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A SHORT EXPLANATION

OF

The Blessed Eucharist

BY

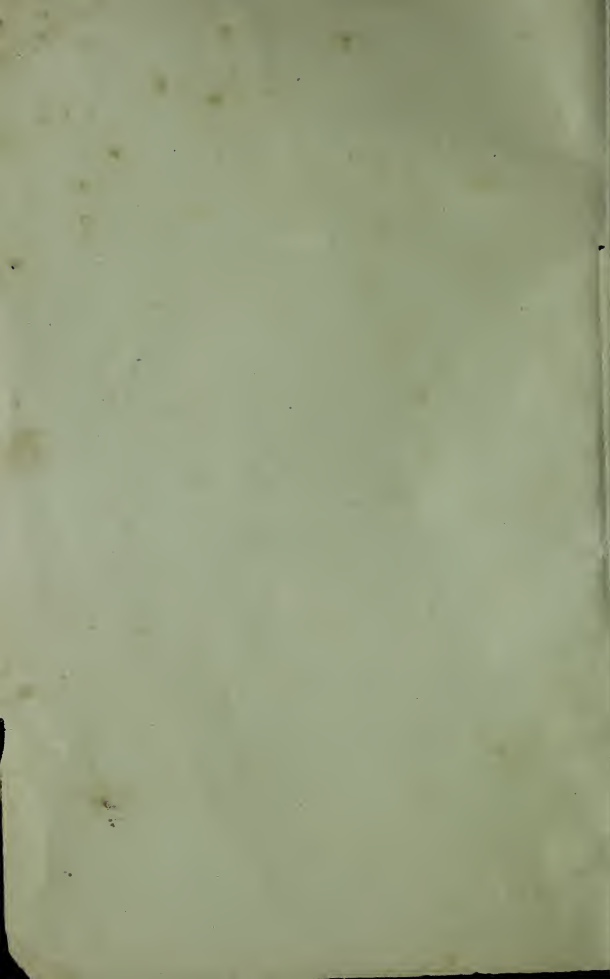
A SECULAR PRIEST.

PERMISSU ORDINARII.

SAN FRANCISCO:

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THE BLESSED EUCHARIST.

INTRODUCTION.

The Blessed Eucharist is the most precious treasure of the Catholic Church. This invaluable gift was bestowed on her by Jesus Christ, her Divine Founder. About a year before His death on the cross, He led the people into the wilderness, like Moses, and there miraculously fed them. Five thousand men, besides women and children, amounting probably to five thousand more, were fully satisfied with five loaves and two fishes. This miracle—this splendid miracle—made a deep impression on the minds of the people, and greatly swelled the number of His followers. The next day an immense multitude surrounded Him at Capharnaum, a city of Galilee, expecting He would feed them again with the bread which perisheth; and on that memorable occasion it was He delivered that famous discourse on the bread of life which perisheth not, recorded in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, and promised to give a food, of which, if any man partook, he should not languish or die, but live and thrive forever. The multitude who listened with wonder, admiration and reverence, heard of course with astonishment this promise of a food which endureth

to life everlasting, and wished to know what sort it should be, whether it should be better, more quickening, more invigorating than the manna which their fathers had received in the desert of Arabia from heaven, and demanded a sign—that is, a miracle—in confirmation of the truth of His assertion. He did not at once gratify their desire, but, to lead them on gradually to the belief of the mystery He was about to unveil, proceeded to point out the

NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGES OF FAITH.

They must first, He said, believe in Him as the Teacher whom God sent, and in His doctrines. And identifying Himself with His doctrines, He, the Word and Wisdom of the Father declared: “I am the bread of life;” that is, My doctrines, when fully and firmly believed, nourish the soul unto life. Whosoever believeth in Me—in My word, in My teachings, in My Gospel, hath everlasting life, that is, hath it in germ, and I will raise him up on the last day. My friends, allow me here to make a short digression. Jesus Christ, when he exacted Faith of the multitudes around Him, required nothing new—nothing but what God in every age of the world required of man, and what the best, the purest, the wisest and the holiest men that were ever in the world at all times rendered to Him. Faith was ever the foundation of that divine, that spiritual, that supernatural life to which man has always and everywhere been called—before the coming of the Redeemer as well as since. It is the root and nourisher of all other virtues that tend towards God.

