

The Eucharist - More Than Just a Devotion

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Gospel of Luke 9:11b-17

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As Catholics, we have always paid great devotional attention to the Eucharist and the real presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of the bread and wine at the Mass. And rightly so!

For 2000 years, we have gathered to celebrate the Mass - based on the Last Supper which Jesus shared with his disciples and which Paul describes as a well established tradition already by the 50's of the first century of the Christian era.

Furthermore, the documents of the Second Vatican Council have described the Eucharist as both the fount and the apex - the source and the summit of the whole Christian life. I hardly think that there could be a more explicit statement in affirming the centrality of this sacrament in the life of a Christian.

However, I sometime wonder if we as Catholics have narrowed our understanding of this sacrament only to the physical elements of the consecrated elements of bread and wine. Great theological treatises have been written concerning the nature of what occurs at the time of consecration resulting in the doctrine of Transubstantiation.

However, there are other elements of Eucharist that sometimes get short shrift or are forgotten about completely. The element of simply **gathering as a community**; the action of **breaking** the bread and the **pouring** out of the wine as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice; and the **sending forth** of the Faithful to bring the gospel beyond the church doors.

So while our focus is often on the physical elements, we cannot neglect the **actions of gathering, breaking, pouring, and sending**,

As for the gathering, it has become apparent to me and many others, after two years of the Covid pandemic, how important 'in-person' gatherings are to us. Many have remarked how they missed being able to physically come together to pray and simply be present to each other. Our faith isn't just a 'Jesus and me' thing. It necessarily involves others. It reinforces the fact that we walk together in faith - whatever other differences we might have. Pope Francis, in his call for synodality in the Church has further underlined that fact.

The actions of breaking or fractioning the Eucharistic bread and the pouring of the cup, understated as they seem to be in our present liturgy, nevertheless commemorates not only Christ's sacrifice but also those whose lives have been broken or those who have poured out their time, talent, and energies for the benefit of others.

And finally, the sending forth. The term, 'Mass' is derived from the Latin - *Ite Missa est* - Go - You are being sent!

It reminds me of the story of a Catholic who was invited by a friend to a Quaker prayer meeting. They came into a stark church with only backless benches to sit on. They waited and waited but nothing seemed to be happening. Finally the Catholic leans over to his Quaker friend and impatiently whispers: 'When does the service start?' To which his friend replies: 'When we leave here!' Indeed, it is when we exit the church doors that we enter into the mission field and the graces of the Mass are to be put into action.

Yes, the physical elements of the consecrated bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus Christ are essential in our worship. But they also remind us that holiness and sacredness are not confined to them alone. All human beings and in fact all creation is sacred because it is the work of God. If we deny or denigrate that, we deny or denigrate the Incarnation.

So ultimately, what we commemorate today on this the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Christ - extends far beyond mere devotion - it is also a call to **actually become** what we eat and drink in this sacred meal.

As Paul reminds the Corinthians of Jesus' words: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' [1Cor.11:26]