

An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

*THE WINE
CELLAR*

February, 1995, Number 3



Eucharist

*The heart of Jesus
is the wine cellar
of the Blood of Christ.*

St. Gaspar del Bufalo

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WINE
CELLAR

An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

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A Table by the Window, Please

Once I had a dream about community life and used as a metaphor the image of building a house with no closets. A place where there would be no secrets because those who lived together would be so open, so honest, so vulnerable, so fearless, that we would be transparent and transformed in a spirit of unconditional love.

I was naive to think we could build such a house. Living in community demands we have ample closet space to keep our secrets, hide our shame, stuff our resentment, stow away our pain.

My mistake was in not drawing from the supper scene where secrets of betrayal and denial were kept not in closets but under the table. So now if I were to design a new house, I would keep ample closet space for those not ready to lay their hearts on the table. I would make the dining room the largest space in the house. And closets instead of windows would line the room.

Then, once we all sat down and started telling stories, drinking wine, breaking bread, entertaining doubt, the wine steward would open all the closet doors. Secrets would come tumbling out along with regret and resentment, fears and faith. Surrounded then by these closet concerns, rather than pushing them under the table, out of sight, out of mind, we'd make a toast and drink some more wine.

Vintage wine splashing in a glass of fine crystal is a sacred sound. "Careful," we tell the steward, "don't spill even a drop of this nectar of God that will warm wounds, ease pain, lighten head and heart, and restore remnant."

But the wine steward is preoccupied because behind these open closet doors there are windows. As he pours more wine, he sees those who stand at the windows. The windows are stained glass, filled with holy

images of the poor and abandoned, the blamed and shamed, the hungry and thirsty.

“You fool!” we shout. “Stop! Look what you’ve done!” Roses stain the silk cloth that covers the table. Look again: blood stains the apron of the wine steward.

“Sorry,” he says, but not to us who are stunned and stammering insults at the one who pours the wine. “I’ll bring you another bottle. This one is empty.” But the glasses are full.

And the windows too.

As we gather once again in the wine cellar, I invite us to unleash our imaginations to see the Eucharist with new eyes and fresh hearts. To look at Eucharist from the vantage point of bended, callused knee.

Welcome, your table by the window is ready.



Eucharist

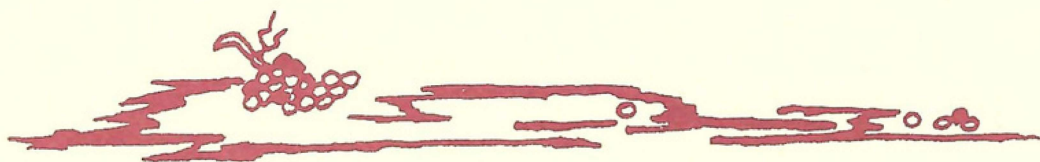
By Martha Wickham, ASC

Because he was an old man
living alone
He loved to cook, took pleasure
in his baking;
And having people in for
coffee and cake
Was a very special undertaking.

All day he worked to set his
house in order,
Spread the snowy linen, set
places for eight.
Cup, saucer, silver, folded
napkin lay beside
Each quaint old fashioned plate.

Because he thought the night was
special he dressed with care,
Laid his work clothes by,
and wore
The clothes that he reserved
for Sundays
A pale blue shirt that matched
his polka-dotted tie.

Night . . . Lights bloomed at the
appointed hour,
But no one came to drink his
coffee, eat his cake.
He turned out all the lights and
sat in darkness,
I thought my heart would break.



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A New Commandment

Eucharist as Loving, Eating and Drinking, and Serving

By Joyce Ann Zimmerman, CPPS

Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment...” (Jn 13,34 NRSV). Most of us tend to interpret this in its Scriptural context as referring to love one another, and rightly so. Additionally, Jesus gave us (at least) two other startlingly new commandments: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22,19b) and “...you also ought to wash one another’s feet (Jn 13,14).” These latter two references, of course, have a Lord’s Supper context. The new Christian commandment, really, is threefold: love, eat and drink, and serve. And it is in celebrating and living Eucharist that these three new commandments most profoundly and clearly intersect as one: to be Body of Christ, to do and be as Jesus.

Eucharist is such a mystery that no amount of words could possibly penetrate its richness. Anything that may be said about Eucharist, then, is necessarily selective and to a point. My point for this article is a simple one: Eucharist is both a celebrating and a living of our Christian identity to be Body of Christ, which may also serve as a succinct description of Precious Blood spirituality. Hence, this brief article is divided into three major sections: Celebrating Eucharist, Living Eucharist, and Eucharist and Precious Blood Spirituality.

Celebrating Eucharist

Four traditional paradigms have shaped our understanding and approach to the celebration of Eucharist over the past twenty centuries: Eucharist is covenant, memorial, sacrifice, and meal. These can serve as a springboard for searching out an alternative paradigm that may more adequately encompass the challenges of today's world and our own contemporary insights into our Precious Blood spirituality.

COVENANT. Frequently the image of "contract" is used to explain covenant, and that can be misleading. Often when we enter into contracts, our agenda is to get the best deal possible at the same time that we give up as little as possible. Not so with covenant. Our covenantal relationship in faith is initiated by a God who gives all in face of a humanity who not only is limited by its very nature in the capacity to respond, but also chooses to limit what we give. The covenantal relationship between God and Israel is the election to be God's chosen people (on God's part) and the willingness to keep the Torah (on Israel's part). Our covenantal relationship with God is largely one-sided: God gives and we (for the most part) receive. If we look at the demands of the Decalogue, what God asks of us is surely reasonable and actually represents minimal standards of conduct for those who live in community. In fact, the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures is a record of God's unrelenting faithfulness and love and Israel's equally unrelenting infidelity and enmity. In spite of our continual turning away from the covenant, God continues to proffer unequalled largess (abundant and undeserved rich giving). The mystery of the covenant is that no matter how often we stray, God always receives us back when we once again choose to live out God's commandments.

Eucharist eases these human limits and lays bare the full extent of God's largess. Now, our God is not only one who dwells among, but also is one who dwells within. For our part, the Torah is fulfilled in the Christian commandment to love one another as God has first loved us. A key concept lies in the comparative "as." How dare we love God's

way? The answer is twofold: on the one hand, we are to love to the extent that God loves; that is, with the same largess; on the other hand, we are able to love like this because by our baptismal commitment we share in God's very identity. As Christians, we live our life out of God's life and it is that God

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within who is the origin and possibility of our Christian loving. To speak of Eucharist as covenant stretches us to embrace our Christian identity as the Body living out the gift of God's largess. Eucharist is God's unprecedented gift of Self to us so that we might in turn gift ourselves to others.

MEAL. In today's North American society, the number of fast food places far exceeds good dining establishments and eating meals has become largely a utilitarian activity. Mealtime all too rarely symbolizes equality, timelessness, unity, transparency, acceptance, common values, sharing. Yet, these were the hallmarks of Jewish meals, those special times when the very invitation to dine is a sign of hospitality such that the invitation into one's home is the invitation into one's heart.

Luke's Gospel sometimes is called the gospel of meals. Luke has Jesus at meals more than any other apostolic writer. As well, there is a common structural pattern to Luke's dominical meals: introductory remarks that set the scene, confrontation between the host and Jesus, and teaching (often as parable) that makes the reign of God apparent. For example, in Luke 7,36-50, while Jesus is dining with a pharisee, a woman comes and washes Jesus' feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. The pharisee, of course, is indignant that Jesus would allow such a woman (of ill repute) to touch him. Jesus, in turn, uses the occasion to teach that the reign of God is available to sinners as well as to the righteous. Luke could easily have gotten his message across in a context other than a meal, but the meal context serves to heighten the contrast between our ways (in which division, rivalry, competition,

class struggle, and self-righteousness reign) and God's ways (in which unity, equality, peace, joy, and holiness reign).

Eucharist as meal symbolizes our leisureliness in face of God's care. It serves well to bring home to us that at Eucharist (and, indeed, in the Christian community) the first shall be last and the last shall be first; that at Eucharist we all share equally because God is our host. Our hospitable response to God's hospitality is to recognize that all are one in the Body of Christ. Indeed, by eating and drinking together we all share in the same heavenly food, all partake in the divine refreshment

Eucharist as meal invites an openness and transparency of self such that we all recognize our common identity and destiny.

of life, and all are more perfectly transformed into the divine identity of being the Body of Christ. Eucharist as meal invites an openness and transparency of self such that we all recognize our common identity and destiny. To gather around the table of the Lord is to hospitably proclaim Christ's victory over death until he comes in glory.

