**Bishop Barron’s “Catholicism”**

***Episode 7: Word Made Flesh; True Bread from Heaven***

* Aristotle said, “The best activities are the most useless.” This is because such things are not subordinated to a further end but rather are done entirely for their own sake.
* The liturgy is the most useless thing of all which means that it is the most important.
* The liturgy is what we do utterly for its own sake. Simply because it is good and beautiful.
* The great liturgical theologian, Romano Bordini, compared the Liturgy to a kind of play. This play is a serious business because it is by this play that we become rightly ordered.
* The theologian Dietrich Von Hildebrand in his book *Liturgy and Personality* said, “In the very act of giving right praise to God we achieve an inner harmony”.
* The Mass, Liturgy, is a kind of Noah’s ark. It is a place where a microcosm of God’s good order is preserved in the midst of a sinful world.
* But more than all this the Mass is our participation in and anticipation of the great heavenly liturgy. The right praise given to God by the saints and the angels.
* For these reasons, Vatican II referred to the Liturgy as the summit and source of Christian life.

The Gathering

* In a certain sense the Mass commences with the matter in which the people who participate in it gather.
* The fallen world is marked by division, separation and stratification. We sinners are intensely interested in questions of priority and exclusivity.
* Who is in and who is out? Who is up and who is down? But as Paul told us, *“In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no man or woman”.* *(Gal. 3:28*) All are members or the mystical body.
* The Catholic historian, Christopher Dawson, upon telling his mother he was converting to Catholicism from Anglicanism was met with this response, “It is not so much the doctrines that concern me, it is know that you will be worshiping with the help”.
* The ritual of the Liturgy proper begins with the Sign of the Cross and the priest’s intonation of the words “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.
* By this gesture and simple phrase, we announce that we belong to the triune God.
* Modern secularism is predicated on the assumption that we essentially belong to no one. That we are self-determining and self-directed. Pursuers of happiness according to our lives.
* St. Paul told Christians long ago that we do not live for ourselves. We do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord.
* Whether we live or whether we did we are the Lord’s. The Liturgy signals this in the very beginning with the Sign of the Cross.
* To speak of the Cross is to reference the great act by which the father sent the Son into God forsakenness in order to gather us through the Holy Spirit into divine light.
* Because the Son went all the way down, He is able to bring even the most recalcitrant sinner back into fellowship with God.
* When we invoke the Cross at the beginning of the Liturgy, we signify that we are praying in God and not merely to God.
* Just after the Sign of the Cross the priest greets the people, not in his own name but in Christ.
* The priest states “*Peace be with you*”. The priest in the Liturgy is operating in the person of Christ and not in his own person.
* His words, gestures and movements are not expressive or his own perspective or convictions but of Christ.
* When the people respond “and with your spirit” they are addressing not the individual man but the Jesus in whose person the priest is operating in.
* Immediately after the greeting the priest invites everyone in attendance to call to mind his or her sins. This simple move is of extraordinary importance.
* *“There are saints in my religion but that just means men who know that they are sinners.” G.K. Chesterton*
* The distinction is between those sinners who know it and those sinners who don’t. The great heroes of our faith, the saints, are those who have ordered their lives towards God and therefore are more keenly aware of how far they fall short of the ideal.
* As the Liturgy commences and we are bathed in the light of the Trinitarian God we mimic the saints in admitting that we are sinners.
* In doing so we offer corrective to a pervasive cultural tendency toward exculpation. I am okay and you are okay.
* To subscribe to such a naïve sentiment is ipso facto; to prove that one is facing away from the clarifying light of God.
* The calling to mind of sins is but a preparation for the Kyrie eleison prayer. The cry of *“Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord of mercy”*
* There is no room for self-aggrandizing and self-deception.
* Compelled by the Liturgy to this correct and finally liberating attitude we hear the words of the priest*, “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.”*
* God has no interest whatsoever in making us grovel before Him in self-approach.
* He wants to forgive. It is imperative that we realize that we have something within us that needs forgiving.
* After the Kyrie eleison prayer there comes the Gloria. The Gloria is one of the most magnificent prayers in our liturgical tradition.
* We can read out of the Gloria the whole of Catholic theology.
* “*Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.*” This is the formula for a happy life.
* When we give God the highest glory; when He is the supreme value for us than our lives become harmoniously ordered around that central love.
* Peace breaks out amongst us when God and not pleasure, money or power is given glory in the highest.
* Our term worship comes from an older English word, “worth ship”, designating what we hold dear.
* Liturgy is a place where we act out our worship where we demonstrate by word and gesture what is the greatest worth to us.
* This is why it is essential to peace. Aristotle commented, “A friendship will only endure by the measure that two friends fall in love not so much with each other but together with a transcendent third.”
* In singing the Gloria the gathered community is expressing their love of God’s glory. If Aristotle is right this will deepen their relationship with each other.

