The Mystery of Faith

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I. Reforming the Reforms

Pope Benedict XVI is expected to introduce liturgical reforms in the Church. Judging from his writings during his time as Prefect of the Congregation of the Faith about post-Vatican II abuses in the Mass, it is highly likely that certain of the so-called reforms following Vatican II will themselves be reformed. Should the reforming of the reforms come about, it is probable that such changes will be gradual. The Holy Father has criticized reforms that "turn on a dime." When they come they should evolve organically, growing naturally out of the tradition of the Church, preserving and extending its riches. Bureaucratically concocted and imposed novelties do not fit the faith. Rushing the Church into the modern age by ecclesial *deus ex machina* has, perhaps, had its day. Liturgical change, like doctrinal development, should evolve from what went before. The natural growth of the liturgy should be likened to the epigenesis of a living organism—where each organ is formed building upon the prior formations and bringing the animal to its perfect completion. The healthy formation wards off any adventitious threats to its natural development.

In his book, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict XVI argues among other reforms for the orientation of the liturgy toward the east. This idea, called the Mass *ad orientem*, maintains that during the celebration the altar, the priest and the

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people should all be facing the Holy City and the east from whence the Lord will return. He points out how this is of ancient origin and grounded in the Scriptures. We read in Matthew 24, "the Son of Man will be like lightning striking in the east and flashing far into the west." Not only does the Mass *ad orientem* symbolize our looking to the Parousia, or second coming of Christ, it also pertains to the first coming, the Incarnation. Recall the *Benedictus* prophecy of Zechariah: "by the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1). The Sun, of course, is the Christ. The *ad orientem*, therefore, is a sign from beginning to end of the Word becoming flesh to redeem mankind, the central event of all history. The symbolism of the Mass *ad orientem* and the weight of its tradition most certainly indicate that this would be an organic reformation of the first order.

I, for my part, would, however, suggest what is even more organic and intrinsic to the Mass itself. I have in mind the return of the *mysterium fidei* to its traditional place joined to the words of consecration. This is a far less complicated reform, yet of deeper theological and liturgical significance. The traditional *mysterium fidei* is not so much an organic accompaniment of the Mass but the very expression of its meaning. In the present *Novus Ordo*, the mystery of faith has been shifted to a much more general proclamation in which the traditional sense may still be present yet is so diluted as to lose its focus. Our attention is no longer on the essence of the liturgy.

In the following I would like to discuss this traditional sense not so much as an issue for reform but to consider why it has been called *the* mystery of faith in the tradition of the Church.

II. The Mystery of Faith

In the present Mass, a proclamation of the mystery of the faith follows the consecrations of the bread and wine, and it consists of the formula for the whole salvific belief: "Christ

has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again," or "Lord, by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free, you are the Savior of the world," etc. . . . Each of the four formulas expresses, more or less explicitly, the whole mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, His Passion, Death and Resurrection, as well as His "return in glory"—the *Parousia*, the second coming.

In the traditional Mass, the mystery of faith occurs with the consecration of the wine: "*Hic est enim Calix Sanguinis Mei, novi et aeterni testamenti: Mysterium Fidei: qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum.*" ("For this is the chalice of my blood, of the new and everlasting covenant: the Mystery of Faith, which will be shed for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven.") Notice that here the "mysterium fidei" is placed in apposition to the words of transubstantiation in which the bread and wine are converted into the substance of the glorified Christ. Thus, the mystery of faith is immediately said of that which is commonly spoken of as the "real presence"—with the understanding that, where the substance of bread and wine were, there now is the substance of Christ, present in his body, blood, soul, and divinity. The mystery, in short, is the mystery of the Eucharist.

But why would tradition reserve the *mysterium fidei* for the Eucharist? Surely the mystery of the Trinity is much more exalted and is farthest from our natural knowledge. "No one knows the Father but the Son and those to whom the Son reveals Him." And again at Caesarea Philippi when Peter was asked by our Lord, "Who do you say I am?," Simon responded: "You are the Son of the Living God." To which the Lord replied, "Blessed are you Peter for flesh and blood [a metaphor for natural knowledge] have not taught you that but the Father in heaven." Peter was acknowledging in his words, not only that God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but that Christ was the God-man; this is the mystery of the Incarnation. God alone *naturally* knows the Trinity and the Incarnation; such knowledge altogether transcends

the powers of creatures, human or angelic. So why speak of the miracle of the transubstantiation, which falls within the order of creation, as *the* mystery?

