

The Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist

By Rev Fr. Stan Chu Ilo

I must admit that I am very happy to be here to share with you on the meaning of the Lord's presence in the Eucharistic species. I must thank Fr Norbert and the evangelization office, for organizing this day of renewal for our diocese. I believe that Fr. Norbert is doing a good job, by following the road map for the renewal of the Church, as inspired by the Magisterium. At the beginning of the New Millennium, the late Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (no. 3) called on all Christians and the universal church, to start afresh from Christ, by gazing once more on the face of Jesus. He invited local churches to work out pastoral programs, which will involve listening to the word of God, celebration of the Eucharist and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as a way of growing in the faith and in the experience of being one holy, apostolic and Catholic Church. The Holy Father called on all Christians to enter into the school of Mary, which is the school of prayer wherein we contemplate the love of God, the depth of his mercy and the riches of his grace and blessing. It is in response to this call that the Day of Renewal is organized.

The Holy Father also introduced the year of the Eucharist to help Catholics to deepen their love of Jesus and to appreciate his real presence in the Eucharist. The Veyo office has taken the very difficult task of animating the faith of Catholics in the diocese so that our hearts will be set on fire with the love of God and an ardent desire to build his kingdom on earth. I believe that my brother in the priesthood, Fr Norbert is responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, under the direction of the bishop and with the support and goodwill of many lay members of Christ faithful and the clergy and religious of this diocese.

I accepted the invitation to speak also because this reflection offered me the opportunity to mediate at a personal level, on the meaning of the real presence of the Lord in the host for me as a Catholic. I must say that I have never had doubt about the real presence of the Eucharist. But I have never really tried to think about it or to justify it from the point of view of intellectual defense. I believe that the greatest miracle that is happening on earth today, is the fact that Jesus can and does come among us everyday at Mass,

assumes the elements of the bread and wine to feed us with the life of God. As a priest, this for me is my greatest joy that I an ordinary and sinful man, could touch the Good Lord in his soul, flesh and divinity. I am joyful that I can touch the Good Lord every day. At the same time, I am filled always with a sense of inadequacy that I am not worthy to touch the Good Lord. As we pray before communion; "Lord I am not worthy to have you come to me but only say the Word and my soul shall be healed". It is an act of faith in God, an act of humility, trusting in the goodness and mercy of God, which led Jesus to the Cross. We are happy that through his supreme act of love the Son of God loved died on the Cross for us to take away our sin. When I think of my own sinfulness and the sins that we find in our world, I approach this Great mystery with some trembling and reverential fear. How much sorrow we have caused the Good Lord by receiving him unworthily, by not showing due respect and reverence to this great mystery and by leaving him lonely in the tabernacle without giving him the praise, honor and glory that are his.

This reflection for me is not a theological presentation. I have written several academic papers on the Eucharist in the university, but in spite of many years of studies on this mystery, I am still searching to grasp the depth of God in the Eucharist. So what I will be presenting is my own personal faith in the real presence. I am praying the Good Lord to open our minds and hearts so that we can believe and so follow Jesus, who is the author and finisher of everything that we have and are. May he help each one of us so that we come to see him clearly in the Eucharist; that we grow in love for him in the Blessed Sacrament and come before him constantly at Mass and pay him constant visits in the tabernacle.

I will like to use the materials from Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the tradition of the Church to show that *from the time of Jesus to our time, the belief in the real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine has always been in the Church*. But more importantly, according to the Second Vatican Council, the living faith expression of the people of God can never be erroneous. That is, the faith and practice of the entire Catholic faithful, lived in full fidelity to the teaching of Jesus can never lead to error. Thus the Eucharistic faith of the Church and the Eucharistic spirituality which have all been with the Church since its foundation, will lead us to God and not away from him.

Eucharistic Presence

How is Christ present in the world? The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in no. 7 states: "To accomplish so great a work Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the Cross' but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power, he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.'" (Mat 18:20). So we can see the many ways in which Christ is present in the world, namely:

-In the Church, his Body on earth

-In the poor Matt 25: 40 'whatever you do the least of the brethren you did it for me.'

-Dwells in our hearts as we read in Ephesians 3:17 "May he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, then planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth until knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God."

-Acts 5: 42, "they (the apostles) did not stop teaching about the Messiah, Jesus" He who listens to you listens to me, anyone who welcomes you welcomes me (Luke 10:16; Matthew 10:40). Jesus is present in the priests, bishops, ministers and all those who are sent to preach him to the world

-Sacraments: whenever a priest celebrates the sacrament, he represents Jesus and confers the sacrament in his name. He is the minister of Word and Sacrament in the name of the Church, the instrument through which God's offer of life reaches us in Christ.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in no. 1374 teaches clearly: *The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique.* It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." (St Thomas, Sth. III, 73, 3c). In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is *truly, really, and substantially* contained." (DS 1651) "This presence is called

'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present." (*mysterium Fidei*, 39). The Reformers Luther, Zwingli and Calvin all understood the real presence of Christ in a general sense and not in a particular sense.