MEMORIAL. In everyday language, "memorial" is frequently used in reference to funerals; that is, "memorial service." The family, relatives, and friends gather to recall the life and virtues of the deceased. Although this is an important context, it is too limiting with respect to Eucharist.

To "remember" (Hebrew root, *zkr*, Greek, *anamnesis*) is a particularly rich biblical concept that far exceeds the notion of "going back to" or recalling the life of a person or the effect of a historical event. To remember is a communal activity that enables the spirit of a person or the meaning of a past historical event to be present. For example, when Israel yearly celebrates the Passover, they are doing far more than marking the historical event of Moses leading the Hebrews out of Egypt toward the promised land. The annual Passover celebration is about the Jewish (extended) family's celebration in the here-and-now of their



own passage from bondage to freedom. Israel's remembering is a participation in the actual events of passing over. Memorial makes the meaning of past events present and fruitful.

When Christians "do this in memory of me," they participate in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ; that is, they enter into the life, death, resurrection, and ascension/pentecost event of Jesus. Eucharist, therefore, is our entry into those historical realities, not as a "going back" but as a making present. Eucharist is a making present of the Jesus event. Eucharist as memorial necessarily takes us beyond the ritual action and into participation in the very life and ministry of Jesus in the here and now.

SACRIFICE. At first glance sacrifice also has a limiting notion. Most of us accept the fact that "sacrifice" is a necessary reality in our lives: parents make all kinds of sacrifices for the benefit of their children; Christians make sacrifices for their own spiritual growth. In this context, sacrifice tends to be a negative term focusing on "giving up" in order to gain a greater good. In a religious context, it may also imply self-discipline and conversion.

Eucharist as sacrifice, however, is not so negative and limiting a notion that instills in us a desire to avoid it if at all possible. In order to speak gainfully about Eucharist as sacrifice, we must draw on the notion of sacrifice as it is used in the Hebrew Scriptures.

"Sacrifice" in the Hebrew Scriptures always implies surrender to God: the one who offers the sacrifice surrenders the best and most that one has; the animal or goods that are sacrificed surrender life and existence for the sake of the common good. Israel's concept of sacrifice was a positive one; rather than "giving up," it emphasized "giving." And the giving was always from among the best and the most. Further, sacrifice was more connected to life than to death (the death of the animal and its loss to the owner were quite secondary). The surrender of first fruits or of the finest yearling was ultimately a gain, for it bound the sacrificer in covenant to God or reconciled the sinner or acknowledged total dependence on God. Whatever the reason for the sacrifice, it always symbolized Israel's relationship to God.

Eucharist as sacrifice has a unique twist to it, for Christ is both the

one sacrificed and the one who offers. Further, our baptismal identity with Christ suggests that we, too, are both victim and priest; that we, too, are called to surrender for the sake of the common good. Eucharist costs. Oh, but what a gain! The sacrifice of self in union with Jesus' death on the cross is the assurance of a share in the divine life of the resurrection.

AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM. Covenant, meal, memorial, sacrifice: largess, hospitality, participation, surrender. In these traditional paradigms we find a compelling invitation to reflect on an alternative paradigm that encompasses an inherent dynamic of both paschal mystery and Eucharist: death and resurrection. God's largess and hospitality bid us to embrace Christ's resurrection as that life-giving event that draws us into hope. Our participation in and surrender to the mystery bid us to meet death as that which impels us to lose self in order to find life. It is both a losing and an embracing.

The history of Eucharist tells us that at any given time, there was a primary focus on one of the four paradigms (since Vatican II, we have tended to speak about Eucharist in terms of a meal). Although a specific focus never totally veiled the rich reality of the other paradigms, it did tend to promote either too much of a focus on resurrection (in the case of covenant and meal) or too much a focus on death (in the case of memorial and sacrifice). This tends to skew the integrity of the death/resurrection mystery. An examination of the eucharistic ritual itself can suggest an alternative paradigm that holds the death/resurrection mystery in integral unity. Ritually, the death/resurrection mystery plays itself out in the relationship of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The necessary inclusion of a Liturgy of the Word in all our revised sacramental celebrations suggests to us that we have a renewed appreciation for the proclamation of God's Word. Furthermore, it helps us to understand that the Liturgy of the Sacrament can really be appreciated only within the context of the proclaimed Word. By implication, then, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of Eucharist (or any other sacramental rite) are inextricably bound together, and herein lies the key to our alternative eucharistic paradigm.

Certainly, central to the eucharistic Liturgy of the Word is the proclamation of the Gospel; special minister of proclamation, change of posture to standing, and other ritual indications (e.g., use of lighted candles and incense) all witness to the Gospel's importance. The proclamation of the Gospel is a prophetic utterance; we are challenged by the "Good News" to take up Jesus' life and ministry, even to the point of taking up the cross

and dying. The paradox of the Gospel makes apparent what our baptismal commitment is all about: there can be no life without death.

Certainly, central to the Liturgy of the Eucharist is the proclamation of the Eucharistic Prayer; the concentration of acclamations, the telling of salvation history, and the fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking (pouring), and giving witness to the importance of this particular ritualized narration of our salvific deeds, a narration so fruitful that Body and Blood are really present. By the narration we are invited to the messianic banquet and share in divine nourishment, whereby we become what we eat. The paradox of the Eucharistic Prayer also makes apparent what our baptismal commitment is all about: death has lost its sting because resurrection has overcome it.

In the paschal mystery, death and resurrection hold each other in a creating tension (dialectic). In Eucharist, too, death and resurrection hold each other in a creating tension: The Liturgy of the Word prophetically challenges us to take up the cross and live the Gospel, even to the point of death; the Liturgy of the Eucharist joyfully invites us to share in the resurrection by standing at the messianic table. This is Eucharist's alternative paradigm. Eucharist as creating tension holds together in a dynamic integrity the whole mystery of salvation: by dying we rise to eternal life. Covenant, meal, memorial, and sacrifice are all gathered into the single paradigm of a death/resurrection dialectic.



- Adele Vecchione, ASC

Yielding to the prophetic Word to lose our life is the path for embracing the messianic reality of finding eternal life. In this are we most perfectly conformed to Christ; in this are we most perfectly visible as the Body. Eucharist is ever re-creating us as Body of Christ. Celebrating Eucharist is our entry into the creating tension of the death/resurrection mystery of Christ, whereby we become more a perfect manifestation of his Body, the Church.

Living Eucharist

This death/resurrection creating tension or dialectic is hardly limited to Eucharist's ritual celebration. In fact, the dynamic of the eucharistic ritual parallels the dynamic of Christian living. This is to say that the reality of Eucharist is not limited to its ritual celebration (Mass), but it extends into and defines our Christian living. In other words, Eucharist cannot be understood merely in terms of "going to Mass." It cannot be relegated to a specific time and space, but rather cuts across all time and space and is received as the reality of God's

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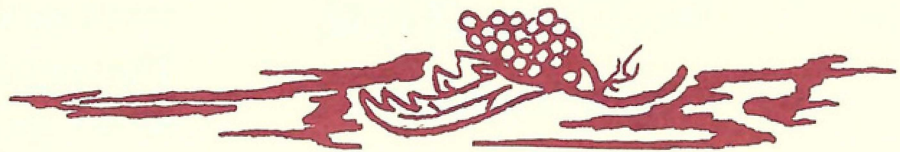
overture of love to us that is so powerful and dynamic that it is really and truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ given and received. Eucharist itself is the paradigm or model of Christian living. To be Christian is to live eucharistically; that is, to die and rise. Eucharistic action trans-

forms us ever more perfectly into the Body of Christ. This is our Christian identity; this is who we are. Living Eucharist is to be the Body broken and Blood poured out for others.

Practically speaking, this means that before there can be a truly fruitful eating and drinking the Body and Blood, there must be a concomitant embrace of the prophetic Word. Unless the Word is a lived reality in our everyday lives, we eat and drink to our own condemnation (1 Cor 11,17-34). The creating tension between Word

and Body and Blood is the dialectic between the prophetic and messianic realities of our salvation. Redemption consists in living (dying) and then living anew (rising). Living Eucharist means that there will be formidable demands on us: our wills must be surrendered to God's will; our living must change to reflect more perfectly the life that Jesus lived; our ministry must be a response to the Christ within the other we meet, whether that other is rich or poor, healthy or diseased, associate or outcast, free or imprisoned, woman or man, saint or sinner.

