

Eucharist and life

“In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the whole creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and resurrection of Christ” (CCC 1359). By joining the sacrifice of Christ, the Church in the Eucharist gives voice to the praise of the whole creation. This must be corresponded by the commitment of each faithful to offer his own existence, his “body” -as Paul says- in “a living and holy sacrifice, “pleasing to God” (Rm 12,1), in full communion with Christ crucified and risen for all men and the disciple called to total self-oblation to Him.

John Paul II

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, let me know who you are,
Let my heart feel the holiness that is you.
Grant that I may see the glory of your face.
From your being and from your word,
from your acting and your design,
Let me draw with certainty that the truth and love
Are at my disposal for my salvation.
You are the way, the truth, the life.
You are the origin of the new creation.
Grant me the courage to dare.
Make me aware of my need for conversation,
and allow that I may fulfil it serenely,
in the reality of my daily life.
If I acknowledge to be an unworthy sinner,
grant me your mercy.
Grant me a persevering faithfulness
And the trust that starts all over again
Every time that everything seems to fail.

Romano Guardini

cards of formation



*“take and eat...
take and drink...”*

Towards the re-discovery
of the mystery of Eucharist

4

Begining...

The Didaché, one of the primitive Christian writings, speaks of the Eucharist as follows:

The day of the Lord, come together; break the bread and give thanks: however, only after confessing your sins, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Let whoever has some friction with his neighbour not join you before they have reconciled, otherwise your sacrifice would be profaned. In fact, this is what the Lord has said about this sacrifice: Everywhere and in every time a pure sacrifice is offered to me because I am a great king - the Lord says- and my name is admirable among the nations. Concerning the Eucharist, you offer your thanksgiving in this way.

First of all on the cup: "Our Father, we thank you for the holy vine of David, your servant (according to some this is Jesus, others say it is the Church, and other the consecrated wine), that you have wanted Christ, your servant, to disclose to us. Glory be to you through the centuries. Amen". Then on the broken bread: "Our Father, we thank you, for the life and the knowledge which you wanted to be disclosed to us by Jesus Christ, your servant. Glory be to you through the centuries. Amen. As the broken bread was spread on the hillocks and once gathered has become one and the same thing, similarly let your Church be united in your kingdom from the extreme boundary of the earth: because yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ, from ever and ever. Amen."

Let no one eat or drink your Eucharist except the Baptised in the name of the Lord, because he said: "Do not give dogs what is holy" (Mt 7,6). After eating to satiety, give thanks like this: "We thank you, holy Father, for your holy name that you have made to dwell in our hear, for the wisdom, faith, immortality that you have revealed us through Jesus Christ, your servant. Glory be to you for ever and ever. Amen. You, almighty Lord, have created all things to the glory of your name, and have given the children of men food and drink so that they may praise you; but to us you have granted the grace of a spiritual food and drink, and of eternal life through Jesus, your servant. First of all we thank you because you are almighty. To you be glory, for ever and ever. Amen. Lord, remember your Church, deliver her from all evil, make her perfect in your love, sanctify and reunite her from all corner into your kingdom that you have prepared for her. Because yours is the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen. Let grace come and the world pass away! Hosanna to the God of David! Let he who is holy come close, let him who is not be converted. Maranathà (Aramaic expression that means: Our Lord comes, o: Our Lord has come)".

To reflect

From the encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, by John Paul II.

The acclamation of the assembly following the consecration appropriately ends by expressing the eschatological thrust which marks the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. *1 Cor* 11:26): "until you come in glory". The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ promised by Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the "pledge of future glory". In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting "in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ".

