

**THE EUCHARIST AND  
THE DIVINE OFFICE**

## The Eucharist

In exile on the island of Patmos, on the Lord's day, John had a vision. He saw the various Christian communities of the Roman province of Asia gathered for the Eucharist. They were like golden lampstands and the risen Christ was present in their midst dressed as a priest:

clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

– Revelation 1:13-16

John saw the churches as the bride of Christ 'adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21:2) and heard the word of God inviting 'everyone who is thirsty' to 'come' (Revelation 22:17):

I am making all things new ... To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

– Revelation 21:6

All the elements of priestly mediation find special expression in the Eucharist in which the priest is a sacrament of Christ the bridegroom who speaks God's word of love to his bride, invites the assembled community to respond in love, and welcomes it into divine communion. Let us reflect on the following statements from the Second Vatican Council.

The ministry of ordained priests is directed to the Eucharist and finds its consummation in it. For their ministration, which begins with the announcement of the Gospel, draws its force and power from the sacrifice of Christ and tends to this.

– PO, n.2

It is in the mystery of the Eucharistic sacrifice that priests fulfil their principal function.

– PO, n. 13

Pastoral charity flows especially from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This sacrifice is therefore the centre and root of the whole life of the ordained priest, so that the priestly soul strives to make its own what is enacted on the altar of sacrifice.

– PO, n.14

'On the level of their own ministry, sharing in the unique office of Christ the mediator, priests announce to all the word of God. However it is in the Eucharistic cult or in the Eucharistic Assembly of the Faithful that they exercise in a supreme degree their sacred functions; there, acting in the person of Christ, and proclaiming his mystery, they unite the votive offerings of the faithful to the sacrifice of Christ their head, and in the sacrifice of the Mass they make present again, and apply until the coming of the Lord, the unique sacrifice of the New Testament, that, namely, of Christ offering himself once for all a spotless victim to the Father.

– LG, n.28

The priest is a sacrament of the priesthood of Christ in which all the baptised share:

Christ's faithful should be instructed by God's word,  
and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body.  
They should give thanks to God.  
Offering the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest  
but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves.  
Through Christ the mediator they should be drawn day by day  
into ever more perfect union with God and each other  
so that finally God may be all in all.

– SC, n.48

John-Paul II writes that those preparing for the priesthood:

will be trained to share in the intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters:  
gratitude for heavenly benefits received, because the Eucharist is thanksgiving;  
an attitude of self-offering, which will impel them to unite the offering of them-  
selves to the Eucharistic offering of Christ; charity nourished by a sacrament  
which is a sign of unity and sharing; the yearning to contemplate and bow in  
adoration before Christ, who is really present under the Eucharistic species.

– I will give you shepherds, n. 48

It is only by such an offering of self that we can respond properly to the question posed by Jesus:

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink,  
or be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?

– Mark 10:38

The importance of the Eucharist in the call and mission of the disciples

The Twelve, as the symbolic number indicates, represent the universality of all disciples. Mark expresses the essence of their call in the following account:

Jesus went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him  
and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to  
preach, with power to cast out demons.

– Mark 3:13-15

Jesus wants them, firstly, to be his companions. If they are not intimate with him they will have nothing to take out to others. But he wants them also to be missionaries. Intimacy with him leads necessarily to sharing in the passion of his life: to liberate any and every person from whatever is holding them back from full communion with God.

After a period of living with and learning from Jesus, the apostles are sent off on their first mission. The setting is important. Jesus has been visiting Nazareth, but the people were interested only in what they could get from Jesus. They showed no interest in what he was revealing about God. Jesus 'was amazed at their lack of faith' (Mark 6:6). He sent the apostles off in an attempt to persuade the people to change their ways (Mark 6:12).

## Liturgy

Immediately on their return from their first missionary journey, Jesus takes them aside to teach them the basic lesson that they must learn if they are to carry out his mission effectively. The lesson is dramatised powerfully in the miracle of the loaves. This scene and the Eucharist both focus on the same central truth: if we offer ourselves and our inadequate resources into the hands of Christ, and if we are willing, despite appearances, to empty ourselves in love, and to share with others all that we are and all that we have, we will find that we have all that we need to carry out God's will and to succeed in our mission. The miracle is his, but it can happen only if we offer ourselves to him and to our needy brothers and sisters.

