

“UNDER VISIBLE SIGNS...”: TRENT & THE REAL PRESENCE IN THE EUCHARIST

It was Lent when I last added to my series on the ecumenical councils. Alas, the Easter season has come and gone, but I haven't forgotten. As we approach the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, it is fitting to address one of Trent's most consequential teachings on the Eucharist, contained in Sessions XIII (11 October 1551) and XXII (17 September 1562). I am indebted to **Dr. Paul Monson** of Sacred Heart School of Theology (Hales Corners, WI) for shedding light on Trent's key theological connections. For a Council comprised of **twenty-five** separate sessions spread over **18 years** (wars, plagues, papal deaths, indifference of Pope Paul IV), the 1551 decree wasted little time getting to the crux of the issue: “First of all, the holy council teaches and openly and plainly professes that after the consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those **sensible things**.” One could write a doctoral **dissertation** on this sentence alone!

Above all, Trent offered a cogent sacramental theology. It was paramount for the Church to defend her doctrine against various reformers regarding the nature of the Eucharist. In the mid-16th century, views **diverged widely** even amongst reformers. Our Catechism teaches: “The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of Jesus himself at the Last Supper: ‘This is my body which is given for you’ and ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood.’” [cf. CCC # 1365, Lk 22:19-20.] The Catholic teaching on the Eucharist includes our belief that a **real and substantial** change takes place, even as clearly the appearances of bread and wine remain the same. What exists **under the visible signs** of bread and wine is in reality the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ. Chapter III of the 1551 decree situates the Eucharist among the other sacraments, in that it too is “a sign of sacred reality and the visible form of invisible grace.”

However, it **adds** that there is more, a **unique quality** about this sacrament, namely “in the Eucharist the **author of holiness himself** is present before their use.” (my emphasis added). In other words, we **encounter** Christ himself in the Eucharist. The next chapter states Catholic dogma on **transubstantiation**, removing all doubt about what Catholics believe happens at each Mass. Recall, the section prior highlighted the **presence** of Christ, the “author of holiness.” While many debated the inclusion of a philosophical term (transubstantiation), Trent rightly cited Nicaea (325 A.D.) and its use of a non-biblical term *homoousios* (Greek: “of one substance”) to describe the Son's relationship with the Father. Our creed's use today of “consubstantial” reflects this. Reducing Trent's teaching to a technical term describing the “how” of the bread and wine's transformation into the Eucharist **ignores** the “**why**” that is described, the **personal encounter** with Jesus Christ.

Chapter V continues to develop the doctrine with its reference to the **veneration** that is to be shown to the Eucharist, such as we will experience with our Eucharistic procession following **next Sunday's** 10:00 a.m. Mass. The decree discusses the **preparation** for the **reception** of Communion, stressing in Chapter VII that “the more the holiness and divinity of this heavenly sacrament are understood by a Christian, the more diligently ought he to give heed that he approach not to receive it but with **great reverence** and holiness.” Chapter VIII exhorts the faithful to “believe and venerate these sacred mysteries of His body and blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of soul, with such piety and worship as to be able **frequently to receive** that supersubstantial bread, and that it may be to them truly the **life of the soul**, and the perpetual health of their mind.” Too many lay faithful had only infrequently received.

Trent's teaching confirms that our belief in the real presence is no medieval invention; rather, it is the constant teaching of the Church. Only much later was eucharistic teaching called into question. Trent clarified: "So, in order to leave to his beloved spouse the church a visible sacrifice...by which that bloody sacrifice carried out on the cross should be represented...at the last supper on the night he was betrayed, as the Catholic Church has **always understood and taught**, he announced that he had been appointed forever a second priest in the order of Melchizedek, offered his body and blood to God the Father under the forms of bread and wine...he instituted a new Passover, namely the offering of himself by the church through its priests **under visible signs** (*sub signis visibilibus*)..." (Session XXII)

Since sacraments are visible signs, we should "see" these signs, feel, taste and touch them. I invite you to give **visible witness** to your belief by joining us **next** Sunday following the **10:00 a.m. Mass** for our **Eucharistic Procession**. Besides being visible signs, the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is **not limited** to the liturgical celebration alone, as some reformers held. This explains why all Catholic churches have tabernacles, deriving from a word meaning tent. The **General Instruction of the Roman Missal** (GIRM) specifies that tabernacles are to be located "in a part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, conspicuous, worthily decorated, and suitable for prayer. The GIRM further specifies it "should usually be the only one, be irremovable, be made of solid and inviolable material that is not transparent, and be locked in such a way that the danger of profanation is prevented to the greatest extent possible."

- Our **busy season** is winding down. The Easter season has made Holy Week look like a piece of cake! We have hosted a whirlwind of confirmations, graduations, special liturgies and an ordination. I am deeply grateful to our tireless and dedicated staff— please offer them your thanks. Hint: They're the ones looking a bit haggard!
- Last weekend's **Pentecost Vigil Mass** was simply amazing. In my ten years here, I have never heard such enthusiastic singing! By this I mean no disrespect to our parishioners— it was simply an amazing gathering of people who attended and participated. I am honored that we could play a role in the Synod and offer thanks to our **sacred music staff** for their hard work in coordinating many, many moving pieces.
- As last week's bulletin noted, your support of the **Leo C. Byrne Residence** renovation is encouraged. Your gift directly assists our retired priests. Envelopes may be found on the tables by the four piers.
- Do you know who is credited with inventing the espresso machine? Clue: his name was not Starbuck! That honor goes to Italian **Angelo Moriondo**, whose 1884 patent was a game changer in the coffee world! His innovation? Controlling the **separate** supply of **water** and **steam** through the coffee. It has made all the difference in the world!
- I will assiduously advocate for the **preservation** of historic **Summit Ave**. The plans for a Regional Trail are complex, but **likely** could result in the loss of **parking** on one side of Summit, east of Lexington. The impact of wider bike trails upon boulevard trees remains a huge unknown. Parking and traffic studies on Summit were conducted when Mitchell-Hamline Law School was in virtual learning mode. I'm not against bike trails, but the plan needs to make sense for **all citizens**.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector