

## **REFLECTION 7**

### **THE EUCHARIST – Part I**

If you had the opportunity to go back to those moments in life when you made mistakes or didn't take advantage of opportunities that presented themselves, would you? Also, when you go back to Scripture and read about all the figures who made grave mistakes in their lives that led to tremendous suffering, do you resent their behavior towards God?

The Mass is a unique opportunity for us to address these two questions: it is without a doubt that humanity has truly behaved poorly towards God, even those who were considered His chosen people. We might have made the same poor choices they made, but instead, God has given us a chance to undo the mistakes of humanity's past by participating in the Mass. This might sound like an exaggeration, but it's true. The entire Mass allows us to relive Salvation History, but this time we get to be present and walk in solidarity with God through the suffering He went through.

Our reliving of Salvation History in the Mass becomes more noticeable in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, especially in two ways: by emulating the sacrifices at the altar within the Temple and by making ourselves present at the Last Supper in which Jesus instituted the Eucharist.

The altar, which is the most evident and central point of every single Catholic church, now becomes the center of liturgical worship. An altar is not simply a table; altars are specifically and exclusively used for sacrifices. The priest venerated the altar with a kiss at the beginning of the Mass because this is where Christ presents his sacrifice for us. Now, those involved in the Mass will carefully set it with the sacramentals that will be used for the sacrifice, including the proper linens, the chalice, the paten (the little dish that contains the host), and the missal.

The gifts of bread and wine are presented to the altar - we call these "gifts" because they are made by human hands, and we are handing them over to God so that He can take our offerings and give them back to us in a much more substantial way. The gifts also call to mind the sacrifice of Abel in Genesis, who gave the

best products of his labor to God. God does not keep these gifts for Himself but returns them to us in a radically new way.

The priest begins to offer these human gifts of bread and wine up to the Lord by raising them up. The words of the prayers he uses emphasize that these are gifts made by human hands using the natural world given to us by God.

In the bread and wine, we have harmonized the abilities that God has given to humans with the gifts of the natural world (fruit of the earth and fruit of the vine). And we do so simply to give back to God. This is a profoundly reciprocal exchange of gifts between us and God.

Because we are offering this gift to God, He will return it to us, but not as merely bread or wine. We acknowledge that it will become the bread of life and our spiritual drink. Then, the priest will also add a bit of water to the chalice of wine.

The wine here signifies Christ's eternal divinity, while the water signifies the humanity that God took on for Himself. By adding water to the wine, this also calls to mind the moment that our Church began - when Christ was pierced at his side on the cross, and blood and water spilled forth. The priest now calls us to participate in the sacrifice by saying: "Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father." We stand because we are now coming into the moment of participation collectively, while together we respond, imploring that God accept the sacrifice of the Church at the hands of the priest who will be acting in the person of Christ for us.