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*Transubstantiation and Christ's Substantial
Presence in the Eucharist*



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Transubstantiation and Christ's Substantial Presence in the Eucharist

The Dogma of the Real Presence

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1374 explains the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist:

In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.*”¹ This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.

In a metaphorical or analogical sense, something may be said to be present in a symbol or sign, or in our memory or intention, or present in our hearts through love. None of these senses of “presence” are what we mean by the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. For this reason, the *Catechism* tells us that it is a “substantial presence,” which means that Christ’s *whole substance* is present in the Eucharist. By the expression “Real Presence” we mean the *substantial presence* of Christ. In other words, Christ is present in the Eucharist with His glorious heavenly body, with His *whole being*, matter and form; with His full underlying reality, whole and entire. For substance refers to the being and the essence of a thing; it is used in philosophy to denote that which has being in itself, and not just in another (as do the accidents).²

This means that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in the fullness of His glorious bodily life as He lives it now in heaven. It is not only that He “comes down” to earth to be with us in the Eucharist, but also that the Eucharist *brings us to Him* as He is in heaven. The Eucharist is the glorious

and risen Lord Himself, as He lives and moves and acts now in His glorious body.³

This doctrine was infallibly defined at the Council of Trent, in which the Catholic dogma was defended against the negations of the various leaders of the Protestant rebellion. In Session 13, chapter 1, the Council declared: “The holy council teaches and openly and straightforwardly professes that in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the appearances of those perceptible realities.”⁴ The same (infallible) doctrine is expressed in negative form in Canon 1:

If any one denies that in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained, but says that he is in it only as in a sign or figure or by his power, let him be anathema.⁵

The Distinction between Substance and Accidents

How does Christ come to be present in the Eucharist in this real and substantial way affirmed by the Church, given that we continue to perceive the appearances of bread and wine? Since this is a mystery of faith, it cannot be verified by scientific means, nor demonstrated by philosophy. We believe it solely because of what Christ said at the Last Supper, and what He said earlier at the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6), and because the Church’s infallible Magisterium has defined the sense of those words and the way they must be interpreted. However, some basic elements of the perennial philosophy must be brought in, not in order to prove the mystery, which is impossible, but simply to correctly grasp what Christ has proclaimed and what the Church teaches about Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. This philosophical analysis is also useful in order to show that a doctrine of the Church is not contradictory. For a mystery of faith, although it is above reason, can never be directly contrary to reason or in contradiction with itself. In this discussion we shall presuppose the doctrine of the Real Presence.

First of all, we must distinguish between substance and accidents (appearances). The accidents of a thing are the changeable conditions which do not directly belong to the essence of the thing, but which answer the question

1 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.

2 Father John A. Hardon, S.J. explains this well: The simplest way to express what Christ asks us to believe about the Real Presence is that the Eucharist is really *He*. The Real Presence is the *real Jesus*. We are to believe that . . . the flesh which the Son of God received from His Mother at the Incarnation is the same flesh into which He changed bread at the Last Supper. . . . It is God become man in the fullness of His divine nature, in the fullness of His human nature, in the fullness of His body and soul, in the fullness of everything that makes Jesus Jesus. He is in the Eucharist with His human mind and will united with the Divinity, with His hands and feet, His face and features, with His eyes and lips and ears and nostrils, with His affections and emotions and, with emphasis, with His living, pulsating, physical Sacred Heart. That is what our Catholic Faith demands of us that we believe. If we believe this, we are Catholic. If we do not, we are not, no matter what people may think we are.” Available online at <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/realpres/a12.html>.

3 See St. Thomas, *ST* III, q. 76.

4 Council of Trent, DS 1636 (D874).

5 Council of Trent, DS 1651 (D883).

of *how* a thing is. We know a thing first by its accidents, because our senses can only perceive the sensible accidents of things, and not the substance *per se*. Accidents include the sensible qualities of color, taste, smell, sound, heat, texture, and size, position, movement, etc. However, they also extend to spiritual realities, such as knowledge, virtue, and grace. An accident is something whose nature is to exist *in a subject*: it does not have being in itself, but in another. The being of an accident naturally depends on the being of the substance in which it exists.

“Substance” refers to the identity of the thing, the reality that underlies all its outward appearances or changeable “accidents.” The term “substance” comes from the Latin to “stand under” because the substance is the reality that “stands under” the accidents.⁶ Substance answers the question of *what* a thing is. It is the substance that has being in itself; the accidents have being through the substance. The substance is the whole and abiding subject in which the accidents inhere. St. Thomas defines substance as “something whose nature is . . . to have being *not in another*.”⁷ It is that which has being in itself, and it is the subject or foundation for the accidents of the thing.

