

A Commentary on the Eucharist by St. Augustine <sup>1</sup>

You see on God's altar bread and a cup. That is what the evidence of your eyes tells you, but your faith requires you to believe that the bread is the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ. In these few words we can say perhaps all that faith demands.

Faith, however, seeks understanding; so you may now say to me: "You have told us what we have to believe, but explain it so that we can understand it, because it is quite possible for someone to think along these lines. We know from whom our Lord Jesus Christ took his flesh – it was from the Virgin Mary. As a baby, he was suckled, he was fed, he developed, he came to young man's estate. He was slain on the cross, he was taken down from it, he was buried, he rose again on the third day. On the day of his own choosing, he ascended to heaven, taking his body with him; and it is from heaven that he will come to judge the living and the dead. But now that he is there, seated at the right hand of the father, how can bread be his body? And the cup, or rather what is in the cup, how can that be his blood?"

These things, my friends, are called sacraments, because our eyes see in them one thing, our understanding another. Our eyes see the material form; our understanding, its spiritual effect. If, then, you want to know what the body of Christ is, you must listen to what the Apostle tells the faithful: *Now you are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.*

If that is so, it is the sacrament of yourselves that is placed on the Lord's altar, and it is the sacrament of yourselves that you receive. You reply "Amen" to what you are, and thereby agree that such you are. You hear the words "The Body of Christ" and you reply "Amen". Be, then, a member of Christ's body, so that your "Amen" may accord with the truth.

Yes, but why all this in bread? Here let us not advance any ideas of our own, but listen to what the apostle says over and over again when speaking of this sacrament: *Because there is one loaf, we, though we are many, form one body.* Let your minds assimilate that and be glad, for there you will find unity, truth, piety, and love. He says, one loaf. And who is this one loaf? *We, though we are many, form one body.* Now bear in mind that bread is not made of a single grain, but of many. Be, then, what you see, and receive what you are.

So much for what the Apostle says about the bread. As for the cup, what we have to believe is quite clear, although the Apostle does not mention it expressly. Just as the unity of the faithful, which holy Scripture describes in the words: *They were of one mind and heart* in God, should be like the kneading together of many grains into one visible loaf, so with the wine. Think how wine is made. Many grapes hang in a cluster, but their juice flows together into an indivisible liquid.

It is thus that Christ our Lord signified us, and his will that we should belong to him, when he hallowed the sacrament of our peace and unity on his altar. Anyone, however, who receives this sacrament of unity and does not keep the bond of peace, does not receive it to his profit, but as a testimony against himself.

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<sup>1</sup>Journey with the Fathers – Year A – New City Press – NY – 1992 – pg 76

From the Life of St Romuald by St Peter Damian <sup>1</sup>

Romuald lived in the vicinity of the city of Parenzo for three years. In the first year he built a monastery and appointed an abbot with monks. For the next two years he remained there in seclusion. In that setting, divine holiness transported him to such a summit of perfection that, breathed upon by the Holy Spirit, he foresaw many future events and comprehended with the rays of his intelligence hidden mysteries of the Old and New Testaments.

Frequently he was seized by so great a contemplation of divinity that he would be reduced to tears with the boiling, indescribable heat of divine love. In this condition he would cry out: Beloved Jesus, beloved, sweet honey, indescribable longing, delight of the saints, sweetness of the angels, and other things of this kind. We are unable to express the ecstasy of these utterances, dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Wherever the holy man might arrange to live, he would follow the same pattern. First he would build an oratory with an altar in a cell; then he would shut himself in and forbid access.

Finally, after he had lived in many places, perceiving that his end was near, he returned to the monastery he had built in the valley of Castro. While he awaited with certainty his approaching death, he ordered a cell to be constructed there with an oratory in which he might isolate himself and preserve silence until death.

Accordingly his hermitage was built, since he had made up his mind that he would die there. His body began to grow more and more oppressed by afflictions and was already failing, not so much from weakness as from the exhaustion of great age. One day he began to feel the loss of his physical strength under all the harassment of increasingly violent afflictions. As the sun was beginning to set, he instructed two monks who were standing by to go out and close the door of the cell behind them; they were to come back to him at daybreak to celebrate Matins. They were so concerned about his end that they went out reluctantly and did not rest immediately. On the contrary, since they were worried that their master might die, they lay hidden near the cell and watched this precious treasure. For some time they continued to listen attentively until they hear neither movement nor sound. Rightly guessing what had happened, they pushed open the door, rushed in quickly, lit a candle and found the holy man lying on his back, his blessed soul snatched up into heaven. As he lay there, he seemed like a neglected heavenly pearl

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<sup>1</sup> The Liturgy of the Hours – vol III – Catholic Book Publishing Co – New York – 1975 – pg 1472

Divine Calls – a Sermon by Blessed John Henry Newman <sup>1</sup>

We find in scripture a remarkable instance of a Divine Call, and the manner in which it is our duty to meet it. Samuel was a mere child when he was brought to the house of the Lord; and in due time he was called to a sacred office, and made a prophet. He was called, and he forthwith answered the call. He did not understand at first who called, and what was meant; but on going to Eli he learned who spoke, and what his answer should be. So when God called again, he said: "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Here is prompt obedience.