One might respond that in assenting to the "real presence" in the Eucharist we assent to the whole salvific mystery, as well as the "real presence." That is, if our "Amen" at Communion when the priest says *Corpus Christi* (the Body of Christ) is to affirm the "real presence," then we are in effect affirming that the glorified substance of Christ is present in the host, which implicitly entails the belief that God is a Trinity, that the Son has become incarnate, that He has died, that He has risen, that He has ascended to His present glory, and that He will come again out of the east in glory. This is in effect to say that the Eucharist comprehends the whole mystery of Salvation—and perhaps for this reason the Eucharist ought to be regarded as *the* mystery of the faith.

III. "Thinking With Assent"

The reason, however, lies elsewhere. St. Augustine describes the faith of Christians as "thinking with assent." "Assent" distinguishes faith from opinion. To assent to a proposition is to hold its truth unshakably, that is, with firmness and certitude. In opinion we are always uneasy about the contradictory. In adding "thinking" to the account, St. Augustine distinguishes the certitude of faith from that of strict demonstration. When a conclusion is demonstrated rigorously, the mind no longer searches, but it rests in seeing that the demonstrated truths cannot be otherwise. In faith, however, though a truth is held unshakably, the reasons for it are, nonetheless, inconclusive. In this respect faith is like opinion: reason goes on "thinking." The mysteries of faith are still hidden; they are "seen" only "in a glass darkly."

The unique Mystery of the Eucharist is not so much in the truths contained therein, the things assented to, but in the "thinking." Some of the articles of faith found in the Creed

may in fact be known to be true by reason. For example, the assertion "I believe in God" can be known, as St. Paul says in Romans, from the visible things around us. Though we may at one time hold this article by an act of faith, we can bring our "thinking" to rest when we see that God must exist as the first and necessary cause of the sensible effects of the world around us. When we come to "see" such truths they are no longer held by faith—for faith is the substance of "things hoped for but unseen," as St. Paul says. These provable articles are called the preambles to the central mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the like. These latter, called the mysteries, cannot in this life be attained to by reason, and therefore "thinking" goes on along with assent. With some of these mysteries, "thinking" can be brought to rest in particular cases. For most of us the Resurrection will remain a mystery; but Doubting Thomas and the other apostles were privileged to confirm this article of faith with their senses. Thomas even touched the sacred wounds of the risen Christ. Again, the Ascension, for me, must remain a pure article of faith, but some of the disciples witnessed Christ's departure from this earth. But for all of us the Trinity and the Incarnation are beyond "flesh and blood." Still, when St. Peter could say in faith that Jesus was "the Christ the Son of the living God" there was much in his exclamation that he naturally knew beyond a doubt. He knew, for example, that a true man stood before him. He knew that there was a living God (or at least he might have known, with more learning, that God cannot *not* exist). But what he did not know, except that it be revealed to him from the Father, was that the man before him was not a human person, but a divine person: the Word, the Son of God made flesh. The truths of the Trinity and the Incarnation, though they are beyond natural reason, are nonetheless not in conflict with natural reason. (And, in fact, a trace of the Trinity is to be found even in man's own thinking and willing.) We may assent to these greatest mysteries without violence to our understanding, yet we cannot

prove them and will remain "thinking" about them until the Beatific Vision.

But the Eucharist, unlike the other mysteries, conflicts with our understanding of the visible things around us. When our Lord said, in view of the sacrament of bread and wine to be instituted at the Last Supper, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed," even some of His disciples were troubled: "This saying is hard, and who can bear it?" And, of course, later on heresies arose that claimed the body and blood of Christ were not really present in the sacrament but by way of sign only, and they supported this claim with the Lord's words, "That the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Such a view, of course, is widespread to this day. Man does not turn from the idea of the Trinity or the Incarnation as readily as he does from the idea of the "real presence." "Thinking" on the "real presence" makes "assent" to this truth even more difficult than assenting to the Trinity of Divine Persons, or the Word becoming flesh. Because of our everyday familiarity with bread and wine, the truth of the Eucharist challenges our judgment in the extreme.

