

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

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**THE EUCHARIST:**  
**THE ONE PERFECT OFFERING OF CHRIST**

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Mr. Alphonse Kemuma Gwaro and Mrs. Francisca Arisa, who were my first teachers and catechists for bringing me up in the Catholic Faith. Their life is a real example for the entire family and I. May God continue Blessing them abundantly. **Amen.**

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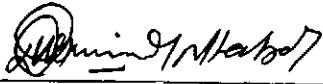
Secondly, my vote of thanks go to all the lecturers who have helped me in the course of my studies may God Bless them for their good work. In a special way I would like to thank Fr. David Blowey, Ofm Conv. who, tirelessly helped me to accomplish this work. I thank him for his time, input and dedication and may God bless him abundantly.

Thirdly, I would like to thank Fr. Giovanni Rolandi, S.D.B. for accepting to moderate this work. I am grateful for his support and input and to have seen that something perfect came out.

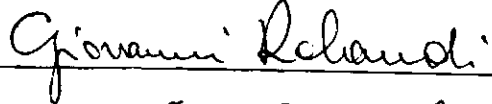
Last but not least, my sincere thanks go to all my formators and brothers, Conventual Franciscan Friars for the peace of mind and heart they gave me throughout my research. May God Bless them all.

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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The long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Holy Eucharist is a mystery placed by God into the visible continuity of human history. As a genuine historical reality, its exterior shape has undergone development and variations from one epoch to another and from one place to another. The first six centuries after the death of Christ were undoubtedly the greatest periods of development, as far as the shaping of the eucharistic liturgy is concerned. The gathering of Christians to celebrate the Eucharist grew from simple domestic celebrations to elaborate papal liturgies. There was a lot of copying of elements from the imperial courts, and gradually the Eucharist took a more official character. Slowly, a fixed outline of rubrics emerged, so that the main line of the Eucharist as it is known today in the West solidified.

This development in the liturgy of the West between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries consisted of assimilation of liturgical forms according to the practice of the Roman imperial courts, for instance, the use of a ceremonial handkerchief (maniple), the adoption of the chasuble, the ritual procession for the entrance, the rank of sub-deacon, and the origins of a fixed style of prayer and chant. In the midst of all of the evolutions and variations, one consistent factor emerges: the experience of the Eucharist as a communitarian event.

The primary emphasis in eucharistic theology from its very beginning was that the Eucharist is both the image and source of the unity of the Christian

community. Another important point is that apart from the influence of the Roman imperial courts, further major influences came from the intellectual, social and architectural developments of the Middle Ages. These greatly affected the development and understanding of the Eucharist.

I intend to present a systematic, that is, a step-by-step progressive unfolding of the Christian eucharistic liturgy, and whatever our understanding of the Eucharist may be, this presentation should give us exactly what the word meant originally. We shall see that in the eucharistic celebration God himself is revealing and communicating the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ through a specific type of prayer, a prayer that is a re-presentation of the Christ-Event in a sacred action.

Beneath the divergent 'liturgical' practices in the Old and New Testaments, there is no doubt that there are some constants that have survived up to the present time, in the sense that there has been a general continuity with respect to the developments and changes of liturgy over the centuries. My aim in undertaking this research is to show how the Eucharist is rooted as an event in the Old Testament, a command at its institution in the New Testament, and the celebration today with its significance in Christian living.

Having said this, the first chapter focuses on the origin of the Eucharist. It is a historical survey the objective of which is to serve as an instrument for the proceeding chapters under the titles: The One Perfect Offering of Christ, and the Significance of the Eucharist in the Christian Life.

## Chapter I

### A Historical Survey of the Eucharist in the Western Church

#### Introduction

The term 'Eucharist' comes from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means thanksgiving; it was used in New Testament times to translate the Hebrew, *berakah*, blessing.<sup>1</sup> This is the name given to the Blessed Sacrament of the altar under its twofold aspects of *sacrament* and *sacrifice* of the Mass, and in which, whether as sacrament or sacrifice, Jesus Christ is truly present under the appearance of the accidents of bread and wine. There is no doubt that the Eucharist is a specifically Christian event with its origin in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It did not exist in the Old Testament, but like so many other realities in the New Testament, it has its roots there. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the Greek words *eucharistein* and *eulogein* recall the Jewish blessings that proclaim — especially during a meal — God's work: creation, redemption and sanctification."<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter we shall take a historical survey of the eucharistic liturgy beginning with the biblical period, and proceeding across the centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> J. MARTOS, "Eucharistic Theology", 187.

<sup>2</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1328.

## 1. Biblical Survey

In his first letter to the Corinthians (11:23-25),<sup>3</sup> Saint Paul uses terms that are rich in meaning reflecting Old Testament themes — body, memorial, cup and blood — which all refer to sacrifice and covenant. These images also evoke the memory of the Old Testament peace offerings made in thanksgiving to God (Lev 7:11-15.22.29). Saint Paul sees these concepts reflected in Jesus' 'Words of Institution': "This is my body that is for you [...]" (1 Cor 11:24). We also have words that evoke the New Covenant, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor 11:25), which correspond to the ratification of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai with the sprinkling of the blood by Moses (Exod 24:8-11). They also remind us of Jeremiah's announcement of the "New Covenant": God's law written in the hearts of men (Jer 31:31-34). St. Paul applies phrases like "spiritual food", "spiritual drink" to Old Testament realities: passing through the sea (a sign of baptism), the quails, and the water from the rock (foreshadowing the spiritual food and drink of the Eucharist).

The synoptic gospels enlarge upon the same Old Testament themes employing terminology like the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, imagery of the eschatological banquet, the feast of the Unleavened Bread and that of the Passover. St. John in his gospel speaks of the bread of life (6:31-35.45-51.57-58), and he emphasizes the difference between the old and the new manna: "Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever" (6:58).

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<sup>3</sup> The scripture quotations are taken from *The African Bible*, unless otherwise noted.



## 1.1 *Witness of St. Paul*

Paul was not simply a speculative theologian concerned with the interpretation of concepts with an ideal structure, but rather he was a pastor concerned with the real problems of Christians living in concrete situations. Basically, the attention given to particular doctrines is related to the degree of misunderstanding or confusion that Paul perceived among the recipients. In line with this, we see that “Paul’s allusions in the Eucharist are concentrated in chapters 10–11 of the first Corinthians”,<sup>4</sup> where he deals with the problem of ‘participation’ in the *agape* meal of the Eucharist. His devotedness to the Eucharist in the community of the Corinthians attests that there was something radically wrong with their approach to this sacrament. This problem is not cited in any other letter, and this suggests that the problem did not arise in other communities.

It is important to make clear that the eucharistic testimonial found in the First Letter to the Corinthians is the most ancient, around A.D. 56-57. “Its witness is older than that of the Gospels.”<sup>5</sup> Paul relates, “For I received from the Lord<sup>6</sup> what I also handed on to you” (1 Cor 11:23), thus indicating that the recorded statement is even older than his letter, and clearly older than the Synoptics. Paul deduced a conclusion regarding the essential meaning of the eucharistic meal, namely, that the words referring to the body offered and blood poured out in the New Covenant, shed light

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<sup>4</sup> R.K. SEASOLTZ, *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Paul’s witness in the expression, “I received from the Lord”, does not mean that Paul had a special revelation in which Christ himself has addressed him. “What he received is a tradition having its origin in the actions and words of Jesus”, and this is the tradition he is transmitting to the Corinthians. However, by *stating* “from the Lord” in this text, he is actually reinforcing his teaching (cf. 15:3-4). THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 32.

on the magnitude of a meal whose purpose was to proclaim the death of Christ, with a view to his coming in glory.

Notably, the Corinthians being Christians who participated in the Eucharist should take care not to associate themselves in any way with the pagan cults.<sup>7</sup> This seems to be the reason why he “adds his own concern that he who eats and drinks unworthily, *anaxios*, will be guilty, *enochos*, of the Lord’s body and blood.”<sup>8</sup>

## ***1.2 The Gospel Testimonials***

Turning away from St. Paul, we have the accounts of the three synoptic gospels. Their presentations have slight differences from each other, but we can say that “they substantially coincide in their way of recounting the events and of reporting Jesus’ words.”<sup>9</sup> Of all the evangelists, Luke underlines the Passover nature of the Last Supper: the Lucan Jesus actually calls it “the Passover” (Luke 22:15; see also 22:7-13). The obvious distinction that Luke has made is that “Jesus gives thanks at two quite distinct moments, first over the Passover food and drinks and over the eucharistic gifts.”<sup>10</sup> This distinction is seen in Luke chapter 22, verse 17 and verse 20; in the former we find the traditional blessing over the seder cup, in the latter, the ‘consecration’ of the cup of wine. Luke draws a clear line between the Jewish Passover and the Christian Eucharist.

