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## THE EUCHARIST: CUP OF SACRIFICE, BANQUET OF THE KINGDOM

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The eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of “new heavens” and “a new earth” (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, *our sense of responsibility for the world today* (GS 39).

( St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 20 )

The title combines two great aspects of the Eucharist that are not usually put together because of the vastness of the discourse that each one deserves: cup of sacrifice, banquet of the Kingdom. The eschatological aspect (Banquet of the Kingdom) sounds formidable enough; even more if joined with another aspect that is almost as overwhelming (Cup of Sacrifice)! Their having been joined in a single title and hence in a single paper or session, it seems to me, is an invitation to reflect on the Eucharist from the perspective of Liturgical spirituality, particularly, of Eucharistic Spirituality, rather than from a purely theological and academic standpoint.

We venture into a reflection such as this because we want to celebrate the Eucharist the way we should. Very early in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, we are told that the Eucharist –and the whole Christian liturgy for that matter—is the work of our redemption being accomplished and is the perfect, efficacious expression of the redemptive mystery of Christ and of the real nature of the true Church.<sup>1</sup> By ‘celebrating the Eucharist the way we should,’ I do not only mean accomplishing the act of celebrating with utmost rubrical accuracy, but realizing on the levels of life, relationships, and social responsibility the meaning and vision that Christ himself had for and through this most sublime Sacrament. We want to celebrate the Eucharist in such a way that our participation in it forms us into effective instruments of the redemption that Christ desires to be continued in the world today through our works of justice and fraternal love and into “signs and instruments of communion” with God and with fellow human beings (cf. LG 1). In other words, we want to come to an understanding of the Eucharist that can help us live as we believe, where doctrine is authenticated by practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Sacred Liturgy (4 December 1963), n. 2.

A fruitful way to go in this direction, it seems to me, is to begin our reflection with the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist expressed in the phrase “Banquet of the Kingdom” as an articulation of the VISION that Christ had in giving the Eucharist to his Church. We then turn to the CHALLENGES that this VISION poses on the Church and on the Christian faithful given the present realities in which a great number of men and women today live. The Christian response of SERVICE and MISSION to these realities and challenges will then be considered as the believer’s SHARING IN CHRIST’S CUP OF SACRIFICE, participation in the once-and-for-all redemptive sacrifice of Christ for the life of man.

VISION – CHALLENGES – MISSION/SERVICE – OBLATION will be the itinerary we will take in our reflection on the eschatological and oblation dimensions of the Eucharist.

## I. THE EUCHARIST: BANQUET OF THE KINGDOM (Eschatological Dimension)

A banquet or table feast is perhaps one of the most appealing images to people across all cultures, ethnicities, social strata, and epochs. Even those who have easy access to an abundance of good food and drink will find delight in the thought of a banquet or feast, for its significance goes well beyond mere gratification of hunger and basic provision for survival and nourishment. Banquets are held to celebrate shared memories, values, and aspirations. They forge relationships and connections, build communities, and firm up common causes. In view of this, banquets are prepared to bring together family members, friends, associates, or members of a social group. For those who are invited and accept the invitation, a banquet is not only about taking food and drink. It is more about enjoying the graciousness of the host, the presence of the others in attendance, and the common values or cause that brought them together.

The Eucharistic faith and practice of the early Christians has always included an eschatological dimension expressed in the image of a feast or banquet. They were aware that whenever they ate the bread and drank of the cup they were proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes again.<sup>2</sup> With the words and deeds of Jesus still fresh in their memory, thanks to the teaching of the apostles which they constantly heard at their Eucharistic gatherings, the early Christian community has always understood the Eucharist as a memorial and making present of the saving history that culminates in his death and resurrection. But their Eucharistic celebrations were also replete with a sense of hope and anticipation of a future fulfillment, for the words of Jesus that they heard at these gatherings always hinted at the future reign of God.

