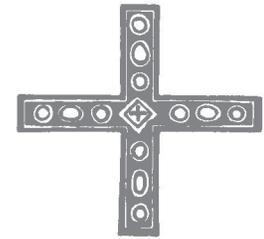




The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part I *Shaping the Catholic Imagination*

Imagination and Theology

It may seem odd to mention the Sacrifice of the Mass and imagination in the same sentence. The Mass is that great faith act that Vatican II called the fount and summit of the church's life. "Imagination," however, can suggest the fanciful or frivolous. For some, imagination is a childish exercise and is thus an inappropriate framework for thinking about something so holy as the Mass.

Some might be surprised, however, to discover that imagining is important for more than toddlers conjuring an imaginary playmate. Scientists, for example, use the imagination for guiding their research and developing theories out of their research. For instance, a best-selling book, *The Whole Shebang*, by Timothy Ferris, illustrates how scientists are imagining space today. They envision—though they cannot definitively prove—an ever expanding universe and the existence of other universes each with its own set of laws.

Imagination is also important for thinking about worship. Some theologians have argued, for example, that Catholics have a particular kind of religious imagination. Further, some believe you can scientifically demonstrate that Catholics think sacramentally. They contend we imagine God as more

similar to than different from creation. Consequently we feel comfortable using things fashioned from creation—oil, wax, wine, bread—in our worship.

Worship Shapes Our Religious Imagination

It is not only that imagination shapes worship; worship also shapes imagination. What we do shapes the way we think and perceive. That's why there has been such concern about things like the sort of language we use in worship. Language is a powerful tool for shaping how we think about God and each other. The words we use, like so many of the symbols we use in worship, mold our religious imaginations.

Our liturgies also shape our religious imaginations. The way a parish celebrates baptism undoubtedly influences whether that community gives a public or private emphasis to the baptismal vocation. The same could be said about how parishes celebrate marriages. Sometimes the marriage ritual is an elaborate setting announcing a personal relationship between two people; other times, it announces marriage as a vocation that must be generative, bringing its loving gifts to the church and world.

Shaping and Misshaping Religious Imagination

If liturgy in general shapes our religious thinking and resulting spirituality, the Mass in particular has a profound effect on our outlook. The Second Vatican Council called the Mass a primary way that Catholics “express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 2). In his recent Eucharistic encyclical, Pope John Paul II similarly notes how Eucharist is at the center of the Church's life; from it the Church draws life and nourishment (*On the Eucharist*, n. 6).

To grasp how Eucharist is a source of belief and spirituality, consider Eucharist as a kind of “rehearsal” of Christian life. Rehearsal in this sense, is not merely repetition in order to get something right, as in actors or musicians rehearsing for a performance, nor the dramatic enactment of some long finished historical event. Rather, this kind of rehearsal is a continuing, enriching encounter with a mystery that so great that it cannot be absorbed at any one time or in any one lifetime. Thus we continually return to the Eucharist, the wellspring of individual and collective faith.

Paradoxically, if worship has the power to shape faith and religious imaginations, it can also deform them. The U.S. Bishops thus noted in their statement, *Music in Catholic Worship*, “Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it” [n. 6]. The Pope's recent encyclical similarly underscores those “shadows” which lead “to confusion with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament.” [n. 10] Consequently, we must be attentive to what kind of worship we enact so that praise and belief might be truly Catholic.

Sacrifice of the Mass and Mission

One key image that helps lead us to the center of Eucharist is sacrifice. The language of sacrifice points us to Christ's death and resurrection, the ground of our belief. Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is the only true and complete sacrifice for Christians. Christ's sacrifice is a completely unexpected and undeserved gift. It is also a gift that obligates. This precious gift of the death of the Lord, once received, demands that we join ourselves to Christ's outpouring of love, and live in the spirit of his eternal sacrifice. While God's gift in Christ's sacrifice is so overwhelming that we can never respond adequately, we must yet respond. This gift-sacrifice commissions us to engage in the hard work of redemption.

