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The Meaning Behind the Mystery of the Mass Theology on Tap Sunday,
August 1, 1999 6:30 p.m. Jn 6:52-59 St. Joseph Church Hall

I thank you for your warm welcome. I'd like to begin with a prayer.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father we ask that you send your Holy Spirit to be among us this evening as we reflect on the meaning of the sacrament of the Eucharist. We ask for the gift of understanding, which is one of the manifold gifts of your Spirit. We ask for wisdom to understand how the Eucharist fits into the whole economy of salvation. We ask that you help us to have a deeper personal feeling for your presence among us in word and sacrament and in the community. And we ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

I would like to read as an introduction from the Gospel of John. This is Chapter 6:52. "The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' And Jesus said to them, 'Amen, amen, I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.' These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum."

I have a few notes for you. There are three parts to this little presentation, and after each part I'll ask for questions. It would probably go better if we wait until those moments. So if you have a pen and paper perhaps just jot them down.

The first section I'd like to talk about is background, and the background has to do with the Israelite culture, because when we talk in Church about our sacramental life, and when we use language in our liturgy, that language is really based on the culture that Jesus Himself lived in, which happens to have been the Jewish culture. Now actually the liturgical nature of Judaism and Old Testament religion is very complex. Much of it is actually not relevant to Christianity, but a few points are; and that I would like to present as background.

I'd also like to note that we need to distinguish between picture thinking and conceptualized thinking. Picture thinking is what we do often, most of the time. We use our imagination. We think in pictures. Conceptualizing means something else. That's more abstract. Well, pictured thinking comes first. And liturgy is all about pictures and symbols and images. Concepts are something that we would perhaps derive from these images and pictures. And we would call the concepts "theology." But the original thinking is pictures because that's really the way to address the ordinary human mind, and that's what the Bible does.

What is remarkable about the Bible is that there is a remarkable consistency from beginning to end, although there is great diversity in the way in which terms and images are used. Nonetheless, there is this consistency that there is a basic system of meaning that encompasses the whole thing. And this distinguishes the Bible from other religious books, other sacred books in other traditions, where there can be complete, total contradictions. And people just say, “Well” . . . ; then they will just say, “Well” But the Bible doesn’t say, “Well”! There is a consistency to the whole thing.

The first word I’d like to talk about, or image I’d like to talk about is the image of “sacrifice.” In Scripture sacrifice always has to do with food. Food is very important. People don’t always think about this, but sacrifice in the Biblical tradition is always a ritual concerning food. And it’s got to be kosher food, “kosher” meaning it has to meet a certain set of criteria, but I’m not going to go into that. But the law of Israel set up a certain set of criteria about what was appropriate to eat. For example, pork was not appropriate to eat because pigs ate the food, such as grain, that belonged to human beings. Therefore they were violating the food chain. See? Certain beings are proper food for other beings. So therefore they were not to have pigs around. They were an inappropriate animal. So the Hebrew, the Jewish, people had a very clear idea of what was meant to be eaten. Not everything we would call edible was edible for them. It depended upon how they saw that organism and how it fit into the whole chain of life.

Now food, of course, is a holy thing because it is so absolutely necessary to eat for survival. We have to have food to eat. In order to have food, of course , we have to have a giver of food which is God, the source of life. In the Old Testament as well as the New there is only one God. This is very important. Among the Canaanites there were many gods, and they could imagine that the creator god is not the same god as the one who provided wheat or calves. And this produced, of course, what we call polytheism which is the idea of many gods which, of course, leads to a divided sort of loyalty and even conflicting loyalties. For Scripture that is not possible. God is--there is only one God; there is one source of all life. All food comes from the same God who created the earth, who created us. And it is simply natural to be grateful to have food. It is therefore natural also to recognize the sacred quality of food since it is given by God.

That is also connected to petition. Once you put yourself in the feast--you see we’re eating here and we’re always eating--so a lady upstairs says to me, “Whenever I see you, you are always eating.” Well, it’s true we do eat. We Americans are full of food all the time, and in a sense we’re a little bit separated from nature that way because actually food doesn’t come so easily. And if you can put yourself in the shoes of people who have to forage for food, hunt for food or even later plant food, there’s really a great deal of effort that goes into providing this. So it’s with great gratitude that something has been caught or found, and along with gratitude comes the petition to send more. So this is therefore a religious context--the very idea of eating itself!

