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Why Did Christ Institute the Eucharist?



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Why Did Christ Institute the Eucharist?

What is the Eucharist? It is the greatest conceivable gift of God to man. It is literally heaven on earth. At the beginning of his papacy, in *Dominicae Cena*e of 1980, St. John Paul II wrote:

We cannot, even for a moment, forget that the Eucharist is a special possession belonging to the whole Church. It is the greatest gift in the order of grace and of sacrament that the divine Spouse has offered and unceasingly offers to His spouse. . . . We should remain faithful in every detail to what it expresses in itself and to what it asks of us, namely, thanksgiving.¹

Twenty-three years later, in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he wrote:

Today I take up anew the thread of that argument [from *Dominicae Cena*e], with even greater emotion and gratitude in my heart, echoing as it were the word of the Psalmist: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord” (*Ps*116:12-13).²

He also said: “Holy Mass is the absolute center of my life and of every day of my life.”³ After his election to the pontificate, Benedict XVI quoted this and made it his own in his address to the clergy of Rome on May 13, 2005 in the Basilica of St. John Lateran.

In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 9, St. John Paul II goes even further, writing: “The Eucharist, as Christ’s saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church *can* have in her journey through history.”⁴ This is a very strong statement. St. John Paul does not only say that the Eucharist *is* the greatest gift that Christ has in fact given us. He says that it is the greatest gift that He *can* give here in this period of her earthly pilgrimage, short of the beatific vision.

God can always make better gifts of nature and creation, giving us better bodies and a better physical world. No matter what He gave us in created gifts, His wisdom and omnipotence could always make something better. But His omnipotence and wisdom *cannot* give us a greater gift than the Eucharist. Why not? Because in the Eucharist Christ is giving us *Himself*, whole and entire, as a gift, and God

has nothing better to give than Himself. The Eucharist is Christ’s complete gift of self to His Church, His Bride. It is the “greatest gift” of God to man because in this sacrament, Christ the Word Incarnate, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Body, Blood, soul and divinity, becomes present throughout the life of the Church. Here on our altars we are in the presence of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, with Christ Himself as Priest and Victim.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men.”⁵ In *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 11, St. John Paul formulates this idea using his characteristic theme of “gift of self”:

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as *the gift par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since “all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times.”⁶

Since He has fully given Himself for us, John Paul II asks: “What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes ‘to the end’ (cf. *Jn* 13:1), a love which knows no measure.” Here John Paul is referring to John 13:1, by which John introduces his account of the Last Supper in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist: “When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he *loved them to the end.*”

REASONS OF FITTINGNESS FOR THE EUCHARIST

Why did Christ institute the Eucharist? In asking this simple question, we are seeking reasons of fittingness for one of God’s greatest marvels.⁷ Asking such questions is a key part of theology’s task as *faith seeking understanding*. When we come to know through faith that God has done something, we naturally desire to understand why He has done that, how it reveals His love for us, and how it fits in with everything else we know about Him and His

1 St. John Paul II, Letter On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist *Dominicae Cena*e (Feb. 24, 1980), §12.

2 St. John Paul, encyclical On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), §9.

3 Address at a Symposium in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Decree “Presbyterorum Ordinis,” Oct. 27, 1995, n. 4; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition, Nov. 15, 1995, p. 7.

4 My italics.

5 Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, §5.

6 The quotation is from CCC 1085.

7 The Eucharist can be said to be God’s greatest miracle after His Incarnation and paschal mystery (both of which are sacramentally contained in the Eucharist).

plans. Arguments of fittingness do not seek to demonstrate what God has revealed, but presupposing faith in it, seek to understand its reasons, so that we can come to love His plan more deeply.