-Nature (everything is reconciled in Christ). God manifests himself in nature and everything has been put under dominion of Christ. "God has highly exalted him above all things" (Phil 1: 1-11).

Scriptural Reflection

One of my favorite biblical passages is Deut 4: 7: "*What nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us*" St Thomas Aquinas picked up this saying in his homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi to underlie that the joy of Israel at her election by God as his people, has become the joy of the Church because in Christ we have been chosen to become the subject of God's love. But in a special way, in Christ God has drawn close to us. His name is Immanuel 'God-with-us'. Jesus has become man like us, taken human flesh, suffered in human flesh on the Cross, rose in his bodily glory. He remains with us in such a way that he places himself in the mystery of the transubstantiated bread; he places himself in our hands and in our hearts. Like humans that we are, we do not want God to be near us; like our first parents we want to run away. We imagine how it is possible that God can be so near; how it is possible that he could humble himself to be real in the host. How can he be so great and so near, so near and yet far? This is the mystery that we celebrate at Mass. As we read from the Gospel of John 6: 48-59 "The Jews disputed among themselves, how can this man give us his flesh to eat...?" This question was already raised by the Jews in the time of Jesus. This question is raised among us today:

-Some people ask: Does the Bible teach about the real presence? Is it possible for a body to share itself out in many and all places at the same time? Does this not contradict the limitations that are of essence of a body, since a body has to occupy a particular space? In the light of new scientific discoveries about atom, isn't true that the elements that make the host could be reduced to the sum of its parts to the smallest elements of the substance (ie

atoms)? Anything material cannot be so transformed as the Church teaches in her dogma. Even within theological circle, this question is hotly debated. In 1966 the late Fr. Karl Rahner stated that "one can no longer maintain today that bread is a substance, as St. Thomas and the Fathers of the Council (of Trent) obviously thought it was". For Rahner, the "substance" of a thing did not include its *material and physical* reality, but the "meaning and purpose" of the thing. So, according to Karl Rahner, transubstantiation meant that, after the consecration of the Mass, the physical bread remained physical bread but it now had a new "meaning" of spiritual food because it was now a "symbol" of Jesus Christ. Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx agreed with Fr. Karl Rahner that the physical bread and wine were only a "sign" of Christ. In fact, for Schillebeeckx, the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist was not the consecrated bread and wine, but the presence of Christ in the "*assembled community*". This is why Schillebeeckx says that "*I kneel, not before a Christ who is, as it were, condensed in the host, but before the Lord himself who is offering his reality, his body, to me through the host.*" This same theory of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was accepted by some theologians in the United States. Thus, Tad W. Guzie, S. J. of Marquette University, says that the change in the bread and wine taking place through the consecration of the Mass is "not one that has to do with the *physical* order'." And, Georgetown University professor, Monika K. Hellwig, suggests that Jesus' words at the Eucharist were not meant to identify the "bread" with his body, but that the "community" was the "embodiment . . . of Jesus". Finally, Anthony Wilhelm, author of *Christ Among Us* (a catechism with "two million copies sold"), stated: "When we say that the bread and wine 'become Christ' *we are not saying that bread and wine are Christ . . . What we mean is that the bread and wine are a sign of Christ present , here and now, in a special way - not in a mere physical way, as if condensed into a wafer . . .*"

According to the Gallup poll (Joseph Cardinal Bernardin) more than 30% of Catholic faithful in North America no longer believe in the real presence of the Lord in the elements of bread and wine. This was also reiterated at the recent Synod of Bishop on the Eucharist. The number of Catholics who do not believe in the real presence are on the rise. Why is this so? The lack of faith is always a corollary of the loss of the sense of the sacred. The lack of adequate catechesis is also at the root of the failure of many Catholics to have a mature faith. It is important for us to deepen our understanding of the beliefs and practices

of our Church so that we can as St Peter advises in 1Peter 3: 16 be ready to give an answer to anyone of the hope and faith that we profess.

When Jesus told his disciples that "my flesh is real food and my blood real drink" (Jn. 6:55), his disciples took Him *literally* and said: "This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously?" (Jn. 6:60). Then St. John's Gospel reports: "Jesus was fully aware that his disciples were murmuring in protest at what he had said" (Jn. 6:61). John then states that "From this time on, many of his disciples broke away and would not remain in his company any longer. Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Do you want to leave me too?'" (Jn. 6:66-67). The Twelve (except for Judas) stayed with Jesus because they trusted his words (Jn. 6:69-71). Now, "Jesus was fully aware" that the departing disciples understood his teaching *literally*. Obviously, if Jesus had only meant that they would eat his Body and drink his Blood *figuratively* or *symbolically*, He would have said so before they walked away. He would have said to them; "come back I am kidding! I did not mean that you should eat my flesh! I meant it figuratively! Since He did not, He meant his words *literally* and properly so and, of course, *not sensibly or cannibalistically*, but miraculously!