The notion of substance (or essence, which is closely related) is not to be confused with the notion of substantial *form*. When we speak of the substance of a human being, we are not speaking of an immaterial reality, like form, or the soul, but a complete reality of body and soul. That is why we say that Jesus becomes present not through “transformation,” which is what happens when one substance receives another form and becomes something else, as when wood becomes ash, but “transubstantiation,” in which the whole thing, the substance itself (such as bread) becomes a new substance (a human being). With the Real Presence, the full substance of Christ, *body* and soul (and divinity) are present, but hidden under the accidents (appearances) of bread and wine.

The words uttered by Christ at the Last Supper: “*This is my Body. . . . This is the chalice of my blood,*” through the divine omnipotence, convert the *substance* of bread and wine into the *substance* of Christ’s Body and Blood. However, the outward appearances or accidents of bread and wine are miraculously suspended, remaining exactly what they were, but no longer inhering in a substance.

The pronoun “this” before the consecration refers to the substance of the bread. After the words of consecration have been uttered, “this” reality in the priest’s hands has now become the Body of Christ. We generally use demonstra-

⁶ See St. Thomas, *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 1, in which he defines substance as having two properties, “of which the first is that it does not need an extrinsic foundation in which it is sustained, but rather it is sustained in itself, and thus it is said to subsist *per se* and not in another. The second property of substance is that it is the foundation for the accidents, sustaining them, and for that reason it is said to stand below [*substare*].”

⁷ St. Thomas, *SCG I*, ch. 25, no. 10.

tive pronouns to refer to the substance of things: *this* is a man, a dog, a cat, a piece of bread, a rock, etc.

The Eucharistic Conversion: Transubstantiation

How does Christ come to be really and substantially present in the Eucharist? The answer of the Church is that this occurs through a unique and marvelous *conversion* of the substance of the bread and wine on the altar into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. Prior to the consecration of the bread and the wine in the Eucharistic prayer, Christ was not present on the altar. After the priest pronounces the words of the consecration, Christ is substantially present. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the only way this can come about is through the *conversion* of the entire substance of the bread and substance of the wine into the entire substance of Christ. This conversion is fittingly called *transubstantiation*, for it is the instantaneous conversion of one entire substance into another.⁸

Are there any other options? Could Christ come to be present by *moving into the bread*, instead of through the conversion of one substance into another? This is another logical alternative, and it was the position of Martin Luther, who sought to maintain the Real Presence while denying transubstantiation. He held that the substance of the bread and the substance of the wine *remain* after the consecration, but Christ comes to be present *in addition to the bread and wine*. Instead of the bread and wine being converted into Christ, this theory would imply a coming of Christ into the bread and wine. This position is often referred to as “consubstantiation” or “impanation.” St. Thomas Aquinas argues that is not compatible with the faith of the Church for two reasons.⁹ First of all, it is incompatible with the

⁸ However, in this case, God performs an additional miracle, in which the accidents of the former substances, the bread and the wine, remain suspended, without inhering in any substance.

⁹ St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 75, a. 2: “I answer that, some have held that the substance of the bread and wine remains in this sacrament after the consecration. But this opinion cannot stand: first of all, because by such an opinion the truth of this sacrament is destroyed, to which it belongs that Christ’s true body exists in this sacrament; which indeed was not there before the consecration. *Now a thing cannot be in any place, where it was not previously, except by change of place, or by the conversion of another thing into itself*; just as fire begins anew to be in some house, either because it is carried thither, or because it is generated there. Now it is evident that Christ’s body does not begin to be present in this sacrament by local motion. First of all, because it would follow that it would cease to be in heaven: for what is moved locally does not come anew to some place unless it quit the former one. Secondly, because every body moved locally passes through all intermediary spaces, which cannot be said here. Thirdly, because it is not possible for one movement of the same body moved locally to be terminated in different places at the one time, whereas the body of Christ under this sacrament begins at the one time to be in several places. And consequently it remains that *Christ’s body cannot begin to be anew in this sacrament except by change of the substance of bread into itself. But what is changed into another thing, no longer remains*

words of Christ: “This is my body.” If the substance of bread remained, Christ would have had to say: “Here is my body”; or “Here, where the bread is, there is also my Body,” or “My Body is in the bread.” But instead He said: “*This* is my body.” The meaning has to be: “This substance—which was bread—is now my Body.” Christ’s words imply a conversion of substance from one “this” into another “this.”

