

The Presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

(EDITORIAL NOTE.—Readers of the “Annual” will be interested in the following article, giving as it does a first-hand account of the Orthodox Church by one of its own priests. The Editorial Committee, however, would point out that as they allow all those who contribute articles an entirely free pen, it sometimes happens, particularly when contributors belong to different communions from our own, that opinions (doctrinal and other) are either expressed or implied, with which the Committee are not necessarily in agreement; for these they must not be held responsible).

THE Holy Eucharist is celebrated “in remembrance” of our Lord. But it is not a mere remembrance. For one can only remember what was and is gone, and is no more. And the Lord Jesus has not gone; He is still present. The liturgical “commemoration” (or *ἀνάμνησις*) is rather a perpetual “representation” of what is perfect.

Again, Our Saviour did not say merely “remember,” but —“do it in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. xi., 24, 25). What is actually prescribed is not only “to remember,” but just “to do.” The Liturgy is not only to be said, but also *to be enacted*. “Word” and “action” cannot be separated one from the other in the Eucharistic rite. . . . “On the sacred rite of the Eucharist the whole Incarnation of Christ is written in the bread as on a writing tablet. For as in a figure we behold Him as a babe, and led to death, and crucified, and pierced in His side; then also the bread itself changed into that all-holy Body which really endured this, and rose from the dead, and was taken into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. . . . And so the whole celebration of the Mystery is as one image of the whole body of the economy of Our Lord.” . . . This is a quotation from Nicolaus Cabasilas, the great Byzantine religious and scholar of the fourteenth century. The high authority of his remarkable “Explanation of the Holy Liturgy” depends upon the fact that he gives a most genuine and adequate interpretation of what may be called the spiritual “common-sense” or self-consciousness of the

Church . . . Cabasilas says : an "image," a "figure," *τὴς εἰκὸν μίᾱ* and *ὡς ἐν τύπῳ*. But we have to keep in mind that vigorous notice of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, when speaking on the baptismal rite. "O strange and inconceivable thing ! We did not really die, we were not really buried, we were not really crucified, but we are really risen. Our imitation was in a figure, and our salvation in reality. . . Christ was actually crucified, and actually buried, and truly rose again. And all these things He has freely bestowed upon us, that we, sharing His sufferings by imitation, might gain salvation in reality. . . O, surpassing loving-kindness !" (*Mystag.* xx., 5). . . This is also true in the Eucharistic rite, but in an even more perfect manner. The Holy Eucharist is the greatest Christian Witness. As often as the Holy Eucharist is celebrated, the Church of Christ is bearing witness to Her Lord and Master. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." (*1 Cor.*, xi., 26). . . Come and see ! And everyone who comes with open heart and with real faith can touch and see the Lord Himself, abiding perpetually in His mysteries, present and visible. Visible, of course, by spiritual sight, not by the carnal one . . . The teaching of the "Real Presence" of the Lord Jesus in the blessed Sacrament is neither a theological theory, nor merely an interpretation. On the contrary, it is the most direct and immediate witness—it is an "eye-witness" of the spiritual sight.

And thus the "Real Presence" of Our Lord is not yet adequately described by a mere assertion of "some change" taking place in the Eucharistic elements by virtue of the priestly consecration. In very truth, there is a true "change," the consecrated elements are changed or "converted" (whatever term is used to define this "change"), and there is no longer Bread or Wine on the Holy Altar, after the consecration. There are only the very Body broken for us and the very Blood shed for us, for the remission of sins.

But there is something more, something greater than this. There is the Lord Himself, in all His supreme glory. "Let all human flesh keep silence, and stand with fear and trembling, and meditate nothing earthly within itself : for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords cometh to be slain, and to give Himself to be the food of the faithful. And before Him also come the Angelic Hosts with all dominion

and power, the many-eyed Cherubim, and the six-winged Seraphim, covering their faces, and crying aloud the song: "Alleluia": (a hymn sung at the Liturgy on Great Saturday) . . . The Holy Eucharist is the very *Epiphany* of Our Saviour.

