



Mystery Of Faith

Mysterium Fidei

Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Paul VI

Pope Paul VI by divine providence Pope, to our venerable brothers, the Patriarchs Primates, Archbishops, Bishops and other local Ordinaries in peace and communion with the Holy See, and to all the clergy and faithful of the world:

on the doctrine and worship of the Holy Eucharist. Venerable brothers and dear sons: Health and apostolic benediction.

The Catholic Church has always devoutly guarded as a most precious treasure the mystery of faith, that is, the ineffable gift of the Eucharist which she received from Christ her Spouse as a pledge of His immense love, and during the Second Vatican Council in a new and solemn demonstration she professed her faith and veneration for this mystery. When dealing with the restoration of the sacred liturgy, the Fathers of the council, by reason of their pastoral concern for the whole Church, considered it of the highest importance to exhort the faithful to participate actively with sound faith and with the utmost devotion in the celebration of this Most Holy Mystery, to offer it with the priest to God as a sacrifice for their own salvation and for that of the whole world, and to find in it spiritual nourishment.

For if the sacred liturgy holds the first place in the life of the Church, the Eucharistic Mystery stands at the heart and center of the liturgy, since it is the font of life by which we are cleansed and strengthened to live not for ourselves but for God, and to be united in love among ourselves.

To make evident the indissoluble bond which exists between faith and devotion, the Fathers of the council, confirming the doctrine which the Church has always held and taught and which was solemnly defined by the Council of Trent, determine to introduce their treatise on the Most Holy Mystery of the Eucharist with the following summary of truths:

"At the Last Supper, on the night He was handed over, Our Lord instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until He should come, and thus entrust to the Church, His beloved spouse, the memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of

devotion, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is received, the soul is filled with grace and there is given to us the pledge of future glory."[1]

In these words are highlighted both the sacrifice, which pertains to the essence of the Mass which is celebrated daily, and the sacrament in which the faithful participate in Holy Communion by eating the Flesh of Christ and drinking His Blood, receiving both grace, the beginning of eternal life, and the medicine of immortality. According to the words of Our Lord: "The man who eats my flesh and drinks my blood enjoys eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."[2]

Therefore we earnestly hope that the restored sacred liturgy will bring forth abundant fruits of eucharistic devotion, so that the Holy Church, under this saving sign of piety, may make daily progress toward perfect unity[3] and may invite all Christians to a unity of faith and of love, drawing them gently, thanks to the action of divine grace.

We seem to have a preview of these fruits and, as it were, to gather in the early results not only in the genuine joy and eagerness with which the members of the Catholic Church have received both the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the restoration of the liturgy, but also in the great number of well-prepared publications which seek to investigate more profoundly and to understand more fruitfully the doctrine on the Holy Eucharist, with special reference to its relation with the mystery of the Church.

All of this is for us a cause of profound consolation and joy. It is a great pleasure for us to communicate this to you, venerable brothers, so that along with us you may give thanks to God, the giver of all gifts, who with His Spirit rules the Church and enriches her with increasing virtues.

However, venerable brothers, in this very matter which we are discussing, there are not lacking reasons for serious pastoral concern and anxiety. The awareness of our apostolic duty does not allow us to be silent in the face of these problems. Indeed, we are aware of the fact that, among those who deal with this Most Holy Mystery in written or spoken word, there are some who with reference either to Masses which are celebrated in private, or to the dogma of transubstantiation, or to devotion to the Eucharist, spread abroad opinions which disturb the faithful and fill their minds with no little confusion about matters of faith. It is as if everyone were permitted to consign to oblivion doctrine already defined by the Church, or else to interpret it in such a way as to weaken the genuine meaning of the words or the recognized force of the concepts involved.

To confirm what we have said by examples, it is not allowable to emphasize what is called the "communal" Mass to the disparagement of Masses celebrated in private, or to exaggerate the element of sacramental sign as if the symbolism, which all certainly admit in the Eucharist, expresses fully and exhausts completely

the mode of Christ's presence in this sacrament. Nor is it allowable to discuss the mystery of transubstantiation without mentioning what the Council of Trent stated about the marvelous conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood of Christ, speaking rather only of what is called "transignification" and "transfiguration," or finally to propose and act upon the opinion according to which, in the Consecrated Hosts which remain after the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass, Christ Our Lord is no longer present.

Everyone can see that the spread of these and similar opinions does great harm to the faith and devotion to the Divine Eucharist.

And therefore, so that the hope aroused by the council, that a flourishing of eucharistic piety which is now pervading the whole Church, be not frustrated by this spread of false opinions, we have with apostolic authority decided to address you, venerable brothers, and to express our mind on this subject.

We certainly do not wish to deny in those who are spreading these singular opinions the praiseworthy effort to investigate this lofty mystery and to set forth its inexhaustible riches, revealing its meaning to the men of today; rather we acknowledge and approve their effort. However, we cannot approve the opinions which they express, and we have the duty to warn you about the grave danger which these opinions involve for correct faith.

