

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series
The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Spring 2016 – Series 17
On the Eucharist

Talk #8

Post – Nicene Fathers on the Eucharist



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk.
It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by
The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church".
If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org*

*This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site.
The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at:
<http://www.hebrewcatholic.net/studies/mystery-of-israel-church/>*



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.net • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

Post – Nicene Fathers on the Eucharist

With the end of the Roman persecution in 313 AD, Christians were able to exercise complete freedom to practice their faith. Therefore it is not surprising that we have many more documents of the Fathers for the next two centuries, which are extremely rich in their testimony on the Church's faith in the Eucharist.

St. Hilary of Poitiers

St. Hilary, great fourth-century bishop of Poitiers, France, speaks of the sanctifying (or divinizing) power of the Eucharist, explaining that it has that power precisely because the Body of Christ is united to His soul and the divine nature of the Son. By reverently receiving His Body and Blood, we come to partake more in His Spirit and divine life.

If indeed the Word has become Flesh and if indeed we receive the Word made Flesh in the Eucharist [*cibo dominico*], how can it be thought that he does not remain in us by his nature since, by becoming man, he took to himself our fleshy nature in an inseparable way and has mingled his fleshy nature with his divine nature to be communicated to us in the Sacrament? . . . Therefore, if Christ truly assumed the flesh of our body and if Christ is truly that man born of Mary, and if we truly receive the Flesh of his Body in the Mystery [sacrament], how is anyone going to assert that we are speaking merely of a union of wills?

About the truth of his Flesh and Blood there is left no room for doubt. For by the Lord's own word and by our faith [we know] that it is truly flesh and truly blood. And when we have received and drunk these realities it comes about that we are in Christ and Christ in us. . . . He is in us through his Flesh, and we are in him, and that by which we are with him is in God.¹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

St. Cyril of Jerusalem's *Mystagogical Catecheses*, which are the sermons he gave to the newly baptized perhaps in the year 348 in the Basilica of the Resurrection in Jerusalem,² conclude with an affirmation of faith in the mystery of the Real Presence:

You have now been taught and fully instructed that what seems to be bread is not bread, though it appear to be such to the sense of taste, but the body of Christ; and that what seems to be wine is not wine, though the taste would have it so, but the Blood of Christ. . . . So strengthen your heart by partaking of that spiritual bread.³

1 St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 8.13 (PL 10:246–47), quoted in O'Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 26.

2 See Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 66.

3 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* 4.9, in Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 87.

Similarly, he says:

Since, then, Christ himself clearly described the bread to us in the words "This is my body," who will dare henceforward to dispute it? And since he has emphatically said, "This is my blood," who will waver in the slightest and say it is not his blood?

By his own power on a previous occasion he turned the water into wine at Cana in Galilee; so it is surely credible that he has changed wine into blood. If he performed that wonderful miracle just because he had been invited to a human marriage, we shall certainly be much more willing to admit that he has conferred on the wedding-guests⁴ the savouring of his body and blood.⁵

St. Cyril then explains that the purpose of the Eucharistic conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood is so that we may receive a share in His divinity—sanctifying grace—through receiving His Body and Blood:

So let us partake with the fullest confidence that it is the body and blood of Christ. For his body has been bestowed on you in the form [τύπος, type] of bread, and his blood in the form of wine, so that by partaking Christ's body and blood you may share with him the same body and blood. This is how we become bearers of Christ, since his body and blood spreads throughout our limbs; this is how, in the blessed Peter's words, "we become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).⁶

St. Cyril also speaks of the Eucharistic conversion as the work of the Holy Spirit: We "call upon the merciful God to send the Holy Spirit on our offerings, so that he may make the bread Christ's body, and the wine Christ's blood; for clearly whatever the Holy Spirit touches is sanctified and transformed."⁷

St. Cyril also emphasizes the Real Presence when explaining that the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered also for the dead, for he says that "we offer Christ who has been slain for our sins, and so we appease the merciful God both on their behalf [the faithful departed] and on ours."⁸

4 See Mk 2:19.

5 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* 4.1-2, in Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 84.

6 Ibid., 4.3, p. 85.

7 Ibid., 5.7, p. 91. This text is quoted in Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* 13. See also *Mystagogical Catecheses* 1.7, in Yarnold, p. 71: "The bread and wine of the Eucharist is merely bread and wine before the invocation of the sacred and adorable Trinity, but after the invocation the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine his blood."