While the ‘setting’ is still the Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread, the accounts of the institution of the Eucharist in Mark (14:22-25) and in Matthew (26:26-29) are very similar. In both passages the Lord instructs us to take and eat the

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<sup>7</sup> Participants should truly put on Christ.

<sup>8</sup> A. NICHOLS, *The Holy Eucharist*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> A. NICHOLS, *The Holy Eucharist*, 32.

bread and tells us the blood is of the New Covenant. However, we can observe a slight refinement in Matthew, applying the blood of the covenant to the forgiveness of sins.

The gospel of John has no account of the institution of the Eucharist, as we know. However, regarding the account of the institution of the Eucharist, there are two essential johannine additions to the teachings furnished by the Synoptics. The first addition, John 6:1-13, is the account of the multiplication of the loaves, and foreshadows the eucharistic institution. The manner in which John reports the miracle in verse 11, "then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them [...]", suggests the proclamation of the Eucharist. In the subsequent verses, Jesus declares that "I am the bread of Life [...]" (6:35) and again, "[...] the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (6:51). This is more or less equivalent to "this is my body, which is given for you." The bread he multiplied for the crowd is a "sign" disclosing to us that Jesus is the one who sustains us with the gift of his living word and the gift of his own life in the eucharistic bread.<sup>11</sup>

For the second addition, we recall the account of the washing of the feet (John 13:1-20) as key actions and words of the Last Supper. Normally the washing of the feet of the invited guests would take place upon their arrival (see Gen 18:4-5; Luke 7:44; John 2:1-11); John puts the pericope directly into the context of the meal (John 13:4), in the very place where we would expect to find the institution narrative. The Beloved Disciple links the eucharistic sacrificial celebration to the context of the fraternal love and servant-ministry of the Christians. John replaces

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<sup>11</sup> J. MCPOLIN, *John*, 99.

“Do this in memory of me,” with “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).

We also cannot forget Jesus’ Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26) as the one which sheds light on the thrust of the offering and thanksgiving that characterise the Eucharist.

## **2. Celebration of the Eucharist over the Centuries up the Council of Trent**

Having examined the eucharistic accounts in the New Testament, let us now survey the structure of the eucharistic celebration in the history of Christ’s Church.

### ***2.1 The First Christian Century***

To have an idea of how the Eucharist was celebrated towards the end of the first century, it is better to refer back to the New Testament texts which we have already seen. The structure that appears is basically the one that we still have today and is composed by three fixed elements, which we find summarized in Acts 20:7-11 — a celebration presided over by Paul himself. The three elements concern reflection on the Scriptures, prayer, and communion:

**The Reading of the Word:** at Jerusalem, the first generation was still attending the ‘Liturgy of the Word’ in the Temple, which was still functioning (up to A.D. 70), and then used to ‘break bread’ in their homes (see Acts 2:46).

**The Great Prayer:** the principal prayer of the eucharist was originally pronounced by an elder of the community, an apostle; in Rome the elder was called *proistamenos*, “president” (Rom 12:8), a local Roman title which existed already before the coming of Peter and Paul; he was also called *prestos*, a noun derived from the *proistemi*, meaning, “to stay in front of the Lord in the celebration.”

**The Breaking of the Bread:** the Community would gather on the first day of the week to share the Communion of the Bread and Cup; there are various other texts which confirm this position (1 Cor 10:16-17; 11:17-34; 12:12-14).

It is undisputed that in apostolic times and long after the double eucharistic action with the bread and the cup was normally combined with an ordinary meal — the usual custom was to place the Eucharist after the ordinary meal (1 Cor 11:17-26, especially verse 26), that is, the eucharistic prayer spoken over the bread and the cup, and the distribution of the sacred gifts.<sup>12</sup>

## **2.2 *The Second and Third Centuries***

The Apostolic Era we understand as the time of the New Testament that came to a close with 'the death of the last Apostle,' and is dated around the year A.D. 100. Following this epoch there comes that of the Apostolic Fathers (extending throughout the second Christian century), and that of the Apologists (in the third). The Apostolic Fathers lived with the apostles as their disciples, and, taking over from them, became their immediate successors as leaders of the churches. Later, the Apologists formally sought to explain and defend 'traditional' Christian beliefs and practices in the midst of the persecutions. What both groups taught and wrote is very important.<sup>13</sup>

The elaboration of the understanding of the Eucharist in its christological institution takes place already at the end of the New Testament period and can be noticed in the fact that it is identified as 'Eucharist'. At the beginning of the second century we find a long series of witnesses in which not only the entire memorial action of the Lord but also the very holy gifts are both qualified as 'Eucharist'.<sup>14</sup> Starting from post-apostolic times the eucharistic thanksgiving is characterised by

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<sup>12</sup> V. WARNACH, *The Breaking of Bread*, 120-121.

<sup>13</sup> X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 27.

<sup>14</sup> See *Didache* (9,5), Ignatius (*Ehp.* 13:1; *Phld.* 4; *Smyr.* 8,1), Justin (*Apol.* 1,66,1), Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 4,18,5,5,2,3), and Hippolytus (*Trad. Apost.* 36ff).

three aspects. It is a way of expression whereby the praise that the Christians raise to God for the work of creation and redemption is summarised and achieved.

1. **Anamnesis:** “a phrase akin to rabbinic liturgical blessings which speaks of the feasts God has given his people for joy and for a memorial.”<sup>15</sup> We must be grateful to God for creation and redemption, which are both held in the Eucharist (*Didache* 9:2-4).
2. **Sacrifice:** a gift coming from God, the eucharistic remembrance/*anamnesis*, is at the same time an offering to the same God; it is a sacrifice. According to St. Justin the Martyr, prayer was understood as sacrifice, and this led some theologians to interpret him “as holding that the Eucharist is a sacrifice only in the sense of the offering of these prayers, but not in the strictly ritual sense by which gifts are presented to God.”<sup>16</sup> Justin was writing in the middle of an incomplete process in which the categories and terms of worship were being radically remoulded in the light of a fundamentally new reality.
3. **Blessing, Prayer of Blessing/Thanksgiving:** the prayer of blessing/thanks-giving is necessary to be said over the gifts (consecration) before they are distributed. After the blessing the elements are no more ‘common’ nourishment, but spiritual.

### 2.3 *The Fathers of the Church*

Christ and the apostles handed down their teaching verbally, that is by the process of instructions. They did so in the context of handing down the new life that Christ came to bring, the life of a new community that is the Church. In Catholic theology, based on the Jewish message, we speak of Tradition. In many ways, “the writings of the Fathers and the great Christian teachers and the official decisions of the teaching authority of the church bear witness to the handing on of the revelation of God and the life that comes from it.”<sup>17</sup>

The Christian liturgy is characterized by its elements and formulae. It is undisputed that, “the Christian liturgy, and the Eucharist especially, is one [of] the

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<sup>15</sup> A. NICHOLS, *The Holy Eucharist*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 47.

most original creations of Christianity.”<sup>18</sup> We must not forget the materials from which the Christians’ Eucharist was formed; the bread and wine are something quite different from mere ‘prime matter’, for they have their source in Christ himself and carry with themselves the weight of their Jewish traditional symbolism. Thus they cannot be changed.

With the first eucharistic formulas we also cannot start from zero; for they are rooted in Jewish celebrations and blessings, as well as the meals that Jesus shared in the Gospels. In the patristic period the Fathers of the Church would build upon this tradition and came up with formalized Eucharistic Prayers or *anaphora*.