What is unholy, what is not kosher cannot be sacrificed--human sacrifice being completely unacceptable. Now human sacrifice was practiced in the middle east, and in

the near east. The Phoenicians practiced it. So did some of the other groups that lived in the plains. They would actually kill their infants. They would offer infants. They would throw them into the fire. And the idea was that this would prove to the deity their great willingness to give up. But the Hebrew idea is not that. It's not being willing to give up something. It's recognition of the holiness of food. And you see the story of Abraham and Isaac told in the Old Testament to show how human sacrifice is not important. Abraham is honored because he was willing to let go of his son, but then God said, "No, that's not what I want."

A poor quality of food even if kosher is not acceptable. There is this story in the Book of Genesis about Cain, Cain's offerings, Cain's sacrifices, not being acceptable to God. Now when I was a boy and we had catechism class we used to have little pictures, and I remember those pictures of Cain's sacrifice and he was, of course, cooking, you know, offering up these fruits--he was a farmer. And in the book the smoke didn't go up; it went down along the earth. That's the way the catechism book showed that God didn't approve of this sacrifice--the smoke did not rise. So the action of sacrifice acknowledges God's providential care for his people. It offers thanks and praise and petition.

There's also an element of paying taxes or tithing because since God had presented himself to the Israelite people as the king, God--that's the whole idea of the covenant; in the covenant God established a relationship, a treaty, with a particular people and he presents himself as their king and he promises to care for them, to support them, guard them, lead them into green pastures and so on; and part of the response to that is they have to pay taxes. And so there's an element that for the Hebrew people sacrifices are a form of tax paid to God to acknowledge that he is king.

Since all life--and this is the most important part of all in the whole idea of sacrifice--because all life comes from God, since all life comes from God all life is living; all living things live because they have what is call the "ruah," that means the breath that comes from God. When any living being dies that ruah goes back to God. Therefore when an animal is immolated that animal's ruah or spirit, breath, goes back to God who is the owner of the life. And this creates a communication with God. It is upon the breath or spirit of the animal that the supplicant puts a petition with the hope that it will rise to God and God will receive this petition along with the spirit of the animal that died. It's very important we understand this to understand what comes subsequently in the life of Christ. The returning spirit is a messenger from the people to God. Now many of these ideas that we talk about will strike us as being peculiar or even absurd, but nonetheless this is part of the way a different culture looked at life.

Secondly, the sacrificial meal. All sacrifices had to be made of food, but not all sacrifices were sacrifice meals. In the sacrifice meal the food was not totally destroyed. When it was totally destroyed that was called a "holocaust" or whole offering. But in other cases the sacrifice, having been blessed and consecrated to God, was then shared with the supplicant or the community as a whole. We could call this "communion sacrifice" or a "sacrifice meal." This, of course, becomes very significant in the life of the

Church because the Church will look at the Eucharist as a sacrifice meal in which those who offer the meal receive communion with God after the Spirit consecrates the element offered in the Eucharistic action.

Blood. Blood in the Old Testament is almost a magical thing. It has a power to prevent evil from alighting on a person. So, for example, there was a practice that covered the lintels of a door with blood to protect the inhabitants, the dwellers, within that place. An example is found in the story of Exodus where the half of the lamb's blood is sprinkled on the lintels of the homes where the Israelites dwell so that the Angel of Death will not touch them. But this should not be thought of as unique. This actually was done more often than that. That was an ancient symbol.

Blood was also seen to be having cleansing power. Now this is very strange to our mind. We think of blood as staining and being, you know, pretty awful and hard to get out; but for the Hebrew people blood had a purifying power. Once again think of blood as containing the life force. If blood within an animal is thought to be God, that animal is now holy and sacred; the blood is also sacred. So if you do something sacred it can connect. So Moses is seen as sprinkling blood on the people to represent their purification. In the Book of Revelation it mentions that the saints have washed their clothes in the blood of Christ. Well, if you wash yours in blood, it won't be very clean. But in biblical mentality to wash in blood--that is, holy blood--makes something clean. So expressions will arise later that "we cover ourselves with the blood of Christ." That means we purify ourselves. We strengthen ourselves. We prevent evil from attacking us through the blood of Christ. These symbols are directly transferred to the New Testament into Christian thought--all these Old Testament symbols and images.

