

Real Presence

A threat to the existence of the Roman Catholic Church is revealed in a 2019 Pew Research poll which found that only one-third of Roman Catholics believe in the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is at the very center of the church’s existence. Attendance at Sunday Mass dropped precipitously after Roman Catholics decided that they would not go to hell for missing Mass. Attendance now depends on church members finding that it is a worthwhile experience for them to attend. The attraction must be at a deep level if it is to be sustained.

The reaction of most bishops to the poll was predictable. According to Bishop Robert Barron, “It represents a massive failure on the part of Catholic educators and catechists, evangelists and teachers.”¹ It is unfair to lay the problem on that group of people. The question of Christ’s real presence is not a matter for better catechizing so that people would know the church’s teaching. Most of the church’s members are aware of the teaching, but it simply doesn’t make sense to them. Taken in isolation, the idea of bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Christ is unintelligible. Earlier generations of Roman Catholics were able to believe in the real presence from within a sacred context and in a texture of other beliefs.

The Pew Research poll found that twenty-two percent of Roman Catholics believe in “transubstantiation.” I was surprised that that number was so high. The term “transubstantiation” was introduced by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and it was affirmed by the Council of Trent. A detailed study of the history of the term is now available in Brett Salkeld’s book, *Transubstantiation*.² The book shows that Thomas Aquinas did not force the Eucharist into Aristotle’s philosophy. As is true of all of Thomas’s philosophy, Aristotelian elements are incorporated into a philosophy of participation or a sacramental way of looking at the universe. A clarification of the original meaning of transubstantiation is important for ecumenical dialogue but it is doubtful that the term can be made intelligible for most Catholics today. Insisting on the word is not the way to have Catholics understand the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The phrase “real presence” can be misleading. What other kind of presence is there? Sometimes people contrast real with symbolic which is not entirely accurate. The symbolic is real although it can be real in several ways. A symbol can be an arbitrary sign that is used to stand for something else. That is a symbol without much depth. Symbols can also be the outward expression of something that has spiritual depth; the symbol shares in the richness of what it expresses. That

is the sacramental principle that is central to Catholic life. The sacraments, including the Eucharist, are based on this meaning of symbol. Flannery O'Connor wrote of the Eucharist: "Well, if it is just a symbol, to hell with it!"³ The crucial word in O'Connor's statement is "just." Is Christ's presence just or merely symbolic so that bread and wine are a stand-in to remind us of something else? No. Is Christ's presence symbolic and real? Yes.

The Roman Catholic Church urgently needs some profound thinking about real presence. There are probably some profound thinkers in the church but they do not seem to be prominent. We need a philosopher of the caliber of Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber or Karl Rahner to reflect on the meaning of presence.

Presence

Belief in the real presence of Christ depends on people experiencing real presence in their lives. One writer who tries to get at what that presence means is Richard Rohr in *The Universal Christ*: "Only presence can know presence and our real presence can know Real Presence. When Jesus spoke the words 'This is my body,' I believe he was speaking not just about the bread in front of him, but about the whole universe, about everything that is physical, material and yet also spirit filled."⁴

Robert Orsi's book, *History and Presence*, is related to the topic of this chapter.⁵ However, the presence that Orsi is interested in is supernatural beings that confront the human. He reports on an impressive collection of material about the past and present Catholic experiences of the supernatural. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist falls within this experience. However, the presence that he writes about is only obliquely related to the topic of this chapter. Orsi says very little about the meaning of presence in human experience that I argue is the necessary basis of the experience of the Eucharistic presence.

Presence refer to the present or, more precisely, to being present. Human beings are often encouraged to live in the present. But in our common image of time as a line in which the past is behind us and the future is in front of us, the present is not a part of time. It is simply the dividing line between the past and the future. How can human beings live in the present if it disappears at the rate of sixty seconds a minute?

If the past is no longer here, the future has not arrived, and the present is a disappearing point, where is a human being to live? The answer of great

philosophers and religious mystics is that one should live in the *depths* of the present. For them, presence is not a point but a relation. It is a relation not first to time but to other human beings, and through them to the whole world. To be able to live in the present is to have discovered that the present has a dimension of depth.

In this meaning of presence, a person stands upon the past, as in the image of standing on the shoulders of our ancestors. Some writers who talk about living in the present mean to forget the past because it no longer exists. But the attempt to escape from the past is a bad idea that does not work. As William Faulkner wrote: “The past has never died; it is not even past.”⁶ Whatever is in the past must be accepted as the underpinning of the present.

