

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

(From Wiseman.)

The objection raised by our Lord's hearers is, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" If the words were meant figuratively, our Lord, according to custom, would meet the objection by explaining his figurative meaning. Instead of this He stands to his words, again and again repeats the obnoxious expressions, and requires his hearers to believe them. He had made himself clearly understood and insists on the literal meaning. Are not we right, then, in adopting that meaning? If He allowed many to go away and give up following Him rather than place a figurative meaning on His words, is it credible He really meant them figuratively? Our Lord's conduct was a model of perfect simplicity and frankness: He has to teach a doctrine, and He expresses it in the most obvious and literal terms. The doctrine is disbelieved as absurd; objections are raised, but He goes on repeating it in the very terms which gave offence, and insists on their acceptance without reserve. This shows that His purpose is not to form a party and gather a multitude of adherents. He is the divine teacher and all must believe Him, whatever His doctrines and however grating to the feelings. And so clear is this that multitudes even of Protestants believe and profess in the literal meaning of this teaching, and therefore in the real presence of Christ in the Holy Communion.

Some have endeavored to parry the force of this reasoning by referring to the sixty-fourth verse of this chapter: "The flesh profiteth nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Here our Saviour declares His meaning to be spiritual, but does that mean figurative? When in Scripture flesh and spirit are named as opposed to each other, it means the carnal man and the regenerate man, the carnal spirit and that of divine grace. However, when such great Protestant authors as Kuinoel, Horne, Bloomfield, and Schleusner agree with the Catholic interpretation of this verse, it is unnecessary for us to enlarge upon it.

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