



## The Miracle of Things Made New

The Son of God made flesh in the womb of the Virgin and born of her in Bethlehem works a miracle of newness before our eyes in every Mass we attend. When the priest speaks the words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, the *substance* of the bread and wine (what they really are at the deepest level of their being) instantly changes in perfect obedience to His divine command. They become what the “Maker of all things visible and invisible” wants them to be: the Body and Blood of the Word Made Flesh.

Not a one of our senses can discern this transformation, because the *appearances* of bread and wine (their look, their feel, their taste) remain completely, recognizably *unchanged*. Yet beneath the surface *everything* about these most ordinary elements has changed into the Real Presence of Christ. The Church calls this miracle *transubstantiation* to convey the truth Jesus leaves us in the Gospel of John: “[T]he bread which I will give for the life of the world is My Flesh”; and “My Flesh is food indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed.”

It all happens in an instant—too fast and too deep for our earthbound eyes to follow. Only hearing can be trusted to be true: “This is My Body. This is My Blood.” If we believe Jesus is the Truth, then transubstantiation must be true.

Transubstantiation happens because Jesus is *consubstantial* with the Father, “the Maker of heaven and earth.” In the beginning, the Bible

tells us, to make something exist that did not exist before, the all-powerful Creator had only to say the word: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

By the mere power of His Word over “all that is visible and invisible,” therefore, this same World Maker can change something that *already* exists as one thing into an entirely different thing altogether. So did Jesus do when merely by speaking He changed the substance of water into wine at the wedding in Cana and the substance of wine into Blood at the Last Supper.

Bread and wine cannot resist the word of the Creator of the World; they are not free to disobey. You and I are—and do. An interior chasm we can’t cross on our own blocks our way out of sin and keeps us captive to misery and guilt. Only God’s pardon can give us free passage to peace.

This sad human condition makes the transubstantiation of sinner to saint the work of a life-time of grace-prompted repentance, because Jesus’ transubstantiating command (“If you love Me, keep My commandments”) has to work its way through our tangled, self-destructive history of freedom.

The priest says, “I absolve you of your sins”; but the penitent coming out of the confessional is recognizably the same person who went in. External appearances stay the same, but the Redeemer’s mercy makes the substance within suddenly new as His word of pardon cancels completely the debt of our sins and washes away our guilt.

As with the Sacrament of the Eucharist, so with the Sacrament of Penance, we must take Truth at His word. The Jesus Who said to the

Apostles, "This is My Body," is the same Jesus Who told them, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Only the eyes of faith can discern the soul-saving force of these miracle-making words. We would be wise to let ourselves hear them often in the year that opens before us.