The present has depth because of the millions of people who have gone before us. The Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh writes: “Our presence here means the presence of all our ancestors. They are still alive in us. Every time we smile, all the generations of our ancestors, our children and the generations to come – all of whom are within us – smile too. We practice not just for ourselves but for everyone, and the stream of life continues. If you have made mistakes and caused your beloved to suffer, and if he or she is no longer alive, don’t be frustrated. You can still heal the wound within you. You can make him or her smile.”⁷

The future is a different kind of reality than the past. The future exists only in the possibilities of the present. The future is the source of possible good things and possible horrors that never happen. Anxiety about the future can prevent a person from ever living in the present. Humans can influence the future but they cannot control it. They must act on what to them seems to be the best available choice for the future and not agonize over what might have been. I doubt that even God can foresee the future.

For anyone who lives a busy life of going and coming, who never stops long enough to wonder at existence, “presence” may be a meaningless term. But while philosophers and mystics may be the writers on presence, millions of people experience what those writers try to convey in written words. The experience of deep presence is usually in a silence beyond words although that is not to disparage language which is needed to draw near to a wise silence.

For some people a deep presence is found when they are alone with mountains, oceans, or starry skies but before that experience of presence in solitude is possible there needs to be the presence of one or many human beings. People who lead busy

lives, such as mothers of small children, may be mystics among us. People who do boring and tedious work may survive because of the presence of an interior life.

For someone to be genuinely present there is required to have been at least one other human being. Every human baby has at least one person who cared for it; otherwise it could not have survived. Most people have several family members and friends who bring out their personal qualities and provide experiences of caring, friendship and love. Anyone who is seriously lacking in such experiences is likely to be distracted by failures in the past and fear for the future. Living calmly and contentedly in the present is unknown to a person who is overwhelmed with regret for what happened in the past or anxiety about what may happen in the future.

Eating and Drinking with Friends

A central activity of sharing life with others is eating and drinking. A “companion” is someone you break bread with. Food and drink are a necessity for existence, but the human act of eating and drinking also has a meaning that goes far beyond mere survival. Other animals eat and seem to find it a pleasing experience, but humans can invest their meals with solemnity or joy. If a family does not at least sometimes sit at the table and eat a meal together, its future as a family is precarious. When friends meet for talk about what is happening in their lives, they very often share a meal and help along the conversation with a glass or two of wine.

Food like other good things in life can be misused. One of the cardinal sins is gluttony which is usually assumed to mean eating too much. But undereating, for various reasons, can be a problem, too. People who have an abundance of food should accept that gift with gratitude while also doing whatever they can to help people who lack food. Sometimes the poor who lack enough nourishing food are our neighbors. Sharing food with a neighbor can be the beginning of a bond of friendship.

Philosophers who give serious attention to the importance of food, such as the Epicureans, unfairly get a bad name. The human act of eating is not a bad place to begin philosophical reflection on human life. Unfortunately, René Descartes began modern philosophy by sitting alone in a room until he decided that the basis of all knowledge is “I think, therefore I exist.” If he had waited a few hours more, he would have said, “I am hungry, and I know how to solve that.” Philosophy and ethics might have been based on the relation between the body and food rather than

on ideas in a guy's head. The newborn infant instinctively and immediately goes for the source of food. As a person approaches the end of life there is no better indicator of whether the body is ready to die than whether the person can still enjoy a meal.

Drink is a bigger danger than food for being abused. Humans early discovered the pleasure of some beverages that provide a heightened sense of life, at least for a while. Drinking too much of a beverage like alcohol has repercussions in the body and mind. The context is crucial. Drinking alcohol by oneself can lead to deadly addiction. Sharing a bottle of wine at dinner has a built-in control for the amount of drink consumed.

Many religions have rituals of fasting and abstinence. The practices do not imply hatred of food or the body. On the contrary, the temporary restraint is to remind us that food is a gift and we need to be aware of those who are not as fortunate as we are. Catholics, like other groups, were encouraged to give thanks before every meal (Bless us our Lord and these thy gifts...). Lent is still observed by many Catholics as a time to observe some restraint. The best-known Catholic practice of meatless Friday was abandoned in the 1960s. Although that practice probably no longer made sense, the almost total absence of a comparable discipline does not bode well for the Roman Catholic Church's future. Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus still have dietary laws as a means of strengthening community bonds.