It is true, however, that the great development of the eucharistic formularies coincides with the highpoint of the patristic period, which extends approximately from the middle of the fourth century to the middle of the sixth century, or from the Cappadocian Fathers to St. Gregory the Great. Moloney says that what underlies all of these developments is the sacrificial nature of the sacrament.<sup>19</sup> Whereas St. Justin the Martyr emphasized the constitutive role of prayer and thanksgiving in the Christian sacrifice, and Irenaeus the presentation of the Eucharist as the offering of the first fruits,<sup>20</sup> later the custom of the faithful bringing the bread and wine for the Eucharist comes to be referred to as their “offerings” of these gifts. St. John Chrysostom goes further and asserts that, “in the Eucharist the exalted Christ is the host at the table entering his guests and they are worshiping with him and through him.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> L. BOUYER, *Eucharist, Theology and Spirituality of Eucharistic Prayer*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, IV, 17, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 87.

## 2.4 Early Middle Ages

Starting from the eighth century, ties within the liturgical domain were established between Gaul and Rome. This was probably due to the high esteem and admiration for the Papal liturgy, as well as to political interests. During this period the Eucharist was destined to become a focal point for faith and piety in a new way. When the writers of the patristic age had thought about this sacrament, their attention was principally on the total work of our redemption, which this ritual actualises and renews amongst us. In the Middle Ages, people began to pay more attention to the extraordinary means which the sacrament itself represented, seeing it as the chosen vehicle for bringing redemption.<sup>22</sup> The people lost the focus of sacramental synthesis of the ancient Church, and soon there was a controversy on the Eucharist for the first time. We can cite the Berengarian controversy; Berengar basically denied the eucharistic change when he said, “after the consecration, you may refer to the eucharistic gifts as Christ’s body and blood, but in reality they remain bread and wine.”<sup>23</sup>

Although some aspects of the liturgy became more animated and lively, nevertheless, there is no doubt that during these centuries there had been a gradual decline in the celebration, as well as in the theological comprehension (language) of the Eucharist. This includes a loss of the symbolic knowledge whereby people could understand reality by different ways. The great question was whether in the Eucharist Christ is really present or only symbolically.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 118.

<sup>24</sup> The question was solved by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, where they used the word “transubstantiation” in the creed in a Conciliar document (DS 802).



## ***2.5 High Scholasticism to Trent***

Because of the people's loss of focus regarding the Eucharist, as time continued to unfold, a sharp distinction arose in the West between the people's eucharistic piety and formal reflection on eucharistic theology. The celebration of the Eucharist became a sacred 'drama' of the priest alone, while the people attending (the assembly) watched.

Devotion to Christ in the Middle Ages meant devotion to the humanity of Christ. Perhaps because of the Crusades, devotion to the way of cross, veneration of the cross, the crucifix and other sacred images (icons) developed. To this devotionism, we can add the eucharistic piety of the people. There was a strong desire to *see* the host during elevation, and thus the host was idealised with the humanity of Christ: to see the host was to see the Son of God. At this time devotion to the Blessed Sacrament emerged in the form of rites outside the Mass. This was to be later rejected by the Reformers.

From this aspect of the people's eucharistic piety, there would be in this period a shift to a more profound christological reflection. It was the Islamic theologians who brought the Aristotelian distinction of substance and accidents to the Church, providing a way out of an intellectual stalemate. These two principles of being are contained within created matter: the one (accidents) concerns what the senses perceive (hence: size, shape, texture); and the other (substance), a universal principle not limited to any one of its manifestations.

St. Thomas Aquinas was the answer for the Church; he moved from eucharistic realism to a metaphysical solution, but he did not manage to break away

from the statement of the problem as established by earlier theologians. Thomas's answer is that the Eucharist is the true body and blood of Christ.

The Ecumenical Council convened at Trent (1545-1563) sought to curb abuses and settle matters. The success of Protestantism had challenged the Council to deal directly with the Eucharist. In the second meeting (1551), the theology of the Eucharist was precisely defined, and the positions of Luther and Zwingli were rejected.

## **Conclusion**

The Eucharist had an important place in the lives of the first Christian community, which had a personal knowledge of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles describes these eucharistic gatherings in which there was a communal meal as well as 'the breaking of the bread', referring to the Eucharist. In their gatherings they listened to the teaching of the apostles; they prayed together; they conversed about their own daily problems; they shared a meal and commemorated the Lord. The Eucharist was a corporate public worship of the whole community of believers. It was also a time to initiate new members. Relating these aspects to our modern period, basically when Christians meet in churches, at home, or even in Small Christian Communities — either for the eucharistic celebration or for Bible studies/sharing --- the Word of God is broken and elaborated in the concrete situations of our lives.

The liturgy and tradition concerning the Eucharist have been so developed within the Roman Catholic Church that almost everywhere in the world human beings are going through a phase in which they seek to know more clearly the

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meaning of their lives and what they do. Within Nairobi, I have been to many parishes, and I can attest that even after so many centuries of evolution, and even after the reforms of the recent decades, the Eucharist is still quite far from relating effectively to the people in the spirit of the teaching of the Old Testament, that of Jesus Christ and of the Early Church (which we have seen thus far). Everywhere this presents a big challenge to today's followers of Jesus Christ and more so to the ministers of the Eucharist and of the Word of God. We should not place the blame for this 'distancing' on the shoulders of the leaders who have brought us up to the present time; we should also not feel deceived. Now is the time, rather, we should start working together.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the Eucharist in our daily lives, let us examine more deeply certain eucharistic themes which we can deduce from the biblical and theological reflection of the Church. These topics will help us in our presentation in Chapter Three.

## **Chapter II**

### **The One Perfect Offering of Christ**

#### **Introduction**

So far we have seen that from the earliest days of Christianity, the eucharistic celebration has been at the center of the Church's life. It has been the supreme prayer and act of worship, an important moment of Christ's institution, source of unity and love in the community. It is right to say that all other sacraments point toward it and find fulfillment in it. Therefore, the Eucharist is truly the center of Christianity.

This chapter is dedicated to the understanding of Christ as the One Perfect Offering. We will see how and why Christ had to offer himself, and there are four underlying themes which we hope will come out in the course of our discussion, namely: Eucharist as sacrifice, as worship, as word, and as redemption. These aspects will present themselves as we consider the Eucharist in its biblical and theological context. We shall proceed as follows, beginning with a brief examination of the Eucharist from an Old and New Testament perspective, we shall then

investigate five evangelical themes, before focusing on the notions of Real Presence and Sacrifice.

## **1. Relationship of the Eucharist between the Old and the New Testament**

One of the notions that stands out in the Old Testament is the presence of food or drink to represent the relationship of the Israelites and their God. Even in the institution narrative of the Eucharist the concept of a covenantal or sacrificial meal is central.<sup>25</sup> In the Hebrew Scriptures God encountered his people in various ways. Let us now consider the notion of sacred meals in the Old Testament as one example of such encounters.

In the early part of the Book of Genesis eating and drinking seems to lead to condemnation: God forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree that was in the middle of the garden (Gen 3:3). When Adam ate, he discovered that he was naked and he hid (Gen 3:6-7). Similarly, at the beginning of the new creation, Noah drank wine and was found naked (Gen 9:20-21). God forbade man in the Old Testament to eat of the tree of life, not for condemnation, but rather so that its fulfillment in Christ would be realized. Christ declares, "[...] unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53). What we see here is that eating and drinking, life and death are intertwined, as Seasoltz states, "[I]n the same act of eating and drinking, life and death intervene, the possibility for man to receive or lose the life of God."<sup>26</sup>

A similar contradiction is found in the Book of Exodus, although Yahweh accompanied them during their journey, the Hebrews considered themselves

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> R.K. SEASOLTZ, *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, 137-138.

abandoned by him in the desert, for they felt that he should be providing for their needs. After leaving Egypt, they thought that they would die from hunger and thirst, and so they demanded food and water (Exod 16:1-36). God did give them manna, which nourished the body and restored vigour to the weak and encouraged those of little faith, and in addition, the miracle of manna was accompanied by the miracle of water from the rock (Exod 17:1-7). God responded to the complaints of his people, but only partially, for they would still hunger and thirst again (John 6:48; 4:13-14). Even Moses showed his lack of faith at Meribah striking the rock twice (Num 20:11-12).

To eat in God's sight is a theme which recurs in the Old Testament (Deut 14:26; 27:7) and is found again in the Gospel parables of the heavenly banquet. The Eucharist is also a festival celebration of the new covenant, concluded in the blood of Jesus poured out for many. Therefore, it is in Scripture where we find evidence that both Testaments have a unique "eucharistic" doctrine.