When St. Thomas begins to treat the mystery of the Eucharist in the *Summa of Theology*, he begins by posing this question of why it was fitting for Jesus to institute the Eucharist. Here he makes an analogy between what is necessary for our bodily life, and what is necessary for our supernatural life of grace. In our bodily life we need birth, growth, and nourishment. Likewise, in our spiritual life we need birth, growth to maturity, and nourishment. Spiritual birth is given by Baptism, growth to spiritual maturity is given by Confirmation, and the spiritual nourishment is given by the Eucharist:

The Church's sacraments are ordained for helping man in the spiritual life. But the spiritual life is analogous to the corporeal, since corporeal things bear a resemblance to spiritual. Now it is clear that just as generation is required for corporeal life, since thereby man receives life; and growth, whereby man is brought to maturity: so likewise food is required for the preservation of life. Consequently, just as for the spiritual life there had to be Baptism, which is spiritual generation; and Confirmation, which is spiritual growth: so there needed to be the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is spiritual food.⁸

The sacraments give us supernatural life analogously with the way nature provides for the basic needs of our natural life. In this consideration, the Eucharist corresponds, supernaturally, with man's need with for nourishment. As we need to eat and drink daily to nourish our bodies and replenish our strength, and to grow, so we need the Eucharist to nourish, replenish, and increase our supernatural life, which is the life of Christ in us. This life consists above all in sanctifying grace and charity. Christ instituted the Eucharist therefore to be the food of eternal life. Thus the sacrament produces the spiritual nourishment that it symbolically represents by feeding us with grace,

8 St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 73, a. 1. See also See St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 65, a. 1: "For spiritual life has a certain conformity with the life of the body: just as other corporeal things have a certain likeness to things spiritual. . . . With regard to himself man is perfected in the life of the body, in two ways; first, directly [per se], i.e. by acquiring some vital perfection; secondly, indirectly [per accidens], i.e. by the removal of hindrances to life, such as ailments, or the like. Now the life of the body is perfected "directly," in three ways. First, by generation whereby a man begins to be and to live: and corresponding to this in the spiritual life there is Baptism, which is a spiritual regeneration, according to Titus 3:5: "By the laver of regeneration," etc. Secondly, by growth whereby a man is brought to perfect size and strength: and corresponding to this in the spiritual life there is Confirmation, in which the Holy Ghost is given to strengthen us. . . . Thirdly, by nourishment, whereby life and strength are preserved to man; and corresponding to this in the spiritual life there is the Eucharist. Wherefore it is said (John 6:54): 'Except you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.'"

and strengthening our intimate union with Christ, whom we literally take into ourselves.⁹

The sacramental signs of bread and wine serve as natural symbols of spiritual nourishment. They also have another related significance. Food and drink are taken into our bodies and converted into the very substance of our bodies to strengthen and conserve it. Thus an intimate union is created between the food and ourselves: it becomes one in being with ourselves. This union between our food and ourselves is another aspect of the sacramental sign of the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is a sacrament of communion: it creates an intimate union between ourselves and Christ whom we receive. As St. Augustine relates in his *Confessions*, he heard the voice of Christ as it were saying to him: "I am the food of strong men; grow, and you shall feed upon me; nor shall you convert me, like the food of your flesh, into you, but you shall be converted into me."¹⁰ We change our physical food into our own substance, whereas the Eucharist transforms us spiritually into the image of Christ, if we receive communion with the proper dispositions. The Eucharist therefore deepens and perfects our incorporation into the Body of Christ by infusing charity into our hearts.

Sacrament of Charity

When St. Thomas discusses the fittingness of the seven sacraments, in addition to comparing them with the needs of our bodily life, he also compares the seven sacraments with the seven principal virtues: the four cardinal and the three theological. In this comparison the Eucharist is paired with the theological virtue of charity,¹¹ which is the supernatural love of friendship with God, a friendship both filial and spousal. The Eucharist is the sacrament of charity because it is was instituted to nourish us with charity. We can gain further insight into the purpose and fittingness of the Eucharist by considering three ways in which the Eucharist is the sacrament of charity (gift of self).

