



“The Defenders of the Eucharist”
by Peter Paul Rubens in 1625

In keeping with our years-long theme of the **National Eucharistic Revival**, this week we reflect on an oil painting, now on display in the **Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida**. Originally commissioned by **Isabella Clara Eugenia**, the daughter of **Spain’s King Philip II**, it is one of an estimated 20 tapestries created for a convent in which **Isabella** had hoped to retire. Presently, five are at **The Ringling**, two are in the **Louvre in Paris**, and the rest were presumably destroyed in a fire. As part of the **Church’s Counter-Reformation** efforts, it was intended to defend and reclaim the authentic teachings about the **Eucharist** and the devotions that help believers to deepen their commitment to this **Mystery of our Faith**. we will identify each **Saint**, from left to right, and how each can help us better appreciate and understand this greatest of all **Sacraments**. [The * signifies four of the great Fathers of the Latin Church.]

Saint Augustine of Hippo.* Facing us on the far-left side is **Saint Augustine** [354-430] who, in his talk “On the Eucharist,” said: “one of the deep truths of Christian faith: through our participation in the sacraments (particularly in baptism and Eucharist), we are transformed into the Body of Christ, given for the world ... Behold what we are: May we become what we receive.” [Sermon #57]

Saint Ambrose.* To those who questioned how **bread** and **wine** can become **Christ’s Body** and **Blood**, **Saint Ambrose** [339-397], with his back to us, wearing an ornate cope used in **Eucharistic Adoration**, emblazed with an image of the Risen Christ, wrote: “If the word of the Lord Jesus is so powerful as to bring into existence things which were not, then a fortiori [even more so] those things which already exist can be changed into something else” [De Sacramentis, IV, 5-16]

Saint Gregory the Great.* As one of the best administrators to serve as **Pope** [590-604], **Saint Gregory** [540-604] wears the **papal triple tiara**. He established the **Roman Rite**, which we still use to this day, with adaptations. He had a vision, during the **Consecration**, of **Christ’s physical presence**; this **Eucharistic Miracle** was prompted by a woman who scorned the **Doctrine of Transubstantiation**, which the **Church** has always professed, but did not formally define until the 1500’s, after **Protestant Reformers** questioned or rejected **Church dogmas, doctrines** and **practices**.

Saint Clare of Assisi. **Rubens** used the face of **Princess Isabella** to represent **Saint Clare** [1194-1253], who holds a **Monstrance** to recall another **Eucharistic Miracle**. In **1240**, as the invading **Islamic Saracens**, seeking to conquer the **Convent at San Damiano**, entered the **cloister**, **Saint Clare** courageously held up our **Eucharistic Lord** to encourage the **Sisters** to persevere in their prayer, and the enemy was repulsed.

Saint Thomas Aquinas. This great **Dominican Theologian** [1225-1274], who composed the **Mass orations** and **hymns** still used on **Corpus Christi** and for **Eucharistic Adoration**, is, perhaps, the greatest defender of the **Catholic** belief in our **Lord’s Real Presence**. He holds a book in front of **Saint Clare**, which recalls his magnificent writings on the **Doctrine of Transubstantiation**.

Saint Norbert. Last week’s bulletin article was all about **Saint Norbert** [1080-1134], who is seen in his white habit, clutching the **Blessed Sacrament** under his robes. The most ‘ordinary’ of the **Seven Defenders**, he preached against dissenters who attacked the **Christian Sacraments**.

Saint Jerome.* Known primarily for his **Latin** translation of the **Bible**, **Saint Jerome** [340’s-420] wears his **red cardinal robes**, holding the **Sacred Scriptures**. In his translations of the **Lord’s Prayer**, which is only found in two **Gospels**, he used the term for ‘ordinary’ bread for ‘daily’ bread in **Luke 11:3**, but the term ‘**supersubstantial**’ bread in **Matthew 6:11** - which has strong **Eucharistic Real Presence** overtones. May these **Saints** help us more fully understand and appreciate our **Lord’s Real Presence** in the **Sacrament of the Altar**.

In Christ,

Father Mark

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