Food and drink play an important role in the accounts of the life of Jesus. Part of the reason for that prominence was simply because Jesus was a Jew of his time. He did, however, seem to give a special emphasis to the importance of food and drink; many of his parables and sayings concern food. Several of his best-known miracles were about food and one of them concerned wine at a wedding feast.

In the miracle of loaves and fishes, as recounted in Mk. 8, it seemed to suddenly occur to Jesus and his disciples that there was a hungry crowd that had followed Jesus into the desert for three days. The disciples said that there were only a few loaves of bread and a few fishes. They brought these few loaves and fishes to Jesus who broke the bread and blessed the fishes. There was enough food for four thousand people and for seven baskets of leftovers. It seems unlikely that Jesus did a kind of magic act. It is also unlikely that the people had gone into the desert without any provisions. The miracle perhaps consisted of the disciples going through the crowd and persuading those who had an abundance of food to share what they had with their neighbor.

The many times that Jesus shared food with his disciples led up to a last supper the night before he died (Mk. 13: 22). The disciples seemed to sense that there was something special about this meal. Jesus clearly wanted them to remember that evening. So he took bread and pronounced the strange words “this is my body.” And stranger still were his words over the cup of wine, “this is my blood which shall be shed for you.” Then presuming that the disciples would meet for many meals like this one, he said, “do this in remembrance of me.” The ritual received a first test with the disciples on the way to Emmaus after the resurrection (Lk 24:30). The disciples were impressed by the conversation with this stranger. But it was only at the breaking of bread did they recognize who this person was.

Body and Blood

A human being is a bodily being. The body hides much of what makes up a person. Nonetheless, the body is what a person presents to the world as a visible and acting self. We share bodily delights. And when something terrible happens to a friend we may not know what to say, but bodily presence is a crucial support. In *Waiting for Godot*, Didi says to Gogo: “Don’t touch me, don’t question me, don’t talk to me, stay with me.” Technology can be a big help today in providing an oral and a visual connection between friends and family members. But nothing can substitute for the bodily presence of a loved one.

A person begins as a tiny body some months before birth. A baby does not look like much at birth but the potential is almost limitless. Among the animals, humans are the most helpless at birth, dependent on the care of a mother and the kindness of strangers. The men who produced the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* wrote “men are born free.” I doubt that any mother would have written that line, having seen the condition of the newborn infant. What the infant does have is an awareness of the universe. The entire unfiltered world rushes in. All being is present and nothing else will be added although the individual will spend a lifetime sorting out differences within unity.

From the moment of birth, the human baby is bodily present to anyone in its vicinity while the baby itself lacks awareness of its own presence. Self-awareness will bring all the joys and sorrows of human existence but that will require years of development. The human will needs to consult the bodily senses before deciding on a path for the self. To live in the depths of the present the body cannot be either dismissed as irrelevant or forced into submission. The body must be won over as a quiet ally in the journey to the center of the self.

One ability of the body that is neglected in philosophy is laughter. Meister Eckhart warned against a supposedly spiritual person for whom laughter does not lie at the center of spirituality.⁸ Mary Midgley says that some cultures try to restrain laughter “but far from showing they do not naturally have it, this indicates quite the contrary. They want to subordinate it to some other good. And however solemn the adults, laughter is found among healthy children everywhere.”⁹ A person who lives in the present can laugh heartily, especially at him- or herself. When we are chuckling in the present, it is impossible to regret the past or worry about the future. A person who never laughs does not know what it means to live in the depths of the present. A person who does not laugh cannot be trusted in political office.

Blood is the indispensable life force that flows throughout the body. The heart cannot take a timeout in pumping blood to the brain. Any injury that results in a great loss of blood is life-threatening. The anthropologist Loren Eiseley recounts how after an injury which left him bleeding his immediate instinct was to apologize to his blood. It is our precious friend that we must protect.

The donation of blood, especially to a stranger, is an extraordinary symbol of the unity of the human race. It is amazing that after any disaster there is a rush of volunteers who wait in a long line to give their blood. I am always intensely aware when I receive blood that I have been given life by someone whose name I do not know. One of those occasions is indelibly printed in my memory. I was so anemic from cancer that I could barely reach the hospital. The transfusion lasted many hours during which I was fully awake. The nurse stayed with me the whole time. I marveled that everyone in the room was receiving a gift of life from a stranger.