9 See Council of Florence, *Decree for the Armenians*: "Every effect which bodily food and bodily drink have for the corporeal life, by preserving, increasing, restoring and refreshing it is produced by this Sacrament for the spiritual life" (DS 1322, D698).

10 St. Augustine, *Confessions* 7.10.16, trans. J.G. Pilkington, NPNF1, vol. 1.

11 See St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 65, a. 1: "Some, again, gather the number of sacraments from a certain adaptation to the virtues and to the defects and penal effects resulting from sin. They say that Baptism corresponds to Faith, and is ordained as a remedy against original sin; Extreme Unction, to Hope, being ordained against venial sin; the Eucharist, to Charity, being ordained against the penal effect which is malice; order, to Prudence, being ordained against ignorance; Penance to Justice, being ordained against mortal sin; Matrimony, to Temperance, being ordained against concupiscence; Confirmation, to Fortitude, being ordained against infirmity."

Presence

First of all, it is proper to the love of spousal friendship to seek to dwell intimately with the beloved. Christ wished to continue to dwell most intimately with His disciples, as He was about to leave them to go to His Passion. So He instituted the Eucharist to be the sacrament by which He would continue to dwell with all His disciples on earth in His sacred humanity, even as He was about to ascend into heaven.

When other mortal men die, they leave a testament to their loved ones who survive them. They may leave material objects and pictures as relics of their presence, as reminders of them: letters, photographs, heirlooms; and they leave their estate as an inheritance. On the night before His passion, Christ also wished to leave a testament to His loved ones; as God, however, He was not limited in His choices. Drawing on His omnipotence and infinite wisdom, He chose to leave a testament which would not be outdone by any other, for He elected to leave to His bride, the Church, *nothing less than Himself*.

And not only did He devise for His humanity to remain present with His Church through the Eucharist, but He enabled it to be present with His disciples in a far better way than He was during His earthly life. For when Christ took on our human nature, He became subject to the limitations of space and time, and therefore was physically present only to a certain circumscribed geographical region, and for a very limited number of years. As we know, His public ministry was only some three years long, which was then prolonged by the forty days from His Resurrection to His Ascension into heaven. Yet as the Word Incarnate, He is the man for all men, the Son of Man, the man in whom all men find fulfillment and salvation. He would not leave all of those born in the centuries after His death and living in other regions deprived of contact with his sacred Humanity! In order to overcome the limitations of space and time, He willed to devise a way to leave His living presence in all the churches of the world, through all the ages, for everyone who was to come into the world.

Intimate Union

Secondly, spousal love seeks not only to dwell with the beloved, but to enter into intimate union. The Eucharist makes possible this most intimate union through Holy Communion. Furthermore, this spousal union is realized in a way fitting for human beings, for it is both physical and spiritual, as is spousal love. Communion makes possible a physical presence of Christ in every communicant for about ten minutes until the sacred species are corrupted by the digestive process. However, the more important union is the spiritual effect of the Eucharist by which sanctifying grace, charity, and the Indwelling of the Trinity is nourished and increased.

As a necessary consequence, the Eucharist also works to deepen our communion with one another in the Mystical Body in fraternal charity, and thus it is the sacrament of ecclesiastical unity.¹² St. Paul states this in 1 Corinthians 10:17: “For we, being many, are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread.” The Eucharist binds us into one Body by strengthening our unity with Christ and with one another.

Sacrificial Love

Finally, it is proper to spousal love that there be a mutual and total self-giving of the partners to each other. St. Paul, in Ephesians 5:25–27: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

In the Eucharist, Christ gives to His Bride the very act by which He poured out His life for her, to cleanse and sanctify her by meriting the remission of sins. At the same time, He gave to the Church the act most pleasing to the Father that is conceivable: that same sacrifice of infinite love.