Very different in its circumstances was St. Paul's call, but resembling Samuel's in this respect, that, when God called, he also promptly obeyed. When St. Paul heard the voice from heaven, he said at once, trembling and astonished, "Lord, what will you have me do?" This same obedience is stated or implied in two accounts which he himself gives of his miraculous conversion. In chapter 22 he says, "And I said, What shall I do, Lord?" and in ch. 26 he tells King Agrippa: "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision". Such is the account given us in St. Paul's case of that first step in God's gracious dealings with him, which ended in his eternal salvation. "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined – and whom He predestined, He also called" – here was the first act which took place in time – "and whom He called He also justified, and whom He justified, He also glorified". Such is the Divine series of mercies; and you see that it was prompt obedience on St. Paul's part which moved Divine grace forward.

This, then, is the first lesson taught us by St. Paul's conversion, promptly to obey the call. If we do obey it, to God be the glory, for He it is Who works in us. If we do not obey, to ourselves be all the shame, for sin and unbelief work in us.

Such is the state of mind expressed by holy David in Psalm 27: "When you said, Seek My face, my heart said to you: Your face, O Lord, will I seek". And this also is illustrated in the case of many other saints in scripture shown in word and deed. For instance, we read of the apostles that "Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. And He said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets and followed him". Again, when He saw James and John with their father Zebedee, "He called them; and they immediately left the ship, and their father and followed Him." And so also with St. Matthew at the custom house, "He said to him, Follow Me; and he left all, rose up and followed Him."

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<sup>1</sup> Parochial and Plain sermons – vol. VIII – John Henry Newman – Longmans, Green & Co – London – 1891 – pg 17f

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St Aloysius of Gonzaga – From Butler's Lives of Saints <sup>1</sup>

The patron of youth, St Aloysius was born on March 9, 1568, in Lombardy. He was the eldest son of Ferrante, Marquis of Castiglione. His father's one ambition was that his eldest son should become a great soldier. In 1577 his father took him and his brother, Ridolfo, to Florence, and left them there under the charge of tutors to improve their Latin and to learn to speak the pure Italian of Tuscany. After two years, his father placed them in the court of the Duke of Mantua, Aloysius was then about eleven. Even then he had the intention to resign to his brother the right of succession to the marquisate of Castiglione. A painful kidney disease furnished him with excuse for appearing little in public, and he spent most of his time in prayer and reading the collection of the Lives of the Saints.

Another book he read about this time described the experiences of the Jesuit missionaries in India. This suggested to him the idea of entering the Society of Jesus in order to work for the conversion of the heathen. As a first step to a future missionary career he set about instructing the poor boys of Castiglione in the catechism during the summer holidays. At Casale-Monferrato, where the winter was spent, he visited the church of the capuchins and began to practice the austerities of a monk, fasting three days a week on bread and water and rising a midnight to pray on the stone floor of a room in which he would allow no fire to be lighted however bitter the weather.

He was now quite resolved to become a Jesuit. After much labor, he was able to convince his father to grudgingly give his consent. On November 25, 1585, he entered the Jesuit novitiate house of Sant' Andrea. Being under regular discipline he was obliged to take recreation and to eat more. Out of consideration for his precarious health he was recalled from Milan to Rome to complete his theological course in the City.

In 1591 an epidemic of plague caused great ravages in Rome. The Jesuits opened a hospital of their own. At his own entreaty, Aloysius was allowed to minister there. He instructed and exhorted the patients, washed them, made their beds, and performed with zeal the lowliest duties of the hospital. Several of the Fathers fell victims to the disease and Aloysius caught it. Contrary to expectation he recovered from the plague but fell into a low fever which reduced him to great weakness. He died on June 21 at the age of twenty-three. He was canonized in 1726.