Living Eucharist means realizing the Gospel in our everyday lives, with all the evangelical demands and contradictions. For it is by identifying with the Jesus of the Gospels that we, first, manifest the reality of the Body which we become by sharing in the eucharistic food and, second, that we make a difference in the world. In this context it is patently inconceivable that eucharistic living is anything but just living. Righteousness and just actions are a fruit and measure of eucharistic living.



Eucharist and Precious Blood Spirituality

Just as Eucharist must be understood broader than an “unbloody sacrifice of the cross,” so must Precious Blood spirituality be understood in terms broader than Jesus’ shedding of his Precious Blood, as rich and implicative an image as that may be. Indeed, Precious Blood spirituality is really just another paradigm for Eucharist. They have parallel internal dynamics: Eucharist is the creating tension between Word and Food, between prophetic and messianic, between dying and rising, between losing and embracing, between doing and being, between covenantal meal and sacrificial memorial. The Precious Blood marks a creating tension between violently spilled and lovingly poured out, between senselessly emptied and willingly filled, between ignoble death and eternal life, between the dead wood of the cross and the ever viable tree of life.

Both Eucharist and Precious Blood spirituality have their negative aspect that we humans wish to shun; they also have their positive aspect

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that we humans wish to encompass without also embracing that dying. But this cannot be. The only way to life is through death.

Precious Blood spirituality calls us to liminal (“on the edge”) living. This is no poetic reflection, but a clear statement of a challenging way to live. Make no mistake about it: this is hardly a call to make dramatic changes in one’s life. There is more at stake than a shaking “conversion experience” that is really no more than the seed planted in sand and the shoot soon withers. The creating tension of Precious Blood spirituality (and Eucharist) makes much greater and lasting demands on us: it de-

mands that in whatever state in life or ministry we presently find ourselves, we always choose to do perfectly God’s will, just as Jesus did. Only in doing God’s will is God’s reign present. Only in doing God’s will is a peaceful and just humanity reborn. Only in doing God’s will does the seed of God’s prophetic Word take root in good soil, and grow in a healthy shoot that feeds and nourishes.

Christ’s new commandment is to love one another. But lest we turn these words into innocuous fluff that we can ignore, Jesus also gave us the commandments to share a meal and wash others’ feet. Love, true Christian love, is always played out between surrendering ourselves to being filled by God and spending ourselves in emptying service. Being filled and being emptied are the only ways to enter into the depths that Eucharist offers. They are also the only ways to enter into living an authentic Precious Blood spirituality. They are the only ways to love as God has first loved us. This is our gift. This is our destiny. This is our hope. This is our challenge.



For Reflection

How are the traditional four eucharistic paradigms of covenant, meal, memorial, and sacrifice played out in our everyday living? How are love, eating and drinking, and serving part of each of the paradigms?

How does the creating tension between dying and rising not only sum up the four traditional eucharistic paradigms, but also sum up the very meaning of Christian living?

In what practical ways does understanding ourselves as Body of Christ help us to connect Eucharist and Precious Blood spirituality?

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Body and Blood as Blasphemy

By Gregory Comella, CPPS

Our deepest desires for naked union, harkening back to the first garden, call us to go to that last table in the life of Jesus. Here is a table where our understanding and celebration of this union and Eucharist are shaped. It is a table that will always call for a contemplative watching and knowing. The draw and enticement is unavoidable and unrelenting.

We will want to watch and wonder as the “cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant” is taken, blessed, offered, received, consumed, and absorbed. We will hear proclaimed that this moment is indeed the “depth of love.” As we look and listen we will notice that the sharing of the cup, this naked union, happens in a room filled with all that makes life abundant: diminishment, denial, defeat, disowning, discomfort, distancing, and deceit. We find here the depths of betrayal. We also remember that it is here that we find liberation, faithfulness, sadness, compassion, sharing, and intimacy. All the wealth and woundedness of human life appear and crowd in that night and on that table, all mingled in that cup.

This cup and table free us from the temptation to forget that we are blasphemously created and here recreated in God’s image.

At this table, we are always and faithfully reminded that God's longing is for our freedom. Here God assures us that our human affliction is known and answered. Here we see our God and our own sense of awe is aroused by taking and eating this woundedness and brokenness; our sense of mercy and justice and forgiveness is surfaced.

This is indeed the cup that saves. Raising up the cup we will recall and relish the deep roots of the word "saving," which is less about "rescuing" and more about the salvation that comes when we are set out in the open and have a spacious room made for the whole of who we are.

Jesus the Blasphemer

Perhaps at this final table an original perception of Jesus is confirmed: the man blasphemes! Although many titles and descriptions for Jesus are rich, true, and lend themselves to meaning, within the context of that table and our Eucharist, none more breaks open a new covenant like the Christological title, Blasphemer. The blasphemy becomes undeniably stark and painfully difficult to avoid when that cup is offered and our bodies and blood mingle with and become quite indistinguishable from the body and blood of God. No other perception or title jars, surprises, offends and awakens us as does this title, Blasphemer. No other title might highlight and clarify the mission of this man. No other title more aptly indicates Jesus' understanding of who we are as a people who raise the cup, drink of the cup, and offer it to one another. We can begin to understand what indeed makes this new covenant uniquely new.

Jesus addressed this perception and label early on in his life. The raising of this cup is but a culmination, and the drinking a consummation of his shocking and unsettling union of sacred and profane throughout his life and at the many tables prior to the last. He is perceived as being friendly toward the profane and powerless. He stands and walks among those warranting separation and walls, barriers, distance, and the garbage dump dwelling places.

Rather than assume a rescuing posture at those tables and in those

dwelling, he instead reclines, drinks, eats, and appears to raise up a blasphemous cup of blessing in those places and with those people where barriers and clear boundaries were thought to be legal, right, justified, and holy.

At these tables he clearly blasphemes by inviting friendship and intimacy with the unclean and unlikely. This blasphemy is characterized not only by an exaggerated, excessive, and extreme perception of his own goodness and godliness but the startling and dangerous conviction that others were likewise formed and created. Friends and leaders of the law wondered whether Jesus was not muddying the waters of the holy and the human. Since uniting the holy and the human was blasphemy,

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his contemporaries began to conclude that Jesus suffered from an apparent distortion of vision: a seeing of godliness where that godliness is thought to be most absent. Is it not a mingling of holy and human that the old covenants viewed as divided by enmity, opposites, at war with one another? Was Jesus proposing to render this old way obsolete? Blasphemy in the life of Jesus was about bridging clean and unclean, first and last, the least and the greatest.

The charge at his trial, then, is not surprising, but rather a consistent consequence of a life of faulty, muddled vision: a life of seeing God in all things and most poignantly in places where God could not possibly be. The sentence and place of execution befits the crime: blasphemous blood and life could not be spilled in view of upright persons and on sacred streets of the “holy city.” Better to mock him and execute him surrounded by those he proclaimed were so holy, so godly; who were surrounded by garbage and separated by the gate and wall.

Yet, powerfully blasphemous images and words are etched on our memories. Blood that is shed in disgrace and humiliation rips the temple



Photo by Dien Truong, CPPS

curtain of separation and cries for unimaginable inclusion of those kept afar. The blood of Jesus is faithfully blasphemous. He utters one last blasphemy in painting a picture of paradise and naked union with God to a fellow criminal sharing that garbage dump dwelling of death.

A More Perfect Union

It is at our eucharistic tables where this union is unmistakable, graphic, tangible, earthy, disarming, and difficult to deny. For if our tables are faithful to the original blasphemy they must be a mixture and fullness of human wonder and wound. The memory is that Jesus longed for this union (for which he prayed in John 17). He is remembered as having passion at that last table for consummation of a life long desire to close the gap, to restore the original union, to wake us to something long forgotten, to remind us of the image of God we are, though that image might be buried, covered, missing, or lost. He is remembered as wanting to be taken so that he could live in, draw near to, be naked with, and so touch the very parts of who we are that we might deem as most human and so most devoid of the holy.

Was the joy at that final table about Jesus being able to be in communion with the godly image of who we are? Was he in communion calling that to our awareness? Approaching the table, our “Amen” is nothing short of an unwavering and stubborn belief in the fundamental

godliness of all human life.