As Seasoltz says, "Christ refers to the manna as an *incomplete* figure of the Eucharist."<sup>27</sup> Likewise St. Paul sees a figure of the Eucharist in this rock from which water springs (1 Cor 10:4). In instituting the Eucharist Christ presents his blood to the Apostles declaring that it is the blood of the new covenant.<sup>28</sup> This can be seen typologically in the ratification of the Sinai Covenant found in Exodus (24:1-11).

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<sup>27</sup> R.K. SEASOLTZ, *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, 138. Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> The eucharistic theology of the New Testament is the one of the church of the Apostles, which was then common heritage of all of the churches. These local communities were united together by a substantial agreement, which nevertheless recognized their legitimate particular diversifications.

## 2. Specific Eucharistic Themes from the Four Gospels

Having used the example of food or meals, we have seen there is a veiled eucharistic relationship in the two Testaments. Let us now examine four specific themes drawn from the Gospel narratives which are also rooted in the Old Testament. These topics will help us to understand the liturgical vision of Christ as the one perfect offering which unites us to the Father.

### 2.1 *Multiplication of the Loaves*<sup>29</sup>

I do not propose to give an exegetical commentary on the episodes of the multiplication of the loaves narrated by the four evangelists, rather let us see some of the basic liturgical themes which are highlighted in those passages. Chronologically, the narrative has the following order: Mark 6:12-17; Matt 14:13-21; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-17; in addition, there is a second version of the multiplication in Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-10).

These six texts provide incontestable evidence of a progressively eucharistic interpretation of this episode. We can see that the authors accentuated the parallelism between the formula of blessing and the distribution of the loaves, and that of the Eucharist. Instead of the term *eulogein*, a more specific term, *eucharistein*, is used.<sup>30</sup> In the presentation of the passage, Christ is the center of the event and the protagonist, while the Apostles assume the function of servers, distributing the bread (and fish), signifying the apprenticeship of their ministry and

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<sup>29</sup> *The Catechism of The Catholic Church*, № 1335

<sup>30</sup> R.K. SEASOLTZ, *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, 143.

their future succession.<sup>31</sup> St. John concludes his version by giving a long discourse on the Bread of Life, which thus becomes a sort of theological explanation of the miracle.

From these texts connoting the “Breaking of the Bread”, the message of the Lord can be described as follows:

- ◆ The ‘bread’ is the Word of God, which is food for those who hunger for him.
- ◆ The ‘bread’ is nourishment for the body, which implies the charity Christians are to show to the poor.
- ◆ The ‘bread’ is spiritual nourishment for the soul.

The baptismal mission for which the Father sent the Lord Jesus involves the proclamation of the Gospel, the manifestation of the Kingdom by providing for the spiritual and physical needs of the people, and presentation of true worship of the Father. The accounts of the multiplication of bread and fish encapsulate Christ’s mission and summarize the missionary challenge of his disciples.

## ***2.2 Foreshadowing of the Death and Resurrection***

There are some episodes in the life of the Lord which — by symbolic “signs” — hint at his death and resurrection as the inauguration of the Banquet of the Kingdom. In some ways, these signs contain and explain the great mysteries of the Eucharist. Just as with Adam and Noah whose *nakedness* expresses the foreshadowing or typology of a *true* relationship with God, in the presentation of the Johannine text of the Eucharist the disciples were scandalised and *divided* by the announcement that they were to eat and drink Jesus’ flesh and blood.<sup>32</sup> In both cases

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<sup>31</sup> Contrary to the synoptic gospels, in St. John’s gospel, Christ is the one who is distributing the loaves, probably to signify that he himself is the Host and we, the guests who he feed.

<sup>32</sup> Cf John 6:60 – “this is a hard saying, who can listen to it.” See *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1336.



— Old Testament and New Testament — it was not the ‘food’ and ‘drink’ but rather the *misunderstanding* which led to division or *nakedness*.

The Eucharist and the cross are stumbling blocks, and they have never ceased to be the occasion of division: “Do you also want to leave?” (John 6:67). John records his episodes carefully, into which he inserts many symbolic signs (see John 20:30). Among the many ‘signs’ — besides John’s version of the multiplication of loaves (6:1-13) — we can mention the following: the Wedding Feast at Cana, (2:1-12), the healing of the royal officer’s son (4:46-54), the healing of the paralytic (5:1-18), Jesus’ walking on the water, (6:16-21), the healing of the man-born-blind (9:1-14), and the resurrection of Lazarus (11:1-14).

### ***2.3 The Anticipation of the Wedding Feast***

When people begin to talk about the Eucharist today, quickly their mind goes to the night before our Lord died, and the accounts we have in the institution narratives. However, we should also look back and see the other meals which our Lord frequently ate during his public ministry.<sup>33</sup>

First, going even further back into the Old Testament, we see how God fed his people in the wilderness. Even the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming of the Kingdom of God under the image of a great banquet. Christ takes up this image with his many parables about the wedding feast or the festival at the end of time. We can see these images, for example, in the passages about the multiplication of the loaves, or the meals he had with his disciples after the Resurrection. For Christ, his involvement in meals symbolically points to the final, eschatological banquet.

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<sup>33</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 195.

In the Gospels, the banquet is presented in different perspectives. In Matthew, for example, we find the passage about the bridegroom and the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13), while Luke has a less articulated account of the same parable (12:36-37). Notably, in this parable, ‘night’ is the sign of death, and ‘dawn’ indicates renewed life. Watchfulness and vigilance, which are indicated by the lamps that must always be burning, are necessary and indispensable.

Another banquet is the wedding feast recorded in Matthew (22:1-14) and Luke (14:16-24): the wedding for the royal son. Here we find aspects like the extensive preparations for the meal, the refusal of some of the invited, and later the image of a wedding hall that is filled by all sorts of people, even the poor and the despised.<sup>34</sup>

Let us recall here that, before the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest shows the faithful the eucharistic bread which they are to receive and invites them to the Banquet of Christ using nuptial symbolism, words similar to those found in Revelation 19:9, “Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” These words remind us of the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist and the liturgy of heaven.<sup>35</sup> Christ invites all to his Holy Banquet — even sinners and outcasts — and we are free to accept or refuse this invitation.

#### ***2.4 The “First” Supper and the Banquet after Resurrection***

The institution of the Eucharist — the Lord’s Supper — must be situated in the broader and more eloquent context of the *anamnesis* which he left for all

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<sup>34</sup> The king offers to everybody the nuptial gown, which cannot be refused and all are invited, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). Let us say according to our context, it is evident that these words are true.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. J.H. EMMINGHAUS, *The Eucharist, Essence, Form and Celebration*, 200.

generations, so that “everybody” may drink the cup of the “New Covenant.” In view of his cross and glorification, and using an appropriate biblical approach, rather than a “last”, we could talk about a “first” supper, which the Lord celebrated with his disciples, for it is the “mother” of all Holy Suppers, and therefore not the last.<sup>36</sup>

Having said this, another striking element, which we find in the evangelists, concerns the passages of the meals which the Lord had with his disciples after the Resurrection and prior to his Ascension.<sup>37</sup> Jesus manifested himself to his disciples, but they were still slow to recognise him until the breaking of the bread. A typical example of this is the account of the Emmaus disciples the evening of the ‘first day of the week’ (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12-13). Later, that same evening, he appeared to the eleven, who “were at table” (Mark 16:14). Jesus also made himself known to some of the disciples in the context of a meal, when he prepared breakfast (bread and grilled fish) at the shore of the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:9-14).

We can say that these passages show a typical way of Jesus being present at a supper. Let us conclude by saying that for the first Christians, the ‘breaking of the bread’ appears not only as the reiteration of the ‘Last’ Supper, but also as the memory and continuation of the meals through which the risen Christ manifested himself to those who would be his witnesses. In brief, the Lord’s Supper is, in fact, the ‘First’ of a long series of suppers which gave way to the celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist, and that sustains the Church until the coming of the Lord.

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<sup>36</sup> See J. ETTORI, *The Eucharist, Sacrament of Initiation*, 37.

<sup>37</sup> R.K. SEASOLTZ, *Living Bread, Saving Cup*, 144.