As Jesus stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he was moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length. By now it was getting very late, and his disciples came to him and said, 'This is a lonely place and it is getting very late, so send them away, and they can go to the farms and villages round about, to buy themselves something to eat.' Jesus replied, 'Give them something to eat yourselves.' They answered, 'Are we to go and spend 200 day's wages on bread for them to eat?' 'How many loaves have you', he asked, 'Go and see.' And when they had found out they said, 'Five, and two fish.' Then he ordered them to get all the people together on the green grass, and they sat down on the ground in squares of hundreds and fifties.

*(The following words explicitly parallel the Last Supper)*

. Last Supper (Mark 14:22)

.	.
'Then taking the five loaves and the two fish	. 'Taking a loaf .
	.
and raising his eyes to heaven	.
.	.
he blessed	. and blessing
.	.
and broke the loaves	. he broke it
.	.
and continued to give them to his disciples	. and gave it to them' .
for them to distribute among the people.	. . . . .
He also shared out the two fish among them all. They all ate as much as they wanted. They collected twelve basketfuls of scraps of bread and pieces of fish.	

– Mark 6:34-43

In the Biblical account of the liberation of the people from Egypt, there is a close connection between the crossing of the Red Sea and the giving of manna in the desert. God who frees them will care for them on their journey. In Mark the scenes are reversed. Having

shown the crowds that his disciples have what is needed from God to nourish them on the journey of life, Jesus, like Moses of old, crosses to the promised land, walking on the water (Mark 6:43-52).

Matthew shows that we can do what Jesus did, if we have faith when he has Jesus invite Peter to come to him across the water (Matthew 14:28-32). The disciples, however, fail to understand because they fail to grasp the significance of the miracle of the loaves: 'They had not understood what the miracle of the loaves meant: their minds were closed' (Mark 6:52).

The only way for their minds to be opened is for them to come to Jesus and allow him to heal them. This is demonstrated when Jesus heals a deaf man (symbol of Everyman) by laying his hands upon him (Mark 7:32). However the lesson has to be constantly reinforced, and so Mark presents a slightly different portrait of the miracle of the loaves (Mark 8:1-10), followed by another scene on the lake:

The disciples had forgotten to take any food and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then he gave this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.'

And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.'

And Jesus knew it, and he said to them,

'Why are you talking about having no bread?

Do you not yet understand?

Have you no perception? Are your minds closed?

Have you *eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear?*

Or do you not remember?

When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand,  
how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?'

They answered 'twelve.'

'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand,  
how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?'

And they answered 'seven.'

Then he said to them, 'Are you still without perception?'

– Mark 8:14-21

The words are addressed to us all, for we are blind and need his healing grace that we might perceive the wonder of God, the wonder of the life to which we are called, and the wonderful possibilities that are open to us if we believe. Once again a man who symbolises every blind disciple is presented on the gospel stage, and Jesus enables him to see (Mark 8:14-22).

Three times Jesus speaks of his mission to his disciples (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32-34), and three times they fail to understand (Mark 8:32, 9:32, 10:35-37). Each time he calls them aside to explain that the essence of his mission, and the essence of their following him, is found in self-giving, the kind of self-giving demonstrated in the accounts of the loaves (Mark 8:33-38, 9:33-35, 10:38-45).

It is this same lesson that is highlighted in the final scene of the public ministry of Jesus, just prior to the eschatological discourse and the account of the passion:

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of two cents. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on.'

– Mark 12:41-45

This is what Christians celebrate in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we are purified by the Word; we participate in Christ's blood (his self-offering); we participate in Christ's body (we are in communion with him in his present exalted state and we are in communion with the body that lives by his Spirit, the Church). Using words from the Letter to the Hebrews, we can say that it is in the Eucharist that we respond to our heavenly call (Hebrews 3:1), that we are enlightened (Hebrews 6:4), that we taste the heavenly gift (Hebrews 6:4), and that we become partakers of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 6:4). In the Eucharist we celebrate in sacrament the once for all self-offering of Christ. We commit ourselves to offer our lives with him. Nourished by him, those partaking in the Eucharist are able to carry out their priestly mission as sacraments of Christ the priest, the one mediator between God and people, and so realising the reign of God's love in this world, drawing all to an eternal redemption and the fullness of communion with the living God.

#### A reflection on Psalm 23

Psalm 23 reflects on the Exodus journey to the Promised Land. In the first part of the psalm, God, like a shepherd, is looking after us as we journey, guiding us to pasture, and to the oases where we can slake our thirst and find rest. When the time comes to move on, we know that God is with us. When darkness falls and we cannot see, we listen for the familiar sound of the shepherd's staff as it strikes the firm earth and the rocks, and when we are straying we feel the familiar touch of the rod, directing us along the right path. With such care we are confident that we will not stray or lag behind. Led and protected by the Shepherd, we trust that we will want for nothing. We are on the right path with a God who is faithful.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.