In other words, Christ willed to give a testament to His Bride that would be not only His own living presence, but the continual presence of the very act by which He showed Himself as the Supreme Lover of our souls. Of course, His whole life was a continual manifestation of love for us; He became flesh for love of us. However, the full extent of that love was only revealed in His suffering and death on the Cross, offered for our redemption. And so He left to His loved ones a perfect token of His love, giving to us, sacramentally, the very act by which He died for our sins. This is the Eucharist. It is the gift of Himself to us, in which He remains with us, Victim of Love, in the very act of pouring Himself out in sacrifice for us.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus left us the Eucharist so that we could forever enter into “His hour”¹³: “The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving.”¹⁴

The Eucharist, therefore, nourishes His Bride not only with affective love through Communion, but also teaches effective love, by giving us His supreme sacrifice of His love to be our sacrifice.

Catholic doctrine describes these essential aspects of the Eucharist by the terms “sacrament” and “sacrifice.” The Eucharist is both a sacrament and a sacrifice. It is

12 Hence St. Thomas Aquinas refers to the Eucharist as the “Sacrament of Church unity” (*ST III*, q. 82, a. 2, ad 3).

13 Benedict XVI, Apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* §11.

14 Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 13: AAS 98 (2006), 228.

the sacrament of all sacraments by which Christ becomes present in our midst so that we can adore Him and receive Him in communion, and the sacrifice of all sacrifices by which He sacramentally offers unceasingly to the Father the price of our Redemption.

In summary, there are three principal reasons for which Christ instituted the Eucharist:

(1) to perpetuate His *presence* among men as our Redeemer and the divine Victim for our souls;

(2) to unite Himself in intimate communion with us so as to be our spiritual food and drink;

(3) to perpetuate His redemptive *Sacrifice*, the supreme act of His burning charity, and allow us to join with Him in offering it to the Father.

All three of these aspects are sacramentally represented through the sacramental signs of bread and wine which becomes Christ's Body and Blood. The wonderful symbolism of spiritual nourishment and spiritual union is combined with a sacramental presentation of Christ's sacrificial act of pouring out His blood for us. His sacrifice is sacramentally presented in the separate consecration of the body and blood under the species of bread and wine, mystically making present the real separation of His body and blood in His death on the Cross. This significance is clearly shown in the words of the consecration: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20).¹⁵

A good summary of these reasons of fittingness for the institution of the Eucharist are given in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium* 47:

At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity [36], a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

This text highlights the three principal reasons for which Jesus instituted the Eucharist. The first reason is to perpetuate His sacrifice and entrust it to His Bride. Secondly, it is the sacrament of unity, perpetuating His presence among us. Third, He nourishes us with His Body and Blood in the paschal banquet of Holy Communion, feeding us with charity.

Why Did Christ Choose the Last Supper as the Time to Institute the Eucharist?

It was fitting that Christ institute this sacrament of His presence and sacrifice on the night before He died. By instituting it immediately before His death, He left it as His last testament, thus impressing it more deeply in the hearts and minds of His Apostles. Furthermore, since it is the sacrament of His bloody sacrifice, He wished to institute it as close to His crucifixion as possible. Finally, He wished to institute the Eucharist in the context of the Passover to show the continuity and passage between the great sacrament of the Old and the New Covenants. St. Thomas explains the fittingness of the institution of the Eucharist on the last night of Christ's earthly life as follows:

This sacrament was appropriately instituted at the supper, when Christ conversed with His disciples for the last time. First of all, because of what is contained in the sacrament: for Christ is Himself contained in the Eucharist sacramentally. Consequently, when Christ was going to leave His disciples in His proper species, He left Himself with them under the sacramental species; as the Emperor's image is set up to be revered in his absence. Hence Eusebius says: "Since He was going to withdraw His assumed body from their eyes, and bear it away to the stars, it was needful that on the day of the supper He should consecrate the sacrament of His body and blood for our sakes, in order that what was once offered up for our ransom should be fittingly worshiped in a mystery."

