

## EUCHARIST

**QUESTION:** What is it that we do when we gather as a community to hear the Word and break the bread together?

*We are seeking the presence of the Lord who is alive and present to us because the Father has raised him from the dead.*

- The document on the liturgy mentions 4 presences of Christ, (cf. Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, 25 May, 1967), chapter I, part E, (p. 109, Flannery))
- In the sequence of the Eucharistic celebration, there is an unfolding of these towards a greater fullness of presence, and in various ways of presence of the risen Christ to us.
- This needs to correspond with a movement in our own faith response as we appropriate this presence through our deepening participation.
- **Read the Emmaus story - groups of 3 to discuss: the stages or developments of Christ's presence to the disciples and their response to him. Get feedback.**

The Emmaus story is a good entrée into the scriptural basis for an understanding of the Church.

- Jesus explains the things concerning himself & contextualizes them in the accounts of scripture of the O.T. to show that it has been fulfilled in him.
- Ultimately their eyes are opened in the shared hospitality at the breaking of bread.
- The O.T. & all the things about Christ only make sense in the context of faith.
- The 2 disciples returned to Jerusalem to say how Jesus became known to them in the breaking of bread.
- Central themes of this story are used by Luke to show what his theology of Church is.
- Recognition of the resurrected Christ is the focus of the Church.
- This takes place "on the road" - Christians were first known as people of the way - **hodos**, ie. people who follow the way of Christ & are on a journey of faith.
- There are 2 components of recognition: a) telling of the story - WORD
- b) breaking of bread - SACRAMENT
- After the experience, the 2 on the road urgently need to tell someone else - the sharing of faith.
- The recognition takes place in the context of hospitality - Jesus is invited in. Hospitality is central in Luke's understanding of Church.
- The notion of community both in the recognition & in the subsequent preaching - ie. the presence & the recognition of Christ in the communal sharing on the horizontal level.
- 3 elements on the theological nature of the Church flow from the above 6 points:-
- I) WORD OF GOD
- II) BREAKING OF BREAD
- III) COMMUNITY RESULTING FROM THE ABOVE 2.

**These are non-eliminable elements of Church.**

- The Christian Church isn't a religion of a book, nor a religion of dogma, but the revelation, recognition & remaining presence of a person in a community of faith.
- Whatever God is like, he's most like Christ.
- Christianity & Church is about RECALLING, REMEMBERING & RE-PRESENTING this Jesus Christ.

- The above 3 elements of the Church take place in the context of sharing a meal - EUCHARIST - that's where the community becomes itself - a union between God & humanity in fellowship with one another.
- There is a difference between eating & drinking & sharing a meal - it is a social event where a unity takes place through a meal.
- The word COMPANION from CON-PANE.
- So, historically, separation from the Church was seen as sacramental separation - excommunicatio - means not being able to share at the table.
- Those out of communion with the Church & one another cannot approach the symbol of unity.
- On the other hand, the Eucharist is the source of unity & its hope of fulfilment.
- Thus, on a horizontal level the most important concern of the Church has & should be hospitality.
- This has obvious ramifications in the exercise of justice & social concern for those in need.
- Having talked about the 3 non-eliminable elements of the Church of *WORD, BREAKING OF BREAD & COMMUNITY* leads us into the 4 functions of the Church.
- **The Four Functions of the Church:-**
- KERYGMA - Church's proclamation of its belief
- KOINONIA - The building-up of the community of one faith/one baptism.
- LEITOURGIA - Worship
- DIAKONIA - Church's life of service
- These are the salient characteristics of the Church - each is interrelated.
- **KERYGMA - (proclamation of the Church's belief)**
- **Teaching & preaching**
- Eucharist - while a bonding meal, it's also a proclamation of the mystery of Christ.
- Essentially about **bearing witness** to the life of Christ by the way you live.
- An **imitation** of Christ in the unique context of YOUR life
- Many models throughout history were worked out in imitation of Christ.
- Francis of Assisi was a synoptic fundamentalist - he took seriously Christ's words - "Go sell everything..."
- Certain spiritualities have been adopted & applied in the Church.
- Every age & cultural milieu has its own particular insight into Christ.
- Reason why we have saints - they modelled themselves on an aspect of Christ.
- Participant in the Eucharist are called & empowered to be living witnesses.
- **DIAKONIA - (Service)** - service & hospitality firstly to the community, then extended out beyond the community to the wider society; it is not about service to the upper class or hierarchy of the community but shouldering the burdens of those who were outcasts or preparing to be martyred and those in the wider community that society neglected – widows and orphans.
- It means that orthodoxy (correct praise) has to be in line with orthopraxis (correct practice) - ie. is your life conformable to Christ & what he preaches - cf. I Jn. - "how can you love God if you hate your neighbour?"; or letter of James - "put into practice your faith."
- **KOINONIA** - Interior building up of the community by one faith/one baptism
- Then the community of the Church to build up the community of the world ie. OEKUMENIA.

- The liturgy manifests horizontally what the community is meant to be as community through their worship of God.
- The way the scriptures are interpreted depends on where they are read from - scriptures are contextualized in the life situation of the community ie. the cares & concerns of the world around them (this is a great contribution of Liberation theology).
- It's a grace to welcome those who are homeless - Francis of Assisi said, "when I was in the world I could not bear to embrace or even look upon lepers until God touched me with his grace & I left the world & thus was able to embrace lepers".
- Unity within the community of the faithful was fundamental, firstly within the local community and then amongst the many churches which increasingly saw themselves as united to the bishop of Rome.
- Thus, in whatever wrong was committed by any individual, its effect was seen as breaking that unity, as a severance from the community.
- Thus in the early Church, reconciliation was public where the bishop publicly received back into the community someone who had broken from the community of faith and who had publicly made his penance.
- However, this unity amongst the many churches was not uniformity - while the beliefs held were one, the ways of liturgical practice were as diverse as there were different cultures - ie. unity through diversity.
- **LEITOURGIA - Worship** - the source and summit of Christian life.
- So, to draw these things together, it can be said that the Church is an assembly of a common faith & baptism which meets in space & time to recall & celebrate the risen Christ in the breaking of bread for the service of the world & the furthering of the kingdom of God until its fulfilment.
  - This raises another fundamental aspect of Church - its role in furthering the kingdom of God.
  - The risen Christ is present before the disciples meet with him;
  - Jesus joins them as a "stranger" on the road and talks with them (they are lost in their grief and almost ignore him);
  - Jesus breaks open the scriptures, enabling them to see inside the event of his death, that it is a fulfilment of all that God has promised and all that they have awaited (they gradually warm to his words till their hearts "burn within them" - a transformation occurs because they now see his death from a faith perspective);
  - By now Jesus is a welcome and trusted teacher/friend who is invited by them to remain with them to share a meal of friendship and unity;
  - Jesus breaks (open) the bread with them (they now recognize him for who he is; there is now an inner quality to their seeing - they now see reality in a new way);
  - Jesus disappears (they run excitedly to tell their story to the others; they have been transformed, seeing his death as a way to new life and a different way of his presence among them).
  - This then leads us to look at the way Jesus is present.
- **The 4 modalities of Christ's presence in the Eucharist:**
- Vatican II states that Christ "is always present in a body of the faithful gathered in his name.

