Transubstantiation

Learning Goals

- All that needs to be explained about something can be done by answering four questions: What is it? What is it made of? Who or what made it or caused it to happen? What is it for?
- Transubstantiation is the teaching that the bread and wine at Mass cease to be in substance bread and wine and transform into the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, while retaining the accidental forms of bread and wine.
- It takes faith to truly recognize Jesus.

Connection to the Catechism of the Catholic Church

- CCC 1373–1376

Vocabulary

- Substance
- Matter
- Agent
- Purpose
- Transubstantiation
- Substantial Form
- Accidental Form

BIBLICAL TOUCHSTONES

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?”

John 6:51-52

Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

John 20:28-29
DAY ONE

Warm-Up

Project or draw a simple picture of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the board. Ask your students the following questions:

- **What is this?** A peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
- **What is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich made of?** Two pieces of bread, peanut butter, and jelly. You may push the conversation further and ask what the bread is made out of, such as wheat or grain and yeast, what the peanut butter is made out of, such as peanuts, and what the jelly is made out of, such as grapes or strawberries.
- **Who or what made the sandwich?** A hungry person, or a mom or dad, or a chef.
- **What is the sandwich for?** To eat, to provide nutrition, to satisfy hunger.

Activity

A. Explain to your students that St. Thomas Aquinas, (a brilliant theologian who lived in the 11th century and believed that what we know by faith and what we know by the power of human reason are actually compatible and complimentary to each other) and many ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, believed that you could fully explain something by answering four basic questions about that thing.

B. Write the following four questions on the board:

- What is it?
- What is it made of?
- Who or what made it or caused it to happen?
- What is it for?

C. Explain to your students and write on the board next to each question the following vocabulary words:

- **Substance** – What a thing is. A thing’s substance describes what a thing is, or what is absolutely necessary to a thing being the thing that it is.
- **Matter** – What a thing is made out of.
- **Agent** – Who or what made or caused a thing to exist.
- **Purpose** – What a thing is for or meant to do.
D. Explain that these four questions are known as the “four causes” and that if you can answer each question successfully and satisfactorily then you have fully explained the thing you’re trying to explain.

E. Arrange students into pairs and trios and have them turn to What Is It? (page 149). Have each group discuss and determine the “four causes” of each item on the worksheet. Circulate the room and assist groups as needed.

Formative Assessment

Review and discuss the answers to each question for each item on What Is It? Ask for a few volunteers to share the item and explanation of the “four causes” that they thought of on their own.

DAY TWO

Warm-Up

Review the previous day’s lesson. Ask for volunteers to explain each of the “four causes” of a lasagna, a marble statue, and a car. Accept reasoned answers for each.

Activity

Ask students to turn to Transubstantiation (page 150) to each student and have them read the essay and complete the focus questions.

Formative Assessment

A. Review and discuss the answers to the focus questions. Help students to understand that in the Eucharist the bread and wine are no longer in substance bread and wine, but actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, while retaining the accidental forms of bread and wine, such as the look, taste, and smell of bread and wine.
B. Have a student stand and read aloud John 20:24-29:

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

C. Ask your students the following questions:

› Why didn’t Thomas the Apostle believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? He wanted to see and touch Jesus for Himself in order to believe.

› Jesus allows Thomas to see Him and touch Him for His belief. What does Jesus explain after he allows Thomas to do this? “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”

D. Explain to your students that while we can experience Jesus truly present in the Eucharist, and we can even come to an understanding of how Jesus is present to us in the Eucharist through Transubstantiation, ultimately, more than anything else, it requires our faith in our Lord to truly see and recognize Him. When we seek only scientific or even philosophical explanations for the miracles of Jesus, we are like doubting Thomas. But Jesus calls us to believe through faith in order to be blessed.

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**How Is This Possible?**

**Directions:** First, read John 6:51-52, then write a 5-7 sentence paragraph that responds to the writing prompt below.

“I am the living bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is My Flesh for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying: “How can this man give us [His] flesh to eat?” Imagine that you have traveled back in time and are standing in the crowd when the quarreling Jews asked: “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” How would you answer their question?

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**DAY THREE**

**Warm-Up**

A. Review the main ideas of the previous day’s lesson: Jesus is truly present [substantial form] in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, under the appearance [accidental forms] of bread and wine. Allow students to ask any questions that they might still have about the Eucharist and Transubstantiation.

**Activity and Assessment**

Ask students to turn to **How Is This Possible?** (page 154). Have them complete the activity on the worksheet individually.
### What Is It?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
<th>What is it made of?</th>
<th>Who/what made it?</th>
<th>What is its purpose?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A wooden chair</td>
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<td>A watch</td>
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<td>The Statue of Liberty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think of your own item:</td>
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### Answer Key

1. A wooden chair/some kind of wood/a carpenter, or a chair maker, or a factory/to sit on, for rest, for decoration, to make money (in the case of the carpenter who made it and sold it)

2. A watch/the various parts of a watch/a watch maker/to tell time, for fashion

3. A novel/words, ideas, paper, ink/an author, a publisher, a printer/to read, to educate, to communicate ideas

4. A pepperoni pizza/cheese, sauce, pepperoni, pizza dough/a chef, or a pizza maker/to eat

5. The Statue of Liberty/copper, gold/Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the French government/to be a symbol of freedom, to enhance the relationship between the U.S. and France

6. Accept reasoned answers.
Transubstantiation

Directions: Read the essay and complete the focus and reflection questions.