### 3. Jesus' Real Presence

The Eucharist is a 'Mystery of Faith.' It is the sacrament in which the whole of our Catholic-Christian beliefs is summed up; in this one rite the whole of our relationship with God is contained. "Mystery" in the sense that, "the invisible God comes into our world, so that the visible and tangible realities become the means by which we come into contact with him."<sup>38</sup> The word "faith" — in a broader sense or when we speak of the "Catholic Faith" — does not merely mean the sum total of things which Catholics believe, but rather the whole system and pattern of life which we call Catholic.<sup>39</sup>

The Eucharist can often appear to be a confusing topic. Although it is not appropriate to take one point and say this is the "whole truth", nonetheless, in this section we wish to focus on only one aspect of the Eucharist. The miracle of the Real Presence is not just an issue of bread and wine, but is our Lord's Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.<sup>40</sup> Some people might say that *this* is the most important point of the Eucharist; others might argue that it is the *celebration* of the Mass, others yet might say that it is the dogma of transubstantiation. The fact is that all these many aspects should be considered together as much as possible. We shall try to keep these concepts together as we approach the notion of the Real Presence from a scriptural and doctrinal point of view.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. L. JOHNSTON, *Teaching the Faith*, 94.

<sup>39</sup> L. JOHNSTON, *Teaching the Faith*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. L. JOHNSTON, *Teaching the Faith*, 95.

### 3.1 According to His Words

The mystery of the Eucharist is present in different ways in the whole of salvific history, “as a figure in the Old Testament, as an event in the New Testament and as a sacrament in the Church today.”<sup>41</sup> The New Testament gives no room for doubting the reality of the presence of Christ in the sacrament. It is the actual presence of the saving work of Christ, which substantiates the real presence in the Eucharist. It follows that “if the cultic celebration of the Eucharist makes the saving work of Christ present then the Savior himself must also be really present for the event itself cannot be personified (or petrified) on its own”<sup>42</sup> The Real Presence is first related to the crucified Lord, the one who died on the cross and enters into glory. His body “which will be given for you” is present here and now (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24); his blood is now being “shed for you,” “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 14:24; Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20).<sup>43</sup>

The discourse in John chapter 6 is commonly seen as the centrepiece in the eucharistic teaching of the fourth gospel. In this chapter, verses 51-58 have remained the centre of interest for many theologians.<sup>44</sup> This is where we find expressed the real identification of the Eucharist with the flesh and blood of Christ. Jesus did not soften his language; he heightened the realism and scandal: “my flesh is real food; my blood is real drink.” He clearly states, “[I]n all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you [...] my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink” (John 6:53-54 NJB). These words correspond to those in the synoptic gospels, “eat, this is my body” and “drink, this is

<sup>41</sup> R. CANTALAMESSA, *The Eucharist*, 77.

<sup>42</sup> V. WARNACH, “Symbol and Reality in the Eucharist”, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Matt 26:28 NJB.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 70.

my blood.” The slight Johannine difference is that the Beloved Disciple uses the word flesh (*sarx*) and not body (*soma*). Therefore, the assertion that “this is my *flesh*” not only confirms the supposition that Jesus expressed himself in this way at the Last Supper, but it also indicates the most pristine version of the formula.<sup>45</sup>

To sum up the reality of the flesh offered as food: Christ’s personal presence plays an essential role. It is the Son of God who is present in the flesh and who communicates to that flesh his nutritive power. Nevertheless, we should not forget the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, for Jesus says, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30), and in another place, “it is the Spirit that gives life” (John 6:63).

### ***3.2 According to the Doctrine of the Church (The Council of Trent)***

The doctrine of the Eucharist is among those which the Council of Trent pronounced in clear terms in the face of the violent attacks it met with on the part of the Reformers. The decree on the eucharistic presence was published in 1551, and contains eight chapters. The issue of the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist is dealt with in the first chapter. The Council Fathers declared that

In the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, after consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, True God and Man, is truly, really and substantially contained under the appearance of those perceptible realities.<sup>46</sup>

Christ said that it was *truly* his body and blood which he was offering (John 6:53-55), and therefore the Church of God is convinced that by the consecration of the bread and wine, a change takes place of the whole substance of the bread into the

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<sup>45</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> J. NEUNER, – J. DUPUIS, *The Christian Faith*, № 1513.

whole substance of the Body of Christ, and the whole substance of the wine into that of his Blood.<sup>47</sup> This change has been named by the Church, *transubstantiation*. The Council dealt with it in the fourth chapter of its decree.

We can conclude by saying that Jesus is present in the Eucharist in a totally unique way. The word ‘real’ is derived from the Latin term *res*, and means a thing or an object. But Christ is not present in the Eucharist as a ‘thing’ or an ‘object’, but as a person, a “eucharistic” presence.

#### 4. Eucharistic Sacrifice

In the Old Testament a feast always involved more than one sacrifice (Deut 12:5-7.17-18). We may think that for the Jews an *individual* sacrifice involved *one* person offering a *single* sacrifice for a *specific* purpose. Rather, the experience of sacrifice that Israelites had, was a feast with *many* sacrifices, which expressed the nature of the feast and not the needs of an individual.<sup>48</sup> Each sacrifice, then, had its own set of offerings which expressed the nature of the feast (Lev 23; Num 28:9; Deut 16:16-17). In the Old Testament, there was not a *single* perfect sacrifice.

Thus, it was necessary that the ‘Father of Compassion’ and ‘God of all Encouragement’ (2 Cor 1:3) bring forth another priest, “according to the order of Melechizedek” (Gen 14:18; Ps 109; Heb 7:11), who is our Lord Jesus Christ, “to perfect for all time those who are sanctified.”<sup>49</sup> Our Lord was to offer himself “once and for all” to realise for us an everlasting redemption.

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<sup>47</sup> J. NEUNER, – J. DUPUIS, *The Christian Faith*, № 1519.

<sup>48</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 83.

<sup>49</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 80. See Heb 10:14.

The word “sacrifice” is used to describe what happens in the eucharistic celebration during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.<sup>50</sup> It comes from the Latin word (*sacrificium*) that literally means “holy thing” or “something made holy”; however, it may also refer to the action of making something holy. Making something holy is to “consecrate”<sup>51</sup>. When something is holy it belongs to God. Things that have been offered to God, especially if they were to be eaten in a sacrificial meal, were called holy things. “Sacrifices, then, were consecrated, that is, put into God’s possession, when they were offered to him and as a result were holy things.”<sup>52</sup>

Sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were either burnt or put on the altar. It was understood that the fire of God’s presence brought the gift into heaven, (2 Chr 7:1-3; 1 Kgs 18:38-9). Not all offerings were burnt completely, for example peace offerings were saved for a meal, and they were eaten either by the priests officiating or the people who had given them. The old covenant understood this as making holy those people who participated in these meals; this may be a true view even in the new covenant.<sup>53</sup>

Christ’s salvific activity is the sacrifice that is offered once and satisfies for all time. The death and resurrection of Christ was the culmination of his earthly ministry. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read (9:25-28):

Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, [...] But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgement, so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

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<sup>50</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 83.

<sup>51</sup> It is well known that the action of consecrating belongs to God and his beings

<sup>52</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 91.

<sup>53</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 92.



We understand this in the sense that Christ obeyed his Father completely, and in so doing he gave his life as an offering to the Father to atone for the sins of those who would believe in him.

Certainly, the Church draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice, not only through faith-filled remembrance, but through a real contact, since this sacrifice is made present ever anew, sacramentally perpetuated. In relationship to the sacrifice of Golgotha, “the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ’s offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food. It is a gift to his Father [...] a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity.”<sup>54</sup> For this reason, in every age, “the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice”.<sup>55</sup> Mass makes present the sacrifice of the cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor multiply it.<sup>56</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* continues to state that “the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice is wholly directed towards the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through communion. To receive the Holy Communion is to receive Christ himself who has offered himself for us.”<sup>57</sup> The teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful is, “taking part in the eucharistic sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it” (*Lumen Gentium* 11). In conclusion, even though it is enclosed in a particular sphere of spirituality, the eucharistic sacrifice is destined to transform the ordinary life of Christians by communicating the breath of Christ’s redemptive offering.

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<sup>54</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 13.

<sup>55</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 12.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1382.