Sexual Life

Sexual intimacy can be a deepening of the presence of a loved person. In other animals, sex is simply a drive to reproduce the species. Sex is not a constant preoccupation of nonhuman animals. In humans, sex is also for reproduction but it is much more. At its best, sex is the way into one of the most intense and genuine experiences of presence in someone’s life. The joining of two as one can give a glimpse into the deepest mystery of human existence.

Because sex is so powerful, it requires discipline and restraint. A person may become entirely taken up with the pleasurable aspects of sexual activity and never get to its more profound meaning. Self-pleasuring is a harmless activity, but for men it can become addictive and create unrealistic fantasies of sexual relations. An

undisciplined person can be preoccupied with pleasure and not be attentive to his or her partner. Sexual fantasies and sexual desires completely dominate many men's lives. Without healthy human relations, the expression of these desires can take a twisted or a violent form that further isolates the person.

Until the middle of the twentieth century the Roman Catholic Church's official teaching on sexual matters exercised a rigid control of Catholic lives and even beyond to the rest of society. When change came it was in the form of a collapse of any agreed upon rules other than what counts as consent. There are still laws to protect children from sexual predators but given the lack of restraints on sexual activity the line that stops at children is, not surprisingly, regularly violated.

The Roman Catholic Church in its effort to stem the tide of this sexual upheaval has made church teaching a target of ridicule. What is tragic is that the church may be right in resisting a revolution of mores that had been in place for centuries. Changes were overdue but on a matter as profound as human sexuality revolutionary speed could be dangerous. The human race may still be ignorant of the mysteries connected to sex so that as a result contemporary wisdom about sex may still have its blind spots.

What is also tragic is that church officials failed to listen to what was genuinely new learning about sexuality. The church was still insisting in the twentieth century that the only purpose of sex is reproduction and that the only moral use of human intercourse was between married people who do not prevent the act from bringing about pregnancy. Human sexuality was thus reduced to the level of sex in every other animal, that is, the meaning of sex is for reproduction.

In 1969 Pope Paul VI dithered over whether to change the church's teaching on contraceptives. His encyclical was dead on arrival. Whichever side he had come down on, the decision would have split the church. The church had a problem that it was incapable of talking about; church officials still cannot discuss sex. There was an almost total rejection of the pope's continued ban on "artificial contraception." There were and still are people who demand that every Catholic assent to the ban. But poll takers do not find many Roman Catholics whose practice reflects such a belief.

The most obvious case in which church officials failed to learn what most of society was suddenly confronting is homosexuality. Gay and lesbian people are one of the most persecuted minorities in history. In some parts of the world homosexuality can still get you killed. In the gospels Jesus does not indicate any

fear about two of his apostles possibly engaging in sexual activity. The Book of Leviticus (18:22) (20:13) has the clearest condemnation of two men having sex (there was neither the idea nor a word for homosexuality). The men were to be put to death.

The church had a wonderful chance to rethink its attitude on homosexuality as part of rethinking its sexual code. Homosexuality could have been an entrance into seeing the wonderful diversity that is human sexuality.

Sex should be one of the greatest helps to the experience of presence. Most people may not reach the depth of union which two people who love one another ideally attain. But any depth is helpful. In contrast, a stunted sexual life, which for many men seems frozen at about age twelve, is a definite obstacle to experiencing the presence of any person. The reality of love can be judged by whether the love shared by two people opens them to respect and care for every human being. Their presence to each other can create a sense of presence to humanity and to being itself.

The sense that we have at certain moments of life that we are related to the whole world is impossible to put into a verbal description. The sense that we carry the universe within us is beyond all rational calculation. We are regularly told these days that human beings are an infinitesimal and unimportant part of the universe. But the humans are not a speck in nature; nature was invented in the human mind and exists because there is a human mind. Unless and until other intelligent beings appear, the humans are the center of all intelligibility. If there is a reality greater in importance than the humans, it is not millions of miles of space. A greater reality would have to possess the qualities of a who not a what and be smarter and more skillful than the best of the humans.

The Presence of God

What do Christians mean when they say, “we are in the presence of God”? If one tries to imagine what that prayer means, we are likely to produce only a childish picture of a big being in the sky who has extraordinary eyesight to watch over each of us. That image is what eighteenth-century deism/theism gave us and it is still with us. We know that the image is a false one but people who loudly proclaim their atheism seem to be imagining that to be the God they don’t believe in. Noam Chomsky has remarked that he would be an atheist if someone could tell him what God he is not to believe in.

