

Liturgical Catechesis; Homily 8
'The Mass & Sacrifice' or "Why Not from the Tabernacle?"

A THEOLOGY OF SACRIFICE

As we know from Hebrews (Heb 10:10), Christ died *once* and for *all*. In other words, his death cannot be repeated; it was a one-time, saving event. This onetime saving event was also for all peoples, for everyone, everywhere, throughout all of time. Thus, Christ's sacrifice does not require *any* repetition.

But knowing that he was about to die, once and for all. Christ himself established a memorial of his suffering and death. Rather clearly, he linked his actions and words at that Last Supper with his disciples to his salvific death and resurrection on the cross. For example, "this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20). Done in the midst of the Passover meal, Christ intends it to be a memorial of the one, great salvific Passover of Christ. Christ intimately unites the celebration of the Eucharist to his saving death.

Thus, St. Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor ii: 26). The catechism says it this way, "the Eucharist is the memorial of the Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body" (no. 1362). It is not simply a historic recollection. It is a *proclamation* of the Lord's death, by which the event is in some way made present to us in a different time and place (cf., no 1363).

The liturgy, established by Christ, is the means by which the events that saved us are made present to us. The Holy Spirit at each celebration makes the unique, saving, mystery of his death and resurrection present, reaching across time and space so that the saving power is made present to us in the here and now (cf., no. 1104, 1368).

Christ offered his body and blood, once and for all upon the cross. But, Christ also established a memorial of his cross and resurrection, whereby he makes his body and blood present. Thus, taking and blessing, in accord with Christ's command, Christ makes his body and blood present to us.. Thus, what we offer is also what he offered. The same sacrifice offered in a different way, or what has traditionally been spoken of as the "unbloody sacrifice of the Mass" (cf., no. 1367).

But we are not only called to remember the saving events, we are called

to live it. The proclamation elicits a response of faith as consent and commitment (cf., 1102). We are called to give ourselves over to Christ and his saving mystery.

“Through [Christ], then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 13:15).

“Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as really you are unleavened, For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed, Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5: 7-8).

Simply put, our lives - by professing faith in word and living holy lives in deeds - become a sacrifice of praise, acceptable and pleasing to God, simply because we are united to Christ's saving work. United together as Christ's body, our sufferings are then a share in Christ's sufferings.

“But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings” (1 Peter 4:13)

“The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value” (no. 1368).

Our sharing then in Christ's sacrifice is also symbolized even in the offering of bread and wine. Bread, which is a gift from God, is taken and ground into bread by human hands. This bread is then offered back to God. In a similar way, our lives, which are a gift from God, are taken and formed by our actions. By professing faith and living holy lives, even our sufferings, we are ground up and united together in Christ - like the individual grains of wheat that are ground up to form a loaf a bread. United in Christ, we then offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of praise. [The same is true for grapes and wine].

Thus, one could say, just as our bread and wine are taken and blest and become the body and blood of Christ, so too our lives are taken and blest by Christ and become his mystical body.

“I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:14-17).

This is best symbolized when the bread and wine that are offered by the people and TAKEN by the priest is the very same that are BLEST, BROKEN, and GIVEN back to them. Thus, in just a few examples, note how clearly the Church has called for this:

In November 1742, Pope Benedict XIV issued *Certiores effecti*, which clearly stated, “nor does [The Church] now forbid a celebrant to satisfy the piety and JUST request of those who, when present at Mass, want to become partakers of the same Sacrifice.., nay, SHE APPROVES OF IT AND DESIRES THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE OMITTED and would REPREHEND those priests through whose fault and negligence this participation would be denied to the faithful.”

In November 1947, Pius XII issued *Mediator Dei* which clearly stated, “Now it is very fitting... that the people receive holy communion after the priest has partaken of the divine repast upon the altar, and, as we have written above, they should be commended who, when present at Mass, receive hosts consecrated at the same Mass....”

The Second Vatican Council also taught, in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 55, that the “more complete form of participation in the Mass by which the faithful after the priest’s communion, receive the Lord’s body from the same sacrifice, is strongly endorsed.”