Against the Old Testament backdrop, the coming of God’s Kingdom was not an unfamiliar idea to the Jews who heard Jesus’ proclamation first hand nor to the early believers who heard his words and deeds from his apostles. Israel’s hope for a Davidic king who would restore the glorious kingdom dimmed when they were thrown into exile—far from their land, far from the Temple from which they drew their sense of identity and pride as a people. It was amidst this dark moment in

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 11:26.

their history that the consoling message of the prophets would come as a glimmer of light to Israel. God was to come in power to deliver his people:

The wilderness and the parched land will exult; the Arabah will rejoice and bloom. They will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. There the redeemed shall walk, and the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy. They meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning flee away.<sup>3</sup>

The prophets announced that God would come to deliver his people by reestablishing his Kingdom: “Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm.”<sup>4</sup> In the prophet Isaiah, this reign of God over his people is expressed in terms of shepherding: “Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.”<sup>5</sup> So it is also in Jeremiah: “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have banished them and bring them back to their folds; there they shall be fruitful and multiply.”<sup>6</sup> The benevolence of God and his Kingdom is described by the Psalmist using the image of a table feast: “You set a table before me as my enemies watch.”<sup>7</sup> The people’s hope for the promised messiah who will come from the line of David—who was once a shepherd—will not be frustrated for God “will raise up a righteous branch for David; who, as a king, shall reign and govern wisely, do what is just and right in the land.”<sup>8</sup>

The reality of God’s future reign is expressed using the image of an eschatological meal.<sup>9</sup> To be one of those found worthy to be part of this reign is to be invited to the great feast or banquet that God will prepare for the elect at the end of time. To be part of the Kingdom of God is to sit down at this banquet table and drink in his presence. The prophet Isaiah has one of the most delightful description of this meal and therefore of the eschatological hope that it signifies.

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations. He will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken.<sup>10</sup>

The Gospels attest that Jesus’ teaching was likewise centered on the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> He proclaimed it and brought it about at the same time by his works of healing, forgiving sins and

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<sup>3</sup> Is 35:1, 3-4, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Is. 40:10.

<sup>5</sup> Is 40:11.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. 23:3.

<sup>7</sup> Ps 23:5.

<sup>8</sup> Jer 23:4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. W. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, New York 1989, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Is 25:6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mt 4:17, Mk 1:15, Lk 4:43, Mt 5-7, etc.

welcoming sinners, preaching, and offering his life as ransom for all. The centrality of the Kingdom of God in the preaching and ministry of Jesus was known by the early Christian community through the preaching of the apostles.<sup>12</sup> Early Christian witness like that of Justin the Martyr in the mid-second century informs us that listening to the memoirs of the apostles was a staple element in Eucharistic gatherings.<sup>13</sup>

Consistent with the prophetic tradition, Jesus frequently used the image of a banquet in expressing the reality of the Kingdom of God. This message and the meals he had during his public ministry unlock an understanding of the Eucharist that can bring Christians to a renewed way of celebrating it as an impetus for undertaking their mission in the world today.

### THE MEALS THAT JESUS HAD

The ministry of Jesus features instances when he shared a meal with people. He ate with tax collectors and sinners at the house of Levi who left his tax collection post to follow Jesus.<sup>14</sup> The great parables of divine mercy in Luke's Gospel are set at a dinner in the house of a Pharisee where tax collectors and sinners, having learned of Jesus' presence there, drew near to listen to him.<sup>15</sup> He stayed at Zaccheus' house at the invitation of the diminutive tax collector where he surely partook of the household's table.<sup>16</sup> His attendance at a dinner in the house of Simon the Pharisee provided the occasion for forgiving the sinful woman who repentantly wept and anointed his feet with precious ointment.

In each of these instances, Jesus earned the criticism of those who thought of themselves as righteous, e.g. the Pharisees and the scribes: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"<sup>17</sup> "Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."<sup>18</sup> "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner."<sup>19</sup> Jesus shared meals with those who were on the fringes of the society, those who were unwanted by the mainstream populace. There seems to be a significant number of these meals that he was branded a glutton and a drunkard especially as he was compared with John the Baptist who was known for being ascetic. By these meals Jesus acted out his message about the inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God. Everyone is invited! Such inclusiveness was a scandal to his fellow Jews who had the thinking that they were the only ones who were called to belong to God's Kingdom. At these meals Jesus was the shepherd with a hundred sheep who left the ninety-nine to

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Acts 2: 42: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Justin the Martyr, *Prima Apologia*, chapter 9.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mk 2:16. See also Lk 15:2.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lk 15:1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Lk 19:1-10.

<sup>17</sup> Mk 2:16.

<sup>18</sup> Lk 7:34.