The Telling of Stories

* The next major move in the Liturgy is the proclamation of the Word of God.
* The Liturgy of the Word usually includes a reading from the Old Testament, a selection from one of Paul’s epistles and a selection from one of the Gospels.
* Why do we read these texts at the Liturgy*?* We do so to be drawn into the particular texture of the Biblical world.
* We must be drawn into the strange world of the Bible. After the first two readings the priest rises to proclaim the Gospel and preach.
* The priest at the Liturgy is acting in the person of Christ and not in his own person. The opening up of a deeper identity becomes especially clear during the homily for the preacher is not meant to share his private conviction about politics, culture or even religion. The priest in persona Christi is supposed to speak the mind of Christ.
* The priest is to use all the Church’s resources, theology, spirituality, and Biblical interpretation.
* The priest is to apply the scripture to the present cultural situation, but the priest is not speaking in his own voice or out of his own convictions.
* The preacher in surrendering to the divine voice finds his own authentic voice. In conforming himself to the attitude of Christ he discovers his own most authentic attitudes.
* When the homily is complete the people stand for the resuscitation of the Creed. They can use the ancient and simple formula called the Apostles Creed but customarily they pray the great statement of faith which emerged from the Council of Nicea in 325
* In reciting the lines of the Nicene Creed, “*God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the father*”, the Church rehearses its victory in a very ancient struggle. The struggle against Arius.
* Arius was a fourth century priest of the Church of Alexandria who denied the full divinity of Jesus.
* Consubstantial means one in being. The word consubstantial is a rendering of the Greek word “homoousios”. Homoousios is a technical uses a Nicea to express the fact that Jesus shares fully in the divinity of the Father.
* What they said at Nicea was a standing or falling point for Christianity. If the divinity of Jesus was denied Christianity would have devolved in short order into one more mythology or moral system.
* Seventeen hundred years later, Sunday after Sunday, the Church rises to declare once again the victory over Arius.
* There is something properly subversive about the opening declaration of the Creed, “*I believe in one God.*”
* The belief in one God precludes any other pretender to ultimacy, be it country, culture, party or charismatic leader.
* Those who state their faith in one God are standing resolutely against all forms of idolatry both ancient and contemporary.
* When the resuscitation of the Creed is over the community offers prayers for the living and the dead.
* These prayers of the faithful are expressive on the inescapable interdependence of the members of Christ’s mystical body.
* We pray for one another precisely because we are implicated in one another; connected by the deepest bonds in Christ.
* One member of the body can not coherently say to another “Your concern is not mine” for we are not a club but an organism.
* As we act out our faith in reciting the Creed, we act out our mystical identity as we pray for one another.

