Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and Buddha and Confucius and Lao Tzu all gave us their minds; Christ gave us his body. They all tried to save the world from ignorance by their philosophies; Christ did save the world from sin and death and hell by his body and his blood, both on the cross and in the Eucharist. Buddha said, “Look not to me; look to my teaching.” Christ said, “Come unto me.” Philosophers all say, “I teach the truth.” Christ said, “I am the truth.” When we receive the Eucharist, we eat the truth. Christ is the meaning of life, so when we receive Him, we receive the meaning of life into our bodies, not just into our minds. The gospel is a series of events culminating in a marriage. The bridegroom, Christ, and the bride, his church – us, both come a long way to meet and marry each other. He comes from eternity to time, from heaven to earth, from spirit to matter, from perfection to a world full of sin, and lives full of sin. He brings us from absolute nothingness into being by creation and our birth and then into his church - into his body - by the sacraments, beginning with baptism which is our second birth.

Now all of these are dramatic events. They are good news. Since our religion is essentially the good news, it is proper to ask about it the five questions that news reporters are told to ask about the events they report - who, what, why, when, and where. These are the five questions I set myself to answer today about our meeting with Christ in the Eucharist.

First, the who. I want to give you the same answer to that question as Saint Joan of Arc did when she was questioned by skeptical church authorities about her visions of Christ and about her relationship to Christ and to the church. They argued against her that, if it was really Christ that had appeared to Joan, then Christ and the church contradicted each other because the church's authorities then were saying that her visions were not of Christ. They were trying to confuse her and get her to utter some heresy. With the simplicity of a saint, she replied, “I don't know how to answer your questions about the relation between Christ and the church. I just know that they are just one thing. That's all.” I want to say the same thing about the relation between Christ and the Eucharist - that they are one thing. That is my simple answer to the first question - who the Eucharist is - not just Christ's gift to us, but it is the
giver. It is Christ himself in person. For the gospel is not just a what, it is a who.

In the first few centuries Christianity, pagan enemies often accused Christians of being cannibals because they claimed that they actually ate the body of Christ. The charge was false, but it was also true. The Catholic claim about the Eucharist is barely believable - incredibly incredible, stunningly stunning, astonishingly astonishing! Almighty God lets us eat his body and drink his blood. That startling Catholic claim is either true or false. If it is false - if the Eucharist is not Christ himself but only a symbol of Christ or a ceremony established by Christ, but not the very self of Christ - then Catholics are the most shamefully, sacrilegious and idiotic idolaters in history, bowing down to bread and worshipping wine - confusing chemicals with God, That's as stupid as confusing God with a scrambled egg. If, on the other hand, the Catholic claim is true, then our Eucharistic tryst with Christ is to life what sexual intercourse is to marriage. It is what our Catechism calls it - the source and summit of our whole Christian life; and non-catholics, though they may have faith and hope and charity and saving grace in their souls and though they may be living wonderfully saintly lives, are missing out on the most perfect, total, intimate, union that is possible in this life with their Lord and Savior - their Creator and Redeemer - a union that is, in fact, even more complete and perfect than any mystical experience.

There's no middle position about the Eucharist. It is an absolute. The “either” and the “or” are startling, uncomfortable, controversial, and divisive consequences we usually fear and avoid, though Christ did not. He was the most startling, most uncomfortable, most controversial, and most divisive human being who ever lived. Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is like three other foundational things we believe in a similarly divisive and uncomfortable way, the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of the church. Let's look at these three things briefly.