<sup>19</sup> Lk 19:7.

seek out the one that was lost;<sup>20</sup> he was the farmer who desisted from pulling out the weeds lest the wheat might also perish;<sup>21</sup> he was the rich host who filled his banquet hall with the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame who were found in the streets and alleys of the town when those he initially invited declined.<sup>22</sup>

The radical newness seen in Jesus eating with the outcast and the despised manifested the dawning of the Kingdom of God which he himself proclaimed. His fellowship meals with those unwanted by society were a parable-in-action. They demonstrated the establishment of a new kind of relationship with God and neighbor when the Kingdom of God shall come to its consummation. Jesus himself foretold and described this future fulfillment of God's Kingdom using the image of a feast or banquet to which all are invited: "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God."<sup>23</sup> In Matthew, the banquet was specifically a wedding feast that a king prepared for his son.<sup>24</sup> An eschatological meal expressing the reality of the Kingdom of God that includes everyone figured significantly in both the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

## THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVES

The Last Supper which Jesus had with his disciples bears the essential characteristics of the earlier meals Jesus had with various personages during his ministry, including the eschatological overtone found therein. It is in this light that Jesus' words in Mark 14:25, set within the Last Supper, could be understood: "Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."<sup>25</sup> It can be said that the Eucharist which Jesus instituted at this supper was not intended to be only a present experience of fellowship with him at every celebration but also an anticipation of the definitive reign of God which Jesus himself often spoke of using the image of an eschatological meal.

In Luke, the abovementioned eschatological saying of Jesus in Mark 14:25 is preceded immediately by a closely related statement that carries a reference to the Passover:<sup>26</sup>

He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lk 15:4-7.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mt 13:24-30.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lk 14:15-24.

<sup>23</sup> Lk 13:29. Cf. Mt 8:11; Lk 14:15-24.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Mt 22: 2-14.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. also its parallel in Mt. 26:29.

<sup>26</sup> Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Lk 22:15-18.

The eschatological overtone continues as Jesus makes reference to eating and drinking at the table in God's Kingdom. Furthermore, reference to "serving" is added.

For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The Gospel of John does not recount the fourfold action and words of Jesus over the bread and wine at the Last Supper as the Synoptic Gospels do. He presents instead Jesus' Farewell Discourse (Chapters 14-17) which contains explicit eschatological references: "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places... I am going to prepare a place for you."<sup>29</sup> "So you are also now in anguish. But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy away from you."<sup>30</sup> Like Luke, John brings in the theme of "serving" by narrating that Jesus washed his disciple's feet during the supper. An eschatological orientation could also be gleaned in Paul's account of the institution of the Eucharist:<sup>31</sup> "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes."

The various data from the New Testament we considered above show the clear presence of an eschatological dimension in the supper and therefore in the Eucharist that was instituted thereat. Such eschatological dimension means that the Eucharist looks forward to the eschatological banquet, stimulates faith-commitment to what that future entails, and inspires hope for its definitive realization. Such eschatological perspective in the Last Supper tradition links the celebration of the Eucharist to the offer of a share in the blessings of eschatological salvation. From the eschatological perspective, to share in the Eucharistic bread and cup was to share already by anticipation in the future meal of the Kingdom of God.

#### **IMPLICATION: EUCHARIST AS SACRAMENT OF HOPE**

An eschatological dimension is unmistakably seen belonging to the Eucharist on the basis of biblical data, not the least of which are those found in the New Testament. They attest, in other words, to the Eucharist being a sacrament of hope. It is such because with its rites and prayer, it stimulates confidence in God's promise of eschatological fullness where "an everlasting share in the Paschal Mystery"<sup>32</sup> awaits us and where God will "wipe away every tear from our eyes."<sup>33</sup> Every

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Lk 22:27-29.

<sup>29</sup> Lk 14:2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Lk 16:22.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 11:23-26.

<sup>32</sup> From Preface VI in Ordinary Time.

Eucharistic celebration is a sacramental realization of that eschatological fullness where God will gather his People to enjoy eternal peace and joy in his presence and in loving fellowship with one another. The Eucharist is a pledge and foretaste of that eschatological banquet described in the prophecy of Isaiah (cf. Is 25:6-9) and that wedding feast described in the book of Revelation (19:8-9). “Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist,” we are reminded however by St. Pope John Paul II, “need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: they already possess it on earth as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality.”<sup>34</sup> By the actions and words of Jesus in the company of his disciples at the Last Supper and the command he gave them to celebrate his memorial, he was entrusting to his Church the task of being, within history, the sign and instrument of the eschatological gathering that had its origin in him.<sup>35</sup> In and through the Eucharist, the Lord wishes to remain with his Church, making his presence in word, meal and sacrifice the promise of a humanity renewed by his love.<sup>36</sup>