8 Ibid., 5.10.

St. Ambrose

St. Ambrose speaks very clearly about the conversion of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ through the power of the words of institution said at the consecration. This forms one of the main themes of his discourse to the neophytes in his fourth Sermon on the Sacraments. He writes:

Perhaps you say: “The bread I have here is ordinary bread.” Yes, before the sacramental words are uttered this bread is nothing but bread. But at the consecration this bread becomes the body of Christ. Let us reason this out. How can something which is bread be the body of Christ? Well, by what words is the consecration effected, and whose words are they? The words of the Lord Jesus. All that is said before are the words of the priest: praise is offered to God, the prayer is offered up, petitions are made for the people, for kings, for all others. But when the moment comes for bringing the most holy sacrament into being, the priest does not use his own words any longer: he uses the words of Christ. Therefore, it is Christ’s word that brings this sacrament into being.

What is this word of Christ? It is the word by which all things were made. The Lord commanded and the heavens were made, the Lord commanded and the earth was made, the Lord commanded and the seas were made, the Lord commanded and all creatures came into being. See, then, how efficacious the word of Christ is. If, then, there is such power in the word of the Lord Jesus that things begin to exist which did not exist before, how much more powerful it is for changing what already existed into something else.

To answer your question, then, before the consecration it was not the body of Christ, but after the consecration I tell you that it is now the body of Christ. He spoke and it was made, he commanded and it was created. You yourself were in existence, but you were a creature of the old order; after your consecration, you began to exist as a new creature.

You see from all this, surely, the power that is contained in the heavenly word. If it is effective in the earthly spring [in reference to the words of Moses that brought water from the rock in Ex 15:23-25], if the heavenly word is effective in the other cases, why should it not be so in the heavenly sacraments? So now you have learnt that the bread becomes the body of Christ, and that, though wine and water are poured into the chalice, through the consecration effected by the heavenly word it becomes his blood.⁹

The day before he suffered, it says, he took bread in his holy hands. Before it is consecrated, it is bread; but when the words of Christ have been uttered over it, it is the body of Christ. Listen to what he says then: “Take and eat of this, all of you, for this is my body.” And the chalice, before the words of Christ, is full of wine and water. But when the words of Christ have done their work, it becomes the blood of Christ which has redeemed the people. So you can see the ways in which the word of Christ is powerful enough to change all things. Besides, the Lord Jesus himself is our witness that we

received his body and blood. Should we doubt his authority and testimony?¹⁰

In this text it is clear that St. Ambrose teaches a substantial conversion of the bread and wine into Christ’s Body and Blood, that this substantial conversion is caused by the words of Christ, and that the conversion takes place when these words are uttered.

A parallel text of equal power is in St. Ambrose’s *De mysteriis*. He strengthens faith in the miracle of the Eucharist by comparing it to the miracles of Moses, Elijah, the Incarnation, and the virgin birth. It is also interesting that he draws in some philosophy, speaking of the Eucharistic consecration as a change in nature:

But if the benediction of man had such power as to change nature, what do we say of divine consecration itself, in which the very words of our Lord and Saviour function? For that sacrament, which you receive, is effected by the words of Christ. But if the words of Elias had such power as to call down fire from heaven, will not the words of Christ have power enough to change the nature of the elements? You have read about the works of the world: “that He spoke and they were done; He commanded and they were created.”¹¹ So, cannot the words of Christ, which were able to make what was not out of nothing, change those things that are into the things that were not? For it is not of less importance to give things new natures than to change natures.

. . . It is clear then that the Virgin conceived contrary to the course of nature. And this body which we make is from the Virgin. Why do you seek here the course of nature in the body of Christ, when the Lord Jesus himself was born of the Virgin contrary to nature? Surely it is the true flesh of Christ which was crucified, which was buried; therefore it is truly the sacrament of that flesh.

The Lord Jesus himself declares: “This is my body.” Before the benediction of the heavenly words another species is mentioned; after the consecration the body is signified. He Himself speaks of His blood. Before the consecration it is mentioned as something else; after the consecration it is called blood. And you say “Amen,” that is, “It is true.” What the mouth speaks, let the mind within confess; what words utter, let the heart feel.¹²

St. Ambrose also regards the separate consecration of the Body and Blood as sacramentally realizing the sacrifice of Christ on the altar, thus “showing the Lord’s death”:

“My flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink” (Jn 6:56). You hear Him speak of His Flesh and of His Blood, you perceive the sacred pledges (conveying to us the merits and power) of the Lord’s death. . . . Now we, as often as we receive the Sacramental Elements, which by the mysterious efficacy of holy prayer are transformed into the Flesh and the

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.23, in Yarnold, pp. 137–38.