The Offering

* With the prayers of the faithful the first part of the Mass, Liturgy of the Word, comes to an end and the second part of the Mass, Liturgy of the Eucharist, commences.
* It is helpful at this juncture to think of the Mass as a kind of encounter. A formal encounter with another person usually involves two basic moves.
* In the Liturgy of the Word we listen as Jesus speaks to us in scriptures. In our songs and responses, we speak back to him. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we sit down to eat at a meal that he Himself prepares for us.
* The fundamental Biblical principle is that in a world gone wrong that is no communion without sacrifice.
* Sin has twisted us out of shape. Intimacy with God will involve a twisting back into shape. A painful realignment made possible through sacrifice,
* In animal sacrifice a person took one small aspect of God’s creation and returned it to its source in order to signal his gratitude for the gift of his own existence and indeed the existence of the world.
* God had no need of sacrifices. God has no need of anything at all. The point is that we need sacrifice in order to reorder us and restore us to communion.
* What is given back to God, sacrificed to Him, breaks against the rock of the divine self-sufficiency and returns for the benefit of the one who has made the offer.
* Sacrifice produces communion. This is the distinctive logic that undergirds the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
* At the commencement of the second part of the Mass small offerings of bread, wine and water are brought forward so that the priest can offer them to God.
* To say bread and wine is to imply wheat and wine. And to say wheat and wine in to imply earth, soil water, wind and sunshine. And to say earth, soil, water, wind, and sunshine is to imply the solar system and indeed the cosmos itself.
* The tiny gifts are symbolically representative or the entirety of creation. Taking these gifts in hand the pries prays “*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation for through your goodness we have received the bread and wine we offer you.*”
* The Bread and wine are offered to the God who does not need them will return to the offerors unmeasurably elevated as the body of Jesus.
* The priest moves onto the climatic prayer of the Mass, the Eucharistic prayer, in the course of which Christ become really, truly, and substantially present
* Just before the beginning of the prayer proper he invokes the song of the heavenly community.
* *“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the Highest,”*
* In praying these words, the faithful are like that angels and the saints. Giving glory to God in the highest hence actually realizing the unity that God desires for them.
* The prayer itself commences with a word of gratitude to the Trinitarian God for the sheer grace of His creation and redemption.
* *“You are indeed holy, O Lord, and all you have created rightly gives you praise, for through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, you give life to all things and make them holy.”*
* The priest then beckons the Father to send down the Holy Spirit for the sanctification and transformation of the bread and wine.
* *“Therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you by the same spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for the consecration that they may become the body and blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
* The priest then continues with what is termed the *“****institution narrative****”* which is to say an abbreviated form of what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper.
* He recalls how Jesus took bread and gave thanks. The priest then moves for the third person description to the direct quotation, speaking the very words of Jesus.
* *“This is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which be poured our for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*
* The faith of the Church is that by the power of these words the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.
* Jesus becomes really, truly and substantially present to His people under the appearance of the Eucharistic elements.

Excursus on the Real Presence / John 6: Bread of Life Discourse

* After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish Jesus came to Capernaum. The people followed Him.
* Jesus instructed the people saying, *“Don’t seek for bread that perishes but seek the food that lasts unto eternal life.” (John 6:27)*
* Jesus said, “*I am the living bread come down from heaven. My flesh is food for the life of the world.*” *(John 6:51)*
* It would be hard to imagine anything that was more theologically problematic and more disgusting for first century Jews than these words.
* Throughout the Old Testament there were prohibitions against eating animals’ flesh with blood.
* Here is a human being saying, I want you to eat my body and drink my blood.
* When those present protest this teaching, Jesus had every opportunity to render his language more spiritual or metaphorical, but he did not.
* Instead, he doubled down and said, *“unless you eat the flesh and the Son of Man and drink His blood you have no life in you”.* (John 6:53)
* The Greek word used to eat was the word for the way an animal would eat. To gnaw on food. Unless you gnaw on the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood.”
* Those present objected to the physical realism or His words. Jesus could have explained that he intended this teaching symbolically or metaphorically, but he did not.
* Many of the disciples that day went away. This teaching on His Body and Blood was too much to bear.
* Jesus turned to His own inner circle of the twelve apostles and asked, “*Are you going to leave me too?*” *(John 6:67)*
* This teaching of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is a standing of falling point from the moment Jesus gave the Bread of Life discourse to today.
* Peter replies to Jesus saying, “*Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of everlasting life.*” (John 6:68)
* Peter confesses the truth of the Real Presence and the Church has followed him ever since.
* In 1863 a priest names Peter of Prague was making his way to Rome in pilgrimage. He stopped in a small Italian town of Bolsena to celebrate the Mass.
* Peter of Prague had been entertaining doubts on the Church’s doctrine of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
* Just after the words of the consecration blood began to run from the host down his hands and down onto the corporal.
* He was confused and came to Orvieto. Pope Urban IV was at Orvieto as that time. He confessed his sin on unbelief and advised Pope Urban IV of his experience in celebrating Mass at Bolsena.
* Pope Urban sent a delegation to Bolsena to retrieve the corporal that was stained with that blood. They were able to locate the corporal and returned it to the pope.
* The pope was so impressed that he inaugurated a new feast: Corpus Christi (The Body of Christ)
* Thomas Aquinas was with the Pope at this time. Pope Urban turned to Thomas Aquinas and asked him to compose an office for the feast, a series of prayer and hymns for the feast of Corpus Christi.
* Thomas responded with one of the most poetic works of the Middle Ages. The Office of Corpus Christi is still prayed today on the feast of Corpus Christi.
* At the end of his life, Thomas Aquinas wrote a treatise on the Eucharist. When he completed the Treatise on the Eucharist, he was unconvinced that he had done justice to this great sacrament.
* He placed the text at the foot of the Cross and prayed. A voice can from the Cross, “You have written well of me, Thomas. What would you have as a reward?” Thomas Aquinas responded, “I will have nothing accept you.”
* In the ***Treatise on the Eucharist***, Thomas Aquinas discussed the Eucharist under the rubric of “***transubstantiation***”.
* He said that at the consecration the total substance of the bread becomes the substance of the Body of Christ. The total substance of the wine becomes the substance of the blood of Christ. Even as the accidents of bread and wind remain unchanged.
* It comes down to reality and appearance. The deepest reality of the bread and wine change is the body and blood of Christ even as the appearance of the bread and wine remain unchanged.
* The distinction between appearance and reality is reverenced in the philosophies of the world; both ancient and modern.
* It is also part of our common experience. Most often appearance and reality coincide. Things are as they seem.
* That is not always the case. When we look up in the sky and see the stars, we know that we are looking into the past. It has taken that long for the light from the stars to reach your eyes.
* You are not looking at the stars that are there but the stars that were there. It takes that long for the rays of the stars to reach the earth. Appearance and reality are different.
* It seems that the sun moves across the sky, but we know that it is not the sun that moves but it is the earth that orbits the sun. Appearance and reality are different.
* The Church teaching on the Eucharist is that what appears to be ordinary bread and wine has in fact has changed at the deepest level of its reality.
* How does this happen? Consider for a moment the power of words. Words not only describe reality but under the right circumstances can change reality.
* In the Bible God creates by the power of His word. “*There the be light*” and there was light. “*Let the earth come forth*” and it came forth. God’s word does not just describe it affects what it says.