The Eucharist is not only a sign but also an instrument to realize that eschatological gathering because it possesses a persuasive power to generate commitment to building up the Body of Christ in the world through our efforts to bring about unity, justice, love, and fraternal sharing where these are wanting. “Awaiting the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ” which we hear at every Mass never meant a passive waiting. It rather entails an increased sense of responsibility for the world where we live in.<sup>37</sup> Being blessed to be one of those invited to the Supper of the Lamb and expecting “a new heaven” and “a new earth”<sup>38</sup> challenge us to contribute “with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan.”<sup>39</sup>

With the assurances found here and there in the prayers and texts of the Eucharistic celebration that Christ, having suffered, died and risen, will come again in glory, the Eucharist inspires hope and confidence that the triumph of Christ over sin and death by his resurrection will bring about transformation and healing to creation that has been wounded by sin and improve the lot of those who are disadvantaged by the present state of things. In the present world where a great number find themselves in bleak situations and conditions caused by poverty, oppression, injustice, and wars, among others, it is easy to fall into despair. In the face of the temptation to hopeless resignation, the Eucharist is for the Christian community and the world a guarantee that such hostile realities do not have the final say. The Eucharist is Christ's and the Church's statement that it is God who has the final say! He will intervene with his love and power to turn things upside down in favor of those who are suffering and are deprived in the present state of affairs. This is Christian hope! It is to be convinced that God's love conquers all that is hostile to the well-being of

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<sup>33</sup> From the special embolism for the deceased, Eucharistic Prayer III. Cf. Rev. 21:4.

<sup>34</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), n. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), n. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. SC 20; *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Rev 21:1.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 20.

his children; that in his mercy he went so far as giving us his only-begotten Son in whom he has been “pleased to renew all things giving us all a share in his fullness.”<sup>40</sup>

Thanks to the Vatican II liturgical renewal that significantly fostered the active and conscious participation of the Christian faithful in the liturgy. Such participation in the table of the Word and in the one Bread and one Cup can stimulate the imagination, affectivity, and will, indeed the whole person, to engage in creative human activity that will contribute to the “renewal of all things” in and by Christ.<sup>41</sup> The conviction that God is intent at renewing all things in favor of all his children, especially the disadvantaged, inspires Christians to cooperate in hastening the transformation of the various sectors of society through their specific engagements in the world using their God-given skills and talents. It is for this reason that, as pointed out earlier, there is a component of “service” in the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper.<sup>42</sup>

### **IMPLICATION: EUCHARIST AND JUSTICE**

For the Eucharist to be in fact a sacrament of hope emerging from its eschatological aspect expressed by the image of a banquet necessitates a close link between the Eucharist and social justice. The imagery of a meal expressing the reality of the Kingdom of God long-foretold and promised has serious implications and demands. Its characteristic of inclusiveness and its elements of sharing, fellowship, and family ties imply an ideal and a vision for that which it is a symbol of.

If the Eucharist is Banquet of the Kingdom then it implies that the Eucharist is envisioned to bring about situations in the world and society where no one is excluded; no one is wanting because everyone shares what he or she has with those who have none; everyone is a friend, a brother, or a sister to care for. Now this calls into question social, economic, and political structures and systems that produce scandalous statistics such that less than 20% of the world’s population splurge on more than 80% of the earth’s resources leaving 80% of the world’s population scrimping miserably on the remaining 20% of the earth’s resources! It means that a few indulge in careless abundance while majority do not even have enough of the basic needs. God cannot be reigning in these situations of inequality!

In the Eucharist, Jesus’ command to his disciples in the face of a multitude who were hungry is directed to us: “You yourselves give them something to eat!”<sup>43</sup> The Holy Father Pope Francis tells us that this means “working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs

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<sup>40</sup> From the Common Preface I.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Rev 21:5. Cf. GS, n. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lk 22:27-29; Jn 13: 1-20.

<sup>43</sup> Mk 6:37.



which we encounter.”<sup>44</sup> It entails, moreover, “the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.”<sup>45</sup> That the Eucharist is the Banquet of the Kingdom asks that the goods of this earth be shared in justice and fraternal love. It radically opposes the hoarding of the world’s resources by a few who have power and influence because it means the deprivation of the many.

