

“The immensity of heaven and earth cannot contain me, but I can be contained by the heart of one who loves me.”

(Ibn ben Arabi)

“In the world outside and around you, in the world within you – at their best and their worst – always know Christ at the centre of yourself. Make your heart a monstrance in which he is set.”

(Contemporary writer)

“Out of the darkness of my life, so much frustrated, I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament... there you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves on earth.

The only cure for sagging or fainting faith is Holy Communion.”

(J.R.R. Tolkien)

“If angels could be jealous of us, they would be so for one reason only: Holy Communion.”

(St Maximilian Kolbe)

“In the Eucharist, oneness with God is not a dream, it is the only reality. Everything else is illusion.”

(E'yen Gardner)

“If you wish to know the truth of the Eucharist, it is simple: just stay out of your head. (Contemporary writer)

If it truly is our ‘daily bread’, why do we not take it every day?”

(St Ambrose)

‘Transubstantiation’ was the term used by the medieval scholastics to describe what was happening at Mass – and more specifically – during the consecration. However, it has never been – and it certainly is not now – the most helpful way of understanding the reality of the Body and Blood of Christ. It was coined by philosophers (not theologians, mind) for the benefit of philosophers; but despite that, the ordinary, average, everyday medieval heart beat with love for our Lord in Holy Communion, not with philosophy. I was taught dogmatic theology for a few years by Gabriel Daly, an Irish Augustinian priest, who recently wrote a book in which he said:

“Prior to the Second Vatican Council a uniform theology of the Eucharist had been imposed throughout the Church which had concentrated on what happens to the bread and the wine when the priest says the words of consecration. Eucharistic theology had become “reduced to a philosophical problem employing abstractions like substance and accidents”.

It isn’t that the term ‘transubstantiation’ is false or incorrect – not at all, I’m sure it is absolutely right – it is

simply not as accessible or helpful as it once was. It's the theological language that has faded in meaning across the centuries, not the reality it refers to. Professor Daly felt that a far more true, rich and real understanding of the Eucharist would be mystical, grasped not with the head but felt by the heart, beyond all words, something to be received, not comprehended. The bread and wine during Mass are no longer bread and wine as we would understand these things, but the real presence of Jesus Christ. His Body and Blood not in any biological sense – which would be grotesque – but sacramentally. Not flesh or bone or fatty tissue, not haemoglobin or proteins or white corpuscles, of course not – but a living and substantial presence which transcends all these physical, corporeal things and certainly all philosophical definitions.

The Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Christ – is the deepest and richest mystery of our lives of faith. It is also the most generous, the most profligate and universal. It is the ultimate reconciliation: between Creator and creation, the human and the divine, the spiritual and material, the One and the many – it is the fullness of meaning in which all meanings are held and sustained. Joy and misery, happiness and suffering, pain and delight, peace and conflict, life and death – all possible opposites in the world outside and around us, and in the world within us, at their best and their worst – are reconciled in the Eucharist. The medieval German mystic Nicholas of Cusa described it as the 'coincidence of

contraries' and used it to describe a revelation of the oneness of things previously believed to be separate.

Look at the world around us: so full of beauty and joy, yet also so full of horror and suffering, tears and pain. Look at the world within us: so full of and delight, yet also so full of anxiety and craziness, fear and desire. All of these are reconciled if we know the Lord – especially in the Eucharist – at the centre of ourselves.

I like the old story of the Jewish rabbi and the Catholic priest – who have always had a great deal in common – and the rabbi said to the priest: “If I truly believed that Almighty God was in that tabernacle, I would crawl into church on my belly.” And the priest replied: “Absolutely. But in Jesus, God has already done the crawling for us.”