If God does not exist, then believers are not just mistaken, they are insane, for they are resting their whole lives on an illusion - placing at the absolute center and summit of all of human life a being who simply
does not exist. They're like adults who behave like little children playing with an invisible imaginary friend - like Jimmy Stewart in the old movie Harvey. Harvey is an invisible giant rabbit that no one ever sees but Jimmy, but if God does exist, then atheists are insane, for they're like college students who go home for Thanksgiving or Christmas and never acknowledge the existence of their parents - never talk to them, never look at them, never thank them for their food in their presence, and act as if they were all alone. The one thing that cannot possibly be true is that both atheists and theists are quite sane, because they're both living in the real world. That's the one thing that's logically impossible, and here is the second either/or. If Jesus Christ is not divine as he claimed to be at many times and in many ways in all four Gospels, then the one thing he could not possibly be is just a very good man and a very wise man. He must be either infinitely more or infinitely less than that, for if his claim is true, then he is infinitely more than a good man. He is exactly what doubting Thomas confessed him to be - my Lord and my God. And if the claim is false, then he is infinitely less than a good man. In fact, he's the worst man who ever lived - either intellectually the worst or morally the worst - for if he sincerely believed that he is God when he is not, that is the greatest possible insanity, and if he knows he's not God but claims that he is and asks us to worship Him and to put our souls and salvation into his hands, then he is the greatest blasphemer and liar in human history. The one thing he could not possibly be is what almost every non-christian in the world believes he is - a good and wise man, but not God.

And here is a third similarly divisive either/or. If the Catholic Church is not the one visible authoritative voice of Christ himself - if Christ did not really say to his apostles, “He who hears you, hears me” - or if he did not really mean it when he said it - well then, the church that claims to be the recipient of that promise and that divine authority is not just one of the many thousands of fallible churches or denominations in the world, it is the one that is by far the most arrogant and proud and egotistic and idolatrous and blasphemous and sacrilegious! But, if she is what she claims to be, then she is unique and alone in both making that
claim and in the objective truth of the claim. She alone is the one holy
catholic apostolic church - the Bride of Christ. Why can't there be many
churches? Because Christ will not marry a harem. When he comes again,
that one bride - that one true church - can't be simply the invisible
church, because his church is his body, not his ghost or his haunted
house; so the one thing the Catholic Church cannot possibly be is what
most non-Catholic Christians believe she is, namely, just one of the
many good but fallible Christian denominations.

Similarly, the Eucharist is either everything or nothing. Either it is to be
worshipped as God - as the extension of the Incarnation - or it is to be
denounced as the most blasphemous and ridiculous idolatry in history.
The one thing it cannot possibly be is something comfortable and
compromising, something non-divine and therefore non-divisive, merely
a holy symbol or ceremony. As God divides mankind into believers and
unbelievers and ultimately into the heaven bound and the hell bound,
and as Christ came not to unite all mankind, but to divide mankind into
two opposing camps, to bring not peace, but a sword of division, as he
himself said, and as the Catholic Church is among institutions what
Christ is among human beings -namely the one that is most loved and
most hated far more than any other because she makes the most
uncompromising claims - so the Eucharist is either divinely adorable or
demonically idolatrous. These four controversial claims are logically
related. If God does not exist, Christ cannot be God, and if Christ is not
God, the church cannot be the established Authority from God; and if
the Church does not have divine authority, she cannot confess and
administer the Eucharist. Obviously, nothing merely human could
possibly transubstantiate bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, so
God, Christ, the Church, and the Eucharist are four connected links in
the same chain.

The connection can also be seen in the reversed way. Our reason for our
belief in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist is the authority of the
church, which teaches it; and the reason for our belief in the Church's
authority is that she has been established and given such authority by
Christ. And the reason for our belief in everything Christ says, no matter
how incredible it seems, is that he is divine, not just human; so that is my first answer to the question of the “who” in the Eucharist.