First of all we wish to recall something which is well known to you but which is altogether necessary for repelling every virus of rationalism, something to which many illustrious martyrs have witnessed with their blood, while celebrated Fathers and Doctors of the Church constantly professed and taught it; that is, that the Eucharist is a very great mystery. In fact, properly speaking, and to use the words of the sacred liturgy, it is the Mystery of Faith. "Indeed, in it alone," as Leo XIII, our predecessor of happy memory very wisely remarked, "are contained, in a remarkable richness and variety of miracles, all supernatural realities." [4]

We must therefore approach especially this mystery with humble respect, not following human arguments, which ought to be silent, but adhering firmly to divine revelation.

St. John Chrysostom, who, as you know, treated of the eucharistic mystery with such nobility of language and insight born of devotion, instructing his faithful on one occasion about this mystery, expressed these most fitting words: "Let us submit to God in all things and not contradict Him, even if what He says seems contrary to our reason and intellect; rather let His words prevail over our reason and intellect. Let us act in this way with regard to the (eucharistic) mysteries, looking not only at what falls under our senses but holding on to His words. For His word cannot lead us astray." [5]

The scholastic Doctors often made similar affirmations: That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and His true Blood is something that "cannot be apprehended by the senses," says St. Thomas, "but only by faith which relies on divine authority. This is why, in a comment on Luke, 22,19: ('This is My Body which is given for you'), St. Cyril says: 'Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since He is the truth, He cannot lie.'"[6]

Thus the Christian people, echoing the words of the same St. Thomas, frequently sing the words: "Sight, touch, and taste in Thee are each deceived, the ear alone most safely is believed. I believe all the Son of God has spoken -- than truth's own word there is no truer token."

In fact, St. Bonaventure asserts: "There is no difficulty about Christ's presence in the Eucharist as in a sign, but that He is truly present in the Eucharist as He is in heaven, this is most difficult. Therefore to believe this is especially meritorious."[7]

Moreover, the Holy Gospel alludes to this when it tells of the many disciples of Christ who, after listening to the sermon about eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood, turned away and left Our Lord, saying: "This is strange talk, who can be expected to listen to it?" Peter, on the other hand, in reply to Jesus' question whether also the twelve wished to leave, expressed his faith and that of the others promptly and resolutely with the marvelous answer: "Lord, to whom should we go? Thy words are the words of eternal life."[8]

It is logical, then, that we should follow as a guiding star in our investigations of this mystery the magisterium of the Church, to which the Divine Redeemer entrusted for protection and for explanation the revelation which He has communicated to us through Scripture or tradition. For we are convinced that "what since the days of antiquity was preached and believed throughout the whole Church with true Catholic Faith is true, even if it is not submitted to rational investigation, even if it is not explained by means of words."[9]

But this is not enough. Having safeguarded the integrity of the faith, it is necessary to safeguard also its proper mode of expression, lest by the careless use of words, we occasion (God forbid) the rise of false opinions regarding faith in the most sublime of mysteries. St. Augustine gives a stern warning about this in his consideration of the way of speaking employed by the philosophers and of that which ought to be used by Christians.

"The philosophers," he says, "speak freely without fear of offending religious listeners on subjects quite difficult to understand. We, on the other hand, must speak according to a fixed norm, lest the lack of restraint in our speech result in some impious opinion even about the things signified by the words themselves."[10]

The Church, therefore, with the long labor of centuries and, not without the help of

the Holy Spirit, has established a rule of language and confirmed it with the authority of the councils. This rule, which has more than once been the watchword and banner of Orthodox faith, must be religiously preserved, and let no one presume to change it at his own pleasure or under the pretext of new science. Who would ever tolerate that the dogmatic formulas used by the ecumenical councils for the mysteries of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation be judged as no longer appropriate for men of our times and therefore that others be rashly substituted for them? In the same way it cannot be tolerated that any individual should on his own authority modify the formulas which were used by the Council of Trent to express belief in the Eucharistic Mystery. For these formulas, like the others which the Church uses to propose the dogmas of faith, express concepts which are not tied to a certain form of human culture, nor to a specific phase of human culture, nor to one or other theological school.

No, these formulas present that part of reality which necessary and universal experience permits the human mind to grasp and to manifest with apt and exact terms taken either from common or polished language. For this reason, these formulas are adapted to men of all times and all places. But the most sacred task of theology is, not the invention of new dogmatic formulas to replace old ones, but rather such a defense and explanation of the formulas adopted by the councils as may demonstrate that divine Revelation is the source of the truths communicated through these expressions.

It must be admitted that these formulas can sometimes be more clearly and accurately explained. In fact, the achievement of this goal is highly beneficial. But it would be wrong to give to these expressions a meaning other than the original. Thus the understanding of the faith should be advanced without threat to its unchangeable truth. It is, in fact, the teaching of the First Vatican Council that "the same signification (of sacred dogmas) is to be forever retained once our Holy Mother the Church *has defined it, and under no pretext of deeper penetration may that meaning be weakened." [11]

For the inspiration and consolation of all, we wish to review with you, venerable brothers, the doctrine which the Catholic Church has always transmitted and unanimously teaches concerning the Mystery of the Eucharist.

