

## **Why Catholic session #4: Eucharist**

Before beginning this evening's presentation, I want to read an excerpt from an article in TIME magazine on the Holy Father's recent visit, which struck me as rather beautiful, and should stir thanksgiving in our hearts:

**As the pope-mobile descended the ramp, the sound of bagpipes from above mixed with the sorrowful tune of a single cello player below. Benedict stepped out near the bottom of the ramp to walk the final 35 yards. Amidst all the surrounding concrete and work equipment, he looked particularly slight of build in simple, but heavy white papal vestments for the cold morning. His normally brisk walk was even brisker than usual, seemingly eager to arrive before the paschal candle to pray. Silently he knelt, and remained on his knees, eyes open, but otherwise lost in his prayer for more than two minutes.**

**The prayer he read was a simple and direct, a call for peace and comprehension: "God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world: peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the earth. Turn to your way of love those whose hearts and minds are consumed with hatred. God of understanding, overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy, we seek your light and guidance as we confront such terrible events."**

**The Pope shared a private moment with each of the 9/11 survivors and savers of lives, and was back in his pope-mobile. As he rolled away up the ramp and the bagpipes above began playing again, the 9/11 representatives wiped away tears and hugged each other. As photographers and cameramen put away their equipment, a local radio reporter was giving an instant report from his cell phone: "There's a humility about this man," he said, "that is quite something."**

There was also this passage about one of the abuse victims who met with Benedict.

**"I actually kept my head down; I couldn't believe it until I saw his little red shoes," Olan Horne of Lowell said. "I looked up, and I had the eyes of somebody's grandfather looking at me. He was a very sincere, humble man."**

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Last week we considered Baptism: the initial encounter with Jesus,  
the initial embrace by Jesus.

Baptism is the most fundamental of the three Sacraments of Initiation  
(the other two being Confirmation and Eucharist),

the most fundamental of the Sacraments that *directly introduce* into the life of God.  
Baptism is the doorway to the life of God.

If you recall, Thomas Aquinas likens Baptism to human life coming to be.

This week we explore the Eucharist, considered to be the Sacrament of Sacraments.

I came across an article online also regarding the Pope's visit,  
entitled, "**Why the Pope Speaks for Evangelicals, Too**", by Richard J. Mouw. (4/18/08)

There were a series of responses to the article that were posted.

One of them was short, sweet and eloquent:

"I cannot count the times when I have tried to leave the Church in disgust because of this  
or that. The Holy Eucharist always draws me back. Just to sit in His presence."

-- Enrique.

I know for myself that all of my church-hopping led me to the Catholic Church  
*because of the Eucharist.*

I know for myself that all of my struggles with the Church find their meaning  
*in the Eucharist.*

A French Dominican priest, Fr. Marie-Dominique Philippe (+2007), once wrote:

"The Church is not easy, for it is God placing His trust in human beings."

He also writes,

"The entire institution of the Church is for the Eucharist, and only has meaning in relation  
to the Eucharist. We are really of the Church when we live the Eucharist, when we live  
the Eucharist fully, when we understand what the Eucharist must be for us."

We will see why the Eucharist is considered the Sacrament of Sacraments.

It surely suggests that, of all the Sacraments, it offers the *greatest intimacy*.

If you recall in our overview of the seven Sacraments,

Thomas Aquinas likens the Eucharist to *nourishment*

which preserves the life of the body.

This is *one aspect* of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist, however, can be considered from different angles or perspectives. We need but consider paragraph #1323 in the Catechism,  
to have enough food for thought for a long time. Let us read and dissect it.

**At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his Body and Blood.**

We believe that Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, where he also gave His authority to His Apostles, and those to whom they transmit the authority, to celebrate this mysterious gift. All three Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), as well as Paul in the letter to the Corinthians, transmit the institution of the Eucharist.

John does not transmit the institution itself,

but sheds the deepest of light on the Eucharist in his gospel, chapter 6.

Jesus instituted a *Eucharistic Sacrifice*. What does this mean?

The term “Eucharist” comes from a Greek term that means

- “thanksgiving”
- “giving thanks”.

Now, it is very important to keep in mind that Jesus’ purpose is to reveal the Father.

Last Sunday’s Gospel said it loudly and clearly:

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9).

Everything that Jesus does leads to the Father and is an expression of love for the Father.

In other words, everything that Jesus says and does opens

unto His intimacy with the Father, the life of the Trinity.

As we have said before, Jesus never just gives messages.

At the Cross, Jesus offers Himself to the Father in a unique offering of love.