IV. "A Hard Saying"

St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* gives several reasons why this is "a hard saying," and thus why even "thinking" on it is difficult in the extreme. Among the reasons he mentions are certain difficulties we all might sense. How, for example, is the body of Christ at once in heaven and on earth? How can the whole substance of Christ be one and yet fragmented when the host is divided? How can the larger body of Christ be present in a host that is far smaller than His true body? How can the one body exist in many places, as happens, it seems, when Masses are celebrated around the world? If it is the living Christ Who is truly present, how could it be that we might be nourished by the bread and made drunk by the wine, yet neither of these changes "agrees

with" the body of Christ, which can suffer no longer? Let me pick out one obvious difficulty. Clearly in this sacrament we sense, even after the consecration, all the accidents (appearances) of bread and wine: color, taste, odor, figure, quantity, and weight; and concerning these our senses do not fail. The appearances, however, cannot have the flesh and blood of Christ as their subject, nor could they inhere in the air. Rather, the proper accidents of each sensible substance belong to it alone and cannot inhere in another substance. The wetness of water, for example, cannot belong to fire, nor can the luminosity of fire belong to water or earth, etc. . . . How then can the appearances of bread and wine have the substance of Christ for their subject? In effect, the "real presence" in the Eucharist defies our senses and appears downright absurd to nonbelievers. But the Church, following the Lord's words, teaches: where bread and wine were, there now is the body and blood of the glorified Christ.

St. Thomas in his hymn *Adoro Te Devote* writes: "Visus, tactus, gustus, in te fallitur, / Sed auditu solo tuto creditor: / Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius, Nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius." (Roughly paraphrased: All the senses fail to show the reality of the Eucharist. My only evidence is through hearing the word of the Son of God, Who is Truth itself.) In the "Pange Lingua" ("Tantum ergo Sacramentum") from the office that St. Thomas composed for the feast of Corpus Christi, he writes, "Faith for all defects supplying, where the feeble senses fail."

Yet what further does this belief entail? Surely the spherical shape of a baseball cannot exist if the baseball is taken away. Can the appearance of bread and wine remain when the substances of bread and wine cease to be and to subsist under them? It is clear that they cannot inhere in the substance of Christ either, which now exists where true bread and wine once were. What, therefore, does the Church teach on this matter? The truth, according to the Church, is that the accidents of bread and wine exist by themselves. They no longer

have a subject that *has* them. How much this seems like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland!* "All right said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, *which remained some time after the rest of it had gone away.*" [My emphasis].

Are we left with an absurdity of this sort with the doctrine of the Eucharist? Are we to be forced into the heresy of fideism regarding this article of faith? Fideism is the heresy that faith might be assented to even in contradiction to right reason. Is the act of faith on this point not like assenting to square circles or mountains without valleys?

V. Reason and Revelation

Does orthodoxy on the Eucharist condemn us to the heresy of fideism? (Damned if we do and damned if we don't?) Who will deliver us from the horns of this dilemma? Aristotle saves the day. Theology, calling upon sound reasoning, turns to this perennial master.

I must interject a thought or two at this point about philosophy and the faith. On the one hand, I have no intention of attaining full clarity in this area; nothing short of a sound classical liberal education can quite prepare one to use the liberal arts and sciences and philosophy in their roles as handmaidens to the queen, theology. On the other hand, faith presupposes reason and builds upon natural wisdom. Men are raised to the supernatural from the natural and, consequently, there is no authentic theologizing without the truths of natural reason. Genuine philosophy consists principally in making explicit what is implicit in the common and universal experience of man. True philosophy is not creative; it finds the order in nature; it doesn't invent and impose orders and systems on reality. Who has unfolded the ordinary experience of mankind with the greatest fidelity? Surely, Aristotle. St. Thomas saw this and called him simply, "the Philosopher." Cardinal Newman referred to him as the oracle of nature, who

explicates our fundamental understanding for us long before we are born. The business of passing from what we all know implicitly to an explicit account is delicate and difficult—and this is the reason why history has known so many wild and diverse "philosophies." In turning to Aristotle, the Church is turning to the human mind itself in its genius. This genius does not consist in inventions or creations but in seeing into what things are.

