



From the Pastor
4th Sunday in
Ordinary Time - B
January 28, 2024

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS & THE EUCHARIST.

Although we do not celebrate **Saint Thomas Aquinas' Feast Day** this year since its on a **Sunday** and we are not named in honor of him, we are in the three-year **National Eucharistic Revival** - and **Saint Thomas Aquinas'** - nick-

named **the 'Angelic Doctor'** because of his purity and intelligence - wrote volumes about the **Eucharist**. He also composed many **Eucharistic Adoration** hymns and the texts for the **holy Mass** offered on **'Corpus Christi'** or **The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.'** First, let's put it all in context.

Saint Thomas Aquinas' [1225-1274] times were very similar to our own: the **Church's** liturgical and sacramental life was in sad shape. In 1215, the **4th Lateran Council** promulgated **'The Easter Duty,'** requiring **Catholics** to receive **Holy Communion** [between the **1st Sunday of Lent** and **Trinity Sunday**] and to confess their sins at least once a year. To help us better understand and celebrate the **Eucharist**, the **Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ [Corpus Christi]** was added to the liturgical calendar, and **Aquinas** composed the orations for that **holy Mass** which we still use to this day! He also composed numerous **Eucharistic Adoration** hymns like: **'Pange Lingua'** [**'Sing My Tongue'**] - **'Panis Angelicus'** [**'Bread of Angels'**] - **Tantum Ergo'** [**'Therefore so great'**] - and **'O Salutaris Hostia'** [**'O Saving Victim'** or **'O Saving Sacrifice'**], which will be the basis of next week's reflection.

GREAT DEVOTION TO THE EUCHARIST. As a young cleric, the **'Eucharistic Doctor'** [the title given him by Pope Pius XI] would 'sneak' out of his cell [a violation of the **'Monastic Rule!'**] to pray before the **Blessed Sacrament**. As a **Priest**, he began his day - even before offering **holy Mass**, by 'making a visit' to **Christ** truly present in the **Tabernacle**. He would often attend Masses celebrated by other Priests so he could adore the **Blessed Sacrament**. He not only profoundly explained, philosophically and theologically, the **'Real Presence,'** he 'coined' the term for the mystery by which it occurs: **'Transubstantiation.'**

On his deathbed, when **Viaticum** was brought to him, he exclaimed with great emotion: **"Lord ... hast Thou come to visit me?"!**

A COMMON MISCONCEPTION. In the 1500's, **Protestant Reformers** began to question and even deny **Christ's Real Presence** in the **Eucharist**. To explain their erroneous position, they cited the hymns and terminology **Saint Thomas** composed as 'proof' that the **Catholic Church's** belief in the **'Real Presence'** was a recent development. While it is true that, due to a lack of catechesis or proper faith formation, the growth of academic centers, urbanized cities and the like, **Aquinas** was able to give new emphasis and formal explanations of the **Christ's Real Presence** in the **Eucharist**. However, the **Church** has **ALWAYS** believed in **Christ's Real Presence**. Here are some facts:

In the centuries before **Aquinas**, the **Eucharistic Real Presence** was gradually more formalized and emphasized. In **431**, the **Council of Ephesus** [431] declared that the **Eucharist** is **"truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself."** **Saint Augustine of Hippo** [354-430] wrote: **"What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ."** **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem** [313-386] instructed communicants to make a throne with their hands to receive the **Lord of Life**.

In **151**, (our parish patron) **Saint Justin Martyr** wrote: **"For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these ... for by the Eucharistic Prayer ... [they become] the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus."** **Saints Hippolytus** [170-235], **Irenaeus** [130-202], **Ignatius of Antioch** [died: 110] also wrote of **Christ's Real Eucharistic Presence**. And **Jesus** was perfectly clear: **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."** [John 6:51] **Jesus** even let those who scoffed at His **Real Presence** in the **Eucharist** walk away!

Next week we will reflect on the **Eucharistic Hymns** mentioned above that were composed by **Saint Thomas Aquinas**. As a **Eucharistic Adoration** oration says: **"May our worship of this sacrament of Your body and blood help us to experience the salvation You won for us and the peace of the kingdom."** Amen.

In Christ,

Father Mark

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