Our hands are not empty approaching this table. They hold out a life that is abundant, colored by contradictions and alternations. Yet, we are in the very image of the One who breathed into this body that we hold out for communion. Our "Amen" is a firm "Yes" to the inheritance that has been promised and given to all those who have been freed from slavery and drawn to a new friendship and partnership with God. Leaving the table, we know we have been reminded once again of who we are, blasphemous though it might be.

Our sacred texts are faithful in recounting the fear that grips us when we are called to be godly and to do the very works of God. We have memories of clay feet called to walk on water. Our "Amen" at that table is a "Yes" to that walking, trusting that we are in the very image of the One who called us out of the boat. Contemplative watching at this first Eucharist reveals why this moment in our life together is so central to our identity. Washed and welcomed feet are invited to walk on water and to do even greater things than the one who washed them.

The body and blood of Christ is reminding us of the union that has made our own body and blood indistinguishable from God's. A crucial moment at that table is when the blood birthed a new covenant characterized by friendship rather than servitude. A cup of blessing is joyfully and confidently raised and shared proclaiming a conviction that indeed life is the stronger over the death dealing temptations of self hatred and the violence it breeds.

The believer will never fail to ask the Blasphemer: what do you see that I don't? And, indeed, Blasphemer, are you not blind? Why do you continue to blaspheme in claiming that if you go and send the Spirit we will do even greater things than you? At table how is it that you mingle with all that is wound and broken and lie, holding fast to the wonder of our godliness? How is it that you kneel before us, touching and washing feet that are frightened and free, faithful and in flight, believing and disbelieving, knowing places and peoples we will walk and stand with? Why draw near and dance with feet that will take us to a night fire where we will say, "We know you not?"

It is just such honest conversation with the One who blasphemed in calling us friends that the mystery of faith is affirmed and we choose

to believe again that our blood is precious as is the blood of all that lives.

Saving blood is rendered void when we diligently mend torn curtains while insisting on the differences between human and divine; when we place our best foot forward in the temples where we live and worship. The blood of Jesus is a static substance when we understand ourselves being saved by that blood as though being rescued magnanimously and without cause rather than allowing the richness of that saving mission draw us, attract us, by setting us out in the open, making spacious our lives, making room for all that has been denied, feared, divided, and forgotten.

The blasphemous love of God will invite us to believe that our faith has healed us. The blasphemy calls us to believe the God who knows of our godliness and depends on it.

Living the Memory

The last words we hear, “Do this in memory of me,” haunt us. We know that this phrase has been minimally reduced to a consecration mandate given to future priests. Yet further contemplation broadens the vision. The entire evening is to be reclaimed. Friends are to “do” what Jesus did: the intimacy with brokenness, the union, the washing of feet, the belief in our creation, claiming again a birthright image. We are sent forth and commissioned to be body and blood that it is no less blasphemous than the one who first longed to close the gap and to unite with that which we had been told was separate.

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So this new family, this new covenant, is nothing less than a household of friends courageously uttering blasphemies in the face of the world that call into question and sometime cynical doubt, the Good News: all that was once considered afar, distant, outside has, by blasphemous blood, been brought near. In consuming that blood of Christ, we consummate a union longed for by God and us.

At our tables we won't tire of recalling the blasphemies of Jesus, his claiming holiness and godliness for those considered most distant, disordered, disadvantaged and disempowered. Sometimes we might squirm at the thought; sometimes be disarmed and humbled; sometimes baffled at how to understand evil in the midst of it, and reluctant and frightened as we take up the cup, wondering what we will become of us in this holy communion so unimaginably and uncomfortably inclusive.

Leaving that table, empowered by the memory of the blood of Jesus, our body and blood will experience a compelling attraction to be blasphemous. We find ourselves seeking out the distant and the disadvantaged of our day and our tables will become bigger than when we first entered the room.

We will discover among us a growing tendency to be easily spontaneous, and often offended by exclusion, rank, dualism, and the ungodly distancing of human and divine, his blood and ours. We will find this thought and behavior in ourselves, our church, and our world to be distasteful, wrong, and sometimes enraging, all of which will loosen our tongues, curing that which is mute.

Some might observe us as being lopsided, lax, or loose. We might well be accused of overemphasizing the fundamental goodness of ALL blood and life. There might well even be moments of ridicule and mockery as we admit that we don't know how a new household of God would look were all people treated as though they were gods.

Without little doubt, we will also experience the charge and the trial of the first blasphemer. We might also be forced from the mainstream finding ourselves outside the gates for having led the people astray. Being newly displaced and perhaps finding ourselves, maybe for the first time, to be strangers and aliens in this new place, it might take us aback as those who have always lived there provide us with a table, some of their bread and a cup to be raised up and shared. In that



moment we might know for the first time what it is to “go to him, then, outside the gates and bear his humiliation, sharing in his degradation” with an odd and surprising peace and joy.



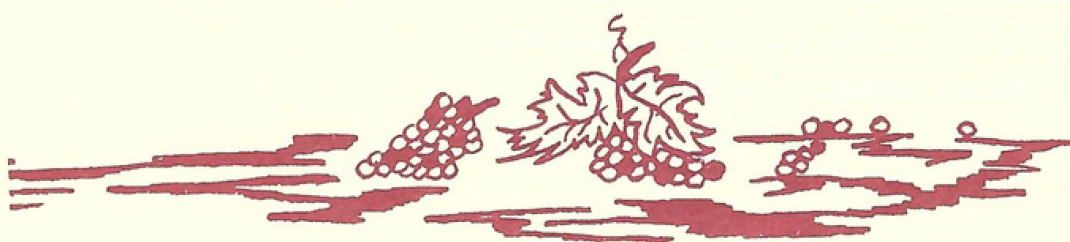
For Reflection

What is your initial reaction to the idea of Eucharist as blasphemy? What is the most disturbing thing you read in this article? What is the most disturbing thing to you about the Eucharist of body and blood? Why? In what way are we as Church disturbing to our culture and times?

Who is not finding room at the altar in your parish or in your worship community? Who is not finding room at the altar of your heart and why aren't they? What would we want to change during our liturgies to reflect the message of this article?

What does the word “save” mean to you? How is this word used in this article? Share your understanding of the connection between “union” and “salvation” as discussed in the article.

In what ways does your spirituality and ministry reflect the utter godliness of others in your life? In what ways do you connect body and spirit, blood and spirit in your daily life?



Credo

By Geraldine Hotze, ASC

I believe --

in the God of the Meal

in the God who moved Abraham to
provide a simple desert meal
for strangers passing by

in the bond of table-community

in Jesus, the Christ, who by His Presence
at so many meals emphasized
the intrinsic and sacramental value of meal

in shared meal as an invitation to friendship

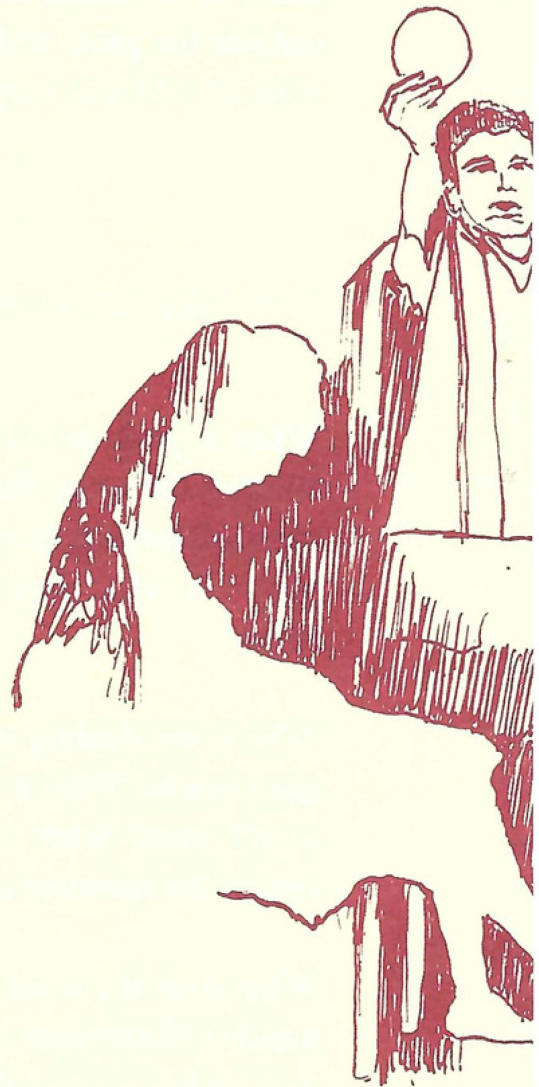
in shared meal as a sacramentalization
of the bond of friendship

in shared meal as eucharist
and pointing to Eucharist

in the sacredness of life and all that nourishes life --
bread, wine, fruits of the earth

in meal-time as time for remembering how God
enters our lives and blesses them

in meal-time as covenant time in imitation of Him
who, at table set with simple foods, established
“new and eternal covenant” in His Blood





Ergo, I believe --

in the priestly activity of meal
preparation and service

in food preparation as contemplative
action and prayer

in responsible and respectful handling
of fruits of the earth -- Gift of God
to become the meal that nourishes
and sustains

in loving, careful, beautiful service --
a candle, a flower, a splash of color --
so that those who share may be
reminded of the Lord of the Meal

in the simple meal that does not overly
burden those who prepare and serve
so that all can be done in peace and joy

in the open table, desert hospitality --
the "stranger" is always welcome,
there is always room for one more

in kitchen as warmest, holiest, friendliest
room in the house.

