

Jesus Living In The World - Today

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Saint John the Evangelist lay dying in exile. A few faithful followers knelt nearby in prayer. Back over the years, his thoughts flew. The three years of the ministry in Galilee pass before his eyes. Once more, he hears the Master speak! Once more, he lays his head on the Master's breast at the Last Supper! Once more, he stands beneath the Cross during those heart-rending three hours of the Crucifixion!

The dying Saint raised his head for the last time. The wan face of the Beloved Disciple, aglow with memories. Tears of happiness and joy coursed down his cheeks. "O my little children," he cried. "Always remember this. God is Love!" It is a good thing to remember!

You stand beneath the stars and gaze up into the overwhelming glory and majesty of the universe. You consider the Eternal, Almighty, and Limitless Intelligence behind the functioning of this same universe. You consider your own insignificance, littleness and helplessness. You ask yourself haltingly how this Great God can be interested in you. There you stand. Facing the sorrows and unhappiness of life. Age relentlessly creeping on. Poverty always threatening. Sickness and suffering, never far distant. Death lying in wait. "Tested and tried, as it were, by fire." You are very close to despair. And then you remember! God is Love!

And the wonder of wonders, God loves you!

Why? It is hard to understand! But He, Himself, has said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

And the real "Story of Mankind" is the story of God seeking the love of man. And down through the ages, God drawing closer to His people.

Thus with the Chosen People of Old. He feeds them with manna in the desert. He causes water to gush forth from the very rock to quench their thirst. He dwells among them in the "Ark of the Tabernacle." And to remind them of that, over His "Mercy-seat" there stands a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. But even this does not suffice!

With all the reminders of His presence how frequently and how foully they fell! Under the very shadow of the clouded mountain. With the thunders crashing over their heads. With the lightning flashing its forked death. They fell into the vilest sins and idolatry. To save men He must come nearer. If the New Law was to be the perfection of the Old. If God was to be true to His word, He must come closer still to His people. And so the cloud vanished. The pillar of fire disappeared. The Ark of the Tabernacle was destroyed. And "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." "And we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only Begotten of the Father."

And how remain thus, ever visible with men? A merely historical Christ would be as far away from men as the God of the Deluge, or Sinai. And can we boast that we are of any stronger fiber than

they? How, then, could He substitute a book for His presence? A book is no substitute for any being. And when this Being is God Himself, the very thought is folly.

Nearer to men He must be. Remaining with them. Dwelling among them forever. His presence a lasting memorial of His love. Veiled in such shadows that while they could have perfect faith, they be not overwhelmed with His infinite eternal glory. And how could He do this? Is such a thing possible?

Only in one way – the only possible way consistent with the dignity of the Most-High – the way His Divine ingenuity discovered for the most stupendous mystery He has wrought.

At the present time, knowing how God carried out His divine plans, it can be seen, in reading Holy Scripture, how Christ's entire ministry was directed to this very end. It can be seen how He gently directed the minds of His followers towards its fulfillment. It can be seen how He prepared their intellects to receive it. From the miracle of Cana, through the miracle of the loaves and fishes, to that day on which His body was delivered, and His blood shed on the Cross. Scripture speaks plainly!

There is no other teaching of Christ, which has as much strength of Scriptural authority.

THE FIRST REVELATION.

But the first explicit revealing came, so it seems, immediately after His miracle of feeding the hungry multitude. It was the second year of His ministry. He was preaching at a place near the coast of the Sea of Galilee. On this occasion, He had miraculously multiplied five loaves and two fishes to such an extent as to supply the wants of five thousand men besides the women and children. And after they had their fill, twelve baskets were filled with the fragments that remained. (Read the full story in John chapter 6.)

The following day the multitude had followed Him to the other side of the sea.

Jesus rebuked them, "You seek Me, not because you have seen miracles but because you did eat the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perishes but for that which endures unto life everlasting..."

They said therefore unto Him, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?"

Jesus answered them and said, "This is the work of God that you believe in Him Whom He has sent."

They said therefore to Him: "What sign do You show that we may see, and may believe You? What do You work?"

"Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'."

Then Jesus said to them: "Amen, amen, I say to you: Moses gave you not bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven."