One of the key gifts or “fruits” of the Mass—rehearsed continuously throughout the liturgy—is the renewal of our call to mission. This call to mission occurs, in large measure, through the powerful images of sacrifice which uniquely permeate this worship event. Unfortunately, through careless ritualization in many places, we minimize key elements of the Mass which should lead us to a life of self-sacrificing mission in the world. The centrifugal is overpowered by the centripetal, the move to others stymied by a concern for self-preservation. Sadly, for many Roman Catholics today, a spirituality grounded in Christ's sacrifice calling us to pour ourselves out in mission has been replaced by a spirituality focused on receiving communion, where we seem more concerned with our own self-nourishment and contentment.

There is widespread obscuring of this truly Catholic imagination today because many assemblies celebrate the Mass as though it were a communion service, erasing key sacrificial symbols that should propel us to a eucharistic vocation in service to the world. This erasure is reflected in the imagination of many Catholics who cannot distinguish Communion Services from the Mass. Some Catholics today can actually say, referring to Communion services, “I like Sister's Mass more than Father's.” Such comments indicate that there is something wrong with our Eucharistic imaginations. They suggest that as long as we receive communion, they have worshipped properly. Receiving communion at a Communion service, however, is not the same as the participating in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

In five subsequent parts we will explore distinctive elements of the Mass which distinguish the Mass from Word and Communion services and contribute to understanding the Mass as a unique rehearsal of our mission born of Christ's Sacrifice. We do this to contribute to the building up of a truly Catholic imagination and an authentic sacrificial-mission spirituality rooted in the one and eternal Sacrifice of Christ.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 1 of 6

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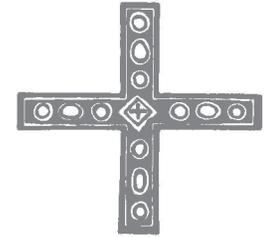
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The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part 2

The Preparation of the Gifts

This is the second of six reflections on the relationship between the Sacrifice of the Mass and our call to mission. This insert explores the meaning and importance of the preparation of the gifts as part of the liturgy of the Eucharist and as one of the elements that distinguishes the celebration of Eucharistic celebration from a Word and Communion service.

The Preparation of the Gifts

Most people know that the preparation of the gifts occurs when we sit down after the homily and the prayer of the faithful. The meaning of this ritual, however, is not always so clear. Musicians sometimes consider this an important moment for singing something they have rehearsed all week. In some communities, this is when children come back from their own Liturgy of the Word and are reunited with their families. For most of us, however, this is the time for the collection, when we put our envelope into the basket.

Amazingly many Catholics revert to language from a previous era and call this the “offertory” of the Mass. While a common belief, it is also inaccurate. The new *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (n. 73) clearly notes that this is a “preparation of the gifts” (in Latin, *praeparatio donorum*). It is not when the gifts are “offered” but when they are prepared for an offering that comes

later in the Mass. As the *General Instruction* notes (n. 79), the offering occurs later during the Eucharistic prayer. Thus, in Eucharistic Prayer III, the priest-president says *Father, calling to mind the death your son endured for our salvation, his glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, and ready to greet him when he comes again, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice.*

Sacramental preparation for Offering

If the preparation of the gifts is not a time of offering but preparation for that offering, how does it contribute to our understanding of the Eucharistic Sacrifice as our call to mission? Jesus’ once and for all sacrifice on the cross was a gift beyond our comprehension and one to which we can never adequately respond. Even though our response is inadequate, we must respond for this is a holy exchange which God has initiated. The preparation of the gifts is a key ritual for expressing that response to God’s graciousness by returning to God gifts given to us.

We return gifts brought forth from the earth through human effort and ingenuity. But this return of gifts is not done to manipulate God or appease God so that we can keep on receiving. Rather, we return these gifts of creation as a way to rehearse our own self-giving in the image of Jesus’ own

once-and-for-all sacrifice. This is what the *General Instruction* calls their “force and spiritual significance.” (n. 73).

