

## **THE EUCHARIST MAKES THE CHURCH,**

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### **Introduction**

May I begin with a personal story.

I became an altar boy to serve at Holy Mass when I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was 10 years old. My older brother, a high school student and an altar server, would teach me the Latin responses for the Mass. Early in my life then I fell in love with serving Mass.

I did not know at that time what the Mass was all about. I only knew that our family had to go to Mass, because my mother was the parish “cantora” and President of the Catholic Women’s League, my father was the Grand Knight of Columbus, an older brother was an altar server, and another older brother used to ride the horse of the parish priest, an American missionary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

When I was already a theology student in the 1960’s, I learned a classic Latin theological formula, “*Eucharistia facit Ecclesiam, Ecclesia facit Eucharistiam.*” It meant: “The Eucharist makes the Church; the Church makes the Eucharist.”

This afternoon we ask: what does this saying mean for you and me? What does it require of us when we celebrate Holy Mass? What does it signify for our daily life?

### **Pastoral Context**

In the Philippines Sunday Masses are filled with people. Mostly women, old and middle aged, married or single, youth and children. We seem to take this fact for granted.

**But where are the men? One time I suggested that Masses should be celebrated where the men gather, i.e., in the town *gallera*. The suggestion was shot down. Sometimes I think that Islam is a religion of men, while Catholicism is a religion of women.**

**Sunday Masses are full. A typical parish Church has 7 or 8 Masses every Sunday, not including *barangay (barrio)* chapel Masses, and each is full. But statistics also say that only about 20% of the total number of Catholics in a parish are able to go to Sunday Mass.**

**Attendance at Mass is a major expression of our Filipino faith. Participatory songs with guitars or keyboard. Characterized more by joyful fellowship rather than prayerful silence. It is our Filipino way of celebrating Mass. While Koreans, Chinese, Thais have their own way. Theirs is more quiet, more solemn and more reverent. Indians have their own way, too, more incense and more chanting. Inculturation has been in accord with the way of the Spirit, unplanned, unintended, gradual, just simply expressing one's worship through some cultural trait.**

**In the Philippines, thousands receive Holy Communion but comparatively very few go to Confession. On Sundays we seem to be a nation of Saints.**

**But there is massive poverty, homelessness, street children, human trafficking, drug problem, and other forms of criminality. And media reports speak of horrendous corruption from top to bottom.**

**Our faith is focused on externals and rituals, processions and private devotions. Deep down they manifest the Filipino's authentic awareness of God's presence in everything that is blessed or holy. In the extreme such "holy" things become superstitions, amulets and charms, believed to be imbued with magical powers of protection like *anting-anting*.**

**But the question remains: What does the Holy Eucharist really mean? How should we participate? What does it tell us about how we should live?**

## **Seeing, Loving, Living**

Let us “see.”

The simple three letter word “see” in the Gospel according to John, is very rich in meaning. Seeing is about knowing and believing.

Note the following passages:

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (some Greeks to Philip, Jn. 12: 20-21).

See Jn. 11 and the interplay of “see” and believe” with regard to the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus.

“I will not believe until I see” (the unbelieving Thomas after the Resurrection, Jn 20:25) and Jesus response to “see and believe” (Jn. 20:28-29).

On entering the empty tomb, Peter and the disciple “saw and believed” (Jn. 20:8).

To see is not only to see with our physical eyes. To see is to open the eyes of our mind and of our heart.

Let us then “see” what we celebrate at the Holy Eucharist, to ponder it, to be aware of what we do, and to keep it in our heart.

## **The Birth of the Church**

Pentecost Sunday is celebrated as the birth of the Church. But do you know that the ancient Fathers of the Church said that the Church was born from the pierced side of Jesus?

Let us ponder. Let us place ourselves among the believers in Jesus, among the curious, and among those who had cried out crucify

him, crucify him. We see Jesus hanging lifeless on the Cross. Out of love for us, in obedience to the will of His Father, Jesus has sacrificed his very life for our redemption and salvation.