The Liturgy is the "Mystical Supper," and we are always praying, while making our communion—"Of thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me to-day as a communicant." For every Liturgy *is*—not only represents, but truly *is*—the same Mystical Supper which was celebrated for the first time by the Heavenly High-Priest Himself, "in the night in which He was given up or, rather, He gave Himself for the life of the world." There is no repetition, but truly an identity. "Believe," says St. John Chrysostom, "that even now it is that Supper at which He Himself sat down. For this is in no respect different from that. For neither doth man make this and Himself the other—but both this and that is His own work. When therefore thou seest the priest delivering it unto thee, account not that it is the priest that doth so, but that it is Christ's hand that is stretched out." (In S. Matthew, hom. 50, 3). And once more: "He who then did those things at that Supper is He who now also accomplishes them. We hold the rank of ministers. But it is He who consecrates and transforms them." (Ibid, hom. 82, 5). . . . The Mystery is one, and the Sacrifice is one, and the Table is one. Not one Lamb is slain or offered to-day, and another yesterday; not one here, and another anywhere. But *the same* always and everywhere. One very Lamb of God, "which taketh away the sin of the world," the Lord Jesus.

One may prefer to speak rather of the fulfilment or extension of the unique sacrifice. The Eucharist is a sacrifice, not because Jesus is slain in it all over again, but because the offerings of the Church are, by the priestly invocation (*i.e.*, ἐπίκλησις), by the action of the Holy Spirit, "*converted*" and "*changed*" into the slain Body and the Blood shed, so that there is, in very truth, the Lamb of God slain once for ever, present in His all-embracing plenitude. And the Altar is actually the Holy grave, in which the Heavenly Master is falling asleep. The reality of Calvary is here revealed in its deepest essence, "*in sacramento*," ἐν μυστηρίῳ.

But Calvary is a mystery of joy, not one of fear, the mystery of love and glory. The "Son of man" has been glorified on the Cross. And, if we stand before the Cross in awe and trembling, it is rather a trembling of ecstasy

and exultation. "For lo, through the Cross is joy come into all the world." And we can hardly comprehend the unspeakable depth of the Love Divine. Certainly, we are trembling also because of our sins, feeling and understanding our own unworthiness. But nevertheless we are also full of joy, and sing the song of victory, the triumphant song of praise and thanksgiving: "for all the things whereof we know, and whereof we know not, for all benefits bestowed upon us both manifest and unseen."

The Holy Liturgy is the Eucharist, first of all, *i.e.*, the Thanksgiving. It is a hymn rather than a prayer. It is the service of triumphant joy, the continuous Easter, the solemn entrance of the King of Glory. We contemplate and remember not only Calvary, but "all those things which came to pass for us: the Cross, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into Heaven, the sitting on the right hand, the second and glorious Coming." . . . We contemplate Christ not only on the Cross; but even the Cross is "life-bringing." We contemplate Christ not only in the grave; but even the grave is "life-giving," "the fountain of our resurrection." But we contemplate also Christ Risen and Glorified. . . . The Eucharist is the sign of victory and the seal of salvation, the mystery of joy and not of sorrow, the mystery of remission and not of judgment. . . . Christ is risen. And our Risen Lord is with us, is present among us, among His people, in His Church, which is His Body and completion. And it is given to us to bear witness to this mysterious but real presence. . . . "And we render thanks unto Thee for this ministry which Thou dost deign to accept at our hands."

The Eucharist is celebrated not as a contemplation only, and not merely as a symbolic "commemoration." The elements are sanctified and converted for the communion. Not to be looked at, but to be received and eaten. As a celestial food, the Eucharist is "the medicine of immortality": τὸ φάρμακον ἀθανασίας. The Eucharist is a Supper, above all. And we give thanks for "this heavenly Bread and this Cup of Life"; this tremendous sacrament is for us "a Betrothal" of the Life Eternal. . . . "O Christ, Passover great and most Holy! O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God! Vouchsafe that we may more perfectly partake of Thee in the days of Thine everlasting kingdom": (an Easter hymn, recited by the priest at every Liturgy).

GEORGES V. FLOROVSKY.