (1 Chr 28:2), but it was actually his son Solomon whom the Lord chose "to build a house for the name of the Lord," the first Temple (2 Chr 2:4; see 1 Chr 28:6), which was built according to the same pattern as was given to Moses, except that the Temple was stationary. After Solomon had built the Temple, moved the Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence inside, and prayed a prayer of dedication, "fire came down from heaven ... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (2 Chr 7:1). "When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement, and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever'" (2 Chr 7:3).

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon and said: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice... if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in



A tabernacle, for the safe and reverent reservation of the Eucharist

this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever" (2 Chr 7:12-16).

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament

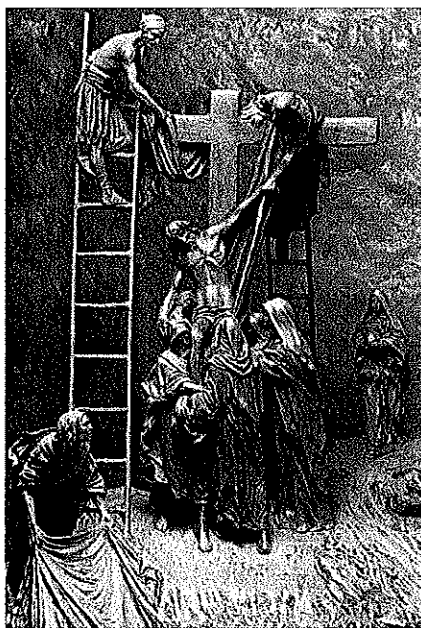
The practice of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament has been given its full meaning in Jesus. Because the consecrated bread is Jesus, really present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, there is a tabernacle for its reservation in every Catholic Church. Furthermore, this tabernacle must be in a most worthy place with the greatest honor, to honor Jesus even by its location and to foster adoration by others.

The tabernacle is a place where Jesus will "meet with you... speak with you," just as he did with Moses (Ex 25:22). Here is the place he has chosen to hear our humble prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land.

Lastly, because the consecrated bread is Jesus, there are several outward signs and gestures that are customarily seen near or directed towards Jesus who is in the tabernacle. These signs and gestures include: 1) A lighted candle called a sanctuary light which is kept burning day and night near the tabernacle as a sign of Christ's constant presence (see Lv 24:1-4); 2) Sometimes the tabernacle may be surrounded by flowers or lighted votive candles as symbols of prayers and offerings (gifts) for Jesus; 3) Those who enter a Catholic church genuflect or bow toward the tabernacle and make the Sign of the Cross; 4) Some people stop by a church "to make a visit" to Jesus in the tabernacle, similar to stopping by a friend's house; and 5) Some people make the Sign of the Cross whenever they pass by a church.

Function in the Ministry of the Church

Because Jesus is the center of our lives, the Blessed Sacrament must be the center of our lives. The reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the ways the



Jesus is taken down from the Cross, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

Church keeps Jesus central and it is one of the ways that Jesus fulfills his promise to be with her always (see Mt 28:20). Bl. Teresa of Calcutta said, "When we look at the sacred host, we see how much Jesus loves us now."

The Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle is often used in the ministry of the Church, for example, to take Communion to the sick and shut-ins who were unable to attend Mass, to lead Eucharistic processions held on special feast days or in times of great trouble, to pray holy hours with exposition (showing) and benediction (blessing with the Eucharist), and to have perpetual adoration.

Pope John Paul II urged parishes to start perpetual adoration, a practice that he reinstated at the Vatican in 1981. Perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is accomplished when a group of people takes turns adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that is exposed perpetually (twenty-four hours a day).

Along with his urging for parishes to start perpetual adoration, Pope John Paul II taught: "The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease"¹ (CCC 1380). The Church, the family of God, who is commanded to "pray constantly" (1 Thes 5:17) can never spend too much time with Jesus in the Eucharist.

Pope Paul VI taught that to visit the Blessed Sacrament is "a proof of gratitude and a pledge of love and a display of the adoration that is owed to Christ the Lord who is present there" (*Mysterium Fidei*). By our adoration, we resemble St. Mary of Bethany, "who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching" (Lk 10:39). In this way love will grow in our hearts and

"A sanctuary light is kept burning day and night near the tabernacle as a sign of Christ's constant presence."

strength will grow in our spirits as we draw nearer and nearer to Jesus.

(CCC 1378-1382)

¹ John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 3