- He is also present in his Word, for it is he who speaks when the Scriptures are read in the Church.
- In the sacrifice of the Eucharist he is present both in the person of the minister, "the same now offering through the ministry of the priest who formerly offered himself on the cross," and above all under the species of the Eucharist."
- The risen Lord is present before we gather for Eucharist - he is present to us, to all humanity, to all creation.
- **Christ is present in** his Spirit in the unity of prayer of those gathered in his name - **the ASSEMBLY** (he walks with us on the road...).
- This is brought out in the introductory rites of the Mass which begins by focusing on the altar as the focus of our gathering and unity in prayer and worship.
- When a group of Christians gather for celebration of eucharist, the risen Christ is already present to them before the ritual action begins.
- Since they are believers, they already have the open minds and hearts which are the "receptacle" for Christ's self-gift to them; and Christ already offers to them his friendship, shares with them his own Spirit.
- If not, they would not be a portion of the church which is the body of Christ.
- What this means is that the presence of Christ connected with eucharist is basically his presence to the people who are there.
- So, the notion of sharing or communing is basic to genuine eucharistic celebration.
- If one scans, even quickly, the sequence of actions that make up a eucharist, one can see that "communing" is intrinsic to all of them.
- The coming together of men, women, and children for eucharist, let us say on a Sunday morning, is something they do in common; they come to the same place, at the same time, to do more or less the same thing.
- While we seldom pay attention to it when people gather on a Sunday morning, they are there as an assembly called together by the word of God; they are a "called people" and their "call" stands in a direct line with the vocation of Israel out of Egypt to become the people of God.
- The very fact that they are there together to celebrate eucharist is already a symbol of the faith, heritage, and identity they share with one another.
- Of course, the symbolism of this gathering runs deeper.
- A community of Christians, because it is body of Christ, signifies the presence of the risen Christ, and of his Spirit.
- Probably the gospel saying, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst," is to be understood in terms of eucharistic gathering.
- And the sacramentally effective action of eucharist begins as soon as people start coming together to share this action - and not only when the priest appears on the scene.
- In simpler times, there probably was much more sharing of life's experiences among people as they met and conversed before going into the church building; and the meaning they had for one another passed unnoticed but importantly into what they then did during the liturgy.
- If, for example, someone learned before Mass that a friend's young daughter was dangerously ill, that was certain to be part of that person's Prayer of the Faithful.

- Perhaps we should try to regain some of this interchange among the assembled group, even capitalize on it to make the entire eucharistic celebration more personally meaningful.
- The introductory rites are now, since Vatican II, have the priest facing the people with whom he prays with the awareness that Christ's presence unfolds from within the praying assembly.
- **Christ is in his Word**, in the lector who proclaims and in the hearts of those who listen.
- Listening to the proclaimed word of the Scripture readings is another important element in the communing that goes on in eucharist.
- While only the lector is publicly active, the attentive hearing of the readings is its own important kind of activity.
- In human relationships, listening is one of the most important things that people can do; it is half of communication.
- And we all know that it is often difficult to listen; relatively few people are good listeners.
- Even when it is a question of hearing the word of God, as this happens in the early portion of the liturgy, people can hear the words without really accepting them as something they wish to understand and make their own.
- If, however, a group of Christians gathered together for eucharist really do listen to the Scripture readings for that liturgy, this means that at least for that short time they are sharing a common awareness.
- They have a more or less common mentality because the same passage of the Scriptures is for that moment shaping their consciousness.
- They are at that moment professing a common faith by the very fact of listening together.
- They are sharing the vision of human life revealed by that particular portion of Old or New Testament.
- One can see how early Christianity placed great weight on this unifying role of the proclaimed Scriptures.
- Being a lector was recognized as a distinct ministry, which received public recognition in an ordination ceremony.
- Those who are listening and open to God's word, receive it in faith and allow it to challenge their lives by internalizing its meaning and being transformed according to the mind of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- One of the key elements in achieving communion among a group of Christians assembled for eucharist is the homily, or sermon.
- Any real sharing of a common action demands that the group of people understand what they are doing.
- In eucharist this is the function of the homily.
- While a good homily does include an explanation of the Scripture readings that is appropriate to the particular group gathered for eucharist, it is meant to go beyond that and help the people understand the meaning of the entire eucharistic liturgy on that occasion.
- What is the significance on this day of their coming together as Christians?
- What does it mean in the concrete circumstances of their lives, at this time and in this place, for them to be disciples of the crucified and risen Christ?

- How is that view of human life that comes with Christian faith to be translated into the demands and possibilities of their lives?
- What is "the word of God" that is addressed to them and to which eucharist is meant to be response?
- By responding to such questions, by clarifying the particular meaning of a given eucharist, the homily plays an indispensable role in shaping the shared awareness of the people.
- More important than any theoretical clarification of a preacher is that person's own faith witness; the preacher is meant to help initiate that sharing of faith that will make the assembled people a true community of believers.
- And the homily should lead into the Prayer of the Faithful, so that this can be a time of sharing needs and hopes, praying together for common goals, becoming more aware of one another's sorrows, joys, and hopes.
- One of the things all Christians - for that matter, all humans - have in common is a need for salvation, a need for divine assistance if they are to reach their destiny despite the barriers we encounter.
- This shared need for God's help finds expression in the Prayer of the Faithful.
- **Christ is present in his minister** who takes his place at the altar.
- He focuses the atmosphere of presence now on the table, which recalls and re-presents both the table of the new Covenant at the Last Supper and the cross of Christ's sacrifice.
- The priest leads the assembly to offer with the bread and wine, themselves to be transformed through surrender to the Father.
- Though we have long become accustomed to thinking of the Eucharistic Prayer as the portion that is proper to the celebrant, such isn't really the case.
- Even when it was recited in Latin and said silently, its introduction stated that it was to be prayed in common by celebrant and people.
- Now, with the use of the vernacular, all can understand and respond to the invitation, "Lift up your hearts to the Lord." "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."
- Even though the celebrant speaks the Eucharistic Prayer, he does so as the voice of the assembled people; it is the prayer of the entire people, not just the celebrant's.
- This is why the entire community agrees by its solemn "amen" at the end of the prayer.
- Obviously, there cannot be a real communing in this Eucharistic Prayer unless those assembled for the celebration actually join their consciousness to the celebrant's as they silently pray with him.
- But if there is such a united awareness, the Eucharistic Prayer becomes a corporate ritual in which all join, rather than a performance by a celebrant that others watch.
- All the assembled Christians are meant to commune in the act of acknowledging (that is, worshipping) the God revealed in Jesus as the Christ.
- Unless the Eucharistic Prayer becomes this kind of shared praise of God, a true faith community will not emerge from the eucharistic action.
- This particular prayer is the most ancient and most basic profession of faith.

- For people to join in praying it means that together they are professing their faith; there is a real communing in faith; there is taking place that process of sharing which is the dynamic meaning of "Christian community."
- And because the consecration of bread and wine takes place in the course of the Eucharistic Prayer, the assembled Christians are professing their faith not just in the saving events of the past, but also in the saving event happening now in their very midst.
- **Christ is present in the bread and wine** outside of us and is then taken within us as food and drink.
- This is the ultimate moment of interiorization of Christ's presence into our lives together with his attitudes and values.
- The climax of Christ's presence to us and within is in communion where, as food, he becomes one with us, and in faith we know we become him (the body of Christ) if we allow his Spirit to transform us.
- We who receive Christ as our food of life are then sent into the world that as we have been transformed, we then become transforming agents in the world.
- Because the sense of the sacredness of this reception of Jesus Christ grew strong and especially meaningful to each Christian who received communion, there was a tendency to stress this individual aspect of the action, with the consequent loss of the social significance.
- The social meaning - that this is primarily an action of sharing with others - was largely forgotten.
- Still today, it is not very widely understood that the reception of the eucharistic bread and wine is something that Christians at eucharist are meant to share with one another.
- They are a community because they come into union with the same Lord; he relates to them as individuals but he also relates to them as a group.
- It is as a group, a community, that they are body of Christ.
- One indication of the extent to which the social character of "receiving communion" was forgotten is the fact that for centuries there was a rather complete loss of the notion that eucharist is a sacred meal.
- Instead, especially in Catholic circles, emphasis was placed on the teaching that eucharist was a sacrifice; it was commonly called "the sacrifice of the Mass."
- Ironically, it was also forgotten that the very thing that makes eucharist a sacrificial action is its reality as a sacred covenant meal.
- Overlooking this meal character of the action led theologians to many strange theories to explain what was meant by calling eucharist "a sacrifice," theories that have now been largely discredited and abandoned.
- This does not mean that the sacrificial nature of eucharist is unimportant, or that concentration on it was a mistake.
- In fact, it is important from several points of view, and so it is worth trying to understand what the word "sacrifice" means when applied to Christianity.
- "Sacrifice," refers to the combined act of Jesus' death-resurrection.
- If we apply the term to what Jesus does today, it means that the risen Christ is giving himself in new life to his friends.