And, finally, I believe --

in loving Creator who still provides
bread and wine
to become Body and Blood.

The Lament of the Grape

By Madeleine Kisner, ASC

How lovingly the Vine-Dresser tends the Vines!
Painstakingly He plucks and prunes the mellowed fruits,
Soon to be squeezed of their Precious Blood
In the Wine-Press of agony and suffering.

Why this ruthless treatment? the Grape asks.
Patiently I have clung to this charming Vine, green and golden,
Ripening to a rich red as I slowly don the cloak of royal purple.
Poised in a naked cluster, I am ripped from my shelter
and forced to bring to term
My pregnancy with the breaking of Birth-water.
The dying tendrils let go and expose my Blood-red succulent wares
To those who long for life and the cheerful nourishment
In a mystical Wine on their journey to Love's Blood-union.

Understanding my mission, I finally surrender
My Life-Blood to my Lover's heralding,
Inviting all to "drink freely" of the
Choice Wine of Loving Union --
Through Him,
With Him and
In Him.



Graphic by Alan Hartway, CPPS

Eucharist as a Way of Life

By Mary Pierre Ellebracht, CPPS

The Constitutions of the Precious Blood sisters of O'Fallon (MO) state: "In celebrating Eucharist...we allow the redemptive work of Christ to transform our lives and to overflow into our community efforts and mission."(1) The Eucharist is indeed a way of life in that profound sense in which Jesus called himself the Way. It is the culminating celebration of the life begun in baptism. That is why, in the reflection which follows, I want to highlight how we allow the redemptive work of Christ to transform our lives.

Gathering to celebrate Eucharist is itself a symbol. It points beyond the simple act of bringing bodies into close proximity where each will offer his/her own worship to God. Gathering to celebrate even points beyond the gesture of persons coming together, interacting with, and influencing one another in response to God's call. Jesus is present in this assembly (2), not in a static manner, but as influencing all by his glorified synergistic presence. Jesus Christ, the Risen One, is active right within our human interactions -- whether these be well-wishing and forgiving, or standing to join the opening song, or responding to the formal greeting and call to repentance issued by the presider. We gather to celebrate the reality that we are the Mystical Body of Christ.

Hence, *Dominus vobiscum*, could well be translated in the affirmative, “The Lord is with you,” for it is a reminder and an affirmation of the fact that Jesus Christ is already present and acting among us. The opening prayer gathers the desires of the entire assembly into one and thus readies us to enter together into the Liturgy of the Word.

The Liturgy of the Word

In the Liturgy of the Word, Jesus speaks very personally, giving a unique message to each one and to all as an assembled people. We need to keep in mind that the Liturgy of the Word is dialogue; it is a living interaction between God and human beings. God’s Word engenders its own convictions; it touches the heart where new insights emerge; and it releases its own energy providing strength to the human will to carry the insights into actions.

To illustrate this profound movement, so gentle, so transforming, I recall hearing the familiar parable, “The reign of God is like a buried treasure which a man found in a field. He hid it again, and rejoicing at his find went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Mt 13,44-46) I have heard these words a hundred times, but then last year, they generated in me a conviction and an energy I had never experienced before. When those words were proclaimed, I knew in my whole being that for the sake of possessing this treasure, Christ, I would let go of (sell) a motivation, namely, the compulsive need to make a good impression, which had been plaguing me over 60 years. And I knew for the first time, that I have not only the desire, but I also have energy, God’s own energy, to do it.

The attitude I arrived at was within my human potential, even as it was at the same time called forth by a vision that can be recognized only in faith. All Scripture readings are first and foremost proclamations of God’s wonderful deeds affecting us here and now. It is simply true that “God’s word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hb 4,12).”

To exemplify how the Liturgy of the Word celebrates what it

proclaims and thus makes the “wonderful deed” of God an event for and in us today, I shall reflect on the readings for one single occasion: the texts for the Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle C. We shall do this reflection in two parts: the meaning of each pericope in itself and for us, and the significance that lies in the impact which the several Scripture selections have upon one another.

We begin with the Gospel. Luke’s account of the transfiguration



- Adele Vecchione, ASC

(9,28-36) contains the full impact of a story well told. One has to hear it to savor it to the full. As we allow images and ideas to emerge, we may actually experience how the climbing and the prayer - - Jesus goes onto the mountain to pray -- do become true openings to God. We may also recognize how the circumstances of our lives today become part of the opening of our hearts to God. The impact his prayer has on Jesus shows itself in

the radiance of his face and the brilliance of his garments. As Jesus dialogues with Moses and Elijah, i.e., with the established law and also with the forward thrust of prophecy, he sees how the current circumstances of his life fit into the meaning of his life and mission. That moment of truth for Jesus is powerful enough to stir the disciples and to call forth Peter’s extroverted exclamation about its “being good to be here” and “building three tents.” But there is still the cloud calling for further revelation.

The story is not over. The voice from the cloud names the divine-human reality that is being acted out: “This is my Son, my chosen One. Listen to him.” For Jesus and for the disciples these words carry the memory of the event that took place on Jordan’s bank “where Jesus arrived as a carpenter and left as Messiah.”(3) Now his mission as the

chosen One of God is being carried a step further. He comes with questions about his frequent confrontations with the Jewish authorities and he learns that these are becoming the pathway to his condemnation and crucifixion. Thus they are destined to play a significant role in his carrying out the will of God for our salvation. That entry into the divine will bring Jesus joy. At the same time it calls us and gives us energy to enter into God's plan for us in and through the current circumstances of our lives.

As we see Jesus striving to know his Father's will, we recognize how completely human he is. We see also the tremendous potential that lies within humanity itself: the capability to recognize with joy that one is being "caught up" into the plan of God's infinite love. The words, "This is my Son, my chosen One," spell out this reality with unction. In the presence of Jesus' identification of himself and his mission, we can only take a long loving look in silence, and simply be present to what has been announced. With the disciples we remain silent.

The first reading (Gn 15,5-12, 17-18) represents a kind of preview for the message of the Gospel. There is as much unsaid as said in this account. As Abram stands there out under the stars, his beloved wife,

Sarai, is present to him in a very significant way. God promises that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. But how can this be given Sarai's condition? Who is not able to identify with that cry from the heart, "How?" Abram has faith, which holds a generativity of a transcendent kind. Then Abram enters into a ritual, which expresses his entry into God's presence. We can allow Abram to walk us through the rite with him. We can be present to the flaming torch and the smoking pot as we walk between the bro-

*We can allow Abram
to walk us through
the rite with him.
We can be present to
the flaming torch and
the smoking pot
as we walk between
the broken pieces
of our life.*

ken pieces of our life. There we can allow God to renew the divine covenant with us.

The selections from Psalm 27 assure us lyrically that there will be light for the journey into the unknown and there will be healing of our brokenness as well. The spark of awareness is so deep and real:

*You, my heart seeks,
hide not your face from me,
wait for the Lord, be strong, wait for the Lord.*

Now secondly, put this entire reflection into the dynamic of celebration. This will show the movement which begins with a very cloudy and smokey and uncertain first reading where the heart knows but a first glimmer of the thrill of being covenanted with God. Singing the Psalm in dialogue form expresses and furthers the inner movement. Reassurance and hope keep mounting each time we join in singing: "The Lord is my light and my salvation." In the second reading Paul's insight about our citizenship in heaven fits well in the movement of the event of this day. Finally, when the Gospel brings this momentum to a climax, we know that we are on the way, the Christian way with Christ into the reality of the Paschal Mystery. In this celebration the Word has become event for us today. Homily, Creed, and Intercessions lead us further.

