

Spirituality and the Mass

Peter Feldmeier, Ph.D.

Sacrifice and Eating Jesus: Magic? Superstition? Or Expression and Communion with the Living Christ

- **Irenaeus of Lyon:** He took...bread, and gave thanks, and said, "this is My body." And the cup likewise... He confessed to be his blood, and taught the new oblation [offering] of the new covenant; which the Church receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world.... The oblation of the Church... [is] a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him.... Inasmuch, then, as the Church offers with single-mindedness, her gift is justly reckoned a pure sacrifice with God.... For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity (Against Heresies 4.17.5-18.5).
- **Tertullian:** He made the bread his own body (*Against Marcion*, 4.40.3)
- **Justin Martyr:** Not common bread and drink do we receive...it is the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh (*First Apology*, 67).

Mysticism Primer

- **Kataphatic:** God dramatically manifests himself mediated through the created world and subjectivity of the psyche.
- **Apophatic:** God dramatically manifests himself in radical union that transcends all concepts or created realities.
- **Divinization:** Being transformed by God's grace to live God's life as God lives it. St. John of the Cross: *Having been made one with God, the soul is somehow God through participation.... For the will of the two is one will, and thus, God's operation and the soul's are one.... A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both...are possessed by both together.*
- The Eucharist is filled with mediations that intend kataphatic experiences of God that ultimately lead to apophatic union and divinization.

Sacred Rites: Symbols do not simply represent ultimate realities; they are *presentations* of them. These rites do not merely disclose truth, they enable participants to enter into the presence of these spiritual forms and enable those forms to contain a living presence in the lives of participants. They *manifest* ultimate realities.

The Eucharist includes all the core symbols of what Christians believe save us. Our spiritual reality is constituted by: (1) Incarnation: The radical presence of the divine being communicated through the human Jesus of Nazareth; (2) Christ's preaching and healing: Expressions of the breaking in of the kingdom of God; (3) Cross: Sacrifice that is atonement, covenant, and communion; (4) Resurrection: victory over death; (5) Ascension and gift of the Holy Spirit: New life in the kingdom. *The Eucharist is the body of Christ actualizing itself.*

The Body of Christ is a dense symbol. It is Christ glorified, it is the church, it is the Christian, it is the consecrated bread and wine. This is, of course, metaphorical and symbolic language, but also language that discloses the reality.

Divinization

Biblical Texts

1. *He gave power to become children of God...born from God himself (Jn 1:12-13).*
2. *Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not been revealed. We know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn 3:2).*
3. *Love comes to its perfection in us...because even in this world we have become as he is (1 Jn 4:17)*
4. *When everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to him, so that God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).*
5. *As we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so we shall bear the likeness of the heavenly one (1 Cor 15:49).*
6. *He has put all things under his feet, and made him, as he is above all things, the head of the Church; which is his Body, the fullness of him who is filled, all in all (Eph 1:23).*
7. *We receive the Spirit and become co-heirs, true children of God, sharing Christ's very glory (Rom 8:14-17).*
8. *All of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18).*
9. *Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).*
10. *For our sake he made him who did not know sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God (2 Cor 5:21).*
11. *[Through Christ's Spirit] you will have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God (Eph 1:19).*
12. *Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24).*
13. *You have put on a new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator (Col 3:10).*
14. *There is only Christ: he is everything and in everything (Col 3:11).*
15. *He does it all for our own good, so that we may share his holiness (Heb 12:10).*
16. *His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature... (2 Pt 1:3-4).*

Texts from the Tradition

St. Justin Martyr: And we have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue (*First Apology* XXI).

St. Irenaeus of Lyons: As those who see light are in the light sharing its brilliance, so those who see God are in God sharing his glory (*Against Heresies*, 4.20.5).

St. Hippolytus: When we have been deified and made immortal, God has promised us to share in his own attributes...we shall be like him and he will honor us. God is not beggarly, and for the sake of his own glory he has given us a share in his divinity (*Refutation of all Heresies*).