The presence of God is the experience of the depths of presence in which we realize that we have barely begun to grasp the mystery of existence. We inevitably live most of the time on the surface of reality as we move through our mundane existence. But there are moments, if one is attentive to them, when there is an opening to a level of being that we are usually oblivious of. It can be a moment that is profoundly shaking such as the death of a close friend. But it might also be a whiff of a scent or the sound of a voice that throws open the mind to a usually hidden universe.

My own experience of a deep presence occurs when I regularly visit a community of Christian Brothers in Rhode Island. The experience can be called private because it is only mine, but it is an experience like that of numerous people past and present. The building which I visit was constructed as a novitiate and is now put to good use as a school for young men who would otherwise be put in prison.

I have been associated with the place since it was built in 1959. There is a plaque with my parents' names at the front of the building; a room on the second floor has my wife's name. The office on the first floor is where the council met when I was provincial. I always half expect a brother named Andy to appear; Brother Andrew was my novice director in 1954 and in his last years he was technically my secretary, but he was in fact my greatest supporter and my secret weapon in any argument.

I left the brothers 35 years ago, but I know all the retired brothers there who treat me as if I never left. They have forgotten or have forgiven me for some irresponsible years. I am deeply indebted to the brothers for the education I received and for the friendships that have endured for a lifetime with current and former brothers. In the chapel prayers I am present to myself because I am present with others who lives I deeply respect. Morning prayer begins with "Let us remember that we are in the presence of God" which signifies to me the community of brothers.

I regularly visit the cemetery on the property. On one occasion while I was sitting there, a couple drove up; the woman brought flowers to put on a grave. While she was doing that, the man walked over to me and said, "Do you know someone who is buried here?" With only slight exaggeration, I replied, "I know everyone here." I suspect he thought I was someone who had wandered into the place or maybe someone with dementia. But to me the names on the headstones are a main part of the communion of saints that brings together the past and the depths of the present.

Religious people seldom talk about God; they certainly are not foolish enough to try to describe God. Even to use the word God is close to blasphemy. The “presence of God” is most accurately referred to as the experiencing of the limits of one’s awareness together with the acceptance that there is reality beyond what can be imagined, thought, or spoken.

Christ and Eucharist

Some religions, including Christianity, have a more intimate name for this reality but it is a name to be spoken only in the setting of prayer. That is where the Christian language of the presence of Christ or the Spirit of Christ comes into play. In the context of prayer, the “presence of God” in a Christian form is expressed concretely in a community acting in the name of Jesus the Christ.

“Christ’s sacramental presence in the Eucharist was, we might say, an intensification of his sacramental presence in the world.”¹⁰ It is the experience of presence at its most profound. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist depends upon the experience of the believers who are the Christian community. If there were no believers there would not be a Eucharist. Christ or the Spirit of Christ is present in the church community not in the sense of what William James called the “will-to-believe,” but as the deepening of the presence that is always there. The meal of bread and wine is the symbolic expression of that (real) presence.

The locating of the real presence in the community may sound at variance with the church’s teaching. However, in the first centuries of the church the real presence of Christ was said to be in the church. Jesus said, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” He also said that he had to leave but that he would send the Spirit to be with his followers. The Eucharist is the presence of Christ not the presence of Jesus.

In the early church era, the Eucharist was called the “mystical body” of Christ. Mystical does not mean unreal; instead it refers to a mysterious depth. In recent centuries, the “mystical body” was used as a metaphor for the church. Pope Pius XII wrote an encyclical on the mystical body. I remember laboring through its prose in high school religion class. Despite that experience, I think the mystical body of Christ is a rich image for the church, based on Paul’s epistles. Each organ of the body has an important part to play. The body has a head, but it depends on the cooperation of every other part.

The church as “the mystical body of Christ” seems to have fallen out of use. That is a shame. The fact that it has almost disappeared has a significant relation to the lack of belief in the (real) presence of the Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the real and mystical presence of Christ because the church is the mystical body of Christ. In Thomas Aquinas’s philosophy of sacramental presence, “the true Body of Christ is also the sign of his mystical body which is the church.”¹¹

The bishops at the Second Vatican Council in the document on the church surprised everyone by looking first at the church as a whole or what they called the “mystery” of the church. They referred to the members of the church as “the people of God,” a choice which was an immediate hit. I thought “people of God” was a terrible choice of terms that did not bring out the organic character of the church. The phrase “people of Christ” would have made some sense, referring to the people whose faith is in the Christ.