Secondly, because without faith in the Passion there could never be any salvation, according to Romans 3:25: "Whom God hath proposed to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood." It was necessary accordingly that there should be at all times among men something to show forth our Lord's Passion; the chief sacrament of which in the old Law was the Paschal Lamb. Hence the Apostle says (1 Corinthians 5:7): "Christ our Pasch is sacrificed." But its successor under the New Testament is the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is a remembrance of the Passion now past, just as the other was figurative of the Passion to come. And so it was fitting that when the hour of the Passion was come, Christ should institute a new Sacrament after celebrating the old, as Pope Leo I says.¹⁶

Thirdly, because last words, chiefly such as are spoken by departing friends, are committed most deeply to memory; since then especially affection for friends is more enkindled, and the things which affect us most are impressed the deepest in the soul. Consequently, since, as Pope Alexander I says, "among sacrifices there can be none greater than the body and blood of Christ, nor any more powerful oblation"; our Lord instituted this sacrament at His last parting with His disciples, in order that it might be held in the greater veneration. And this is what Augustine says (Respons. ad Januar. i): "In order to commend more earnestly the death of this mystery, our Saviour willed this last act to be fixed in the hearts and memories of the disciples whom He was about

¹⁵ See Mt 26:28: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

¹⁶ Pope St. Leo I, *Sermones*, sermo 58 (7 De Passione Domini), ch. 1 (PL 54:332).

to quit for the Passion.”¹⁷

The Eucharist Is the Summit of the Sacramental Economy

In all the works of God, where there is multiplicity there is order and hierarchy. Thus there must also be hierarchy in the seven sacraments. Baptism is first in terms of necessity, and Holy Orders is necessary for the Church as a whole, but the Eucharist is by far the first in dignity. We can see this in various ways. First of all, the Eucharist contains the real and substantial presence of Jesus Christ, who dwells among us in the Eucharist. The other sacraments only contain His power. Secondly, the Eucharist is the sacrament of charity. As charity is the queen of the virtues and of the spiritual life, so the Eucharist is the queen of the sacraments. As charity already attains to the life of heaven, so the Eucharist already participates in creating the nuptial union which will constitute heaven. Third, the Eucharist makes present the very sacrifice of Calvary, by which Christ redeemed the world. The other sacraments apply the merits of Calvary, but the Eucharist contains and makes present the very sacrifice of Calvary. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* explains:

Although all the sacraments have a divine efficacy, it is nevertheless very important to note that they are quite unequal in terms of necessity and dignity. This inequality is based, of course, on the differences in their respective significations. Three of the sacraments are clearly more necessary than the others; but even among these three the nature of their necessity varies. The only sacrament which is universally and uniquely necessary is Baptism. . . . Secondly, there is a necessity for the sacrament of Penance, but only in a relative sense. . . . Thirdly, the sacrament of Holy Orders, although not for each one of the faithful, is absolutely necessary for the Church as a whole. If, on the other hand, we compare the sacraments in terms of dignity, we immediately recognize the Holy Eucharist as far and away superior to all the others. This is because of its substantial holiness, and the number and greatness of its mysteries.¹⁸

To explore this question, St. Thomas has an article in which he asks whether the Eucharist is the greatest of the sacraments. He answers:

Absolutely speaking, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments: and this may be shown in three ways. First of all because it contains Christ Himself substantially: whereas the other sacraments contain a certain

17 St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 73, a. 5. See also St. Thomas, *Opusculum 57, in festo Corporis Christi*, lectio 2: “It was to impress the vastness of this love more firmly upon the hearts of the faithful that our Lord instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper. As he was on the point of leaving the world to go to the Father, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he left it as a perpetual memorial of his passion. It was the fulfillment of ancient figures and the greatest of all his miracles, while for those who were to experience the sorrow of his departure, it was destined to be a unique and abiding consolation.”

18 *The Roman Catechism*, part 2, intro., § 22, pp. 156–57.

instrumental power which is a share of Christ’s power, as we have shown above (62, 4, ad 3, 5). Now that which is essentially such is always of more account than that which is such by participation.