VI. Substance and Accidents

The relevant distinction that Aristotle helps us with is the distinction between the substance of sensible things and their accidents. I know myself to be a being of body and soul and to remain that selfsame being as long as I exist. But I also know that I can change my size, shape, color, posture, place and so forth. . . . without ceasing to be the same man. I am aware, therefore, that this substance of mine that is the subject to my accidents (shape, color, posture, and the like) is one manner of being, and my accidents are another. The accidents, as it were, are modifications found in my substance—just as the grin on the face of the Cheshire Cat requires the cat itself for its subject. It is not the nature of an accident to exist by itself. Substance, which exists through itself, on the contrary, can be thought to exist without accidents, especially in God Who is simply substance. I don't mean to be exhaustive here, but only to make the point that the substance of a being is one thing and its accidents another. So, returning to the Eucharist, we will say that the accidents (appearances) are those of bread and wine, not inhering in any substance, and that the substance of Christ's body and blood is present, not as the subject of the accidents of bread and wine but where their own proper substances had been—the substances of bread and wine no longer present but now converted by the power of God into the substance of the body and blood of Christ.

In this brief outline of "thinking" on the Eucharist, I want

to make two further points. The first is that the matter of a substance like man (who is composed of matter and form—in man's case, body and soul) is responsible for the possibility of there being many men of the same human nature. We define all men by a common definition, but they exist as distinct individuals. Angels, by contrast, have no matter (i.e. they are incorporeal), and therefore each kind cannot be multiplied. There can only be one St. Michael, one instance of the nature Michaelness. Matter, by contrast, can be multiplied because its first and fundamental accident is quantity, and quantity, say a line, is composed of parts outside of parts, not differing in kind but only in sheer otherness—this one is not that one. Hence, it is matter insofar as it is the principle and root of quantity that is the source of individuation in creatures.

The second point: among the accidents that befall material beings, quantity is the first and most fundamental—the most immediate to matter and in virtue of which a body has its dimension and is, thereby, a body. The other accidents, such as the quality color, presuppose surface, which is the limit of dimension. The quality heat that is found in fire obviously needs a body as its subject, and in turn this body, fire, can act through its heat to warm other bodies. So actions and passions, and in fact, all the other corporeal accidents, presuppose quantity as their ultimate subject in the order of accidents. Even the ability to be in a place requires that the being have quantity so as to be able to be contained by other bodies.

With these points in mind, let us think of the conversion of the substances of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. When bread and wine become the sacred flesh and blood, no part of creation is, in fact, annihilated. The entirety of the matter and form of bread and wine ceases to be the substance of bread and wine by this miraculous conversion into the whole substance of Christ, but the quantities of bread and wine do not cease to exist. The quantity exists in the appearances but does not inhere in the substances of bread and wine that first gave existence to that quantity. The quantity

now subsists by itself. That is, it exists through itself without a subject, sustained now only by the infinite power of God. He Who can create bread and wine ex nihilo can preserve the accidents of bread and wine, even when their substance ceases to be. And, furthermore, these accidents are real, sustained directly by God. They can themselves effect changes in the bodies of those who receive this sacrament of the Eucharist. The accidents of bread can nourish the flesh, and the wine can even intoxicate, taken in sufficient quantity.

If we consider, now, that a being is individuated through this quantity and that the quantity found in the Eucharist pertains only to the appearances of bread and wine and not to the substance of Christ's body and blood, we can see how it is that Christ can be present in a host that is far smaller than Christ's own body, that His body can exist simultaneously in many places, that the bread can be fractured into many parts—all this without dividing or affecting in any way the body and blood of Christ. He is still this undivided man in virtue of His own proper quantity which is manifest in heaven, retaining His own individual being in all of its glory. Yet His substance is present whole and entire in each part of the consecrated bread and wine—just as our souls are present whole and entire in each and every part of our bodies. If I should divide a lump of clay into many parts, or even divide an earthworm into two, I would have a multitude of individual and distinct substances, because the quantity of clay and earthworms inheres in the several substances of clay and earthworms. But the quantity of bread and wine in the Eucharist miraculously does not inhere in any subject at all, and, consequently, it can be divided into many while the whole of Christ's body and blood remains one in reality in every fragment.

