

Though Many, One Body

This column will conclude our series on the Mass as we begin the liturgical year with Advent next weekend.

Immediately following the Eucharistic Prayer, we say or sing the Our Father, the prayer given to us by Jesus. Volumes have been written on this beautiful prayer. For the sake of brevity, I will point out that the structure of the prayer teaches us how to pray. We first ask for those things pertaining to God (*hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done*) before asking for our needs (*give us this day our daily bread, forgive our trespasses, deliver us from evil*).

After the Our Father, the priest says, "*The peace of the Lord be with you always.*" When the Risen Christ encountered the frightened apostles in the upper room, He said *three* times, "*Peace be with you*" (Jn 20:19, 21, 26). Evidently, they really needed Christ's peace! Now that the Risen Christ is present in our midst in the Eucharist, the priest extends the peace of Christ.

The faithful, for the part, receive this peace. This, in turn, allows them to extend Christ's peace to one another. This reflects the early Christian practice based on the exhortations of Saints Peter and Paul to "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Pet. 5:14). The unity expressed by the sign of peace is then expressed as the faithful receive Holy Communion.

Next, the people say or sing the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God). Jesus is the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world. At this time, the priest breaks the Host, which reminds us of St. Paul's words, "*The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*" (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

The priest then takes a little part of the Host and places it in the chalice while saying quietly, "*May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.*" This ritual is known as the commingling. In the early Church, the pope had a small particle of the consecrated Host sent to the priests in the city, who then placed it in their chalices as a sign of unity with him.

Additionally, some have seen the commingling as a sign of the Resurrection. Whereas the separate consecration of the bread and wine signifies Christ's death, the particle of the Host being placed in the chalice of Blood signifies His Resurrection.

The priest then holds up the consecrated Host saying, "*Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.*" When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn 1:29) Like John the Baptist, the priest points to Jesus present in the Eucharist as the "Lamb of God."

The priest says that those called to the marriage supper of the lamb are blessed. The Book of Revelation, for its part, refers to heaven as the "marriage supper of the lamb." (19:7) In other words, by receiving the Eucharist, we receive a "foretaste" of heaven itself. In the Old Testament, God nourished the Israelites in the desert with manna from heaven. The manna tasted like honey. This reminded them of the Promised Land, a land flowing with "milk and honey." Similarly, the Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven, the true Promised Land.

The faithful respond, "*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.*" These words are borrowed from the Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant, but then told Jesus that He could heal from afar by simply saying the word. "*But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.*" (Mt. 8:8)

Then the faithful receive Holy Communion. Prior to receiving Holy Communion, the faithful are asked to make a simple head bow out of reverence for the true Presence. The faithful can either receive the Eucharist in the hand (a throne for Jesus) or on the tongue (buried in the tomb so to speak). Either way is acceptable. After receiving Holy Communion, it is appropriate to make an act of thanksgiving.

After a short period of silence and the Prayer after Communion, the priest gives the holy announcements. Most of the faithful can hardly wait for this moment. Then the priest greets the people and says, "*Go forth, the Mass is ended.*" The Latin is *Ite Missa est* ("Go, you are dismissed"). This is where the liturgy receives its name "The Mass."

The people respond, "*Thanks be to God.*" In gratitude, they are "sent" (*missio*) to fulfill God's will in their lives. Nourished by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the faithful are sent on mission to bring the mysteries of Christ into the world!

Go forth, the Mass is ended!

