



Things to Ponder

A Double Transubstantiation (Based on the Feast of Corpus Christi, The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ)

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Mysteriously he left the shadows of his courtyard and approached Abram. The soldiers eyed him warily. Who was this stranger? He was Melchizedek, the king of Salem, the place we know today as Jerusalem. He was a priest of God Most High, a God different from the one whom Abram knew and worshiped. But this mysterious king and priest did not come empty-handed. He brought bread and wine as a sacrifice in thanksgiving for Abram's victory over some local warriors. In the power of that sacrifice, Melchizedek pronounced words of God's blessing over Abram, later known as Abraham, our father in faith.

The readings of today's feast of *Corpus Christi*, the Body and Blood of Christ, recall that Jesus is a priest in the line of Melchizedek. Like Melchizedek's, Jesus' kingship and priesthood were mysterious. He was not born into a human family of priests and kings. His father was a carpenter, His mother a housewife. But God called Jesus to offer the most perfect and powerful sacrifice of all: His own body and blood on the cross. It was a once-for-all sacrifice, never to be repeated. But its saving power comes to us now in the bread and wine mysteriously transformed into His most holy and precious Body and Blood.

"You are a priest forever, in the line of Melchizedek." Today's liturgy (Psalm 110) sings this of Christ, but it is also addressed to us. Like Jesus, we share a mysterious priesthood. We became priests of our God at our baptism, for there we hear the words, "As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as members of his body, sharing everlasting life." Our baptism makes us one with Christ the priest. Living in the power of our baptism makes us one with His self-offering. At the Eucharist we come forward with bread and wine, simple and humble gifts. But we also bring our human lives, with all their circumstances and events. We place our gifts—ourselves—into the hands of Jesus Christ, God's chosen priest who transforms them into His Body and Blood through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how Jesus wants us to thankfully remember His victory, over evil and sin and death, by His death and resurrection. By remembering Him in this way, Jesus becomes present here and now, just as truly as when He walked on this earth.

We call this mysterious change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, *transubstantiation*. It means the changing of one substance into another, the changing of one reality—bread and wine—into another reality, the Body and Blood of Christ. This transubstantiation happens instantaneously and completely at the words of

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consecration spoken by the priest. But when we receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, transubstantiation is set in motion: the transformation of ourselves, with all our weaknesses and sins, into the Body and Blood of Christ. Unlike the first transubstantiation at Mass, this second transubstantiation is not immediately and completely effected by the pronouncement of words. It is a much slower and gradual transformation into Christ that requires our cooperation and surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a process that begins at Mass, but one that needs to be worked out in the circumstances of our everyday lives that present us with the crosses Christ gives us, so that we can share in His ultimate sacrifice as well.

Today's feast of Corpus Christi is not simply the commemoration of what Our Lord did at the Last Supper, nor does it merely focus on the transformation of bread and wine into the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It also gives us the opportunity to recommit ourselves to that *other transubstantiation*—the one that is being accomplished within you and me because we all share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ through our baptism, as the Holy Spirit moves us relentlessly to become more and more the very Person we receive in the Eucharist.

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