Temple. Originally, of course, there was no temple at all. And the temple itself became a great controversial issue. If you remember 1 Samuel, David got the big idea one day that he was going to build God a temple. And God said, "You are going to build me a temple?! Who do you think you are? I've been living in a tent." Because the idea was that in the Ark of the Covenant--the Ark of the Covenant was some sort of a little vehicle on poles carried by men on their shoulders. And in this little vehicle, this little chair, there were the two tablets of the law. The law, of course, contained ten stipulations; we call them the "ten commandments." There were two tablets, not one to five and six to ten but two tablets of ten each. And the reason for the two tablets was, of course, very similar to today when you have a copy of a contract. There was a copy for the people and there was a copy for God, but God didn't take his copy with him. He left it with the people as a sign of his enduring presence. And they carried their copy and his copy in the Ark of the Covenant. That's why they called it the "Ark of the Covenant."

Now eventually that ark was lost. But nonetheless, it was in a place where--let's put it this way, in a sense in their way of thinking, God was localized in some strange way. This was a space where God was in a special way. Now David got the big idea that he was going to build a temple. God told the prophet Nathan, "Don't bother! I'm not impressed! I'm the one who is taking care of you; you're not the one taking care of me!" But he said,

“In your son’s life there will be a temple.” And of course, this became the temple of Solomon. Well, the temple was only one of the problems.

The other problem was the monarchy itself. Before David, there was Saul; and Saul was the first king of Israel. Who had been the king before? God had been the king before. The Lord was the king. See? Now the prophet Samuel--when the people came and said, “We want a king,” he said, “No.” But God came to Samuel and said, “Go ahead and give them a king. It is not you they are rejecting; it is me.” So it’s a very important turning point in the history of Israel. God said, “Go ahead. Give them a king; that’s what they want. But I’ll warn you, you won’t like him! He will tax you. He will draft your boys. He’ll use your produce. He’ll take over your property,” etc., etc. All these things, of course, eventually happen.

Now kings and temples in the ancient middle and near east were connected. It was a way of saying that God is on our side. And the Israelite covenant was an attempt to get away from the idea of “our side.” There wasn’t supposed to be a side for us. There was only God. And God was supposed to be the king, and God was supposed to direct people. Maybe one way to think about this is that it’s too ideal. And eventually the people wanted a king like everybody else had. And eventually they did just that, and they set up a monarchy; and they set up a temple! And the temple was housed with the king and also a sacred space for God. And the idea was that now God was going to protect the king. See? It’s going to divinize the monarchy. It’s going to make the monarchy a sacred thing. And this idea was very clear in the ancient middle east; the Hebrews just borrowed it. So the temple was a sore point in the beginning, but you might say that God always adapts to the people; and so in time the temple became a place of honor in Jerusalem.

Now in the middle of the temple there is a place called the ‘inner sanctum’ or the “holy of holies.” It’s actually an empty room. It has an empty chair or seat called the “kapporeth,” meaning the mercy seat or the place of atonement. And the Hebrew people believed, the Jewish people believed, that God sat on this empty seat. But, of course , since God is a spirit you can’t see God, and they were forbidden to have an image of God. That would violate the first commandment. “You shall have no graven images of me.” So it was an empty room with an empty seat. In the Letter to the Hebrews this temple, this earthly temple, is taken to be something built on a heavenly model. And this becomes very important in the theology of the fathers of the Church. They talk a great deal about “heavenly temple.” It’s introduced in the Letter to the Hebrews which is in the Bible in the New Testament. The idea of the heavenly temple is much more important than the earthly one, because in the idea of the heavenly temple this is where God really dwells. Earth is just a reflection, a shadowy image, of the true reality of the heavenly temple. And then the holy of holies of heaven--that’s where God sits. They would think anthropomorphically about God as sitting on his mercy seat, the kapporeth. In Greek it is called the “hilasterion.” This later on became called the throne of God. The word “throne” does not translate what it really means. It really means “place of mercy” or “place of atonement.”