The Eucharist *creates communion* and *fosters communion*. Saint Paul wrote to the faithful of Corinth explaining how their divisions, reflected in their Eucharistic gatherings, contradicted what they were celebrating, the Lord's Supper. The Apostle then urged them to reflect on the true reality of the Eucharist in order to return to the spirit of fraternal communion (cf. *1 Cor* 11:17- 34). Saint Augustine effectively echoed this call when, in recalling the Apostle's words: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (*1 Cor* 12: 27), he went on to say: "If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord's table your own mystery. Yes, you receive your own mystery". And from this observation he concludes: "Christ the Lord... hallowed at his table the mystery of our peace and unity. Whoever receives the mystery of unity without preserving the bonds of peace receives not a mystery for his benefit but evidence against himself".

REFLECT

Our mortal flesh is nourished by the Body and blood of Christ, so that our mortal soul may be enriched with the divine nature.

(Tertulliano)



This was the reason why in the converted pagan communities the word “many” was substituted by “for you”, for them undoubtedly clearer.

About the words on the cup, the expression used by Matthew and Mark seems to be preferable: “This is my blood, of the covenant”, that is : this is the cup that really contains my blood, that signifies and actuates the new covenant. The expression contains an evident allusion to the words of Moses: “ This is the blood of the covenant” (Ex. 24, 8): but probably, because of their concision and the syntactic hardness, in the non Hebrews communities, they have been transformed into formulas similar to those of Paul and Luke: “This cup is the new covenant of my blood”. The attribute “new”, that in Paul and Luke accompany the word “covenant”, might have been added in the linguistic use, but could also go back to Jesus himself. In fact, the expression “new covenant” corresponds perfectly to the thought of Jesus, who wanted to renew the mosaic covenant through the new covenant, already announced by the Prophets; it had also been prefigured in the Old Testament: Jeremiah had spoken expressly of the “new covenant” (Jer. 31,31).

The same observation can be done about the words “in remission of sins”, used only by Matthew. It is possible that Jesus himself might have wanted to mention explicitly the forgiveness of sins, that was also remembered in the oracle of Jeremiah (Jer. 31). The expression anyhow, does nothing but underline the expiatory aspect of redemption and of the covenant, already contained in the statement: “this is my blood ... poured for many”.

Jer. 31, 31-34: Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel, but not like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, a covenant, which they broke, even though I was their Master, Yahweh declares. No, this is the covenant I shall make with the house of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be my people. There will be no further need for everyone to teach neighbour or brother, saying, “Learn to know Yahweh!” No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest, Yahweh declares, since I shall forgive their guilt and never more call sin to mind.

Even the formulas of invitation: “take, eat ...; drink from it all of you”, used only by Matthew, were surely pronounced by Jesus: In the Liturgical formulation they might sometimes have been omitted, because they were substituted by gestures and by the celebration all together; thus they are not used by Paul and Luke. The same reason can explain also the absence of the form of command (do this in memory of me) in Matthew and Mark. The liturgical tradition to which they refer could omit this formula, because it was implicit in the celebration itself the fact that it was the execution of a command of Jesus; indeed this could be expressed by the action of grace in which the narration was inserted.. The command was probably expressed by Jesus twice, after each of the two gestures on the cup, as the tradition, referred to by Paul, attests.

Listening to the Word of God

From the Gospel of Matthew Mt 26, 26-28:

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, “Take it and eat”, he said, “this is my body,” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he handed it to them saying, “*Drink from this all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*”



EUCCHARISTIC DICTIONARY

New Covenant

Instituting the Eucharist, Jesus speaks of the New Covenant. Why? After passing the Red Sea, God stipulated with Moses a Covenant on the mt of Sinai. As a sign of the covenant they offered to God some calves and their blood was sprinkled on the people who then ate the meat. As a “contract of the covenant, God donated the 10 commandments. The covenant, therefore, donates a law and the sacrifice that follows with the sacred meal shows the bond of communion and of friendship between God and his people. Jesus brings this covenant to perfection and to fulfilment: he gives a new commandment “love one another as I have loved you” and institutes a new sacrifice founded, not on the blood of calves, but on his own blood. The communion with God, therefore, is no longer “symbolic” as in the covenant made with Moses, but real, because it is written by the blood of Jesus on the cross, whose living and real memorial the Eucharist is.)

