

Holy Eucharist Rev. Msgr. J. Brian Bransfield

Every Sunday, in fact, every day at Mass, the priest prays an offertory prayer. As he lifts the bread, the small host that will become the body of Christ, the priest says:

“Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation,
for through your goodness we have received
the bread we offer you:
fruit of the earth and work of human hands,
it will become for us the bread of life.”

This short, easily missed prayer “locates” in one sense, the Holy Eucharist. The bread that is about to be transformed by the words of the priest and the action of the Holy Spirit is acknowledged to be already the gift of the “Lord God of all creation” and the “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” The simple bread that the priest holds is itself, even before its supernatural transformation into the true body and blood of Christ, the natural gift of God as the “fruit of the earth.” The natural bread itself reflects the ordinary gift of the interaction of God and human beings – bread does not arise on its own. Bread arises when human beings take and mix the gifts God has given in the created world, flour and water, and bakes them by the gift of fire. Human hands take up and shape the natural ingredients and transform them into the recognizable substance of bread.

So too with the wine. The wine that will become the blood of Christ is likewise the natural “fruit of the vine” given by the “God of all creation.” Having thus offered the bread and the wine to God in the offertory, the priest then begins to pray the Eucharistic Prayer. In this prayer he prays the institution narrative, the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. It is at these words, that the consecration takes place and through the miracle of transubstantiation the bread and the wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ. In the consecration, the natural gifts of bread and wine become the supernatural gift of the true body and true blood of Christ, the first fruits of the New Creation.

And Jesus transforms the pain and suffering. He endures it. The Eucharist is His gift given just as He enters upon His suffering and supernaturally connects the bread and wine with the suffering of His Cross, His body offered on the Cross and His blood poured out – such that the bread and wine are transformed into His true body and true blood. Just as the original creation brings forth wheat from the seed, so the Lord, from the seed of betrayal, through His enduring trust in the Father’s love, in the Holy Spirit, brings forth new life. The Eucharist isn’t a magic trick emerging with the snap of the fingers. It is not “success” as the world describes it or the old story of the underdog who comes from behind for the victory. The Eucharist is far more. It is the font and apex of entire mystery of the crucible of grace. We hold on to the Cross in the deepest hour of our own vulnerable suffering, in hardship after bottomless hardship. It is the story of Job clinging in the dark night to God alone. So often we seek consolation as a sign or a confirmation of God’s favor. But more often, the only sign we receive is the sign of Jonah (Mt. 12:39). The struggle itself is often the sign that God sends. And our struggles are often traceable to the betrayals we have experienced. The Eucharist nourishes a longstanding trust that steadfastly endures. In the spiritual life you become what you endure. Christ knows those pains not from the outside like someone who has simply taken a quick tour. He knows our pain from the inside.

The Holy Eucharist “is the source and summit of the Christian life.”²

1 Eucharistic Prayer III

2 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324; LG 11.