"For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said therefore unto Him: "Lord, give us always this bread."

Jesus said to them: "I am the bread of life... I am the living bread which came down from heaven."

Immediately there is a murmur of hostility. Was He not the Son of Mary and yet He says, "I came down from heaven." But Jesus meets their murmuring with words more explicit, "I am the bread of life... I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man shall eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world."

The murmuring of the throng increases in resentful vehemence, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

There is no compromise. There never is with God! In the face of their hostility and angry mutterings, not only does He not recede, but with flashing eyes He flings into their faces:

"Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you."

"He that eats My flesh, and drinks My blood has everlasting life; and I will raise him up on the last day."

Even His disciples are shocked now. They stand appalled. Their faces blanched. Their minds dazed. How can these impossible things be? Here is Jesus standing before them and telling them in the most positive unmistakable way, that they must eat His body and drink His blood if they are to have everlasting life. The murmuring of His enemies has made Him uncompromisingly definite.

There is no way of escape! It is a moment of trial. They are being tried.

They must accept His word! Or reject it!

Then came the unforgettable scene. Many of His disciples hearing these words cried out: "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?"

What thoughts must have torn at the heart of the Evangelist as he wrote the next few lines. How he must have bent his head in prayer and gratitude for the grace God had given to him that day. What words of love and thankfulness for his faith in Christ as he sorrowfully penned the words:

"After this many of His disciples went back; and walked no more with Him."

It was a hard saying! It was then! It is now!

And none knew it better than Christ Himself.

But He let them go. They turned their backs on Him and walked away. They have rightly understood His words. They will not believe.

The sin against the light! The unforgivable sin!

Again and again down through the ages has this scene been repeated. "The saying is hard and who can hear it."

But it is the word of Christ.

And not only did He let these disciples go, but He was ready to sacrifice even His Apostles for this sacrament of love.

Turning to them, He sternly demands, "Will you also go away?"

Simon Peter answered. Simon, then only Simon Bar-Jona. Simon knew no more than those who were rejecting Christ, how such a thing could be. But Simon knew Christ was God, and with God, all things are possible. He bends his intellect and will in utter submission to the Christ he knows and

loves. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have known that You are the Christ the Son of God."

THE FULFILLMENT.

A year passes. More and more the plan of God is revealed.

The feast of the Passover comes around again. In the supper room, Jesus and the Apostles have kept the paschal rite. And now a sudden silence comes upon the assembled group.

Jesus takes the white unleavened bread in His hands. He speaks! What does He say? "This is My body." Then He takes the chalice of wine. Again He speaks: "This is My blood."

In a flash, they are back at that sorrowful scene of a year ago. It returns to them with tremendous vividness. They realize that at this moment they see the fulfillment of His words spoken then. Those words, which seemed so utterly impossible. But now, with His own hands, He is giving Himself to His own.

"This is My body, which shall be delivered for you. Take you all, and eat."

"This is My blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins."

The first Mass is said. The first consecration has been made. The Sacrament is instituted.

Before the eyes of Christ, the future stood revealed. He sees the unborn ages living and dying in this world of time. Living their lives of temptation and trial. He sees them falling, rising, and failing again.

In His ears are ringing their cries of suffering, pain, and remorse. Lifting their hands in anguish to Him as they plead, "Lord, save us or we perish."

THE REAL PRESENCE.

And thus comes that moment of Supreme command! The Sacrament is to be perpetuated. Down through the ages to the weak, to the famished, to the faltering, He is to come. To be their food, to strengthen them with His own strength. To abide in them.

"Come to Me," He had said, "all ye that labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you." "For My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed." "Whosoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him."... "He that eats Me, the same also shall live by Me."

But how was this to be done?

In significant solemnity, He says to those who sit at the table with Him — "Do this for a commemoration of Me."

Unfortunately, the word "commemoration" according to the present parlance does not convey the real significance of Christ's command. The original meaning in the Aramaic tongue, which Christ spoke, and the Greek tongue in which the Gospels were first written, is to "re-present" Him. That is, to make Him present, again and again. "Until He come," in person, at the end of time.