VII. The New Covenant

What is the significance of all this for the faith? When our Lord at the Last Supper said "This is my blood of the new

and everlasting covenant," at that time all of the Old Testament gave way to the new covenant "Novo cedat ritui" ("Let the old laws yield to the new rite," says St. Thomas in the "Pange Lingua"). The sin offerings, the peace offerings, and the holocaust of the Old Law were fulfilled and superseded by the New Law, that is, by the sacrifice of the cross. The people of God, the chosen people, now become the mystical body of Christ. They are no longer merely a body of believers, followers of the living God, but now they become one body by becoming organic members of the living body whose head is Christ. How so, this new unity? The grace in the soul of Christ (for as true man He, too, needed sanctifying grace in His [human] soul to lead a supernatural life) was in such rich fullness (as full as full can be in any creature) that it can now overflow into the souls of all those who believe and are baptized. In the words of the Scriptures, "We saw him full of grace and truth," and again, "Of his fullness we have all received." The grace we now receive through the sacraments of the Church is the grace that is first in the soul of Christ.

When Adam and Eve were in the state of innocence, they enjoyed not only the preternatural graces that endowed them with all earthly perfection but also sanctifying grace, by which they lived a supernatural life. This grace, however, was given directly by God (called the *gratia Dei*). But now, through the Incarnation, Passion and Death of our Lord, all grace flows through the humanity of Christ—so that now we might sing "one bread, one body" with the true understanding that the multitude receiving the bread is one in receiving the one body of Christ, whole and entire in each and every fragment of bread. The blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ on the cross is a symbol of all the sacraments. The blood is a sign of the Eucharist and the water a sign of Baptism—the two fundamental sacraments (in a sense containing the whole spiritual life). Our grace now is the *gratia Christi*, because it immediately derives from Christ and partakes of His

own sanctity. "I preach Christ only," wrote St. Paul, "and Him crucified."

VIII. The "Real Presence" and the "Presence of God"

The immediate effect of the "real presence" in the Eucharist pertains to its nature as a sacrifice. Here in the Mass the true and selfsame sacrifice of the cross is present in an unbloody manner. Christ in His body, blood, soul and divinity is offered to God as a pleasing sacrifice by Christ the priest, the Son of man, through His ministers on earth for man's salvation. In turn, God gives man the nourishment of spiritual life in the sacrament of the Eucharist now in the form of the "real presence" under the appearances of bread and wine. All the sacraments, as we have said, flow from the side of Christ crucified, but the Eucharist alone applies the grace of Christ to the faithful from the body, blood, soul and divinity directly —that is, without the mediation of water or chrisms and the like. To be sure, the appearances of bread and wine are truly sensible signs (as is common to all the sacraments) and, moreover, they are realities; yet here alone in the Eucharist the sensible signs are without their own proper substances, such that the substance of the crucified Christ is immediately present to the communicant. In this way the Eucharist is the sacrament of sacraments, the Most Blessed Sacrament.

The Church speaks of "the presence of God" as distinct from the real presence found in the Holy Eucharist. There are surely two senses in which God is present to us apart from the Eucharistic presence. St. Thomas speaks of sanctifying grace as a partaking of the Divine Life—the active life of God in the soul. Through having grace, we share in God's own life, even here on earth if we have the virtues of faith, hope and charity. Through these virtues, we know and love as God knows and loves, albeit most incompletely now (as "through a glass darkly") in the hope of the Beatific Vision to come. With

faith, hope, and charity in our souls, we enjoy "the presence of God" by sharing in His own life. This "presence," however, is never so perfect in this life as it is when we are actually contemplating the truths of faith and actually loving God and neighbor with our whole mind and heart and soul. This is "the presence of God" of which the saints speak, especially as a continuous awareness of God and His omnipotence.