Secondly, St. Thomas argues that to hold that the substance of bread remains after the consecration is contrary to the faith of the Church for it would make the substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist impossible to reconcile with the continued presence of Christ’s humanity in heaven. The core of St. Thomas’ reasoning is that a thing can begin to be present in a new place in only two ways: by moving to the new place, or by something already in that place converting into it. In other words, something can begin to be present in a place either through local motion, or through generation/conversion. For example, fire can begin to be present in a room by being carried there from somewhere else, or it can begin to be present there by being ignited there, and transforming other things into itself, such as the wood and furniture, etc. Similarly, a baby can begin to be present in a woman’s womb either by being moved there as in in-vitro fertilization in which the embryo conceived in a test-tube is later implanted in a mother’s womb, or by being conceived there through the union of the egg and sperm to form a new human being.

Now Christ does not begin to be present in the Eucharist through being *moved*. There is no local motion. It is not as if Christ “moved” from heaven down to the altar, for three reasons. First, if that were true, He would cease to be present in heaven, which is false. Similarly, He would have to pass through all the intervening places to get there, which would take time. Finally, if He became present through local movement, He could only become present in one place at a time, and thus He could not be present simultaneously in all the consecrated hosts throughout the world. Therefore, by eliminating the possibility of local movement, we have to hold instead that He becomes present through the other possibility, which is conversion of the bread and wine into Him. Christ becomes present on the altar because the bread and wine become His Body and Blood. An odd thing about this conversion, however, is that bread and wine are converted into a substance that *already exists*: Christ’s Body and Blood, which—unlike

after such change. Hence the conclusion is that, saving the truth of this sacrament, the substance of the bread cannot remain after the consecration. Secondly, because this position is contrary to the form of this sacrament, in which it is said: ‘This is My body,’ which would not be true if the substance of the bread were to remain there; for the substance of bread never is the body of Christ. Rather should one say in that case: “Here is My body.” Thirdly, because it would be opposed to the veneration of this sacrament, if any substance were there, which could not be adored with adoration of latria.”

the baby in our analogy—are not changed by this conversion. All the change is on the part of the substance of the bread and wine that become Christ’s Body and Blood. Meanwhile, the accidents of the bread and wine remain.

The fact that transubstantiation involves the conversion of the bread and wine rather than the local movement of Christ into the bread and wine is what makes possible the simultaneous celebration of many Masses throughout the world and the resulting Real Presence in many different tabernacles at the same time. There can be many simultaneous conversions of many different bodies of bread and wine into Christ’s one Body in heaven. However, there cannot be many simultaneous local movements of the one Body of Christ into many different localities all at the same time.

Catholic theology speaks of this extraordinary conversion in the Eucharist with the technical term “transubstantiation,” which refers to the direct conversion of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ. The Council of Trent infallibly teaches:

Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy council now again declares, that, by the consecration of the bread and wine, there takes place a change of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly named transubstantiation.¹⁰

God can work the miracle of transubstantiation because of His omnipotent power over all being. Since He is the Lord of being, He can convert any being into any other being directly and immediately, without there being any proper substrate of the change:

Form cannot be changed into form, nor matter into matter by the power of any finite agent. Such a change, however, can be made by the power of an infinite agent, which has control over all being, because the nature of being is common to both forms and to both matters; and whatever there is of being in the one, the author of being can change into whatever there is of being in the other, withdrawing that whereby it was distinguished from the other.¹¹

The technical term “transubstantiation” shows us that this conversion of the bread and wine into Christ is no ordinary conversion. It is a unique conversion that has no direct parallel in the natural world. This, of course, does not make it impossible, for God is not bound to obey the normal laws of nature; He framed that order through His omnipotence, and hence He can also operate outside the natural order He has created.

Christ wished His presence on our altars and tabernacles to be an article of faith and not of vision. He did not wish us to see His glorious Body made present by the words of

¹⁰ Council of Trent, Session 13 (Oct. 11, 1551), chapter 4, DS1642.
¹¹ St. Thomas, *ST* III, a. 75, a. 4, ad 3.

consecration, so that we would not lose the merit of faith, which is firm belief in what is unseen. Thus He chose to have the appearances of bread and wine remain in the sacrament as *sacred veils*, suspended over Christ's mysterious presence in the consecrated host.