Some people become confused by what Jesus said after the disciples complained that "This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously'?" Jesus states: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I spoke to you are spirit and life" (Jn. 6:63). They mistakenly think that this is proof that Jesus is saying that He only means that the disciples will eat his flesh and drink his blood *spiritually* and not *literally*. But it is illogical that Jesus would say that *his flesh* is "useless" after saying 'the flesh of the Son of Man' gives "life" (Jn. 6:53). Rather, Jesus is not talking about his flesh, but about *their flesh*. Jesus is telling the disciples that they cannot grasp or come to his teaching on the Eucharist by their *senses* or their "flesh," which is "useless" for this purpose, but only through faith or "spirit".

Now, the fourth century Church Fathers understood that the Eucharist is really Jesus Christ Himself. St. Cyril of Alexandria states: "He said *This is my body* and *this is my blood* in a demonstrative fashion, so that you might judge that what you see *is not a mere figure* ." [3] And St. Ambrose of Milan teaches about the Eucharist that "*nature itself is changed*

through the blessing".[4] St Iganitius of Antioch prays in one of his homilies; "I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David, for drink I desire his blood which is incorruptible love." Justin the Martyr who taught that those who do not believe what believe should not eat what we eat-the grounds on which communion is denied to non-Catholics and those not in communion with the Church, writes that through the prayer that Christ has put in the mouth of the priest through the Holy Spirit, common bread and common drink become the body and blood of Christ. Irenaeus writing in the second century as teaches that "the bread over which blessing has been said and the cup over which thanks is given is the body of the Lord and the blood of the Savior. The clearest evidence of the real presence from the point of view of tradition is to be found in the *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* where it states:

And let all take care that no unbaptized person taste of the Eucharist nor a mouse or other animal, that none of it at all fall and be lost. For it is the Body of Christ to be eaten by them that believe and not to be thought lightly of. For having blessed the cup in the name of God thou didst receive it as the antitype of the Blood of Christ. Wherefore, spill not from it, that no alien spirit lick it up because thou didst despise it, and become guilty of the Blood of Christ as one who despises the price with which he has been bought."

So, it is quite clear from the fourth century Church Fathers that the Eucharistic consecration "changes" the "nature" of the bread and wine into the "nature" of Jesus Christ and that the Eucharist is not just "a mere figure" of Jesus Christ but "truly" Jesus Christ Himself. This is precisely why St. Augustine states about the Eucharist: "no one eats of this flesh without having first adored it . . . and not only do we not sin in thus adoring it, but we would be sinning if we did not do so". In the Catechetical Lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem, the most ancient Catechetical text of the Church, we hear again this instruction emphasizing the real presence: "*Since he himself has declared and said of the bread, This is my body, who shall dare to doubt any longer? And since he has affirmed and said, 'This is my blood', who shall hesitate, saying, that it is not his blood?*" Cyril even draws the analogy with the changing of water into wine at Cana and says to Christians; "With fullest assurance let us partake of the Body and Blood of Christ as in the natural process of digestion. In the Eucharist they immediately become

his body through the action of the Logos” In the ninth century, the same teaching and practice on the real presence was upheld, we hear in the sermon of St John of Damascus; “The bread and wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid) but the deified body of the Lord itself. Jesus did not say, “This is a figure of my body’, he said ‘This is my body’. Let us then receive the body of the crucified Lord our Saviour.”

St Paul underlies the continuity of this teaching even from the earliest time in the history of the Church: "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.**'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The debate is over the word: This is my body. Jesus did not say ‘This stands for my body’. If he meant the real presence to be mere metaphor he would have called back his disciples who abandoned him because they did not want to eat human flesh. These disciples according to the account we have said; “this is a hard teaching who can believe that”. This hard teaching was presented by Jesus this way; “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood you have no life in you” Jesus insisted and asked the rest of the apostles who remained; “What of you, do you wish to go away too?” Peter answered “Lord to whom we shall go you have the words of eternal life, we have believed and we know that you are the Son of God.” *It is this ‘Yes’ to God that is called for today for all Catholics: ‘This is My Body’, take and eat. Shall we hear and heed the Lord’s Call?*

