

B319 – In festo corporis Christ, et hoc de corpore Christio glorioso,
scilicet sancto sacramento. Sermo 1

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon 1 for Corpus Christi

1 Cor 11:23-27 Douay translation.

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. 24 And giving thanks, broke, and said: Take ye, and eat: this is my body, which shall be delivered for you: this do for the commemoration of me. 25 In like manner also the chalice, after he had supped, saying: This chalice is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of me. 26 For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall shew the death of the Lord, until he come. 27 Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," (1 Cor 11:23)

This word we have verbatim from 1 Cor 11 and it has just been recited in today's epistle. Since the whole feast today is about this holy and glorious sacrament of the altar, so also shall be our sermon. And we shall have many good ideas for the enlightenment of the mind and the consolation of the soul and some moral advice for the correction of life. But first the Virgin Mary is hailed.

For the declaration of this passage and the introduction of the material to be preached it must be known that the entire belief of the heart which we have of this holy sacrament and the verbal expression which we make of the same ought all to be founded on holy scriptures. So that our heart ought not extend itself more for believing nor the mouth for speaking unless to the extent that we have it from holy scriptures. The reason is because of the height and transcendental sublimity of this sacrament, which exceeds all natural understanding and philosophical science and all the powers of nature. So whoever wishes to believe of this holy sacrament, or speak according to natural understanding, or philosophical knowledge, or the powers of nature would err and fail in many ways. Just as someone who would wish to count according to understanding how many palms or cubits [measures of length] there are from here to heaven, or how many steps from the east to the west, or how many grains of sand and drops of water there are, that person would err and fall short. And so scripture says, Eccl 3, "Seek not the things that are too high for you," i.e. for the natural intellect, "and search not into things above your ability," namely philosophical knowledge, "but the things that God has commanded thee," (Sir 3:22), which is his mouth having two lips, namely the two testaments. Above is the New Testament, below the Old Testament. Therefore the Lord says, "If you will separate the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth," (Jer 15:19). "Think on them always," (Jer 15:19).

So now, dismissing natural and philosophical reasons, I shall accept proofs [auctoritates] only from sacred scripture, because I do not want to say anything but what the Lord says in sacred scripture. And then I shall be able to speak the theme: "For I have received of the Lord," not from a philosopher, nor from Virgil nor by natural genius, but by the Lord, namely from sacred

scripture, "that which also I delivered unto you," (1 Cor 11:23). The theme is clear. Among other wonders and secrets of this sacrament there are five principal ones, which I shall now speak about to you according to sacred scriptures.

- First, is the substantial change [mutatio substantialis],
- Second, is the work of the priest [operatio sacerdotalis],
- Third, the sacramental indwelling [habitatio sacramentalis],
- Fourth, the sense perception [perceptio sensualis],
- Fifth, the usual reception. [receptio usualis].

In this are the heights and difficulties of this sacrament. If it is said, "Whence do you have this brother." The theme replies: "For I have received of the Lord," and now I shall give it to you.

SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE

The first wonder and sublime secret of this holy sacrifice is the change of substance. There is a double change, one is accidental, the other substantial. Accidental change is when the accident or quality changes in a creature, the substance remaining the same, as is the change from whiteness into blackness, or from health to illness, or from hot into cold, or from smallness into largeness like a child changes, but the substance remains the same. Such changes are said to be "accidental." Substantial change is when not only the accidents but also the substance changes, as if mud is changed into gold, or lead into silver. Not only accidents are changed but also the substance. In this sacrament however only substantial change happens and not accidental, because the substance of bread and wine do not remain once the conversion is done, but their accidents remain.

