

The Eucharist and live

The Eucharist is first of all the great gift of God to men, the gift of his Son: “the bread of God is the one descends from heaven and gives his life to the world. I am the living bread, that has come down from heaven. He who eats this bread will have eternal life, and the bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world (Jn, 6,33-51); CCC 1336). The Eucharist is “source and apex” of all the gifts of God for us: in fact it is Christ himself (CCC 1324), whom the Father has given to all of us and in whom He offers us every thing (Rm 8,32). In the Eucharist God comes to us: he speaks to us with His word, reconciles himself with us through the sacrifice of love, gives us his life through the “bread of life” and sends us as his witnesses (CCC 1332).

The Eucharist is also fond and apex of all the answers of men to God. It is the perfect prayer because it remembers the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father; it is the perfect sacrifice because we can introduce our gifts and ourselves into the sacrifice of Christ: it is the sacrament of the intimate union of man with God (CCC 1323).

Card. Christoph Schomborn OP

Final prayer

I Thank you, Lord, Father almighty, eternal God, who surely because of no merit of mine, but only for the effect of your mercy have deigned, with the precious Body and Blood of your Son and Our Lord Jesus Christ, to feed me a sinner, an unworthy servant. I beg you that this Holy Communion may not be for me a crime worthy of pain, but may rather be a valid intercession to obtain forgiveness, May it be for me a weapon of defence and a shield of good will. May it be a deliverance from my vices, the extermination of concupiscence and passions, an increase of charity, patience, humility, obedience and all other virtues, secure defence against the alluring of my enemies both visible and invisible, absolute quiet from carnal and spiritual passion, perfect abandonment in you, unique and true God, happy fulfilment of my goal. I beg you to lead me, a sinner, to the ineffable banquet where you with your Son and with the Holy Spirit are the true light of your Saints, full satiety, eternal, full joy, everlasting happiness. Through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

San Tommaso d'Aquino

cards of formation



*“I am the living bread,
which has come down
from heaven*

Gv 6, 51

**Towards the re-discovery
of the mystery of the Eucharist.**

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To starting...

Before dying, Jesus wanted “to eat the Passover”, to consume the Paschal lamb with his disciples; however, he opened that banquet to new perspectives: by blessing and breaking the unleavened bread, He has made of it the sacrament of his body; by rendering thanks on “the chalice of blessing”, he has made of it the sacrament of his blood. This is how the old Passover has been brought to fulfilment in the kingdom of God and how its definitive completion is pre-announced in the eschatological banquet.

The institution of the Eucharist is narrated in four texts of the New Testament that can be distinguished in two reviews: Matthew and Marc, Luke and Paul. On these texts, that contain several differences, we can tentatively reconstruct the original tenor of the words of Jesus in the last supper.

The gesture of Jesus on the bread and wine at the eve of his death is a “prophetic sign”, that makes already present and efficacious the redeeming event. Jesus designates the bread as his body “given up for many”, and the wine as his blood “shed for many”: he does introduces himself as the servant of Yahweh who donates himself to the shedding of blood, for the salvation of many. The Church repeats this same ritual gesture, as “memorial” of the death and resurrection of the Lord; she make memory to God the sacrifice of his Son, and makes it present for the believers of every generation. This ritual was called “the breaking of bread” or “the supper of the Lord”. The “breaking of bread” was the characteristic sign and the constitutive element of the union of the community in charity.