Usually when we eat, it is our body that takes in the food and after metabolism integrates what is eaten into the body’s system; in the Eucharist it is a reverse, we are transformed by the Eucharist; it is the Eucharist that in a certain sense metabolizes us in a radical way. It is as Augustine says, the Eucharist that transforms us. When we receive the Eucharist, we are taken out of ourselves, we communicate with the historic Jesus, the one who walked the path in Galilee, the one who suffered on Golgotha and was crucified and died and rose again. We are assimilated with him and through him with all our brothers and sisters. What we receive is not a piece of body, but the Resurrected One, Jesus himself—the person who shares himself in his love which runs right through the Cross. Receiving communion is a personal act; it is not a social routine. In communion, I enter into the Lord

who is communicating himself with me. That is why the liturgy changes over from 'Let us proclaim the mystery of faith' to 'Lord I am not worthy to receive you'. What we receive at communion is a person and not a figure. In earlier centuries perhaps we forgot the man Jesus too much and thought only of his divinity. Today we are in the danger of seeing only in the Holy Communion the sign of the human material Jesus, who is ordinary, while forgetting that we are coming in contact with the living God himself.

Scripture shows us that God wants to remain with us: Jesus says 'Lo I am with you even till the end of the world' How does he do it? In his real presence in the Eucharist. This is the fundamental difference between the Eucharist as celebrated by the Catholic Church and the last supper of the other denominations. For us Catholics, Mass is a sacrifice and Christ is the *minister principalis*, as the high priest who offers himself, and as the giver of the feast who gives himself to us. The same offering that Jesus gave up on the Cross, is being re-enacted in *an unbloody manner* on our altars through the hands of the priest, if the priest does what the Church intends to do and remains in communion with Christ through the Church. Vat II teaches in SC 28; "Through the ministry of the priest, Christ now offers his sacrifice. Just as the priest officiates *in persona Christi* and *in virtute Christi*, the character given to all Christians in baptism and confirmation enables Christians to be co-offerers to the sacrifice, thanksgiving, and communion."

"Pray brethren that our sacrifice..." The Christian community at Mass not only receives the fruits of the Lord's redemption of humanity in the real presence of Jesus, which is given in communion; they also actively concurs in the saving deeds of Christ and ratifies the actions of Jesus on the Cross for their age and time. In this way, they become contemporaries of Christ, saying 'Yes' to him and consecrating themselves anew in the blood shed on Calvary. This is why St Paul tells us in Romans: 12 vs. 1 'I encourage you brothers to offer up yourself as a living sacrifice to God fully given; the sacrifice of your life', St Paul will also write in Gal 2:20 "The life I lead is not I living but Jesus lives in me'. The real presence of Christ is a challenge for us who receive him, who mediate on him and who are transformed in him to become in a certain sense his real presence in our family, society and the world.

The sacrifice of the Mass is the same sacrifice of Christ everywhere in Peterborough or Rome, in Nigeria or India, it is the same Christ, the same altar, the celebration, the same offering. St Paul's letter to the Corinthians is the oldest recorded account of the institution of the Eucharist. It is almost verbatim as the Synoptic Gospels record (Matt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22,24; Lk 22:19-20). In essence, Jesus' self sacrifice on the cross began at the last supper. For He offered His Body separate from His Blood, which is a way of signifying death because the blood was considered the seat of life. Christ states that this is the blood of the "new covenant," which brings to mind the establishment of the covenant with the Israelites in Exodus 24. Moses had holocausts and bulls sacrificed in worship of God to inaugurate this new relationship. Then he took the bodies of the animals and burnt them on the altar and sprinkled half the blood around it. Moses sealed the covenant with God by sprinkling the people with the other half. Therefore, what Jesus was doing is establishing a way for His church to celebrate His sacrifice on the cross and the new covenant He formed with it. The separation of His Body and Blood, is an unbloody representation of what took place on Calvary. The separation of body and blood was a crucial element to sacrifice of peace with God. In the Temple, the flesh was burnt on the altar and the blood was poured out around the altar. Looking closer at the words of Jesus, we can see that they have sacrificial overtones also. "Do this in remembrance of me" in Greek is "*Touto poiete eis tan emain anamnesin.*" The word translated as "do" is "*poiete*" whose root is *poiein* which more properly is to "offer" in a sacrificial manner. Here are some examples from the Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek: "Now, this is what you shall **offer** on the altar: two yearling lambs as the sacrifice established for each day; one lamb in the morning and the other lamb at the evening twilight." (Exodus 29:38-39). "'Come up to the altar,' Moses then told Aaron, 'and **offer** your sin offering and your holocaust in atonement for yourself and for your family; then present the offering of the people in atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded.'" (Leviticus 9:7). "Holocausts of fatlings I will **offer** you and burnt offerings of rams; I will sacrifice oxen and goats. Selah" (Psalms 66:15)

Scripture and Tradition Are Clear On Transubstantiation

The term transubstantiation goes back to the practice of the Church but was only properly articulated in the second half of the 12th century. The 4th Lateran Council defined it this way in 1215;

"His body and blood are really contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the Body, and the wine into the Blood, by the power of God." That means that the substantia of the bread and wine become the substantia of the body and blood of Christ, but the accidents is what remains of the original bread and wine. The material appearance of the bread and wine remain.