"The presence of God" of which we now speak is derived from all of the sacraments—each sacrament applying grace for its distinct purpose, as, for example, rebirth in Baptism, confirming in the truth, ordaining to the priestly office, and the like. So too "the presence of God" derives immediately from the "real presence" of Christ received into our own bodies under the appearances of bread and wine. When the appearances of bread and wine have dissolved in our own digestive tracts, Christ is no longer present in His body, blood, soul and divinity—for what was bread and wine in their accidents has changed to some other nature, just as the food we ingest is quickly broken down into a pabulum or the like, when it is no longer food and drink. Only as long as the accidents of bread and wine are present is the substance of Christ present where their substances would otherwise be.

Yet the grace flowing from the body and soul of Christ fills our souls ever more with faith, hope, and charity, so that now we have the divine life—and hence, the "divine presence" nourished and renewed.

IX. The Deeper Mystery

The likeness of the Eucharist to the grin left behind by the Cheshire Cat is certainly mysterious enough. Still a greater challenge awaits the mind. Before we assent in faith to the "real presence" of the substance of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, we must first assent to the conversion of the substances of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood, effected by the power of God at the

priest's words of consecration. To all appearances no change has occurred. The bread and wine appear intact. Yet the faith tells us that a transubstantiation has taken place—a mystery more profound than that of the subsisting appearances.

To the senses, nothing has happened when the priest has said the words of consecration. The accidents of bread and wine remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the most extraordinary event has occurred. Nowhere in this sensible world has anything like it come to pass! In the changes we are familiar with, we always find a subject that changes in some respect. A man becomes wise, say, but as a man he in no way changes as a human being. And even when he dies his matter is the subject that comes to have a new substantial form, by which it is now a new sort of being, (a corpse apparently in the process of returning to dust). But never does it happen that a change of substance takes place while all of the accidents remain unchanged. A dead man may look like a live man at rest, but, in fact, no substantial change will occur without detectable accidental changes taking place. A healthy man would never die unless alterations took place in him through illness or trauma or the like. In transubstantiation, however, no accidental change occurs at all. The conversions of the substances of bread and wine into the substance of Christ have no subject, no third term that remains unchanged, except for the accidents whose nature it is not to be subjects. Their very nature is to inhere in some subject.

Furthermore, the conversion of the substances of bread and wine into the substance of Christ is whole and instantaneous. It is whole in the sense that the whole composite substance of bread, its matter and form, converts entirely into Christ's substance. It does not happen in the way that the food we eat becomes our substance. In that case, the matter of our nutrients becomes part of our physical substance. It ceases to have the substantial form of food; the matter now exists through our substantial forms. In transubstantiation, however, the matter of bread and wine is not added to Christ's substance; but

insofar as it is of the essence of the substance of bread or wine, it converts to Christ's body and blood. Moreover, unlike the assimilation of food which takes place gradually, transubstantiation takes place instantaneously, just as the water at Cana became wine in an instant.

How does this happen? At this point, "thinking" is at wit's end. Theories have been advanced, but the shroud of mystery is here—perhaps the greatest of all in the faith. Only the blessed in heaven will comprehend. Since transubstantiation is true, however, we know that no genuine rational argument can be made against it. This deep truth is suprarational, not irrational. The Divine Artist works in the Eucharist the most unique and sublime reality of creation. Though we assent in confidence to the *mysterium fidei*, our "thinking" on it cannot rest until we have eternal life.

X. Panis Angelicus

Why did the blessed angels rejoice at the Incarnation? Surely, that God's will be done, and, they rejoiced, furthermore, out of a perfect and generous love, at the redemption of the fallen human race. But did the Incarnation impact their own beatitude? St. Thomas in one of the Corpus Christi hymns speaks of the bread of man as also the bread of angels (*Panis Angelicus*). We must not forget that the angels, too, are now members of the mystical body of Christ, and, like men, they receive their supernatural vitality from the soul of Christ—not as we do in this life through the visible sacraments, but spiritually, as the good thief on the cross received the grace of Christ by Christ's words alone. "The words I have spoken to you", said the Lord, "are spirit and life." Thus, the ultimate effect of the sacraments is enjoyed also by the angels in Heaven.