To reflect

From the Encyclical “Ecclesia de Eucharistia”, by John Paul II

“On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 11,23), instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and of his blood. Paul’s words take us back to the dramatic circumstance in which the Eucharist was born. It carries indelibly written the event of the passion and death of the Lord. It is not only the evocation, but a sacramental representation. It is the sacrifice of the cross that perpetuates throughout the centuries The words with which the people, in the Latin rite, answer the proclamation of the “mystery of faith” express this truth very well, “We announce your death, Lord!”. The Church received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as a gift, though very precious among the others, but as *the gift par excellence*, because it is a gift of himself, of his presence with his holy humanity, as well as with his saving work. This does not remain stuck in the past,, since all that Jesus is, all that he has suffered and fulfilled for all men, shares his divine eternity, wherefore it embraces all times. When the church celebrated the Eucharist, memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, this central event of salvation is made really present and “the work of redemption is actuated”. This sacrifice is so much decisive for the salvation of mankind that Jesus Christ fulfilled it and returned to the Father *only after leaving us the means to share it*, just as if we had been present. Thus, every faithful can participate in it and can draw inexhaustible fruit from it.. This is the faith lived by Christian generations through the centuries. The Magisterium of the church has kept on insisting on this faith with a joyful gratitude for the inestimable gift. A wonderful mystery! A mystery of mercy! Could Jesus do anything better than this? Truly, in the Eucharist, “He loved them to the end” (Jn 13,1), an immeasurable love!

Eucharistic

Dictionary

Memorial

The Eucharist is a memorial, it is not a simple remembrance, that is an interior movement of the soul towards the past, but is the actualisation of the objective and active presence of the event of deliverance of the past in the present moment, with all its operative, saving, actual efficacy. The Eucharist is the Paschal action Of Christ who, here and now, as a sacrament of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, offers and realizes the salvation, involving in its dynamism the charity commitment of the faithful, sacramental but real presence and dynamic presence of the Risen Lord who, in and through the church continues in the world and history to operate the definitive and universal salvation.

To meditate

From the "Works" of Saint Thomas Aquinas, doctor of the Church (Opusc. 57, nella festa del Signore, lect.1-4)

Wanting to share his divinity, the only begotten Son of God assumed our nature and became man so that we, men, might become gods. For our salvation, he valued all that he assumed. In fact, he offered to God his body, as a victim on the cross, for our reconciliation, He shed his blood giving to it the value of price and washing, so that, once redeemed from the humiliating slavery, we might be purified from all sins. To let us remember constantly such a great benefit, he left us his body as food and his blood as drink under the species of bread and wine.

O inestimable and marvellous banquet! You give salvation and everlasting joy to all the invitees! Can there ever be anything more precious than this? We are not served with veal or goat meat, as in the old law, but with the body of Christ, true God. Is there anything more sublime than this sacrament? Indeed, there is no sacrament more efficacious than this: sins are cancelled by it, good dispositions grow, and the mind is enriched with all the spiritual charisms. Having been instituted for the universal salvation, in the Church, the Eucharist is offered for the living and for the dead.

Nobody can express the suavity of this sacrament. The spiritual sweetness is enjoyed with it from its very source, and memory is made of the highest degree of charity that Christ manifested in his passion. He instituted the Eucharist in the last supper, when, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, he was on the point of passing from the world to the Father. The Eucharist is the memorial of the Passion, the fulfilment of the figures in the Old Covenant, the admirable document of his immense love for men.

Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel of John - Jn 6,51-58

Jesus said to the crowds of the Jews, "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus replied to them, "In 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. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink, Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person,

As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me.

This is the bread, which has come down from heaven; it is not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever".

PRAYER

*O Sacred banquet,
in which Christ is
received, the
memory of his
passion is recalled
And there is
given to us the
pledge of future
glory....*



To form oneself

The Eucharist, an action of grace by the faithful

In the Gospel narration of the Institution of the Eucharist, the words *eukharistéin* (to thank) and *euloghéin* (to bless) are used with the same meaning: however it has been the first word to give the name to the Eucharist, probably because it expresses more clearly the meaning of thanksgiving.

The two words, anyhow, are equivalent and connect the gesture of Christ and of the church to the most genuine cultural tradition of the people of God in the O.T., giving evidence to the continuity of the divine design that keeps on evolving in history.