- This self-giving by the risen Lord is his continuing action of "offering sacrifice."
- And the corollary of this is that Christians' action of "offering sacrifice" consists in their loving self-gift to their fellow humans which, because it is a recognition of their relationship as brothers and sisters, witnesses to their common relationship to that God who is the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.
- This relationship, among humans and between them and God, a relationship that finds its centre in the risen Christ, is the new covenant.
- When Christians gather for that covenant meal they call "eucharist," they are pledging their "being for" one another by sharing in this meal, by accepting the covenant relationship to one another, by identifying themselves to one another as members of the same family of God.
- As individuals and as a community, they join themselves to the risen Christ, present in their midst, as set aside for the sacred purpose of bringing new life to their fellow humans.
- This is what it means for them to "offer the sacrifice" of eucharist.
- The Eucharist is the central act of communal prayer (worship) of the People of God. The Church without Eucharist is impossible.
- Christian eucharist is, then, a continuing celebration of the new covenant, which is lived out by the community of the risen Christ and his disciples, joined together as one body, bringing new and unending life to all who do not refuse it.
- But what eucharist celebrates is that the entire life of these Christians, if lived out in loving concern for and genuine self-gift to their fellow humans, is a living sacrifice.
- Because this loving self-gift must take ever-changing form as the circumstances of life change, the covenant must be constantly renewed and "translated" in ever new and different ways as circumstances of communal life in society change.
- This intrinsic connection between Eucharist and church was very clearly expressed in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican Council II.
- In fact, this document has become the charter, as it were, of our involvement as church in the Eucharist.
- The Pope and bishops realized very clearly that if the Council was to be a significant instrument for the renewal of the church, then the Eucharist, and the reanimation of participation in it by the faithful people of God, must be the very focus of that renewal.
- Therefore, before attending to any other important matters, the Council addressed itself to the forming of a document on the Sacred Liturgy.
- From this document have come many changes in the form of celebration of the Eucharist.

### **Passover**

- We cannot understand the Christian Eucharist unless we go back in Jewish history to the Passover event.
- You will recall the story of the Exodus – the crossing of the Sea of Reeds at which the Israelite people experienced as never before the saving power of God.
- This momentous saving act of God moulded the Israelites into a people; it convinced them that God was indeed present in their lives, that they were God's specially chosen and specially favoured people.

- It convinced them to enter into a covenant with God.
- But Exodus begins with Passover.
- As far as we can make out, Passover was an ancient rite of the people of the land of Egypt.
- It pre-dated the advent of the family of Jacob in Egypt, but this people adopted it from their Egyptian hosts as a religious service.
- Because of subsequent events this religious service became associated with the Israelite belief that God had saved them from the Egyptians.
- From your reading of the Book of Exodus (Chapters 5-12), you will remember that just prior to the actual exodus, the going out from Egypt, the country had been subject to the so-called plagues, which were probably a series of natural disasters (we cannot know for certain).
- The Jews understood these disasters as punishments sent by God on the Egyptians because Pharaoh wouldn't free them from slavery & let them leave.
- The last and most powerful of these tragedies was the death of many children and animals, the cause of which the Bible does not make clear.
- In the history of Israel's faith, however, it was God who preserved the Israelites from this last catastrophe.
- The "Angel of Death" passed over the houses of the Jews that had been marked with the blood of the lamb that was sacrificed.
- READ: Exodus 12:5-23.
- The Passover event is associated with the eating of a meal of roasted lamb, bitter herbs and unleavened bread.
- The ritual eating of this meal became the memorial of the Exodus – the central experience of Jewish faith – to be repeated through all generations.
- You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children.... And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice of the Lord for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses. (Ex 12:24-27)
- And so, when the Jewish people celebrate Passover and eat the seder meal, what are they doing?

### **1. They are remembering God's saving act on their behalf**

- It is more than mere remembrance, however – more than simply recalling a past event.
- The ritual requires that in their minds and hearts they re-live the great event.
- They must enter into it spiritually, emotionally, imagine that they were actually there and experiencing it themselves.
- Monika Hellwig puts it very well:
- *Each generation must experience the liberation in its own life experience. Therefore, each generation must enter into the bitter experience of slavery, of being held in contempt, of deep alienation and the sense of rejection, of feeling that there is no escape from the vicious circle of violence and fear and hate, of not knowing whether life is worth living at all. Without really experiencing this it is not possible to understand what the liberation of Exodus means.*
- And later she adds:

- *When Israel celebrates Passover, the families try to enter into the great Exodus event so that it is no longer then but becomes now, and when it becomes here and now, they ask themselves what it demands of them here and now, this year, to bring about the reign of God in the world and to move towards the promised freedom for all men.*

## **2. They are giving thanks for God's saving act**

- They thank God for the experience of freedom from slavery and oppression, an experience which now becomes the paradigm for freedom from all kinds of slavery, whether personal or societal.

## **3. The whole ritual constitutes an act of worship of God**

- After Moses' injunction to the people to eat the Passover meal as a constant remembrance of their salvation, the book of Exodus remarks: "*And the people bowed down and worshipped*" (Ex 12:27).
- It is a worship that will be enjoined on them by the covenant (First Commandment).

## **4. They are renewing their sense of being a people, a community formed by covenant with God**

- They are bound together forever and share this special gift of God.
- All this is important for us, for as Christians we are the direct inheritors of that same tradition.
- What we do at the celebration of the Eucharist is basically what the Jewish people do in celebrating Passover.

## **The Last Supper**

- READ: Luke 22:7-8, 14-20.
- Scripture scholars are somewhat divided as to whether the last meal celebrated by Jesus with his disciples was in fact the ritual Passover supper.
- That uncertainty is not really of great consequence, for all agree that the meal that was eaten had strong Passover connotations and overtones and partook of the very ceremonial of the Paschal meal (see for example Mk 14:12, 1 Cor 5:7).
- At this last Passover supper with his apostles, Jesus introduced a new dimension to the Jewish ritual meal.
- The saving act of God at the Exodus is now to be re-enacted in a most dramatic way.
- Following the Passover ritual, after giving thanks Jesus distributes the unleavened bread to his disciples, saying that this bread is his body which is given for them.
- Similarly, the cup of wine is the "new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you" (Lk 22:20; "for the forgiveness of sins" – Mt 26:28).
- Thus, through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, God was once again to seal a new covenant with his people – the new covenant in the blood of Jesus.
- The Passover lamb, the victim of the Jewish sacrifice, is now Jesus himself, who becomes the victim of the sacrifice of the new covenant.
- And so in our present celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus is spoken of as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
- Jesus requested that his followers repeat this ritual meal "in commemoration of me."
- And his request is honoured every time we celebrate the Eucharist.

- Eucharist comes from the Greek Eucharistic, meaning "thanksgiving."
- Following the Jewish ritual of the Passover meal Jesus "gave thanks" to God before he distributed the bread and wine.
- The name Eucharist has come down to us from what Jesus did at the Last Supper with his disciples.
- And so, just as the Jews re-enacted the original Passover and commemorated their freedom from oppression in the ritual Passover supper, we Christians re-enact the sacrifice of Jesus, the installation of the New Covenant, in the celebration of our Eucharist.

### **Eucharist As Mystery**

- In its essence, Eucharist is a deep mystery.
- It belongs irrevocably to Christian faith.
- Here we are in the realm of sacrament, an earthly reality that reveals God to us.
- We are in the realm of signs and symbols that point beyond themselves to an unseen reality and which make that reality "present" to us.
- The deep mystery that is the Eucharist is not something that we can find out for ourselves; it is a gift of God's revelation.
- Certainly, it is beyond full human explanation.
- It is an aspect of God's presence to us in the midst of life.
- But, mystery is not something that we cannot know; it is something that we cannot wholly know.
- F.J. Sheed's analogy: It is as though we stand in a small circle of light.
- We can see a certain distance around us, but beyond the circle of light is darkness.
- We must keep trying to increase the circle of light, we must keep trying to push back the boundaries of darkness so that we may see more, even though we know that there will always be more than we can see and understand.
- Explanations of Eucharist down through the centuries have attempted to increase our circle of light.
- We shall deal with Eucharist under three major headings:
  - Eucharist as presence;
  - Eucharist as communion;
  - Eucharist as sacrifice.