In this sacrament two rules of philosophy fail. First that which says that whenever substantial change happens accidental change also happens. Reason, because accidents don't migrate, that is, pass from subject into subject, because if mud is changed into gold, even its quality is changed. But in this sacrament it is the opposite. Because the substance of bread by the power of words is changed into the body of Christ, however the accidents are not, because the same whiteness and quantity and roundness, smell and flavor remain as before. Now in this sacrament by governing yourselves by the rules of philosophy, it is necessary to err and fall short. When the change is accomplished, we adore, but we do not adore that which we see, neither the whiteness nor the roundness, but Christ true God and man contained within, as truly and really, as he was in the womb of the Virgin or as he is in heaven. On this see St. Thomas [III, q. 75, a. 1.](#) For just as soldiers adore the king behind the curtains, when he hears mass, although they do not see him, so we adore Christ under those accidents as if existing beneath the curtains.

A second rule of philosophy fails also in this sacrament, which says that no substantial change is total, because there always remains prime matter, which the Philosopher calls "hyle". Because if mud is changed into gold, the prime matter which is the term from which [terminus a quo, the mud], is the same with that which is the term to which [terminus ad quem, the gold], because the matter of all generable and corruptible things is the same. In this holy sacrament these rules fail, because nothing remains of the matter, nor of the substantial form of bread, because it entirely is changed into the body of Christ. On this see St. Thomas [III, q. 75, a. 5 & 6.](#) So therefore it is necessary that man not rule himself here with philosophical rules which are lacking, but according to holy scriptures, in the Psalter, which says, "This is the change," namely

the substantial, "of the right hand of the most High," (Ps 76:11) Natural changes are from the left, but this [is], "of the right of the most High." And it follows, "You are the God that does wonders," (Ps 76:15), namely the aforesaid. It is the same for the change of wine in the chalice into the blood of Christ.

Morally [using now the moral sense of scripture], you have here the teaching that you ought to adore Christ in the consecrated host without doubt and without condition. Some persons, presumptuous and shameless, fall into error saying when they adore, "I adore you, if you are Christ. [This deserves] Neither thanks nor gratitude [Nec grates, nec gratias] because even a stick or stone or dog can adore in this way, with conditions. So you should adore without condition. Reason, because condition includes doubt, and God wishes to be adored firmly with a whole heart, spirit, will and devotion. So David: "Bring up sacrifices, and come into his courts: adore the Lord in his holy court," (Ps 95:8-9). Note, "bring up sacrifices," here he speaks to the priests. "And come into his courts," here he speaks to the people. "Adore the Lord," namely both priests and people. "In his holy court," i.e. in the heart, without doubt and without condition.

Should someone say, "If the priest did not say the words, or if he had not been ordained he did not consecrate, therefore," etc. I reply that the priest alone shall be damned, and it is not a danger to you. Thus you should adore without doubt, although you habitually have in your heart this, that if you would know the opposite that you would not adore, and this suffices. Nevertheless this ought not to be expressed in words, but you ought simply to adore. See the first wonderful secret, which is, "For I have received of the Lord," in scripture, and "...I delivered unto you," (1 Cor 11:23)

PRIESTLY WORK

The second wonder of this sacrament is the priestly operation [operatio sacerdotalis]. The priest living here on earth has the power to open the heavens and make the Son of the Virgin Mary descend onto the altar into his hands. A great wonder is attributed to Moses, who made manna come down from the air, as we read in Ex 16:13. And of Elijah who made fire come down from the sphere of fire to burn the two squads of fifty soldiers, as we read in 4 Kgs 1, (Cf vv. 9-12). This wonder is greater, because the priest makes Christ descend not from the air, nor from the sphere of fire, nor from the heaven of the moon, nor from the heaven of Mercury, nor from the heaven of Venus, nor from the heaven of the sun, nor from the heaven of Mars, nor from the heaven of Jupiter, nor from the heaven of Saturn, nor from the heaven of the stars or firmament, nor from the crystalline heaven, but from the empyreal heaven. Behold, the priestly operation.