St. Clement of Alexandria: Logos, the Word of God, became man in order that you can learn through the intercession of Man, how many can become God by grace (*Protrepticos* 1.8).

St. Athanasius: Being God, the Son revealed God, deified human flesh, and sent the Spirit. And by the Spirit we are deified and saved. God became human that we may become divine (*De Decretis*, 14).

St. Gregory Nazianzen: He who makes rich became poor; he takes on the poverty of my flesh, that I may gain the riches of his divinity. He who is full is made empty; he is emptied for a brief

space of his glory that I may share in his fullness (*Oratio* 45). Man is a creature who has received the command to become God (PG 36:560).

St. Gregory of Nyssa: Man surpasses his nature: mortal, he becomes immortal; perishable, he becomes imperishable; fleeting, he becomes eternal; human, he becomes divine (*Oratio* VII).

St. Basil the Great: Man received grace in order to become Divine (*On the Holy Spirit*, PG 32).

St. Cyril of Alexandria: By receiving the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of union between us and Christ our Savior, those who are joined in him, as branches are to a vine, share in his own nature.

St. Augustine: I [God] am the food of the fully-grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into you like the food your flesh eats, but you will be changed into me (*Confessions* 7.10). God became man so that man might become God (*Sermo 13 de Tempore*). He gives it [victory] only through the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who was made partaker of our mortality to make us partakers of divinity (*City of God* XXI.16).

St. Leo The Great: Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition (*Sermo 1 in Nativitate Domini*).

St. Gregory the Great: The effect of our sharing in the body and blood of Christ is to change us into what we receive (*Sermo de Passione*).

St. Maximus the Confessor: God grants a reward as a gift to those who have believed him, namely eternal deification (*Questions to Thalassius*, 61). What God is in essence the creature may become by participation (*Third Century on Love*, #25).

St. Symeon the New Theologian: When we thus live in our natural state, wearing the resplendent robe of the Spirit, we dwell in God and God dwells in us. Then we are called gods by adoption (*Practical and Theological Texts*, #48).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153): O pure and sacred love!...It is deifying to go through such an experience (*On Loving God* IX.28).

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274): He is joined to us, not by changing into us, but by changing us into him (*Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, IV, dist.VIII, a.3,q.III). Since it is the will of God's only-begotten Son that we should share in his divinity, he assumed our nature in order that by becoming man he might make men gods (*Opusculum* 57, *in festo Corporis Christi*).

St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359): He who is deified through grace will be everything that God is, without possessing identity of essence. Thus it is impossible to participate in God's essence, even for those who are deified by divine grace. It is, however, possible to participate in the divine energy (*Topics of Natural the Theological Science*, #111).

Meister Eckhart: If therefore I am changed into God and He makes me one with Himself, then, by the living God, there is no distinction between us...God and I: we are one.

St. John of the Cross: Union is transformation in God (*Ascent* II.5.3). God will so communicate his supernatural being to the soul that it will appear to be God himself and will possess what God himself possesses...both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation (*Ascent* II.5.7). All it is will become like God. Thus it will be called, and shall be, God through participation (*Dark Night* 2.20.5). So great is this union that even though they differ in substance, in glory and appearance the soul seems to be God and God seems to be the soul (*Spiritual Canticle* 31.1).

Blessed John Henry Newman: To make us partakers of the divine nature...God became man so that men...might in the end become as gods (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 93).

Vatican II: For God has called man, and still calls him, to cleave with all his being to him in sharing for ever a life that is divine and free from all decay (*Gaudium et Spes*, 18). In his wisdom and goodness the eternal Father created the whole world according to his supremely free and mysterious purpose and decreed that men would be raised up to share in the divine nature (*Lumen Gentium*, 16). God's will was that men should have access to the Father through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (*Dei Verbum*, 2). The Son of God entered the world by means of a true incarnation that he might make us sharers in the divine nature (*Ad Gentes*, 3).