Liturgy of the Sacrament

Although the shape of the Liturgy of the Sacrament is relatively fixed, it differs profoundly from occasion to occasion. This is because we who enter into it are different. Each time we come to Eucharist, we are formed anew by the Word proclaimed and celebrated on that occasion. Thus on this Second Sunday of Lent in Cycle C, we move into the dialogue that introduces the Eucharistic Prayer as an assembly with new insights and commitments, with fuller identification with Christ in his movement toward fulfilling God's plan for human salvation.

We enter the Liturgy of the Sacrament, then, acknowledging who we are and where we are going. Praise and thanks to God is our over-

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Preface.*

all attitude at this point; and that stance is maintained throughout the entire Eucharistic Prayer. We are turned outward toward God while recognizing that God resides right within our hearts as human persons.

Our experience of the event which the Liturgy of the Word has begun, finds specific ritual expression in the Preface. As we remember the wonderful work of God amid our thanks and praise,

we know that God's saving deed is present now: "On your holy mountain (Jesus) revealed himself in glory in the presence of his disciples ... He wanted to teach them through Law and Prophets that the promised Christ had first to suffer and so come to the glory of his resurrection (Preface for the Second Sunday of Lent)." Notice how these words of the Preface carry the event that the Liturgy of the Word began right into the Eucharistic Prayer.

At the heart of this prayer, which gives utterance and ritual expression to the assembly's attitude of thanks and praise, there beams the brilliant and many-faceted diamond, namely, the Narrative of the Institution and Consecration.⁽⁴⁾ Here is story par excellence, the story which brings into being what it narrates. We need only be filled with awe as we listen to it. Its original setting was the paschal supper: "On the night before he died..." The reality of that holy time and place is present for us and in us today, when the Narrative of the Institution and Consecration is proclaimed.

As we move through these sacred words, allowing ourselves to be impacted by each moment of truth they utter, we cannot miss some sparks of recognition and connection which may flash from one or other of the faces of this diamond. "He broke the bread" sheds meaning on the brokenness of Abram's life and our own. "This is my body which will be given up for you," reveals the destination of Jesus' Tabor insight and invites us into that same journey. Gesture and

narrative move on: "...drink the blood of the new and everlasting covenant..." These words open up the meaning of God's covenant with Abram and Sarai, as they call us anew to live fully our own baptismal covenant. On this day, given the event in progress, the most appropriate acclamation -- standing ovation, really -- would be: "Lord by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free, you are the Savior of the world!"

We feel the need to name it all again taking yet another long loving look at the entire sweep of God's wonderful deeds, the Paschal Mystery: passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming of Christ in glory. We savor these deeds once more, realizing that we make present what we remember. We do it all in the power of the Holy Spirit. Nourishment and social bonding happen at a meal, so we pray "that all who are nourished by his body and blood may ... become one body, one spirit in Christ." Of course, we remember the living and the dead.

The Great Doxology contains in concentrated form all that preceded it. It is our climactic utterance of awe and admiration. It sums up the key movements of our hearts that have been expressed in the prayer thus far. "Through him, with him, in him," ring out as the gifts are raised on high, and we affirm Christ's living, personal presence in his paschal sacrament of dying and rising. In the phrase, "in the unity of the Holy Spirit," we recognize the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, even as we thrill in knowing that we stand united as an assembly in the unity which the Holy Spirit is at this moment convening and sealing. Our "praise and thanks" is nowhere else uttered so crisply and clearly nor affirmed so resolutely as it is here: "All glory and honor is yours, almighty Father!"

The entire Eucharistic Prayer has been a call for an affirmative response, a commitment from those celebrating. Now, the mounting crescendo of praise in the doxology releases a volume of psychic and spiritual energy that breaks out in the "Amen." This Amen gives us pause, too. "It is commitment, vulnerability, and a willingness to let things happen." (5) In some ways this Amen is our most important word of the entire prayer -- indeed of our entire lives.

The Lord's Prayer is the overture to our partaking of the sacrament, the holy meal. The environment of this meal is unique by reason

of the event being celebrated on this Second Sunday of Lent, Cycle C, just as the meal celebrating a birthday differs from the dinner on a wedding anniversary even if the same kind of food is served at each meal. Today, we enter the mystery of Christ's transfiguration as we accept the food and drink of which Jesus said: "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink." There is no doubt that we are ingesting the whole Christ and nourishing our entire beings in this sacred meal on the occasion of our entry into the mystery our transfiguration.

The social bonding which happens as we face one another around the table of the Lord has a special character today also. The words, "This is my Son, my beloved," reverberate in our hearts now as we are being more consciously bonded. Together we have a fuller sense of being the mystical Christ "in whom is all my (God's) delight."

We need a few moments of awe-filled silence as we allow the meaning and impact of this day's event to pervade our entire beings. A brief, communal prayer after Communion serves to refocus us as assembly. We are now more fully a communion in Christ. Thus we have been readied, not for an ending, but for the sending; we are prepared to allow this Eucharistic event to "overflow into our community efforts and mission."(6) We have been enabled to "go forth to love and serve the Lord."

In summary, then, we see a bit more clearly now how it is that the Eucharist becomes our way of life. We walk not only in the company of Jesus, but as people gathered in Christ's name, as his Mystical Body. Christ is walking in us who are thus gathered into him and are responding to his call. Today we, who ascend the mountain to take our hesitations and uncertainties to prayer, are the Mystical Christ. In dialogue with the Word of God, and then in eating and drinking the very sacrament of his body and blood in the mystery of Christ's total self-giving, we are truly empowered to continue the mission of Jesus, and "to be and to experience Christ's redeeming presence"(7) throughout our daily lives and in all our activities.



Notes

1. Constitutions, Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, p. 23.
2. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #7.
3. Jim Dinn, Familiar Voices: Advent Themes of Nonviolence, Pax Christi, USA, 1994, p. 9.
4. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, #55. What we are more used to calling "words of consecration," this document names, "Narrative of the Institution and Consecration."
5. Peter Fink, SJ, "Three Languages of Worship," *Worship* 52, p. 571.
6. Constitutions, Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, p. 23.
7. Mission Statement, Sisters of the Most Precious Blood of O'Fallon.

For Reflection

Using the process outlined by the author, take the Scripture readings for the Second Sunday of Lent (Cycle C) and sit with them awhile. What ideas and images emerge from your experience of praying with these Scriptures?

In making the connections between liturgy and life, how are you making present in the world what you remember and celebrate at the Eucharist?

The "Amen" at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer "is commitment, vulnerability, and a willingness to let things happen." As you reflect on Eucharist as a way of life, how is your participation in the Eucharist challenging you in terms of commitment, vulnerability, and a willingness to let things happen?



Communion from the Cup:

Poetic Images, Practical Possibilities

By Richard Bayuk, CPPS

Unfermented grape juice is a bland and unpleasant drink, especially on a warm afternoon mixed half-and-half with ginger ale. It is a ghastly symbol of the life blood of Jesus Christ, especially when served in individual antiseptic, thimble-sized glasses. Wine is booze, which means it is dangerous and drunk-making. It makes the timid brave and the reserved amorous. It loosens the tongue and breaks the ice especially when served in a loving cup. It kills germs. As symbols go, it is a rather splendid one. (1)

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (1969) states: “Holy Communion has a more complete form as a sign when it is received under both kinds. For in this manner of reception a fuller light shines on the sign of the eucharistic banquet...and of (its) relationship to the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom.” (240) It was not until December 1978, however, that Catholics in the United States received permission to partake of both bread and cup at all Masses. Although the present practice is a reintroduction of an ancient and long-standing tradition, our experience of communion from the cup is recent (and in numerous places, still non-existent). In addition,

because of centuries without the cup in our experience of communion, the rich, varied, and multilayered signs and meanings of the cup await rediscovery and a renewed appreciation. Unfortunately, despite the centrality of the cup to our celebration of the Eucharist, there remains some significant residue of complacency, hesitation, and perhaps disinterest regarding this practice.