This teaching on Christ's Eucharistic Real Presence was not seriously challenged until the eleventh century (after a thousand years!). Then, Berengarius of Tours held that Christ was present in the Eucharist only "as mere sign and symbol" and that after the consecration, "bread must remain".[6] Berengarius stated: "That which is consecrated (the bread) is not able to cease existing materially."[(Berengarius, *De Sacra Coena Adversus Lanfrancum*, A. F. Vischer and F. T. Vischer, eds. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975), p. 91. English translation taken from James T. O'Connor, p. 102). St. Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) calls "Berengarius . . . the first deviser of this heresy," that the consecrated Bread and Wine are only a "sign" of Christ's Body and Blood."). St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 75, art. 1.) St. Thomas also gave a very good reason why bread and wine cannot remain after the consecration: "Because it would be opposed to the veneration of this sacrament, if any substance were there, which could not be adored with adoration of *latria*." [9] If bread and wine remained, Catholics would be committing the sin of idolatry by adoring it. So, physical bread and wine do not remain! Thus, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), in harmony with St. Thomas infallibly taught: "If anyone says that in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular conversion of the *whole substance of the bread* into the Body, and of the *entire substance of the wine* into the Blood, the species (appearance) of the bread and wine only remaining, a change which the Catholic Church most fittingly calls *transubstantiation*: let him be anathema."

Finally, in 1968, Pope Paul VI taught most clearly that, after the consecration at Mass, "nothing remains of the bread and wine except for the (smell, taste, etc.)" and that

Christ is (bodily) present whole and entire in his *physical* 'reality,' corporeally present, although not in the manner in which bodies are in a place."^[11] So, the "*physical*" thing that remains after the consecration is Jesus Christ and not bread and wine. Consequently, when Paul VI discussed the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist in *Mysterium Fidei*, he stated: "And so it would be wrong for anyone to try to explain this manner of presence by dreaming up a so-called "*pneumatic*" nature of the glorious body of Christ that would be present everywhere; or for anyone to limit it to symbolism, as if this most sacred Sacrament were to consist in nothing more than an efficacious sign "of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful, the members of His Mystical Body." *Mysterium Fidei* (39) Thus, the primary meaning of the words, "Body of Christ," at communion is not the spiritual or Mystical Body of Christ called the Church. Rather the primary meaning is the individual being of Jesus Christ, from and beyond history, the "substantial" or "whole Christ," including his "physical reality," made "corporeally" present. The Eucharist is the presence of the sacrifice of the Cross in the festive signs of bread and wine. The Lord instituted the Eucharist on the eve of his Passion so that the memorial, or sacrament, of his Sacrifice might be present in the Church. The real presence of his offering on Calvary is brought about at every Eucharistic Celebration.

After the Mass, however, the bread and wine, consecrated by the priest who represents Christ "in persona Christi", do not cease to be the Body and Blood of Jesus; the "effective word of Christ" (the "*operatorius sermo Christi*", as St Ambrose defines it [*De Sacram.*, IV, 4, 15]) radically transforms them, that is, in their very substance, and this is not merely a transient transformation that endures in space and time or for only as long as the rite.

"Transubstantiation" as termed by the Tridentine Fathers

To describe at what level this "conversion" occurs, indeed, this "wonderful and singular conversion", according to the Tridentine Fathers' connotation, the Fathers themselves with a felicitous and suitable definition termed it "transubstantiation". Nor was this a philosophical choice as all too often, and superficially, people are still saying. Indeed, that incomprehensible concept was used to express a truth whose doctrine and procedures Christian Tradition has never ceased to profess: "after the prayer of thanksgiving formed of Christ's words", (Justin, *Apol.* 1, 66), even when Mass is over and as long as the species

remain, the bread and the wine continue irreversibly to be the Body and Blood of Our Lord; and remain so – according to the clear, perceptive and descriptive Tridentine adverbs – "vere, realiter, substantialiter" [truly, really, substantially]. Christ is truly, really and substantially present under both species and in each of their parts, beyond the duration of the Mass, so long as the species, the empirical realities of bread and wine as food remain. The presence of Christ in this manner is worthy of adoration, an adoration that should not however, lose sight of the connection with the sacrifice of Jesus. Let us refer to a text by Origen: "You who habitually witness the holy mysteries know with what respectful precaution you preserve the Body of the Lord when you receive it, lest some crumbs of it fall and part of the consecrated treasure be lost. Thus, you would feel guilty, and rightly so, if by your negligence even a particle of it were to be lost" (*In Ex Hom.* 13, 3). A real transformation takes place which is beyond our human understanding. There is something new that was not there before. We cannot measure what happens. Whenever Christ comes in the power of the Spirit upon the bread and wine, it is fundamentally, substantially and totally transformed into a new order. It is not two orders or a transignification, it is an essential change.