### **1. Eucharist As Presence**

- There is an anecdote from the life of St. John Mary Vianney, the Cure of Ars, which, goes something like this.
- St. John, parish priest of the small town of Ars in France in the last century, observed a man who used to come to his church and sit for hours just staring at the tabernacle not seeming to say any prayers.
- Upon enquiry from St. John, the man replied that there was no need for formal prayers for, as he said simply, "I know that he is there, and he knows that I am here."

- This story focuses on the very Catholic understanding that the person of Jesus is specially present in the eucharistic bread reserved in the tabernacle.
- It is a sacramental presence which belongs to the realm of symbol, a symbol that "makes present" the reality to which it points.
- The matter is well stated by the Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.
- What is here affirmed is a sacramental presence in which God uses the realities of this world to convey the realities of a new creation: bread for this life becomes bread for eternal life.
- After praying the eucharistic prayer the bread and wine are now said to be consecrated.
- If any is left over after communion it is not just ordinary bread.
- It is bread that is "truly the Body of Christ, the Bread of life," the Eucharist of the Lord.
- This Eucharist, under the form of bread and wine, this Eucharist that "contains" the whole person of Christ, is kept in the churches in a special receptacle, the tabernacle, which in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches is the focus and centre of prayer.
- In their understanding of Eucharist most other Christian denominations will not go as far as this.
- There are no tabernacles in their churches, for there is no consecrated bread to reserve.
- They believe that the bread & wine only signify (point to) the presence of Jesus.
- Union with the Lord is achieved in the act of eating the bread and wine in the course of a eucharistic celebration.
- The bread left over is of no special significance.
- It is safe to say that far too much time and energy have been spent in trying to explain how precisely the change in the eucharistic bread takes place, rather than in trying to stress its significance for the church.
- As Monika Hellwig says: *"The real problem with the centuries-old debate is that by focusing so much attention on what happened to the bread and wine it took the attention away from the strictly spiritual and far more important question of what ought to be happening to the community and in what ways it was expected to change and by what power and motivation."*
- There is little usefulness at this point in going into the details of the various explanations offered for the change that takes place.
- The disentangling of such esoteric terms as "transubstantiation," or "transignification," or "transfinalization" is better left to a more thorough theological treatment than is possible here.
- Perhaps all we need to remember is, as one author expresses it, that in the Eucharist Jesus "identifies himself" with the bread and wine in such fashion that they become his body and blood.
- In addition to this special sacramental presence in the eucharistic bread, we believe that Jesus is present in the church in many other ways.
- For example, when Christians gather to pray together they have faith in Jesus' presence in the community, as he said "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 16:20).
- Again, Jesus is present in the word of Scripture, particularly when this word is spoken and explained to the community and associated with some liturgical action such as the Eucharist.

- What we must specially emphasize is that the essence of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist is centred in the praying community.
- This community is gathered in his name to do in his memory what he did at the Last Supper and thus enter into the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection.
- It is the "entering into" the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus (just as the Jews "enter into" the experience of being saved by God at the Reed Sea), through the gathering together for prayer, through the proclamation of the Scriptures, through the symbolism of eating together of bread and wine, that Christ becomes present in the eucharistic community.
- The priest does not celebrate Eucharist by himself, rather it is the whole community that celebrates.
- The priest is their representative who calls the community to celebrate and leads them in the celebration.
- Without community, without a caring, sharing, forgiving, loving family there is no true Eucharist, for the Eucharist is both the sign of unity among Christians and the power of God's Spirit which brings about this unity.

## **2. Eucharist As Communion**

- The story is told of a Christian missionary in India who was distributing copies of the Christian Scriptures to anyone who would accept them.
- One day while travelling on a train he offered a copy to a man sitting next to him.
- The man took the book, angrily tore it into pieces and threw the pieces out of the window.
- As it happened there was a man walking beside the railroad track that day, and he picked up a piece of paper on which was written "the Bread of Life."
- He did not know what it meant, but one of his friends told him that it came from a Christian book which he should not read.
- But the man said, "I want to read the book from which this beautiful phrase came," and he bought a copy of the Christian Scriptures.
- In it he read the passage from which the original scrap of paper had come, in which Jesus says, "I am the Bread of Life."
- This was the beginning of his conversion to Christianity.
- Through the power of God's grace, that little scrap of paper had indeed been for him the Bread of Life.
- Jesus is the Bread of Life given to us in the Eucharist.
- For us to better understand this phrase we must take a look at the symbolism of bread and wine.

## **Symbolism of Bread and Wine**

- Bread and wine are basic elements of food.
- In our culture, wine is an expensive and little-used commodity.
- Not so in many other cultures, and particularly the culture to which Jesus belonged.
- But food itself is full of deep symbolism, that is, it points to something beyond itself which is not easy to explain.

## 1. Food is nourishment

- Just as food is nourishment for our bodies, so also is the Eucharist nourishment for our spiritual life. As Jesus said: *"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."* (Jn 6:54-56)
- Eating the eucharistic bread will bring us into close union with him who is our Lord and saviour.

## 2. Food speaks the language of love

- A little baby best understands that it is loved and cared for when it is fed, particularly when it is fed at its mother's breast with much caressing and tenderness.
- Such feeding and loving produce a sense of security which, child psychologists assure us, is very necessary for a healthy, balanced and emotionally stable development.
- There is no mystery in the fact that if we love someone we will feed them; it is something which is cut deep in our human experience.
- There is profound significance in the well-known aphorism, "The way to a person's heart is through his/her stomach!"
- Jesus himself makes the point very clearly in his parable about the end of time: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" (Mt. 25:31-46).
- God loves us by feeding us with himself in the Eucharist.

## 3. Eating together is central to celebration and unity

- When people gather together to celebrate, or just to be with one another, they frequently eat.
- If you study the Gospels, you will find that stories about eating seem to have a prominent place.
- Jesus seems to spend a lot of time eating: Jesus ate with his disciples, with his friends, with publicans and other "unsavoury" characters.
- One of the big accusations against him was that he ate with sinners!
- A meal together cements friendship, expresses care and consideration, produces koinonia (caring, sharing, togetherness).
- Correspondingly, we do not like eating with people with whom we do not get along, and we rarely plan to eat with our enemies.
- It has been said that the family that prays together stays together.
- Can it not also be said that the family that eats together stays together?
- One of the greatest tragedies of modern fast-paced living is precisely that families do not seem to be able to find the time to eat together.
- A meal together is, in fact, a **COM- UNION**, that is, union with.
- The act of eating together at the table of the Lord, at the eucharistic celebration, is not only a COMMUNION with the Lord, it is also cements our communion in the church.
- Sharing Christ together in the Eucharist also means that we share ourselves with one another; we are brought together in the experience of close unity in the church.

- We Catholics have an unfortunate tendency to look upon Holy Communion as a purely personal matter between ourselves and God.
- Most of the time we are not even conscious of the other people with whom we are sharing the meal.
- Clearly, in a large church it is difficult to get the sense of a community meal.
- Nevertheless, that is what it is; it is not purely a personal contact between myself and God.
- The depth and intimacy of God's presence to us in communion is as much a function of the depth of our community togetherness as it is a function of Jesus' presence in the eucharistic bread.
- Because of the difficulty of sensing a community togetherness in a large gathering for Sunday Mass, for example, we should try as much as possible to foster such community outside of the eucharistic celebration.
- In other words, we should not just walk in and out of Mass immersed in our own thoughts.
- We should meet and greet people, share with them our experiences and concerns, try to strengthen our community ties in whatever way possible.
- All the effects that flow from a happily shared meal should flow from sharing the Eucharist together – increased understanding of others, more caring, sharing, helping and forgiving.
- Everything, in other words, that helps to build true community, and the kingdom of God.
- The koinonia established around the table of the Lord should be the koinonia of our lives as Christians.