It may be difficult to imagine how giving something like bread and wine back to God rehearses our own self giving. One insight that may help comes from Latin American theologian, Enrique Dussel. He notes that Judaism teaches us to give gifts back to God because God has enabled us to receive these gifts from the good earth through the divine blessing of rain. But Jesus adds a new twist to this gift exchange, for he revealed that the face of God is reflected in the poor. Thus, in the image of Jesus, we make a return to God by offering our selves and our gifts to God through the poor.

The US Bishops made a similar point in their pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, when they noted that our worship—especially the Eucharist—challenges Christians “to commit themselves to living as redeemed people with the same care and love for all people that Jesus showed...to work to heal the brokenness of society and human relationships and to grow in a spirit of self-giving for others” (n. 330). When we bring forward gifts of bread and wine as well as the gift of our own money (in slang sometimes called “bread”) we symbolically announce our willingness to make a return to God, in part by being a people who respond to every kind of poverty and need in the world.

The Importance of the Procession of Gifts.

One of the rituals which makes the Mass quite different from Word and Communion Services is the procession of gifts. During the Mass people bring forward gifts of bread and wine; in Word and Communion services, however, the previously consecrated bread comes from the tabernacle. This is a very different sacramental act, which does not carry the same symbols of self-giving and sacrifice. Unfortunately, however, in many places a true procession of the gifts at Mass is not done or its connection with communion minimized by bringing consecrated hosts to the altar from the tabernacle. Yet, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* notes that “it is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that in the instances when it is permitted, they partake of the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated” (#85)

In a procession of gifts, the fruit of the vine and work of human hands are prepared for offering back to God who graced us with such gifts in the first place. Here we begin ritualizing an obligating holy exchange. It is here that we also encounter Christ who identified the face of God with the poor, and modeled how every return to God in his name must exact justice from us. Thus the gifts brought forth are potent symbols of economic justice—the collaboration of God and human hands and creation—not for the satisfaction of a few, but the feeding of the many. This does not happen at communion rituals but at the celebration of the Mass. The procession of gifts is not a ritual we can afford to overlook.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 2 of 6

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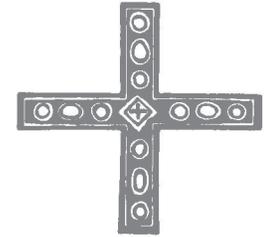
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The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part 3

The Eucharistic Prayer

This, the third of six reflections on the relationship between the Sacrifice of the Mass and our call to mission, reflects on the eucharistic prayer as the moment when the community acknowledges, accepts and deepens its own consecration as the body of Christ.

The Eucharistic Prayer

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (first published in Latin in 2000 and translated into English in 2002) is an official church document which gives important introductions to and directions for celebrating the Mass.

This is what that document says about the Eucharistic Prayer:

Now the center and summit of the entire celebration begins: namely, the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving; he unites the congregation with himself in the prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of Sacrifice. (n. 78)

What a noble vision of this central eucharistic activity! However, for many the eucharistic prayer is seldom the center and high point of the celebration. One reason for this may be that in many situations both clergy and laity have an incomplete understanding of the Eucharistic prayer. In particular, many are so focused on the Institution Narrative or Words of Consecration in that prayer that the rest of the prayer is easily reduced to simply a long setting for the Consecration.

The Eucharistic Prayer as a Creed

One way to counteract this limited perspective is to recover the ancient belief that Eucharistic Prayers are not only prayers that consecrate but also prayers that profess faith: thus they are not simply consecratory but also credal. In this prayer the Catholic community professes the pillars of its faith and its unending belief in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. Did you ever wonder why the Nicene Creed (“We believe in One God”) was not part of in the Roman eucharistic liturgy until the 11th century? Because it was not essential for celebrating the Eucharist, a point made very clearly every weekday when we celebrate Mass without the Creed. But we never celebrate Mass without a Eucharistic Prayer, which expresses our essential creed about Jesus’ dying and rising, about his offering of himself to the Father, and about his promise to send the Spirit.

