

19th Sunday: Eucharistic Talk-II: (Real Presence & the Fathers of the Church)

Most recently- July 21, 28 & Aug. 4- at *St. Sebastinas Church Madavana*, in the Archdiocese of Verapoly- the 15 year old girl Agnes Elizabeth- had Eucharistic Miracle, and the flow of faithful to see the consecrated bread-turned-piece of flesh kept in the church.

‘Bread becoming flesh’ is a minor miracle, compared to the true miracle - the greatest of all- the Bread becoming the whole person-transformed risen Body of Christ”.

What is the real miracle about Eucharist? “Bread becoming the Body-Person-of Jesus. This Person/Body is the risen body of Jesus, which is different from the living Physical body of Jesus. Eg: Magdelene, couldn’t recognize! Thinking he is Gardner, asked ‘have you taken him”; Apostles behind closed door, Jesus could enter; Emmaus disciples couldn’t recognize him”(Risen Body is different)

Even before the full development of Eucharistic Theology of Transubstantiation in the medieval time, we find that there existed a continuity and graduality in the thought-conviction in the Catholic Church about the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, from Biblical times down through the centuries till our times- (St. Pope Paul VI at Vat II). We now look to some Fathers of the Church’s understanding of the “real presence”, from the very first century-for the first seven centuries soon after Jesus’ and Apostles’ time.

Ignatius of Antioch: (AD 35-108), who knew Apostles and the early Church writes: (letter to community of Smyrna)- “The *Docetists* abstain from The Eucharist and prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the Body of our savior Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our sins and God raised from dead” (7:1)

Origen of Alexandria (3rdC)- “you know when you have received the body of the Lord, you reverently exercise every care, lest a particle of it fall and anything of this consecrated gift perish”. Why would someone care this symbol with such attention- back to centuries? With how much care do we handle Eucharist- today? Do we do it just for a symbol?

Gregory of Nyssa: “The bread again is at first the common bread, but when the mystery sanctifies it, it is called- and actually becomes the Body of Christ”

John Chrysostom: “What is the bread, but the Body of Christ? What do they become, who partake of it? The Body of Christ; not many bodies, but one body” In short, all Fathers of the church explicitly affirmed that the Eucharist is the means by which we are Christified: as we become part of Body of Christ.

About “transubstantiation”: How can Jesus be present in what looks like bread and wine? We need to understand the distinction between *a Substance and its Accidents*: a substance is something that exists there. Eg. A dog- Fido- a substance. Many things could be said of a dog: he is white, hairy and skinny. These are properties or characteristics of Fido, that Philosophers call *accidents*. They can change over time. Fido can get a haircut, can become fat, but the substance of Fido stays the same. Accidents are the kind of things that are inherent in a substance. Whenever we encounter a substance, our senses encounter its appearance, its accidents, and our mind grasp what is there-its substance. (Eg: we grasp that the same being/person is present when an embryo grows to a toddler, a teenager and eventually an adult.)

Back to Eucharistic discourse, the Catholic understanding is that at the moment of consecration, the SUBSTANCE of the bread is miraculously changed into the SUBSTANCE of the Body of Christ. The key point is that the *accidents* or the *appearance* of bread do not change. They remain just what they were before. The accidents are miraculously held in being by God, without being rooted in the substance of bread. Where do we read it in the bible? John chapter 6, we are reflecting on these weeks.

Today's readings: Elijah, who prays for death, is fed by the angel, the power of which enables him to walk for 40 days & nights. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever”, food for eternity. Blessed are we who are continuously fed with the food that leads us to eternal life. Amen.