

# Encountering the Eucharist

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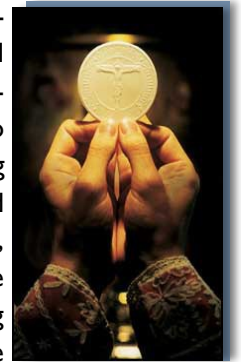
A very important part of any Catholic Church is the Tabernacle. We find this word in the Old Testament. It is used to describe a mobile tent that the Israelites made and carried with them through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. In that tent, was placed the Ark of the Covenant. When the Israelites would make camp, they set up the tabernacle and the presence of God would “overshadow” and come upon it. Likewise, the tabernacle in our church contains the reserved Blessed Sacrament and so the presence of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity—the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is really present in this vessel.



## What We Believe...

### The Doctrine of Transubstantiation

The Eucharist is the Sacrament in which Christ, under the forms of bread and wine, is truly present with His body and blood in order to offer Himself in an unbloody manner to the Heavenly Father to give Himself to the faithful as nourishment for their souls. This definition contains all the essential elements of this Sacrament. Nevertheless, many people struggle to understand *how* bread and wine can actually *change* into something else. This seems to challenge our notions of what is reasonable and logical. The doctrine of Transubstantiation says that “Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (*transsubstantiati*) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us.” [Forth Lateran Council canon #1]. There’s a lot to unpack here. Firstly, we have to understand and acknowledge that Jesus is in fact God. And that God, being all powerful, speaks creation into existence by His word. Through the prophet Isaiah God said: “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). Jesus is God’s Word made flesh (cf. Jn. 1:14). In John’s Gospel, we read that Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” Then He adds: “for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (Jn. 6:53, 55). At the Last Supper while celebrating the Passover, Jesus says of the bread: “This is my body” and of the wine: “This is my blood.” So since God’s Word always accomplishes its purpose, when Jesus uttered those words He was actually changing the *substance* of the bread and wine into something entirely different. What is “substance?” Substances are a particular kind of basic entity deriving from the intuitive notion that an individual thing or object has particular properties. We might say something that exists in its own right. In chemistry, for example, there is this concept of a “chemical change” when a chemical reaction, involving the rearrangement of the atoms of one or more substances and a change in their chemical properties or composition, results in the formation of at least one new substance. For example when wood (one substance) is burned by fire it changes into ash (another substance). We might therefore understand that during the words of consecration, the bread and wine, like the wood, are undergoing a change in their composition and turning into the new substance of Christ’s body and blood. However, unlike the example of wood turning into ash where the change is progressive and visible, the changes to the bread and wine are instantaneous and invisible. We say that God creates *ex nihilo*, meaning He makes a substance to exist where previously it did not. Yet, at Mass, God is doing something entirely different here. He is causing



*continued on the back*



“The Ark would be the type and image of Christ : for if we look back to the way of the Incarnation of the Only-begotten, we shall see that it is in the temple of the Virgin, as in an ark, that the Word of God took up His abode. For in Him dwelt all the fullness of the God-head bodily, as the Scripture saith.”  
-St. Cyril of Jerusalem  
*De ador. In Spir. Et Verit*



### “The Doctrine of Transubstantiation” continued from the front...

something new (i.e. a new substance) to be from something else that was previously there. In other words, God is “replacing,” as it were, the substance of the bread and wine instantaneously and invisibly, with the substance of Christ’s body and blood. Going back to the example of wood changing into ash, when the wood is burned by the fire, we also visibly “see” that the wood is changing its appearance. It becomes the gray or black powdery substance we call “ash.” The way something affects our senses (our sight, smell, taste, or touch) we call a “characterization” or a “property” of an object that it happens to have but that it could lack. Take for example an unripe piece of fruit like an orange. We know that it’s still an “orange” but the color property we see with our eyes we characterize as “green.” Even though this fruit usually is orange in color, when it is ripening on the tree it *lacks* the property of *orange-ness*, yet we understand that it is still the same type of fruit at every stage of its development. Those properties we take in through our senses, are called “accidents.” In an analogous way, while the substance of the bread and wine have been changed, those accidental properties we see, smell, taste, and touch that identify these things as bread and wine are still present. Yet, unlike the unripen orange in our example where the substance of the fruit remains, there is an exclusion of the substance of the bread and wine. This is because the accidents of bread and wine cannot inhere (exist) in the body and blood of Christ Himself, it remains that, contrary to physical laws, they remain in their being of themselves without a subject. Thus, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, “What our senses fail to fathom, let us grasp through faith’s consent.” Our senses are deceived, but by faith we recognize Jesus’ body, blood, soul and divinity.

### Life in the Eucharist: Mary the Ark of the New Covenant



Many things we read about in the Old Testament are a foreshadowing or an indication of what is to come in the New Testament. One such thing is the Ark of the Covenant. This was a wooden box overlaid with pure gold. On the lid were two an-

gels, called cherubim, with their wings raised above facing each other. Within this ark were to be placed the tables of the law which God was about to give to Moses. The ark was designed to be a symbol of the presence of God in the midst of His people. Because Jesus was carried inside the womb of the Virgin Mary, the early Church fathers saw her as the “true ark” fore-

shadowed in the Old Testament. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* continually teaches the words from the earliest centuries, “Mary, in whom the Lord Himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the Ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is “the dwelling of God . . . with men” (#2676). Mary was the true tabernacle.

### Adoro te Devote: The Epiclesis of Consecration

Epiclesis literally means *invocation* (kl’esis) *upon* (épi). During the Mass, the epiclesis is the part of the Eucharistic Prayer where the priest is calling down and invoking the Holy Spirit *upon the offerings* “so that they may become the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer II). According to the Eastern tradition, it is the epiclesis which consecrates the bread and wine into the body and blood of the risen Christ. According to the Western tradition, it is the narration of the Institution that performs this consecration. The epiclesis underlines with superb precision the humility of the priestly ministry. The epiclesis reveals exactly what the priest does: he says the prayer asking God the Father to send His Holy Spirit over the bread and wine so that they may become the body and blood of Jesus. Therefore, it is the Heavenly Father who consecrates through His Holy Spirit.