A large curtain separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple and indicated that no one could enter this part of the temple except the high priest--and he only once a year. Now Matthew says that when Jesus died on the cross the curtain was torn in two from top to bottom, which indicates--it's a way of saying in image language--that God, who had dwelt within this empty room isolated from the people, left. He "took off." That's the way of interpreting the meaning of the death of Jesus. Jesus' death now does something to the relationship between God and the people so that God can no longer be contained in a physical place.

Now the high priest. That is the last image. The high priest was a very important figure in late Jewish temple ritual. The high priest's main function was once a year to perform the Day of Atonement ritual on the day called "Yom Kippur." On this day, which is near the new year, special sacrifices were offered, and the blood was taken into the holy of holies and poured in front of the mercy seat. This symbolized the fact that again blood, which purifies, was now purifying the whole people from all sins created in the former year. So it was an annual ritual.

Now at this point I am going to pause and ask if you need any clarifications or have any questions?

--A question about pork and pigs--

That's not historical because they never ate pork going back centuries. No, it's the other way around. It's more than likely that the reason Jesus sent demons into the swine was that they were unclean anyway. After all, don't forget the demons asked to go in there.

Now you have to realize that you have to leave the world of image thinking and start conceptualizing; God, of course, is everywhere. See? So what it means is we use sacred space or holy things--Matthew is saying--now I don't know and no one knows whether the curtain was really rent from top to bottom, but it's a way of saying that the temple no longer has any use. See? It is broken; you can't use it any more because something has superseded its formal function. Everything I've talked about all had to do with form and function. What's it used for? It doesn't have any more use once Jesus died, according to what Matthew is saying. It's a way of proclaiming Christ--see?--as the atonement. That's saying that in image form. See? Now we go on to conceptualize--well, not quite yet.

First we are going to talk about early Christian preaching. The Church was bewildered by the fact that the Messiah died. I don't know if you are quite aware of this, but the Messiah was not supposed to die. The Messiah was supposed to reign. And so the death of Christ caught people completely unawares and was a tragedy for them. And there are all these stories about how they huddled in fear. They were bewildered. They didn't really know what to make of the death of Jesus because they believed he was the Messiah.

Now in trying to make sense of this in their own human nature they used the images of the Old Testament--some of them--the ones I've already talked about. Plus they used

some of Jesus' enigmatic statements and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they forged together a type of proclamation which is a kind of early sacramental theology or catechesis.

Everything is now compared to Christ either negatively or positively. In the Letter to the Hebrews Jesus is the heavenly high priest, but he's not like an earthly high priest. An earthly high priest serves by hereditary election--that's the wrong word--he inherits the office. The earthly priest prepares for the ritual of Yom Kippur by bathing and then vesting in these very special liturgical garments including miters and aprons and so on. Well, the Letter to the Hebrews says, "No, Christ is the eternal high priest from heaven"--not earthly but heavenly. He doesn't start on our level, but he comes from God's level. He comes down into our level. Instead of washing himself, he dirties himself. He dirties himself with blood, his own blood, which of course, again, has that secondary meaning of purifying. He is not vested in raiment but is stripped for the crucifixion. He's nailed to the cross, and that's not the end of it. He really becomes the high priest when he dies and his spirit--don't forget that when any living being dies, the spirit goes to God. So [Jesus says,] "Into your hands I commend my Spirit," in preparation for death. Jesus in his death goes back to God, but it's not simply a matter of Jesus going for the first time to God. He is really returning to where he came from because he is already from God. And he takes with him the blood that is shed, and that he pours forth in the inner sanctum of the heavenly temple before the mercy seat of God which is his true throne. And this image sticks in the minds of the fathers of the Church, and that will become the central image as they develop the liturgical theology and as they develop the sacramental theology of the Church. Jesus' sacrifice now is eternal; it will never be repeated. But because it is eternal it is all present. When the fathers talk about the presence of the blood on the altar during Eucharist, it performs a function far superior to that of the blood of goats and rams. It supersedes in every way the atoning sacrifice of the temple.