¹¹ Ps 148:5.

¹² St. Ambrose, *De mysteriis* 9.52–54, trans. Roy Deferrari, in *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 25–26.

⁹ St. Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* 4.14–19, in Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation* pp. 133–35.

Blood, “do show the Lord’s Death” (1 Cor 11:26).¹³

St. Augustine

St. Augustine’s theology of the Eucharist stresses its proper fruit, which is the unity of the Mystical Body. However, the Eucharist has the effect of binding together the Mystical Body of Christ precisely because we receive the real Body and Blood of Christ. In other words, the *res tantum*—the charity that binds the Church together—is the proper effect of the *res et sacramentum*, which is the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist can build up the Body of Christ in charity (*res tantum*) only because it is itself the Body of Christ sacramentally present (*res et sacramentum*). Thus St. Augustine also stresses the realism of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist, present under the sacramental species. In Sermon 227 to the neophytes on Easter, he says:

You ought to know what you have received, what you are about to receive, and what you ought to receive every day. That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive.¹⁴

In another sermon he stresses the conversion of the elements through the power of the word:

Dear brethren, that which you see on the Lord’s table is bread and wine. But when a word is added, that bread and wine become the body and blood of the Word. . . . As you know, that Word assumed human nature by assuming a human soul and a human body, and thus became man without ceasing to be God. In this way, He suffered for us, and He has left us His body and blood in this sacrament. He has even made us His body, for we have become the body of Christ. Through His mercy, therefore, we are that which we receive.¹⁵

St. Augustine makes the same point later in the same sermon, in which he is explaining the Eucharistic liturgy to the neophytes:

This is also the reason for the thanks expressed in the holy supplications which you will hear pronounced in order that, when the word is added, the oblation may become the body and blood of Christ. Without the word, the oblation is bread and wine, but, when the word is added, the oblation

is at once something else. And that something else—what is it? It is the body of Christ and the blood of Christ. Hence, without the word, it is bread and wine, but, when the word is added, it will become a sacrament. To this you respond with an *Amen*.¹⁶

In another sermon, St. Augustine stresses that what we receive in Communion is the same Body of Christ that hung on the Cross, from which we are fed.¹⁷ In a sermon to the neophytes he says:

Recognize in the bread that which hung on the Cross, and in the Chalice that which poured out from His side. . . . For you receive that flesh of which He who is the Life Itself said: “The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”¹⁸

In his commentary on Psalm 99 [98], he interprets verse 5,¹⁹ which says “worship at his footstool,” with regard to Christ’s humanity present in the Eucharist:

In my uncertainty I turn to Christ, for he it is whom I am seeking in this psalm; and then I discover how . . . God’s footstool may be adored without impiety. . . . He received his flesh from the flesh of Mary. He walked here below in that flesh, and even gave us that same flesh to eat for our salvation. But since *no one eats it without first worshipping it*, we plainly see how the Lord’s footstool is rightly worshiped. *Not only do we commit no sin in worshipping it; we should sin if we did not.*²⁰

St. Augustine’s insistence on worship of the Eucharist before receiving Communion shows that he clearly acknowledged the substantial presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is worthy of worship only because it contains the substantial presence of the humanity of the Word. This is a good example of how liturgical practice—the adoration of the consecrated host in the Eucharistic liturgy—manifests doctrine.

With regard to the Eucharist at the Last Supper, St. Augustine stresses the identity of the priest and the victim: “Christ was being carried in his own hands when he handed over his body, saying, ‘This is my body’; for he was holding that very body in his hands as he spoke.”²¹

16 Ibid., 324–325

17 “*Nos de cruce Domini pascimur, quia corpus Ipsius manducamus*” (Serm. 9, 10, 14): “We are fed from the cross of the Lord, for we eat His body.” Comm. In Ps 100, n. 9, col. 1553.

18 *Miscellanea Augustiniana: Testi e Studi*, vol. 1: *Sancti Augustini sermones post Maurinos reperti*, “Sermo de Sacramentis in die Paschae” (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta Vaticana, 1930), p. 19 (PL 46:827).

19 The Latin Vulgate reads “*adorate scabellum pedum eius, quoniam sanctum est.*”

20 St. Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos* 98.9, trans. Maria Boulding, in Expositions of the Psalms 73–98, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part III, vol. 18 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), pp. 474–475 (my italics).