-The Lord takes possession of the bread and wine; he lifts them up, as it were, out of the setting of their normal existence into a new order; even if, from a purely physical point of view, they remain the same, they have become profoundly different.

-What is happening to the bread and wine is an event to the thing itself; it is not something that we bring upon or agreed upon. This is the Lutheran position that the bread and wine are symbols of our faith expression. It is the faith of the Christian community that produces and adds the added meaning to the bread and wine as symbols of the blood and body of Christ. Thus at the end of the celebration, the bread and wine remain what they are bread and wine. Thus they make the bread and wine a fiction, a phantom which satisfies the cultic purpose of the worshiping community. However, the Catholic Church teaches that it is not us who make God; it is God who makes us. Jesus is really and actually present at Mass and he offers himself in the same manner as he did on Calvary but in an unbloody manner. The effects are the same even though the acts are different but continuous.

-Transubstantiation signifies also that God is near; that he answers us that is why we call the Mass Eucharist, thanksgiving which is that God has accepted our offering of our lives, our dreams, our everything together with the offering of his Son which is always an acceptable oblation to God. That is why every Mass is valid not because of the holiness of the priest or the worshiping community-though this is necessary for worthy reception-but because of the holiness and efficacy of the salvific act of Christ.

Consecrated hosts do not cease to be Christ's Body outside Mass

When the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus are preserved outside Mass, they remain so in relation to it: "born" from the sacrament of Christ's sacrifice, as the Encyclical *Eucharistia de Ecclesia* defines Mass, they never cease to converge in it. The Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* reasserts this in the words of the Decree *Eucharisticum Sacramentum* of 1973: "The celebration of the Eucharist in the Sacrifice of Mass is truly the origin and end of the worship given to the Eucharist outside the Mass" (n. 129), and explains the two purposes of the reservation of the "sacred species": sacramental communion, especially for the sick and elderly, and both private and public adoration of Jesus Christ in this great sacrament.

Implications of the Real Presence for us Catholics.

It is most unfortunate that the errors of Berengarius are still with us today. They are to be found at the center of a maze of subtle, obfuscating theological language. It should come as no surprise then, that so many of today's Catholics are ignorant of the Church's teaching on the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. There have been a lot of Eucharistic miracles which can also help confirm our faith in the real presence and assist us as we journey to Christ. Perhaps the best known miracle in which there was a lack of faith in the Real Presence was the miracle of Bolsena-Orvieto. A Bohemian priest by the name of Peter of Prague was tempted into questioning the Real Presence. When he broke the Host after the Consecration he was stunned to see blood flowing from it and dripping onto the corporal (the square piece of linen on which the Host and chalice are placed during Mass). The bloodstained corporal was taken to the Cathedral of Orvieto where it is preserved to this

day. It was as a result of this great miracle that the Pope commissioned Saint Thomas Aquinas to write the Mass of the "Body of Christ" (Corpus Christi). Pope Paul VI in our own day visited the famous shrine in August of 1964 for the anniversary of the Miracle of Orvieto.

It seems like most of the miracles regarding the Real Presence involve outrages committed against this Sacrament of God's infinite love. To name but a few, there was Slavings, Moravia in 1120; the little town of Excelles near the border of France and Italy in 1453; Orthez in the Upper Pyrenees in 1845, and Santarem, Portugal several centuries ago. All of these extend to many countries and over many centuries.

The Eucharistic Prodigy of Siena is outstanding, however, as it is a continuous miracle. On August 14, 1730 the yearly procession in honor of Our Lady's Assumption was taking place in Siena. Practically the whole town turned out for the feast leaving the Church of St. Francis unattended. At the same time the town's people were occupied in honoring the Queen of Heaven thieves desecrated her Son present in the Eucharist by stealing a large ciborium full of consecrated hosts.

When the theft was discovered the people were shocked and went into mourning. They prayed for pardon for this terrible sacrilege and begged God for light on how to recover the Sacred particles. Their petitions were heard. Within three days the hosts were found. On the morning of the 17th a choir boy in the Church of Holy Mary in Provenzano, near the Church of St. Francis, noticed something white in the alms box. There among the dust and cobwebs were the Sacred Particles. The Archbishop himself carefully cleaned and counted them, one by one. There were 351 Sacred Hosts that were brought back with great solemnity to the Church of St. Francis.