You know that when the Virgin Mary, greeted by the angel Gabriel, consenting, said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," etc., (Lk 1:38), at the last word, the heaven was open and the Son of God descended into her womb, and the angel and the Virgin adored him in the womb. Just as the voice [literally, the mouth] of the Virgin opened up heaven, so also does the voice of the priest, and more excellently. It shall not displease the Virgin Mary if I speak the truth, because the Virgin in opening heaven had to say eight words. [Ecce ancilla Domini : fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.] First, "Behold," second "the handmaid," etc. until she said the whole, and then the heaven was open and she conceived. The priest says only five words [Hoc est enim corpus meum], and when he says the last word, namely "meum" then heaven is opened and Christ is in

the host. Also the Virgin Mary opened heaven only once, but the priest, every day, and at every mass. Also in the womb of the Virgin it was a baby that descended, not as large as an ant, and vulnerable and mortal. In the host he descends as large as he is in heaven, as he was on the cross, neither vulnerable nor mortal but glorious and invulnerable. Gregory: "Who of the faithful can have a doubt, in that hour of sacrifice, at the voice of the priest the heavens are opened, in that mystery of Jesus Christ the chorus of angels are present, the highest associate with the least, earthly things are joined to heavenly, and the same happens from visibles as well as invisibles," (Gregory the Great, Dialogues IV, c. 58), and it is found in [Gratian] *De Consecratione, dist. II, canon. 73*: "*What be the blood,*" *vers.:* "*Who of the faithful.*" Note how 'the heavens are opened' is understood like the telling of a secret. It is said. "He has opened his heart to me," not that it is wounded or divided, but because a secret is revealed. So Delilah says of Sampson to the Philistines, "Now he hath opened his heart to me," (Judges 16:18). So of the Son of God who is hidden in the empyreal heaven, when he descends into the consecrated host, that descent is said to be the opening of the heavens. "This is the bread that came down from heaven." If anyone eats of this bread, "he shall live for ever," (Jn 6:59).

If someone says that Christ descends from heaven into the host, and so he departs from heaven, I reply that he does not leave heaven. For this note two comparisons [similitudines]. First, with a house having a hundred windows or even a thousand windows, in which the rays of the sun enter, and nevertheless they do not depart from the heaven. So Christ, the ray of God the Father, descends into each host, and nevertheless does not leave heaven. Second, with my voice, which is in each of your ears. You see already how many ears there are here. Now I believe that each of you has two, etc. and in each of them is my voice, and nevertheless it doesn't depart from me. If a corruptible and transitory word can be in that way, how much more the eternal Word about which John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word," (Jn 1:1). Thus David says, "The Lord is in his holy temple," and at the same time, "the Lord's throne is in heaven," (Ps 10:5). If the pregnant Virgin was the temple of God, so also the consecrated host is pregnant. The temple of God can be said where there are angels, as Gregory says, because a king does not travel alone, if we would not have eyes half-blind nor ears plugged up we would see and perceive them singing. Just as some saints, like St. Thomas Aquinas of the Order of Preachers, who composed today's [Divine] Office, in which we sing:

Panis angelicus	The Bread of Angels
fit panis hominum;	becomes the bread of men;
Dat panis coelicus	The Bread of heaven
figuris terminum:	ends all prefigurations:
O res mirabilis!	What wonder!
Manducat Dominum	Consumes him, the Lord,
Pauper, servus et humilis	a poor and humble servant.

Morally [the moral sense of the passage], it is clear how pure the priest ought to be, who has a judge and is surrounded by angels, and his hand and fingers are filled with angels. If he is good, the angels say, "O blessed one, you have a greater grace than we," etc. If he be evil, lustful, have a mistress [concubinarius], a gambler [lusor], the angels say to Christ, "Lord do you want us to

kill this traitor?" Christ responds, "I do not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live," (Cf Ez 18:23).