<sup>57</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1382.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have been looking at the One Perfect Offering of Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews contains the fullest and most developed New Testament explanation of the death and resurrection of Christ as a sacrifice. When we read the Old Testament, we are actually reading about the beginnings of God's salvific plan-of-action (the principle of the Incarnation): "[T]he old covenant realities prefigured or foreshadowed what would happen in the new covenant as a result of the incarnation [...] or in outline of what was to come."<sup>58</sup> Hebrews teaches that the sacrifices of the old covenant were the shadows of what was to come, "the old covenant sacrifices were incomplete versions of the kind of sacrifice God really had in mind."<sup>59</sup>

Christ's sacrifice is the only sacrifice of the new covenant; he came to offer it so that he might save the world. Christ has appeared once and for all at the end of the ages to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself on the cross — the Servant of the Lord who made many to be righteous (Is 52:13–53:12).

Consequently, we saw that the Fourth Gospel is permeated with a eucharistic spirit: the Marriage Feast at Cana (2:1-11), the multiplication of the loaves (6:1-15), and the Discourse on the Eucharist (6:32ff). When Jesus articulated that, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you, it does not mean that the Eucharist is cannibalism, because Christ's body and blood are made present sacramentally, and not in a crudely physical sense.<sup>60</sup> To partake in the

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<sup>58</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> S.B. CLARK, *Catholics and The Eucharist*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 71.

Eucharist is to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, which have been offered for us in his death and resurrection, his Passover.

## **Chapter III**

### **The Significance of the Eucharist in the Christian Life**

#### **Introduction**

It is now high time to look at the importance of the Holy Eucharist in our lives as Christians. I have always been wondering if the Eucharist makes any sense in our contemporary world, a world that has gone materialistic, a world that is in constant search of instant answers to the problems we encounter within our daily activities. The world is looking for scientific proofs in almost all spheres, and to some extent I would agree. The Eucharist has a great influence in our lives, and this is what we are going to see in this chapter.

For two thousand years now, the Church has continued to celebrate the Eucharist, a challenging spiritual event that Jesus instituted at a time when the Jews were commemorating their liberation from Egypt. On the one side, throughout the centuries and throughout the world, millions of men, women, and children have drawn personal inspiration from the Eucharist and from their prayer to Jesus present in the tabernacle. On the other side, Christians have divided themselves on the ground of differences in understanding the Eucharist. As far as the eucharistic celebration is concerned, many of the faithful have given up attending, a tendency

which is especially notable in the West and is slowly entering into Africa. This trend is partially due to the gap of income, wealth, knowledge and power growing in the minds of many in the world today.

In this chapter I wish to show that the Eucharist still is meaningful and powerful in our lives as it has been over the centuries.

Among the many aspects of the Eucharist that we could consider, I will try to highlight just a few, namely the importance of the Eucharist for our Christian discipleship, its relationship to the empowerment of the ecclesial community, realized in the growth of the Body, through the practice of the *mandatum* of the Lord's Passover. At the conclusion of our study we shall see the presence of our Blessed Mother in the eucharistic celebration as a model or pattern to follow in the development of our Christian lives.

## **1. Eucharist in the Life of the Christians**

If the Eucharist nowadays seems remote from any real experience, this is due to our ignorance of the Jewish and human environment in which it acquired its form. It can, then, be seen that Christianity — like Judaism — has its roots in the soil of humanity. The bread and wine are food and therefore signify new life. Taking into account that the first Christians did not invent their rites, we realize that they adopted and adapted the practices of their Jewish ancestors.<sup>61</sup> *Berakah* was the context in which the Eucharist took its shape. Therefore, taken as a whole, this food that has become a meal expresses the very life of the Community; believers form one body, and in return this 'living body' also uses the word *berakah* to praise God

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<sup>61</sup> X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 44-45.

for his mighty deeds, for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the establishment of his new Community.

When we think of the Eucharist, we think first of all of eating and drinking. This act is something significant in human life and society. Food is life: if we do not eat we die; food is pleasure: a feast means joy and merrymaking. What we eat is the result of our labours. It is such a central part of life that we realize food gives us strength to go on working. In its strict sense, however, life is more than this, but the truth is that food plays an important part in it. We eat food in our joys, sorrows labour and achievements. This is the reason why eating food is common to all people.

A meal has significance: the Eucharist and community go together, just as life and liturgy are inseparable. We are reminded of this by the Bishops of the Second Vatican Council:

in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ (1 Cor 10:17), is both expressed and brought about. All are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live and towards whom our life whole is directed (*Lumen Gentium* 3).

The principal fruit of receiving Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ. Christ said, “[W]hoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, remains in me, and I in him” (John 6:56).<sup>62</sup> Holy Communion gives life through the Holy Spirit, preserves, increases and renews the life of grace received at baptism.<sup>63</sup> As mentioned above, the Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice of the cross perpetuated in the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>64</sup> The Eucharist can

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1391.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1392.

<sup>64</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 12.

respond to our aspirations in the present life. Therefore, the “Eucharistic meal is a meal of Christ — that is, a meal that establishes a union with him, one that involves the whole being and enables the believer to remain in him as he abides in us.”<sup>65</sup>

While everywhere in the world, society is deeply divided on the grounds of the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the exploiting and the exploited, the Eucharist as a sacrament of unity should build togetherness, or at least tend towards it. As the sacrament for the nourishment of the spiritual life of the baptised, the Eucharist should help us to create the values of the Kingdom of God where there will be no discrimination.<sup>66</sup> The Eucharist should serve as a remedy against selfishness, should become a struggle for the building up of the new community on the earth. This is how the power of the blood of Christ is to take effect in society. After Jesus had shared the meal with his disciples, they went out to the Mount of Olives where he told them, “[P]ray that you may not undergo the test” (Luke 22:39-40); afterwards, they made their way to Calvary. In our eucharistic gatherings nowadays, we try to finish within the shortest time possible, in order to be able to go to our Sunday relaxation joints and the activities of the rest of the week, instead of making our way to Calvary, to be with the sick, the poor and the needy in our society as a whole.

### *1.1 Necessity of the Eucharist for the Development of Christian life*

The Eucharist in which the sacrifice of Christ is renewed introduces the faithful into the sphere of divine love, so that they themselves may become

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<sup>65</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 119-120.

<sup>66</sup> “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; see also 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11; Eph 2:13-18; Jn 7:37-39).

“eucharist” for others. Becoming Eucharist reaches its summit in martyrdom. It reflects the perfect imitation of the Master “who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Let us now see what happens at the multiplication of the loaves. “I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry, they will collapse on the way, some have come a great distance” (Mark 8:2-3 NJB). This concern responds to an actual immediate need: the food was to keep them from fainting. It is in this line that later Jesus clearly formulates the necessity of the eucharistic meal for the spiritual life, “Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you do not have life in you” (John 6:53). To this extent we see the Eucharist as indispensable for the Christian life.<sup>67</sup>

Jesus declare, “[J]ust as the living Father sent me, and I have life because of the Father, so also one who feeds on me will have life because of me” (John 6:57). We can be certain that the Eucharist is a true Banquet, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment.<sup>68</sup> On this point St. Paul attests that “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Allegorically, we are now grafted onto Christ and we live his life and produce his fruits (John 15:4-5).<sup>69</sup> Such is the effect and importance of receiving Holy Communion, of which we now see plainly its necessity. Even in the *Code of Canon Law* this necessity is stated, a precept which holds only for those who have reached the age of reason (around seven years of age).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 123.

<sup>68</sup> John PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 16.

<sup>69</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 124.

<sup>70</sup> *The Code of the Canon Law*, can. 913§2.



The consciousness of being sinners should lead us to approach the Sacrament of Penance, in order to receive Holy Communion worthily; otherwise, we could be like the disciples distancing themselves from the Eucharist (John 6:60.66.67). Of this St. Paul reminds us, “[...] whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27). At the same time, Holy Communion can free us from sin; the Body of Christ we receive at Communion and the Blood we drink is “shed for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28 NJB). This means that the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ (*ex opere operantis*) without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from sinning in the future.<sup>71</sup> Daily recourse to Holy Communion is an idea that should never escape our mind, even if for the great majority of Christians, circumstances and conditions of life prevent them from doing so. This is one reason why the Faithful are obliged to attend Sunday Mass.

Meanwhile, life is still imperfect; sufferings, sins and death are a reality and so too is our share in Christ’s sufferings (Col 1:24). He made suffering into an act of love, and death a gateway to life. In this meal we remember the sacrifice of Christ, a sacrifice which made it possible for us to do the same as he, living the same life. Therefore, eating this bread, we make suffering an experience of love: to die if need be, for our fellows. Our offering of ourselves is united with his offering of himself as a single offering to the Father.

