

## Manna 3 – Seventh Session

# Eating and Drinking Together in the LORD: The Eucharist and the Rite of Communion

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*I have often reflected upon the remedies for the universal indifference  
which is taking hold of so many Catholics in a frightening way.  
I can find only one: the Eucharist, love for Jesus Eucharistic.*

-To November 11, 1851

Agarithe Monavon

### ***Preface***

The Second Vatican Council called for such a marvelous vision for the celebration of the Mass. For it taught that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of Christian life” (*Sacrosanctum concilium* 47, 1963). Furthermore, it invited and called for all the laity to realize that “the full and active participation of all the people is the aim to be considered before all else” (SC 14). Oh, how Father Peter Julian Eymard would rejoice!

At the time Father Eymard lived there was so little liturgical awareness of the Mass, especially among the laity. Yet Father Eymard himself had such a deep love for the Mass and the Scriptures that he sought to deepen his own understanding and appreciation for the Eucharist. Such so, that he stressed for his followers the frequent reception of Holy Communion. The Church at that time considered such a teaching quite liberal and unacceptable. Yet Father Eymard even encouraged this practice for those who came to him for spiritual direction. He was clearly ahead of his time. (In 1905 Pope Pius X allowed for the practice of frequent and daily Holy Communion, largely due to the persistent campaigning of two members of Father Eymard’s religious community: Father Eugene Couet, SSS and Father Louis Estevenon, SSS.)

## ***Introduction to the Theme***

The Communion Rite is certainly among, if not *the* most profound, moments of the Mass. It is a part of the Mass that may not be fully understood nor practiced well.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, (hereafter *GIRM*) is the “owner’s manual” that tells us how to celebrate the order of Mass. Found at the beginning of the *Roman Missal*, the missal that the presider uses to guide the celebration, *GIRM* states principles and theologies that are operative in this part of the Mass. Our reflection in this unit of *Manna* will ask us to review how we celebrate the Communion Rite.

This exercise will be an act of “ritual studies.” For a time, you are being asked to step back and observe how you participate in this part of the Eucharist. Then you will be asked to read and reflect on the *GIRM*. A subsequent document from the United States’ bishops, *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*, continues the principles first defined in *GIRM* and calls us to further reflect on the “center of ecclesial life.” Finally, you will be challenged to better celebrate this ritual and decide how you can make this profound ritual more meaningful for you and for your community. We are celebrating the communion of the people!

## *Opening Prayer*

Source of all unity, expression of total joy!

You are the mystery that calls us to be one in you, a communion of believers.

You are the saving mystery whose action transforms us!

You take us and make us your body.

You take our gifts of bread and wine and transform us!

You break them and pour them for a broken world  
that we may become one in you and so give you glory!

May we become one body

a living sign of your presence and action in the world.

May our time of reflection

draw us deeper into the saving action that transforms our lives.

Help us grow in the hidden mystery of this rite of communion

for we trust that you enable us to grow in union with the Holy Spirit.

God forever and ever.

Amen.

### *Song Options:*

- “At That First Eucharist” by William Turton and William Monk.
- “Gather Us In” by Marty Haugen.
- “I Received the Living God” by Anonymous, arranged by Richard Proulix.
- “Now in This Banquet” by Marty Haugen
- “What is This Place?” by Huub Oosterhuis

### ***Work Exercise***

1. Describe in detail to someone who is new to your worship space what happens musically, physically, gesture-wise, etc. once the “Lord’s Prayer” begins, the “Lamb of God” sung, and people receive Holy Communion. How should they act? What should they expect to see, smell, hear, and feel?
2. How does music work to enhance the communion process? What does the ritual of processing mean to you who are receiving communion? Are people singing as they process? After they receive communion?
3. Why does Christ invite (and the church present) Christ’s body and blood for consumption? How do people respect this invitation to “take and eat, take and drink?”

***The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.***

## ***Teaching***

Looking at a ritual guide (missalette or hymnal) one can view the order of the Communion Rite. It might be a trivia question to ask, “When does the Communion Rite begin?” Most, probably, would not be aware of this unique rite within the Liturgy of the Eucharist of the Order of Mass. In actuality, there are rites within rites and layer upon layer of special moments that draw the community to be in communion with Christ and one another. Here’s the outline:

- Lord’s Prayer
- Doxology
- Sing of Peace
- Breaking of the bread (and pouring of the wine)
- Communion
- Communion song
- Period of silence or song of praise
- Prayer after communion

2002 *GIRM* paragraphs 80 and 81 says that

Since the Eucharistic celebration is the Paschal Banquet, it is desirable that in accordance with the Lord’s command his Body and Blood should be received as spiritual food by those of the faithful who are properly disposed. This is the sense of the fraction and the other preparatory rites by which the faithful are led more immediately to Communion.

In the Lord’s Prayer a petition is made for daily bread, which for Christians means principally the Eucharistic Bread, and entreating also purification from sin, so that what is holy may in truth be given to the holy.