There is, of course, another “who” in our understanding of the Eucharist, and that is ourselves, both individually and collectively as the church - as Christ's mystical body. For the sake of this Eucharist, for the sake of this union between ourselves and Christ, this spiritual wedding, this tryst - how far did he bring us, and how far did he come himself? Well, he brought us from nothing, from absolute nothingness, into being by creating the universe - the sum total of all matter - out of nothing in what scientists called the Big Bang; and then gradually forming our bodies out of that matter - out of starstuff - over about 13.8 billion years through all the processes that he had created and designed in nature, including probably evolution, and then creating each of our immortal souls out of nothing. As soon as our parents pro-created our bodies out of their bodies and genetic material, and then providentially molded and folded our souls like origami through the mysterious interplay of his divine providence, and our free choices throughout our lives - his invisible hands directing every event in our lives like the conductor of an orchestra - he brought us that far for the moment of our communion with him in the Eucharist! And how far did he bring himself? As we were brought from the nothingness of non-existence, he came from the timeless fullness of existence down into time and matter and history and our fallen race, and into the worst torture the world ever invented, crucifixion, and the worst sin the world ever committed, the sin of deicide - the murder of God, and then down into death and the grave and the underworld, and then back up through the resurrection and the Ascension, and then, in his spirit, down again in Pentecost, and again in every Eucharistic consecration, and then down into our mouth, our tongue, our esophagus, our stomach, the very cells of our body. We bring into the heart the heights of His divine life by his entering into the depths of our human life. It is an amazing story - this double drama, this cosmic romance - and it is the exact opposite of what it seems to be, for when we seem to eat this bread and transform it into us, he is really transforming us into him. We seem to be bringing his fullness into our
emptiness; he is really bringing our emptiness into his fullness. What seems to be the humanization of divinity, is really the divinization of humanity. That's “who's who” in the Eucharist.

Next comes the “when” question, and the answer to it is, first of all, that we meet him in three different ways, whenever we assist at Mass or receive Holy Communion or participate in Eucharistic Adoration; but there is something even more mysterious about this “when” about the time, and this is going to require some hard thinking. He is the eternal God, and he does not lose his divine and eternal nature when he assumes a human and temporal nature in the Incarnation; and because of that, he can do what merely temporal creatures like us cannot do. He can transcend time, even when he is in time. This means that what he did 2,000 years ago, he is doing now. For all times are “now” to him who is eternal. He comes across time to us. The Eucharist is a time machine, and so the eternal one whom we meet in the Eucharist continues in his unending “present” - to do to us today all the things he did in our past time as recorded in Scripture. And he also does now what he will do in our future time as prophesied in scriptures last book.

One of these things that he does to us when we meet him in the Eucharist is giving us being. He did not create us and our universe at a certain moment in time, he created time itself. He created the whole of history including this moment. He is keeping us in existence, now, at this moment. He is loving us into existence. If he stopped loving us, we would cease to exist. We would return to that out of which we were made, namely nothing. He is incarnated himself, now, becoming one of us - sharing our growth and education and limitations in time - loving and obeying his family, loving his father's house even at the age of 12, loving his mother so much that he conforms his will to hers as he did at Cana, because she conformed her will so perfectly to his. He is now doing all the things prophesied for the Messiah. He is now forgiving all our iniquities, healing all our diseases, redeeming our lives from destruction, crowning us with loving-kindness and tender mercies, so that our youth is renewed like the Eagles.
That is what he is doing now. He is now raising our Lazarus from the
dead and raising our Martha-like-faith from the dead. Also, from our
mere faith in the future - I know that my brother will rise again in the
resurrection on the last day - to faith in the present - I am the
resurrection and the life, and he is now sending his spirit again and again
in a million more Pentecosts - he is doing to us what his angel promised
to do to Mary when he said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and
the power of the most high will overshadow you, and therefore that holy
thing to be born in you will be the son of God.” He who was born in
Mary's body is also born in our souls when we are reborn by faith and
baptism and in our bodies in the Eucharist, and he is now ascending to
heaven with trophies and loot from his victorious battle with the devil.
We are his trophies and loot! We are on the first stages of our way to
heaven. We are climbing Jacob's Ladder, and even now he is saying,
“Time is up! Come home, my child, and I will judge you by my love and
by my truth. I will judge you truly as who you really are, as one of my
children; and I will share with you the joy that is far too big to enter into
you, so that you must enter into it. The joy that you sought in vain - in
greed and lust and pride, in money sex and power - the love that you
sought in vain in this world - the love for which you cried and cursed
and clawed your pillow - all of that is not dead past or the unborn future.
To him, it is the living present, and therefore, it is the same to us, insofar
as we are in him. That means that nothing is lost forever except in hell.
What has passed for us is not dead for him; it is alive. What is future for
us is not yet to born for him. It already is. That is why he says in the
song of songs to us, his bride, his church, “Behold! You're all fair, my
love. There is not a spot or a wrinkle in you.” He says that to us, truly,
because he sees us as we will be in heaven. God is not in time, but he
acts in time. How does he act in time? Well, we saw him acting during
Christ's 33-year-long incarnation, but we no longer see him. Yet he is
still acting. Wherever he is, he acts, and he is everywhere, therefore he is
acting everywhere- not just existing but acting - doing something.