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<sup>71</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1393.

## ***1.2 Communion as a Source of High Energy***

The situation at the Last Supper is clear: Jesus had called his disciples together in order to tell them that he was about to leave them until the day when he would see them again in the Kingdom of his Father. He wished to tell them that he would remain present with them 'liturgically through the eucharistic rite', by the new covenant which he would establish by shedding his blood (see Matt 26:26-29).

Let us look at the way the Last Supper unfolded: the disciples were looking forward to the trials that were about to shake them badly. Jesus prophesied, "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed, but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee" (Matt 26:31-32). The community scattered due to the passion of Jesus; Jesus needed to strengthen it, at the same time heartening the man who would bring the community together.<sup>72</sup>

We have a picture that the community is entering into a period of its own life, which is quite different from the serene days when they gathered around the Master. There had been no need to worry, but "now they must anticipate imminent harsh trials."<sup>73</sup> The eucharistic meal must indeed continue to be celebrated, as the command or remembrance requires. Jesus now speaks of a heavenly banquet which comes after a struggle with evil. The earlier life of Jesus is over, but the Banquet in heaven is not yet here. The time of the Church is beginning, the time of struggle with destructive powers. The Church will be able to carry on because of the new presence of the One who had entrusted his cause to the Father departing to face death alone.

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<sup>72</sup> X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 240.

<sup>73</sup> X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 242.

You will agree with me that human life is not a joy; the world in which we live is not paradise, it brings forth “thorns and briars” as well as fruits. The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (Matt 8:20): people do not live as brothers/sisters, and they find it easier to hate their neighbours, than to love them.<sup>74</sup> People have their own experiences of weakness, especially in the area of morality. People have great expectations, but fail to meet their own demands. Take as an example Peter where he says, “Lord I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you”, and yet later he says three times that he does not know him (Luke 22:33.54-62).

The remedy for this frailty is divine assistance. The eucharistic food assimilates us and transforms us, to introduce us to a higher life. The Eucharist responds to every situation of weakness. Of this Jesus says, “[C]ome to me all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). Therefore, in the Eucharist the great concrete principle that inspires the entire work of salvation is revealed, that is the merciful goodness that reaches out even to the very weakest in order to lift them up. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is clear here. It teaches that in the same way bodily that nourishment restores our lost strength, the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which is weakened in our daily life, and this living charity wipes away venial sins.<sup>75</sup> Let us now look into this aspect of eucharistic charity.

### ***1.3 Eucharistic Meal as the Source of Charity, the Well-spring of Joy***

Jesus mentioned the commandment of mutual love (*mandatum*) on the occasion of the institution of the meal that also afforded the possibility of observing that love. He rendered his disciples capable of loving one another as he had loved

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<sup>74</sup> J. JOHNSTON, *Teaching the Faith*, 104.

<sup>75</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1394.

them: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). What is required of us, as far as charity is concerned, is to have the inner disposition necessary for forgiving offences. This is required even before participation in the Eucharist, as Jesus states on the Mount, “[...] if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5:23-24). These are the *daily* efforts from which we cannot excuse ourselves (see Luke 9:23). This condition is necessary in order to live in harmony with all.

Doing good to our enemies is at the heart of Jesus’ teachings. “Do not resist an evildoer, if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matt 5:39, NJB). Luke explicitly deals with love of one’s enemies (6:27-36); “the sermon on the plain makes it clear that we are dealing with the love of one’s enemies wherever there are «persecutors», and their «victims», instead of fighting, just passively enduring the persecution do good to their «persecutors».”<sup>76</sup> To love is to do good. This is very urgent in the context of our secularised culture, characterised by a forgetfulness of God and vain pursuit of human self-sufficiency. The Eucharist should be ‘incarnated’ within daily life, wherever people live or work, in their families, at school, in all settings of life.<sup>77</sup>

Given the opportunity to receive in truth, the Body and Blood of Christ, we must recognise Christ in the poorest in our midst.<sup>78</sup> I cannot forget St. Paul who vigorously reaffirms that a eucharistic celebration which lacks charity — expressed by practical sharing with the poor — is meaningless (1 Cor 11:17-22). The primitive

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<sup>76</sup> C. OWCZAREK *Sons of The Most High*, 198.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Mane nobiscum Domine*, № 26.

<sup>78</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1397.

Church indicated joy and simplicity of heart as distinctive marks of the meal in reference to the “Breaking of the Bread” (Acts 2:46). The wedding at Cana gives a typical example of the joy Jesus brings to the people. We find another example of this joy in the passage about a king who prepares a feast for his son’s wedding: we may see this account as Jesus promising his disciples that they will eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Luke 22:30). Our joy in the Eucharist in which we ‘taste’ God (Ps 34:9), draws the faithful to appreciate the savour of God and stimulates the desire to possess him.<sup>79</sup>

#### ***1.4 Eucharist: Up-building of the Body of Christ***

The Church officially teaches that “the Eucharist is the heart and summit of the church’s life, for in it, Christ associates his church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise, a thanksgiving offered once and for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the grace of salvation on his body which is the church.”<sup>80</sup> This leaves no doubt that the Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church’s life, but it is also a project of solidarity for all humanity.<sup>81</sup> It follows that a Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a promoter of communion, peace and solidarity in every situation. The Eucharist forms men/women in all levels of responsibilities, in all cultures, societies, economic systems and political arenas.

Community is part of the Greek word, *koinonia* (communion) and has been a eucharistic word since the time of the New Testament. The phrase, “the eucharist makes the church”, carries a deep patristic theology of how the Body of Christ

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<sup>79</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1407.

<sup>81</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Mane nobiscum Domine*, № 27.

makes the Body of Christ, the sacramental body making the ecclesial body.<sup>82</sup> When the question of Real Presence arose, the Eucharist was understood to give to Christians the life of that Body — the Church — and so to enable them to go out and deepen that presence in the world.<sup>83</sup> Community is the whole assembly of which the Church is a sign. Here lies St. Paul's image of the body where he says, "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). He goes on to demonstrate that this oneness is actually that of the Body of Christ given as food.<sup>84</sup> The Blood of Christ — as is the Body — is, then, the source of communion. Those who communicate in an unworthy way prevent the formation of one body among the participants.

The Eucharist tends towards the formation and development of one body called the "mystical Body of Christ",<sup>85</sup> the entire Church and each of its members. Fidelity to the new commandment is vital here, "love one another as I loved you" (John 15:12; 13:14). The Eucharist is the power, which develops all aspects of reciprocal love where the entire body "receives the strength to grow and build itself in charity," (see Eph 4:16). The body of Christ is humankind, united in the Church. Christ is the head of the body, has reconciled divided humanity, and on the cross has brought it together into unity.

## **2. The Presence of Mary in the Celebration of the Eucharist**

It is significant now to turn to the school of Mary, the mother of our saviour, who was ever present in the early ministry of her Son. We can note three active

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<sup>82</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 243.

<sup>83</sup> R. MOLONEY, *The Eucharist*, 243.

<sup>84</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 131.

<sup>85</sup> THE THEOLOGICAL - HISTORICAL COMMISSION..., *The Eucharist*, 132.

presences of Mary in the key moments of the economy of salvation. Mary was present at the incarnation, the paschal mystery, and Pentecost. She wholly participated in these salvific events, and she became an inseparable dimension of the Church as it was being founded.<sup>86</sup> At the incarnation she was gifted with grace, faith and divine motherhood (Luke 1:26-45). The main element here is that Mary is the mother of Christ, the mother of the Son of God; she became mother once and forever. She conceived Jesus in her womb and more so in her heart in faith. Later Jesus declares that, “my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it” (Luke 8:21; Mark 3:31; Matt 12:49). Doing the works of God with faith, we conceive and bring forth Christ again. Here we see faith and work integrated together and as one reality in us, by means of which we bear witness to an authentic Christian life.

Our attention is focused on the paschal mystery. Mary is present as Jesus’ disciple and as the mother of all the disciples; she is present as one who suffers as she associates herself in her Son’s passion. The Gospel according to John gives us a hint of this by stating that “standing by the cross of Jesus was his mother [...]” (John 19:25). It implies that she is part of the whole paschal mystery: the death and resurrection.

