

The Consecration

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At the heart of the Mass is the story of the Last Supper—a story many times told—told daily, told hourly. Perhaps, as earth turns through time zones, it is told continually. “From the rising of the sun to its setting.”(Eucharistic Prayer III) A continual sacred story-telling, you might say. As words are concerned, yes.

But the words themselves point to a specific time reference, a time frame: “On the day before he was to suffer . . .”, and ends up with “Do this in memory of me.” Thus there is a reference to time past, the Last Supper, and time present, the memorial of the Mass. These words therefore narrate a very wide setting.

At the core of these words are the timeless words of Jesus himself: “Take this, all of you and eat of it, for this is my body.” To call these words timeless might be better described as omni-temporal. It is that because as it came from the lips of Jesus it was directed not only to those present in the room. It came and still comes from the heart of Jesus as a command—a command of love communicated and made present now by the Holy Spirit. As situated in the current ceremonial setting, they are omni-temporal.

If that is how I hear it, if I believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit that is everywhere present but, like dew, is condensed here—then I also believe the resurrected Christ, inseparable from the Trinity, is inseparably present here and even now is speaking these words. They are words coming directly from Christ’s heart to us. They bid us to do what? Take this. But take what? “My body.” Is that not the body that was seated in the upper room in Jerusalem? Yes and no. He refers immediately to “. . . my body which will be given up for you.” That will not happen until the next day with the crucifixion. Already there is multi-temporal reference in the words of Jesus.

We are, in effect, being pulled into the “now” of the Last Supper and of the “now” of the crucifixion, this “now” includes the resurrected body-time of Christ. Or Christ’s body-time includes those actual times. Thanks to the Holy Spirit there is a conflation of the now of our present moment with the now of the Last Supper. Love can do that. We know this by understanding and experiencing love. Christ wants it that way.

So Jesus’ personal self-gift, body and soul, is timeless because the love and person of Jesus Christ is timeless. My momentary “now” cannot stand outside of the permanent self-gift given by Christ. That was never outside the intention of Christ and never will be. Christ’s

act of self-gift remains his self given. It will never not be. This love is totally unconditional, indeed, totally unconditioned by space or time.

In love we are brought into the space-time of the resurrected Christ. What is his becomes our own because he wants it to be. Why should I put conditions on it? Put my possibles and impossibles on it? What do I really know about time and space? “Categories” as Kant called them—the preconditions of consciousness such as we know it.

The same must be said about what is spoken over the chalice: “This is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant,” (The omni-temporal is made explicit here in the references to eternal covenants.) “. . . which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Eternity is not exclusive of time, eternity is not the opposite of time, it is inclusive of time and unites it in the oneness of God’s being. Eternity is the “toto simul”, as St. Augustine put it. All that is given us in the body-time offered to us by Christ. The Mass is not so much offered to God as it is offered to us. The sacrifice of his life made by Christ is not offered to God so much as it is offered to us as a proof of love. To us it is offered because God knows we need it. That need may be hard to admit personally, but just look at humanity’s bloody history and it becomes more obvious.

Much you see there, perhaps, is warped, and what you see is also the futility of bloodshed. God Incarnate entered into the midst of our futility and suffered the consequences. With the resurrection that was transcended. Violence is not the last word. “Peace be with you”, are the first words spoken by the risen Jesus. That changes everything.