The thanksgiving is the typical element of the people of Israel: in fact, it is the religious attitude that assumes the revelation of God, his intervention in history; it is the answer of the community that believes in the marvels God performs in its favour. To be a witness of God's wonders, to experience the saving efficacy and to remember all this, spontaneously arouses in the heart and puts on the lips of the believer the "blessing", the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God, the admiration and celebration of his saving love. The "blessing" flows as a spontaneous expression of praise, of wonder, of thanksgiving. We remember that of Jethro after hearing from Moses the prodigies fulfilled by God during the exodus from Egypt (Exodus,18).

Ex. 18,9-11: Jethro was delighted at all Yahweh's goodness to Israel in having rescued them from the clutches of the Egyptians. Blessed be Yahweh, Jethro exclaimed, for having rescued you from the clutches of the Egyptians and the clutches of Pharaoh, for having rescued the people from the grasp of the Egyptians! Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all other gods, because he delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians, when they dealt with them.

Later on the "blessing" was ritualised, it became literary genre of prayer and cult of the People of God. It is expressed in many Psalms, in the meals of the Hebrews as thanksgiving to God for the food He has given to men, but its strong moment is precisely of the Passover. In the Paschal banquet, in fact, the wonders of God are remembered and the "prayer of blessing" pronounced by the head of the family, who presides the celebration, at the end of the rite, is a *blessing* of God's name and of his power, love and fidelity; it is *the memory* of the benefits that He accomplished *with mighty hand and outstretched arms*; it is a *supplication* to the merciful God that he may intervene once again in the history of his people.

Here is an example:

The head of the family: "Bless out God whom all that we have eaten belongs to".

The assembly: "Let our God be blessed for the food we have eaten".

The head of the family, raising the chalice: "Blessed be Yahweh, our God, who nourishes the whole world with bounty, grace and mercy- We thank you, Yahweh, our God, for giving us the possession of a vast and fertile land- Have mercy, our God, of Israel your people, and of Jerusalem, your city,- and of Sion, the place where your glory dwells, - and of your altar and of your temple- blessed be you, Yahweh, who build Jerusalem.

This is the context in which the *first Eucharist* was celebrated by Jesus. In the multiplication of bread, type of the Eucharist, he had already pronounced a prayer of blessing (Mt.14,19), an action of grace "Jn 6,11.23; cfr Mt.15,35; Mk.8,6). Thus now, in the last supper, He pronounces a "blessing" on the bread "Mt. 26.26; Mk. 14,22; cfr Lk.24,30) and renders thanks on the chalice (Mt.26,27; Mk. 14,23; differently in 1 Cor. 10,16; 11,24; Lk,22,19).

This Paschal "blessing" of Jesus assumes a new, original meaning and importance. The sacrifice of the cross is *anticipated in it*, the miracle of the resurrection is in it *celebrated*, the new Passover and the new covenant are in it *remembered*.

In the primitive church, the two blessings pronounced by Jesus were prayed at the end of the community meal, one immediately after the other. It so happened that a "unique blessing", the more solemn one that was said on the chalice of wine, was used as the action of grace also on the bread that was to be used for the Eucharist. It is from the action of grace that the Eucharistic prayer, the anaphora of the Oriental liturgies, the preface and the canon of the Roman liturgy directly derive.

The Eucharistic word, therefore, has remained to designate the central act of the Christian cult, instituted by Jesus and repeated regularly in the church as a memorial, praise, gratitude and return to the Father.

EUCCHARISTIC DICTIONARY

Eucharist

The word 'eucharist' designates the action of grace of the believers in Christ. Like the "blessing" of the people of Israel, the Eucharist celebrated by Jesus is repeated regularly by the churches, it is a sacrifice of praise to the Father, a memorial of his wonderful works, a celebration of his love. The "blessing" of the Hebrews had its strong moment in the celebration of the Passover and in the Paschal banquet. The Passover was the feast of the deliverance and redemption of Israel.