“What” is he doing in the Eucharist? That is our next question - the
question of “what.” Obviously, he is acting on us and in us in every
Holy Communion, both in body and soul, since he enters us both in body and soul. But he enters, not just to be there, but also to act there. He does stuff to us. He saves us. He washes away our sins. He justifies us and sanctifies us and glorifies us. He gives us all graces. He makes us gradually what he made Mary suddenly and totally – namely, full of grace. For us, this process is not completed and perfected in this life as it was for Mary, but what he did to her, he does to us. He is now at work doing a far greater work in us than creating the entire universe out of nothing. He is making saints out of sinners, especially in the confessional where Adam walks in and Jesus walks out. He does what only God can do. He creates in us a clean heart. He performs heart surgery on us. He is what T.S. Eliot called the wounded surgeon. Holy Communion is heart surgery, but what is he doing there in the Eucharist all the time, even when we are not receiving Holy Communion and when we are not offering his body and blood to the Father for the salvation of the world as we assist at Mass? What is he doing there during Eucharistic Adoration? What is he doing right now in the Eucharist? Well, for one thing, he is waiting for us patiently, longing for us to come and love him, thirsting for our love; but even before that, he's doing something else that we usually forget. He is hiding.

That's what Thomas Aquinas says in that beautiful Eucharistic hymn Adóro te

Devote - látens Déitas, Quæ sub his figúris, vere látitas. Vere latitas means “hiding.” He's hiding. Hiding is an act; it's not just a static state of being. It's an activity - a freely willed action that changes something, that makes a difference. When we hide, we change our appearance. If we did not hide, we would be visible. When we hide, we change something. We become invisible. We withdraw from appearances. Then, when we come out of hiding, we do not add anything to ourselves; we subtract something from ourselves. We subtract our disguise, our hiding place. We stop the action of hiding. Imagine the sun hiding itself so we could not see it. In a sense, that is what it does on cloudy days, and that is like what Christ does in the Eucharist. Like the sun putting on a costume of clouds, he interposes the appearances of bread and wine between himself
and the eyes of our body, but not between himself and the eyes of our soul, which are the eyes of faith. Faith is a seeing - a kind of x-ray vision. Faith is not, essentially, a feeling any more than love is, essentially, a feeling. Feelings can be commanded. Faith cannot be commanded, but Christ commands our love. However, feelings, too, are very important, and faith, like love, is naturally aided by feelings and naturally produces feelings such as trust and confidence and peace and joy. But faith is essentially a seeing, a knowing. We know the truth by faith, as well as by reason, and not only in religion. Most of what we know about this world, as well as the next, we know by faith. For instance, we know that Africa exists and that e=mc² and that George Washington was our first president by faith in the authorities who have taught us these things, even if we have never seen them. The authorities did the science and made the maps and wrote the histories, and if it's reasonable for us to put our faith in thousands of human authorities, how much more reasonable for us to put our faith in the one divine authority, the one supreme infallible God. You see, we have three eyes. The eye of a body sees truth by colors and shapes and sizes. The eye of the mind sees truth by reason, and the eye of the heart sees truth by faith. We do not see Christ in the Eucharist with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the rational mind because he is hiding from those two eyes. He is hiding from the eyes of the body and the eyes of the mind. He's wearing a costume, and the costume is made of bread and wine. Why is he hiding? That raises our fourth question, the “why” question. He is hiding to elicit our faith, to make room for faith, but why does he demand? Because he wants our love above all things, and faith is a necessary property of love. Faith means trust, first of all, and we do not trust those we do not love. If we do not love and trust, then we need sensory appearances and rational proofs. That is called science. Science is a noble and honorable thing, but science is not love. Love has no place in science, nor does trust. We must begin by distrust if we are doing science. We must begin, not by trusting any idea as true, but by distrusting it as false until it is proved to be true by data and experiment and calculation - that is with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the
