

EUCHARIST IS LIFE.

We are most attractive when most eucharist --- grateful for bread, wine, divine life.
[John Tully Carmody].¹

The value of our liturgy depends on the quality of our Christian living... A piece of wafer and a sip of wine do not constitute a meal in any ordinary sense of the word... Life itself is the meal.

[Raymond Moloney, S.J., p. 37]

Our experience is showing us that it takes a long time to make the spirit of the liturgy our own.

[John F. Baldwin, SJ., p. xii].

Why the Mass?

- Because Jesus told us to do this “in memory of him.”
- The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church’s life, as Vatican II taught, because it is an intensification of life used by God to heal our humanness through making us divine.
- These responses, while accurate, do not show us how Eucharist correlates with life as such, “how the Eucharist responds to some of the most fundamental issues and problems facing human beings both as individuals and as communities.” [J. F. Baldwin, p. 2].
- The Eucharist goes straight to the heart of what it means to be human.

Life: assembly, listening and speaking, eating and drinking, dismissal: *the anthropological antecedents to Christianity*. [L. Bouyer, p. 3].

Eucharist: assembly, listening and speaking, eating and drinking, dismissal.

Step 1: Describing Human Life.

Assembly.

- Our life in this world comes to be through others, literally through their assembly. Our being depends on the assembly of others: of the love-assembly of our parents, and then later on the continued loving support of those who nurture us --- the wider family, friends, school, pastors, and so forth ---enabling us to flourish.

¹ John Tully Carmody, *God Is No Illusion: Meditations on the End of Life* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 11.

- “To be fully human is to be ‘inducted’ into the human community. This ‘induction’ begins for all of us at birth, but the instrument for this actualization of the potential that is human nature is learning language... The ‘who’ is a shifting center of initiative and response in the ongoing human ‘conversation.’” [M. Scanlon, p. 198].
- “We are, it may be said, loved into selfhood... We are not only not islands, we never were... ‘I’ is itself a learned word...”²
- “*Gift* is the principle on which the Creator has based human existence; it is the most pervasive, even if little noticed, reality of our lives. We have life itself by others’ gift of procreation, pregnancy and childbirth. We are sustained in life by the good things of nature and by the labour, generosity and society of other human beings. We are educated by the self-giving of our teachers. We are sustained constantly by gifts --- love, forgiveness, reconciliation, pleasure. Our whole life is a fabrication of gifts received, and we ourselves contribute our gifts to the life of others.”³
- The Orthodox theologian and bishop, Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas, when he says, “One person is no person.”

Listening.

- Much of our life is about listening. We listen to the story of who we are, told by others in family and religious tradition, in school, college and nation. The literary critic and philosopher, Kenneth Burke offers us a parable of how we are shaped by conversation: *Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got here, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion vigorously in progress.*⁴

Speaking.

- We not only listen, we speak, we respond to others in so many different ways.

² George Pattison, *The End of Theology and the Task of Thinking About God* (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 44-45.

³ L. William Countryman, *Forgiven and Forgiving* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1998), p. 83.

⁴ Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 110-111.

- Timothy Radcliffe, OP: *Dialogue is fruitful when it is the struggle to learn from each other... It is easy to identify another's errors. Do we have the courage to hear what they may teach us? The struggle of true dialogue is like Jacob wrestling with the angel, leaving one wounded and blessed. This demands of us vulnerability.* [p. 249].
- Vulnerability is an ineluctable risk of dialogue.

Eating and drinking.

- Eating and drinking are obviously basic to human life, but there is more. *Eating is 'the first and most urgent activity of all animal and human life,' the philosopher Leon Kass tells us. 'We are only because we eat.'... We eat to live, it is true. But we also eat to remember where we came from, or to experience a connection with those who first fed us, or to find a place within a new culture, or to celebrate one that has passed to us from hand to hand, cook by cook. We ask the food we eat to meet many hungers...*⁵
- The food we eat meets many hungers. Food and drink are singularly enhanced by com-panionship, literally eating bread with another.
- “We produce our food together, we consume it together, we share it with one another. It is an expression of love and desire. It aims at communion... With food we tell one another that we love one another, that we are dependent upon one another, that we desire the other to live and be well.” [J. Driscoll, p. 64].

Dismissal.

Our life in this world comes to an end. There are many endings before *the* end, in each of which we have an experience of being sent out, dis-missed...

Step 2: Describing Eucharist: -

Assembly.

- There is no Eucharist without an assembly. *Whatever else the Church is, it is the assembly of God's people who have been called to gather as one in the name of Jesus the Lord.* [J. F. Baldovin, p. 63].
- In this assembly is hidden the whole Church, of all centuries, of all time, and, since the Church is for the world, “in that Church is gathered the whole creation and the desires of every human heart... The meaning of the whole creation and the whole of human history is contained here in ritual form and in the people who enact the ritual.” [J. Driscoll, p. 10].

⁵ Stephanie Paulsell, *Honoring the Body* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 77.

Listening.

- Primacy is given to listening: the Liturgy of the Word.
- No listening is every purely passive, and so as we listen in the Liturgy of the Word. Robert Barron: *Christians discover who God is, what constitutes the sacred world, who they are and ought to be, precisely by listening to the oddly textured narratives of the Bible. They learn to be holy by attending to the cast of characters --- saints, rogues, prophets, sinners --- on display in the biblical stories, and especially by watching the great Character who acts, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, in every story.* [p. 160].

Speaking.

- We respond in words of prayer and psalmody, in hymns.

Eating and drinking.

- Many faiths have developed forms of food and drink as ways of sustaining and developing relationship with God.
- The Word of the Lord.” “The Gospel of the Lord.” // “The Body of Christ.” “The Blood of Christ.” For Christians we are fed at the Table of the Word and the Table of the Eucharist, “at the twinned tables in the refectory of the Incarnate Logos, one for his word, the other for his flesh”[Aidan Nichols, OP].⁶
- “If bread is the most fundamental end of the food spectrum, wine is its festive end.” [J. Driscoll, p. 64].
- Robert Barron: *We are meant not simply to admire the Lamb of God, but to consume him, making him bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.* [p. 161].
- “Perhaps we could say that there are, anthropologically, few levels of meaning deeper, in the celebration of the Eucharist, than the celebration of life shared in the taking together of food and drink, although, of course, the heart of the matter, theologically, is that what is celebrated is the grounding of the possibility of such trust, such sharing, through the life-giving death and resurrection of the Crucified.”⁷

Dismissal.

- “The mass is ended. Go in peace.” We are sent forth/dismissed to be in the world what we have further expressed and become in the assembly, the Body of Christ. We are dis-missed to be that Body in our circumstances, in our place.

⁶ Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Service of Glory: The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Worship, Ethics, Spirituality* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), p. 57.

⁷ Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God* (Burlington, VT and London: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 56.

- Michael Scanlon, OSA: “The ‘we’ who constitute the Church are those whose imaginations... are formed by Word and Sacrament... to reproduce the ‘mind of Christ’ in ‘the Body of Christ.’” [p. 197].
- “Perhaps the greatest, and certainly the most difficult problem for liturgical piety is the one which awaits us when we go out of the church after the liturgical celebration is finished... The liturgical celebration itself implies a correlative importance in what we do, after the liturgical celebration, in daily living.” [L. Bouyer, 2, p. 257].

Conclusion.

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003: In brief, those who participate in the Eucharist, by that very fact, make the public commitment to change their lives, “making them in a certain way completely ‘Eucharistic’” [par. 20].

SOURCES.

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