### **3. Eucharist As Sacrifice**

- The English word sacrifice comes from the Latin *sacrum facere* meaning to make sacred.
- When something is set aside from its ordinary use and made over to God it is made sacred.
- The key element in sacrifice, therefore, is that of making a gift to God. God receives our gift and thereby makes it sacred, or holy.
- The more popular understanding of sacrifice tends to focus on the killing of a victim, with all the attendant implications of destruction and the shedding of blood.
- Another popular understanding of sacrifice is that it implies giving something up, doing something unpleasant, like giving up sweets for Lent.
- It is Probable that this notion of sacrifice came to us from an imperfect understanding of Jewish sacrifice which, for the most part, seemed to involve the killing of animals.
- But, for Jewish religious worship, the essence of sacrifice was not the killing of an animal.
- The essence of the sacrifice revolved around blood.
- In their pre-scientific understanding of things blood was life, and only God was the author of life.
- In their ritual the blood was poured out over the altar.
- The symbolism of this act is that, since only God is the author of life, the pouring out of blood (life) points to the fact that only God has supreme power over life, that God is the sovereign God, the Lord of the universe.
- Thus, it is a formal act of worship, an offering to God, a sign and a symbol that the people also give themselves to God – a sacrifice.

- Perhaps even more pertinent for our understanding of Jewish ritual is the importance for them of the peace offering.
- Essentially, this is a meal shared by God and the people, a meal which cemented the covenant relationship, or restored it if it had been broken.
- The Passover celebration, in which God's saving act was "remembered," re-lived, was such a meal.
- By sharing in this meal the Jews participated in the peace offering, they participated in sacrifice.

### **Jesus' Sacrifice**

- Traditionally, Roman Catholics have held that Jesus' passion and death on the cross is a "sacrifice." But how are we to understand this?
  - Does it mean that we concentrate on the painful shedding of blood on the cross?
  - Or does it rather mean that we should concentrate on Jesus' giving of his life, his most precious human possession, for his friends?
  - If we understand the essence of sacrifice to be in the gift-giving, then this latter meaning makes most sense.
  - That gift began at the Passover supper ("This is my body which is given for you").
  - It is continued on the cross as one continuous act of giving. We quote Bernard Cooke once more:
  - *In the case of Jesus' Passover, what happens is that by going freely to death in order to be the instrument of humankind's salvation, Jesus is placed irrevocably beyond the ordinary world of space and time we live in. He lives with a new and fulfilled form of human existence, so that he can share this fuller life with all persons of faith . . . . "Sacrifice," then, refers to the combined act of death/resurrection.*
  - Where does all this leave us?
1. We must participate in Jesus' sacrifice, his offering of himself to his Father, by offering ourselves in union with him, that is, by making a gift of ourselves and all aspects of our life to God.  
The gift of ourselves is symbolized by the gifts of bread and wine; they are our small gifts to God.  
Jesus takes these gifts, wonderfully identifies himself with them in the course of the eucharistic celebration and then returns them to us as nourishment for our spiritual life of union with him and work for the kingdom of God.
- What this means is that we must re-commit ourselves to the Christian life, accepting the guidance of the church.
  - We re-commit ourselves to efforts to establish the kingdom of God on earth, we re-commit ourselves to personal union with Jesus.
  - If we are to participate fully in the eucharistic celebration we must make this re-commitment in our minds and hearts at some stage during the celebration.
  - To seal this offering we must partake of the eucharistic meal: we must "eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood" so that we may have life (Jn 6:52 ff.).

- Partaking of the eucharistic meal is an essential complement to the offering.
- Unless we are conscious of complete separation from God by what has been traditionally referred to as mortal sin we should eat the bread of the Eucharist when we participate in the Mass.
- This act of eating brings us right back to the symbolism of the meal as mentioned above.
- Thus, the symbolism of sacrifice and the symbolism of the meal are inextricably woven together in the Eucharist.
- We cannot have one without the other.

## **The Rite of Eucharistic Celebration**

### **The Mass**

- Why is the eucharistic celebration called the Mass?
- The term Mass comes from the Latin *missa* meaning sent, or dismissed.
- In the early days of the church, any ecclesiastical celebration was concluded with a blessing and a sending forth of the people, a dismissal.
- In the course of time this term *missa*, which evolved into *mass*, came to be used only for the eucharistic celebration.
- In order to promote the dialogue between priest and people, which is essential if we are to participate properly in the Eucharist, it is useful to have a Missal in which the parts of the celebration are clearly laid out.
- It is simply a help in focusing our attention, in making us aware of what is going on and in promoting our thorough involvement in what is very much our Eucharist.
- Finally, we should be aware of the fact that the rite of the Eucharist (that is, the order and form of the eucharistic celebration) varies in different parts of the church.
- The rite used in the Latin churches and does not apply, for example, to the Ukrainian Catholic churches.
- However, no matter what rite is used, the essential parts of the Eucharist are the same.
- The Mass consists basically of a repetition of what Jesus did at the Last Supper. Go back to the Gospel According to Matthew (26:26).

### **Liturgical Reform Since Vatican II:**

- Liturgical reform began well before the Second Vatican Council which brought together efforts made over a long period of time.
- In the Introduction to the new Roman missal of 1969, Pope Paul VI spoke of 4 centuries of progress in the liturgical sciences which began with Trent's efforts to return to the riches to which the ancient traditions of the early Church bore witness.
- After having established the nature and purpose of liturgy in our own time, the Constitution on the Liturgy in Vatican II established a mandate for each of the rituals of the Church to be reviewed, renewed and rewritten for our own time and with the object of greater participation by the assembly - this was carried out over the next 10 years.
- One of the fundamental principles for the revision of the liturgy after Vatican II was that the liturgy is the prayer of the entire Church.

- Operating from this sound theological premise, it follows that the prayer of the Church, if it is to be truly that, must be of such a nature that all of the faithful are able to participate in it with understanding.
- So, apart from the obvious need for the reintroduction of the vernacular in the liturgy, there was also the need to revise the existing liturgical rites in such a way that the nature and purpose of the various elements of each of the rites as well as their interrelationship, might be clearly understood by all who assemble for worship.
- In other words, that the actions, words and elements of the liturgy might speak well and effectively as instrumental symbols of God's activity and encounter with us who gather.
- Vatican II brought into the everyday lives of people what was prior to it only the privilege of a restricted group of people, and especially with the Eucharist, it wanted it to become the "source and summit" of the life of the Church and therefore, all its members.
- Therefore, in summing up the changes in liturgy which we see today derive from the concretization of 4 fundamental points on which liturgical reform hinged:
  - 1. the rediscovery of the assembly;
  - 2. the place and importance of the Word;
  - 3. the importance of thanksgiving by the whole assembly (therefore also the newly acquired significance of the word '*eucharist*');
  - 4. the prayer of the faithful.
- These are the foundational premises on which renewal of the liturgy has been established and it must be noted that the reforms are not once and for all, but since the Church says of itself that it is in constant and continual need of renewal, so is its liturgical life in order to best express itself and the nature of God's encounter with his Church in all times.
- Also, it needs to be stated that though the new reformed rites provide a common structure for liturgical celebrations, there is provided enough scope for cultural expressions within the structure in order that the symbols used may best convey the intended meaning within a given culture.
- Let's now look more specifically at the structure of the Eucharist as each aspect is analyzed in its historical beginnings, its symbolism and the meaning conveyed through symbolic words, actions and elements.