We see the Roman centurion thrust his spear into the side of Jesus. And we are completely startled. For from his pierced side comes an outpouring of blood and water.

What does this outpouring of blood and water from the side of Christ mean?

Listen to Pope Benedict XVI:

In this double outpouring of blood and water, the Fathers saw an image of the two fundamental sacraments – Eucharist and Baptism – which spring forth from the Lord’s pierced side, from his heart. *This is the new outpouring that creates the Church and renews mankind.* Moreover, the opened side of the Lord asleep on the Cross prompted the Fathers to point out to the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and so *in the outpouring of the sacraments they also recognized the birth of the Church: the creation of the new woman, from the side of the new Adam (Jesus of Nazareth, Part II, Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, Ignatius Press, 2011, p. 226, italics mine).*

St. John Chrysostom, one of the Fathers of the Church, is an example:

I said that water and blood symbolized Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born.... it was from his side that Christ fashioned the Church (*Cat. 3, 3\_19; SC 50, 174-177 in Office of Readings, Good Friday; cited by Sacramentum Caritatis, no.14).*

More specific are Pope Benedict’s beautiful insight for us to ponder in our hearts:

Even more important than the cosmic signs [darkening of the sun, tearing of the Temple veil, earthquake, rising of the dead], is an act of faith: the Roman centurion – the commander of the the execution squad – in his consternation over all that was taking place, acknowledges Jesus as God’s Son: ‘Truly, this man was the Son of God’ (Mk. 15:39). *At the foot of the Cross, the Church of the Gentiles comes into being. Through the Cross, the Lord gathers people together to form the new community of the worldwide Church. Through the suffering Son, they recognize the true God (Jesus of Nazareth, Pat II, p 224, italics mine).*

For this reason, St. John Paul II, states that the Church is born of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. The Church is born of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection (see *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 3). So likewise said Pope Benedict XVI: “In the sacrifice of the Cross, Christ gave birth to the Church as His Bride and his body” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 14).

### From Paschal Mystery to Eucharist

Let us ponder more deeply and “see” this tremendous mystery.

Our catechism teaches us: the Holy Eucharist is the “living memorial of the Paschal Mystery,” the living memorial of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ.

As a “living memorial” the Holy Eucharist brings into our space and time the whole event of the Cross, the brokenness of Christ’s body, the outpouring of his blood, his death, and his resurrection from the dead. The unrepeatable total sacrifice of Jesus with all its loving salvific power, celebrated once and for all time on the Cross of suffering and glory, is brought dynamically into the present with every celebration of the Holy Eucharist – the Sacrament of Christ’s immeasurable, limitless Love.

St. John Paul II connects the the Holy Eucharist, the Paschal Mystery and Pentecost:

**By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the Institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room. Her foundation and wellspring is the whole *Triduum paschale*, but this is as it were gathered up, foreshadowed and concentrated forever in the gift of the Eucharist (*EE*, no. 5).**

**Pope Benedict XVI simply concludes: “The Church comes into being from the Eucharist” (Jesus of Nazareth, Part II, p. 138).**

**What a truly awesome grace! In his mercy and compassion our loving God has blessed us with the Sacrament of his Love, the Holy Eucharist. We have to “see” this “tremendous mystery” with the eyes of our mind and heart, with the eyes of our faith, and be profoundly aware of it!**

**When as a priest I celebrate Mass with the people, my heart has to be filled with the greatest awe and reverence. I have to be filled with devotion, with the “joy of the Gospel,” the joy of the Holy Eucharist. I need to be filled with love.**

**Our Holy Mass cannot be routinary. It cannot be perfunctory. It cannot be a robotic, monotonous distracted recitation of prayers.**

**Holy Mass is not time for conversation with our neighbor. It is not a time to look around for friends, to talk about someone’s dress, or to gossip about our neighbor.**

**On the contrary, I am celebrating with all the people the birthday of the Church, *our* birthday as a community of faith!**

