

ST AUGUSTINE: SERMON ON THE EUCHARIST ON EASTER DAY¹

TRANSLATED BY E.H.

YOU have just been reborn of water and the spirit—that is why you are called infants—and so you look at this food and drink on this table of the Lord's in an altogether new light, and regard it with fresh feelings of love and reverence. And now the duty of preaching a sermon, and the care I have spent in giving birth to you so that Christ might be formed in you, compels me to explain to you what it means, what it is about—this great and divine sacrament, this noble and superlative medicine, this clean and simple sacrifice, which is now offered, no longer in just one city, the earthly Jerusalem, nor in the tabernacle which Moses or the temple which Solomon constructed (these were just shadows of things to come); no, now it is sacrificed from 'the rising of the sun to its setting' as the prophets foretold, and it is offered to God as a victim of praise according to the grace of the new covenant. Not any more is a victim for a blood sacrifice to be picked out from the flocks, no sheep now or goat is led to the altars of God; the sacrifice of our present age is the body and blood of the priest himself. Of him it was that the prediction had been made such a long time before in the psalms: 'You are a priest for ever of the order of Melchisedech'. And Melchisedech the priest of God Most High offered bread and wine when he blessed our father Abraham, as we are assured in the book of Genesis. Christ our Lord therefore, who offered in his death for us what he had received in his birth from us, being established prince of priests for ever, laid down this order of sacrifice that you see here—the sacrifice of course of his body and blood. When his body was struck with the lance it yielded blood and water, the forgiveness of our sins. With this gracious favour fresh in your minds work out your own salvation, since it is God who is working it out in you, and come up with fear and trembling to partake at this altar. Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the chalice what flowed from his side. For this is the

¹ Dennis III.

one sacrifice that those old ones of the people of God, with all their variety, foreshadowed. For example, Christ is at once a sheep in the innocence and simplicity of his soul, and a goat in his likeness to sinful flesh. And anything else that the sacrifices of the old covenant variously foretold belongs properly to this one sacrifice which the new covenant unfolds.

So take and eat the body of Christ, for you too in the body of Christ have now become the limbs of Christ; take and drink the blood of Christ. To avoid coming undone, eat what ties you together; to avoid treating yourselves as trash, drink the price that was paid for you. Just as this is turned into you when you eat it and drink it, so you are turned into the body of Christ when you live an obedient and dutiful life. He himself took bread as his passion drew near; when he was keeping the pasch with his disciples he took bread and blessed it and said: 'This is my body which will be given up for you'. In the same way he blessed the cup and gave it them saying: 'This is my blood of the new covenant which will be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins'. You have probably read or heard this in the gospel before now, but what you hadn't realized was that this eucharist here is the Son. But now that your hearts have been sprinkled and your consciences are clear and your bodies washed in clean water, 'come up to him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not blush'. Here is the new covenant, here is your hope of inheriting eternity; and so if you receive it worthily, keeping the new commandment to love each other, you have in you life itself. For what you eat is the very flesh of which Life said, 'The bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world'; and 'Unless a man eats my flesh and drinks my blood, he will not have life in himself'.

If you therefore have life in him, you will be one flesh with him. This sacrament, after all, does not present you with Christ's body only to part you from it. St Paul reminds us that this union had been foretold in holy scripture: 'They will be two in one flesh. This', he says, 'is a great sacrament; but I mean in Christ and in the Church.' And elsewhere he says of this same eucharist: 'We, though many, are one bread and one body'. So you are beginning to receive what you have begun to be, provided you don't receive it unworthily, and so eat and drink judgment on yourselves. That is how he puts it: 'Whoever eats the bread or

drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, will be guilty of the Lord's body and blood. But let each man prove himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup; for whoever eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment on himself.'

But you receive it worthily if you avoid the yeast of bad doctrine, and so remain unleavened loaves of sincerity and truth; or the other way round, if you retain that yeast of charity which the woman hid in three measures of flour until the whole was leavened. This woman is the wisdom of God, who became mortal flesh through the Virgin; and throughout the whole world, which is like three measures of flour because it has been built up after the flood from the three sons of Noe, she spreads her gospel until the whole is leavened. This is the whole which in Greek is called *holon*, and if you keep the bond of peace in it you will be 'by the whole', Greek *catholon*, from which the Church gets the name Catholic.



GAMALIEL

Q. I have been having an argument with a friend of mine about the 'Our Father'. I say that it is addressed to God the Father, he disagrees, and says it is addressed to the whole Trinity. Which of us is right?

UNDERGRADUATE

A. Your friend certainly has St Thomas on his side. But St Thomas, as far as I know, never really argues the point; he simply states as something to be taken for granted, as a premise to be used in further argument, what when we say the 'Our Father' we are praying to the whole Trinity. (*Sum. Theol.* Ia, 33, iii, obj. 1; IIIa, 23, ii, sed con.) I do not think you need be frightened out of your own view simply by the authority of St Thomas, because in this matter there has been a certain shift of theological emphasis since his time. And anyhow, need I say it, both of you are right in some respect.

We are given the Lord's prayer in two classic contexts; in the