We desire to recall at the very outset what may be termed the very essence of the dogma, namely, that by means of the Mystery of the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Cross, which was once offered on Calvary, is remarkably re-enacted and constantly recalled, and its saving power exerted for the forgiveness of those sins which we daily commit. [12]

Just as Moses with the blood of calves had sanctified the Old Testament, [13] so also Christ Our Lord, through the institution of the Mystery of the Eucharist, with His own Blood sanctified the New Testament, whose Mediator He is. For, as the Evangelists narrate, at the Last Supper "He took bread, and blessed and broke it,

and gave it to them, saying: 'This is My Body, given for you; do this for a commemoration of Me. And so with the cup, when supper was ended. This cup, he said, is the New Testament, in My Blood which is to be shed for you.'"[14] And by bidding the Apostles to do this in memory of Him, He made clear His will that the same sacrifice be forever repeated.

This intention of Christ was faithfully executed by the primitive Church through her adherence to the teaching of the Apostles and through her gatherings summoned to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice. As St. Luke carefully testifies, "These occupied themselves continually with the Apostles' teaching, their fellowship in the breaking of bread, and the fixed times of prayer."[15] From this practice, the faithful used to derive such spiritual strength that it was said of them that "there was one heart and soul in all the company of believers."[16]

Moreover, the Apostle Paul, who has faithfully transmitted to us what he had received from the Lord,[17] is clearly speaking of the Eucharistic Sacrifice when he points out that Christians, precisely because they have been made partakers at the table of the Lord, ought not take part in pagan sacrifices. "Is not this cup we bless," he says, "a participation in Christ's Blood? Is not the Bread we break a participation in Christ's Body?... To drink the Lord's cup, and yet to drink the cup of evil spirits, to share the Lord's feast, and to share the feast of evil spirits, is impossible for you."[18] Foreshadowed by Malachias,[19] this new offering of the New Testament has always been offered by the Church, in accordance with the teaching of Our Lord and Apostles, "Not only to tone for the sins of the living faithful and to appeal for their other needs, but also to help these who have died in Christ but have not yet been completely purified."[20]

Passing over other citations, we recall merely the testimony rendered by St. Cyril of Jerusalem, who wrote the following memorable instruction for his neophytes:

"After the Spiritual Sacrifice, the unbloody act of worship has been completed. Bending over this propitiatory offering we beg God to grant peace to all the Churches, to give harmony to the whole world, to bless our rulers, our soldiers, and our companions, to aid the sick and afflicted, and in general to assist all who stand in need; and then we offer the Victim also for our deceased holy ancestors and bishops and for all our dead. As we do this, we are filled with the conviction that this Sacrifice will be of the greatest help to those souls for whom prayers are being offered in the very presence of our holy and awesome Victim."

This holy Doctor closes his instruction by citing the parallel of the crown which is woven for the emperor to move him to pardon exiles: "In the same fashion, when we offer our prayers to God for the dead, even though they be sinners, we weave no crown, but instead we offer Christ slaughtered for our sins, beseeching our merciful God to take pity both on them and on ourselves."[21]

St. Augustine testifies that this manner of offering also for the deceased "the

Sacrifice which ransomed us" was being faithfully observed in the Church at Rome,[22] and at the same time he observes that the universal Church was following this custom in her conviction that it had been handed down by the earliest Fathers.[23]

To shed fuller light on the mystery of the Church, it helps to realize that it is nothing less than the whole Church which, in union with Christ in His role as Priest and Victim, offers the Sacrifice of the Mass and is offered in it. The Fathers of the Church taught this wondrous doctrine.[24] A few years ago our predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, explained it,[25] and only recently the Second Vatican Council enunciated it in its treatise on the People of God as formulated in its Constitution on the Church.[26]

To be sure, the distinction between universal priesthood and hierarchical priesthood is one of essence and not merely one of degree,[27] and this distinction should be faithfully observed. Yet we cannot fail to be filled with the earnest desire that this teaching on the Mass be explained over and over until it takes root deep in the hearts of the faithful. Our desire is founded on our conviction that the correct understanding of the Eucharistic Mystery is the most effective means to foster devotion to this Sacrament, to extol the dignity of all the faithful, and to spur their spirit toward the attainment of the summit of sanctity, which is nothing less than the total offering of oneself to service of the Divine Majesty.

We should also mention "the public and social nature of every Mass,"[28] a conclusion which clearly follows from the doctrine we have been discussing. For even though a priest should offer Mass in private, that Mass is not something private; it is an act of Christ and of the Church. In offering this Sacrifice, the Church learns to offer herself as a sacrifice for all. Moreover, for the salvation of the entire world she applies the single, boundless, redemptive power of the Sacrifice of the Cross. For every Mass is offered not for the salvation of ourselves alone, but also for that of the whole world.

Hence, although the very nature of the action renders most appropriate the active participation of many of the faithful in the celebration of the Mass, nevertheless, that Mass is to be fully approved which, in conformity with the prescriptions and lawful traditions of the Church, a priest for a sufficient reason offers in private, that is, in the presence of no one except his server. From such a Mass an abundant treasure of special salutary graces enriches the celebrant, the faithful, the whole Church, and the entire world -- graces which are not imparted in the same abundance by the mere reception of Holy Communion.

Therefore, from a paternal and solicitous heart, we recommend to priests, who bestow on us a special crown of happiness in the Lord, that they be mindful of their power, received through the hands of the ordaining Bishop, of offering sacrifice to God and of celebrating Masses both for the living and for the dead in the name of the Lord,[29] and that they worthily and devoutly offer Mass each day in order that

both they and the rest of the faithful may enjoy the benefits that flow so richly from the Sacrifice of the Cross. Thus also they will contribute most to the salvation of the human race.