He could have expressed His love in multitude of ways, and, in fact, did.

But, given the Fall, i.e. the break between God and Humanity

caused by our first parents in humanity, symbolized by Adam and Eve, it was fitting that He die.

Why? Because death was the gravest consequence of the Fall.

Prior to the Fall, in the original blissful state that humanity knew, symbolized by Eden (which did not last very long!), there was no death.

We all sense that death is not normal; hence, our uneasiness with it.

The only way for death to be emptied of itself, and no longer stop love, was for God Himself, in human flesh,

- to die,
- to live the experience of death in everlasting love that is greater than death.

Death is subsequently, we believe, a doorway.

Because of this love, because God always seeks to go further in love, in the Incarnation, the intimacy between God and Humanity

is now greater than the intimacy in “Eden”

– which is why we sing, during the great Easter hymn at the Easter Vigil, “O, blessed fault.”

The intimacy is, of course, lived in a certain brokenness.

Humanity is limping.

There is heartache and cancer and starvation and...and...and in our world.

The intimacy is interior.

This act of self-offering at the Cross is an act of thanksgiving.

It is Jesus thanking the Father.

Now, because the love with which Jesus offers Himself is everlasting love, this act is everlasting in its hidden aspect.

The pain and the blood occurred at a particular time and are finished.

The *love* continues. Consequently the mystery of the Cross can be present to us 2000 years later.

We can participate in the mystery of the Cross.

The Eucharist renders present to us the mystery of the Cross.

The Eucharist communicates to us the everlasting love with which Jesus offers Himself.

Thus, we participate in Jesus very own everlasting act of Thanksgiving: *Eucharist*.

We speak a lot of the “sacrifice of the Mass”.

What does this mean? That we make sacrifices to come to and *at* Mass?

“Oh yes, I got out of bed, a huge sacrifice.

I listened to a boring homily, which made me feel like *I* was on an altar of sacrifice.

I sat behind very bizarre people, who made me sacrifice my comfort.

I postponed my golf game: supreme sacrifice. OK: *sacrifice* of the Mass.”

We speak of sacrifice in referring precisely to this everlasting act of Thanksgiving  
of Jesus, to this offering of Jesus.

There is only one Redeemer and one offering.

The Eucharist grants us to participate in this one offering.

Jesus is not *re*-crucified. Jesus does not re-offer Himself. Nor do we go back in time.

If Jesus comes to us and embraces us in this intimate way,

then He opens to us His eternal offering.

It is important always to think in reference to eternity – as difficult as it may be!

Otherwise, we fall into criticisms such as that leveled, for example,

by John Hardin of Gideon’s Sword Ministries ([www.gideonsword.net](http://www.gideonsword.net))

**The crucifixion took place approx. 2,000 years ago, and, as the central theme of all time, the sacrifice of Christ’s body and the shedding of His blood was sufficient to atone for all sin... it doesn’t need to happen again, and the crucifixion doesn’t need to be witnessed in real time to be effective... God is already doing that. All one needs to do to be saved is to accept Christ’s payment for their sins... and be saved.**

For *anyone* simply to be saved, for any subsequent generations to be touched,

Mr. Hardin does not realize that the sacrifice of the Cross must be beyond time.

John Hardin, by the way, had these kind words to say about the Community of Taize,

whose chant we use at our monthly Adoration:

**Taizé is not a “Christian” organization, although they claim to be. The Taizé “brothers”, as they call themselves, practice the Catholic false doctrine of the Eucharist. The doctrine of transubstantiation (digesting Jesus’ blood and flesh) is nowhere taught in the Word of God, it is a pagan teaching. They also teach the heresy that baptism is necessary for salvation. Through recited prayers and cultic songs, they worship in vain.**

Moving right along (!), the Catechism continues:

**This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection.**

It is interesting to see how the Catechism articulates both the reality of

- eternal love in the perpetuation of the Cross throughout the ages
- the Church as spouse who is entrusted with this.

As you know, this perspective contrasts with that of certain other Christian churches.

I thought I would share with you one of these other perspectives with you,

- so that we be aware.
- because contrast can sometimes help us to see more clearly.