<sup>1</sup>Butler's Lives of Saints – Revised edition – Harper – San Francisco – 1991 – pg 187

## **A READING FROM THE SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES OF JOHN TAULER O.P.<sup>1</sup>**

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Our Lord said to his disciples: "You shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and even to the uttermost part of the earth." Jerusalem was a city of peace, but also of tribulation, for there it was that Christ underwent such infinite suffering and a bitter death. Children, we are to be his witnesses in this city, not by mere words but in truth, by our life and by following him according to our strength. There are plenty of persons who would gladly be Christ's witnesses in peace, when everything goes along just as they would wish. They would like to be holy, provided that their pious exercises and work never become irksome; they would be glad enough to enjoy, desire, or know the things of God, if there were no bitterness, labour, or tedium involved. But once they are assailed by strong temptations and spiritual darkness, as soon as they no longer feel or enjoy the nearness of God, and are left destitute inwardly and outwardly, they fall away and are not true witnesses at all.

Peace is what all are striving for; they seek after it in every direction, in every occupation, and in all their ways of life. Oh, if we could only shake ourselves free from this tendency, and learn to seek peace in tribulation. Only there is true peace born, peace which will last and really endure. To seek elsewhere is to go astray inevitably. You will always find that this is true. If only we could seek joy in sadness, peace in trouble, simplicity in multiplicity, comfort in bitterness! This is the way to become true witnesses to God.

Before his death our Lord always promised his disciples peace, and also after his resurrection he promised them all peace. Yet they never obtained peace externally. Nonetheless, they found peace in tribulation and love in suffering. In death they found life; to be cross-examined, judged, and condemned was for them a joyous victory. These were true witnesses.

There are many who have been inundated with consolation in body and soul. I have known some who were filled with such sweetness in every fiber of their being. And yet, when suffering and darkness came upon them, when they were forsaken inwardly and outwardly, they did not know which way to turn. They stopped short, and it all came to

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<sup>1</sup>Spiritual Conferences, John Tauler, O.P., Herder: St. Louis 1961. pp.95-97.

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nothing.

When terrible storms break upon us, buffeting us with desolations and temptations, then it is, if only we can break through and weather the storm, that we shall find essential peace, a peace that no one can take from us.

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**On the mysteries of our redemption hidden and revealed in the heart of Jesus;  
a prayer from the *Meditations* of William of St. Thierry. 1**

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O Truth supreme, you are the heaven of heavens, you who are what you are, who have your being from yourself, who belong to yourself and are sufficient to yourself. You lack nothing, yet you have no excess; ...you have within yourself supremest concord, utmost clarity, most perfect fullness and completest life.

...O Lord, the height, the depth, the wisdom and the mightCare these the heaven of which you are the door? It is so, truly; that is why the ark of the covenant was seen in heaven when the door was opened, as [St.] John says. For what does the ark of the covenant that was seen in heaven mean, if not, as the Apostle [Paul] says: *Athe dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning has been hidden in God, who created all things@?* You are yourself that ark. In you from all eternity was hidden, and in you in these latter days has been fulfilled, all that from the beginning of the world has been revealed to all the saints and prophets by the Law and by the prophecies, by wonders and by signs....

These blessings, that were hidden in your secret heaven through the ages, you at the ages= end unveiled to the world=s longing eyes, when you opened in heaven the door that is yourself. You opened that door when your grace appeared to all [people], teaching us.... The heavens being thus opened, all the good and glory and delight of heaven poured itself out on earth. And then, O God, who spared not your own Son, but delivered him up for us all, the greatness of your kindness... to us was published openly to all. You made known your salvation to the world, and in the sight of all the nations you revealed your righteousness....

Those unsearchable riches of your glory, Lord, were hidden in your secret place in heaven until the soldier=s spear opened the side of your Son our Lord and Savior on the cross, and from it flowed the mysteries of our redemption. Now we may not only thrust our finger or our hand into his side, like Thomas, but through that open door may enter whole, O Jesus, even into your heart, the sure seat of your mercy,

even into your holy soul that is filled with the fullness of God, full of grace and truth, full of our salvation and our consolation....

Open, O Lord, the ark-door of your side, that all your own who shall be saved may enter in, before this flood that overwhelms the earth. Open to us your body=s side, that those who long to see the secrets of your Son may enter in, and may receive the sacraments that flow [from there], even the price of their redemption. Open the door of your heaven, that your redeemed may see the good things of God in the land of the living, though they still labor in the land of the dying....

O good Father, loving Brother, and sweet Lord, you are all that is good and sweet and loving; the sum of goodness overflows in you. Open yourself to us, that your sweetness may flow forth from you to us, and fill us. Open yourself to me, O you who are the door, so that through you I may by longing love attain sometimes to the place of your wondrous dwelling, even to the house of God, although I am not worthy yet to enter there in full reality....