But this was not the end; it was the beginning of a tremendous Eucharistic prodigy that is still going on. The Conventual Franciscan friars who now had the hosts restored to their church could not consume them as there was a continuous procession of people from Siena who came to adore the Sacred Particles day after day. It soon became evident that contrary to natural conditions the Particles remained in their original freshness. From time to time,

over the centuries, the Sacred Particles were received in Holy Communion, so that now there are only 223 Particles remaining. But these are still in a state of perfect preservation.

During the 13th century St. Anthony of Padua was reported to have converted a hardened heretic through a rather unique contest. The heretic, by the name of Bononillo, was unmoved by the reasoning of the "hammer of heretics," as St. Anthony was called. Bononillo was as stubborn as the mule that stood beside him.

Eyeing the mule, Anthony made an offer to Bononillo. He asked him whether he would give up his heresy if the mule were to bow down and adore its Creator present in the Blessed Sacrament. The heretic answered he would, provided he could lay down certain conditions: for two days the mule was not to be fed, and on the third day it was to be led into the public square. On one side of the square would be placed a tempting pile of fresh feed, on the opposite side Anthony could stand with what Bononillo contemptuously called the "body of Christ." Anthony agreed, but in all humility made one condition. If the animal did not kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, his sins alone were to be blamed.

The day arrived for this strange contest and the square was crowded with people. When the derisive Bononillo arrived with his half-starved mule, he was fully confident that his mule had sense and appetite enough to go after the feed. But he was wrong. Anthony had implored his Lord in the intervening two days for the soul of this heretic. God did not let his faithful servant down. When turned loose, the mule without the least hesitation advanced towards Anthony and knelt in an attitude of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. With much emotion and contrition the heretic too fell on his knees and gave up his heresy. As wonderful as these miracles are the greatest of all, transubstantiation, has to be viewed with the eyes of faith. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is a form of Eucharistic cult which is particularly widespread in the Church and earnestly recommended to her Pastors and faithful. Its initial form derives from Holy Thursday and the altar of repose, following the celebration of the Coena Domini Mass. This adoration is a most apt way of expressing the connection between the celebration of the memorial of the

Lord's Sacrifice and his continued presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. The reservation of the Sacred Species, so as to be able to administer Viaticum to the sick at any time, encouraged the practice among the faithful of recollection before the tabernacle and to worship Christ present in the Sacrament.

Indeed, "this worship of adoration has a sound and firm foundation, especially since faith in the Lord's real presence has as its natural consequence the outward and public manifestation of that belief. Therefore, the devotion prompting the faithful to visit the blessed sacrament draws them into an ever deeper share in the paschal mystery and leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of him who through his humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of his Body. Abiding with Christ the Lord, they enjoy his intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before him for themselves and for those dear to them and they pray for the peace and salvation of the world. Offering their entire lives with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit, they derive from this sublime colloquy an increase of faith, hope, and charity. Thus they foster those right dispositions that enable them with due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father.

Eucharistic devotion outside Mass has an inestimable value in the life of the Church". The Instruction reconfirms this in order to encourage sacred pastors to promote vigorously "both public and private devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist even outside Mass..., for by means of it the faithful give adoration to Christ, truly and really present" (n. 134).

Thus, the various forms of this worship and devotion are listed (cf. nn. 134-145):

- The public and private devotion of the faithful;
- Visits to the Most Holy Sacrament during the day;
- Where possible, the designation of a church in which the Most Holy Sacrament is exposed for perpetual adoration;
- The establishment of guilds or associations to ensure this form of adoration;

The practice of holding Eucharistic processions and congresses;

(International Eucharistic Congress in Seville, Spain June 1993)

"Public and private devotion to the Holy Eucharist outside Mass is highly recommended: for the presence of Christ, who is adored by the faithful in the Sacrament, derives from the sacrifice and is directed towards sacramental and spiritual communion."

(Inaestimabile Donum, #20, 1980)

"The Church and the world have great need of Eucharistic adoration. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and contemplation full of faith. And let us be ready to make reparation for the great faults and crimes of the world. May our adoration never cease."

(Dominicae Cena: Letter to Priests, Holy Thursday, 1980)

"Closeness to the Eucharistic Christ in silence and contemplation does not distance us from our contemporaries but, on the contrary, makes us open to human joy and distress, broadening our hearts on a global scale. Through adoration the Christian mysteriously contributes to the radical transformation of the world and to the sowing of the gospel. Anyone who prays to the Eucharistic Savior draws the whole world with him and raises it to God."