Certain “Sola Scriptura” (Scripture only) churches,

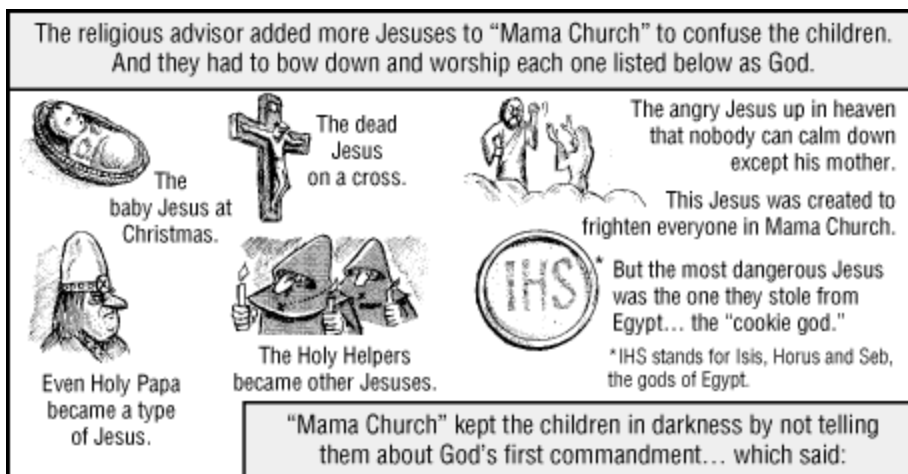
see much of what we believe to be entrusted to the Church with cynical eyes.

This particular Christian organization, Chick publications, based in California,

sees what we treasure as entrusted to the Church as wonderful means

that the Holy Spirit gives us,




as tools with which the Church actually seeks to enslave people to the “Catholic system”.



“IHS”, by the way, is an abbreviation of the Greek of Jesus Christ, which was subsequently transposed into Latin, and became an acronym:

"Jesus Hominum (or Hierosolymae) Salvator",  
i.e. **Jesus**, the Saviour of men (or of **Jerusalem**=Hierosolyma).

The greatest tool for enslavement invented by the Catholic Church, they think,  
is the Eucharist:

The creation of the wafer god was the greatest religious con job in world history.	
	
The Lord Jesus hates the wafer god because it is an idol, and behind every idol is a demon. (1 Cor. 10:20,21)	
<b>That's why God forbids idol worship.</b>	
One billion people live in terror that it will cost them their salvation if the priest denies them the wafer god.	
This religious weapon is one of the most powerful idols ever created by man.	The demonic power behind the wafer god holds the people in bondage, making it very hard to leave the system.

This does raise an interesting point about the Sacraments being “of the Church”.  
One can take a Bible, and “go solo” – to an extent. One can start his or her own church.  
One cannot, however, celebrate the Sacraments solo – as we understand Sacraments,  
i.e. as gestures of Christ.

I recall reading another evangelical Christian website,  
in which the gentleman explains that he would occasionally take bread and wine at work  
and briefly, at his desk, “remember the death of the Lord”.

It is a beautiful intention. It is not the Eucharist.

To celebrate the Eucharist, we must be part of the Body, the Church.

This is important to recall.

Whenever your children (for those who have children), or whenever *we*, say

“Why do I have to go to Church?”

The response is very simple: “We go

- to receive something that we cannot give to ourselves at home
- because we are part of something much bigger than us: the Mystical Body”

We do not go to be entertained, but to be loved and “gifted”

– which does not, of course, justify any liturgical mediocrity.

We understand the Sacraments as being entrusted to the Body of Christ,  
and as an expression of the Body of Christ.

They lovingly join us to one another and those who shepherd us,  
and who, with us, safeguard the gift of the Eucharist.

A question was posed last time that it might be fitting to answer at this point,  
“Why do Protestants not celebrate Sacraments?”

Well, some mainline Protestants do, in a sense.

Evangelicals do not, however.

Now, you may think, “It’s in Scripture, why not?”

It is true that their thinking seems to be inconsistent.

When it comes to the Sacraments, there is a sudden shifting of gears: “Now: symbolic.”

I think that the problem might be that to think otherwise, to believe otherwise  
would lead to accepting the Church, which would be “the end”,  
because the Church is seen as an obstacle.

To claim that there are no Sacraments allows one to stay away from the Church.

The Reformation had legitimate grievances.

But the baby was thrown out with the bath water.

There is a lack of understanding of the Church as Body of Christ,

linked to a misunderstanding of mediation and instrumentality.

In evangelical circles, it seems to me that there is no differentiation

between human and divine mediation.

This means that, in their perspective, what is true of human relationships

is necessarily true of divine relationships, i.e. our relationship with God.

In human relationship, there is a crowd.

It is true that in a human relationship,

making use of a messenger to communicate your love diminishes the intimacy.

Is the same true in our relationship with God? Does Mary get in the way?