The “real presence of Christ,” that is, the presence with the greatest depth, is found in the Eucharistic meal which is integrally linked to the scriptural readings. The scriptures are the symbolic “word of God.” The homily is intended to be a few words of commentary on the readings by someone in the community who has reflected deeply on the words of scripture. Priests are not necessarily good preachers. Many congregations have church members who could occasionally deliver a good homily.

The meal of bread and wine is the central religious act of Christians because the most basic affirmation of life is eating and drinking. The church, following the example of Jesus, uses bread and wine which are staples of life. Wine is an intoxicant which can be abused but wine can also rouse the spirit and inspire the community. Richard Rohr writes: “In the act of drinking the blood of Christ at the Holy Meal, you are consciously uniting yourself with all unjust suffering in the world, from the beginning of time until its end. Wherever there was and is suffering, there is the empathy and sympathy of God.”¹²

If the “real presence” of Christ is found in the eucharistic meal, what does that mean for the many rituals and “sacramentals” that grew up as extensions of the central act? The answer depends on whether they have an integral relation to the Eucharistic meal. In the middle ages and the early modern era, devotion to the “blessed sacrament” sometimes overshadowed the Eucharistic meal.

Many people who call themselves conservatives resisted the changes in the liturgy made by the Second Vatican Council. But the Council’s emphasis on the Eucharist

as a meal was a restoration of the original meaning of the Mass that had been obscured by some devotional practices. A traditionalist should welcome the new emphasis of the presence of Christ in the community sharing of the Eucharistic meal.

The Mass was looked upon by many Catholics as a ritual to produce the hosts for communion and for veneration. In the middle ages some people would come into church for the solemn moment of consecration. The saying of the words of consecration became an isolated and magical moment. Enemies of the church coined the term “hocus pocus” from the words of consecration. (*Hoc est....*)

A devotion such as “benediction of the blessed sacrament” was a gathering of church members who were usually aware that they were extending the Eucharistic meal. But as the practice of venerating the host moved to such things as the Corpus Christi procession, the devotion to the host bordered on the superstitious. However, the practice of bringing the host to a sick or an aged person is an appropriate way to connect an individual to the community’s experience of the real presence of the Eucharist.

The coronavirus crisis has forced the church to radically change its practice. What will emerge as a result during the next decade will either be an improvement of liturgy or a further decline in many people’s meaningful engagement in liturgical prayer. Unless there is imaginative thinking and bold experiments by church leaders, the decline is far more likely.

A true leader will enlist the best minds and most creative artists of the church to try out new forms of liturgy that put community and presence at the center. The Second Vatican Council taught that the Eucharist is a meal. To be sure, it is a sacred meal but nonetheless a real meal in which a community sit around a table and pass the food and drink to each other. There is a place for a person to preside over several such meals that make up a larger community ritual. That is the role of priest which needs to be carefully rethought in the Roman Catholic Church.

During the crisis Catholics were actually forbidden to go to church. For some people, this experience was one of separation from church and prayer. Modern technology became the imperfect means for keeping some connection to others and to the Eucharistic ritual. Perhaps this experience will make people reflect on what the point is for gathering with others in a building called a church and physically participating in a ritual of eating and drinking.

Television has long played a part in the televising of the Mass for millions of people. My mother had been a daily communicant until she was physically unable to go to church. The daily Mass on television was a great comfort to her. I remember arguing with a prominent theologian who ridiculed the television Mass as not liturgy at all. For many old and sick people, their sense of community through televised liturgy is genuine.

Most Roman Catholics still think of the church building as filled with the presence of Christ. The presence of Christ and the Spirit is attenuated in the church building but the believer still experiences a presence there. The place where the Eucharist occurs retains a sacredness for many people. That attitude deserves respect.

¹ *National Catholic Reporter*, Sept. 6-19, 8.

² Brett Salkeld, *Transubstantiation: Theology, History and Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Co., 2019).

³ Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 125.

⁴ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, (New York: Crown, 2018). 131.

⁵ Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁶ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage, 2011).

⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh* (Boulder, CO.: Shambhala, 2012), 122.

⁸ Matthew Fox, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Transition*. (New York: Image Books, 1980, 48.

⁹ Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 324; see similar view of Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York, Mariner Books, 1974), 294-95.

¹⁰ Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010,

¹¹ Giles Emery, "Ecclesiastical Fruits of the Eucharist in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* 2, no. 1(2004), 60.

¹² Rohr, *Universal Christ*, 133.