

Robert Barron. *Eucharist*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008. 141 pages. \$10.00.

Robert Barron's *Eucharist* is the eighth volume of the Catholic Spirituality for Adults series produced by RCL Benziger. The publishers intended this series to help Roman Catholic adults "make real, here and now, the words we once learned in school... to help us go beyond information to transformation" (7). RCL Benziger provides free online study guides to accompany each chapter of each volume at its website for the series (<http://www.rclbenziger.com>).

*Eucharist* includes an author's introduction, three main chapters, and an epilogue. In addition to setting out the broad themes of the three main chapters (the Eucharist as meal, sacrifice, and real presence of Jesus Christ), Barron devotes much of his introduction to retelling Isak Dinesen's story, "Babette's Feast." Barron uses this story in part to contrast a "sacramental" understanding of the faith and the Eucharist with a dualist (Gnostic) vision that rejects the joys of creation. Throughout the book, he uses this story to create a narrative foil for his presentation of the Eucharist as sacred meal (feast), sacrifice, and real presence of Jesus Christ.

Barron grounds the understanding of the Eucharist as sacred meal in three stories from the Hebrew Bible (the garden of Eden, the Passover, and the feast Isaiah foretells in chapter 2) and five from the New Testament (Luke's birth narrative, the calling of Levi, the feeding of the thousands, the last supper and the post-resurrection meal in John 21). Across all these stories, Barron notes, God's most persistent desire for us as God's creatures is expressed in fellowship around the sharing of food, the sharing of life with us. Barron concludes the chapter by describing how the Eucharist recapitulates all of these meals and makes them all visible and tangible every time we celebrate it.

Noting Babette's exhaustion of energy and resources to create the meal that revived her community, Barron begins the second chapter by stating that "in a world gone wrong, there is no communion without sacrifice." He introduces his argument in "The Eucharist as Sacrifice" by lamenting the ways in which elements of sacrifice have been muted or ridiculed since Vatican II. Just as there is no communion without sacrifice, he argues, there is also no covenant without sacrifice. He walks through signal instances of the linkage between covenant and sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible to make his point. Based on that extensive background, he states that "Jesus, the covenant in person, will perforce be a sacrificed victim as well" (79). He then offers a reading of the life of Jesus based on the gospels to support this view. The chapter concludes by describing how the Eucharist as sacrifice recapitulates not only the meals but also all the covenants and all the sacrifices of all time and so makes present, at each instance, both communion with God and the sacrifice and forgiveness of venial sins that makes such communion possible.

The third chapter opens not with a reference to "Babette's Feast," but with a quote from Flannery O'Connor that gives the chapter its name. "If It's only a Symbol, to Hell with It." Here, Barron walks his readers through the history of the development of Roman Catholic doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Included are a discussion of John 6, sayings of second through sixth century theologians, the dispute between Berengarius and Lanfranc that led to the first articulation of a doctrine of transubstantiation, its refinement by Aquinas, its inclusion at Trent, and its further refinements in the late twentieth century. Unlike the preceding two chapters, Barron does not conclude this chapter describing how this doctrine informs the overall shape and actions of the Mass. The epilogue, which recounts the Emmaus story, seems to take on this function for both the chapter and the book.

Study groups of adults who were raised in Roman Catholic schools and may be uncomfortable with some of the theological and liturgical reforms of Vatican II may find the theological and biblical interpretation Barron offers a helpful grounding. Those with more ecumenical leanings may find his discussion of real presence incomplete since it does not take account of Protestant bodies that embrace real presence but do not require adherence to transubstantiation to explain it. Roman Catholic adults, whatever their views, who have not had substantial theological education, may need some help to follow Barron's arguments. Unfortunately, the study guide provided by RCL Benziger, focused on personal experience, does little to make Barron's most helpful biblical and theological arguments more accessible.

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