The next question which you already have strong in your hearts is this: If the priest be a man of evil life, lustful etc, does such a priest have that power of consecrating? For we all agree the good priest does. I respond that both the good and the bad priests, by saying the words, truly consecrate. For this, note the similarity between two pipes, gold and wood, through which water from the same spring flows into the garden to water the cabbages. Which cabbages will do better? Is it not just as beneficial from the one [pipe] as from the other, from which comes the same water? For the goodness of the cabbages is not from the virtue of the pipes, but from the virtue of the water. So it is in our situation:

The spring from which the water of the whole world and knowledge flows is Christ. "The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom," (Sir 1:5). The pipes through which the water of consecration passes are the priests. The hosts are the vegetables or cabbages from the land, [made] of wheat, not from any other material. The gold pipe is the good and devout priest, the wooden is the priest of bad life, who has a mistress, simoniacal, raunchy [ribaldus], and yet each truly consecrates, not by the power of the priest, but of Christ. Christ then, in the end, becomes the lord of the garden, who after he has used the pipes, puts the gold pipe in a box in the treasury of heaven. "If any man minister to me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my minister be," (Jn 12:26). A pipe of rotten wood is thrown into the fire to be burned in hell. So the Apostle [Paul]: "But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord," (1 Cor 11:28). Where the Gloss says quoting Ambrose: "He is so punished as if he had killed Christ with his own hands." See this priestly operation, and from where do you know this, brother? "For I have received of the Lord," etc., (1 Cor 11:23).

SACRAMENTAL INDWELLING

The third secret wonder of this sacrament is the sacramental indwelling. O wonderful it is that the whole Christ dwells in such a small quantity. You ask how is this possible? Again how is it possible that when the host is broken, the whole Christ is not broken, moreover the whole remains integral, even in each broken particle. Here all rules of philosophy fail. Nevertheless for your consolation I will show you a comparison to the eye, from your image howsoever large you may be, which is received whole in a mirror. If there were a hundred thousand or even more mirrors in front of you, your image would be in all of them. And if you break a mirror, nevertheless the image is not broken, but in each of its fragments it remains integral. Shall not God the Father be able to do the same with his image, who is Christ? Christ is the image of the invisible God. (Cf 2 Cor 4:4, and Col 1:15). The host is a mirror, someone said. Is it not like an image in a mirror, which is not corporeal, and of Christ in the host, which has a real body? I say that always, because the glorified body is more subtle than an image which is prevented from entering the mirror by a little handkerchief [panno]. Nothing can impede a glorified body; [it is] more subtle than light, than a voice, than even an image. Therefore, once the words are pronounced, immediately the whole body is in the host, like the image in the mirror.

Therefore of this consecrated host it can be said "For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness," (Wis 7:26). " For she is

the brightness of eternal light," with respect to the divinity which is there. For which it must be known that by the power of the word alone it is there, namely under the appearance of bread, the body of Christ, but from real concomitance the soul is also there, because the body of Christ is there as a living body, which is not without a soul, nor without blood.

If in the triduum [triduo, three day duration of Christ's entombment] the Apostles had consecrated, only the dead body of Christ would have been there, which was [its state] at that time. But now it is alive, together with the soul and blood and divinity. By the power of the words only the body is there, but concomitantly the soul is there with its excellences and the divinity with all its perfections. Just as if some lord had invited a certain great lord or prelate to dinner, and he had arrived with his shield-bearers, by virtue of the words of invitation., only the lord himself or the prelate was invited, but from concomitance or association the shield-bearers were also there. Thus the priest by consecrating with the power of the words, consecrates precisely only the body of Christ, but the soul, blood and divinity follow him. Therefore think what you eat, when you receive communion, because there is something greater there than all things corporeal, namely the body of Christ, something there more excellent than spiritual creatures, namely the soul of Christ, and divinity is also there, which is above everything which God made or will make or can make.

And so the authority says, "For she is the brightness of eternal light," (Wis 7:26), namely with respect to divinity. Therefore the host is round, which signifies the eternity of God. And "the unspotted mirror," (Wis 7:26), with respect to the soul. Therefore the host ought to be most pure and white. "and the image of his goodness," (Wis 7:26). with respect to the body through which he accomplished his goodness in the work of redemption.

