

with Christ in his giving, the *Totus Christus*, the whole Christ, head and members is built up into one giver in one act of giving, we are built into Christ in his active function of worshipper of the Father. The *Totus Christus* is at worship. And what does it give? It gives the Body and Blood. In sign of what? Of its giving itself. Christ's human will and heart are poured out in devotion. To the extent that our wills and hearts are offered to the Father, to that extent we are built up into the *Totus Christus*, not merely as one principle in the offering of the body and the blood, but as one principle in the offering the inner holocaust of the spirit, and mind, and will, and heart. It was the inner holocaust of Jesus on the Cross that made his sacrifice of infinite availing; it is our inner holocaust of ourselves united to that of Jesus which will make the Mass, the *sacrificium ecclesiae*, the sacrifice of the *Totus Christus*, a sacrifice of infinite availing.

And so we return at the end to the idea of self-sacrifice, of the giving of ourselves to God. This is the supreme principle which we must teach our children. In every vocation, in every circumstance, in every accident, we must be always giving. 'The art of perfect living', Fr Jarrett never tired of repeating, 'is the art of perfect giving.' If we have taught our children this we have succeeded as Christian educators.

Suscipe Domine universam meam libertatem. Accipe memoriam, intellectum atque voluntatem omnem. Quidquid habeo, vel possideo, mihi largitus es: id tibi totum restituo, ac tuae prorsus voluntati trado gubernandum. (S. Ignatius de Loyola.)



TASTING GOD

BY

PHILIP BARRY, O.P.

Grant us, we beseech thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of thy body and blood, that we may ever taste within us the fruit of thy Redemption.



RUCTUS Redemptionis—the fruit of redemption is grace which Christ merited for us on the Cross—hence the metaphor. We already received grace in Baptism and the other sacraments. But the Eucharist is the Sacrament *par excellence* of grace. It contains the Author of grace in Person—not so the other sacraments which contain but a participation of the power of Christ. The

Eucharist is the very store-house of grace, the very Orchard of the fruit of Redemption, the very fountain-head of the divine life, the

very wine-press of the blood. The Bl. Eucharist, the last and supreme Sacrament, has for its aim to perfect the life of grace in us, to consummate our union with God by love. Hence this prayer does not ask merely that we may *obtain* the fruit of redemption—we obtained that already in Baptism and the other sacraments—but that we may ever *taste* that fruit within us. The Eucharist is the only sacrament that is applied to us by way of *taste*: the others are applied by way of external touch. This itself is a sign of the excelling intimacy of our contact with grace effected by this Sacrament. But it is only a *sign*: the *reality* is ‘a certain transformation of ourselves into Christ by means of love’ (St Thomas) even as food is transformed into the eater thereof. Only in this case since it is for the higher life to assimilate the lower, it is not we who transform Christ into us but Christ who transforms us into himself. ‘The property of love is to transform the one who loves into the object of his love.’ Love—that is the distinctive fruit of Holy Communion. Nothing less. Love, which is ‘the fulfilling of the law’, ‘the bond, the substance of perfection’, the Queen and Mother and Soul of all the virtues. Love, which is the possession and fruition of God, whether in heaven or on earth. That is the meaning of *taste*—to experience the fruition.

‘This Sacrament confers grace spiritually together with the virtue of love. Hence St John Damascene . . . compares this Sacrament to the burning coal which Isaias saw (6, 6): “for a live ember is not simply wood, but wood united to fire; so also the Bread of Communion is not simple bread but bread united to the Godhead”. Moreover, as St Gregory observes . . . : “God’s love is never idle; for, wherever it is it is powerfully active”. Consequently through this Sacrament, so far as concerns its power, not only is the habit of grace and virtue bestowed, but it is furthermore aroused to act, according to 2 *Cor.* 5, 14: “The Love of Christ presseth us”. Hence it is that the soul is spiritually nourished through the power of this Sacrament, by being gladdened in spirit and, as it were, inebriated with the sweetness of the divine goodness, according to what is said in the *Canticle*, 5, 1: “Eat, o friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved” (III, 79, 1 ad 2).

‘That we may ever taste . . .’ It is a cry of hunger and thirst for the food and drink of our souls. It is a cry of longing for Holy Communion. It is a cry of love for God. It is the cry of the woman of Samaria: ‘Sir, give me water such as that, so that I may never be thirsty’ (*John*, 4, 15). It is the cry of the Psalmist: ‘As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after thee, o God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God’ (*Ps.* 41).

'O God, my God, I search for thee at break of day. My soul thirsteth for thee. My flesh languisheth in this desert land where no water is. So I come before thee in thy Sanctuary' (*Ps.* 62). 'I opened my mouth and panted for longing' (*Ps.* 118, 131).

That love-hunger of the soul to be united with God in the embrace of Holy Communion is the perfect disposition for the perfect receiving of this Sacrament. This prayer does well to pray for it. For the Sacrament benefits us only in proportion as we are so disposed, only in proportion as we hunger for it. We eat in proportion to our appetite. So it is with this heavenly Food—as it is with the Manna of the desert: 'And the children of Israel . . . gathered, one more, another less. . . . Neither had he more that had gathered more; nor did he find less that had provided less: but everyone had gathered *according to what they were able to eat*' (*Exod.* 16, 18). So can a vessel be filled only in proportion as it can contain, or, only in proportion as it is empty—in this case, empty of self-love.