It is eternal and it is presented to us in the Eucharist. So we have then, in Christ and in the Eucharistic sacrifice itself, we have access to the Father of Mercy. Now Jesus' blood then can protect those people who believe in him; it can purify believers from sin. And Jesus' statements, "Take and eat; this is my body," and "take and drink; this is my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins," interprets his death--which again don't forget was a matter of bewilderment--but interprets his death as atonement **and** connects it to food. This is very important. Now in sacramental theology there is often a lot of talk about the death of Jesus that is never attached to food. We have to see that the Eucharist as the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ in the form of bread and wine is absolutely necessary to the entire picture of Jesus' death as being truly a sacrifice. And Jesus, before he even dies, already leaves bread and wine. See? And that's why the text I read before was so important. He already has taught, "I am the bread that comes down from heaven." We have to see Jesus as true food before we can have Jesus as sacrifice. He would not be sacrifice if he were not food, not in the context of the Jewish way of life. And, after all, that's really what we have to deal with. And if we move out of it, we're actually losing our capacity to have meaning. And that's one reason why infantile Christianity, for example, does not

understand what is meant by the death of Christ, because it looks at it as if somehow this is a punishment that satisfies the anger of God. And this is not the meaning of the whole context. It is a self-offering of Jesus in love and service in which he gives himself as food for the people. Now any questions on that part?

Okay, the first question has to deal with did the Jews understand Jesus' sacrifice as cannibalistic? Possibly. Possibly that was one of their objections, but of course that would be a misunderstanding of the way in which Jesus is the bread of life, because Jesus is not the bread of life on a physical level, but a metaphysical level. So the Church teaches, for example, that Jesus is substantially body, blood, soul and the divinity present in the bread; in fact, the bread is transformed into the body, blood, soul and divinity. That's metaphysical, not physical; so when you chew the host you are not chewing the physical flesh of Christ. So it would be a misunderstanding, a possible one; and that's very possible.

Second question is in regard to Jesus' eternal sacrifice--is that what you are talking about? His Spirit goes to the Father. No, returned to the Father. See, Jesus returns to the Father. All right now this is picture; this is still in the world of pictures. He is returning to the temple, but what he does now is eternal. So it goes beyond now what we would normally call human picture thinking because it's talking about something we can picture as if it were in sequence, but saying it's not in sequence any more. It's now an eternal reality. Christ is eternally pouring forth his blood. Now, of course, I admit that you can't imagine this. So these images, you know, go beyond the possibly of imagination, and that's where you get into what you call "Christ mysticism." It's a type of mystical way of looking at it.

The boulder was moved so that people could see in, not so Christ could get out. The resurrection of the body of Christ was not bound by what physicists would call "magnetic field." He could walk through doors. See? He could disappear from sight. So the resurrection of the body--it's a true body--it is truly resurrected, but it doesn't operate according to the laws of physical nature as we understand them. And even now we would say his resurrected body lives in eternity. We say that also about the body of the Blessed Mother. We don't say that about anyone else. But eventually we shall all have a resurrected body.

Exactly. The message attached to Christ's spirit returning to the Father is for the forgiveness of sins--it's a message of mercy. It's a request for forgiveness. "Father forgive them. They know not what they do." That is the message now that goes to God.

Now we are going to go into the next area which is more thinking conceptually. Further reflection on the nature of food observes that it is transformed into the being which consumes it. We become what we eat; that is, we eat corn chips, corn chips are transformed into our body parts. That is what is useable is; the rest of it is eliminated. Now Jesus is the bread that has come down from heaven; but the bread that comes down from heaven, again, is not to be understood on a physical level, and it does not feed a

physical body, but feeds something else. It truly feeds something else. And St. Paul refers to this as the “spiritual body” or we could call it “heavenly body.”

Now in order to understand what that is we have to understand the document of rebirth that is found in various places, in particular, the Nicodemus story. Jesus says to Nicodemus, “Unless a person be begotten from above by water and the spirit”--reference to Baptism--“he or she cannot enter the kingdom of heaven,” which means that physical life as we know it is not a normal, natural continuity with the sort of life God is talking about and offering to us. “Flesh begets flesh.” We know what that means; it’s the natural reproduction in the course of nature. “Spirit begets spirit.” That’s different. In order to have spirit life, in order to have eternal life with God within us, we have to have that life generated within us in what we could call a new birth.