Do the saints get in the way? Do our brothers and sisters get in the way?

Do priests get in the way? Well, sometimes!

When priests are celebrating the Sacraments, they do not. Whew!

To all of these questions, an evangelical would respond “yes”.

The Catholic Church, however, has come to understand that God likes to make us of instruments, and, in so doing, comes even closer.

Only God can do this!

Human mediation diminishes intimacy.

Divine mediation does not diminish intimacy.

Now, to continue with our exploration of the Eucharist...

As we have stated about the sacraments, a sensible sign, a symbol that is used, fittingly lends itself to the meaning of what is taking place.

In other words, Jesus deliberately chose specific “matter”, specific “elements”

so that we might understand how he encounters us in each Sacrament.

As we said regarding Baptism, water lends itself well to being a springboard to our understanding, in faith, that *regeneration* and *cleansing* occur in Baptism.

For the Eucharist, we use *bread* and *wine*.

Why bread and wine?

What does Jesus want us to understand about the Eucharist through these “sensible signs”?

Many of you might perhaps say,

“Well, we use wine because it is the drinkable liquid that most resembles blood”.

OK: but why bread?

If we were to proceed along similar lines of thinking, would one expect to use meat?

Why not meat? Why did Jesus not share with His Apostles *lamb*?

After all, it *was* the Passover, *and* it would speak “flesh” much more than bread.

Seriously. Why does the priest not offer a little morsel of lamb?

Or how about a tiny hamburger patty, with some ketchup to make the point?

“This is my *flesh*?”

“Well, it would be such a messy endeavor.

You would have to distribute napkins. It would be a logistical nightmare.”

The Sacraments do not use literal representations.

The Sacraments use symbols. Consequently,

- We do not use animal flesh.
- We do not use wine because it looks like blood.

We will see why we use bread and wine.

First, however,

let us make a few other comments that give us perspective on the Eucharist.

Living the Eucharist in a deep loving fashion requires that we keep our eyes on Jesus who comes to us in the Eucharist, whom we receive in the Eucharist.

This of course takes beyond the question of obligation, Sunday obligation.

This takes us beyond the obligation mentality that haunts many Catholics.

If we do speak of “obligation” it is with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

The obligation of which the Church speaks is not an obligation of law, strictly speaking, but an obligation of *love*.

Think of the “obligation” you have to loved ones...

Jesus, through the Church, gathers us to feed us

- and, in so doing, has us share in the mystery of his death and resurrection
- and, in so doing, makes us church

The Eucharist makes us church.

The Eucharist binds us to Jesus and to one another, making us the Mystical Body.

The Eucharist obliges

- acts of faith
- growth in faith

Think about it.

When it comes to Scripture, (which also does require faith),

there is at least something to “chew on”, to ponder.

There is food for thought. There is something to think about.

With the Eucharist, however, there is indeed something tangible, bread and wine,  
but which veils.

With the Eucharist there is nothing to “chew on”.

Well there is something to chew on” – literally but not mentally.

There is no food for thought. There is nothing to think about.

There is silence and apparent emptiness.

The Eucharist “impoverishes” us in this sense, so that

- we let go
- we welcome more deeply than we normally would, *and*
- we not be afraid

I would venture to say that one reason why Jesus chose bread to come to us in this way  
is so that we not be afraid.

The God of the Old Testament often aroused fear.

Jesus does not want to be feared.

He wants to be welcomed and chosen in love.

The use of bread allays our fear.

Panophobia is quite rare!

I have yet to see someone scream at the sight of a slice of bread.

For this sacrament Jesus chose bread and wine, both *fruits of human labor*,  
“which human hands have made”, the “work of human hands”.

We are to *cooperate* with Jesus, with Jesus loving us.

Although Jesus always takes the initiative,

“It was not you who loved me, but I who loved you”

we, nonetheless, bring something to the table.

Such are the ways of love.

Love is reciprocal and respectful and invites to growth.

For this sacrament Jesus chose bread and wine, the *odd couple*.  
Bread and wine are, in a sense, at opposite ends of the spectrum.  
If you were starving and obliged to beg, in humility you would ask for bread.  
You probably would not ask for wine. Wine would be too luxurious.  
If you were *not* starving, and spontaneously throwing a party,  
you would say “Let’s have wine!”,  
but probably would not say “Oh yes, and some bread!”

The more we reflect, the more we discover different reasons  
why Jesus chose bread and wine.

Both bread and wine “speak” to us and fittingly suggest

- what Jesus is doing.
- how Jesus comes to us.