By the few ideas which we have mentioned regarding the Sacrifice of the Mass, we are encouraged to explain a few notions concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist, seeing that both sacrifice and Sacrament pertain inseparably to the same mystery. In an unbloody representation of the Sacrifice of the Cross and in application of its saving power, in the Sacrifice of the Mass the Lord is immolated when, through the words of consecration, He begins to be present in a sacramental form under the appearances of bread and wine to become the spiritual food of the faithful.

All of us realize that there is more than one way in which Christ is present in His Church. We wish to review at greater length the consoling doctrine which was briefly set forth in the constitution "De Sacra Liturgia." [30] Christ is present in His Church when she prays, since it is He who "prays for us and prays in us and to whom we pray as to our God." [31] It is He who has promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" [32]

He is present in the Church as she performs her works of mercy, not only because we do to Christ whatever good we do to one of His least brethren, [33] but also because it is Christ, performing these works through the Church, who continually assists men with His divine love. He is present in the Church on her pilgrimage of struggle to reach the harbor of eternal life, since it is He who through faith dwells in our hearts [34] and, through the Holy Spirit whom He gives us, pours His love into those hearts. [35]

In still another genuine way He is present in the Church as she preaches, since the Gospel which she proclaims is the Word of God, which is not preached except in the name of Christ, by the authority of Christ, and with the assistance of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. In this way there is formed "one flock which trusts its only shepherd." [36]

He is present in His Church as she governs the People of God, since her sacred power comes from Christ, and since Christ, The Shepherd of Shepherds, [37] is present in the pastors who exercise that power, according to His promise to the Apostles: "Behold I am with you all through the days that are coming, until the consummation of the world."

Moreover, in a manner still more sublime, Christ is present in His Church as she offers in His name the Sacrifice of the Mass, He is present in her as she administers the sacraments. We find deep consolation in recalling the accurate and eloquent words with which St. John Chrysostom, overcome with a sense of awe, described the presence of Christ in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass: "I wish to add something that is plainly awe-inspiring, but do not be astonished or upset. This

Sacrifice, no matter who offers it, be it Peter or Paul, is always the same as that which Christ gave His disciples and which priests now offer: The offering of today is in no way inferior to that which Christ offered, because it is not men who sanctify the offering of today; it is the same Christ who sanctified His own. For just as the words which God spoke are the very same as those which the priest now speaks, so too the oblation is the very same."[38]

No one is unaware that the sacraments are the actions of Christ, who administers them through men. Therefore, the sacraments are holy in themselves, and by the power of Christ they pour grace into the soul when they touch the body. The mind boggles at these different ways in which Christ is present; they confront the Church with a mystery ever to be pondered.

But there is yet another manner in which Christ is present in His Church, a manner which surpasses all the others; it is His presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is for this reason "a more consoling source of devotion, a more lovely object of contemplation, a more effective means of sanctification than all the other sacraments."[39]

The reason is clear; it contains Christ Himself and it is "a kind of perfection of the spiritual life; in a way, it is the goal of all the sacraments."[40]

This presence is called "real" -- by which it is not intended to exclude all 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, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present.[41] It would therefore be wrong to explain this presence by having recourse to the "spiritual" nature, as it is called, of the glorified Body of Christ, which is present everywhere, or by reducing it to a kind of symbolism, as if this most august Sacrament consisted of nothing else than an efficacious sign, "of the spiritual presence of Christ and of His intimate union with the faithful, members of His Mystical Body."[42]

It is true that much can be found in the Fathers and in the scholastics with regard to symbolism in the Eucharist, especially with reference to the unity of the Church. The Council of Trent, restating their doctrine, taught that the Savior bequeathed the blessed Eucharist to His Church "as a symbol . . . of that unity and charity with which He wished all Christians to be most intimately united among themselves," and hence "as a symbol of that One Body of which He is the Head."[43]

When Christian literature was still in its infancy, the unknown author of that work we know as the "Didache or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" wrote as follows on this subject: "In regard to the Eucharist, give thanks in this manner:... just as this bread was scattered and dispersed over the hills, but when harvested was made one, so may Your Church be gathered into Your kingdom from the ends of the earth."[44]

The same we read in St. Cyprian, writing in defense of the Church against schism: "Finally, the sacrifices of the Lord proclaim the unity of Christians, bound together by the bond of a firm and inviolable charity. For when the Lord, in speaking of bread which is produced by the compacting of many grains of wheat, refers to it as His Body, He is describing our people whose unity He has sustained, and when He refers to wine pressed from many grapes and berries, as His Blood, He is speaking of our flock, formed by the fusing of many united together." [45]

But before all of these, St. Paul had written to the Corinthians: the one bread makes us one body, though we are many in number the same bread is shared by all. [46]