### **Structure of the Liturgy of the Eucharist:**

#### Introductory Rites:

- As early as the mid-second century the celebration of the eucharist, already separated from its setting within a regular meal, was usually preceded by a scripture service.
- The people gathered in silence and, when all had arrived, a reader began to proclaim the Word.
- But the psychological desire to give a definitive starting point to the celebration and to provide an initial experience of prayer resulted in the gradual development of various introductory rites and formulas.
- The present Order of Mass has given the introductory rites a public character and has arranged them in a structure that is more logical and adaptable to enable the assembled people to be aware of

themselves as a unified community and to prepare them to listen to God's Word and celebrate the eucharist.

\* - **Entrance Procession:**

- Once the Church began to celebrate the eucharist within large buildings, it became natural to utilize the space and since the sacristy was located close to the entrance of the major churches, the celebrant accompanied by a retinue of ministers entered the Church and solemnly processed from the door to the altar.

- Eventually, sacristies became built close to the sanctuary and consequently the procession became more abbreviated or fell into complete disuse.

- Today it is restored as an option in which the celebrant together with the various ministers process into the Church as a visual expression of the gathered people becoming a liturgical community whose members possess distinct offices and ministries.

\* - **Entrance Song:**

- The majority of the western rites have traditionally accompanied the entrance procession with song and this is restored as the preferred option with the intention of creating an atmosphere of celebration and putting the assembly in the proper frame of mind for listening to the word of God.

- It helps people to become conscious of themselves as a worshipping community.

- In general, during the most important seasons of the Church's year, the songs used should reflect that season and should generally lead into the focus of the readings.

- If no hymn is employed, there is an entrance antiphon provided for each day of the year that is recited as the assembly stand ready for worship.

\* - **Veneration of the Altar:**

- The focus of the celebration is the altar which came to represent not only the "table of the Lord" but also became the symbol of Christ, the cornerstone and spiritual rock of the Church.

- The altar also, with the growth of the cult of martyrs, became representative of the focus of rebirth through death and symbolically represented the place where the Church of the living and the dead are united in the one worship of God in Christ.

- It is kissed and sometimes incensed in silence as a veneration of the focus of Christ's sacrifice.

- The veneration is an act of greeting which recalls that the common table is holy and sacred to the action of the assembly.

\* - **Sign of the Cross; Greeting and Introduction:**

- Signing with the cross was a gesture practised by Christians as early as the 2nd century and eventually served as an introduction to the opening prayer of the Mass.

- It is a form of self-blessing with strong baptismal overtones as having been saved through the cross of Christ.

- The greeting "The Lord be with you" is one of reciprocity calling for participation in what is to be celebrated.

- The introduction, always very brief, focuses on the special character of the celebration or upon those who are present.

\* - **Penitential Rite:**

- From very early in the Church it is understood that on the Lord's Day people are to come together to break bread and to give thanks 'after first confessing their sins' so that the sacrifice will be pure.

- It has a 4 part structure - an invitation requesting the assembly to recall its sinfulness (both personal and communal); a period of silence; a common proclamation whose first form is the **Confiteor** and finally, the priest concludes with a prayer requesting forgiveness.

- In the penitential rite the whole assembly, proclaiming itself sinful before God, manifests that it is a community ever converting, ever in need of reconciliation with God and with each other.

- The **Asperges** is also an option which is a sprinkling with water as a visual reminder of baptism and the unique character of Sunday which is a paschal feast celebrating the memorial of the Lord's Resurrection which is the source of our reconciliation.

- The **Kyrie** which is always an acclamation of praise of the risen Christ for his goodness and love on behalf of humanity as another option for the penitential rite, remembers the reconciling power of Christ.

\* - **Gloria:**

- Often sung, it is a joyful hymn whose content is primarily that of praising God and emphasizes the festive and special character of the Sunday and certain feasts

\* - **Opening Prayer or Collect:**

- The concise invitation, "Let us pray.." calls firstly for a quiet prayer and focus by everyone that they are in God's presence and then is focused by the presider in a prayer that he voices on behalf of the assembly on the specific character of the celebration and concludes with their assent in the 'Amen' response.

**Liturgy of the Word:**

- From very early in the Church, proclamation of the scriptures was a fundamental part of the eucharistic celebration and the texts chosen became chosen to highlight particular feasts or seasons and give thematic unity to the readings.

- The lectionary since the reforms after Vatican II arranges the Sunday readings in a 3 year cycle, the characteristic feature of each year being the gospel: year A is based on Matthew; year B on Mark; and year C on Luke.

- John's gospel occurs on the first Sundays of lent, during the Easter season, and on certain Sundays during year B.

- For weekdays there is a 2 year cycle: the gospels remain the same each year but the first reading varies.

- Because we believe the Word to be living and nourishing, it is another aspect of the life-giving mystery we celebrate in the eucharist as revealing a faithful, loving God who continues to be so in our own time.

\* - **First Reading:**

- The presence of the O.T. reading manifests the Church's firm conviction that all scripture is the Word of God and that there is a continuity between the 2 Testaments, both focusing on Christ.

\* - **Responsorial Psalm:**

- The psalms of the O.T. are emotional responses in song to the observation and experience of how God works in the life of the Jewish people.

- In this context they are employed as appropriate responses to the first reading, be that a sense of guilt, an expression of praise and thanks, of a sense of abandonment, of a knowledge of being cared-for etc.

- It is primarily the assembly's response to the reading which has just been proclaimed as God's Word.

\* - **Second Reading:**

- In the 2nd reading the assembly encounters the early Church living its Christian faith.

- The witness of the apostolic community provides an example for all time since Christians of every age are called to remember the love of God enfleshed in Christ and continued to be lived out by those who believe in the Good News and follow its life-giving message.

\* - **Alleluia/Gospel Acclamation:**

- "Alleluia" means "praise Yahweh (God)" and in the Christian context is associated with Christ's resurrection as the means of our salvation.

- It is often sung, sometimes during a procession of the gospel book, sometimes accompanied with an incensation and expresses the joy we have in God's plan of salvation of us in the Paschal Mystery that is about to be proclaimed in the gospel.

\* - **Gospel:**

- From the earliest times the primacy of the gospel has been emphasised by special signs of respect and honour surrounding its liturgical proclamation.

- Whereas the other readings could be proclaimed by any lector, there was always a special minister appointed to read the gospel.

- In almost all liturgies of the east and the west the gospel book was brought in procession to the ambo.

- The custom of carrying candles and incense in procession derives from imperial court usage where it was a means of showing respect to a ruler appearing in public.

- Although the people were seated for the other readings, as early as the 4th century in the east they began to stand for the gospel as a sign of respect and alertness in the presence of the Risen Lord.

- The Middle Ages witnessed the development of additional signs of honour for the gospel in liturgy.

- The making of small signs of the cross on the book, forehead, mouth and heart was seen as expressing readiness to open one's mind to the Word, to profess it with the mouth and to safeguard it in the heart.

- In 8th century Rome the book was kissed by all the clergy after the gospel was proclaimed; occasionally it was given to the whole assembly to kiss.

- By the 11th century the book itself was incensed.

- The Order of the Mass today retains these traditional signs of solemnity and veneration.

- The procession with the gospel book has been restored and whether it is simple or solemn in form, there is a gospel procession in every celebration, even if it's just the movement of the priest or deacon across the sanctuary during the Gospel acclamation and the holding up of the book after its proclamation.

- The proclamation of the Gospel is understood as Christ living and present among his assembled followers to speak to them as he calls them forth to faith and conversion.

\* - **Homily:**

- The homily from ancient times has often been spoken about in eucharistic imagery as the breaking open of the Word as the bread is broken for consumption and communion.

- Its purpose is to apply the word to the concrete life situations of the people.

- We have handed down to us many magnificent homilies of great preachers who reflected on the readings and spoke with great eloquence on their particular relevance in their own time to this particular people.

- It was always seen as a fundamental part of the eucharistic liturgy, but in time during the Middle Ages, the homily's nature as a living application of God's proclaimed word weakened -often the preacher merely read a homily from one of the past Fathers of the Church.

- Preaching, though considered important, came to be considered as extrinsic to the liturgy, but Vatican II underlined the importance of the homily and restored it as an integral part of the liturgy.