Participation in the Eucharist must have the effect of forming the social conscience, of inculcating a new social vision, and stimulating the will to work in favor of the poor and the underprivileged. It seriously asks us to examine our relationships in the social, economic, and political spheres if they reflect the selfless love of Christ that the Eucharist celebrates. Meaningful Eucharistic participation can encourage advocacies and mobilize concrete actions to change the situations that keep them poor and unproductive. It is true that there are people who do not have enough even of their basic necessities to live a decent life because the resources in their places are meager and development happens in trickles and most of the time not in favor of the poor. This, however, does not justify their relegation to subhuman standard of living. With this in view, the Holy Father appeals to those who are more fortunate to “renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others”.<sup>46</sup>

Around the Eucharistic table we are reminded of the self-effacing service that Jesus rendered for our sake—prefigured in his act of washing the feet of his disciples and culminated in his sacrifice on the Cross. This is the yardstick against which the symbolic aptitude of our Eucharistic assemblies as Banquet of the Kingdom is measured: Are the poor and underprivileged helped through selfless service of their fellow men and women so that they too may be empowered to serve others in a chain of loving service that effectively spreads the Kingdom of God until he will be all in all? By God’s grace this is not a utopian dream but has the possibility of becoming a program of life that every Christian community could and should strive for. The eschatological parable in Matthew 25:31-46 tells us that such service to the least of our brethren is service rendered to Christ himself and therefore enables one to “inherit the Kingdom prepared for all from the foundation of the world”.<sup>47</sup>

## II. THE EUCHARIST: CUP OF SACRIFICE

For the Eucharist to become truly a sacrament of hope and a seed of justice in our present time, we who celebrate it should make it the basis, constant point of reference, and inspiration of our lives, relationships, decisions, and actions. What we hear, say, and do in our Eucharistic celebrations should influence our thinking, speaking, and behaving beyond the confines of the celebrative time and space. In other words, the Eucharist must become the source of Christian

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<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (24 November 2013), n. 188.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 190, quoting Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (14 May 1971), 23: AAS 63 (1971), 418.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Mt 25:34.

discipleship to which we are called, following Jesus in his love that culminated in his sacrifice on the Cross.

## **MEMORIAL OF THE ONE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS**

While the words of Jesus over the bread and the cup— “*Take and eat... Take and drink*”<sup>48</sup>— point to the image of a meal, his words over the cup of wine add a whole new dimension to the meal by an explicit reference to the image of sacrifice that seals a covenant: “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.*”<sup>49</sup> It was by the shedding of his blood, as has been foreshadowed in Gen 15:1-21 and Exodus 24: 4-6, that he was to seal the new relationship between God and man and thereby inaugurate a state of things and relationships where it is God’s will that is being done. Christ’s giving his body to eat and his blood to drink at the Last Supper was the ritual anticipation of his sacrifice on the cross which was to take place the following day. By this he gave a form in which his sacrifice on the Cross may be commemorated and thus perpetuated.<sup>50</sup> In the Eucharist, the broken bread signified his pierced body: “This is my body which will be given up [that is, offered in sacrifice] for you”; the wine signified his blood poured out in sacrifice: “This is the cup of my blood..., it will be shed [that is, in sacrifice] for you and for all”. The Eucharist is inseparably meal and sacrifice.

The significance of this for all men and women of all time is not lost to the Church in the Second Vatican Council: By his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus “reveals to us that ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8) and at the same time teaches that the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love. He assures those who trust in the charity of God that the way of love is open to all and that the effort to establish a universal communion will not be in vain.”<sup>51</sup>

## **THE CHRISTIAN’S SHARING IN THE CUP OF SACRIFICE (Baptismal priesthood)**

The call to Christian discipleship and mission can therefore be articulated as the Christians’ sharing in Christ’s cup of sacrifice by virtue of their Baptism. “Christ’s example in dying for us sinners teaches us that we must carry the cross, which the flesh and the world inflict on the shoulders of any who seek after peace and justice. Constituted Lord by his resurrection and given all authority in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in human hearts by the power of his Spirit; not only does he arouse in them a desire for the world to come but he quickens, purifies, and strengthens the generous aspirations of humanity to make life more humane and conquer the earth for this purpose.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mt. 26:27.

<sup>49</sup> Lk 22:20 and parallels.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. SC 7.

<sup>51</sup> GS, n. 38.

<sup>52</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World, n. 38.