While the eucharistic symbolism brings us to an understanding of the effect proper to this Sacrament, which is the unity of the mystical Body, it does not indicate or explain what it is that makes this Sacrament different from all others. The constant teaching which the Catholic Church passes on to her catechumens, the understanding of the Christian people, the doctrine defined by the Council of Trent, the very words used by Christ when He instituted the Most Holy Eucharist, compel us to acknowledge that "the Eucharist is that flesh of Our Savior Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins and whom the Father in His loving kindness raised again." [47] To these words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, we may add those which Theodore of Mopsueta, a faithful witness to the faith of the Church on this point, addressed to the faithful: "The Lord did not say: This is a symbol of My Body, and this a symbol of My Blood but: 'This is My Body and My Blood.' He teaches us not to look to the nature of those things which lie before us and are perceived by the senses, for by the prayer of thanksgiving and the words spoken over them, they have been changed into Flesh and Blood." [48]

The Council of Trent, basing itself on this faith of the Church, "openly and sincerely professes that within the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, after the Consecration of the bread and wine, Our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is really, truly and substantially contained under those outward appearances." In this way, the Savior in His humanity is present not only at the right hand of the Father according to the natural manner of existence, but also in the Sacrament of the Eucharist "by a mode of existence which we cannot express in words, but which, with a mind illumined by faith, we can conceive, and must most firmly believe, to be possible to God." [49]

To avoid misunderstanding this sacramental presence which surpasses the laws of nature and constitutes the greatest miracle of its kind [50] we must listen with docility to the voice of the teaching and praying Church. This voice, which constantly echoes the voice of Christ, assures us that the way Christ is made present in this Sacrament is none other than by the change of the whole substance of the bread into His Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into His Blood, and that this unique and truly wonderful change the Catholic Church rightly calls transubstantiation. [51] As a result of transubstantiation, the species of bread and

wine undoubtedly take on a new meaning and a new finality, for they no longer remain ordinary bread and ordinary wine, but become the sign of something sacred, the sign of a spiritual food. However, the reason they take on this new significance and this new finality is simply because they contain a new "reality" which we may justly term ontological. Not that there lies under those species what was already there before, but something quite different; and that not only because of the faith of the Church, but in objective reality, since after the change of the substance or nature of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, nothing remains of the bread and wine but the appearances, under which Christ, whole and entire, in His physical "reality" is bodily present, although not in the same way that bodies are present in a given place.

For this reason the Fathers took special care to warn the faithful that in reflecting on this most august Sacrament, they should not trust to their senses, which reach only the properties of bread and wine, but rather to the words of Christ which have power to transform, change and transmute the bread and wine into His Body and Blood. For, as those same Fathers often said, the power that accomplishes this is that same power by which God Almighty, at the beginning of time, created the world out of nothing.

"We have been instructed in these matters and filled with an unshakable faith," says St. Cyril of Alexandria, at the end of a sermon on the mysteries of the faith, "that that which seems to be bread, is not bread, though it tastes like it, but the Body of Christ, and that which seems to be wine, is not wine, though it too tastes as such, but the Blood of Christ . . . draw inner strength by receiving this bread as spiritual food and your soul will rejoice." [52]

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes this point, saying: "It is not the power of man which makes what is put before us the Body and Blood of Christ, but the power of Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest standing there in the place of Christ says these words but their power and grace are from God. 'This is My Body,' he says, and these words transform what lies before him." [53]

Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, is in full agreement with the Bishop of Constantinople when he writes in his commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew: "Christ said indicating (the bread and wine): 'This is My Body,' and 'This is My Blood,' in order that you might not judge what you see to be a mere figure. The offerings, by the hidden power of God Almighty, are changed into Christ's Body and Blood, and by receiving these we come to share in the life-giving and sanctifying efficacy of Christ." [54]

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, dealing with the Eucharistic change, says: "Let us be assured that this is not what nature formed, but what the blessing consecrated, and that greater efficacy resides in the blessing than in nature, for by the blessing nature is changed." To confirm the truth of this mystery, he recounts many of the miracles described in the Scriptures, including Christ's birth of the Virgin Mary, and

then turning to the work of creation, concludes thus: "Surely the word of Christ, which could make out of nothing that which did not exist, can change things already in existence into what they were not. For it is no less extraordinary to give things new natures than to change their natures." [55]

However, there is no need to assemble many testimonies. Rather let us recall that firmness of faith with which the Church with one accord opposed Berengarius, who, yielding to the difficulties of human reasoning, was the first who dared deny the Eucharistic change. More than once she threatened to condemn him unless he retracted. Thus it was that our predecessor, St. Gregory VII, ordered him to pronounce the following oath:

"I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine which are placed upon the altar are, by the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ Our Lord, and that after the Consecration, there is present the true Body of Christ which was born of the Virgin and, offered up for the salvation of the world, hung on the Cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father, and that there is present the true Blood of Christ which flowed from His side. They are present not only by means of a sign and of the efficacy of the Sacrament, but also in the very reality and truth of their nature and substance." [56]

These words fully accord with the doctrine of the mystery of the Eucharistic change as set forth by the ecumenical councils. The constant teaching of these councils -- of the Lateran, of Constance, Florence and Trent -- whether stating the teaching of the Church or condemning errors, affords us an admirable example of the unchangingness of the Catholic Faith.

