

"Real Presence. . . Real Absence."

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a tremendous truth. The Son of God became Man--that is amazing enough. He took on a human nature, lived a human life, died a human death. One could reflect on this day and night, for all the years of a long lifetime, and never begin to exhaust the meaning and the wonder of it.

But He did more. Before He went to His death, He changed bread and wine into His Body and Blood, and gave His priests the power to do this same thing in generation after generation after generation. So that, under the appearances of bread and wine, He is truly present in the consecrated host and chalice. Humanity and divinity, He is there in the tabernacle which holds the Blessed Sacrament.

Catholics take it for granted. They do this in two senses, one good and one not so good. In the good sense, they accept the fact of the Real Presence without the slightest question. They have no doubts about it. It is for them an unshakable actuality. They are aware of the Real Presence whenever they step into a Catholic Church.

And so are not a few non-Catholics. The latter, before they know much at all about Catholicism, sense the Real Presence when they visit a Catholic Church. They apprehend a curious difference in such a church, a vital pulse beating, beating, beating, a Personality close at hand, a Presence which is a Real Presence. . . . It is not necessary to argue with Catholics the case for the Real Presence. But sometimes it is necessary to argue with them the case for the Real Absence.

What do I mean by that? By the Real Absence I mean the fact that Christ is deliberately and totally left out of one after another of the most important aspects of our living. But, for the genuine Christian, Christ must permeate all living, and all living must be absorbed into Christ. St. Paul repeated this idea times innumerable.

"In Him we live and move and have our being. . . If we live, we live to the Lord. . . Christ died for all in order that they who are alive may live no longer for themselves but for Him. . . It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. . . Whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do all for the glory of God."

This is the Christian pattern. This is Christ's will for us. We pretty generally disregard it. Hence we have the Real Absence of Christ in most of our daily round. If we open our eyes and take a searching look at our environment, we shall note in it the Real Absence. Take for example, education. With every passing day its scope widens. . . (There) is the total exclusion of religion from education. God is out, the Son of God is out. In education you have the Real Absence. . .

You have it, too, in marriage. . . What about religion and marriage in the sense of marriage's being sacramental, a fusing of two lives in one sacred love in which Christ is a partner. . . Here again is the Real Absence.

The books we read, the plays we see, the television and radio programs which come pouring into our homes hour on end, these certainly present ideas of living which are the very reverse of living in Christ and by Christ. . . Is there need of saying much about the Real Absence in international affairs. . . We insisted on the Real Absence from our post-war arrangements, from the proceedings of the UN, lest the proponents of militant atheism be offended. It would have been much worse to offend them than to offend Him. We chose the Real Absence, and now the bill is presented, to be paid in oceans of blood. (-- John S. Kennedy, December 1950 CATHOLIC THOUGHT)

Another way to understand the Real Absence would be to study our secularistic western culture. There are only slight variations in meaning among SECULARISM, MATERIALISM, NATURALISM, REAL-ABSENTEEISM.