- The homily is a continuation of God's saving message which calls forth faith and conversion and is meant to be neither a scientific exegesis of the readings nor a moral exhortation, but a joyful proclamation of God's saving work for us in Christ.

\*     - **Profession of Faith:**

- In early Christianity the profession of faith was primarily associated with baptism where a candidate went down into the water and was required to confess personal belief by responding to a series of questions dealing with the Trinity; after each question and response the person was immersed.

- As the catechumenate developed, the candidates finished their preparation for baptism by memorising a credal formula and reciting it back to the bishop prior to being baptised by him.

- The recitation of the creed at Mass however, is a summary of the faith expressed by the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (451).

- The creed is a corporate profession of faith whereby the assembly responds, assents and adheres to the word of God proclaimed in the scriptures and preached in the homily; it also links the liturgies of the word and eucharist as the assembly recalls the mysteries of faith which will be again proclaimed in the eucharistic prayer.

\*     - **General Intercessions:**

- One of the components of the synagogue liturgy was a series of 18 blessings containing requests for individual and universal needs and at a very early period of Christianity, a similar prayer became a fixed part of the liturgy in both east and west.

- These prayers became called the "general intercessions" since they extend beyond the needs and concerns of the local assembly and they were often called the "prayer of the faithful" since in the ancient Church, the catechumens were in some areas dismissed before these prayers.

- It had for a long time fallen out of use in the liturgy until its restoration by Vatican II which saw it as an integral part of the celebration.

- Since the Church is both local and universal, at least one intention is usually taken from each of the following categories: 1) the needs of the universal Church; 2) public authorities and the salvation of the world; 3) those oppressed by any need; 4) the local community - they are intercessions current to the changing events and concerns of the world.

**Liturgy of the Eucharist:**

- The N.T. accounts of the Last Supper highlight certain basic actions of Jesus at the meal he shared with his disciples - toward the beginning of the meal proper he 1) took bread; 2) gave thanks; 3) broke bread; 4) and gave the bread to his disciples; toward the end of the meal Christ 5) took a cup of wine; 6) gave thanks; 7) and shared the cup with those present.

- The ancient Christian community, conscious of Christ's command that his followers break bread and share the cup "in memory" of him, continued these actions of Jesus and did so within a meal.
- For many reasons, in time the eucharist became dissociated with a meal.

**A. - Preparation of the Gifts:**

- The preparation of the altar and the gifts, prepares for and leads into the eucharistic prayer and in the preparation the assembly expresses its desire to incorporate itself in the sacrifice of Christ.
- The bread and wine are placed on the altar as the presider praises God for his gifts of creation which will become the body and blood of Christ.

\* **- Preparation of the Altar:**

- The Christian altar is by its very nature both an altar of sacrifice and a table of the paschal feast - an altar on which the effects of the sacrifice of the cross are perpetuated and a table at which the assembly comes to give thanks to God and is nourished by the body and blood of Christ.
- Its preparation at this time makes clear that something new is beginning.
- Just as the lectern was the focal point of the liturgy of the word, so the altar-table is the focus of the eucharistic liturgy.

\* **- Presentation of the Gifts:**

- One of the most ancient customs of the Church is that of the people themselves providing the bread and wine for the eucharist and at this time in the ceremony were brought in procession to the altar.
- The decrease in the number of communicants as well as the change from leavened to unleavened bread contributed to the gradual disappearance of the procession and from the 11th century was generally replaced by the giving of money.
- The new Order of the Mass has restored a simple form of the procession with representative members of the assembly bringing to the altar the bread and wine as well as other offerings to the poor or for the Church.

\* **- Offertory Song:**

- The function of the offertory song is to accompany the procession and highlight its communal aspects.
- Songs of praise and joy or those appropriate to the season can be used and need not necessarily speak of bread and wine or of offering and since the presentation and preparation are secondary rites, soft instrumental music or silence may be preferred as a more fitting psychological preparation for the eucharistic prayer.

\* **- Prayers at the Preparation of Gifts:**

- God is praised for the works of his creation; bread and wine, being the God-given fruits of the earth, symbolize our world, life and labour and are presented in view of what they will become - our bread of life and our drink of salvation.

\* **- Mixing of Water and Wine:**

- The mixing of water with wine is an ancient liturgical practice deriving from the utilitarian custom of diluting the heavy wine to make it less strong, but this came to develop a symbolic interpretation where, in the west the mingling came to represent the union of Christ with his followers, and that just as wine receives water, so Christ takes us and our sins to himself.
- The eastern interpretation was that the wine and water represent the divine and human nature in Christ.

- The prayer said by the priest in the new Order expresses the faith that through the eucharist we are to share in the divinity of Christ who first shared in our humanity.

\*                   **- Washing of Hands:**

- The original purpose of this gesture within the liturgy was not for the purposes of physical cleanliness but as a symbol of the interior purity required before celebrating the eucharistic liturgy.

- Today the washing of the hands which is done only by the principle presider is accompanied by a silent prayer from Psalm 51:2 by which he expresses his desire for inward purification.

\*                   **- Prayer Over the Gifts and its Invitation:**

- The presider addresses an invitation to the whole assembly which prays that the sacrifice we together offer, will be acceptable and pleasing to God.

- The prayer over the gifts concludes the preparation of the bread, wine, altar and assembly.

- The invitation to prayer which draws the people's response indicates the assembly's link with the priest and also distinguishes a bipolar aspect of the liturgy - it is the worship of God and the sanctification of the assembly.

- The prayer which varies according to the day, feast or season requests God's acceptance and expresses the assembly's desire to unite itself with Christ's sacrifice and gift of himself to God.

**B.            - Eucharistic Prayer:**

- Its origins are to be found in a series of table prayers required at every Jewish meal, particularly remembering the Covenant that God has established with his people.

- It is from this prototype, used by Christ and then by the apostles that the eucharistic prayer evolved.

- In the first centuries, since there were no liturgical books, the presider improvised over the *berakah's* structure with its themes of praise, thanksgiving and asking for blessing.

- It was only in the 4th century that fixed form of the prayer were devised and differed according to geographic regions.

- Unlike the eastern liturgies, the Roman rite knew only one eucharistic prayer and although its preface was variable, the rest of the prayer was fixed with, at most, some minor additions on certain days.

- Most probably written in Latin, its text goes back to the 4th century but through time underwent various elaborations until it was stabilized and edited by Pope Gregory the Great in the late 6th century.

- The eucharistic prayer was originally either prayed out loud or sung so that it could be heard by all, but by the second half of the 9th century it came to be prayed in silence.

- Its being prayed aloud with the possibility of its being sung was restored by the liturgical reforms after Vatican II.

- At that time 3 other eucharistic prayers were written based on other liturgical traditions and since then another 3 children's eucharistic prayers and 2 eucharistic prayers of reconciliation have been added for special use.

- Although the eucharistic prayer is essentially one, several elements are incorporated in them:

1) thanksgiving; 2) acclamation; 3) epiclesis; 4) narrative of the institution and consecration; 5) anamnesis; 6) offering; 7) intercessions; 8) final doxology.

- The prayer is essentially a statement of praise and thanksgiving for God's works of salvation as well as an action which makes the eucharist, rendering present both the body and blood of Christ and his saving actions.

- In language which is poetic and scriptural, the priest, addressing the Father in the name of Christ, speaks to and on behalf of the whole assembly - the priest voices the prayer on behalf of the people.

\*                   - **Preface:**

- In this beginning of the eucharistic prayer the whole assembly through the priest blesses or praises God for his wonderful works of creation and redemption.

- In its introductory dialogue the assembly is made conscious of its close union with the presider who speaks in the name of all.

\*                   - **"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord":**

- In this acclamation the assembly responds to the presider's invitation to join all creation in giving praise to the Father through Christ and is a culmination of the praise of the preface and as such, is often sung.

\*                   - **Epiclesis:**

- The Holy Spirit is called upon to make us who gather holy and to transform the gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, so that the gifts and people are transformed by the power of the Spirit - the gifts become the signs of Christ's sacramental presence as food; the people enter into communion with Christ and with each other.