(Letter to the Bishop of Liege, Reported in L'Osserv. Romano, 1996)

I will conclude my reflection by a brief meditation to the Lord on this day. You all remember the story of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus in Luke 24. It is a Eucharistic passage in Luke and shows again the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist.

This was the invitation that the two disciples journeying to Emmaus on the evening of the Resurrection, addressed to Jesus, who was the Stranger who had accompanied them on their journey. These two disciples were weighed down by sadness and disappointment because they had lost Jesus their Master. They were overshadowed by doubts about their

future and darkness clouded their spirit on this evening. Jesus, in whom they put their trust to redeem and liberate Israel, had died. Though some women and apostles had testified that they saw him risen from the dead, these two disciples did not believe them. They abandoned the community of the early Christians in Jerusalem; they lost faith in Christ, and were on their way to Emmaus, a city about 17 miles from Jerusalem. They turned their back on Jesus and the Church, but the searching eyes of Jesus found them as they journeyed away from him into an uncertain future.

Jesus gave them a ray of light, which rekindled their hope and led their hearts to burn within for the fullness of light. How did Jesus do this? First he explained the scriptures to them; secondly the disciples hearing the word of God accepted Jesus whom they had not yet recognized and subsequently invited him to stay with them for the night. On entering their home, Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it and gave it to them; it was at this point that the disciples recognized him. *The two disciples recognized Jesus at the breaking of the bread. Is this not what happens when we invite Jesus into our homes and families? He blesses us, unites us, opens our eyes to see his hand in our lives and remains in our homes. In a special way, is this not what happens when we gather to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist? We listen to the Word and action of God in the Scripture; we invite Jesus into our hearts and Jesus comes down in the power of his Spirit to reveal himself to us in the bread and wine which are transformed into his real body and blood and then remains with us in the Church, in the tabernacle and in our history.*

We have a message of hope today that amidst our questions and doubts, in the moments of personal difficulties and even disappointments, that the Risen Lord is the divine stranger who walks by our side, opening our eyes to see the hand of God in our lives. When we come to Jesus as we have done today at this Mass, we experience him anew. He shows us the way and he offers us the bread of life to strengthen us in our journey. When we encounter Jesus what follows is that we are enthusiastic to share his love and goodness with others. This is what happens to these two disciples, after receiving the bread of life, the Gospel account tells us that 'at the same hour' they returned to Jerusalem, back to the Christian community to share the Good News that Jesus is alive. The encounter with Jesus changed the course of their lives; it gave them new strength and new purpose. Indeed, it made them new people hopeful and happy to follow Jesus and confident to face the challenges of life.

We are all in a journey that is filled with uncertainties. Sometimes we are filled with doubt; sometimes we wonder whether our faith is real and true; sometimes we even question if God exists or whether the risen Lord Jesus is the One in whom we can put our faith and destiny? Sometimes we are hunted by our past and afraid to face the future. *The Christian journey is often a complex and ongoing journey from darkness into light, from doubt into faith, from sin to righteousness and from death to life. The truth is that Jesus is alive and he walks with us all the days of our life. He might not be visible to us especially in our moments of pain but he is definitely there helping us to carry on.* He stays with us in a special way in the Eucharist. We learn from the Gospel today that we do see Jesus in the breaking bread. At Mass, we touch the Risen and Glorified Jesus, who is the Lord of our Life. In the Eucharist, we lift our lives and hearts into the Mighty hand of Jesus, who is the Lord of time and history. Pope John Paul II had proclaimed this year, the Year of the Eucharist because he personally experienced in his own life the power of Christ in the breaking of bread. Jesus is able to change our lives. He is able to handle all that comes our way. Let us like the two disciples ask Jesus to stay with us and we pray to you Jesus:

Stay with us Lord when we wake up in the morning and do not find the strength to carry on for the day;

Stay with us Lord in the evenings when we return home and are too tired to spend time with our family and friends that we find the strength to do so;

Stay with us when people reject us or misunderstood us because of who we are and we are left alone, betrayed or broken ; may we see you as our faithful friend and constant companion;

Stay with us Lord when in our moment of personal weakness and anxiety we tend to settle for something cheap that we set our eyes always on something better;

Stay with us Jesus when we fall away from the path of life, may we never become used to sin or in presumption receive you unworthily;

Stay with us when we meet any stranger, that we take no person for granted for he or she may be the angel you are sending to touch our lives;

Stay with us in our moments of sickness and sadness that we may have the comfort and light of your Holy Spirit;

Stay with us Jesus on this Day of Renewal may we come to know you more deeply and to love you more tenderly.

Stay with each of us O Lord every moment of our lives especially in our last moment, that we may find our final rest and peace in you. May we all enter into the fullness of that glory which here and now in this Eucharistic celebration we experience, Amen.