In Catholic theology the sacramental practice, being reborn or born again, is not something complete in itself. It’s not enough just to be born again; but one needs to be born again, and that life needs to be nurtured through the sacrament which is the body and blood of Christ. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” The fathers of the Church draw from the New Testament sources and build a theology of sacramental life.

Now Augustine goes a step farther. Augustine goes beyond the Church offering Christ to the Father. The fathers got to the point where they realized that Jesus now gave himself into our hands to be the offering, we now give [this offering] to God--that we truly have access to God through Jesus. But then he sees more to it than that. He senses that Christ is pulling the believer into a new relationship with the Trinity. This we could call transformation. In other words, the rebirth itself is already transformation. It’s something new happening. Jesus says, “You don’t sew a new patch on an old garment.” Now that would mean that you just can’t take what you like from the gospel, kind of fit it into your life and then, you know, make adjustments. But rather, the gospel is something totally new, and so it’s total in itself. It has to be accepted as a whole. This is what we are talking about when we say “rebirth.” Now through Baptism then we are brought into a new relationship with the Trinity so that eventually we will know the Father just as Jesus knows the Father--have his exact relationship! But then that would also mean that we to some degree give the Spirit since Jesus gives the Spirit. Well, how can we give the Spirit? Only by a powerful transformation of our spiritual nature. So Augustine sees then that if Christ is the way, then his followers follow his way of being in the Spirit relating to the Father. And he has this Latin phrase, “Totus Christus offerit totum Christum ad Patrem. That means the whole Christ, meaning all believers--all believers offer all believers to the Father. So not only does the Church offer Christ to the Father and the blood of Christ to the Father, but we actually offer ourselves with Christ. We become part of the sacrifice. Christ makes us part of the sacrifice actually in our own Baptism. And this then involves a certain understanding of the nature of the “self.”

Now Buddhists and eastern mystics believe the self is a delusion. That means that we really don’t exist in ourselves, that the belief that we exist is really not--it’s not clear

thinking; we have been deluded by what they call myra--the web of illusion that covers all things. In eastern mysticism, not in Christian mysticism, there is a tendency to believe that there is only one will or one spirit or one actor in all of the universe. Now you can call that "God" or "the universe"; it doesn't matter. Mysticism is usually either atheistic or pantheistic. In atheism they just don't talk about God; in pantheism they call everything God. But it comes out more or less the same no matter what they say. There is one, whole, living being; it's the universe. That universe has one living will. Everything is perfect the way it is. One of the results of mysticism of the eastern variety is that there is no need to do anything. There is no need to change; there is no need to do anything at all because everything is perfect the way it is. Our only job--if you want to call it that--is becoming neutral, losing our desires and becoming totally content with the way everything is. This is not Christian teaching.

Christian teaching is that we have to bring our wills and our egos into service to the Father as Jesus did. Now sin can produce illusions in us, for example: I am independent; I can do whatever I want; this is my life. The Hebrews could never say something like this, "This is my life," because they knew that life belonged to God. But in sin we can think that way. We can think it is mine; my life has nothing to do with anybody else. That's an illusion. That's created by sin.

Now indeed salvation and sanctification means losing our illusions and then being reconnected in a proper way to the source of our life. But the old biblical principle that every human being is an image of God must be retained. We are real reflections of the reality of God. So when God reveals himself to Moses as "I Am who Am," that feeling of I is actually divine; and insofar as we have the feeling of I, that is a reflection of divinity. And if we are closed in on ourselves and centered on ourselves that is a perversion of the divine gift. So the unspiritual man or woman lives as if self-preservation, success, pleasure, comfort, achievement, etc., are the ultimate goals. That's an illusion. That's what St. Paul calls the "flesh." That's living in the flesh. That's living as if the physical life is the life.

