



Allocutio



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Allocutio: Eucharistic Congress

Tonight sees the beginning of a year of events leading up to the Eucharistic Congress. Over the next 12 months I'll be sharing with you the teaching of the Church about the Eucharist as laid out in Councils and letters of the Holy Fathers.

Tonight I want to begin with the Council of Trent. This council was called after the Reformation which itself had been provoked by a series of misunderstandings and abuses in the Church. Some of these abuses had been around the Eucharist so it was necessary to lay down with clarity what the unbroken faith of the Church had always been, East and West, and the decrees of that Council of Trent remain the bedrock of all Church teaching on the Eucharist to this day. The Council of Trent is probably known better for its anathemas, in other words those canons by which it condemned false doctrines. But it also laid out in its decrees the positive teaching of the Church which I will now dip into. I will read out the substantial teaching of this council on the Most Holy Eucharist, but if you get a copy of it yourself you can read the lot.

The council taught "that in the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained under the perceptible species of bread and wine" (Session XIII, October 11, 1551). The redeemer "instituted this wonderful sacrament of the Last Supper, when, after he had blessed bread and wine he said in plain unmistakable words that he was giving them his own body and his own blood".

"It was his will that this sacrament be received as the soul's spiritual food, to sustain and build up those who live with his life ... to be a remedy to free us from our daily defects and to keep us from mortal sin. It was Christ's will that this sacrament be a pledge of our future glory and our everlasting happiness and likewise a symbol of that one body of which he is the head."

"The Church of Christ has always believed that immediately after the consecration the true body and blood of our Lord, together with his soul and divinity, exist under the species of bread and wine. His body exists under the species of bread and his blood under the species of wine according to the import of the words. But his body exists under the species of wine, his blood under the species of bread, and his soul under both species in virtue of the natural connection and concomitance which unite the parts of Christ our Lord, who has risen from the dead and dies now no more. Moreover, Christ's divinity is present because of its admirable hypostatic union with his body and soul. It is therefore perfectly true that just as much is present under either species as is present under both. For Christ, whole and entire, exists under the species of bread and under any part of that species, and similarly the whole Christ exists under the species of wine and under its parts."



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And that is why when only the hosts are given out you also receive the whole Christ. Or when a coeliac receives only from the chalice that person receives the whole Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity. It is also why we must have great reverence for every crumb and the remains in the chalice.

“This Holy Council now again declares that by the consecration of bread and wine a change takes place in which the whole substance of bread is changed into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the Holy Catholic Church fittingly and properly names transubstantiation.”

“This holy council furthermore declares that the custom which has grown up in the Church of God of honouring this great and adorable sacrament with special worship and solemnity on a particular feast day each year, and the custom of carrying the sacrament in procession through the streets and public places with reverence and respect, are good and very religious customs.”

“The custom of reserving the Holy Eucharist in a sacred place is so ancient that it was recognised already in the century of the council of Nicaea. That the Holy Eucharist should be taken to the sick and that it should be carefully kept in the Churches for this purpose is right and very reasonable.”

“The more a Christian is aware of the holiness and the divinity of this heavenly Sacrament, the more careful he should be not to receive it without great reverence and sanctity ... no one who has a mortal sin on his conscience shall dare receive the Holy Eucharist before making a sacramental confession regardless of how contrite he may think he is.”

On this last point you may need guidance from a spiritual director for there can be situations when it is hard to know if someone is in mortal sin and also a scrupulous person can suffer greatly over small matters.

These are quotes from the council of Trent on the Eucharist. All subsequent teaching and devotion in the Church take this teaching as the starting point.

I hope next month to say something on the teaching about the sacrifice of the Mass.

Amen.

Fr Paul Churchill