This article is written as a collection of “sight bites” around the issue of communion from the cup, including historical background, reflection on the symbolic nature of liturgy, Precious Blood spirituality, and observations and suggestions. The quotes scattered throughout are loosely related to each other and the text. They are meant to be more evocative and suggestive, perhaps a catalyst for reflection and discussion.

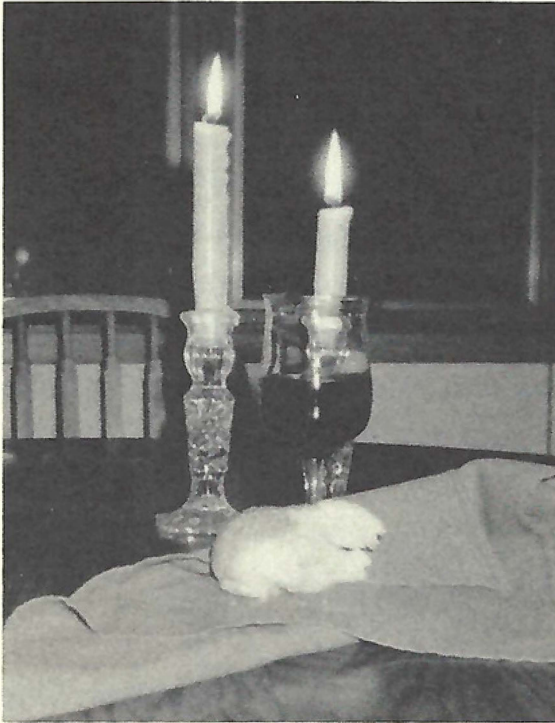
The Sacred and the Profane

The history of the Christian Eucharist is long and complex. One constant has been the original pattern: a fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking (pouring), and giving. Through centuries of development, that action remains and is recognizable.

In the first centuries already, there began a gradual move towards a distinction between laity and clergy, who were not originally differentiated in any significant way. As more emphasis was placed on the cultic and ritualistic aspects of ministry, the presbyter took on a more sacral character. This coincided with a shift in the idea of the sacred. Before Constantine, the entire church was considered the arena of the sacred which was in opposition to the profane world. Eventually this difference came to be understood and defined as one between sacred clergy and profane laity within the church. The introduction of clerical celibacy is but one indication of this trend.

The increasing separation of clergy from laity (significantly experienced in the liturgy) led to the suppression of the meal sign in the Eucharist. A growing obsession with sinfulness and unworthiness helped mold an understanding of the clergy as mediators between God and the merely baptized. Over the course of the first millennium, the

practice of receiving communion by the laity increasingly waned and finally became a trickle.



Although the Roman Church for almost twelve centuries continued to officially resist attempts to truncate the full symbolic action of both eating and drinking, the reception of the cup by the laity was prohibited by law by the end of the 13th century. It was ultimately a victim of the preoccupation with distinguishing sacred from profane. Even the fear of spillage, the anxiety about convenience, and the arguments about necessity, were filtered through this obsession. Once the laity's relationship

to the cup had been broken, the attitude toward this fuller sign was further damaged by the events and controversies surrounding the reformation. Because the reformers wished to maintain the cup for all, the desire for the same among Catholics was even perceived as a sign of disobedience to the church and to the Lord (quite an irony, considering the words of Christ, "Take this, all of you, and drink...").

Of what happened later in the evening nothing definite can here be stated. None of the guests later on had any clear remembrance of it. They only knew that the rooms had been filled with a heavenly light.... Time itself had merged into eternity. Long after midnight the windows of the house shone like gold, and golden song flowed out into the winter air....The vain illusion of this earth had dissolved before their eyes like smoke, and they had seen the universe as it really is. They had been given one hour of the millennium. (2)

Since 1978, partaking of the cup has little or no sign value as rebellion against authority. But there is still a significant measure of it being an indicator of lay/clergy distinction. And not only is the cup still perceived as clerical by many, it is still seen as Protestant by some. The clerical aspect is shown in practical ways. How many still use a separate chalice for the presider and different cups for the laity at communion. This is parallel to the use of and reference to the large host as the "priest's" host. This understanding, which flows directly from an all too common experience of our present Eucharists, must gently and quietly and quickly come to an end. Respecting roles and ministries within liturgical celebrations is not at all the same as maintaining or imposing useless and harmful divisions, which have no basis in theology, history, or even common sense.

More important is that we in fact commune with the full sign at every Eucharist, bread and cup. This takes more than persistent and patient instruction; it needs consistent and clear experience. We have to celebrate the Eucharist as a meal, a taste of the heavenly banquet, if we will ever be able to believe such a mystery.

Paying Attention to Symbols

We are keepers of the garden / but must our mastery turn everything opaque? / Can nothing be more than it is? / Are we left with the eucharistic world / ground down to bread / and the horrible boredom of a wine / which refuses its mission of blood?(3)

It should be noted that this is not as simple as having the cup available for everyone. All this is in the context of our understanding of an relationship to symbols and ritual. More than one author has written about our need to make friends with our symbols, to embrace them, to open them up, to use them. And this necessitates paying attention to those that are primary, letting them speak the loudest. Surely bread and wine and the sharing of both must be the realities that dominate. Unfortunately, our penchant for convenience in all of life has contaminated our liturgies. If convenience is to be our



Precious Blood Congress, 1988

measure, then the cup will easily be withheld (and bread will not always look, taste, feel, or smell like bread). It has been observed that if the Eucharist expresses the essence of the church, we are projecting quite an image of the church when bread is flat, thin, and tasteless or wine is non-existent.

We are still emerging from centuries of dehydrated dominant symbols in all our sacraments. Thus we are yet trying to make friends with the symbols. It may very well be that we insulate ourselves from experiencing the full impact of symbolic action because it is too threatening, at least at a subconscious level. What does it say if we are so uncomfortable with the symbol (eucharistic, no less!) of foot washing that we skip it, or replace it with something like hand washing, to make it more "meaningful." Less mess, perhaps; convenient, sanitized; but not more meaningful. In fact, what we do in such a situation is take a primary eucharistic symbol and replace it with something which has a whole different set of connotations and allusions (to name just two, "I wash my hands of the whole thing," a la Pontius Pilate; or the hand washing at Mass). We need the eucharistic symbol of foot washing, in great part because it is intimately related to the symbol of the cup, as

will be noted later. Precious Blood spirituality loses some significant power without it. Sadly, many people still do not experience either the cup or the foot washing.

There is this aluminum mug of ours...The family's eleven children of all ages drank from it...It has shared everything. It has always been there. It is the ongoing mystery of life and its continuity amid differing situations of life and mortal existence...When I drink from it, I do not drink just water. I drink in freshness, gentleness, familiarity, my family history, and the memory of a greedy little boy quenching his thirst...The boy leaves home, travels to other parts of the world...Then he returns home. He kisses his mother, hugs his brothers and sisters... Words are few but the looks are long and careful. We must drink in other people before we can love them. Eyes that drink in people speak the language of the heart. Its glance speaks the ineffable language of love. Only the light of heart and mind understands. "Mama, I'm thirsty! I want a drink from our old mug!" (4)

The primary symbol in the Eucharist is not the bread and wine, but the action of the assembly taking, blessing, breaking, pouring, giving, receiving, sharing the bread and wine. This sacramental symbol mediates presence; but far more than the presence of Jesus. It is not just Jesus, but the entire "Jesus event" which is made present; his life, death, resurrection, teaching, loving, all his saving acts. Sacramental symbols are events and they make events present. Is it possible that the symbol of bread broken and cup shared is entirely too expressive of what we are called to be as church -- a real body, reconciled and reconciling, who not only can share this bread and cup, but can commit to that which it makes present and points to: the entire Jesus event. This event, it seems to me, is characterized above all by sacrificial self-giving and non-exclusive universal love. It does not seem a stretch to find a home for Precious Blood spirituality in this event characterized in this way. It follows, then, that we embrace the wonderfully challenging symbolic actions of the Eucharist as expressive of that same spirituality.

