

# **“A New Attuning of the Elements Occurred”: A Brief Reflection on the Sacrament of the Eucharist**

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*A new attuning of the elements occurred, as on a harp the notes may change their rhythm, though all the while preserving the same tone; and this is just what happened ...*

[Wisdom 19,18]

The celebration of the Eucharist [*eucharistos*, “grateful”, *charis*, “favour”, *chairein*, “to rejoice”] involves an unstinting reception of a great and generous gift, whose fullness exceeds our capacity to entirely receive it. The gift of great favour, the moment of sweet [“How pleasant your promise to my palate, sweeter than honey in my mouth,” Psalm 119, 103] rejoicing [“I have told you this so that my own joy be in you and your joy complete,” John 15, 11] that is the Eucharist is simultaneously so exalted and yet so profound a truth that it eludes us both above and below; so fundamental that we overlook it, so transcendent that we cannot comprehend it: “I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know” [Job 42, 3].<sup>1</sup>

The Eucharist is a testament to transformation. The meaning of the sacrament can not be understood primarily as either allegorical [this does not *stand* for that; which is substitution], or analogical [this is not *like* that; which is relationship], but as metaphorical [*meta*, “to change,” “to transform” + *pherein*, “to carry,” “to bear”] because the meaning of the Eucharist is neither “this stands for that” or “this is like that” but both, and more. The Eucharist declares, “this *is* that,” which is identity: “I am the living bread which has come down from heaven” [John 6,48].

The definition of Eucharistic transformation is *transubstantiation*, whereby bread and wine, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, become

1. One is reminded of the observation of Anaxagoras that “Because of the weakness of our senses we are not able to judge the truth” [Quoted in Philip Wheelwright, ed., *The Presocratics* Macmillan; New York 1966, 160].

the Body and Blood of Life Himself.<sup>2</sup> Transubstantiation is the material expression *ne plus ultra* of metaphor. Not limited to substitution or relationship, the meaning carried by the bread and wine is transformed [“Changing them by Your Holy Spirit”<sup>3</sup>] through identity: “This is my body given for you ... This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you” [Luke 22, 19–20].

The bread and wine, the staves of life, and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the life of the world [“God has given to us eternal life, and this life is His Son,” 1 John 5,11], are the symbolic poles of Eucharistic transformation. The peace [“Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give to you,” John 14, 27] and harmony [“A new attuning of the elements occurred,” Wisdom 19,18] proclaimed in Christ, through Him and with Him, reveals the truth of a cosmic [*kosmos*, “order,” “universe”] *metanoia*: the authentic conversion of the heart of all creation.

The entirety of God’s creation, its abundance and plenitude [“the breadth and the length, the height and the depth,” Ephesians 3,18], finds its fullest expression and perfection in Christ, the pre-existent *pleroma* [the fullness of all possible categories of being]; in Whom, through Whom, and for Whom all things were created and are completed: “God wanted all fullness to be found in Him and through Him to reconcile all things, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through His death on the cross” [Colossians 1, 19-20].<sup>4</sup>

The Eucharist is the epitome of the perfection of all creation [mineral, vegetable, animal, human, angelic and divine] in the beauty of Christ, through Whom all things have been reconciled, perfected, and transformed. All of creation cries out the beauty of the Lord, for in Him is its joy [“May the Lord find joy in His creatures!” Psalm 104, 31]. In the consummation of time that is the *kairos* [the fitting and proportionate fulfilment], Christ will be “all in all” [1 Corinthians 15,28] and in no sense is this

2. The Fathers of the First Council of Constantinople in 381 in the *expositio fidei* proclaimed their faith “in the Spirit, the holy, the lordly and life-giving one” [Quoted in Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* Volume I, Washington University Press, Georgetown 1990, 23] and throughout, especially, the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies Himself as the life [e.g. John 14,6].
3. The *epiclesis*, the prayer to God the Holy Spirit, in the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, Alluevia Press, Allendale 1970, 53.
4. This fullness is suggested beautifully in the canon of the Mass in the Roman Rite, immediately before the minor elevation, when our prayers are offered to God through Christ: “Through Whom, O Lord, You always create, sanctify, fill with life, bless, and bestow upon us all good things” [*Saint Joseph Daily Missal*, Catholic Book Publishing; New York 1959, 683].

more perfectly expressed than in the Eucharist: "I am the food of grown men. Grow, and you shall feed on me. You will not change me into yourself, as you change food into your flesh, but you will be changed into me."<sup>5</sup>

Christ reveals to us that the new commandment of love ["I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you," John 13,34] is not only the fundamental law of human perfection, but is also the catalyst for the transformation of the world.<sup>6</sup> Sorrow, Jesus Christ tells His disciples at the Last Supper, will be turned into joy: "Your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you . . . I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" [John 16,20.22.33].

Sorrow is transformed into joy; and bread and wine are transformed into Christ's Body and Blood. The peace, which Christ leaves with us, is the very presence of His own person. The Eucharist, then, is that peace which is given unto us: it is that good cheer, that rejoicing, which is the perfection of love ["Love comes to its perfection in us," 1 John 4,17] because "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" [1 John 4,16; cf. Ephesians 3,19, "Know also the love of Christ, which surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God"].

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5. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.10; in the translation of John K. Ryan (Image; Garden City 1960), 171. If you have received worthily, Augustine writes elsewhere, "you are what you have received" [*Sermon 227*]. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his *Mystagogic Catecheses*, explains that "by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, you become united in body and blood with Him. For thus we do become Christ-bearers, His Body and Blood being distributed through our members. And thus it is that we become, according to blessed Peter (cf. 2 Peter 1,4), sharers of the divine nature" ["On the Body and Blood of Christ," *On the Mysteries*, IV.3; in his *Catechetical Lectures*, XXII].
6. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, "The Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World," No. 38.