21 St. Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos* 33.10, trans. Maria Boulding, in *Expositions of the Psalms* 33–50, *The Works of Saint*

13 St. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 4.10.125, trans. H. de Romestin, in NPNF, second series, 10:278 (PL 16:641).

14 St. Augustine, *Sermon 227*, preached to the neophytes on Easter (414–415), trans. Edmund Hill, in *Sermons (184–229Z) on the Liturgical Seasons*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part III, vol. 6 (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), p. 254 (ML 38, 1099).

15 St. Augustine, *Sermon 6 (Denis)*, “The Holy Eucharist,” trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, in *Commentary on the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons*, Fathers of the Church 11 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1951), 321.

St. Augustine also emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist in his sermons to the neophytes on Easter day. In Sermon 228 he speaks of the Eucharist as the true sacrificial offering of Christ's Body and Blood that was prefigured in all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. The Eucharist alone is the sacrifice of the "body and blood of the priest himself":

You have all just now been born again of water and the Spirit, and can see that food and drink upon this table of the Lord's in a new light, and receive it with a fresh love and piety. So I am obliged . . . to remind you infants of what the meaning is of such a great and divine sacrament, such a splendid and noble medicine, such a pure and simple sacrifice, which is not offered now just in the one earthly city of Jerusalem, nor in that tabernacle which was constructed by Moses, nor in the temple built by Solomon. These were just "shadows of things to come" (Col 2:17; Heb 10:1). But "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (Mal 1:11) it is offered as the prophets foretold, and as a sacrifice of praise to God, according to the grace of the New Testament.

No longer is a victim sought from the flocks for a blood sacrifice, nor is a sheep or a goat any more led to the divine altars, but *now the sacrifice of our time is the body and blood of the priest himself*. . . .

So Christ our Lord, who offered by suffering for us what by being born he had received from us, has become our high priest for ever, and has given us the *order of sacrifice which you can see, of his body that is to say, and his blood*. . . . *Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup what flowed from his side*.

You see, *those old sacrifices of the people of God also represented in a variety of ways this single one that was to come*. . . . And therefore receive and eat the body of Christ, yes, you that have become members of Christ in the body of Christ; receive and drink the blood of Christ. In order not to be scattered and separated, eat what binds you together; in order not to seem cheap in your own estimation, *drink the price that was paid for you*. . . . You are then, after all, receiving that flesh about which Life itself says, "The bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51).²²

This magnificent homily brings together the themes of the Real Presence of the very Body crucified on Calvary and the very Blood poured out there, the sacrificial nature of the Mass making present the sacrifice of Calvary, and the Eucharist's effect of binding the Church together in charity.

St. Augustine also stresses that the sacrifice of the Mass involves, together with the sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice of the faithful of themselves. In Sermon 227 for the neophytes on Easter, he says:

Then, after the consecration of the Holy Sacrifice of God, because he wished us also to be his sacrifice, a fact which was made clear when the Holy Sacrifice was first instituted,

Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, part 3, vol. 16 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), p. 21.

22 St. Augustine, Sermon 228B, 1–3, trans. E. Hill, in *Sermons III/6*, pp. 261–262.

and because that Sacrifice is a sign of what we are, behold, when the Sacrifice is finished, we say the Lord's Prayer.²³

St. Augustine so strongly identifies the Eucharistic Body of Christ and the ecclesial Body of Christ that if the one is offered, so must be the other. The sacrifice of the Head, made present on the altar, demands the interior self-sacrifice of the members who gather to offer the Holy Mass.

St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nazianzen (329-390) likens the words of the consecration in a very realist way to a mystical knife that sacramentally immolates the Lamb of God. He writes to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium:

Scarcely yet delivered from the pains of my illness, I hasten to you, the guardian of my cure. For the tongue of a priest meditating on the Lord raises the sick. Do then the greater thing in your priestly ministration, and loose the great mass of my sins when you lay hold of the Sacrifice of Resurrection. . . . Most reverend friend, cease not both to pray and to plead for me when you draw down the Word by your word, when with a bloodless cutting you sever the Body and Blood of the Lord, using your voice for the sacrificial knife.²⁴

Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), likewise speaks with great realism of the Eucharistic conversion effected by the power of the words of institution:

Rightly, then, do we believe that now also the bread which is consecrated by the Word of God is changed into the Body of God the Word. . . . It is at once changed into the body by means of the Word, as the Word itself said, "This is My Body."²⁵

St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom ("golden-mouthed," 347-407 AD), patriarch of Constantinople, Doctor of the Church, and one of the most famous preachers of the patristic period, has some extraordinary texts on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Eucharistic conversion, and the sacrificial aspect of the Mass.²⁶ In his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11, he says:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the Blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). Very persuasively spoke he, and with awe. For what he says is this: "*This which is in the cup is that which flowed from His side, and of that do we partake.*" But he called it a cup of blessing, because holding it in our hands, we so exalt Him in our hymn,

23 St. Augustine, Sermon 227, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, The Fathers of the Church 38 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 197.