mind. We treat people as innocent till proven guilty, but we treat scientific ideas as guilty until proven innocent. Well, you can't get to heaven by science. You can't even get to earthly happiness by science. You can only get to happiness by love, both on earth and in heaven; and in order to elicit our love, Christ elicits our faith. He is always doing that. He did that in the Garden of Eden when he deliberately refused to put up signs around the forbidden fruit. That would have appealed through the eye of the body or the eye of reason. There was nothing in sensory appearances to distinguish the forbidden fruit from the non-forbidden fruit. Eve looked at the forbidden fruit and saw that it looked good, not evil. It looked like all the other fruits, just as the Eucharist looks like all other bread; and it made no rational sense for God to pick out this one fruit for forbidding. The command was deliberately irrational and arbitrary as in the fairy tales. You may live in the beautiful palace forever if only you do not ever say that one forbidden word. Why did he do that? To make room for faith and trust and love. It is like a marriage proposal. In fact, it is a marriage proposal. Romeo did not bring a battery of philosophers and scientists and lawyers to Juliet when he asked her to elope with him. He simply said, “Trust me.” That is what God did to Adam and Eve, and that is what Christ does to us in the Eucharist. He hides.

He did that in creation when the creator remained hidden. He still remains hidden, even though it is he who is responsible for everything that exists. He even remains hidden in his creation of human souls. He could have truly attached a label reading “Made in Heaven” to every newborn baby's tush, but he didn't. He hides every day when he gives us rain and grain, and waking and sleeping, and all the other gifts that he not only created long ago, but also at every moment continues to act in and through every one of them. So that, when we drink the rain from the sky, we are drinking a grace from God, who is not an absent deadbeat dad who simply mails us gifts, but a present father, whose hand touches us in every gift of nature. That is why gratitude is the touchstone of sanity - of living in the real world. That is why we thank him in every meal and why we ought to thank him in every moment - in every event -
even painful events. For he is making all things work together for our
greatest good, but he's hiding as he does it all. So what he is doing in the
Eucharist is like what he is doing everywhere else, though his presence
there is fuller and realer than his presence everywhere else. We only
wonder at nature. We adore the Eucharist, so in order to test and
strengthen our faith, he performs only a few rare visible miracles in the
world.

The same is true of the Eucharist. Miracles are like coming out of hiding
just a little bit for just a little while, letting his disguise fall. We know
why he performs miracles. They are signs. The word for miracle,
miraculum, means literally a sign, a word, a revelation, but the lack of
miracles is also a sign. What is it a sign of? What does his hiddenness
signify and reveal to us? Why does he hide? The answer is a great irony,
a great paradox, a great joke. It is that this non-revealing is a revealing.
This withholding of his miraculous signs is a sign, a revelation of his
nature, of his character, of his personality. It is a revelation of his
humility, his humble love. For humility, like trust, is a property of love.
He disguises himself out of love in order to come down to our
earthiness, as the root of the word humility is the word houmous which
means earth or growth or soil. He meets us where we are for love always
seeks union, unity, closeness, intimacy. St. Augustine, when asked to list
the four cardinal virtues, replied humility, humility, humility, and
humility. My favorite sermon of all time was to elicit this virtue of
humility. God himself preached it to Saint Catherine. He summed up all
of divine revelation in four words in two sentences: I'm God. You're not.
We keep forgetting that second part.