Morally, we have here a teaching which if we wish to receive communion in a dignified way, we have three, namely, the brightness of eternal light through true belief without error and false opinion. Secondly, the mirror unspotted through chastity. Third that we have the image of his goodness through firm friendship, because just as Christ did not wish to take revenge on his enemies, neither, out of your love of him, should you. Therefore Christ, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God," (Mt 5:9). Note "peacemakers" from its etymology, i.e. making peace, and cursed is he who impedes peace about which it can be said, "Damned are the warmongers, because they shall be called children of the devil."

SENSE PERCEPTION

The fourth secret wonder is sense perception, because the bodily senses seem to be deceived about the Eucharist, because one thing is perceived, which is believed, because the eye does not see Christ, but whiteness, nor is Christ heard, nor smelled. Why this? Christ well could have made it that just as the image is seen in the mirror, also he would be seen in the host, just as by many saints he has been seen there. But he did not want this for two reasons. First out of necessity. Second out of usefulness.

Of necessity, because it is necessary to receive communion, because just as all our evil comes to us from the eating of fruit, about which it is said of the Virgin Mary, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb Jesus Christ." And it would be disgusting to visibly eat human flesh and drink blood. But just as a doctor covers up the pills offered or the host, lest it be distasteful to

fastidious people, so Christ our physician, whose flesh is the pill of our salvation, because otherwise we cannot be saved, unless through communion, he hides [his flesh] lest it be seen, nor is the flavor of flesh perceived, etc. See the necessity. About which the prophet Isaiah said, "And they shall worship you," in the consecrated host, "and shall make supplication to you: only in you is God, and there is no God besides you. Verily you are a hidden God, the God of Israel the savior." (Isa 45:14). Note "only in you is God," just this saying is exclusive, it excludes other sacraments, in which God is not, unless figuratively. Only in this sacrament really and personally. About this see St. [Thomas III, q. 75, a. 1](#). He does not say "similarly" but "verily". "For my flesh is meat indeed: and my blood is drink indeed," (Jn 6:56), is so construed. That meat is truly my flesh and that drink truly is my blood.

The second reason is from usefulness, for our merit. The article about this sacrament is of especially great merit, because of the difficulty of the senses, which judge the opposite from this which we believe. If indeed you believe that the host be white, you have no credit [grates] because your eyes can see it. But it is of merit to believe that Christ is there whom you do not see. Gregory. Faith is without merit where human reason provides experience. But it is of merit to believe because he says that really. He is not able to lie nor deceive. Therefore we offer him great honor by simply believing, saying: Lord although my intellect cannot grasp this mystery, nevertheless I believe from what you say. He says: "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed," (Jn 20:29). Many saints have seen Christ in this sacrament.

REGULAR RECEPTION

The fifth secret wonder is regular reception., because he permits and wishes not only to be adored by us, but to be received according to the use and custom of the church. Priests, well prepared, should celebrate every day. Devout people, with good advice, every month. Others once a year, namely by mandate during Easter, otherwise they will never be received into heaven. The angels say:

O res mirabilis!	What wonder!
Manducat Dominum	a poor and humble servant
Pauper, servus et humilis	consumes him, the Lord.

O what a great wonder is this. Why it was instituted, what usefulness does it have? I say that he instituted this for two reasons. First, for his honor. Second for our progress. It is an honor to the victorious king to be received faithfully in the castle which he acquired by conquest [quae bellando acquisivit]. And on the contrary it is a disgrace when they are not permitted to enter it. About which John said, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not," (Jn 1:11). But indeed they let cattle, chickens, and hens enter. The second reason is for our furtherance. If a king or a Pope show great gratitude when well received, how much more will Christ the king and Pope do likewise, from whose worthy reception Christians inestimably grow? David: "He has made a remembrance of his wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious Lord: he has given food to them that fear him " (Ps. 110:4-5).