Secondly, this is made clear by considering the relation of the sacraments to one another. For all the other sacraments seem to be ordained to this one as to their end. For it is manifest that the sacrament of order is ordained to the consecration of the Eucharist: and the sacrament of Baptism to the reception of the Eucharist: while a man is perfected by Confirmation, so as not to fear to abstain from this sacrament. By Penance and Extreme Unction man is prepared to receive the Body of Christ worthily. And Matrimony at least in its signification, touches this sacrament; in so far as it signifies the union of Christ with the Church, of which union the Eucharist is a figure: hence the Apostle says (Ephesians 5:32): “This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the Church.”

Thirdly, this is made clear by considering the rites of the sacraments. For nearly all the sacraments terminate in the Eucharist, as Dionysius says (Eccl. Hier. iii): thus those who have been ordained receive Holy Communion, as also do those who have been baptized, if they be adults.

The remaining sacraments may be compared to one another in several ways. For on the ground of necessity, Baptism is the greatest of the sacraments; while from the point of view of perfection, order comes first; while Confirmation holds a middle place. The sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction are on a degree inferior to those mentioned above; because, as stated above (Article 2), they are ordained to the Christian life, not directly, but accidentally, as it were, that is to say, as remedies against supervening defects. And among these, Extreme Unction is compared to Penance, as Confirmation to Baptism; in such a way, that Penance is more necessary, whereas Extreme Unction is more perfect.¹⁹

The Second Vatican Council speaks of the ordering of the other sacraments to the Eucharist in *Presbyterorum ordinis* 5:

The other sacraments, as well as with every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it. The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual good of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through his very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to men who are thus invited and encouraged to offer themselves, their labors and all created things, together with him. In this light, the Eucharist shows itself as the source and summit of the whole work of preaching the Gospel.²⁰

19 St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 65, a. 3. See also *ST III*, q. 63, a. 6, in which St. Thomas refers to the Eucharist, citing Dionysius’ *Ecclesial Hierarchy* 3 as the “the end and consummation of all the sacraments.” He explains here that the Eucharist does not imprint character because “it contains within itself Christ, in Whom there is not the character, but the very plenitude of the Priesthood.”

20 Translation from the National Catholic Welfare Conference (in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II* [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1999], 586), slightly modified by me.

Uniqueness of the Eucharist Compared with the Other Sacraments

The Eucharist, compared with the other sacraments, is unique. The other sacraments consist in the use that is made of the elements, and not just in the consecration of the elements. Baptism, for example, does not consist just in the consecration of the water but in the application of the water to the recipient through immersion or pouring. The Eucharist alone is realized in the consecration of the elements,²¹ and it does not cease to be a sacrament after the consecration of the elements. This is because it alone contains not only Christ's power in an instrumental way, but also His substantial presence. All the sacraments give an encounter with Christ's sanctifying power, but the Eucharist alone contains His substantial presence. Secondly, in the other sacraments, no substantial change takes place in the elements. This is the unique property of the Eucharist, in which alone transubstantiation occurs.²²

21 See St. Thomas, *ST* III, q. 73, a. 1, ad 3.

22 See *The Roman Catechism*, part 2, ch. 3, § 9, p. 214: "It is easier to see now how this sacrament differs from all the others. The formal existence of the other six sacraments consists in the actual use made of the materials composing them, i.e., by their being confectioned (or administered) and received. Baptism, for instance, becomes a sacrament when the ablution performed. The Eucharist, on the other hand, is constituted a sacrament solely by the consecration of the elements. And when it is preserved in a pyx or other sacred vessel, it does not cease to be a sacrament. A second point of difference is that in the material elements of which the other sacraments are composed, no change takes place. In Baptism the water or in Confirmation the chrism do not lose their nature of water or oil when they are confectioned. In the Eucharist, however, that which before consecration was bread and wine becomes after its consecration really and substantially the Body and the Blood of our Lord."