God reveals himself by humbly hiding. That is the world's greatest
paradox - the greatest joke, and that is why the Eucharist is the greatest
of the five Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. It's very darkness to our
eyes and our mind is precisely the great light. When he told Moses his
name in the burning bush, the name was I am Who I am, which in
Hebrew means literally, I will be who I will be. He does not conform to
our expectations. Whenever in Scripture anyone meets him, he always
surprises them. Scripture itself is a surprise. It is not what we expect.
God certainly could have inspired a Bible that was a little clearer and less puzzling and mysterious. His choice to hide behind mystery, to our eyes and our reason, is what reveals him the most and what necessitates the response of our heart, from which alone can come our faith and our hope and our love, which alone can glue us to him. He hides because he is love. Love hides. Love does not say, “Look at me.” Love looks at the other. Love is humble.

What does humility mean? It doesn't mean having a low opinion of yourself. Humility means having no opinion of yourself. If we have to have an opinion of ourselves, we're caught in a trilemma, for we either have a high opinion or a low opinion or a medium opinion of ourselves, and there's a problem either way. If it's a high opinion, we're proud and presumptuous like the Pharisees. If it's a low opinion, we are dejected and close to despair. If it is medium, we are bored and flabby and neither hot nor cold, but like a wet noodle or a dishrag. What's the solution? Humility. Ingrown eyeballs are like ingrown toenails. God gave us eyes to look at others. God did not invent mirrors in heaven. There are no mirrors, and that humility is the secret of sanctity and joy in this world, too. The greatest saint in history is one who performed no miracles, who spoke only a very few words, and most of her words were poetry, the Magnificat. Her silence reveals God's silence. Mary is very much like the Eucharist.

Our last question is “where.” Where is Christ, who is the “who” - always, which is the “when” - doing this “what” of hiding his presence out of love - which is the “why” - and the answer is everywhere, because He is God, and God is everywhere. In some way, therefore, the real presence, though total only in the Eucharist, is nevertheless also real in some way everywhere. In that sense, everything is somewhat Eucharistic. That is the vision of Tielhard de Chardin in *The Divine Will*. He writes, “As our humanity assimilates the material world and as the host assimilates our humanity, the Eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step, it irresistibly invades the universe like the fire that sweeps over the heath or the stroke that vibrates through the bronze. In a
secondary and generalized sense, but in a true sense, the sacramental species are formed by the totality of the world, and the duration of the creation is the time needed for its consecration. In Christ, we live and move and have our being.” He concludes with a prayer, “O Lord, repeat to me the great liberating words, the words which at once reveal and operate - this in my body.” In truth, the huge and dark thing, the phantom, the storm is you. It is I; be not afraid. The things in our life which terrify us, the things that through you yourself into agony in the garden, are ultimately the species, appearance, the matter of one and the same sacrament. I think that's the best of Jesuit spirituality, seeing God in all things. He's doing that everywhere in our lives, as extensions of what he is doing in the Eucharist. What's he doing everywhere? He's handling us, molding us, remaking us, shaping us into the things we will be forever. He is making us Saints. He is making us into little gods and goddesses. I end with my favorite quote from C.S. Lewis, who I think is the best Christian apologist of modern times. He writes, “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and the most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.” All day long, we are, in some degree, helping each other through one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another. All friendships, all loves, all play, all politics - there are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals, whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, or exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbor, he is holy in almost the same way. For in him, also Christ, *vere latitat* - is truly hidden. That vision, that truth, that faith is what made St. Teresa of Calcutta, a saint, and it is what will make you one, too. God bless you.