

We've been pondering the mystery and meaning of the eucharist for almost a month now in not only the series of Sunday readings since the Feeding of the Five Thousand but also in those accompanying the feasts of Mary, Martha and Lazarus; the Transfiguration; St Lawrence; the Assumption; St Bernard Tolomei and, yesterday, St Bartholomew commonly identified with Nathaniel with his sceptical but honest take on the possibility of Christ. And we can use his conversion as a springboard perhaps to understanding how the eucharist presents us with a challenge which can only be resolved by trust. "Come and see", "Taste and see" one might say. So this is the eucharist as an invitation to trust, to encounter a Christ who in a sense will do the work of belief for us. Another touchstone for this is today's very difficult to hear and understand passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians which is an immediate turn-off to modern ears, though perhaps not all, because of its culturally conditioned patriarchal language – as scandalous in many ways today as the thought of eating human flesh.

"Wives should regard their husbands as they regard the Lord ...

*So is a husband the head of his wife and as the Church submits to Christ,
so should wives to their husbands in everything "*

It's those last words "*in everything*" that perhaps jar the most because as in the readings from John's gospel which we've been hearing for the past four weeks our immediate reaction is to want to qualify them. "But surely this is intolerable language – we're not doormats after all, obedience has its limits we're not to look for suffering for its own sake", and so on, to quote from the homily for Sunday week 18. All good and necessary qualifications but with the danger of ameliorating or watering down the scandal of love which is also at issue here both in the nature of the Church and the nature of the eucharist – the two indeed being complementary – the Church making the eucharist and the eucharist making the Church. What I am saying, to echo St. Paul, is that something of this complementarity applies to the mystery of love – to the necessary suffering involved in two people become one. In the Rule of St Benedict we have that puzzling but wonderful injunction to practise "mutual obedience" – puzzling because it seems to undermine the hierarchical nature of much of the Rule: wonderful because when one sees it in action one begins to understand. This is the impossible made possible in God and the touchstone for this is Christ's sacrifice of his flesh for us which is in a sense his or, just as well, God's, expression of the necessarily mutual character of love demanding sacrifice from both parties. So the meaning of the eucharist and the meaning of the Church is in our "participation" – that surrendering of one's own will, in that close attention to the needs of others before the satisfaction of one's own and in that the sharing of one's own resources which love demands and demands love. The act, the feeling, is mutual. "Yes, dear" goes both ways if a marriage is to work. Or, as St Paul also puts it "*give way to one another in obedience to Christ.*"

There's nowhere else to go.

Br John Mayhead

Monastery of Christ Our Saviour