

Thomas speaks of sacraments in a “special sense, as implying the habitude of sign” (III.60.1.I Respond). Sacraments are things that signify the perfection of the holiness in man (III.60.2 Reply to Obj.3). Aquinas coincides with Augustine as defining sacrament as “every sign of a sacred thing” (III.60.2.On the contrary). The role of material things and words for sacraments is to aid human beings “to discover the unknown by means of the known” (III.60.2.I Respond). “In the sacraments, words and things, like form and matter, combine in the formation of one thing, in so far as the signification of things is completed by means of words” (Ibid). The word is added to the element, and this becomes a sacrament” (III.60.6.On the contrary). In “the sacraments, the words produce an effect according to the sense which they convey” (III.60.8.I Respond).

Human beings need sacraments for salvation. Thomas cites the words Saint Paul received and later shared with the Corinthians: “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2Cor.12,9). In agreement, Thomas adds that “God gives grace to man in a way which is suitable to him. Hence it is that man needs the sacraments that he may obtain grace” (III.61.1. Reply to Obj. 2). This need for grace existed even before the Fall, not from sacraments but in another spiritual way (III.61.2. Reply to Obj.1) then after the Fall and before the coming of Christ there was a need that some sacraments were instituted (III.61.3.On the Contrary) “whereby man might testify to his faith in the future coming of a Saviour” (III.61.3.I Respond). Those first sacraments, contained in the Old Law, were necessary to overcome the shortcomings of those under the natural law and to “give a clearer signification of faith” (III.61.3.Reply to Obj.2). After the Incarnation and until our earthly journey is completed in the state of glory, Thomas argues that

we still need sacraments. We need sacraments to have our corrupted human nature healed.

(III.61.2.On the Contrary).

God is the principal cause of grace, however, the “sacraments by their operation, which they exercise on the body that they touch, accomplish through the Divine institution an instrumental operation on the soul (III.62.1Reply to Obj.2). It is God’s desire to confer grace employing the sacraments. The grace obtained through sacraments is there “as the instrument of some work to be done” (III.62.3. Reply to Obj.1). There is power in the words pronounced at the moment of a sacrament. There is a “spiritual power in the sacraments, inasmuch as they are ordained by God unto the production of a spiritual effect” (III.62.4.Reply to Obj.1). A “sacrament receives spiritual power from Christ’s blessing and from the action of the minister in applying it to a sacramental use” (III.62.4. Reply to Obj.3). The Sacraments of the New Law derive their power from Christ’s passion (III.62.5.Reply to Obj.2).

Thomas compares the need for food that human beings have for health and physical strength to needs of the spiritual life satisfied in the Eucharist for sustenance and to grow in virtue (Summa Contra Gentiles, Book IV, chapter LXI, p.224). The Eucharist is not a signification of the body and blood of Christ but the real, true and complete body, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This teaching of the Church is true. This begins to happen in the last instant of the pronouncement of words that change the substance of the bread into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. This change is different from all the natural changes. What happens is a substantial change. This type of change cannot be done by nature. In the change the accidents of the bread and wine remain without a subject, the subject passes away. The

body of Christ is hidden in the accidents of the bread and wine, which are man's most common form of food and drink virtue (Summa Contra Gentiles, Book IV, chapter LXIII, p.229-232).

One lingering question I have, born out of our readings, concerns if transubstantiation could provide the basis to find a new way to explain Real Presence using the latest discoveries from quantum mechanics regarding particles being present in two places at once? I believe the Holy Spirit provides humans of any era what they need to accept God's mysteries.