The Eucharistic Prayer is also an expression of belief in the Church and in ourselves, a belief that in the eucharistic prayer it is not only God who acts, but the church is called to act with Christ as well in offering the great sacrifice of praise. Here we profess that we can and must join ourselves to Christ's self-offering. In the Eucharistic prayer we believe that Christ becomes present under species of bread and wine. There is clearly a consecration which takes place here. Yet, the Eucharistic prayer is more than a ritual action for rendering Christ present, for Christ always reveals himself for a purpose and not simply for his own sake. This is shown in the Eucharistic Prayer, where the wondrous revelation of Christ's presence, the powerful remembering of his death and resurrection are also for a very clear purpose—that we might respond to that presence and join ourselves to Christ's offering.

Two Consecrations

One way to grasp the profound implications of the Eucharistic Prayer is to think about it as a prayer that enacts one consecration and prepares for another. During this great thanksgiving the Church teaches that the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. It is also ancient church teaching, however, that *we* are the body of Christ. St. Paul makes this point infinitely clear in his First Letter to the Corinthians when he writes, "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. (12:27) This image echoed often throughout Christian history. Thus the great 5th century African Doctor St. Augustine relies on St. Paul when he writes, "You are the body of Christ, member for member."

We recognize that the bread and wine become consecrated through the words of Jesus and the prayer for the Holy Spirit. But how do we become "consecrated"? How do we become the body of Christ? It certainly begins at our baptism, and happens gradually as we grow in our Christian vocation through acts of charity, living justly and by cultivating a heart open to God's word. The Church also presumes that our worship, especially the Eucharist, shape us into the body of Christ. The Eucharistic Prayer makes a particular contribution here, for as we profess the presence of Christ on the table, and express our belief in his saving dying and rising, so do we ally ourselves with Christ. This great prayer is not only the time when bread and wine are consecrated, it is also a key moment when the community acknowledges, accepts and deepens its own consecration as the body of Christ. Thus, the Eucharistic Prayer is a key rehearsal and commitment to the mission of being Christ to the world.

Conclusion

Rather than a long "priest's prayer," divorced from the life of the baptized, the Eucharistic Prayer is actually a precious action in which all believers profess their belief in Christ's saving presence. Furthermore, though this great prayer—as in no other—we deepen our commitment to the perennial mission to be Christ's body in the world and receive the gift of the Spirit that this mission might be realized. Such is not the stuff of communion rituals, but the celebration of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 3 of 6

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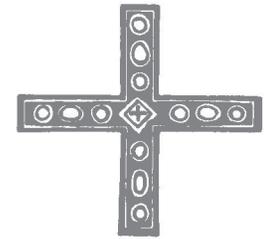
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The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part 4

The Fraction Rite

This fourth of six reflections on the relationship between the Sacrifice of the Mass and our call to mission explores the full significance of the fraction rite at Mass.

The Fraction Rite

While many people know when the preparation of the gifts takes place during the Mass, and when the Eucharist prayer occurs, many would not be able to identify the fraction rite. Admittedly, it is a somewhat modest ritual that can easily be overlooked, because it is a ritual action that many communities play down or hurry through. As a consequence, the richness of this ancient ritual and especially its sacrificial and missionary overtones are often closed to our worshipping communities.