At Mass, when the priest says the words of consecration, “This is my body which will be given up for you... this is the cup of my blood...,” the bread and wine literally become the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is a difficult teaching to understand. The Eucharist still looks like bread and wine and when we receive it, it still tastes like bread and wine. But it is truly no longer bread and wine. It has become Jesus’ Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. How does this happen?

We can think about what is necessary for something to be what it is and not something else. For example, what makes a chair a chair rather than a table? A chair has certain necessary characteristics that make it a chair. It does not possess the characteristics to be a table. These necessary characteristics are called “substantial forms.” The substantial form of a chair is its “chair-ness.” In other words, the substantial form of a chair is what is necessary for a chair to be a chair and not a table, or a banana, or something else entirely. Normally, you cannot change the substantial form of something without changing that thing into something else completely. If you change the substantial form of a chair, it would no longer be a chair. You could take it apart and use the wood and nails to make something else. Then it would become a table, or a stool, or something else entirely.

We can also think about characteristics of something that do NOT make it what
it is. For example, what a chair is made of does not make it a chair. A chair can be made of wood, or metal, or plastic, or many other types of material. A chair is also not a chair because of its color. A chair could be colored red, or blue, or green. What a chair is made of or what color it is doesn't make a chair what it is. These sorts of characteristics are called “accidents.” The word “accident” simply means that even though the characteristic is a part of something, it does not make that something what it is. Color, for example, only makes a chair red, or blue, or green. It does not make a chair a chair, or something else instead. You can even change the accidents of a thing, and it will still be that thing. You can paint a red chair blue, or replace a wooden chair’s legs with plastic, and it still remains a chair.

What does any of this have to do with the Eucharist? On one hand, it is enough just to know that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity become truly present under the appearances of bread and wine. On the other hand, we can describe what happens at Mass during the consecration using the ideas we just learned: substantial forms and accidents.

At Mass, the change of bread and wine into the Real Presence of Jesus is called “transubstantiation.” If you look closely at the word transubstantiation, it is made of two parts: the prefix trans, which means change, and the root word substance. In other words, transubstantiation is a “change of substance.”

In the Eucharist, the substantial forms of the bread and wine are transformed into the substantial form of Christ's Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. That means, the essential characteristics of bread and wine are changed into the essential characteristics of the Body and Blood of Jesus. The now consecrated hosts, however, keep the accidents of bread and wine. In other words, the look, smell, taste, size, shape, and so forth of bread and wine remain. This is why at Mass the bread still looks and tastes like bread. But, hidden beneath those non-essential characteristics of bread and wine is Jesus’ Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

The Eucharist is 100% Jesus Christ, in substance. It is not just a symbol or an idea. We truly receive Jesus when we receive the Eucharist, just as He told us that He would give us His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink as true food for the nourishment of our souls.
**Answer Key**

1. The words of consecration.

2. The bread and wine literally become the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

3. The necessary qualities for something to be what it is. The “chair-ness” of a chair.

4. It changes into something else completely.

5. Qualities of something that, though they might be a part of that thing, do not make that thing what it is. The color of a chair, or the material it is made out of.

6. The things remains what it is. If you paint a blue chair red, it does not change into something else.

7. Transformation and substance.
8. A transformation of substance.

9. In the Eucharist, the substantial forms of the bread and wine are transformed into the substantial form of Christ’s Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. The bread and wine are literally no longer bread and wine. They do, however, keep the accidental forms of bread and wine.

Reflection Question:
Because we truly receive Jesus when we receive the Eucharist, just as He told us that He would give us His flesh to eat and His Blood to drink as true food for the nourishment of our souls.

8. What does the word “transubstantiation” mean?

9. How does the word “transubstantiation” help explain what happens in the Eucharist?

Reflection Question
Why is the Eucharist not just a symbol or an idea?
How Is This Possible?

Directions: First, read John 6:51-52, then write a 5-7 sentence paragraph that responds to the writing prompt below.

“I am the living bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is My Flesh for the life of the world.” The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us [His] flesh to eat?”

Imagine that you have traveled back in time and are standing in the crowd when the quarreling Jews asked: “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” How would you answer their question?

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1. What are the words the priest says at Mass at the Eucharist called?

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2. What happens to the bread and wine when the priest speaks these words?

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3. What is a substantial form? Describe the substantial form of a chair.

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4. What happens if you change the substantial form of something?

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5. What is an accidental form? Give an example.

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6. What happens if you change an accidental form of something?

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7. What are the two root words of the word “transubstantiation”?

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8. What does the word “transubstantiation” mean?

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9. How does the word “transubstantiation” help explain what happens in the Eucharist?

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Reflection Question

Why is the Eucharist not just a symbol or an idea?

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