To form oneself

4. The narrations of the holy supper

a) *4 Texts, two recensions* - The text of the N.T. that narrate the institution of the Eucharist are 4 (*Mt.26; Mk 14; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11*). They seem to have their origin in a liturgical tradition, The thing is particularly evident for the text of St. Paul, who does not quote from an oral or written Gospel, but directly from the narration known to all and that was continually repeated in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Mt, 26, 26-28: As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing, he broke it and gave it to the disciples, "Take it and eat", he said, "this is my body," Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he handed it to them saying, "Drink from this all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".

Mk 14, 22-24: As they were eating he took bread, and when he had said the blessing, he broke it and gave it to them, "Take it", he said, "This is my body", then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he handed it to them and all drank from it, and he said to them, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many".

Lk 22, 19-20: Then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me". He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood poured out for you".

1 Cor, 11, 22-25: For the tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you is that on the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me". And in the same way with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me".

The four texts can be distinguished in two versions: Matthew and Mark on one side, Luke and Paul on the other. Luke follows the text of the Letter to the Corinthians, or draws it from the same liturgical tradition from which Paul has drawn it. The version of Mark compared with that of Matthew, is more sober: the following words are missing: "eat", "drink from it all of you", "for the remission of sin".

The version of Luke, if compared to that of St. Paul, omits the second command: "do this in remembrance of me", though it contains some clarifying additions: after stating that Jesus "broke" the bread, he adds: "and gave it to them"; the sentence "this is my body, which is for you" is clarified with "given" ("given for you"); the hint on the blood is completed with the words "poured out for you". If we compare the two different versions, we can be aware of the main differences: - Matthew and Mark have the formula "this is my body"; Paul and Luke add: "that is (given) for you".

- The formula on the cup is: "this is my blood, the blood of the covenant", in Matthew and Mark; This cup is the new covenant in my blood", in Paul and Luke.

Only in Paul and Luke there is the command of Jesus: "Do this in remembrance of me".

There are also some minor differences: Matthew and Mark use the expression "for many"; Paul and Luke, "for you". Only in Matthew we find the important words: "for the remission of sins". Only Paul and Luke mention the particular "after supper".

Before these differences it is opportune to ask ourselves which version is to be preferred. Undoubtedly both the formulations are the authentic Word of God; being complementary, they help us understand better the thought of Jesus and the meaning of what he accomplished in that solemn circumstance. Moreover the different formulations, reflecting the liturgical fluctuations of the primitive Christian communities, reveal the development of the original thought present in them. However, from the historical point of view, Jesus pronounced the words of the institution in a unique form and we can attempt to re-construct the original tenor of the words which he used.

b) *The original tenor of the words of the institution*- We can consider the following as the most probable re-construction:

Take, eat:

This is my body that is given for many.

Do this in remembrance of me

Drink from it all of you;

this is my blood, of the (new) covenant, that is poured for you (in remission of sins)

Do this, /every time you drink it, in memory of me.

At the words "this is my body", in all the versions, we think that Jesus must have added the specification "that is given for many", relating the gift of that broken bread with his imminent death and with the saving significance of his death. This relation could not be shown by the words on the cup, because they were pronounced "after supper", while the presentation of the body as the body of Christ had taken place at the beginning of the Paschal Banquet. We feel that the expression in Matthew and Mark about the blood "poured for many" may be preferred to "that is given for you" in Paul and Luke. The Hebrew "for many" is a key-word that establishes a connection with the prophecy of "The Servant of Yahweh", where the word "many" recurs often times. (Is, 53, 11.12 a.12c) and it means "the multitude", practically "all", as we read in the Italian version of the Roman Canon: "for you and for all", corresponding to the Latin text "pro vobis et pro multis". This Biblical value of the word "many" was overlooked by the non Hebrews, who, instead, saw in it more easily a limitation.