

The material world offers resistance to love but it's that very material world that God takes on and uses as a vehicle of God's love, a means to transformation, a work of love that re-creates us in God's image and likeness or, in the words of Thomas Aquinas

The only-begotten Son of God, wishing to enable us to share in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that by becoming human he might make us gods.

And Jesus carries this logic of incarnation all the way through to, not only shedding his body and blood for us on the cross, but by inviting us to participate in that very same sacrifice – but always as gift and not of our own doing. Being human, however, we readily invert this logic and make the Eucharist something we do for God rather than something God is doing for us. It readily becomes a sort of 'magical thinking', a material take on a spiritual reality, receiving grace in quantitative terms – the more masses the holier I become – as if there's some sort of bargaining going on here with God. No, it's pure gift all the way down the line, and transformative, precisely because of this. What I have in mind is a recent reflection by Sue Stuart Smith on the transformative power of gardening. It necessarily begins with the illusion that we have some control over the matter but only to prepare us for the disillusion which will inevitably follow. She has in mind the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott's take on 'infantile omnipotence':

With an imaginative leap to understanding he came to the conclusion that not only is a baby the centre of its own world, it also feels it has created its world. So when the mother responds to a baby in the very same moment or soon after the feeling of wanting her arises, the baby may fleetingly feel that he or she has created the mother rather than the other way round.

The 'good enough mother' doesn't disillusion the baby in one go but by her more frequent absences or delays allows the baby to experience 'small frustrations' which are accompanied by a dawning awareness that magical control over reality does not exist.

Now, with an imaginative leap of my own, I would like to suggest that what God is asking of us in the Eucharist is to trust that we are being fed and transformed by God's love whatever the appearances to the contrary: that is, that whatever resistance material reality may otherwise seem to offer, there's nothing going on here which is not indeed under God's control, for God is both gardener and garden and we the crop.

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