

**You Will Be
Changed into Me**

You Will Be Changed into Me

The Fruits of the Eucharist

Stuart Squires

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*For Andy,
whose hand was on my shoulder
the first time I received the Eucharist*

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Introduction

In recent decades, countless Catholic books have been written that focus on the question of the nature of the Eucharist. What, they ask, is it? Is Jesus physically present in the Eucharist? Is he sacramentally present? Is he spiritually present? Is he really present? Is the Eucharist merely a symbol? Interest in the question of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist persists because of the continuing debate between Catholics and Protestants that has been simmering since the Reformation. For five hundred years, Catholics and Protestants have disagreed (sometimes violently) over the answer to this question. In light of Protestant assertions that the communion wafer (as many Protestants call it) is a symbol of Jesus or represents Jesus (among other nuanced answers), these Catholic books emphasize that the Catholic Church teaches that Christ's body, blood, soul, and divinity are "truly, really, and substantially" present in the Eucharist.

Although this question of the nature of the Eucharist is historically and theologically important, it unfortunately has overshadowed a question that is just as important, if not more important: what does the Eucharist *do*? If the Eucharist were nothing more than a symbol, all it would do is point to something outside itself. If, as Catholics believe, Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, then we should expect that the Eucharist does something. It does, in fact, many things.

This book will introduce six of the most important fruits, or effects, of the Eucharist. It will explore how the Jesus Event is brought to the present through eucharistic memory; it will investigate how the Eucharist is the application of Christ's sacrificial offering on the cross; it will demonstrate how the Eucharist transforms the communicant; it will review how the unity in the human family is created by the Eucharist through union with Christ; it will show how the Eucharist leads to a

life that seeks justice; it will explain the significance of the Eucharist for the journey beyond this life.

The answers to our main question—what does the Eucharist do?—are relevant to every Catholic in the pews. They directly address the pressing question many young Catholics (and even adult Catholics) are asking today: why should I go to Mass when I find it uninspiring? The answers that young Catholics often receive are some variations of “because I said so,” or “because we are Catholic, and that is what we do,” or “because your grandmother would be upset if we don’t go.” Although these answers may be true, they are banal, and, in the long run, unlikely to foster in anyone a commitment to receive and cooperate with Jesus’ transformative grace in the Eucharist. I hope that an appreciation of the fruits of the Eucharist described in this book will lead to a deeper desire to encounter Christ in the host and chalice.

Chapter One

The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist

My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Jesus, in the Bread of Life Discourse

Introduction

An oft-cited vignette that summarizes the Catholic understanding of the nature of the Eucharist comes from a letter by one of the most important Catholic fiction writers of the twentieth century—Flannery O’Connor.¹ Around 1950, the poet Robert Lowell and the novelist Elizabeth Hardwick took O’Connor to a dinner party with the author Mary McCarthy and her husband. Five hours into the party, the shy O’Connor had yet to say a word, as she did not feel that she had anything to contribute to the conversation. She felt as if she were a dog “who had been trained to say a few words but overcome with inadequacy had forgotten them.” Eventually, the conversation turned towards the Eucharist, and McCarthy, who had abandoned Catholicism as a teenager, said that when she was a child, she had thought of the Eucharist as the Holy Spirit because it was the “most portable” of the three persons of the Trinity. Now, as an adult, McCarthy thought of the Eucharist as a pretty good symbol. Her voice trembling, O’Connor shot back: “Well, if it’s a symbol, to hell with it.”²

Usually with less spicy language, the Catholic Church has echoed O’Connor’s sentiment through time. The Eucharist is

more than a symbol. It is “truly, really, and substantially”³ the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ—a theological mouthful usually shortened to the phrase the “real presence” of Jesus in the Eucharist. Most Catholics today, however, seem to have no idea that this is what the Catholic Church has taught for two thousand years. A 2019 Pew Research Center study found that 69 percent of self-identified Catholics believe that, after the consecration, the bread and the wine “are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.”⁴ Only 31 percent acknowledge that the bread and wine “actually become the body and blood of Jesus.”⁵ In light of the Church’s emphasis of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the ease of finding the authentic Catholic teaching in books or on the internet, it is shocking that so many Catholics do not know what the Church actually teaches. Or, as Bishop Robert Barron put it sharply, this study is “deeply disturbing,” and demonstrates a “massive failure on the part of the Church carrying on its own Tradition.”⁶

This chapter will survey some of the most important biblical, theological, and conciliar attestations to Jesus’ real presence in the Eucharist. It will begin by exploring three passages from the Old Testament concerning God’s presence to his people: in the Tabernacle, in the Temple, and in the Bread of the Presence. It then will survey how God’s presence in the Tabernacle, in the Temple, and in the Bread of the Presence continues in Jesus himself. Finally, it will review some important examples from the Tradition that reiterate the Church’s teaching of the real presence. As this book is primarily interested in investigating the fruits of the Eucharist, this will be the shortest chapter because many other books explore the real presence in detail.⁷

Old Testament

Although the Old Testament offers many examples of God's "overshadowing presence" to his people (in Hebrew *shekinah*, from the verb *shachan* meaning "to dwell or abide"),⁸ we will focus on three: God's presence in the Tabernacle, in the Temple, and in the Bread of the Presence.