24 St. Gregory Nazianzen, Letter 171 to Amphilochius, trans. Charles Browne and James Swallow, in NPNF, second series, 7:469.

25 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism [Catechetical Oration]* 37.105–7, trans. William Moore and Henry Wilson, in NPNF, second series, 5:505–6.

26 For a brief summary, see Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1960), 3:479–481.

wondering, astonished at His unspeakable gift, blessing Him, among other things, for the pouring it out, but also for the imparting thereof to us all. “Wherefore if you desire blood,” says He, “redden not the altar of idols with the slaughter of brute beasts, but My altar with My blood.” Tell me, what can be more tremendous than this? What more tenderly kind?²⁷

In other words, what we receive in the Eucharist is the very same blood that was poured forth on Calvary, the same Body that was pierced to make us partakers in the fruit of His sacrifice. What greater gift could God give than His very self, immolated for us and made present in a way that we can receive it through the aid of sensible realities, under the veils of bread and wine?

Chrysostom again movingly affirms the Real Presence of Christ in comparing the Eucharistic sacrifice with the sacrifices of the Old Covenant:

And in the old covenant, because they were in an imperfect state, the blood which they used to offer to idols He Himself submitted to receive, that He might separate them from those idols; which very thing again was a proof of His unspeakable affection: but here He transferred the service to that which is far more awful and glorious, changing the very sacrifice itself, and instead of the slaughter of irrational creatures, commanding to offer up Himself.²⁸

Later in the same homily, he stresses how the Eucharist is the supreme manifestation of the divine Love:

When you see [the Body of Christ] set before you, say to yourself: Because of this Body I am no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner, but free: because of this I hope for heaven, and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels, converse with Christ; this Body, nailed and scourged, was more than death could stand against; this Body the very sun saw sacrificed, and turned aside his beams; for this both the veil was rent in that moment, and rocks were burst asunder, and all the earth was shaken. This is even that Body, the bloodstained, the pierced, and that out of which gushed the saving fountains, the one of blood, the other of water, for all the world. This Body He has given to us both to hold and to eat; a thing appropriate to intense love.²⁹

In his commentary on Hebrews 9:24-26, St. John Chrysostom stresses that every sacrifice of the Mass is one sacrifice, the Sacrifice of Calvary:

He is Himself then both victim and Priest and sacrifice. . . . For we always offer the same Lamb, not one now and another tomorrow, but always the same one, so that the sacrifice is one. And yet by this reasoning, since the offering is made in many places, are there many Christs? But Christ is one everywhere, being complete here and complete there also, one Body. As then while offered in many places, He is one body and not many bodies; so also [He is] one sacrifice. He is our High Priest, who offered the sacrifice that cleanses us. We now offer that victim which was then offered, which

cannot be exhausted.³⁰

St. John Chrysostom explains that the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist does not add a new sacrifice to that of Calvary, as if such an addition would be desirable, or multiply sacrifices as in the Old Covenant. No, the sacrifice of the Mass is one, throughout all the centuries and on all the altars in which a valid Mass is celebrated. The sacrifice of the Mass is the same as the sacrifice of Calvary, precisely because the words of consecration make Christ’s Body and Blood truly present on the altar, that same Body and Blood which was immolated for us at Calvary, and which is made present on the altar as the “new oblation of the new Covenant,” in the words of St. Irenaeus.