***“Yet just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down And do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, Giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it.”*** *(Isaiah 55:10-11)*

* This is how it works with the divine word.
* Who is Jesus? Not one figure among many. Not one in a long line of prophets. Jesus is the very Logos (Word) of God made flesh.
* *The same words by which the same God makes the whole cosmos becomes personally present in Jesus and therefore what Jesus says is.*
* “Lazarus come out” and he came out. “*Little girl get up*” and she got up. “*My son your sins are forgiven*” and by God the paralytics sins were forgiven. ***What Jesus says is.***
* The night before he died, He took bread and said, “*This is my body which will be given up for you*”. He said, “*This is the cup of my blood*”.
* Jesus’ word is the divine word. It does not simply describe but is affects, creates, changes reality in the most radical sense.
* When the priest pronounces the words of consecration, he is not using his own words, he is using those divine words of Christ that can affect and change reality profoundly.

Communion and Sending

* At the close of the Eucharistic Prayer the Jesus who is really present in the forms of bread and wine is offered as a living sacrifice to the Father.
* Lifting up the elements the priest prays, “*Through Him, and with Him and in Him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours forever and ever*”.
* It is at this moment that the Catholic priest is in the true Holy of Holies. What he does is analogous to what the High Priest did in the temple on the Day of Atonement.
* In ancient times the priest would enter the Holy of Holies and there he would sacrifice an animal to Yahweh on behalf of all the people.
* He would then sprinkle some of the blood around the interior of the sanctuary and the rest he would bring out in a bowl and sprinkle some of the blood on the people. With this ritual there was a blood bond between God and the people.
* The Catholic priest at the climax of the Mass offers the Father not the blood of bulls or goats but the blood of Christ beyond all price.
* Since the Father has no need of anything that sacrifice redounds completely to our benefit.
* Our troubles began with a bad meal. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Our redemption is affected through a properly constituted meal. God feeding His people with His own body and blood.
* After the congregation has communed and given thanks they are blessed and sent. The priest says, “*Go forth, the Mass has ended*”.
* Now that the people have gathered as on family, heard the word of God, professed their faith, prayed for one another, offered sacrifice to the Father and received the Body and Blood of Jesus , they are more properly formed and ready to go out and to affect the transformation of the world.
* The Liturgy is the privileged communion with the Lord. It is the source and summit of Christian life. Those who participate in it never leave unchanged, they never go back the same way that they came in.