Bread is food. And food, if you really think about it, is the servant *par excellence*  
—so to speak. The food we eat is at our service—completely.

Every ounce of the bread serves us, and only us.

It is a “whole-hearted”, very *individual* service.

You cannot lend your food. It is either yours or someone else’s.

And once it has rendered its service,

the food is no more, the food is one with us and eventually becomes us.

Jesus deliberately chose bread for this reason,

i.e. that we might understand how he gives himself to us: *completely*.

Jesus humbles himself so to serve us in such a way as to give us everything.

Hence the fitting preparation for the institution of the Eucharist in the washing of the feet.

Of course, there is a big difference in the assimilation of this food.

As is written in the confessions of St. Augustine (confessions VII, X, 16),

Jesus, speaking in the first person says,

“You will not change me into you. You will be changed into me.”

The Eucharist continues *kenosis*, the descent of God, God lowering Himself in love.

Son/Word/“Bread of the Father”

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become flesh: Jesus

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given as bread: Eucharist

Bread, as suggested, is, in many cultures and in the Jewish culture of Jesus’ time,  
basic food, basic staple.

This speaks to the *necessity* of what Jesus shares and gives.

Divine love is *necessary*.

We cannot *truly* live without divine love.

Hence, Jesus words

“Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood,  
you have no life within you.” (John 6:53)

What about *wine*? As we said, wine is not a basic staple—not normally!

Wine is the beverage of *festivity*, of *celebration*.

The wedding feast at Cana prefigures the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a marriage between our heart and the heart of Jesus  
in which love overflows.

At Cana, Jesus turned water into wine to excess. There was a lot of wine!

Now, either Jesus is a “party animal” or He likes to use symbols to speak deeper truths.

Love is gratuitous. Love overflows. Love must overflow.

And there is nothing beyond love.

In the Eucharist, we receive the glorified body of Jesus,  
Jesus' body after the resurrection, Jesus body in conformity with the reality of heaven,  
i.e. with the reality of god, and therefore beyond our physical world.  
Jesus glorified body – although a real body – is a transformed body  
that escapes time and place.

Do not try to imagine it: your head will explode!

This is why we will not ever “run out” of Eucharist.

Jesus glorified body cannot be exhausted.

This is why we can celebrate the Eucharist in Beijing, in San Francisco, in Brussels  
all at the same time!

Children ask the best questions:

seemingly naïve, but actually wonderfully realistic questions.

“How can Jesus be everywhere?” Glorified body!

And because Jesus body is glorified, there is no distance  
between Jesus heart and my heart.

We, in our physical world, experience distance.

Think of all those awesome love songs that describe the pining  
experienced the absence of a loved one.

We do not sing such songs with respect for Jesus.

Our pining for Jesus is different.

We pine to see Jesus face-to-face because He is *present*, not because he is absent.

Moved by His presence, we pine for fullness of communion.

The Eucharist is, therefore, a strange sort of food.

It satisfies and, at the same time, it intensifies hunger. No other food does this.

Saint Augustine (+430) articulates this beautifully:

**You called me and your cry overcame my deafness.**

**You shone and your light overcame my blindness.**

**You surrounded me with your fragrance and I breathed it,  
so that now I long for more of you.**

The Eucharist is designed so that we might live more intensely the “presence of grace”,  
the “presence by grace” of Jesus in our hearts.

The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is ordered to presence of Jesus in our hearts.

There will be no Eucharist in heaven.

There will only be Jesus in full splendor, having perfectly seized our hearts.

The Eucharist, as many of our Protestant brother and sisters argues,  
is not necessary—in a sense.

The Cross was enough to redeem human kind.

The cross was enough to show us Jesus’ love.

And yet, we believe, Jesus wanted,

beyond the cross, as an “extension” of the cross, to invent this gift.

It makes sense given the nature of love.

Jesus acts beyond the order of justice. Jesus acts according to love.

Love is superabundant.

Love cannot be measured.

Love must always grow.

The Eucharist manifests the superabundance of divine love.

Mary, by the way, received the Eucharist, for she, although immaculate,  
had to grow in love until the moment of her assumption.

One more thought: one of the first things that Jesus says regarding the Eucharist,  
in John chapter 6 (v. 27), is

“Work not for food that perishes but for food that endures to eternal life.”

Jesus is suggesting that somehow the Eucharist can render holy all of our daily labors.

Jesus is suggesting that our daily labors ultimately should be ordered to the Eucharist.

All of our efforts find meaning in the Eucharist.