By faith the just man liveth, and without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews, ix. 6, and x, 33). All men, therefore, who desire to be justified and saved, must enter into the lineage of Abraham, who is called "the father of all those who believe." (Rom., iv, 2). When faith finds a pure soul, a good and perfect heart, it dwells there at ease; it strikes deep roots, and can only with the greatest difficulty be plucked up and eradicated, and soon that soul looks like a well cultivated field of grain. The faith of that soul, whether it be the soul of an individual or nation, is like a fine fruit tree that blossoms in your orchards, or to a flower that blooms and yields sweet odor in your gardens—yes, a beautiful thing it then is to look at and admire; beautiful indeed, as the most fair and lovely flower of the garden—graceful as the rose of Jerico—sweet as the lily of the valley—stately as the cedar on Libanus—fruitful as the grain which, in the steppes of Tartary, is to be gathered ripe, and uncut by the sickle—rich as the clustering grapes of the vines of Engaddi, where they grow amid the ordinary productions of the soil; and where, unlike those in the gardens of Judea, they need not be planted or pruned. As fruitful and beautiful as any of these is the growth of the Catholic Faith, wherever it finds a soil congenial to it—a native soil. O; my friends, cultivate it well, remembering that every slip of the fair plant is of priceless value.

Having now fixed their thoughts on the necessity of believing in Him and in His word, and pointed out the advantages of this firm faith and trust in God, He next

led them to expect a food far superior to the miraculous manna—an immortalizing food, which the manna was not—a food that should be an earnest of eternal life, and when He had wound up the expectation of the rapt multitude to the highest pitch, He then distinctly declared that this food was to be His *own* Flesh: The bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world. Hear His own blessed words,

THE WORDS OF PROMISE,
John, vi, 48, etc.:

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert, and died. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that if any man eat of it, he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world. The Jews therefore disputed among themselves, saying: How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said to them: Amen, amen, I say to you, unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye shall not have life in you. He who eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink. He who eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he who eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna and

died. He who eateth this bread shall live forever.”

Well did our Lord redeem his word of promise. The bread of life promised at Capharnaum He gave a year later at Jerusalem on the eve of his death, when He instituted the holy Eucharist, leaving His own most precious Body and Blood as a legacy of His love to His followers for all time to come. Listen to His solemn words on that solemn occasion:

III—THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION.

Matt., xxvi, 26, 27, 28.

And whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke, and gave to his disciples, and said: Take and eat: this is My Body. And He took the chalice, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. For this is My Blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many, unto remission of sins.

Mark, xiv, 22, 23, 24.

And whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessing, broke, and gave to them, and said: Take ye, this is My Body. And he took the chalice, and when he had given thanks, He gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said to them: This is My Blood, that of the new Covenant, which shall be shed for many.

Luke, xxii, 19, etc.

And taking bread, He gave thanks, and broke it, and gave to them, saying: This is My Body, which is given for you. Do this for My remembrance.

In like manner the chalice also, after supper, saying : This is the chalice, the new Covenant in My Blood, which shall be shed for you.

ST. PAUL'S VERY REMARKABLE ACCOUNT.

1 Cor., xi, 23.

Brethren : I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks, broke it and said : Take and eat : this is My Body, which shall be delivered for you : this do for the commemoration of Me. In like manner also He *took* the chalice, after the supper, saying : This chalice is the New Testament in My Blood. This do ye, as often as ye shall drink, for the commemoration of Me. For as often as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, ye shall show the death of the Lord, until He come. Therefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and of the Blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Body of the Lord. Therefore many are infirm and weak among you, and many sleep. But if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But whilst we are judged, we are chastised by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with this world.

Thus did our Lord, on the eve of His crucifixion,

when His desire for the happiness of His poor, fallen creature, man, was kindled to its highest ardor, institute the August Sacrifice, and Sacrament of the Adorable Eucharist; a sacrifice wherein he presented to the Deity a victim every way worthy of His tremendous Majesty—spotless in purity, matchless in greatness, unbounded in acceptableness; and a sacrament wherein He left to the children of the Kingdom, the inmates of His House on earth, the members of his Mystic Body, the Church, His own real flesh and blood, to serve them to the end of time, as medicine, as food, as a dainty, as support, as treasures, to strengthen and cheer them in the desert of this barren life. He took bread into His hands; He pronounced over it that energetic sentence: “This is My Body.” Swifter than lightning, the whole substance of the bread was changed into the substance of His Body. And He took the cup, and over the wine in the cup He pronounced the energetic sentence: “This is My Blood.” Instantaneously the whole substance of the wine was changed into His Blood. There was no longer any bread or wine there. There was only the appearance of bread and the appearance of wine; the taste, color and form of bread, and the taste, color and form of wine. His Body was present under the element of bread, and His Blood under the element of wine in virtue of the words of consecration. With His Body were His Blood and His Soul, by virtue of that natural connection, by which all the parts of Christ our Lord are united together, and moreover, his Divinity, on account of its admirable hypostatical union with

His Body and Soul. With His Blood under the appearance of wine, were His Body and Soul, by concomitance, and His Divinity, by the hypostatic union. In a word, Christ, who is at once perfect God, and perfect man, was whole and entire, under outward appearance of bread, and whole and entire under the outward appearance of wine—the whole Christ, the spotless Victim of Calvary. This was the first Holy Mass. And now began to be fulfilled that prophecy of David: Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisadech. Ps., cix, 4. All this our bountiful Lord did Himself at the last supper. But He did more.