In the Eucharistic sacrifice the grace of Christ enables those who believe in Christ to surrender all earthly goals to God as the very center of our being becomes detached from our egos and moves into God. St. Paul says in Romans, "Do you not know that you who were baptized were buried in Christ. Now we live a new life." The life we live is Christ, the resurrected life of Christ, the one life of Christ--we live this! Which means we have to die to our independence and our individualism and our ethnocentricity. "Ethnocentricity" is simply a corporate form of egocentricity; instead of centered on me, it is centered on my kith and my kin, my culture, my country--same problem. Centeredness in God is different. Jesus' sacrifice of himself is centered on the Father; it's the gift of himself to the Father; it's willingness to go to the Father. And this is really what redeems human life and makes it possible for us now to enter into the Trinity. Since our theology becomes spirituality and a spirituality that is distinctly Christian, neither dissolving the self as in eastern mysticism nor celebrating--that's perhaps not a good word, but what I meant was emphasizing, exaggerating and affirming the self as in new age spirituality, which is

actually not spiritual in the first place--it's more of a material notion. The self then must be seen as a real image and reflection of the true God. Any questions or comments?

Well, new age spirituality is all about me, you know, in it's own sight: well, I have everything else and I'm also spiritual, you know. So that's why I'm saying it's egocentric, really.

--Question asked is about real presence.--

It really is, but that real "is" is a metaphysical "is". Physical level is only the level--it's called in philosophy "accidents," meaning appearance. The physical is all appearance. The substance, the reality, is metaphysical. And the problem with a lot of people is they take what is really real as physical. Well, if you just study physics you'll see that that's not true. What is physical is not even visible; you get into atoms and what is everything, leptons and quarks, and so on. The Church teaches the Eucharist is substance. The substance is really the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ; so when you come to communion you are actually encountering the living Christ. See? That's why the charge of cannibalism is absurd because Christ is alive. See? And the Church never celebrated the Eucharist while Christ was dead. And he was dead, he really died. We teach he died. But while he died, before he rose from the dead, we never celebrated the Eucharist. We only celebrate the Eucharist after he rose. It's not cannibalism.

--Question about Eucharist in Lutheran churches--

Well, what the Church would say is that the Lutherans do not have a validly ordained priesthood. Now it may have a validly ordained priesthood someplace, maybe in Sweden somewhere, but in most places Lutheranism dropped the idea of ordination as a sacrament. So that is something the Catholic Church's very conservative viewpoint would say, "Well, they don't have a priesthood; therefore they can't have a Eucharist." That's a fundamental problem. So I don't know exactly how that will all be worked out, but there are all kinds of people working on it. I'm sure that there is great interest in trying to work out some kind of mutual understanding that is acceptable to everybody. But as I understand the Catholic Church's teaching, you have to have a validly ordained priest to have a Eucharist because the priest represents the high priesthood of Christ. He is the image of the high priesthood of Christ.

Well, now our Church would not invite a Lutheran to receive communion from our altar. If a person is baptized and has faith, they can receive the sacraments, there is no doubt about it, but they are not supposed to receive them until they affirm the belief of the Church. That's our understanding, except there would be exceptions. They may be very peculiar exceptions, danger of death and things like that. But normally the Church wants people to abide in communion of faith before they receive the sacraments. That's normally the only way it works. See, Luther himself denied the need for an ordained priesthood; therefore since he denied it most Lutheran churches, perhaps not all, but in most, they did away with the rite of ordination from a validly ordained bishop; so they lost what is called the "Apostolic succession."

Now the Orthodox Churches--not so. They have a complete priesthood and they have true sacraments. That's how I understand it at this time. Father Jerome, do you understand it the same way? And incidentally, you know, our discipline allows Greek Orthodox to come to our Church and receive the sacraments, but theirs doesn't. Theirs forbids them to come, and does not invite us either.

But, of course, that is theology as opposed to practice, and the Church in the judgment of what is valid and invalid all comes out of practice.

That is correct. Friendship for anyone. Any other comments or questions?

--Question about Anglican orders--

That I don't know. Pope Leo XIII studied the matter and said no. But others said that the study wasn't very full, and some churches may or may not. I don't know. It's clear that Cranmer did not believe in ordination--the Archbishop of Canterbury--but does that mean all the bishops didn't? No, it doesn't. Did some of the bishops continue to ordain? They were already Catholic bishops. Did they ordain other Catholic bishops and ordain other Catholic priests? Perhaps they did. Also what about the Chinese? You know, there is a whole patriotic church in China. Apparently they are all validly ordained. But Cranmer definitely did not do that. There are some areas where it is doubtful. We don't know.