The term “fraction” means “breaking” and another name for the fraction rite is the “breaking of the bread.” This ritual takes place during the eucharistic liturgy right before communion while the “Lamb of God” is being sung. It is founded on the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper as recorded in the Gospels. Thus, in the Gospel of Matthew, we read “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” (Matthew 26:26) The ancient Jewish

custom of “breaking” the bread, practiced by Jesus, provides the precedent for this part of the Mass. This action was so imbedded in our tradition that it was one of the original names for the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, in Acts 2:42 we read the following description of an early Christian community: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”

Besides the breaking of the bread, the “fraction rite” formerly included the pouring of the wine: certainly a more complete symbolization of the fraction rite. This practice ended in 2004, when a Vatican document (*Redemptiois Sacramentum*) instructed that “the pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another is completely to be avoided” (n. 106). Thus a portion of the fraction rite has been relocated to the preparation of the gifts, where the unconsecrated wine is to be poured into the cups needed for the communion of the faithful. This “split” fraction rite, which admittedly raises many questions, nonetheless implicitly underscores the symbolism of unity, and mission so richly celebrated throughout the tradition in these rites.

Being Broken and Poured out

According to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, this ritual action “signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ, who died and rose for the salvation of the world.” [n. 83] That document further notes that “the eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful The action of the fraction or breaking of bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters.” [n. 321]

Notice how the document links becoming “one body” with sharing and charity. Implicit here is the awareness that communion is not an individualistic but a communal event. By extension, the ritual reveals that communion is not simply for maintaining the status quo, but for extending the mission of Christ. That broken piece of bread, with its jagged edges, starkly reminds us that we belong to something beyond ourselves, that we are part of something much larger. Like a piece of bread broken off the loaf, we are a vine on the branch of Christ, and a member of Christ’s cosmic body.

Furthermore, bread broken and wine poured out not only signifies that we belong to the wider Body of Christ, but it also signifies how we are to act as the Body of Christ in the world. The fraction ritual is about breaking and being poured out. We were signed with the cross at our baptism, a foreshadowing that we are to be individuals and a community broken and poured out for others. The Christian life, as mirrored in the fraction rite, is not one of self-protection but one rather of self-emptying.

A real fraction rite also recognizes that there are fissures in the body of Christ, and that we too are sometimes a broken people. But our brokenness does not disable us from ministering to others. Rather our brokenness provides an empathetic link with a world broken by violence, greed, hatred and war. Through the fraction rite we ally ourselves to that fractured world, and we manifest our many-though-oneness as music of mercy in the “Lamb of God” fills the air. In this gesture and ritual song we not only ask that we receive mercy, but join ourselves with Christ, and commit ourselves to be mediators of his mercy and healing to a broken world.

Conclusion

Often reduced to a utilitarian act, in which a sole host for the priest-president is halved for easier consumption, and a morsel of bread is deposited into a single chalice, ministers and communities have sometimes become desensitized to this act so vitally important for the first followers of Jesus that it became the name given to the whole eucharistic action. Let the bread be broken. Let us see the lavish banquet of God’s brokenness for us, and therein discover the promise that through our own brokenness we can serve a world desperate for healing. Such is not the stuff of communion rituals, but the celebration of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 4 of 6

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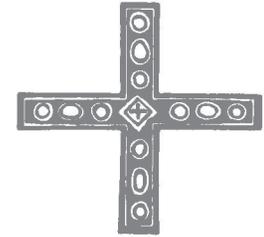
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The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part 5

Communion from the Table

In previous reflections in this series we have considered how the preparation of the gifts, eucharistic prayer and the fraction rite set the Mass apart from other eucharistic worship like Word and Communion services. These are not only distinctive rituals, but they also embody a distinctive theology. It is the Eucharist and its rituals which in a very particular way lead the community to recognize and embrace our mission to the world born of Christ's sacrifice. We now turn to the practice of communion to consider how this liturgical action has the potential for leading us further into living out the self-sacrifice gift communicated in the Eucharist.

The Call to Communion

Receiving communion is such a wondrous privilege that often the faithful give little attention to the source of that communion. In communion we are invited to experience the real presence of Christ under the elements of bread and wine. For Roman Catholics it became our tradition from the 9th century until recent times only to receive the bread, and it is that aspect of communion we will consider this reflection. In the next reflection we will consider drinking from the cup, a practice that has reemerged in the Roman Catholic community after Vatican II.