– Psalm 23:1-4

In the second part of the psalm we experience ourselves as fugitives, pursued by enemies, but welcomed by God into the protection and hospitality of God's home where we enjoy the refreshment and intimacy of a banquet. However, we must move on. God gives us his own Goodness and Mercy (Covenant Love) as escorts. They will go with us, and so God will be present with us on the journey to the sanctuary which awaits us.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
 you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
 and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

– Psalm 23:5-6

### The Divine Office

In his Apostolic Constitution on the Book of Psalms (*Divino Afflatu*, 1911), Pope Pius X quotes from Saint Athanasius (*To Marcellus*, n. 2 and 12) and Saint Augustine (*Confessions*, 9.4):

Saint Athanasius writes: 'The Book of the Psalms is like a garden which contains the fruits of all the other books, grows a crop of song and so adds its own special fruit to the rest ... It seems to me that for the person who recites them the psalms are like a mirror in which we may see ourselves and the movements of your heart and mind and then give voice to them.' In his *Confessions* Saint Augustine says: 'I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of your Church's singing. These sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart: so that my feeling of devotion overflowed, and the tears ran from my eyes, and I was happy in them.' ... Who is not fired with love by the faithful portrait of Christ the Redeemer whose voice Saint Augustine heard in all the psalms, singing, sorrowing, rejoicing in hope, sighing in distress?

The General Instruction on the Divine Office (1970) states:

The Fathers of the Church rightly heard in the Psalms Christ calling out to his Father or the Father speaking to his Son. They even recognised in them the voice of the Church, the apostles and the martyrs. (n.109)

In Promulgating the General Instruction, Pope Paul VI wrote:

Christian prayer is primarily the prayer of the entire community of mankind joined to Christ himself. Each individual has his or her part in this prayer which is common to the one Body, and it thus becomes the voice of the Beloved Spouse of Christ, putting into words the wishes and desires of the whole Christian people and making intercession for the necessities common to all mankind. It obtains its unity from the heart of Christ himself. Our Redeemer, as he himself had entered into life through his prayer and sacrifice, wished that this should not cease throughout the ages in his Mystical Body, the Church, and so the official Prayer of the Church is at the same time the very prayer which Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father. Thus, when the Divine Office is said, our voices re-echo in Christ and his voice in us.

## Liturgy

Father Marie-Eugène in his work on Teresa of Avila writes:

Liturgical prayer, like every other prayer, is to be vivified by interior prayer. If the external movement that it imposes, the art that it cultivates, the sustained attention that it requires, should hinder or even destroy the contemplation that it is meant to serve, the devotion that it should stimulate, or the interior spirit that it wants to express, it would be mere external worship that God could not accept, according to the words of Scripture: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me’[Isaiah 29:13, quoted by Jesus in Mark 7:6]. The beginner must learn to pray with the Church, to enter into the majestic beauty of her ceremonies, to penetrate their symbolism and delight in her liturgical texts. We must above all seek in liturgical prayer the movements of the soul of Christ in the Church, listening to the movements of his Spirit of Love, and so learn in the school of Jesus Christ our Master his daily intimate and silent prayer.

– I want to see God, page 191

All Christians are invited to pray the Divine Office. A special invitation is extended to priests as sacraments of Christ who is ‘able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them’(Hebrews 7:25).

Look to him, and be radiant ... Taste and savour how good the Lord is.

– Psalm 34:5,8

O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your heart.

– Psalm 95:7-8

Here I am! ... I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.

– Psalm 40:7-8

You might like to read some of the following psalms in a reflective way. They are arranged according to the principal movement of soul which they express.

- Longing - see especially Psalm 63.
- Wonder and Awe - see especially Psalm 8, Psalm 19 and Psalm 103.
- Delight - see especially Psalm 16.
- Praise - see especially Psalm 22:22-31, Psalm 71, Psalm 100, Psalm 150.
- Thanksgiving - see especially Psalm 118.
- Trust - see especially Psalm 23, Psalm 27, Psalm 42-43, Psalm 131.
- Petition - see especially Psalm 40, Psalm 55, Psalm 72.
- Pleading for Forgiveness - see especially Psalm 51, Psalm 130.
- Pleading for the oppressed - see especially Psalm 12, Psalm 22:1-21, Psalm 31.