We are called to pray in the words of Jesus, our savior and unifier. This prayer has been recited before the reception of communion since circa year 80. The *Didache*, an early church document, outlined this and the way the worshippers said this prayer as a way of uniting with the risen Christ who was present to them.

We stand together to recite this prayer like the early church: in joyful hope waiting for the Lord’s return. The early Christians put their arms and hands out in the form of the “orans” position, or sign of the body of the cross, in the posture or stance in which the Lord was crucified. Most are familiar with this posture of prayer because the presider uses the orans position for every prayer, especially the Eucharistic Prayer. It came to mean the posture of the resurrection and ascension as the community waited in joyful hope for Christ’s return. The Lord’s Prayer was prayed in anticipation of the reign of God and the coming of the Savior,

*GIRM* 82 continues:

There follows the Rite of Peace, by which the Church entreats peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family, and the faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament.

It is important to note principles for this rite of peace: peace and unity. It is not a time to catch up on the social events of one's life. We are continuing to wish Christ and Christ's peace to one another, continuing to unite and draw this church of people into Christ's body. As head, Christ seeks unity among the members. This action of the rite demonstrates an outward sign of the inward symbol of Christ within us.

*GIRM* 83:

The Priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread, with the assistance, if the case requires, of the Deacon or a concelebrant. The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again.

The term we use to describe our worship (Mass or Eucharist) evolved from many different names: "The Lord's Supper," "The Risen Lord's Meal," "Banquet of the Lord," "Lord's Eucharist," "Supper of the Lord," and "Breaking of the Bread." The story of Emmaus in Luke's Gospel is a record of this early liturgy, done in memory of the Lord. It was in the breaking of the bread that the disciples recognized the risen Lord. If the Lord's Prayer and sign of peace have yet to reveal it, this moment deepens how we are in communion with the Lord.

Yet the bread, the body of the Lord, must be broken and shared! The wine, the blood of the Lord must be poured! Why do we continue this action? To make holy God's holy people. To continue the action of sharing the love that is Christ. To continue giving. To continue to be of service. To continue the flow of the goodness and bounty of God. It is not a static moment.

While this occurs, we sing a litany, an ancient form of song in which a leader guides the assembly through a mantra to deepen us in the spirit of the music and moment. *GIRM* 83 continues:

The fraction or breaking of bread [and sharing of the wine] is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out with proper reverence, and should not be unnecessarily prolonged or accorded exaggerated importance. This rite is reserved to the Priest and the Deacon.

The Priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious. The supplication Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) is usually sung by

the choir or cantor with the congregation replying; or at least recited aloud. This invocation accompanies the fraction of the bread and, for this reason, may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has been completed. The final time it concludes with the words grant us peace.

This is a litany, a mantra to accompany this ritual action of breaking bread and pouring wine. Throughout the Eucharistic liturgy music accompanies actions to heighten the rituals' importance. Our sung response deepens our participation in the ritual process. Sung voices coming together unite the body of Christ, the people of God and proclaim in one voice that we are God's chosen.

We reflect with *GIRM* 85:

It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.

and *GIRM* 319 – 321:

Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

320. The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently made, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened.

321. By reason of the sign, it is required that the material for the Eucharistic Celebration truly have the appearance of food. Therefore, it is desirable that the Eucharistic Bread, even though unleavened and made in the traditional form, be fashioned in such a way that the Priest at Mass with the people is truly able to break it into parts and distribute these to at least some of the faithful

Having real bread or hosts prepared by families in the parish makes a dynamic connection: we take God's blessings and gifts, wheat and grapes, and transform them into bread and wine. We present these gifts from God to God to be hallowed. Then we continue Christ's action by breaking and sharing the mystery for our consumption. We participate in the sharing of this meal in this Eucharistic action, to show that we are one body, but many parts. The bread was one; it now is many, but one! The wine was one, poured out, but one! How wonderful that we sing during this action of breaking and pouring: it continues to unite and share the communion.

Seeing the host and chalice containing the precious blood, hearing “Behold the Lamb of God,” we join in saying we are “not worthy to receive.” Our humbleness placates, subsides, and the Lord calls us to the table of our salvation to eat and drink with Christ and with one another. We sing our joy at this moment; how can we not sing? For we are in union with Christ and one another. To show our oneness we have melodies that join our hearts and voices.

*GIRM* 86 says:

While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the “communitarian” character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. However, if there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion Chant should be ended in a timely manner.

In past times, people were instructed not to sing. No longer does the church have this mandate. In fact, as you see above, the opposite is now true. We have to sing. It’s our obligation if we truly are God’s people, Christ’s body.

We are invited to come and receive Christ’s body and blood and to “taste and see the goodness of the Lord.” We are called as God’s holy gifts to be holy gifts for one another and for the world.