So Much Worship, So Little Commitment



It was becoming the longest table grace in history, it ground on and on and on, and then Aunt Flo slid her chair back, rose, went to the kitchen, and brought out the food that they were competing to see who could be more thankful for. She set the hay down where the goats could get it. Tears ran down Brother Johnson's face. His eyes were clamped shut, and tears streamed down, and so was Brother Miller weeping. It's true what they say, that smell is the key that unlocks our deepest memories, and with their eyes closed, the smell of fried chicken and gravy made those men into boys again. It was years ago, they were fighting, and a mother's voice from on high said, "You two stop it and get in here and have your dinners. Now. I mean it." The blessed cornmeal crust and rapturous gravy brought the memory to mind, and the stony hearts of the two giants melted; they raised their heads and filled their plates and slowly peace was made over that glorious chicken.(5)

More than one person has asked, "Why is there so much worship and so little commitment?" The meaning of liturgical spirituality, and more precisely, Precious Blood spirituality, might be found somewhere in the answer to such a question. The question of Jesus, "Can you drink the cup I will drink," may be understood as an allusion to the Eucharist which would ritualize his self-giving. So we are called to drink of that cup and to give our lives in like manner. John in his Gospel fleshes out this theme when he describes Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, and then making it clear that this is an example for all to follow. It is in loving service that we drink the same cup that Jesus drank.

The sign and symbol of the Eucharist goes beyond the food and drink. It incorporates the entire event of giving, initiated and made possible by Jesus. It is entirely possible that many are unmoved by the Eucharist because they have been successful in drawing a line between

the actions of Christ and their own actions. Instead of the Eucharist being an expression of commitment to live for others, to be broken and poured out if necessary, it is simply an exercise in historical memory. However, to the extent that we make the words, "This is the cup of my blood..." our own words, which reflect our own life of service, then each celebration of the Lord's supper takes on an immediacy and relevancy and power that it could never otherwise have. "Do this in memory of me" refers to the entire pattern of saving, sacrificial giving which we call the Jesus event; this is the real action which is remembered and memorialized.

"I am thirsty for this water," said the little prince. "Give me some of it to drink..." And I understood what he had been looking for. I raised the bucket to his lips. He drank, his eyes closed. It was as sweet as some special festival treat. This water was indeed a different thing from ordinary nourishment. Its sweetness was born of the walk under the stars, the song of the pulley, the effort of my arms. It was good for the heart, like a present..." "The men where you live," said the little prince, "raise five thousand roses in the same garden -- and they do not find in it what they are looking for." "They do not find it," I replied. "And yet what they are looking for could be found in one single rose, or in a little water." "Yes, that is true," I said. And the little prince added: "But the eyes are blind. One must look with the heart..." (6)



We depend on relationships with others -- their support, encouragement, challenge and example. A redemptive community, a new covenant that will make things right, is a common goal for people. This pattern of community and relationship extends above all to the creator. The consistent understanding and experience of covenant in salvation history is that the blessing of covenant carries a responsibility. There can be no covenant with God that is exclusive of others or exclusive of the well-being of others; there is only participation in the one universal covenant with God. The covenant in the person and life and death of Jesus is not so much a new covenant as it is a renewal and new intensity or intimacy of participation in the same great universal covenant. In the Eucharist, Jesus established a covenant community. Therefore, every time we participate in this action, we encounter the Christ who asks again a radical decision to either commit to or withhold oneself from the covenant community, a community transformed and involved in the task of redemption in the world. One theologian sums it up in this way: "The cup of wine which is the cup of the covenant in the blood of Jesus is blessed and shared by a people already responsible to and for each other before God and in Jesus, but now assimilating that covenant anew into the pattern of life which constitutes the becoming...of Christians." (7)

Wine can be both a delight and a danger. We know this from its daily use and surely that is part of its holy use. In wisdom it brings selflessness and camaraderie, yet in foolishness it brings recklessness and delusion...Wine is the fruit of the vine and the work of many, many human hands. Surely it is the property of all the baptized who...need and deserve its holiness at our table. (8)

The cup and the sharing of the same are linked with Jesus' death and the establishment of a new covenant in the New Testament accounts of the Supper. It is important to note that in addition to shared bread there is the further nuance that communion with Jesus beyond his death requires drinking his cup, i.e., being committed to self-giving service as he was. Thus he gave his cup to be shared by all.

One of many detrimental aspects to the current embracing of “communion services” is that communion through bread alone not only perpetuates the experience of less than full signs, but is absent of the aspects of service and the life we hold in common. The cup implies the challenge of total commitment to all, and this may in fact be one reason for the reluctance on the part of many to partake. But in a communion service one does not even have the choice. One author has observed: “Sharing bread is a comfortable communion. Sharing the cup is not; a person can drink too much and must put his or her lips where others have been. Drinking Jesus’ cup requires living and laying down one’s life, as Jesus did, in a service that sets no limits in advance nor excludes anyone but rather takes risks -- including the perilous rick of intimacy.” (9)

The Practice of Eucharist

The practice of the Eucharist is a practice of awareness. When Jesus broke the bread and shared it with his disciples, he said, “Eat this. This is my flesh.” He knew that if his disciples would eat one piece of bread in mindfulness, they would have real life...When we breathe, when we are mindful, when we look deeply at our food, life becomes real at that very moment. To me, the rite of the Eucharist is a wonderful practice of mindfulness. In a drastic way, Jesus tried to wake up his disciples. (10)

Ultimately, all the reservations and hesitations and uncertainties fade when confronted with the reality that Christ said, “Take this all of you and drink from it...” The Church understood for centuries these words to be the command of Christ who wishes to offer his body and blood in the eucharistic meal, and for centuries this was the practice, to administer and receive both bread and cup. Now this has been restored; and it is essential that we make it a priority. Communion from both bread and cup needs to eventually become the way Eucharist is experienced. It will happen gradually, of course; but as time passes and the experience of Eucharist nourishes our belief, we

will find ourselves at the point where the absence of the cup would not only be noticeable, but unthinkable. We who seek to foster and practice a spirituality which has the Precious Blood as its focus and inspiration, should be committed to encouraging this continuing development. And above all, we should seek to embrace the commitment that the cup points to.

It was St. Augustine who put it so eloquently: "You are what you have received...You receive your own mystery." The pattern of the divine plan for each of us is the story of the bread and wine: to be taken, blessed, broken, poured out, given. Each of us is chosen for a purpose, blessed in multiple and varied ways, broken at times in body or heart or spirit; but always as a prelude to being given. It is the mystery of becoming, being that which we celebrate and receive. It is only a few short steps from the question of Jesus, "Can you drink the cup I am to drink" to the action of washing the feet of his disciples, to the words, "Do this in memory of me." May we resist the urge to increase the distance or deny the relationship.

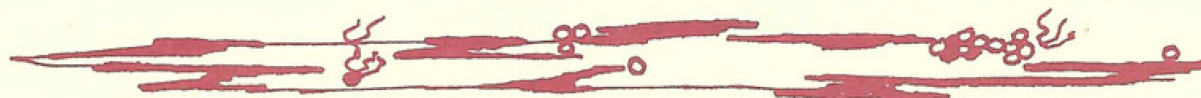
In a delightful collection of children's letters to God, I discovered the following entry: "Dear God, I go to Most Precious Blood school. Other kids make fun of us. They say our nickname is the Donors. We need a new name. Respectfully, Dom, age 10. (11) I respectfully disagree, Dom. I like the name.

Drink! We have not said enough about drink. It makes sense to see bread as sustenance from the creator, as the staple of life. But wine is more and other than food: It is festival, fun, delight, joy. It requires human creativity and human time. It is communal drink. It can be misused by the lonely, dismissed by the dour. And even in this century of sophisticated medical knowledge, wine in one cup has frightened us with its powerful symbolism of shared life. But we all are invited to drink up: not solely the priest, not by the plastic thimbleful, but poured out and shared by the community, which is itself the mystery. (12)



Notes

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4. Leonardo Boff, Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments, Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1987, pp. 9-10.
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6. Antoine de Saint Exupery, The Little Prince, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1943, pp. 96-97.
7. Bernard Lee, "Towards a Process Theology of the Eucharist," *Worship*, 48 (April 1974), pp. 204-205.
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10. Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life, New York: Bantam Books, 1991, pp. 22-23.
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For Reflection

What is the communion practice of bread and wine in your parish? In light of this article what could your parish be doing differently?

What is your memory of the most wonderful banquet, dinner, or meal you'd ever attended and shared? What were the things and who were the people that made it an extraordinary experience? How can your family meals at home become more "eucharistic?"

What is it about blood as a central symbol in Eucharist that makes you uncomfortable? What is challenging on the one hand and comforting on the other about the cup of the blood of Christ?



*All prayer ultimately
hollows our lives
into a cup
to collect the blood
of a torn world
and transform it into
the wine of justice.*

Christin Lore Weber