\*                   - **Narrative of the Institution:**

- The words of institution are essential to the eucharistic prayer as the words attributed to Christ at the Last Supper and through which he promised to remain with his followers in this new covenant.

\*                   - **Memorial Acclamation:**

- This manifests the assembly's active participation in the eucharistic prayer and its firm belief that the whole mystery of the Risen Christ is active and present in this celebration.

\*                   - **Anamnesis:**

- The whole eucharistic action and especially the words of institution are a memorial, an actual making present of God's saving work in Christ so that their fullness and power take effect here and now - it is in the context of Christ's saying "Do this in memory of me".

- The eucharistic prayers recall Christ's death, his descent among the dead, his resurrection, his ascension and his coming again in glory.

\*                   - **Offering of Sacrifice:**

- There is only one offering action in the Mass, and it is celebrated during the eucharistic prayer - it is an offering made by the whole Church but especially the community who are assembled.

- In a prayer of praise to the Father, the assembly offers itself with and through Jesus Christ as the acceptable offering to the Father.

\*                   - **Intercessions:**

- The assembly calls on the Holy Spirit to unite, nourish and strengthen all its members, but it also asks the Father that salvation be extended not only to its own members but to all people, both living and dead.

- In this request the Church unites itself to those who have gone before us and have died and who we are assured also live in their fulfilment in communion with God and asks for their intercession on behalf of the Church in the world and the world's people.

\* **- Final Doxology:**

- The traditional conclusion to the eucharistic prayer as a solemn statement of praise and thanksgiving given in the form of a trinitarian doxology.

- The priest proclaims the eucharistic prayer in the name of the assembly which confirms and approves this action by its "Amen", the Hebrew word for "so be it", given in song or a loud proclamation.

C. **- Communion Rite:**

- **Lord's Prayer:** a petition for daily food, which for Christians also means the eucharist, and for forgiveness which its recipients are called to live out in their daily lives.

- **Rite of Peace:** a gesture expressing faith that Christ is present in the assembly, who calls us to reconciliation with nature, self and God.

- **Breaking of Bread:** just as the eucharistic bread has become the body of Christ, so those who share this one bread, whatever their diversity, become one body in Christ.

- **Commingling of Bread and Wine:** just as the double consecration of bread and wine represented the sacrificial death of Christ, the reuniting of the body and blood symbolizes his resurrection.

- **"Lamb of God":** originally a long chant repeated during the breaking of bread.

- **Invitation to Communion:** the assembly are invited to behold the eucharistic bread and to express reverence, confidence and faith in what they are about to receive.

- **Distribution of the Eucharist:** reception of communion accompanies a response in faith to a declaration that this is indeed the body & blood of Christ.

- **Communion Song:** expresses the spiritual union of the communicants who join their voices in a song of joy and is a proclamation of their unity - so it should be a simple song enabling participation by all the assembly.

- **Purification of Vessels:** the cleansing is purely functional but should be performed with reverence and preferably done after the celebration.

- **Silent Prayer/Song of Praise:** a time of silent reflection or hymn of praise.

- **Prayer After Communion:** a prayer asking for the spiritual effects of the eucharist and marking the conclusion of the liturgy of the eucharist.

**Concluding Rite:**

- **Announcements:** necessary announcements concerning all the assembled; brief.

- **Final Blessing:** requesting that God continue to bless this assembly in their daily lives.

- **Dismissal:** sending members of the assembly to do good works, praising & blessing God.

- **Veneration of the Altar:** a farewell gesture of veneration anticipating the next occasion when the assembly gathers.

- **Recessional Song:** one of joy and commission reflecting the particular day or season.

## **The Eucharist inspires and feeds the hearts and minds of the disciples for God's Mission:**

- We now come back to where we began with Luke's understanding of the church that had its seed in Emmaus – in the breaking of bread.
- The disciples were impelled by a mission to tell others the Good News they experienced.
- The church comes to be as the church engages in mission—as it crosses the boundary of Judaism to the Gentiles, and realizes that its mission is the very mission of God: to go into the world and be God's saving, healing, challenging presence.
- This is why we can say, with Vatican II's document on missionary activity, that the church is "missionary by its very nature."
- Mission precedes the church.
- Mission is first of all God's: God inside out in the world through the Spirit, God in Jesus teaching, healing, including, suffering.
- Almost incredibly—as an act of grace! – God shares that mission with women and men.
- Mission calls the church into being to serve God's purposes in the world.
- The church does not have a mission, but the mission has a church.
- Imagine what our church would be like if Christians really understood this and took this seriously.
- What it means is, first, that the church is not about the church.
- It is about what Jesus called the Reign of God.
- We are most church not when we are building up the church, but when we are outside of it: being good parents, being loving spouses, being diligent and honest in our workplace, treating our patients with care if we are health-workers, going the extra mile with our students if we are teachers, living lives responsible to the environment, being responsible citizens, sharing our resources with the needy, standing up for social justice, consciously using inclusive language, treating immigrants fairly, trying to understand people of other faiths, etc., etc.
- What we realize too is that people in the church don't have a monopoly on working for the Reign of God.
- Maybe people don't call it that, and maybe people are repulsed by the church.
- Nevertheless, they are our partners, our allies, and need to be our friends.
- St. Augustine said it wonderfully, "Many whom God has, the Church does not have; and many whom the Church has, God does not have."
- Imagine how the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, might be celebrated.
- It would be the celebration of all the people of God, and it would be the result of, a preparation for, and an act of mission.
- As U.S. lay theologian Gregory Augustine Pierce has beautifully said, we don't so much go to Eucharist as come back to Imagine what the structure of the church would be like if we recognized that it is mission that needs to be first, and not the church.
- We need structure in the church, for it is a human institution, and all institutions need to be ordered.
- But if the mission has a church, then it is the mission that has ministry, not vice-versa. Ministry would exist for the mission and not for itself.

- So many things that bog us down today would simply fall away: clerical privilege, restrictions on lay people's ministry, the role of women in the ministry and decision making in the church.
- What would be important is not people's roles in the church, but how ministers might equip people for ministry in the world.
- If mission precedes the church, and constitutes it as such, there will be no "passive" Christians.
- Baptism will be understood as the main "ordination," giving every Christian the privilege and the duty to ministry through a life lived in witness of the gospel in the world. Mission will be understood as part of Christian life.
- It certainly includes, but is not restricted to going overseas, or immersing ourselves in exotic cultures or dangerous situations.
- Many people in the church are called to this. All Christians, though, are called to minister in ordinary and extraordinary ways in their daily lives.
- Imagine how the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, might be celebrated.
- It would be the celebration of all the people of God, and it would be the result of, a preparation for, and an act of mission.
- As U.S. lay theologian Gregory Augustine Pierce has beautifully said, we don't so much go to Eucharist as come back to Eucharist, to celebrate, be strengthened for, and share our participation in God's mission in our everyday life.
- We bring our weaknesses in God's service, the needs of the people whom we meet, and the needs of the people of the whole world—even the wounded cosmos itself—to share with our Christian community.
- We receive consolation and inspiration from the scriptures and the paschal mystery for our work in the world.
- We welcome strangers, we celebrate beautifully, we always have something in our homilies for those who might be visiting, or "putting their toes in the water" by coming to our parish.
- The climax of the Eucharist is the dismissal rite, when we are once again sent forth on mission.
- Pierce's book is entitled *The Mass Is Never Ended*.
- Imagine, finally, how recognizing that the mission is primarily God's would ease our anxiety in the church.
- God has certainly given us the privilege of being co-workers, sacraments of God's movement of healing, reconciliation and life-giving in our world.
- Ultimately, though, the work is God's.
- We do our best, we work with all our hearts, but we can realize that is not all up to us.
- We don't have to burn ourselves out in ministry, we don't have to worry about our children not belonging to the church, we don't have to worry about the millions who will never belong to the church.
- As Vatican II says wisely—and the phrase is one of the favorites as well of Pope John Paul II – the Holy Spirit, in a way known only to God, offers all peoples ways of participating in the paschal mystery (GS 22).