### **A New Sacrifice, a New Communion, a New Life**

**So now we have a new born Church, born of the Paschal Mystery, born of the Eucharist. Does this new born Church have a new Sacrifice?**

**Yes we have. It is no longer the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament. At Holy Communion, the priest presents Jesus in the form of the Sacred Host, and declares, See! “Behold, the Lamb of God....” *The new Sacrifice is Jesus, the Lamb of God.* He takes upon himself the the sins of the world. By His Blood, He wipes away everything that separates us from friendship with God.**

**When we receive Holy Communion, we receive new life, a transformed life. Christ shares his very life with us. We see a profound transformation of ourselves. We begin to live a life of friendship with him. St. John Paul II says:**

**We can say not only that *each of us receives Christ*, but also that *Christ receives each of us*. He enters into friendship with us.... It is because of him that we have life. He who eats me will live because of me [Jn. 6:57]. Eucharistic communion brings about in a sublime way the mutual abiding of Christ and each of his followers: “Abide in me, and I in you [Jn. 15:4] (*EE*, no. 22).**

**Christ, therefore, brings about a new communion, the deepest kind of union there could be between us and the once unreachable distant God. Christ’s blood unites us first with himself in the most profound way. We become part of him. He is present within us. He lives in us. We live his very life.**

**[“The Synod of Bishops 1985 focused “on the word *communio*, which refers first of all to the Eucharistic center of the Church and thus anchors our understanding of the Church in the most intimate encounter between Jesus and mankind, in his act of giving himself to us.” (Ratzinger, Chapter VI “Eucharist – Communio – Solidarity, Christ Present and Active in the Blessed Sacrament,” p. 114)].**

**When we see his awesome presence within us, we can only exclaim with Paul, “I am crucified with Christ; it is now longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2: 19-20).**

**What a staggering and exciting truth! In the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Communion, Jesus the Lamb of God enriches my very being beyond my comprehension. Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, lives in me! Christ, the power and the wisdom of God, lives in me!**

**See and believe. [A personal story here??]**

### **A New Temple**

**If the community of Israel of the Old Covenant had their Temple would it not be proper for the the new community of faith of the New Covenant to have a Temple?**

**You will answer, “Of course.” But there is a truly wonderful twist in the answer, one we could never have imagined.**

**Remember the time when Jesus shocked the leaders of Israel by pointing to the magnificent temple of Jerusalem? The Temple was the handiwork of many many years of hard work by hundreds of workers. But Jesus challenged his listeners, “Destroy this temple and I shall build it up in three days.” Such an incredible statement! Who could believe this, even if Jesus worked as a carpenter and trained by his carpenter-father?**

**The Gospels themselves explain. When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple I shall build it up in three days,” he was speaking of the temple of his body, broken, bloody, and destroyed but rose again after three days in the Paschal *Triduum*.**

**The temple of his Body – this is what Jesus shares with us at the Eucharist in such a way that we become the Body of Christ. The Church is the Body of Christ. What an incredible and stupendous reality this is. But this is what we truly are – the Body of Christ, a living temple not built by hands. And so St. Paul reminds of this, “Do you not know that you are temples of the Holy Spirit?” Do you not know that God dwells in you? Do you not know that God abides in you?**



**Thus do we understand the meaning of the classical dictum, the Eucharist Makes the Church. Born of the Eucharist, the living memorial of the Paschal Mystery, the Church has a new sacrifice, new life, a new communion, and has a new Temple.**

[Also see PO, 6, No Christian community can be built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the holy Eucharist (*EE 33*)].