Because receiving communion is such an awesome event, throughout the history of the church the faithful have sometimes been hesitant to receive. In response, the Church often looked for ways to urge the faithful to communion. In the Middle Ages one Church council required that the faithful must go to communion at least one a year, a mandate still with us. During the early part of the 20th Century Pope Pius X lowered the age at which communion is first received to further encourage the faithful to receive communion regularly.

The renewed stress on receiving communion in the 20th century first developed within the context of the old Latin or Tridentine Mass. In that form, the ritual did not demand the full, conscious and active participation of the faithful that was mandated at Vatican II and is foundational for the reformed liturgy. It was common for the laity to be engaged in their own devotions or other activities, like praying the rosary, during the Mass. It also became common in some places for people to receive communion before, during and after Mass. In some places another common practice was distributing communion regularly outside of Mass. Even when people did receive communion at the regular time during Mass, very often such communion was not from bread consecrated at that Mass, but from the tabernacle.

Differentiating Table from Tabernacle

These cumulative forces contributed to the emergence of a religious imagination among Roman Catholics that receiving communion was always the same, whether it was during Mass or outside of Mass. While communion is certainly always the presence of Christ, the context of that communion can mediate quite different meanings. Communion received as Viaticum in the context of the Anointing of the Sick, for example, reveals aspects of the mystery of Christ's presence that are different from those revealed in a Word and Communion service. The various symbols surrounding the rite of Communion impact the way we perceive and receive Christ's presence.

From this perspective, one can understand the importance that the ritual gives to receiving communion from the table rather than the tabernacle during Mass. The current Roman Missal notes that it is "most important" that the faithful receive communion from hosts consecrated at that Mass. One reason for this stress is the complex of symbols and meanings that flow from the table rather than from the tabernacle. For example, it is from the table, not the tabernacle, that the sacrificial imagery of the dying and rising of the Christ arises. It is over the table, not the tabernacle, that the Church invokes the Holy Spirit to change both elements and people into the body of Christ. And it is around the table, not the tabernacle, that the faithful are formed to become what they eat.

When we allow the tabernacle to displace the table as the sending point of communion, when the ritual place of our missioning is not the altar but the reserved sacrament, we symbolically distance the act of communion from all that the community has experienced at that table: from the thanksgiving, the saving remembrance of Christ's death and resurrection, the offering and the interceding. When we allow the tabernacle to displace the table as the sending point of communion, we blur the very distinction between the Mass and other rituals like Word and Communion services. When we allow the tabernacle to displace the table as the sending point of communion, we weaken the linkage between communion and the sacrifice of Christ which is so central to the celebration of the Eucharist. By consequence, we can often turn communion into a private act of reception, rather than a public act of missioning to become the body of Christ in the world.

Conclusion

We receive the Body of Christ that we might become Christ's body in the world. Thus, St. Augustine made this famous statement to the baptized, "When you hear 'The body of Christ' you reply 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your Amen may ring true! Be what you see, receive what you are." One of the signs that our "Amen" rings true is our willingness to pour ourselves out in service to others just as Christ did. Christ's death on the Cross is the perfect expression of God's self-sacrificing spirit. Communion from the table is where that Sacrifice is remembered and celebrated; it is also communion from the table that more perfectly forms us in Christ's own spirit of self-giving. Let communion be shared from the table that this mission might more perfectly be ours.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 5 of 6

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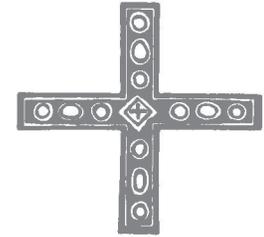
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The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission



Part 6

The Cup of Salvation

This is the last of six reflections in which we have pondered the fundamental linkage between the Sacrifice of the Mass and the Christian call to mission. The focus of this reflection is how accepting Jesus' invitation to drink his blood symbolizes our acceptance of self-sacrificing mission as the way to life.

