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Eucharist

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Eucharist

Tolkien's understanding of the Eucharist is expressed most clearly in a letter to his son Michael of November 1963. Tolkien there emphasized the importance of will to faith and stated: "The only cure for sagging of faith is Communion. Though always Itself, perfect and complete and inviolate, the Blessed Sacrament does not operate completely and once for all in any of us. Like the act of Faith it must be continuous and grow by exercise. Frequency is of the highest effect." He thereby expressed the Catholic doctrines that a sacrament operates *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* and that it sustains and augments the supernatural life of the soul. While he did not explicitly mention the recipient's union with Christ as main effect of the Eucharist, this is implied in this letter, too. For the most part of his life, Tolkien tried to attend Mass daily. He explained by the mercy of God that he never has fallen out of his love with the Blessed Sacrament.

Furthermore, Tolkien was convinced that Christ plainly intended to put the Blessed Sacrament in the prime place. In a letter of March 1941 to Michael he calls it "the one great thing to love on earth" and continues that there one will find "the true way of all your loves upon earth, and more than that: Death: by the divine paradox, that which ends life, and demands the surrender of all, and yet by the taste (or foretaste) of which alone can what you seek in your earthly relationships (love, faithfulness, joy) be maintained, or take on that complexion of reality, of eternal endurance, which every man's heart desires." The nexus between Eucharist and Death might be surprising, but perhaps hints at the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, for on the one hand the sacrifice of Christ is remembered and on the other hand the congregation prays to become an offering in

Christ. Furthermore, the belief of the Communion as pledge of the coming resurrection is present.

Since Tolkien's expressed convictions are harmonious with the Catholic doctrine of his time it seems rather unlikely that *lembas* is a conscious reference to the Eucharist although many critics point out the similarities between both in feeding the will etc. In a letter to Deborah Webster Tolkien mentioned a critic who saw in *lembas* a derivation of the Eucharist and added: "(That is: far greater things may colour the mind in dealing with the lesser things of a fairy-story.)" But there are great differences; e.g. the Eucharist was instituted by Christ, it is not only used for journeys or "the hurt whose life was in peril" ("Of *Lembas*"), it has to be received in a service, it is intended for all men and not restricted to the Elves and very few exceptions and in some cases a confession is necessary before receiving communion. While a certain influence of the effects of the Eucharist on the effects of *lembas* is possible, it seems not a central one, although in "Quenya it was most often named *coimas* which is 'life-bread'." ("On *Lembas*")

See also Catholicism, Roman; Christ; Christianity and Resurrection

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