

Item #46 (An Important Book on an Important Problem)

Recent polls in the United States indicate that well over 50% of Catholics in this country do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This is an extremely serious problem, for it shows that well over a majority of Catholics do not believe in a central truth of the Catholic faith, a truth taught by Jesus Christ explicitly (see John's Gospel, chapter 6, verses 48-69}, a truth that the Second Vatican Council called "the source and summit of the Christian life" (*Lumen gentium*, 11).

The important book in question is by Fr. Gene Martens, S.J., and its title is *At Mass with Jesus on Calvary. Reflections on th Prayers of the Mass and the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist*. It belongs in the series ENROUTE, and is published by En Route Books and Media, LLC, 5705 Rhodes Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63109. Price: \$17.95. Available at Amazon Books or En Route Academic Books online.

Fr. Martens has taught in high school for many years (Rockhurst High School in Kansas City, Missouri), equipped with Licentiate Degrees in Philosophy and Theology from St. Louis University. He thus is an author well versed in the challenges of communicating Catholic doctrine. His book comes at a Providentially chosen point of time, when the forces of secularism are making strong inroads in the traditional religious beliefs of America.

The present Item is designed to give anyone who is interested in contributing to a solution of this important problem preliminary knowledge of this important book as a means of making this contribution. The Item will consist in a presentation of Fr. Marten's book. The reader can then take it from there.

The book begins with a moving translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's hymn "Devoutly I adore you" in which one of the greatest minds in the history of Catholicism publicly acknowledges his belief in the Real Presence of his Lord, Jesus, in the Eucharist.

There follows a Foreword by Fr. Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. (pp. i-ii), and a Preface by Fr. Martens (pp. iii-vu).

Then follows an Introduction by Fr. Martens (pp. 1-3). This Introduction contains a full description of the contents of the book, and will be cited in full in what follows (with the relevant page numbers inserted).

Introduction (with page numbers added to Fr. Martens' text):

This book seeks first to clarify for the ordinary Catholic the teaching of the Catholic Church on the nature of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Afterwards it seeks to bring its readers to a deeper appreciation of the Liturgy and especially of the Prayers used in the celebration of the Mass, during which Jesus becomes present on the altar.

In chapter one [pp. 5-25], we will consider the teaching of the Catholic

Church at great length in order to come to a more clear understanding of what the Church actually teaches about the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

In chapter two [pp. 27-37], which presents a theology of the Eucharist, we will examine what really happens during the celebration of the Mass and the significance of Jesus' Eucharistic presence, especially dwelling upon the fact that Jesus is not only present but He is present in the continuing act of redeeming us through His death on Calvary.

In chapter three [pp. 39-56], we will examine both the Words of Consecration through which Jesus becomes present on the altar, and also those parts of the four ordinary Eucharistic Prayers which immediately precede or follow these Words of Consecration. We will see that the wording of these prayers expresses the theology of the Eucharist presented in chapter two.

In chapter four [pp. 57-84], we will study these four ordinary Eucharistic Prayers more extensively and more in depth, in order to understand the meaning of the words the celebrant is praying to God on behalf of the entire congregation. We will notice that sometimes the meaning of the same word changes as it is repeated in different places in the Eucharistic Prayers. We will focus especially on the words *gift*, *offering*, *oblation*, and *sacrifice*.

In chapter five [pp. 85-118], we will examine the Ordinary Prayers of the Mass used throughout its celebration, in order to see how their wording is taken from the Bible itself, sometimes using the same words found in Scripture, sometimes a paraphrase, and always expressing the thoughts of Scripture. The Profession of Faith, which is one of the Ordinary Prayers of the Mass on Sundays and other solemn feast days, will also be studied, not so much for the relationship of the wording to Scripture, but to understand more clearly the deep truths which are expressed in the complex and somewhat abstract structure of its phrasing.

Finally, in chapter six [pp. 119-129], I will share several thoughts or insights which have come to me over the years with regard to the Eucharist: Jesus' presence in the world: "I am with you always"; the identity of Jesus with the Father; visits before the tabernacle; the death of Jesus.

In reading the Prayers of the Mass, as well as Church documents, or even elsewhere in the text, some readers may find words with which they are not familiar. When this happens, readers are invited to look at *Appendix I* [pp. 131-136] which gives an explanation of some of these words. If a word is discussed in Appendix I, it will be marked in the text by an asterisk at least once. Appendix I itself will indicate the more important page (or pages) on which words with an asterisk are found. Readers will also find, as they go along, that I explain and discuss some of these words more fully in the text itself.

Appendix II [pp. 37-142] will reflect on the preparation of children for their First Holy Communion.

Appendix III [pp. 143-152] will provide the complete texts of the four ordinary Eucharistic Prayers, for easy reference.

A special word of explanation is needed regarding the footnotes in this book. You will notice that the footnotes are not found at the bottom of the pages on which their numbers occur; rather, they are gathered together at the end of each chapter.

This arrangement seemed more convenient, for the following reasons. First of all, you will find that many of the footnotes are not simply short text references, but they are much longer than footnotes usually are. This is because in some cases they supply multiple, informative passages from Scripture or from Church documents for deeper reflection. At other times, they involve in-depth discussions about something which has been treated more briefly in the text itself.

Except for chapter four, which has only one footnote, the reader may find it more convenient not to read the footnotes individually at the time they are indicated in the text, but to read them all together after having read the entire chapter.

The footnotes, then, provide a wealth of added material to further enrich the reader's knowledge and understanding and appreciation of the Church's teaching on the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Mass in which the Eucharist is celebrated. **(Date of book by Fr. Martens: 2019; date of above review by Fr. Swetnam: 11 January 2020.)**