After the Council of Trent, our predecessor, Pius VI on the occasion of the errors of the Synod of Pistoia, warned parish priests when carrying out their office of teaching, not to neglect to speak of transubstantiation, one of the articles of the faith. [57] Similarly our predecessor of happy memory, Pius XII, recalled the bounds which those who undertake to discuss the mystery of transubstantiation might not cross. [58] We ourself also, in fulfillment of our apostolic office, have openly borne solemn witness to the faith of the Church at the National Eucharistic Congress held recently at Pisa. [59]

Moreover the Catholic Church has held on to this faith in the presence in the Eucharist of the Body and Blood of Christ, not only in her teaching but also in her practice, since she has at all times given to this great Sacrament the worship which is known as Latria and which may be given to God alone. As St. Augustine says: "It was in His flesh that Christ walked among us and it is His flesh that He has given us to eat for our salvation. No one, however, eats of this flesh without having first adored it . . . and not only do we not sin in thus adoring it, but we would sin if we did not do so." [60]

The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers the cult of Latria to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving Consecrated Hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to solemn veneration, and carrying them processionaly to the joy of great crowds of the faithful.

In the ancient documents of the Church we have many testimonies of this veneration. The pastors of the church in fact, solicitously exhorted the faithful to take the greatest care in keeping the Eucharist which they took to their homes. "The Body of Christ is meant to be eaten, not to be treated with irreverence," St. Hippolytus warns the faithful.[61]

In fact the faithful thought themselves guilty, and rightly so, as Origen recalls, if after they received the Body of the Lord in order to preserve it with all care and reverence, a small fragment of it fell off through negligence.[62]

The same pastors severely reproved those who showed lack of reverence if it happened. This is attested to by Novitianus whose testimony in the matter is trustworthy. He judged as deserving condemnation any one who came out of Sunday service carrying with him as usual the Eucharist, the sacred Body of the Lord, "not going to his house but running to places of amusement."[63]

On the other hand St. Cyril of Alexandria rejects as folly the opinion of those who maintained that if a part of the Eucharist was left over for the following day it did not confer sanctification. "For," he says, "neither Christ is altered nor His Holy Body changed, but the force and power and vivifying grace always remain with it."[64]

Nor should we forget that in ancient times the faithful, harassed by the violence of persecution or living in solitude out of love for monastic life nourished themselves even daily, receiving Holy Communion by their own hands when the priest or deacon was absent.[65]

We say this not in order that there may be some change in the way of keeping the Eucharist and of receiving Holy Communion which was later on prescribed by Church laws and which now remain in force, but rather that we may rejoice over the faith of the Church which is always one and the same.

This faith also gave rise to the feast of Corpus Christi which was first celebrated in the diocese of Liege specially through the efforts of the servant of God, Blessed Juliana of Mount Cornelius, and which our predecessor Urban IV extended to the Universal Church. From it have originated many practices of Eucharistic piety which under the inspiration of divine grace have increased from day to day and with which the Catholic Church is striving ever more to do homage to Christ, to thank Him for so great a gift and to implore His mercy.

We therefore ask you, venerable brothers, among the people entrusted to your care and vigilance, to preserve this faith in its purity and integrity -- a faith which

seeks only to remain perfectly loyal to the word of Christ and of the Apostles and unambiguously rejects all erroneous and mischievous opinions. Tirelessly promote the cult of the Eucharist, the focus where all other forms of piety must ultimately emerge.

May the faithful, thanks to your efforts, come to realize and experience ever more perfectly the truth of these words: "He who desires life finds here a place to live in and the means to live by. Let him approach, let him believe, let him be incorporated so that he may receive life. Let him not refuse union with the members, let him not be a corrupt member, deserving to be cut off, nor a disfigured member to be ashamed of. Let him be a grateful, fitting and healthy member. Let him cleave to the body, let him live by God and for God. Let him now labor here on earth, that he may afterwards reign in heaven." [66]

It is to be desired that the faithful, every day and in great numbers, actively participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass, receive Holy Communion with a pure heart, and give thanks to Christ Our Lord for so great a gift. Let them remember these words: "The desire of Jesus Christ and of the Church that all the faithful receive daily Communion means above all that through the sacramental union with God they may obtain the strength necessary for mastering their passions, for purifying themselves of their daily venial faults and for avoiding the grave sins to which human frailty is exposed." [67]

In the course of the day the faithful should not omit to visit the Blessed Sacrament, which according to the liturgical laws must be kept in the churches with great reverence in a most honorable location. Such visits are a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, an acknowledgment of the Lord's presence.

No one can fail to understand that the Divine Eucharist bestows upon the Christian people an incomparable dignity. Not only while the sacrifice is offered and the sacrament is received, but as long as the Eucharist is kept in our churches and oratories, Christ is truly the Emmanuel, that is, "God with us." Day and night He is in our midst, He dwells with us, full of grace and truth. [68] He restores morality, nourishes virtues, consoles the afflicted, strengthens the weak. He proposes His own example to those who come to Him that all may learn to be, like Himself, meek and humble of heart and to seek not their own interests but those of God.

Anyone who approaches this august Sacrament with special devotion and endeavors to return generous love for Christ's own infinite love, will experience and fully understand -- not without spiritual joy and fruit -- how precious is the life hidden with Christ in God [69] and how great is the value of converse with Christ, for there is nothing more consoling on earth, nothing more efficacious for advancing along the road of holiness.