St. Thomas gives two other reasons for the preservation of the appearances of the bread and wine:

It is evident to sense that all the accidents of the bread and wine remain after the consecration. And this is reasonably done by Divine providence. First of all, because it is not customary, but horrible, for men to eat human flesh, and to drink blood. And therefore Christ's flesh and blood are set before us to be partaken of under the species of those things which are the more commonly used by men, namely, bread and wine. Secondly, lest this sacrament might be derided by unbelievers, if we were to eat our Lord under His own species.¹²

The Whole Christ Is Present in Each Particle of the Eucharist

Another unique property of this conversion is that the whole substance of Christ is present “under” any part of the appearances of bread and wine. If we break the consecrated host in half, Christ remains whole and entire in each half. And the same thing is true each time the consecrated host is subdivided. Christ is present whole and entire in every little particle of the host that remains on the paten, and in every drop of the consecrated wine. This truth has tremendous practical consequences for priests charged with responsibility for the Eucharist, and in general for all those who distribute and receive Communion! Christ is present whole and entire in every tiny fragment! Just as before the consecration the full substance of bread was present under every part of the extension of the host, so now the full substance of Christ, whole and entire, is present under every part of that same extension of the appearances of bread and wine.

This truth of faith is admirably expressed in the hymn composed by St. Thomas, *Lauda Sion*: “The Sacrament has just been broken, fear not, but remember: there is as much contained in one fragment as in the whole. No rending of the reality but only of the sign takes place; neither the state nor the stature of what is signified is lessened.”¹³

The closest analogy to this reality that the substance of Christ is present everywhere under the appearances of the bread and wine is that of the human soul, which is fully present “in” every part of our body, making it alive and responsive to our wills. It is not a divisible part of the soul that is present in the various parts of our bodies, but our whole soul, which forms an indivisible unity and cannot be divided into separate parts like the extension

of our body. In like manner, Christ is present whole and entire, in an indivisible unity, “in” or “beneath” any part of the extension of the sacramental species (appearances) of bread and wine.

However, although this analogy of the soul present in every part of the body is very helpful, it is nevertheless deficient, for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is altogether unique. What is present is not just a purely spiritual reality like the human soul, but a physical Body, including its accidents (and of course also the soul and divinity of Christ). This will be more fully discussed in the section on the sacramental mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

Concomitance

The words of consecration directly make Christ's body present under the species of bread, and His blood present under the species of wine. However, since Christ's body after the Resurrection is now inseparably united to His blood and to His soul, these also are made present in the Eucharist by *concomitance*. This means that the body is *necessarily accompanied* by the blood and the soul; and the precious blood is necessarily accompanied by the body and the soul.

Furthermore, Christ's divinity is inseparably united to every part of His sacred humanity by the hypostatic union. This union of the divinity with Christ's body and blood was not interrupted even in His death. The dead body in the tomb was still the dead body of the Second Person of the Trinity, and His separated soul was likewise still united to His divine Person.

This is an important point. At the moment of his death on the Cross, Christ's body and blood were physically separated from each other and from Christ's soul, although they all remained united to His divinity. In the moment of His glorious resurrection, however, Christ's body was again united to His blood, and both were again animated by His human soul, and all three—body, blood, and soul—remained inseparably united to His divinity.

Therefore, the words of consecration, “*This is my Body,*” are not limited to producing this one effect by divine fiat—to make Christ's body present—but they also indirectly make His blood, soul, and divinity present, because these are now inseparable from Christ's glorified human body.

The same thing occurs in the separate consecration of the wine. Although the power of the words is directly ordered to making Christ's blood present, they also indirectly make His whole body, soul, and divinity present in every drop of the consecrated species of wine.

St. Thomas Aquinas holds that if Holy Mass had been celebrated on Holy Saturday before the Resurrection, while Christ's physical body was still in the tomb, the words of consecration would have made Christ's inanimate body

¹² ST III, a. 75, a. 5.

¹³ Translation by Victor Szcurek, in Journet, *The Mass: the Presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross*, 167.

present, separated from His soul and from His blood, but still united to His divinity. Likewise, the words of the consecration of the species of wine would have made only His blood present, separated from His body and from his soul, but still united to the divinity.¹⁴ (However, no Mass was actually celebrated on that day.)

After the Resurrection, however, until the end of time, Christ's physical body and blood have been reunited to one another and to His soul; and all three are inseparably united to His divinity. Therefore, the words of consecration in every Mass make Christ's *entire reality as it currently exists*—His Divine Person united to His living and breathing glorious body—present under every part of the consecrated species.