Our standing together during this rite (yes, the posture for the entire communion rite is standing – see *GIRM* 281:

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father.” The General Instruction further states that “at the same time the faithful should be instructed to participate more readily in this sacred rite, by which the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is made more fully evident

We are partaking in the foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Just a taste! This is why we do not eat a meal like we would at Thanksgiving or Christmas. We are merely gaining a glimpse into the life beyond.

Receiving both the body and blood of Christ is so important. Many still skip reception of the precious blood of our Lord with many reasons and worries cited. Yet it is the cup of joy that leads to our salvation. Could you imagine Jesus at the Last Supper telling his disciples to skip it!

We are meant to share in Christ’s blood with each other. Blood is the life that flows through the veins of the body. It sustains our life and keeps us filled with the spirit. There may be rare exceptions to not receiving from the cup. But to be in communion is to drink of the cup! Christ



asked us if we would be able to drink from this bitter cup. We need to do so to participate in the mystery and paschal life of Christ: he shared his blood on the cross that we might live and have eternal life.

Meanwhile we come forward and hear proclaimed to us, “The body/blood of Christ.” With our hearts on fire, we respond heartily, “Amen.” Yes! I believe and accept. Yes, I am part of this. Yes, this is who I am, the body and blood of Christ. We are saying “amen” to who we are and whose we are. It cannot be whispered or mumbled. This is the time to face the music and again claim ourselves as part of this faith and faith community. People have died because of their “Amen.” We join with those of ages past to once again say with them, “amen.”

This Hebrew word has multiple layers of meaning. At this moment in the Eucharist we acknowledge our participation in the communion of the Lord and of the people. After our “amen” we continue to sing and process, stand and sing until all have received communion. In doing so we say “amen” and stand with all as a sign of support and union with one another. We know from etiquette how important it is to eat together and wait together for all to participate together. These same principles apply here in this Eucharist. This is why *GIRM* 21 stresses this posture.

*GIRM* 88 continues:

When the distribution of Communion is over, if appropriate, the Priest and faithful pray quietly for some time. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation.

Our communion is summed up in one final prayer, the “Prayer after Communion.” It brings closure to this rite and action. The priest prays on behalf of the entire community – an awesome responsibility for the leader of prayer and one to which we should listen attentively. For on behalf of us, he tells our God how much this sacred mystery has meant and how this action has touched our lives.

After the Communion Rite is complete, we move to the Concluding Rites and typically hear announcements, are blessed and dismissed. We go forward to live the communion we share in Christ and to manifest its presence to the world in need of unity and love. This is an awesome responsibility for the body of Christ, the people of God! Yet, we are a communion of people. If you hurt, I hurt. If you love, I love.

This teaching has sought to give us a deepened appreciation of the different components of the communion rite, as well as the knowledge we need to fully celebrate and achieve the goal of the rite, “communion of the people.” May we be united in the love of, and remain in communion with, God and one another.

*Resource helps for this teaching:*

- *Bread Broken and Shared* by Paul Bernier, S.S.S. Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1981.

- *The Church at Prayer, Volume II: The Eucharist* by Robert Cabie. The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1986.
- *The Liturgy Document: A Parish Resource, Third Edition*. Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1991.
- *Gathered in Steadfast Love* by Roger Cardinal Mahoney, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1997.

## ***Closing Prayer***

*If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, exposition is made during the opening hymn. When the hymn is concluded, the assembly kneels in silence for several minutes. During this silence, the community welcomes the presence of the Risen LORD before them in the Blessed Sacrament and within them as the LORD'S own body.*

### ***Opening Song:***

- “I Am the Bread of Life,” by Suzanne Toolan, SM
- “The Supper of the Lord,” by Laurence Rosania

### ***Opening Prayer:***

Loving God,  
you call us into communion with your sacred Body & Blood  
and draw us also to grow closer to one another.

May this ritual of deep meaning and action  
reignite and nourish the faith we cherish.

May this saving mystery and action  
sustain us and deepend our sense of mission and unity.

Through Christ our LORD. Amen.

***First Reading:*** John 15:1-17

***Period of Silence:***

***Second Reading:*** 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 *optional*

***Period of Silence:***

***Intercessory Prayer:***

*If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community occurs after the prayers. Consider using the ritual books for Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass (2024) that provides this ritual texts of prayer, praise, The Lord's Prayer, etc.*

***Benediction:*** *optional*

*Reposition: optional*

*Song optional now if there is exposition/reposition or at the end of the prayer*

“Gift of Finest Wheat” by Omer Westendorf

“Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today and For ever,” by Susanne Toolan, SM

*Reposition: optional*

*Closing Prayer:*

God of all unity and communion,  
you call us to be one in you as you are in us.  
Help us through this sacrament to know the depth of this mystery of unity.  
Teach us to know you in the Eucharist we share  
that by breaking bread and pouring wine  
we may recognize your presence  
and radiate this source of unity  
with those with whom we worship, live, move, and have our being.  
May our communion truly allow for us to grow in oneness with you  
where you are one forever and ever.  
Amen.

*Song: “One Bread, One Body” by John Foley, SJ*

*Dismissal with some sign of peace*