When the Israelites had been liberated from slavery in Egypt, God told Moses to have the Israelites "make a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex 25:8). During their years of wandering in the desert, this sanctuary, otherwise known as the Tent of Meeting, or Tabernacle (in Latin *tabernaculum*, which means "tent"), housed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a jar of manna, and the rod of Aaron. God then described how the Ark should be constructed. Among other details, he commanded that the "mercy seat" be placed atop the Ark. God would "meet you [Moses] there," and would "tell you all that I command you regarding the Israelites" (Ex 25:21-22).

God later commanded the Israelites to offer a sacrifice at the entrance of the Tabernacle where God "will meet you and speak to you" (Ex 29:42). There, the altar would be made sacred by God's glory. "Thus," God said, "I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar. . . I will dwell in the midst of the Israelites and will be their God. They shall know that I, the Lord, am their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, so that I, the Lord, their God might dwell among them" (Ex 29:43-46). After God's orders had been completed, the "column of cloud" (Ex 33:9-10) covered the Tabernacle, and "the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle." Moses could not enter because the cloud settled down upon it and the glory of the Lord filled it. Whenever the cloud lifted, the Israelites would resume their journey. "Only when it lifted did they move forward. The cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire in the cloud at night, in the sight of the whole

house of Israel in all the stages of their journey [through the desert]” (Ex 40:37-38).

After the monarchy had been established under King Saul, David, the second king, intended to construct the Temple, the permanent place on earth where God resides. But the Lord would not allow him to build it because he had shed much blood and waged many wars. David’s son, Solomon, constructed the first Temple—what has become known as Solomon’s Temple—around 960 BC (1 Chr 22:9-10). When it was completed, Solomon prayed before the altar of the Lord and in front of all of Israel (2 Chr 6:12). When he had finished, “Fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house. But the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. All the Israelites looked on while the fire came down and the glory of the Lord was upon the house, and they fell down upon the pavement with their faces to the earth and worshiped, praising the Lord ‘who is so good, whose love endures forever’” (2 Chr 7:1-3). The Temple of Solomon lasted until 587-86 BC when the Babylonians destroyed it, and the Israelites were taken into captivity. The Second Temple was constructed when Cyrus the Great allowed the Israelites to return after the Persians had defeated the Babylonians (Ezr 1:1-4). Completed in 515 BC, it lasted until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.⁹

A bronze altar was located in the courtyard in front of the Temple for sacrifice. The Holy Place in the Temple held the altar of incense and ten lamp stands (1 Kgs 6:20-21). It also contained a gold plated table for the *lehem ha panim*, which is variously translated as the “Bread of the Presence,” “Showbread,” “Shewbread,” “Perpetual Bread,” “Bread of Laying Out,” “Bread of Display,” or “Bread of Offering,” which is the third example of how God was present to the Israelites (Ex 25:30, 35:13, 39:36; Nm 4:7; Mt 12:4; Lk 6:4; Heb 9:2).

God commanded the Israelites to keep the Bread of the Presence “set before me” (Ex 25:30)¹⁰ as a symbol of the covenant (1 Kgs 7:48-49). Each Sabbath, two omers (approximately ten pints) of bran flour were baked into twelve unleavened loaves (one for each tribe) and placed on the gold table in two piles of six loaves each, with two bowls of frankincense between them. The following Sabbath, two priests would approach the table. Each would remove one of the piles, and at the exact moment that the first twelve were removed, two other priests would replace them with twelve more. The four priests gave half of the removed bread to the high priest, and they consumed the rest (Lv 24:5-9).¹¹

New Testament

In the New Testament, the theme of God’s presence in the Tabernacle, Temple, and bread continues in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The prologue of the Gospel of John says that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). Through the Word, all things came to be. Nothing came to be without him. Life—which was the light of the human race, which shines in the darkness and that has not overcome it, and which enlightens everyone—came to be through him (1:2-10). The Word was in the world, which came to be through him, but it did not know the Word. He came to his own, but his own people did not accept him. To those who accepted him, he gave power to become children of God (1:10-12). As usually translated, the Gospel then says that the Word became flesh “and made his dwelling among us” (1:14). A more literal translation of the original Greek “*skénoó*” would be that the Word “pitched his tent” among us. The first-century audience would understand: just as God pitched his tent in the Tabernacle with the Israelites, God now has pitched his tent in Jesus.



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