

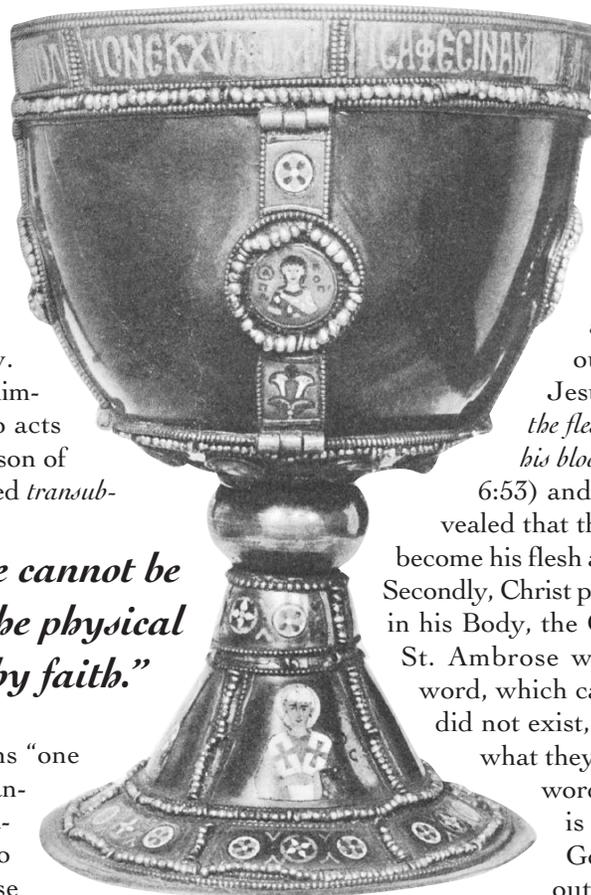
The Real Presence

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. ~ 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

JESUS IS PRESENT in many different ways to his people, but he is most present in the Eucharistic species (the consecrated bread and wine). This presence is called the "Real Presence" because the bread and wine are really and substantially changed into Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. They are changed by Christ himself, through the priest who acts *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"). This change is called *transub-*

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stantiation, a term that means "one substance has changed into another." After the consecration, the bread and wine no longer exist as such, because they have truly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, and will remain so as long as the Eucharistic species exists. Even the smallest crumb or tiniest drop is the Real Presence.



11th century chalice with enamel and pearls

The Church teaches that the Real Presence cannot be perceived through the physical senses, but only by faith; that is, Jesus' presence in the Eucharistic species cannot be scientifically proven or tested. But there are revealed truths (truths that assist our reason) to enable our response of faith. First, Jesus taught that *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* (Jn 6:53) and, at the Last Supper, he revealed that the bread and wine had truly become his flesh and blood (see Lk 22:19-20). Secondly, Christ promised to always be present in his Body, the Church (Mt 18:20). Third, St. Ambrose writes, "Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before?" In other words, if one believes that Christ is the Word through which God creates the entire world out of nothing by saying "Let there be," how much easier it is to believe that he changes the bread and wine into himself. Lastly, throughout the centuries many Eucharistic miracles have occurred. In these miracles, one

is able to physically see that the bread and wine have changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, such as in the Eucharistic Miracle at Lanciano, Italy in the eighth century. Having been kept in a sealed receptacle for 1200 years, the miracle can still be seen today. A hymn written by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century beautifully expresses the Catholic belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:

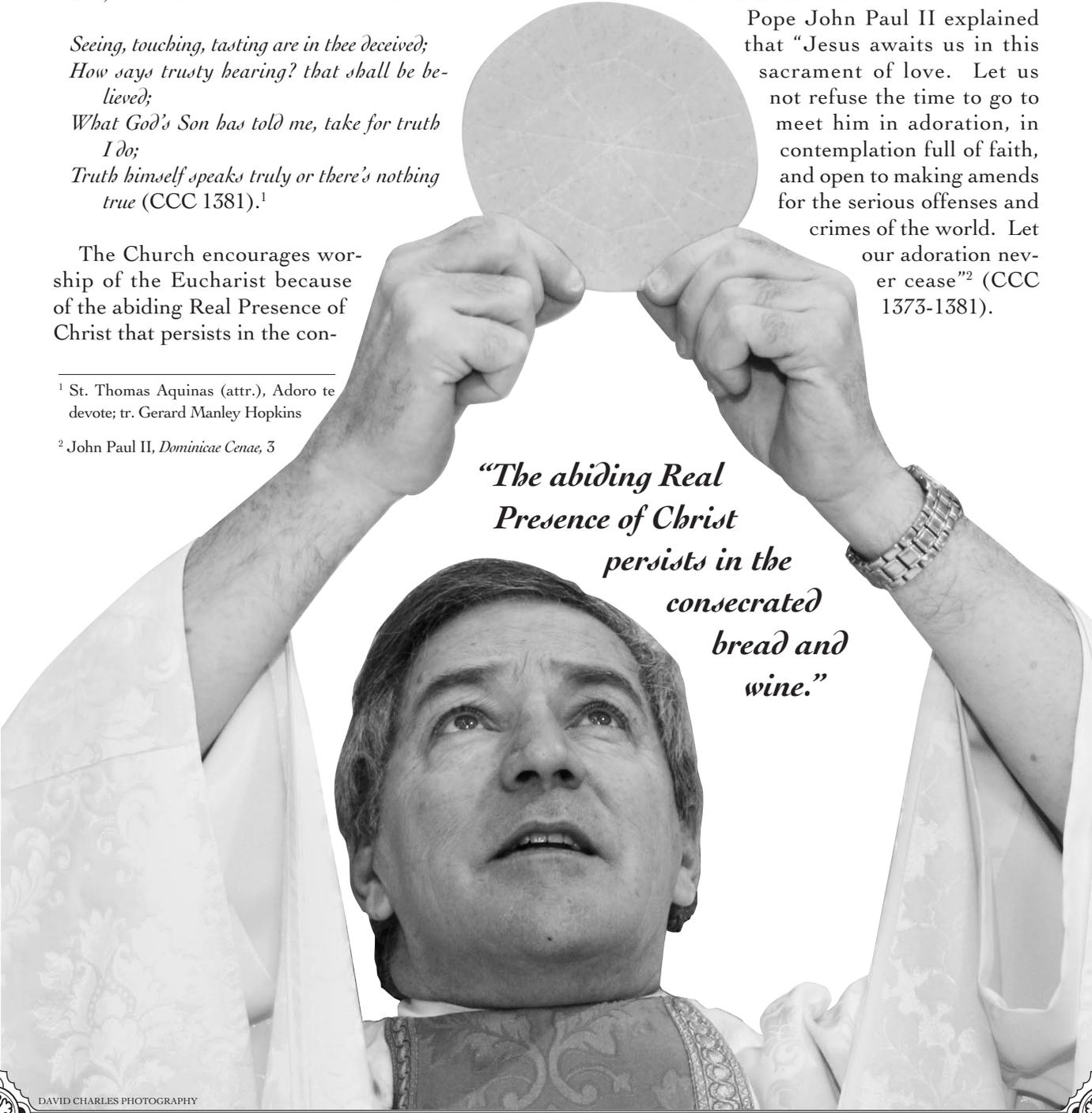
*Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.*

*Seeing, touching, tasting are in thee deceived;
How says trusty hearing? that shall be be-
lieved;
What God's Son has told me, take for truth
I do;
Truth himself speaks truly or there's nothing
true (CCC 1381).¹*

The Church encourages worship of the Eucharist because of the abiding Real Presence of Christ that persists in the con-

secrated bread and wine. For practical reasons, only the consecrated bread is reserved and kept in a holy and prominent place in the church (called the tabernacle). This worship of the Blessed Sacrament (the Eucharist) is expressed through our signs of reverence (kneeling, bowing, and the Sign of the Cross) and culminates in the long-standing tradition called Adoration. In Adoration, the Blessed Sacrament is taken out of the tabernacle and displayed on the altar so that the faithful can come and pray and worship in silence before Christ who is hidden in this consecrated bread.

Pope John Paul II explained that "Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease"² (CCC 1373-1381).



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Presence of Christ
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¹ St. Thomas Aquinas (attr.), *Adoro te devote*; tr. Gerard Manley Hopkins

² John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 3