Further, you realize, venerable brothers, that the Eucharist is reserved in the churches and oratories as in the spiritual center of a religious community or of a

parish, yes, of the universal Church and of all of humanity, since beneath the appearance of the species, Christ is contained, the invisible Head of the Church, the Redeemer of the World, the Center of all hearts, "by whom all things are and by whom we exist." [70]

From this it follows that the worship paid to the Divine Eucharist strongly impels the soul to cultivate a "social" love, [71] by which the common good is given preference over the good of the individual. Let us consider as our own the interests of the community, of the parish, of the entire Church, extending our charity to the whole world, because we know that everywhere there are members of Christ.

The Eucharistic Sacrament, venerable brothers, is the sign and the cause of the unity of the Mystical Body, and it inspires an active "ecclesial" spirit in those who venerate it with greater fervor. Therefore, never cease to persuade those committed to your care that they should learn to make their own the cause of the Church, in approaching the eucharistic mystery to pray to God without interruption to offer themselves to God as a pleasing sacrifice for the peace and unity of the Church, so that all the children of the Church be united and think the same, that there be no divisions among them, but rather unity of mind and purpose, as the Apostle insists. [72] May all those not yet in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, who though separated from her glory in the name of Christian, share with us as soon as possible with the helm of divine grace that unity of faith and communion which Christ wanted to be the distinctive mark of His disciples.

This zeal in praying and consecrating one's self to God for the unity of the Church should be practiced particularly by religious, both men and women, inasmuch as they are in a special way devoted to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, according it homage and honor on earth, in virtue of their vows.

Nothing has ever been or is more important to the Church or more consoling than the desire for the unity of all Christians, a desire which we wish to express once again in the very words used by the Council of Trent at the close of its decree on the Most Blessed Eucharist: "In conclusion, the sacred synod with paternal love admonishes, exhorts, prays and implores 'through the merciful kindness of our God' [73] that each and every Christian come at last to a perfect agreement regarding this sign of unity, this bond of charity, this symbol of concord, and, mindful of such great dignity and such exquisite love of Christ Our Lord who gave His beloved soul as the price of our salvation and 'his flesh to eat' [74] believe and adore these sacred mysteries of His Body and Blood with such firm and unwavering faith, with such devotion, piety and veneration, that they can receive frequently that super-substantial bread, [75] which will be for them truly the life of the soul and un failing strength of mind, so that fortified by its vigor [76] they can depart from this wretched pilgrimage on earth to reach their heavenly home where they will then eat the same 'bread of angels' [77] no longer hidden by the species which now they eat under the sacred appearances." [78]

May the all-good Redeemer who shortly before His death prayed to the Father that all who were to believe in Him would be one even as He and the Father were one,[79] deign speedily to hear our most ardent prayer and that of the entire Church, that we may all with one voice and one faith, celebrate the Eucharistic Mystery and, by participating in the Body of Christ, become one body,[80] linked by those same bonds which He Himself desired for its perfection.

And we turn with paternal affection also to those who belong to the venerable Churches of the Orient, from which came so many most illustrious Fathers whose testimony to the belief of the Eucharist we have so gladly cited in our present letter. Our soul is filled with intense joy as we consider your faith in the Eucharist, which is also our faith, and as we listen to the liturgical prayers by which you celebrate so great a mystery we rejoice to behold your eucharistic devotion, and to read your theologians explaining or defending the doctrine of this most august Sacrament.

May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary from whom Christ Our Lord took the flesh which under the species of bread and wine "is contained, offered and consumed,"[81] may all the saints of God, specially those who burned with a more ardent devotion to the Divine Eucharist, intercede before the Father of mercies so that from this same faith in and devotion toward the Eucharist may result and flourish a perfect unity of communion among all Christians.

Unforgettable are the words of the holy martyr Ignatius, in his warning to the faithful of Philadelphia against the evils of division and schism, the remedy for which lies in the Eucharist: "Strive then," he said, "to make use of one form of thanksgiving for the flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ is one and one is the chalice in the union of His Blood, one altar, one bishop."[82]

Encouraged by the most consoling hope of the blessings which will accrue to the whole Church and the entire world from an increase in devotion to the Eucharist, with profound affection we impart to you, venerable brothers, to the priests, Religious and all those who collaborate with you and to all the faithful entrusted to your care, the apostolic benediction as a pledge of heavenly graces.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the third day of September, the Feast of Pope St. Pius X, in the year 1965, the third year of our pontificate.

Paul VI, Pope.

Footnotes

1. Constit. "De Sacra Liturgia," c. 2. n. 47 A.A.S. LVI, 1964 p. 113
2. John 6, 55
3. cf. John 17, 23
4. Encyclical *Mirae Caritatis*, Acta Leonis XIII, Vol. XXII. 1902-1903,p. 122
5. In Matth. Homil. 82. 4. Migne P.G. 58, 743.