In his work *On the Priesthood*, St. John Chrysostom extols the office of the priest by speaking of the Eucharist as the sacrifice of the Lord who, through the priest, is mystically immolated on the altar. He who sits at the right hand of the Father is continually touched and held by the priest and offered to the faithful:

When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying before you, and the High Priest standing over the sacrifice and praying, and all who partake being tintured with that precious blood, can you think that you are still among men and still standing on earth? Are you not at once transported to heaven? . . . Oh, the loving-kindness of God to men! He who sits above with the Father is at that moment held in our hands, and gives himself to those who wish to clasp and embrace him — which they do, all of them, with their eyes.³¹

But when he invokes the Holy Spirit and offers that awful sacrifice and keeps on touching the common Master of us all, tell me, where shall we rank him? What purity and what piety shall we demand of him? . . . At that moment angels attend the priest, and the whole dais and the sanctuary are thronged with heavenly powers in honor of Him who lies there.³²

The ministerial priest can perform the great sacrifice precisely because Christ works sacramentally through his words offered in the name of Christ, as St. John Chrysostom emphasizes in his second homily on 2 Timothy:

The Offering is the same, whether a common man, or Paul or Peter offer it. It is the same which Christ gave to His disciples, and which the Priests now minister. This is nowise inferior to that, because it is not men that sanctify even this, but the Same who sanctified the one sanctifies the other also. For as the words which God spoke are the same which the Priest now utters, so is the Offering the same.³³

30 *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homiliae* 17, in NPNF first series, 14:447, 449 (I have slightly modified the translation). Quoted in John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 12.

31 St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* 3.4, trans. Graham Neville (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1964), 70–71.

32 *Ibid.*, 6.4, p. 140.

33 St. John Chrysostom, Homily 2 on 2 Timothy in NPNF, first series, 13:483. See also Homily 50 *In Matthew* n. 3 (PG 58:507), trans. in Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:481: “Believe that there takes place now the same banquet as that in which Christ sat at table, and that this banquet

27 St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Corinthians*, 24.1, in NPNF, first series, 12:139 (PG 61:199).

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, 24.7, p. 142 (PG 61:203).

That Christ works through the words of consecration uttered by the priest is again eloquently given in a homily on Maundy Thursday, *On the Betrayal of Judas*:

It is not man who causes what is present to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest is the representative when he pronounces those words, but the power and the grace are those of the Lord. “This is my Body,” he says. This word changes the things that lie before us; and as that sentence “increase and multiply,” once spoken, extends through all time and gives to our nature the power to reproduce itself; even so that saying “This is my Body,” once uttered, does at every table in the Churches from that time to the present day, and even till Christ’s coming, make the sacrifice complete.³⁴

This text is also of great importance because it affirms a substantial conversion of the Eucharistic elements, and attributes this conversion to the omnipotent power of Christ’s words of institution: “This is my Body.”

Although he attributes the Eucharistic conversion (transubstantiation) here to the words of institution, he also attributes great importance to the prayer of the epiclesis in calling down the Holy Spirit to work the transformation of human hearts through the Eucharistic sacrifice and Holy Communion. In his work, *On the Priesthood*, he compares the Eucharistic sacrifice to the sacrifice performed by Elijah on Mt. Carmel, in which the fire of God came down from heaven through Elijah’s prayer to consume the sacrifice:

Would you like to be shown the excellence of this sacred office by another miracle? Imagine in your mind’s eye, if you will, Elijah and the vast crowd standing around him and the sacrifice lying upon the stone altar. All the rest are still, hushed in deep silence. The prophet alone is praying. Suddenly fire falls from the skies on to the offering. It is marvelous; it is charged with bewilderment. Turn, then, from that scene to our present rites, and you will see not only marvelous things, but things that transcend all terror. The priest stands bringing down, not fire, but the Holy Spirit. And he offers prayer at length, not that some flame lit from above may consume the offerings, but that grace may fall on the sacrifice through that prayer, set alight the souls of all, and make them appear brighter than silver refined in the fire.³⁵

Conclusion

The Church Fathers of the first five centuries — most of whom were bishops, and are recognized as saints — offer clear and eloquent testimony to the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. They explain that the Eucharist is a sacra-

is in no way different from that. For it is not true that this banquet is prepared by a man while that was prepared by Himself.”

34 St. John Chrysostom, *De prodicione Judae* [On the Betrayal of Judas], homily 1 and almost identical homily 2 (PG 49:380 and 389), trans. in Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 3:481. See John H. McKenna, *The Eucharistic Epiclesis: A Detailed History from the Patristic to the Modern Era*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2009), 54.

35 St. John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood* 3.4, p. 71.

ment tied to the power of the bishop who has the fullness of the priesthood; that it is the one Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary; and that therefore it is indeed His true Body and Blood, His true flesh given for the life of the world. The continuity and clarity of this teaching throughout the early history of the Church is a luminous revelation of the faith of the Church. As John Henry Cardinal Newman famously claimed in the introduction to his great work, *The Development of Doctrine*: “To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.”³⁶

36 John Henry Card. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, Basil Montagu Pickering, 1878), 8.