

You have probably heard it said that: “The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life;” that’s a (now popular) quote from the Catechism. What does it mean for the Eucharist to be the *summit* of Christian life? Well, a summit is a high point, you might think of the highest point on a mountain. The first thing, then, that the Eucharist as the summit tells us is that you don’t just arrive there. You don’t just drive up to the base of a mountain, get out of your car, and arrive at the summit. You have to climb the mountain. Just showing up for Mass and getting in line for Communion is not enough, it does not get you to the summit, you will not receive the ultimate effect of the Eucharist (the summit) in this way. While getting to Mass is not only good but essential, to receive the ultimate effect of the Eucharist (salvation), steps have to be taken, you have to climb the hill. The question here is: what are those steps? What does this “climb” entail?

This image or analogy of climbing a mountain to reach the high point is helpful in understanding the Eucharist as summit. The first thing it tells you is that to reach the summit (to receive the ultimate effect of the Eucharist), it’s going to entail great personal effort, hard work, and sacrifice, along with determination and perseverance. It’s not for the faint of heart, it requires real commitment and a desire to reach the top.

So again, what does the “climb” to reach the summit entail? A short, succinct answer would be: all the usual means of sanctification – study of the faith, personal prayer, the sacraments, and living the faith in everyday life. That is certainly true and it is one way, and a good way, to focus on arriving at the summit. At the same time, the question of arriving at the summit can be expanded on in such a way that we can perhaps see a little more on the nature of the *mutual* love (which leads to the only true satisfaction of man’s deepest desire). Notice: *mutual* love. God’s love for us is not enough to bring about salvation, we have to respond. *Mutual* love, not one-sided love, is what unites two people. The summit is this perfect mutual love. To see mutual love, we have to look at both sides – what God did and does, and what we have to do to respond.

The starting point is the question: what is it that God is trying to, or wants to, accomplish with man? Although this question has already been largely answered (i.e., mutual love), let us state the answer like this: union with man. What is the nature of this union? We hear it often – a number of times in the Old Testament, but also each time in Mass with the prayers of consecration: this is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal...what?...*covenant*. God makes covenants with man multiple times in the Old Testament. Then when our Lord comes, He establishes the final means of covenant; no new one will be offered. The nature (or kind) of relation that God wants to establish with man is a covenant. The question, then, is: what is a covenant? A covenant, we might say, is similar to a contract or a bargain – *similar*, but not exactly the same. It’s similar insofar as it involves an exchange. But instead of something like a business deal involving an exchange of goods or money – something *impersonal* – a covenant is an exchange of selves, each person giving themselves *completely* to the other, something *deeply* personal. The marriage bond is also called a marriage covenant because marriage is to be this complete giving of one’s self to the other. A covenantal union, then, is mutual love. However, the word covenant helps to bring out more clearly what that means or entails – it’s more than just good feelings; in fact, this complete giving of one’s self will often involve hard things that don’t feel good; the Passion of our Lord is the prime example of this. A covenant has 3 aspects: an oath on each person’s part (like marriage), it is unconditional, and what is exchanged is one’s self. A covenant might be summarized by saying it is: an unconditional total self-gift to another. Notice the word *unconditional*. A covenant can never involve conditions; a covenant can never say: I’ll do something as long as I get what I want. That’s not a covenant (love), that’s self-interest which is the converse of covenant. Yes, covenant does involve self-denial, denial of our own desires, hence our Lord said: If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Why covenant? Simply because this is the nature of I Am Who Am, i.e., the nature of the One who cannot be otherwise, the nature of God, the nature of love.

Another way to characterize covenant is to say that God does something and then wants us to do something in return, not because He needs anything but because that is how mutual love is formed. The point here is that this formulation of covenant brings out the next question: what is man’s part in forging this covenant? We will have to take that up the next time. There will be a number of steps covered in describing Eucharist as summit; the

text of these articles will explain the steps but it's helpful to also have an overall outline, which is provided below. So far, we've only gotten as far as "step 2" in the outline below.

1. What does God wish to accomplish?
→ Union with man

2. What's the nature of that union? What kind of relation?

→ **COVENANT**

3. My part? Worship. What is worship?
BUT, problem: infinite debt.

4. God Himself will make restitution. What does that mean? Substitution = He pays the price and that's it, I do nothing? Does that satisfy *covenant*?

5. No. So how do I offer perfect worship???
→ *By offering Christ*. How? What does that mean?

6. To answer that question, we have to take a little detour – what does it really mean to "know," to know something, to know anything?
→ Union between the knower (say, you) and the thing (or person) known (say Jesus).

7. How do I *really* come to know something or someone?
→ By **PARTICIPATION** in it or, in the case of a person, by participation in their life.

8. The life of Christ was one of sacrifice of self. To really know Him, I have to participate in His sacrifice in everyday life.

9. But is just suffering or just sacrificing for anything enough?

- A person might sacrifice themselves for worldly, personal gain.
- A prisoner might suffer in prison but remain bitter, prideful, unrepentant.

10. Just suffering, just sacrificing is not enough. What else is needed?
→ The right **INTENTION** or purpose. I sacrifice myself or endure suffering for our Lord, according to His will.

11. How can I have a right, pure, intention?
→ Remembering / Anamnesis.

12. What happens when I do this? I become like Christ.

13. How do I offer Christ? By becoming like Him and then offering myself.

14. Now I come to Mass, our Lord makes Himself and His Passion present to us, and we unite our sacrifices with His. This binds us to Him. And this union with Him is what salvation is.
→ Mission accomplished.

God bless you. Fr Kuhn.