St. Thomas explains this doctrine of concomitance in *ST III*, q. 76, a. 1:

It is absolutely necessary to confess according to Catholic faith that the *entire Christ* is in this sacrament. Yet we must know that there is something of Christ in this sacrament in a twofold manner: first, as it were, by the power of the sacrament; secondly, from natural *concomitance*. By the power of the sacrament, there is under the species of this sacrament that into which the pre-existing substance of the bread and wine is changed, as expressed by the words of the form, which are effective in this as in the other sacraments; for instance, by the words: "This is My body," or, "This is My blood." But *from natural concomitance there is also in this sacrament that which is really united* with that thing wherein the aforesaid conversion is terminated. For *if any two things are really united, then wherever the one is really present, there must the other also be.*

This has been infallibly taught in the Council of Trent, Session 13, Canon 3: "If anyone denies that in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist **the whole Christ** is contained under each species and under each and every portion of either species when it is divided up: let him be anathema."

For this reason, anyone who receives Communion under one or the other species has received Christ, whole and entire, *with everything that forms part of His person*, including all His accidents. Thus it can be seen that the traditional custom in the Latin Church of distributing Communion only under the species of bread, motivated probably by the practical concern to avoid the spilling of the sacred blood, is legitimate.¹⁵

¹⁴ See *ST III*, q. 76, a. 1, ad 1: "His soul was truly separated from His body, as stated above (*III*, q. 50, a. 5). And therefore had this sacrament been celebrated during those three days when He was dead, the soul of Christ would not have been there, neither by the power of the sacrament, nor from real concomitance. But since 'Christ rising from the dead dieth now no more' (Romans 6:9), His soul is always really united with His body. And therefore in this sacrament the body indeed of Christ is present by the power of the sacrament, but His soul from real concomitance."

¹⁵ See the Council of Trent, session 21 (July 16, 1562), chapter 3 and canons 1–3, DS 1729, 1731–1733.

Someone may wonder why Christ instituted the Eucharist under the two species of bread and wine if it is not necessary to receive Communion under both kinds. The answer is that the dual and separate consecration of the two species of bread and wine is necessary for the fullness of the sacramental sign. For this double consecration sacramentally signifies His violent death consisting in the pouring out of His blood for us on the Cross. The separate consecration is necessary for the sacramental representation of Christ's sacrifice, which is mystically made present in this way. The sacraments produce the invisible reality that they outwardly signify.

Transubstantiation Is Above Reason but Not Against Reason

The Eucharist certainly cannot be explained by reason, but nevertheless, reason is equally impotent to show that Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist is contradictory or impossible. Certainly the Eucharist is naturally impossible, and in fact it is the greatest miracle known to man. It is something entirely supernatural. But it is not contradictory.

The Council of Trent addresses this question in its definition of the Real Presence:

There is no contradiction in the fact that our Savior always sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven according to his natural way of existing and that, nevertheless, in his substance he is sacramentally present to us in many other places. We can hardly find words to express this way of existing; but our reason, enlightened through faith, can nevertheless recognize it as possible for God, and we must always believe it unhesitatingly.¹⁶

The Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence is not contradictory, but simply rests on the omnipotence of God and the divinity of Jesus Christ. Just as God can create the world out of nothing, so He can change one thing into another by His word. He who said at the beginning, "Let there be light," now says "This is my Body." And just as out of nothingness light was made, so now Jesus Christ is made present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine.

Likewise, the omnipotence of God, which created the substance and appearances or accidents of things, such as the substance and accidents of bread and wine, is powerful also to disjoin by miracle what He put together in composing the natural order of things. For God has complete dominion over His creation. The only limit on God's omnipotence is contradiction, for even God cannot make a square circle, or make something bread and not-bread at the same time and in the same way. After the consecration, the Eucharist is not both bread and not-bread. It is Christ, and it is not bread. Only the accidents of bread remain, without the underlying substance of bread, for the substance has been converted into Christ. God, the creator of substance

¹⁶ Council of Trent, session 13, chapter 1, DS 1636.

and accidents, can do this. Given that He could do this, how do we know that He did in fact do this? Because He Himself said so at the Last Supper: "This is my Body."

This truth is marvelously expressed in St. Thomas Aquinas' hymn, "Adoro te devote":

Seeing, touching, tasting, all are here deceived,
But by hearing only safely 'tis believed:
I believe whatever God's own Son averred:
Nothing can be truer than Truth's very Word.