Restoring the Cup

It was not so long ago that Roman Catholic lay people were not allowed to drink the consecrated wine at Mass. At the origins of Christianity, of course, people both shared the bread and the cup. A variety of factors, however, led to the withdrawal of the cup from the people. Some of the reasons were theological—others were cultural and pastoral reasons. There was, for example, a growing concern that the people might spill some of the precious Blood of Christ. Thus it became the custom in some places for the people to drink the consecrated wine through a straw made of precious metal. Sometimes even the priest would not drink from the cup at Mass, but similarly drink the consecrated wine through a straw. Eventually the cup was withdrawn from the folk, and by the 12th century it was common practice for people to receive the bread only.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (1965) from the Second Vatican Council reversed this trend when it instructed that “communion under both kinds may be granted when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious, but also to the laity” [55]. The 1969 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* listed several circumstances where communion under both species was permitted, and in 1970 Rome granted Conferences of Bishops around the world permission to determine when and how Communion was to be received under both species. By 1978 the US bishops had extended communion under both forms to all Masses on Sundays and Holy Days, and in 1984, the U.S. Bishops decided that the local ordinary of each diocese should set the policy for when and how communion under both forms was to be received.

Restoring a Theology of the Cup

While the practice of drinking the consecrated wine at Mass has officially been restored, and is practiced to some extent in virtually every diocese in the United States, this restored rite does not seem to have captured invaded the religious imagination of most Catholics. We have been taught for a very long time that we receive the “whole and entire Christ” when we receive just the bread or just the wine. This was the teaching of the Council of Trent, and is repeated today in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1390).

While the *Catechism* and many other official Catholic documents recognize that “the sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds,” many Catholics are not convinced. They reason that if they receive the “whole and entire Christ” when receiving the bread, why drink from the cup? Especially with all of our concerns with hygiene and spreading germs, the cup is simply not inviting to some folk. Liturgically, it seems, that receiving from the cup is a practice that is quite dispensable.

Receiving the cup, however, is not a duplication of receiving the bread, because the cup imagery is wholly different from that of the bread. Consider the cup imagery in the New Testament: how Jesus asks James and John if they can drink of the cup from which he will drink (Mark 10:38), or how in Gethsemane Jesus asks the Father to let the cup pass from him (Mt. 26:39). These passages demonstrate that strong images of sacrifice and death are closely connected with the cup. This is especially clear in the last supper narratives, when Jesus shares both the bread as his body and the cup as the new covenant in his blood. As Xavier Léon-Dufour summarizes, “The disciples may be able to become the ‘body’ of Jesus in the world but they cannot become his ‘blood of the covenant.’ The function of the words over the cup is rather to explain the condition required for establishing the new community that will be the ‘body of Christ’ on earth.” Simply put, the “body” or Jesus’ whole self mediated through bread is *what we are to become*; drinking the cup of the covenant in his blood shows *how* that is done. Thus the rich symbolism of the cup does not simply mean accepting one more “holy thing”. Rather, drinking from the cup is accepting a way of being in the world, of sacrificial living. Drinking of the cup is an invitation to receive Christ’s body on his terms, not on ours; it means, as Jesus taught us, accepting self-sacrificing mission as the way to life.

Drink from the Cup

Every member of the worshipping community has her or his own cross to bear. The church does not invite us to suffer in silence and isolation. Rather, we are invited to join our suffering with that of Christ, so that we might become his body in the world. The linkage between cross and cup cannot be overlooked. At the Eucharist we not only celebrate the joy of Christian living, but acknowledge and embrace the Calvary of our own living and dying and rising as they savor the death of the Lord. Being poured out in the image of the crucified is not an invitation to self-pity, inactivity or remorse, but impetus for mission which flowed from the side of the crucified under the form of blood and water. Let the cup be shared, for such is not the stuff of communion rituals, but the celebration of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Our Call to Mission Part 6 of 6

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