

Last week's article took up the question of the meaning of (or perhaps more precisely the implications of) the Eucharist as the *summit* of Christian life. To summarize briefly, we started with that what God wants to accomplish, which is relation or union with man in the form of a covenant, where covenant means giving myself completely to the other. The question now is: what is man's part in this covenant?

From the beginning (i.e., even before original sin) man's role in the covenant with God was worship of God. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that all of creation (the material world) was made as a stage for man to worship God. But what does worship mean? Both Fr John Hardon and Bishop Sheen point out that the root of the word worship is 'worth.' Worship, then, means acknowledging another's worth. What does this mean in terms of man's relation with God, i.e., how do we worship God? Our Lord said: unless you become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Lord did not mean to become childish. Recall that the context for these words was the Apostles arguing about who was greatest. So the first meaning is an exhortation to humility. But what is our Lord bringing out about humility when He says to become like a child? Well what's the relation of a child to a parent? It is, for one thing, one of trusting dependence. When a child takes the hand of a parent, for example, he expresses trusting dependence on the parent; the child takes the parent's hand gladly and willingly; he takes comfort in it; in doing this, he acknowledges the parent as parent, which is basically the meaning of worship – the child expresses the value (or worth) of the parent to him. A child does likewise by giving his mother a handful of wild flowers or his father some small gift, and he does it with joy; in doing so, he is telling the parent what they are worth to him. This trusting dependence and expressing the worth of another are at the core of man's part in covenant, the center, you might say, of his worship of God.

But now there is a problem. Adam & Eve decided not to worship God, they decided that they did not need to depend on Him, that they would be gods unto themselves, *independent* of the one true God. One way to characterize the sin of Adam & Eve (and really any sin) is a refusal to worship God, turning instead to worship of self. That sin broke relation with God and they thus lost this "inheritance" for all of their descendants. The problem is worse yet. Since God is infinitely good, this debt of worship is an infinite debt. Man, being finite, cannot repay an infinite debt. There is no hope, misery and suffering are now all he has; there is no way out.

Man cannot pay the debt of worship. God's love, however, is unconditional. He still desires union with man, covenantal relation with him. But how can it possibly be since man cannot repay an infinite debt? Only an infinite being, one of infinite value (love), can repay an infinite debt. Ah there is the solution, a solution that is almost unthinkable, unimaginable. God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son – God Himself will make the restitution. God Himself will become man and, in and through His human nature, He will offer perfect worship to the Father by making Himself a complete and total oblation, a complete and total sacrifice of Himself. And it will have infinite value because He is also God. During the extreme suffering of His Passion – which He could have stopped by simply denying the Father (truth) a little bit – He is saying: this is what you are worth to Me, Father, I endure all this for your sake. Our Lord's Passion was first and foremost His complete, total, and perfect worship of the Father, offered on our behalf. Covenant means: God does something (first), then provides man with a chance to reciprocate His love so as to make it mutual. He created whole world as a stage for man's worship, man turned his back. So God, out of unfathomable love, acts again.

But now we have to return to covenant. What is man's part in the covenant now? Is it: Christ paid the price and now I'm off the hook, whoopee, off I go on my merry way? How would that satisfy covenant – me giving myself completely to the Lord in an act of mutual love? Would that be acceptable in a family, in marriage? Of course not. No, Christ paid the price and now I do nothing (or at least make very minimal effort) does not satisfy covenant...*at all*, not even close. No one who truly loves the Lord (or a family member) would even want it that way. Genuine love makes a person *want to* expend themselves, go above and beyond so to speak, for the sake of the beloved. Any claim of "Christianity" that does not want to do this, that just wants the easy way – no real sacrifice of self, no fulfillment of covenant – is a false Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant. We need to fix the following two points clearly and irrevocably in our minds:

- God has *clearly* revealed that the nature of His relation with man (or vice versa) can *only* be a covenantal one. There simply is no question about it. It's the only way.
- Covenant means giving one's self completely to the other, which always entails sacrifice of self, denial even of one's own desires.

So to create a covenant God has acted and He waits for man to respond. What is man's response to be in this conventional relation? "Worship" is the answer but what does that mean? How do I do it? Our Lord offered perfect worship to God, in and through His humanity, with His whole life and especially in His Passion. But now how do we reciprocate? How do *we* offer perfect worship to God so as to fulfill covenant?

The answer might be surprising – it is by **offering Christ**. This is the language used by the Church from the earliest times. St John Chrysostom and St Augustine are both Fathers of the Church (thus early Church), in addition to being Doctors of the Church. Chrysostom, echoed by none other than Aquinas, says: "There is but one victim, namely, that which Christ offered, and *which we offer*." Chrysostom and Aquinas are both saying we offer Christ. St Augustine used very similar language: The Eucharist is the Body of Christ that *we offer*. And indeed, the Catechism itself speaks in these terms: The Eucharist...is the pure offering of the whole Body of Christ (CCC 2643). "Offering Christ," however, sounds a lot like: here, take Him and not me, which we just said does not (by any means) satisfy covenant. So answering the question of "how are we to offer perfect worship to God now," with: "by offering Christ," immediately begs the question of: what does that mean?! How do we offer Christ in a way that satisfies covenant? In what sense do we offer Him?

We could just cut immediately to the answer of that question. I think it is helpful, however, to take the longer route of actually *developing* the answer to that question. This will take a little doing, some keeping track of steps, which is a big part of the reason the outline was provided last week. It's likely that the starting point will initially seem remote and unrelated – bear with it, you will see the connection; in the end, it will be helpful to put it all together by reviewing it with the outline.

So again, how or in what sense is man now meant to "offer Christ?" We start with the question of: what does it mean to **know** – to know something or someone? It is necessary to take up this question of knowing because we need to say what it means to know Christ, which, in turn, will lead to an understanding of what it means to offer Christ. In fact, if you follow this, it will actually be obvious what it means to offer Christ – you'll know the conclusion before it's even stated. Unfortunately there's not enough space left in this week's article to complete this topic so we will have to pick it up next week. In the meantime, though, we might at least use the space left to illustrate that, to God and thus for us, knowing is more than just having pieces of information.

Aquinas takes up the question of what it means to know, perhaps drawing somewhat on Aristotle but also on Scripture. In regard to this question of: what does it mean to know, it might be helpful to start with something our Lord said. Jesus said that at the end of time He will to those who are condemned: I know you not (i.e., I don't know you). How can that possibly be? God knew everyone before He even created the world. So what does our Lord mean? What He means is that when He looks at them, He will see nothing inside of them that looks like Him. This alone is already indicating that human 'knowing,' according to the Creator, amounts to something more than just having some facts or information in mind. What Scripture / God means by true knowledge amounts to more than just pointing to someone (for example) and saying: that's John Doe. Knowing is more than mere bits of information.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.