THE APOSTLES ORDAINED PRIESTS.

He ordained the Apostles priests; He gave them power to consecrate bread and wine into His Body and Blood, and He commanded them, and their successors in the priesthood, to perform the same sacred rite, to offer up the same clean oblation, in every place, in every quarter of the globe, without interruption, till His second coming at the end of time, in memory of Him and of His death: "This do in commemoration of Me." And every day since, in every continent of the globe, in almost every island, even on the ships that traverse the wide ocean, not only in the great centres of population, but even on the frontiers of the earth, the Priests of the Church, following the example and obeying the orders of the great, invisible High-Priest, whose Priests they are, have robed themselves in a singular costume, in a vesture of holiness, and going up to the Altars of His Church, have exer-

cised the awful transmuting power which he conferred on them, and immolated and offered in sacrifice the same spotless Victim of Calvary, disguised under the humble veils of bread and wine, as a sweet odor to the Lord, who, no doubt, every time the pure offering is made, says to the congregation, to all present at the Tremendous Mysteries, the self-same words of warning and command which more than once He uttered from His throne in heaven to the crowd gathered around Him in the days of his flesh: "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: Hear ye Him." Matt. iii, 17, xvii, 5. Adore Him, thank Him, pray to Him for yourselves, for the living and the dead, for all blessings, especially for the gift of a lively faith and an ardent charity. And every day since they have distributed the divine, spiritual and immortal food, to nourish, cheer and strengthen the God-like, spiritual and immortal souls of the little ones of Christ, the Lord. And from age to age, and in every age, the humble, the simple, the docile, the little ones of Christ, have approached to enrich their poverty as well as to slake their thirst. What tongue can describe the treasures which the millions upon millions that have approached, have derived from its worthy reception—there was a table spread with every deliciousness, filled to overflowing with every grace; there was the Bread of Life, the Manna of Angels' Lord; there was the Cup of Salvation, the Wine which cheereth the heart of man; there was the concealed Divinity of Bethlehem; there the real sacrifice of Calvary; there the same glorified Flesh, which rose, ascended, and sits at the right hand of God.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

The real Presence and Transubstantiation—these are the two principal points of the Church's belief with regard to this Mystery. Transubstantiation! How incomprehensible! Those whom the Holy Scriptures call "children of unbelief" (Ephesians ii, 2), that is, men out of and beyond the pale of the Church, wanderers from the City of God, and therefore without faith, may wonder if it really does take place at the Mass. But go back in thought to the days of old and your eyes will behold God exercising this wonderful transmuting power. He then changed Lot's wife into a pillar of salt, Moses' rod into a serpent, the waters of Egypt into blood; and when the Second Person of the ever-Adorable Trinity became Man, He assisted at a marriage-feast, at Cana in Galilee, and there changed water into wine to satisfy the desire of the guests—there was transubstantiation.

(see Genesis xix, 26: vii, 20; John ii. 8.)

His arm is not shortened in this, our day. His godness is undiminished, His mercy is the same. At Cana the guests wanted—not water, for of that they had abundance, but a nobler beverage—wine. Wine was the richest, most generous, most invigorating of nature's productions. Earth could yield nothing more excellent than the vine and its fruit. The water which, filtering through the earth, is caught by its roots, elaborated into its sap, distilled into its grape, and then sweetened by the sun, is raised in nature and qualities, in the estimation of men. Our Blessed Lord, at that first feast at Cana, by one simple action,

gave the water that higher existence. And now, at the last feast, it (the wine) must be changed. And for whom? For us, who want—not wine, not earthly growth, of any sort. Man was surfeited of that, and called for better refreshment. If the first transubstantiation was so great, and so worthy of the power that wrought it, what shall we find, into which the wine itself shall be changed? There is but one stream, a draught from which would refresh, renew, revive the fainting race of man; but who shall dare to ask it? It was “of the water out of the cistern that is in Bethlehem,” (the house of bread), that David longed to drink; but he shuddered to partake, saying: The Lord forbid that I should do this: shall I drink the blood of these men? (2 Kings, xxiii, 17.) And it is from the wellspring of Bethlehem that we, too, thirst to drink; but we must not shrink from the awful draught—the priceless *blood* of him that opens it. No, there is only one change more that can be made: the Wine must become a living flow from His Divine Heart. Only thus shall the second feast surpass the first. The change was made. And as in the primitive Eden there was a gushing fountain, whence issued a great river which, divided into four branches, refreshed and fertilized that vast region (Genesis, ii, 10); so in the new Paradise, the Church, there is a still more magnificent Fountain, ever gushing, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whence issues a grander stream, the Golden Stream of His Precious Blood, which, divided into four branches, carries refreshment, healing, and life, to every nation, and to every race. That Sacred

