

The Twenty-First Week in Ordinary Time

August 26, 2018

Part Two

“[She] said that when she was a child and received the Host, she thought of it as the Holy Ghost, He being the ‘most portable’ person of the Trinity; now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, ‘Well, if it’s a symbol, to H E double hockey sticks (you know the word) with it.’ That was all the defense I was capable of but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, outside of a story, except that it is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.”

(Flannery O’Conner, The Habit of Being (letter), recalling a visit she had made to another well-known author and former Catholic.)

Last weekend, we were introduced to the Catholic understanding of Salvation History and how our Eucharist is the summit of this revelation of God. We focused on the first two stages of this eternal revelation. These were (1) the time of the Old Testament and (2) the time of the New Testament. Today, I would like to finish our study of the Sacrament of the Eucharist with an examination of the final stage of salvation history known as the time of the Church.

The Time of the Church. The time of the Church is probably the hardest of these three stages of salvation to understand. Unlike the first two stages which occurred in the past, the time of the Church encompasses past, present, and future. We can say this because God is continually revealing Himself to humanity. We believe Jesus to be the complete and perfect revelation of God. We also believe humanity will continue to journey into a deeper understanding of God through both the revelation of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our knowledge of the Eucharist very much falls into this understanding of God’s self-revelation. To accomplish our goal for today, let us begin by looking at the Eucharist through both Sacred Scripture and Tradition (our history).

The Eucharist in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we can see that the Eucharist was already being celebrated by the early Christian community. The Acts of the Apostles speaks of the Eucharist through the action of the “Breaking of the Bread.” *They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.* (Acts 2: 42) *On the first day of the week when we gathered to break bread, Paul spoke to them because he was going to leave on the next day, and he kept on speaking until midnight.* (Acts 20: 7) *When he said this, he took bread, gave thanks to God in front of them all, broke it, and began to eat.* (Acts 27: 35)

The Eucharist in Tradition. Our unbroken Catholic Tradition can be quite an enormous concept to wrap our minds around. Allow me to begin with two New Testament passages which will be beneficial to our understanding. *There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.* (John 21: 25) *Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours.* (2 Thessalonians 2: 15) Let us consider these two statements. Not everything Jesus said or did was recorded in the Bible. Not everything taught by the Apostles or Saint Paul was recorded in the Bible. If we are to accept these two statements as factual, then we would also have to hold as factual that there were very important teachings concerning Jesus and the development of Christian belief which were not recorded in the Bible. These statements of faith would be taught and recorded elsewhere. It is these historical documents which help form our living Tradition. *And on the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.* (Didache or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles 50-100 AD) Now, let us follow the development of our understanding of the Eucharist. *I take no pleasure in corruptible food or in the delights of this life. I want the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who is of the seed of David; and as drink I want his Blood, which is incorruptible love.* (Saint Ignatius of Antioch died 107AD) Although there are so many other works to choose from, let me finish with

Saint Justin Martyr who was born in Palestine in 110 AD, converted to Christianity in 135 AD, and wrote his masterpiece *Apology* in 150 AD. *This food we call Eucharist, which no one is allowed to share except the one who believes that our teaching is true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and so lives as Christ has handed down. For we do not receive these as common bread and common drink; but just as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we learned that the food over which thanks has been given by the prayer of the word which comes from him, and by which our blood and flesh are nourished through a change, is the Flesh and Blood of the same incarnate Jesus. For the Apostles in the memoirs composed by them and that are called Gospels have thus handed on what was commanded them; namely, that Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, said, "Do this in remembrance of me; this is my Body"; and that, in like manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, he said, "This is my Blood", and gave it to them alone.*