Mary is associated with her Son’s sacrifice, and this is attested to when Simeon prophesies, “(and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:35). Recognizing that Mary bears this invisible stigma in her heart, Vatican Council II acknowledged it by stating that she “lovingly consent[ed] to the immolation of this victim which was born of her”

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<sup>86</sup> See G. KOCHOLICKAL, “The Church We Believe in”, 143.

(*Lumen Gentium* 58). She followed her Son to Jerusalem in the celebration of his last Passover. At the foot of the cross it was soon understood that Mary, like her Son, learned obedience through what she suffered (Heb 5:8). Vatican Council II expresses the idea of Mary being united with her Son's sacrifice in clear terms,

Thus the Blessed virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, associated herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim which was born of her (*Lumen Gentium* 58).

"Mary is a woman of the eucharist" in her whole life, says John Paul II in his 2003 encyclical letter on the eucharist.<sup>87</sup> The Gospel is silent on this matter at first glance. What we are certain of is that Mary was present among the disciples who prayed with one accord, (Acts 1:14). This gives us an impression that Mary was present at the eucharistic celebration of the first Christians, whom we know were devoted to the breaking of bread. Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me", and at the wedding feast of Cana, Mary repeated in similar words, "Do whatever he tells you". Thus if Jesus is able to change water into wine, Mary says, "trust my Son: he can change bread and wine into his Body and Blood."

Consequently, Mary offered her virginal womb for the incarnation of God's Word,<sup>88</sup> that is, Mary conceived the Son of God in physical reality, anticipating what will happen sacramentally to any believer who receives the Body and Blood of Christ in faith. She also replied *fiat*, and we also repeat *Amen* when receiving Holy Communion, affirming that Jesus Christ is Son of God, Son of Mary who has become present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.

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<sup>87</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 53.

<sup>88</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 55.



Moreover, when she visited Elizabeth, she bore in her womb the Word-made-flesh; in some way she became the first tabernacle in history and her relatives was the first to adore the Son of God.

From the cross on Calvary Jesus presented his mother to the Beloved Disciple (and in him, to each of us) as he said, "Woman, behold, your Son". To each one of us he says, "Behold your mother" (see John 19:26-27). This scene gives us confidence that Mary is present with and in the church and is the Mother of the church, even in every eucharistic celebration. In the liturgy, Mary has always been part of the eucharistic celebration of the churches of the East and West, in the traditions of Religious Institutes, at Marian shrines, and in modern movements like the Catholic Youth Organization or the *Militiæ Immaculatæ*.<sup>89</sup>

We have no need to shy off now: having a true eucharistic attitude we should sing *Magnificat* with confidence together with Mary. The Eucharist has been given to us so that our lives, like that of Mary, may become completely a *Magnificat* with the view of what God has done for us and is still doing for us daily.

## Conclusion

At the end of the eucharistic discourse in John's gospel, we can join in with Peter to say to Jesus once more, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe, we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68 NJB). At the dawn of the third millennium, we are called to undertake with renewed enthusiasm the journey of Christian living. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, his redemptive sacrifice, his resurrection; we have the gift of the

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<sup>89</sup> "Her motherhood is particularly experienced by the Christian people at the sacred banquet — the liturgical celebrations of the mystery of the redemption at which Christ, his true body born of the Virgin Mary, becomes present." JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Mater*, № 44.

Holy Spirit which calls us to obedience to the Father, and we find that our commitment to holiness must be drawn from the Eucharist. All activities, every pastoral work, and the church's mission in general should draw their energy from the Eucharist. We should also have recourse to the Blessed Mary ever-Virgin who prays for us. This is what we have highlighted in the last part of Chapter Three.

We have seen that community/solidarity is a vital aspect of the eucharistic celebration. The challenge of dialogue now should become fundamental for transforming relationships between individuals, nations and peoples, in the religious, political, economical, social and cultural life. The church in Africa now should become aware that, through her witness, she has borne her own sons and daughters, and should become a place of true reconciliation amidst its political crisis and wars in many countries.

Having said this, we should now go ahead strengthening the Small Christian Communities, of which John Paul II says, "the church as Family cannot reach her full potential as church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships."<sup>90</sup> The purpose of evangelisation is to transform humanity from within and make it new. This is what the Eucharist does in the lives of Christians, as we have seen. However, if we speak of liturgical inculturation — especially here in Africa — we find that it is a delicate task since it requires fidelity to the Gospel and Apostolic Traditions. I agree with the Synodal Fathers when they said,

Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelisation. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal,

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<sup>90</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, № 89.

cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total union with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup>

This should become a task for African theologians today so that with great care they may not lose sight of the Eucharist.

One of the goals of the Second Vatican Council was to recover the rich eucharistic tradition of the first Christian centuries, and to balance the biblical and patristic insights with the later medieval developments. It affirmed that the eucharistic action is for the whole Church; the baptized and the assembly ought to participate fully, actively and with full consciousness.<sup>92</sup>

The Eucharist, the Mass, and the Lord's Supper are at once inseparably the *sacrifice* in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated, the *memorial* of the death and resurrection of the Lord who said, "[...] do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19), and the *communion* of the Body and Blood, the people of God who share the paschal sacrifice, renewing the covenant which was made once and for all by God in Christ's blood. This holistic approach anticipates our eschatological kingdom, until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

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<sup>91</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, № 62.

<sup>92</sup> See SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, Chap. I, № H.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The episode in Luke 24:13-35 gives us an account of what happened after the Lord's Resurrection, to which I seek to draw our attention. We can learn a lot from two significant phrases,

1. "he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures," v 27 and
2. "[...] he was made know to them by the breaking of the bread." v 35.

This sums up my essay very well. Here let us recall, as mentioned early on, the fact that the development of the primitive Christian liturgy took its shape within the Jewish liturgy, that after a service of readings and prayers there followed a breaking of the bread and blessing of the cup. At every Mass the Liturgy of the Word precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist, hence there are two "tables". This comes out in St. John's gospel where Christ explains the mystery of his person, and then he draws attention to the Eucharist. The same thing happened on the road to Emmaus.

The words of Jesus must make our hearts "burn" within us, drawing us out of the darkness of the world, out of our sorrows, fears and anxieties, and awakening in us the desire to remain with him always, as he remains in us until the end of time (Matt 28:20). In his Apostolic Letter, John Paul II has declared a Year of the Eucharist, which will be celebrated from October 2004 to October 2005.<sup>93</sup> This

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<sup>93</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Mane nobiscum Domine*, № 4.

commemoration can serve as an important opportunity for Christian communities to evaluate their progress in this particular area, that is, how has the Word of God permeated our hearts and been manifested in our daily lives?

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were prepared by the Word of the Lord, later recognised their master in the gesture of breaking of the bread, and their minds were enlightened, hearts enkindled, and they began to speak boldly. This is what the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist should do to us. The Pope continues to teach us that “the mystery of the Eucharist — sacrifice — presence — banquet — does not allow for reduction or exploitation, it must be experienced and lived in its integrity.”<sup>94</sup> Let us learn a lot from the saints, the great interpreters of eucharistic piety, and allow the transforming power present in the Eucharist to work in us.

What we have looked at is the fact that the qualitative and unique character of the sacrifice of Christ derives from his unconditional obedience to his Father. His incarnation, passion, death is a total “Yes” to the Father (2 Cor 1:19), and he said clearly, “[M]y food is to do the will of my Father.” This is the biggest challenge I see today in Africa. St. Paul inspires us by his beautiful words, “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

It has been repeated that the Church is fundamentally an “agapic community”, because she proceeds from Love and exists to practice and preach the Love of God revealed through Jesus Christ. She is sent to be the Sacrament of Love. This is the fundamental task for each believer: sharing the one bread and one cup

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<sup>94</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, № 61.

leads us to communion of material goods, as Luke says, “There was no needy person among them, [...] [for the proceeds from the sale] were distributed to each according to need” (Acts 4:34.35). The teaching of the *Didache* is relevant even today, “[I]f we share heavenly bread why should we not share the earthly things?” (*Didache*, IV, 8). The *Catechism of Catholic Church* also adds that the Eucharist commits us to the poor.<sup>95</sup> This is a real challenge for the Christians today. Let us not close our eyes and neglected our brothers and sisters in need.

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<sup>95</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, № 1397.

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