Heart contains and sends forth perennially this rich abundance; filling the pure vessel itself with sweetness, and thence flowing through the entire city of God, the Church of Ages, in an unfailling stream, stronger than the torrent of Cedron (2 Chronicles, xxx, 14), brighter than the rivers of Damascus (4 Kings, v, 12), more cleansing than the waters of Siloe (John, ix, 7), and holier than the stream of Jordan (Mark, i, 9). And the Lord Himself invites us every one to come not only to see, but to taste, also, how sweet He is (Psalm, xxxiii, 9). Shall we refuse the loving invitation? No, we will not; we shall accept it; we will draw nigh with Thomas, not unbelieving, not doubting, but full of faith, of confidence, of love, and, instead of touching with our hands the open flood-gate whence flowed this inundation of tenderness, we will reverently drink it, till our souls are filled. It is that refreshing torrent of delights at which saints drink with renewed rapture, and forgiven sinners with strengthening relish.

A STUPENDOUS MYSTERY.

From all this it is very apparent that the Blessed Eucharist, as understood and asserted by the Church of God, is a stupendous Mystery. We Catholics hold the doctrine as one positively revealed by Jesus Christ; He was God Incarnate, and so the doctrine cannot possibly be false.

We hold the doctrine firmly by Faith, and to us, the sons and daughters of the Church of God, it is a matter of perfect indifference what philosophy says about the sacred mystery, or whether philosophers can pretend

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to demonstrate its possibility or not. Those who understand the subject best, tell us that it is an unapproachable mystery—beyond the reach of human reason—the mystery of mysteries—and all we can do is stand before it in silent wonder or bow down in profound adoration. All the mysteries of the gospel are concentrated in it, and though Faith grasps it with love and joy unspeakable, philosophy stands aghast before it. Only God Himself can comprehend it, and none but God could have taught it; no human reason could have devised it, and no human reason can lift the veil that covers it. All that man and angels can do is to wonder and adore.

CHRISTIANITY ALL MYSTERIOUS.

But though the doctrine of the Blessed Eucharist, as defined by the Holy Council of Trent, and always taught by the Church, is mysterious and incomprehensible, it must not be rejected by any one calling himself a christian on that account, else he must, to be consistent, reject Christianity itself, for Christianity is all mysterious. A God supreme and one, whose eternal Wisdom or whose Word remaining in Him, yet proceeds abroad and founds the heavens; whilst the connecting love of both, abiding always with Them, yet proceeds from Them, and gives to the Creation all its ornament and virtue; as light and heat from the sun proceed with powers as wonderful as the great source from whence they flow.

And this Wisdom uncreate, this eternal Word-made-flesh—this God-made-man giving of his fullness to all

who believe—is not this mysterious? And the atonement which he made for man and the propitiation of that fault which Adam committed—is it not incomprehensible? And yet we believe, because we know that God has told it; and if He walked on earth, and was seen by men, and lived and died amongst us in that servile form which he took, and promised to bestow upon those whose feet He washed an earnest of his love—a bond of union for his people—a source of grace for His elect—a pledge of resurrection and of future glory—shall we disbelieve Him, because He said it was His Body, not cut into particles, as the gross Capharnaïtes thought, but veiled—as bread and wine, to nourish and exhilarate the soul?

Can He who called the world out of nothing, or who moved on the abyss, putting chaos into order, who slept in Bethlehem, who was numbered among the wicked, who bled between two thieves, whilst all the hosts of heaven worshipped Him above—can He not, I say, take His place within the breast of man, and disseminate His virtues through the soul as the diamond sheds its lustre in obscurity? Surely He can; nor does He here deceive our sense, for He has told us that He would be with us. And as we believe “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,” though we could only see or touch the form of man in which He was; so when he says, “This is my Body,” we can believe the truth of what He says, just as we could believe that he was hidden on the cross. For surely that Diety who could conceal Himself can also ravish from our eyes the glorious and impassible

flesh which in heaven or earth is always with Him, and partaking, as far as it is capable, of His glory. This flesh does not corrupt in us, or feel vicissitude or change, but when the veil which covered it is dissolved, it then departs with that Divinity of Christ, from which it never was disjoined. Wonderful and incomprehensible, it is true—yet only like the other mysteries of Christian faith.

In conclusion, let me again remind you of the greatness of this gift bestowed on you by the superabounding goodness of your dear Savior, and exhort you to make the best possible use of it. Assist as often as you can, and always with faith and love, devotion and reverence, at the all-atoning sacrifice of the Altar, but be sure to do so on the Lord's own day and the Church's holidays. Be careful also to recruit your strength often and often, during each year, with this bread of life and this cup of salvation, that so you may deserve one day to drink of that river of life which flows eternally from the foot of the Lamb.

END.