6. Summ. Theol III Q. 75 A.L.C.
7. In. IV Sent. Dist. X. P. I Art. Un. Qu. I, Oper. Omn. Tom. IV Ad Claras Aquas 1889, p. 217.
8. John 6, 61-69.
9. St. Augustine, Contr. Julian VI. 5, 11, Migne. P.L. 44, 829.
10. De Civit. Dei X, 23 P.L. 41,300.
11. Constit. Dogm. "De Fide Cathol." c.4.
12. cf. Concil. Trid., "Doctrina De SS. Missae Sacrificio, c.l.
13. cf. Exodus 24,8.
14. Luke 22, 19-20, cf. Matt. 26, 26-28; Mark 14, 22-24.
15. Acts 2, 42.
16. Acts 4, 32.
17. I Cor. I 1 23ff.
18. I Cor. 10 16.
19. Malachias 1, 11.
20. Concil. Trid. Doctr. De SS. Missae Sacrif. c. 2.
21. Catecheses, 23 (Myst. 5), 8-18; p.g. 33, 1115-1118.
22. cf. Confess. IX, 12, 32; P.L. 32, 777; cf. Ibid. IX, 11,27; P.L. 32, 775.
23. cf. Serm 172, 2; P. L. 38, 936; cf. De Cura Gerenda Pro Mortuis, 13, P. L. 40. 593.
24. cf. St. Augustine, De Civit. Dei, X, 6; P. L. 41, 284.
25. cf. Litt. Encycl. Mediator Dei, A.A.S. XXXIX, 1947, p. 552.
26. cf. Const. Dogm. De Ecclesia, C. 2, N. 11; A.A.S. LVII, 1965, p. 15.
27. cf. Ibid. C.2, N.[10] A.A.S. LVII, 1965, p. 14.
28. Const. De Sacra Liturgia, C.I, N.27; A.A.S. LVI, 1964, p. 107.
29. cf. Pontifice Romanum.
30. cf. C.I, N.7; A.A.S. LVI, 1964, pp. 100-101.
31. St. Augustine, "In Ps." 85, 1; P.L. 37, 1081.
32. Matt. 18, 20.
33. cf. Matt. 25, 40.
34. cf. Eph. 3, 17.
35. cf. Rom. 5,5.
36. Idem."Contr. Litt Petiliani" III, 10, 11; P.L. 43, 353.
37. St. Augustine, "In Ps." 86, 3; P.L. 37, 1102.
38. "In Epist. 2 Ad Timoth. Homil." 2,4; P.G. 62, 612.
39. Aegidius Romanus, "Theoremata De Corpore Christi,"Theor. 50, Venetiis 1521, p. 127.
40. St. Thomas, Summ. Theol. III, Q. 73, A. 3 C.
41. cf. Conc. of Trent Decree on the Eucharist, Ch. 3.
42. Pius XII, Encycl. ilumani Generis, A.A.S. XLII, 1950, p. 578.
43. Decree "On the Eucharist," Proem, and Ch. 2.
44. "Didache," 9:1 Funk, "Patres Apostolici," 1,20.
45. "Ep. Ad Magnum," 6; P. L. 3, 1189.
46. I Cor. 10, 17.
47. St. Ignatius, "Ep. Ad Smyrn." 7,1, P. G. 5, 714.
48. "In Matth. Comm.," Ch. 26 P. G. 66, 714.

49. Decree "On the Eucharist," Ch. 1.
50. cf. Encycl. Mirae Caritatis, Acta Leonis XIII, Vol. XXII, 1902-1903, p. 123.
51. cf. Council of Trent, "Decree on the Eucharist," Ch. 4, and Can. 2.
52. "Catecheses," 22, 9, "Myst." 4, P.G. 33, 1103.
53. "De Prodit. Iudae. Homil." 1,6, P.G. 49, 380; cf. "In Matth." "Homil." 82,5; P.G. 58, 744.
54. "In Matth." 26,27, P.G. 72, 451.
55. "De Myster." 9, 50-52, P.L. 16, 422-424.
56. Mansi, "Coli. Ampliss. Concil." XX, 524D.
57. Const. "Auctorem Fidei," 28 August 1794.
58. Allocutio Habita Die 22 Septembris 1956, A.A.S. CLVIII, 1956, p 720.
59. A.A.S. LVII, 1965, pp. 588-592.
- 60 "In Ps." 98, 9; P.L. 37, 1264.
61. "Tradit. Apost." Ed Botte, "La Tradition Apostolique De St. Hippolyte," Munster 1963, p. 84.
62. "In Exod. Fragm." P.G. 12, 391.
63. "De Spectaculis" C.S.E.L. III, p. 8.
64. "Epist. Ad Calosyrium" P.G. 76, 1075.
65. cf. Basil. "Epist." 93, P.G. 32, 483-486.
66. St. Augustine, "In Ioann. Tract." 26, 13 P.L. 35, 1613.
67. Decr. S. Congr. Concil., 20 Dec. 1905, Approb. A. S. Pio X, A.A.S. XXXVIII, 1905, p. 401.
68. cf. John 1, 14.
69. cf. Col. 3. 3.
71. cf. St. Augustine. De Gen. Ad Litt. XI, 15, 20; P.L. 34, 437.
72. cf. I Cor. 1. 10.
73. Luke 1, 78.
74. John 6, 48 ss.
75. Matt. 6, 11.
76. cf. Kings 19, 8)
77. Ps. 77. 25.
78. Decr. De SS. Eucharistia, C. 8.
79. cf. John 17, 20-21.
80. cf. I Cor. 10, 17.
81. C.I.C., Can. 801.
82. Epist. Ad Philadeph., 4 P.G. 5, 700.