In his sacrifice on the Cross, Christ has accomplished everything that was necessary for our salvation and for the sanctification of the whole world. We celebrate a memorial of that once-for-all sacrifice of Christ today, rendering it present among us and for our sake, in order that we may make a “spiritual sacrifice” of ourselves, of which the whole NT speaks (e.g. Rom 12: 1ff). Our Eucharistic sharing in Christ’s cup of sacrifice is for the purpose of enabling us to render a sacrifice of ourselves. As recalled by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, “in order that the oblation by which the faithful offer the divine Victim in this sacrifice to the heavenly Father may have its full effect, it is necessary that the people add something else, namely, the offering of themselves as a victim.”<sup>53</sup>

In the Eucharistic Prayers, we ask that the Lord may “make of us an eternal offering acceptable to [the Father]” and that all may become “by the Holy Spirit a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of [the Father’s] glory” (EP IV). In the First Eucharistic Prayer, on the other hand, we ask that our offering may be acceptable to God as that of Abel, Abraham, Melchisedech—an offering that is characterized by interior availability and of self-donation, generous, and capable of heroism if the situation calls for it.

Each day in the Eucharist, the Church learns to offer herself as she offers Christ.<sup>54</sup> To “do this in memory of him” does not only mean imitating Christ’s gestures and words at the Last Supper but assuming his attitudes and dispositions that made him willing to empty himself for our redemption. “No greater love a man can have than to lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). To receive worthily Christ’s “body given up” is to be drawn more deeply into the self-giving action of God that is celebrated sacramentally in the Eucharist and to make a gift of ourselves within the context of whatever specific vocation we may be.<sup>55</sup> For our offering of ourselves to be acceptable and to offer that sacrifice which Jesus offered himself in obedience until death, we are called to live our lives, following Christ, in total obedience to the will of the Father, realizing his plan of love for us.

Our sacramental participation in Christ’s sacrifice is empty if it does not contain in itself the sufferings and toils of each day, as also the joys, the intentions, and the prayers which we carry in our hearts for ourselves and for the whole world, with the desire and need to praise and thank God, to intercede for others’ needs, or to beg for forgiveness. The celebration is done well, that is, it serves its purpose, when we make an acceptable offering of the whole of our life by uniting it with the offering and sacrifice of Christ; when we join our praise, thanksgiving, intercession, and plea for forgiveness in that perfect worship that only Christ knows how to express for us and with us. It is on account of this that one makes his offering and his sacrifice on the altar.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical *Mediator Dei* on the Sacred Liturgy (20 November 1947), n. 98.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Augustine, *City of God*, X.20.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. P. Visintin-D. Sartore, “Eucaristia,” in *Dizionario di Liturgia*, ed. D. Sarote-A. M. Triacca-C. Cibien, Milano 2001, 753.

## Conclusion

The itinerary we took in this reflection brought us to an articulation of the VISION that Christ had in instituting the Eucharist and in giving it to his Church. Referring to the Eucharist as Banquet of the Kingdom is to affirm God's desire to bring everyone to communion with himself and with one another. It is union and unity characterized by equality, mutual caring, and loving service that can only exist among brothers and sisters.

Many are the CHALLENGES and obstacles that darken the horizon of our time, as once the St. Pope John Paul II has pointed out, for this vision to become a reality because such fraternal and filial relationship has been distorted by selfishness and greed.<sup>56</sup> With his or her faith, the response that the Christian has to offer in the face of these realities is twofold: a response of HOPE by which he/she is strengthened by the conviction that God will intervene with his love and power to transform things in favor of those who suffer and are deprived in the present state of things. The Eucharist is Christ's and the Church's assurance that it is God, in his loving mercy and power, who has the final say.

The second is a commitment to SERVE by way of meaningful and liberating engagements in the world in pursuit of JUSTICE using their God-given skills and talents, patterned after Christ who came not to be served but to serve and to offer his life as a cup of sacrifice for our reconciliation with God and with one another. Concretely, this call to discipleship of SERVICE is especially urgent in view of the many who are poor and do not have even the basic things to live a dignified human existence, of the environment that has been too greedily abused that now it can hardly sustain life, and of the many faces of injustice in all levels of society that place the greatest amount of this world's resources in the hands of a few. This brand of Christian discipleship asks for self-giving love and oblation that derives its strength and inspiration from the Eucharist which is the sacrament of Christ's own self-emptying love and promise of a Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

*That in all things God may be glorified.*

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 20.