Open to me, O Lord, so that, although I am a stranger unworthy of enrollment as a citizen, yet nonetheless, I may by your gift be suffered on occasion for a little while to journey there, that I may truly see your glory, and not come out again unless I am thrown out!....

O, if only I may see, if only I may persevere, if only I may hear some day: *AEnter into the joy of your Lord,@* and may thus enter in, never to come out again! Lord, you are mighty and your truth is all about you. Finish your work and give what you have promised.



**A reading about the Aburning and shining@ of John the Baptist, from a sermon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. 1**

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Let us rejoice, dearly beloved, on the Nativity of blessed John [the Baptist], on the solemnity of whose birth is celebrated today, and let us rejoice in that very nativity. Our reason for remembering John is certainly rich, and the source of our rejoicing sundry. Listen, brothers, to what is said about John: AHe was a burning and shining lamp,@ Scripture says. A great testimony, my brothers: great is the one to whom it is given, but greater is the one who gives it. AHe was a burning and shining lamp.@ Only to shine is nothing; only to burn is not enough. To burn and shine is complete.

AHe was,@ Scripture says, Aa burning and shining lamp.@ It does not say Ashining and burning,@ because John's splendor came from his fervor, and not the fervor from his splendor. Some do not shine because they are burning, but rather they burn in order to shine: clearly these do not burn with the spirit of charity but with the zeal that comes from vanity. Do you want to know how John both burned and shone? I think that a threefold division can be found in both, that is, in his burning and in his splendor. He was burning in himself with the mighty rigor of his way of life, with the deep and complete fervor of his devotion to Christ, and with the constancy of his bold reproaches to his sinful neighbors. He was shining no less in his example, in pointing out Christ, in his word; showing himself for the purpose of imitation; greatly illumining what lay concealed for the remission of sins; and for correction, lighting up our darkness, as was written: ALord, you who light my lamp, lighten my darkness.@

Let us rejoice, dearly beloved, on the Nativity of blessed John, and let us rejoice in that very nativity. Our reason for remembering John is certainly rich, and the source of our rejoicing sundry. AHe was a lamp,@ and the Jews were willing to rejoice in his light; John rejoiced rather in the fervor of his loyalty: as the bridegroom's friend, he rejoiced in the bridegroom's voice. We are to rejoice in both ways: on the one hand for him, and on the other, we are to rejoice together

with him for ourselves. He burned for himself; he was shining for us. Let us rejoice in his fervor for the purpose of imitation; let us also rejoice in his light yet not remaining there, but that in his light we may see light, the true light, which is not John himself, but the One to whom he bears witness.

He shone, as I stated above, in his example, in pointing out Christ in his word, making himself known by his deeds, making Christ known by a sign, and making us known to ourselves by his preaching. His father Zechariah said: AYou, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people.@ He does not say Ato give salvation,@ for he was not the light, but to give Aknowledge of salvation@', Athat he might bear witness to the light.@

Ato give knowledge of salvation,@ he says, Ain the forgiveness of sins.@ Can a wise person make light of the knowledge of salvation? Yet let us suppose that John has not yet come, that he has not yet pointed out Christ. Where would we seek salvation? What then shall I do? I will go to John, and listen to the voice of gladness, the voice of mercy, the speech of grace, the word of forgiveness and peace. ABehold the Lamb of God,@ he says, ABehold him who takes away the sins of the world.@ In another place he says: AHe who has the bride is the bridegroom.@ John is revealing that God comes, the Bridegroom, the Lamb. Since he is God, it is certain that he can take away sins; but whether he is willing remains a question. Surely he is willing, because he is the Bridegroom, because he is worthy of love. John is the Bridegroom's friend, because the Bridegroom can have none but friends. And although he wants a glorious bride, having no blemish or wrinkle, or any such thing, yet he does not seek such a oneCfor where would she be found?Cbut rather he himself makes such a one, such a one as he presents to himself.

Then why do we hesitate, brothers, and not approach the throne of glory with complete confidence? Let us give thanks to John, and, with him as mediator, let us journey to Christ, because, as John says, AHe must increase, but I must decrease.@ Decrease in what way? In splendor certainly, not in fervor. He withdrew his rays; he gathered himself up, so that he would not be like one who gives forth all his spirit. He must increase, John says, the one who can not be emptied, and from whose fullness all can receive. ABut I must decrease;@ I came before the sun, like the morning star; I must be hidden, because the sun has risen.