

This week's article will continue the topic of the Holy Eucharist as the *summit* of Christian life. The Eucharist as summit, like the high point on a mountain, implies that there's a climb to really receive the ultimate effect of the Eucharist. How is it that the Eucharist is summit in this sense? We started with the question of: what is it that God wants to accomplish, which is: union or relation with man in the form of a covenant. Covenant, in turn, means giving one's self completely to the other. God acts first to establish this covenant, first with creation and then, after sin, our Lord's redemptive work. What is man's part? From the beginning it was (and is) worship of God. How do I offer perfect worship to fulfill covenant? By offering Christ. But what does that mean? How can a person "offer Christ," and in such a way that it fulfills my part of covenant?

As noted last week, we could just jump to the answer of that question, but it will be helpful to develop the answer. This development involves the question of human knowledge – what does it mean to know? Last week's article used Scripture to illustrate that "knowing" – what man's *Creator* means by knowing – is not just a simple matter of having bits or pieces of information; it's not just facts. The example taken from Scripture to illustrate this was our Lord's words that He said He will say to those who are condemned: I don't know you. God knows everything and everyone, even before He created them. These words, then, indicate that by "knowing," the One who created man's capacity to "know" means more than just having mere information.

Scripture provides further help in understanding what knowledge (or human knowing) means – i.e., how God created human knowing to be. In Jn 10:15 Jesus said: "my Father knows me and I know my Father" and then just a few verses later (Jn 10:38) He says: "the Father is *in me* and I am *in the Father*." These passages indicate that, as created by God, "knowing" someone or something means that thing or person is actually in me in some immaterial, "spiritual" if you will, way. That means the thing (or person) has an effect on me and is indeed part of me; there is a real, albeit intangible, union between the knower and the thing (or person) known. It means the thing or person known is a part of me. Recall the words about marriage: the two shall become one. This understanding of knowing helps to understand what that means. The person is in me, a part of me (there's a union), and has an effect on me – it affects who I am, and I become like them to one degree or another.

This is not really something foreign to us. Family members know each other in this way. Kids know when mom & dad are going to be mad or happy about something because they *know* their parents – the parent is in them in an immaterial way, and vice versa. When me and my brothers and sisters were kids, we'd rarely tell our mom if weren't feeling good because she would start coming up with all sorts of things but no matter how hard we tried to conceal it or deny it, somehow she always knew, and she often knew what it was as well – and usually with *stunning* accuracy! So this meaning of knowing another person: the other is in you in an immaterial way such that part of you is the other person, is actually something familiar.

Knowing another means that part of me *is* that other person, thus they affect who and what I am. But now suppose that continues to grow. Suppose that it grows so much that you arrive at a point where the two become one – one "mind" and one will, let's say. Now suppose that person is our Lord. We can then understand St Paul's words: it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. Although still a distinct person who still has his own intellect and free will, Paul has come to know Christ so much that now Jesus is not just a *part* of him but all of him in a certain sense. At the point where Paul was able to make that statement, the two – Jesus and Paul – had become one.

Now come back to the question of how can a person offer Christ in a way that satisfies covenant. Well what happens if Paul offers himself to God after he is able to say that Jesus is no longer just a part of him but all of him – that he and Jesus are one? In effect, he is **offering Christ by offering himself**.

This, then, is the answer we have been looking for. How can a person "offer Christ" so as to satisfy covenant? By becoming like Him, surrendering myself completely to His, so much that now when I offer myself through sacrifice for His sake, I am, in effect, offering Him.

Is this just wild speculation? None other than the great Doctor and Church Father himself – St Augustine – spoke in these very terms. St. Augustine said the sacrifice of Christians is “the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar in which she teaches that she [the Church] herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.” The Church herself is offered Augustine says; the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, comprised of each individual member of that Body; i.e., members of the Mystical Body of Christ offer Christ by becoming like Him, one with Him, and then offering themselves.

Now of course we can know (have union with) Christ to varying degrees. The more a person really knows Him and thus becomes like Him, the more they offer Christ, the purer and more valuable their sacrifice becomes.

We could have, once again, just cut to the chase and said that a person can “offer Christ” by becoming like Him and then offering themselves. So why go through the work of expressing “becoming like Him” in terms of knowledge? The reason is because this understanding helps bring out *how* one becomes like Christ and thus what the climb to the summit entails. It leads easily to the next question which is: how do you come to really know someone; in this case, how do we really come to know our Lord?

Of course, the very purpose of the usual means of sanctification (personal prayer, sacraments, study of the faith, living the faith in everyday life) is meant to lead to that kind of deep knowing of our Lord, such that it is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. However, there is one aspect in particular that this understanding of knowing brings out that will be touched on here, namely **participation** in the life of the other person.

Suppose a person grows up completely apart from their parents and biological family members. Maybe they were adopted at birth. They carry the DNA – the mark, if you will – of their parents but they still don’t know them. Likewise, we can carry the mark of our Lord through Baptism, but still not know Him. As another example, suppose someone is interested in history and starts studying the various wars throughout history – say WWII. The person can know a lot of information about the war, they can read about and see pictures of the terrible carnage of war, but will they really *know* war like a veteran who lived through it? Of course, not. What all of this brings to the fore is something you already know – that to really know something or someone, there is no substitute for participation in it or participation in their life. The same is true for coming to know our Lord – participation in His life is necessary to really know Him, i.e., to become like Him.

But how can a person participate in the life of our Lord now? Well, what is it that characterized the life of our Lord? It was sacrifice of self; this was at the core of everything He did. Even becoming man was a sacrifice. For God to become man is an even bigger condescension than us becoming something like a rat or an ant while maintaining our human mind and free will. But of course He went further than that. Think about our Lord standing before the crowd when Pilate was trying to release Him. They shouted: Crucify Him, Crucify Him. Have you ever endured the hatred of others? The plotting and scheming of others? It is painful. Have you ever borne, with patience, the wrongs (sins) of others – to the point of sweating blood? It causes a great sadness, it is hard, it is truly a sacrifice. Have you ever watched someone be mocked and ridiculed *as they were dying*? Such a thing is inhumane, brutal, worse than wild animals. This is what our Lord endured.

We come to know Jesus, then, by participating in His life which will always entail self-denial: “unless the seed falls to the ground and dies, it can have no life.” These sacrifices will come in all sizes and shapes, some bigger, some smaller – things we hold near and dear. Recall Abraham & Isaac; recall our Holy Mother at the foot of the Cross. For me, it might be a threat to active priesthood. For parents, maybe the affections of their children – do I dare tell them no? It might be career or job; do I dare not go along with this or that, even if it is a “little” immoral or hurtful to another? Maybe a risk to social status, what others think and say about me. Maybe it will even be my very life. I can only know Christ to the extent that I participate in His life.

We are now faced with another question, though. Suppose, for example, a truly guilty criminal receives a death sentence or a life-long prison term. This causes him dread and suffering but he remains prideful and unrepentant to the end. Does his suffering unite him to Christ? No, which means there is still an ingredient missing. We will take that up the next time. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*