This sacrifice and Sacrament is to be continued by His Church until time shall be no more. As long as a single famished soul should turn to Him, He should be there to refresh, to strengthen, and to save.

Throughout the world, through all days, He is to give Himself to His own.

When the Apostles and their successors should speak, He would speak. When they gave, He would give. Giving nothing less than Himself, His body and blood.

When they should take bread and wine in their hands, and saying over it His words, Christ would speak through their lips, would work through their hands. And the substance of the bread would be changed to the substance of the glorified body and blood of Christ.

Thus the Apostles understood. Thus they taught. Thus they practiced.

THE EVIDENCE OF HISTORY.

So much so, Saint Paul could write to the Corinthians expressing clearly the belief in the real presence. "The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?... For, I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, and said: Take and eat: this is My body which shall be delivered for you. This do for a commemoration of Me. In like manner also the chalice, after the supper, saying: This cup is the New Covenant in My blood. This do ye, as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye shall show the death of the Lord until He come. Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread and drink of the chalice. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord."

And so it has been down through the centuries. One author alone enumerates the names of sixty-three eminent writers living between the first and sixth centuries proclaiming this teaching. Some by explanation. Some by exhortation. Others by giving thanks to God for it. Thus in the first century, Saint Ignatius, a disciple of Saint Peter, says, "The Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ."

In the second century, Saint Justin, Martyr, "We do not receive these things as common bread and drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior was made by the Word of God, even so we have been taught that the Eucharist is both the flesh and blood of the same incarnate Jesus."

Origen, in the third century, writes, "Christ... will give to you that bread of benediction, His own body, and will vouchsafe to you His own blood."

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, in the fourth century, writes, "He Himself having declared, "This is My body," who shall dare to doubt henceforward? And He having said, "This is My blood," who shall ever doubt saying "This is not His blood?" He once, at Cana, turned water into wine, which is akin to blood, and is He undeserving of belief when He turned wine into blood?"

Saint Augustine, in the fifth century. "The bread which you see on the altar, after being sanctified by the Word of God, is the body of Christ. The chalice after being sanctified by the Word of God, is the blood of Christ."

Surely that this was Christ's teaching there can be no dispute. From the day of Christ, for sixteen hundred years, the world never heard any one even question it. For sixteen hundred years every man, woman, and child who believed in Christ, believed identically and precisely in every detail as the Catholic Church believes and teaches today!

But is it to be wondered at?

Study the words! No words could be more simple and intelligible. No words could be more plain and obvious. Depart from the Catholic teaching and there is no reasonable meaning.

THE TRUE MEANING.

But someone may ask, "Could they not be figurative words? Or, at least, understood in a figurative sense?"

Absolutely not! For what about Christ and those disciples who cried out, "The saying is hard, and who can hear it?"

Christ let them go. They had accepted His words in their unmistakable meaning. They had understood Him rightly. They would not believe. And Christ let them go. If Christ was simply speaking figuratively, why did He not call them back? Explain to them that they were simply to eat bread? That would not have been a hard saying. They would gladly have accepted that. Had Christ not meant what He said, and let them go away, He would have been inhuman, despicable, utterly unjust.

Whenever there was a danger of misunderstanding His words, Christ always took the greatest care to make them clear. Thus when He spoke to Nicodemus explaining Baptism. Or, again, when He spoke to His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees. But here, there was no explanation because they understood His words in the plain and obvious sense in which He spoke them.

As a matter of fact, to do away with the identity of the Sacrament with His real body and blood, is to do away with the Atonement. Did not Christ say, "This is My body which shall be delivered for you"? If Christ spoke figuratively, then it was a figurative body that hung on the Cross on Good Friday.

Did He not say, "This is My blood, which shall be shed for you"? If the blood in the chalice at the Last Supper was figurative, then it was only figurative blood that was shed on the Cross.

Take away from the words of Christ their undeniable meaning, make them signify anything else, and the result is chaos. Words cease to have any meaning. All Scripture is nullified. God's revelation becomes an insanity.

It is a hard saying to those who know not God.

But to those who know God, who love Him, and who serve Him, it is not hard. Rather it is, the more you realize God's infinite love and your own weakness, exactly what you would expect God to do.

(Thanks to the Paulist Fathers.)