'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me, and drink' (*John*, 7, 37). 'Come to me all ye that desire me, and be filled with my fruits' (*Ecclus.* 24, 26).

'He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty-handed' (*Lk.* 1, 53).

'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it' (*Ps.* 80, 11).

Desire is as wings to the soul that enable it to soar aloft to reach God himself. By knowledge we grasp, but by desire we reach out far beyond what we can grasp. Hence as Julian of Norwich has it: 'By love he can be gotten and holden but by knowledge never'. As the heavenly Father said to St Catherine of Siena: 'No virtue can merit eternal life for you if you serve me in a finite manner, for I, the infinite God, wish to be served in an infinite manner, and you have nothing approaching the infinite save the desire and transports of your soul' (*Dial.* 4).

The saint learned that lesson well as we know from her life and teaching. It was a favourite maxim of hers: 'God hath no need of a perfect work but only of our infinite desire'. We shall be judged by 'the Searcher of Hearts' less by what we did than by what we desired to do, less by our achievements than by our aspirations. Desire dilates the soul, endows it with fortitude and magnanimity and carries it forward to great achievement, as it did in the case of St Catherine herself, she who, in the words of the pagan Swinburne,

Clothed with calm love and clear desire
 . . . Went forth in her soul's attire,
 A missive fire.

St Catherine could not restrain her cries of hunger for Holy Communion. It was that desire that literally transported her exhausted body to the Church and to the Communion-table. St Margaret Mary tells us that one Good Friday while crying her longing for our Lord whom she could not receive that day in Holy Communion, he said to her: 'My daughter, your desire has so touched my Heart that if I had not instituted this Sacrament of love I should do it now to render myself your food. I take such delight in being desired that as often as the heart forms this wish so often do I regard her with love and draw her to me.'

'That we may ever taste . . .' It is the mystery of this Mystery of love that the more we eat the more we hunger; for, this Sacrament is the food of love. It increases our love: it increases our love-hunger. 'O God of love . . . my joy, my delight . . . thou alone can quench my thirst and satiate my soul. Yet the more I feed on thee the more I hunger; the more I drink . . . the more I thirst Come, then, Lord Jesus, come.' (St Gertrude.)

Celestial sweetness unalloyed
Who eat Thee hunger still,
Who drink of Thee still feel a void
Which only Thou canst fill.¹

That is the love-stricken crying of the soul in the *Spiritual Canticle* of St John of the Cross:

Whither hast thou vanished
Beloved, and hast left me full of woe,
And like the hart hast sped,
Wounding, ere thou didst go
Thy love, who followed crying, high and low? . . .
How do I still draw breath
Since 'tis no life at all, this life I know
These arrow-wounds deal death . . .
O that my griefs would end
Come, grant me thy fruition full and free. . . .

Or, as Crashaw has it in the *Song* appended to the *Flaming Heart* inspired by St Teresa, she of the 'thirsts of love', of 'the brim-filled Bowles of fierce desire':

Though still I dy, I live again;
Still longing so to be still slain
So gainful is such loss of breath
I dy even in desire of death.
Still live in me this loving strive
Of living Death and dying life,
For while Thou sweetly slayest me
Dead to my selfe, I live to Thee.

¹ Hymn for the Lauds of the Feast of the Holy Name.

So does Holy Communion in the height of its fervour make us 'long to be dissolved to be with Christ'. So great can this longing become that it can not only literally transport body and soul, as it did in the case of the saints, but transport the soul quite out of the body, as it did in the case of Blessed Imelda, who died caught up to God by love in the divine clasp of her First Holy Communion. So did the Blessed Virgin herself die—of yearning to be reunited with her Divine Son.



THE UNION OF OPPOSITES

BY

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WHEN God gives his graces to a soul, these graces are never restricted exclusively to the individual. They are bestowed also on the whole Body of Christ. No one can hope to receive graces selfishly, nor can he ascend the Scale of Perfection alone. He may look only towards God and seek him alone, as the three kings journeying to Bethlehem following the beam of the star. But when they have reached their goal and have held the Lord of the whole world in their embrace, they may not stay there alone with him. They are sent back to their country by another way. They return transformed, carrying back what they have received to their own kith and kin. When the soul has reached the heights of perfection, she may not rest there; in one way or another she is sent back to her own folk but to take up a new position, as mediator of the grace she has received. In many cases this may be by no visible movement, but simply that the contemplative, hidden behind high walls, draws down the blessing of God upon his own people. To some, however, who have retired altogether from the world, it is given to return by another way. Thus it was for Mother Julian. She had passed the stage of the purified beginner, the illuminated proficient, she had passed into the Cloud of Unknowing. But she was not to stay there. She must go back by a new way of Revelation, given not for herself alone, not as a sign that God was favouring her for her high stage in perfection.

Mother Julian is conscious that her message is for her even-Christian. As a mystic in the embrace of God she is turned outward. The Lord gently turns her head so that she may see the suffering men around her. Thus she writes her visions for the comfort of mankind.

In all this I was greatly stirred in charity to mine even-Christians,