### **THE CHURCH MAKES THE EUCHARIST**

**We come now to the second part of the theological dictum, “The Church Makes the Eucharist.” What does this theological statement mean? And what does this mean for our life in the Church, in society, and in the world?**

**“The Church makes the Eucharist.” This theological axiom can simply mean that it is the Church that celebrates the Eucharistic sacrifice.**

**It can also mean more. It is the Church that brings the Body and Blood of Christ, the Lord Jesus himself, living and operating in our space and time. He is present an active now in the Holy Eucharist.**

### **Sharing in the Eucharist, Sharing Christ’s Mission**

**Our sharing in the Eucharist the Body and Blood of Christ is also a sharing in his Mission. Christ’s self-sacrifice was not only an offering to God his Father. The Sacrifice of Jesus was the final fulfillment of who Jesus is – the eternal Son of God who by the power of the Holy Spirit became man, whose very humanity is to be a “servant.” Jesus is a “being for others.”**

**The words of Consecration make this perfectly clear. “Take , eat; this is My Body, which is broken *for you.*” “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed *for many.*”**

**Body broken, blood poured out – this is the final realization of the words in Isaiah the prophet, words that Jesus made his own at the synagogue of Nazareth as he began his public life:**

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the Gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:18).**

**The Passion, Death, and Resurrection, is the “hour” of his mission of liberation and salvation. He has fulfilled the mission to which the Spirit of God has sent him. The bloody but glorious Cross is the hour, too, of his glorification by the Father.**

### **The Call of to be Eucharistic – the Mission to Love and to Serve**

**How truly awesome and marvelous it is for us to know that in the Eucharist we are born as a Church and in the Eucharist we are sent by the Spirit of Jesus on mission – a mission to the poor, the oppressed and marginalized – to all who are needy and in need of love and service. The Eucharist is Communion with Jesus, with his very being, a being for others.**

**Jesus, the “Suffering Servant,” shows us the full meaning of our communion with him in the narrative of the Washing of the Feet (see EE, no. 20).**

**You call me your teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (Jn 13: 13-15).**

**The Eucharist then is Mission to Love and to Serve. Our Communion with the Lord in the Eucharist calls us to build communion with one another and to serve one another, particularly and especially the poor and the needy. It is division**

**and indifference to the poor that St. Paul inveighs against as unworthy of those who participate in the Eucharistic sacrifice (see 1 Cor 11:17-34; EE, no. 20)**

**To be Eucharistic is to live the life of Jesus, a life of love and service. It is by living eucharistically that we act eucharistically. You and I have to be Eucharistic persons.**

**And we see a host of burning issues that need Eucharistic action. We cannot be indifferent to them. Among them are the great pastoral issues that we have already heard at this Congress:**

- **Mass Poverty and the increasing gap between rich and poor**
- **Economic Globalization**
- **Clash of Cultures, Cultural Globalization, Culture of Death**
- **Global Warming and Climate Change**
- **The Challenge of Mass Media and the Tools of Social Communication**
- **Challenges to Social Justice and Peace**
- **Challenges to Religious Freedom**
- **Religious Radicalism, Extremism, and Terrorism,**
- **Challenges to the Family, Women and Youth**
- **Human Trafficking**
- **The Challenge of Migration**

**How beautifully and dramatically has Pope Benedict XVI expressed the call of the Eucharist to mission.**

**We carry the Lord, who is the Lord-made-flesh, the Lord-made-bread, out into the streets of our cities and towns. We carry him out into our everyday lives. These streets are supposed to become his paths. He should not live alongside of us, locked up in tabernacles, but rather in our midst, in our daily routine. Wherever we go, he should go, where we live he should live. Our world, our daily routine should become his temple (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Daily Bread and Eucharistic Bread, a Meditation for the Feast of Corpus**

Christi," Chapter VI, On the Way to Jesus Christ, trans. Michael J. Miller, Ignatius Press, 2005, p. 103).

All this we see and believe. [A personal story here??]

**Conclusion - Prayer: *Anima Christi***

Let me conclude with a prayer. It is a prayer that I always pray after receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. It goes back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is found in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Please pray together with me:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.  
Blood of Christ, fill my veins.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
O good Jesus, hear me.  
Within thy wounds, hide me.  
Separated from Thee, let me never be.  
From the malicious enemy, defend me.  
In the hour of my death, call me,  
And bid me come to Thee,  
That I may praise Thee,  
Forever ad ever.  
Amen.

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