How does this make a difference for the blessed? In the preface for the Easter vigil is that oft-noted observation: "Oh, happy fault (*felix culpa*) that we should have such a redeemer." Why would we rejoice at that original sin that cast all human

kind into the "vale of tears"? Without sin, the whole human race from Adam and Eve onwards might have been taken up as "adopted sons," along with the angels, into a share in the glorious life of God. But creation cannot be more than "adopted"; creatures cannot be natural sons of God—for God is infinite and all creation is finite. We pray to God in the "Our Father" (Pater Noster) as to the entire Trinity from which our existence comes forth. We lack the essential likeness to God in order to be sons in a strict sense. But the person of Christ, the Word, is the natural Son of the Father in heaven, after whom all earthly fathers are named. In and through the mystical body, we become "sons and fellow heirs with Christ." In short, men and angels now are "adopted sons," through the natural Son of God, and so enter more intimately into the life of the Trinity. They can call the Father in heaven *Abba*. For this, too, surely even the angels rejoiced.

XI. The Merit of Faith

I began this piece with reference to liturgical reform. Though I focused on the traditional meaning of the *mysterium fidei* as it pertains to the Eucharist, I do believe that it deserves its traditional place in the Mass and ought to be restored to its time-honored position. In *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Ratzinger) argued for the orientation of the church to the east and that the priest and the people should face in the same direction. This is to say that the Mass ought to be entirely *ad orientem*. But he recognized the obvious fact that many churches are already built not facing the east, including St. Peter's in Rome, and that, for certain reasons, some churches cannot be built *ad orientem*. The symbolism of the eastward orientation may in certain cases be unattainable, but he insisted the orientation must be toward the cross. The crucifix announces the Lord's coming and serves as the interior "east." Hence, "it should stand in the middle of the altar and be the common point of focus for both the priest

and the praying community." He goes on to say, "in this way we obey the ancient call to prayer: 'Conversi ad Dominum,' Turn toward the Lord! In this way we look together at the One whose death tore the veil of the Temple—the One who stands before the Father for us and encloses us in His arms in order to make us the new and living Temple."

Yet the church *ad orientem* and the crucifix are both symbolic of the real Christ for Whom we live in expectation of His coming. Even now, however, under the appearances of bread and wine, we become through this sacrament the living Temple, the mystical body of Christ. The centrality of the Eucharist cannot be overemphasized. The prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas before Mass concludes with the following: "Grant as I may receive not only the visible sign of the Lord's body and blood, but also all the reality and the power of the sacrament. Grant, most kind God that I may receive the body of your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, which He received from the Virgin Mary, and may receive it in such a way that I become a living part of His mystical body and counted among His members. O most loving Father, grant me your beloved Son. While on this earthly pilgrimage, I receive Him under the veil of this sacrament; so may I come at last to see Him face to face for all eternity. For He lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen."

Some have argued that the current proclamation of the mystery of faith retains the traditional sense of the *mysterium fidei* of the Eucharist, even in the more comprehensive formulation. This may be true. But it is hard to deny that the Eucharistic meaning has been seriously diluted. When the statistics show a widespread disbelief in the "real presence" among Catholics, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this central truth of the faith has faded into obscurity. With such disbelief, the Mass loses its meaning.

Our Lord told Doubting Thomas that more blessed are those who do not see but yet "believe." There is great spiritual merit in faith in the Lord's word—especially when the

word is a "hard saying." The merit of faith is never greater than when we sincerely and knowingly say "Amen" before the Holy Eucharist. All of Christ's miracles were to give extrinsic evidence to the truth of His words. "If you do not believe what I say, believe my works." In the Eucharist we believe the "work" of transubstantiation simply because the Lord says so. Nothing in the faith so fundamentally defies our earthly nature as the "real presence." This "hard saying" challenges the very foundation of all human knowledge: our senses. "Whatever is in the intellect," as Aristotle pointed out, "is first in our senses." Here alone in the *mysterium fidei* we are totally deceived. Our assent is faith in its purest and most meritorious form. With the "Amen," we say with Doubting Thomas "My Lord and My God," but he did touch the wounds of the Lord. For us, however, "visus, tactus, gustus, in te fallitur, sed auditu solo tuto creditor: credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius, nil hoc verbo Veritas verius." "Faith for all defects supplying, where the feeble senses fail." This "assent," which contains the whole of our belief, defines most of all how we now walk by faith awaiting the hour when "thinking" on the *mysterium fidei* gives way to the Beatific Vision.