

THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY

PART 5 OF 5

FEBRUARY 23, 2020

CONCLUDING RITES

The Eucharist and the Poor

Following our reception of communion, we pray in silence or sing a hymn of praise. This time is for us to reflect on what has happened at Mass: something both awesome and familiar. A mystery we cannot fathom has come very near to us; in the Eucharist, we touch and receive something as familiar as bread and wine, something as mysterious as God.

The Eucharist is many things: daily bread, food for the journey, pledge of eternal life, Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist is the meeting-place of earth and heaven, the Incarnation present, here and now. "The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 236).

And there is more. The Eucharist calls us to live according to Christ's law of love, and thus the Eucharist calls us not only to be transformed but to be agents of transformation in the world. The recent Popes have all put great emphasis on this aspect of Eucharist. "We cannot delude ourselves," said St. John Paul II in announcing the Year of the Eucharist in 2004: "by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 24). Pope Benedict XVI echoed these words: "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 14). There are no two ways about it: the Eucharist commits us to the poor. Long ago, St. Paul wrote to the Christian community at Corinth, where class divisions were evident even in the way they celebrated the Eucharist. "I hear that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you, and to a degree I believe it... When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and



ABOVE: Pope Francis celebrates Eucharist (Photo from America Magazine). BELOW: Pope Francis welcomes homeless people to breakfast on his 80th birthday (Photo from the Tablet). In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the eucharist commits us to the poor."

make those who have nothing feel ashamed? What can I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this matter I do not praise you" (I Corinthians 11:18-22).

The Eucharist and Transformation

Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized that the Eucharist "is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 47). If we waited until we had achieved some imagined purity or perfection, we would have to avoid the sacrament altogether. That would be like waiting until our symptoms disappeared to take the

prescription the doctor gave us! The Eucharist is not the reward of our labors, but food for the journey. In the Prayer after Communion at every Mass, the priest asks for the fruits of the Eucharist—and there are many. Among other things, the Eucharist...

- ...increases our union with Christ
- ...separates us from sin
- ...wipes away venial sins
- ...preserves us from future mortal sin
- ...brings about the Unity of the Mystical Body
- ...commits us to the poor
- ...brings about the unity of Christians

Sometimes, we put limits on the Eucharist, thinking of it as purely “spiritual,” impacting our personal relationship with God, but not much else. But the Eucharist is never “mine”; the Eucharist is always “ours.” By its very nature, Eucharist is communal, touching all our relationships—with God, with each other, with those we know and love and those we struggle to love.

Blessed and Sent

The word “Mass” derives from the Latin words for the dismissal, the very last part of the Mass. *Ite, missa est: Go, you are sent.* It is ironic, perhaps, that the entire liturgy came to be known by its last word, and yet it is appropriate as well. Because ultimately, the Eucharist is not an escape from the world; the Eucharist is ordered towards the transformation of the world. At the end of Mass, we are sent forth, not to clear the pews, but to fill the world – to carry the Gospel into the places it can reach only through us.

The Spirit of the Liturgy

In the course of this series, we have reflected on the phrase “the spirit of the liturgy,” which appears three times in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council. What is the spirit of the liturgy in which we participate? The spirit of the liturgy is wonder and awe, humility and joy, in the presence of God. The spirit of the liturgy is listening and response, gift and offering. The spirit of the liturgy is thanksgiving, memory, communion, and mission. The spirit of the liturgy is transformation. May we all become more deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy.

—Corinna Laughlin, *Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy*



The procession at the end of Mass is a powerful reminder that the Eucharist sends us forth with a mission, to be a leaven of transformation in our families, schools, workplaces, and world.

A Prayer after Mass

Lord Jesus Christ,
you welcomed sinners and dined with them.
Today, you invited me to your table,
not because I am worthy
but because of the greatness of your love.
The Bread of Life and the cup of salvation,
your very Body and Blood,
you have placed in my hands.
May my participation in this mystery
help me to pattern my life on yours,
to empty myself of self
and serve you in others
until I gather once more
with this beloved family of yours
around the table of life.
Amen.