And we believe it even though we see evidence to the contrary, for we know that the accidents of the bread and wine remain. Is this perhaps a contradiction? No, for accidents are one thing and substance is another. The accidents remain, whereas the substance is converted into Christ. There is no contradiction as long as we hold a real distinction between substance and accidents. And this distinction is a truth of common sense, for the accidents of things are subject to constant change, whereas the substance or essence remains the same until it ceases to be what it is and is transformed into something else.

Sacramental Mode of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist

Christ's presence in the Eucharist is mysterious because He is present in a sacramental way, which is distinct from the way a natural body is present in a location with parts outside of parts and measured by the surrounding bodies. Christ's Body is not present in the Eucharist in that way, as a body is in a place. St. Thomas explains:

Christ's body is not in this sacrament in the same way as a body is in a place, which by its dimensions is commensurate with the place; but in a special manner which is proper to this sacrament. Hence we say that Christ's body is upon many altars, not as in different places, but "sacramentally": and thereby we do not understand that Christ is there only as in a sign, although a sacrament is a kind of sign; but that Christ's body is here after a fashion proper to this sacrament.¹⁷

St. Thomas gives a fuller of explanation of this mysterious property of the Eucharist in *ST III*, q. 76, a. 1, ad 3:

As has been already stated (75, 5), after the consecration of the bread into the body of Christ, or of the wine into His blood, the accidents of both remain. From which it is evident that the dimensions of the bread or wine are not changed into the dimensions of the body of Christ, but substance into substance. And so the substance of Christ's body or blood is under this sacrament by the power of the sacrament, but not the dimensions of Christ's body or blood. Hence it is clear that the body of Christ is in this sacrament "by way of substance," and not by way of quantity. But the

¹⁷ St. Thomas, *ST III*, q. 75, a. 1, ad 1. This response is answering the following objection: "No body can be in several places at the one time. For this does not even belong to an angel; since for the same reason it could be everywhere. But Christ's is a true body, and it is in heaven. Consequently, it seems that it is not in very truth in the sacrament of the altar, but only as in a sign."

proper totality of substance is contained indifferently in a small or large quantity; as the whole nature of air in a great or small amount of air, and the whole nature of a man in a big or small individual. Wherefore, after the consecration, the whole substance of Christ's body and blood is contained in this sacrament, just as the whole substance of the bread and wine was contained there before the consecration.

What does St. Thomas mean when he says that Christ is present in the Eucharist "by way of substance, and not by way of quantity"? This mysterious mode of presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a consequence of how Christ comes to be present in the Eucharist through transubstantiation. Before the consecration, the substance or essence of bread was present whole and entire under every part of the dimensions of the bread. At the completion of the words of consecration, the substance of bread is converted into the substance of Christ. This means that Christ comes to be present in the Eucharist in the same way that the substance or essence of bread was previously present under every part of the dimensions of the bread. Therefore Christ is present in the Eucharist not in the way in which a body is present in a particular place (in which each part of the body is present in a different place), but in the way a soul or a nature is present in a body, whole and entire under every part of the sensible appearances.

Transubstantiation Does Not Imply Any Change in Christ

One of the keys to understanding the mystery of transubstantiation is that it does not involve any change in Christ; all the change is on the part of the substance of bread and wine, which are converted into Christ. Christ Himself receives no change by transubstantiation. He is not bilocated, nor moved, nor multiplied, nor divided. He comes to be substantially present in the Eucharist not through a change in Him, but through a conversion of the bread and wine into Him.

Since this is a unique occurrence, we would look in vain for something similar in nature. An imperfect analogy can be made, however, to the Incarnation. The Incarnation did not make any change in the divine nature of the Word, which is immutable. All the change was on the part of the humanity which was assumed by the divine Person. The humanity thus gained an infinite dignity and a relation of union with the Person of the Word. Likewise in the Eucharist, all the change is on the part of the substance of bread and wine which are converted into Christ.

Christ Himself, present in the Eucharist, is neither changed by the action of transubstantiation, nor by anything that happens to the sacramental species, such as division or consumption. But under every part of the dimensions of the sacramental species, Christ is made present, whole and unchanged. Indeed, as mentioned above, the Eucharist not only brings Him to us under the species

of bread and wine, but also and more importantly brings us to Him as He is in heaven! The Eucharist brings us to Him as He continues His heavenly life in all its fullness and freedom.