

The Chalice

Years ago, and only once, I came upon a chalice. The chalice. I had of course seen many chalices, but this one was not only seeing; it was a meeting, an encounter. It was at Beuron when a kindly monk in charge of the sacred vessels was showing me the treasures of the sacristy.

The broad base it stood on adhered firmly to the ground. The stem, sharp, spare and delicately thin, seemed to lift itself with compressed force and carrying power. A little more than half way up it expanded in a knob, and then at the top, first confining its strength in a narrow ring or band in orderly compression, it broke out into a wealth of foliage, finely cut but strong, in which lay the cup, the heart of the chalice.

From this chalice I caught a glimpse of the meaning of the sacrament. The sure-footed base, the long shaft molded to carry weight, the disciplined, ingathered strength blossoming out into a cup, open but enclosed, could signify but one thing: to receive and retain.

The pure and holy vessel of the mystery receives and guards in its dimly shining depths the divine drops of the gracious, fruitful blood, which is sheer fire, sheer love.

I had a further thought, an insight or rather, an intuition. The chalice represents the created universe. That universe has but one purpose and one final meaning: man, the living creature, with his soul and body and his restless heart...Saint Augustine has a great saying: "That which makes a man to be what he is is his capacity to receive God and hold him fast."

