



## LET US PRAY – REFLECTIONS ON THE EUCHARIST

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During this Year of the Eucharist, I offer a series of articles on Eucharistic Spirituality: Source of Life and Mission of our Church. Article #1, *How We Name Eucharist*.

Let me make two initial remarks: one on how, in our long tradition, we have named the eucharist, and the other on eucharistic spirituality.

We've given the eucharist a variety of names, in our church's practice and tradition. The New Testament called it *the Lord's Supper* (Paul so names it in 1 Cor. 11:20); and also *the Breaking of the Bread* (by Luke, in Acts 2:42,46).

Later, a Greek designation was given it, *Anamnesis*, meaning "remembrance". It is the remembrance, the memorial of the Lord, in which we actually participate in his dying and rising.

Sometimes, it was called simply *Communion*, underscoring the unity we have with Jesus and one another when we eat the bread and drink the cup (1 Cor. 10:16). We speak of "doing eucharist" together because, in doing it, we have communion with the Lord and one another. Anglicans still use this name, today, to refer to the Lord's Supper.

We call it *Eucharist* – meaning "thanksgiving" (from the Greek, *eucharistein*, "to give thanks"). Jesus gave thanks at the Last Supper. And we do so. When we come together to be nourished in word and sacrament, we give thanks for Jesus' dying and rising.

It was also called *Sacrifice*. Early christian writers spoke of Jesus' Sacrifice (also calling it his *Offering*), which was not only a gift received but also the gift whereby we approach God.

Another name, this one also Greek, was *Synaxis*, meaning "gathering". This name underscored the communal dimension of the Lord's Supper. It's the assembly of believers that celebrates the eucharist. It's the eucharist that makes this assembly God's People.

Often the eucharist is referred to as *Liturgy*. The Greek word "leiturgia", taken from the Eastern Church, means literally "work" or "service". Liturgy is the work performed by ministers for and with the people assembled for prayer.

Finally, we call it the *Mass*. From the fifth century on, the whole ritual action took its name from the final dismissal rite: "*Ite, Missa est.*" "*Go, the Mass is ended...You are sent.*"

The Vatican Council continued to name eucharist in a variety of ways, in its *Constitution on the Church: Last Supper, Eucharistic Sacrifice, Christ's Body and Blood, Memorial of Christ's Death and Resurrection, Sacrament of Love, Sign of unity, Bond of Charity, Paschal Banquet*. (No. 47)

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For to speak of eucharistic spirituality is to speak of our gathering to give thanks to God, primarily on Sunday (the Lord's Day). It is to speak of our centering ourselves in Christ by this gathering. It is to acknowledge that in him, and with the guidance of his Spirit, we offer ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice to our God (corporately and personally).

Eucharistic spirituality tells us that we, who gather at the table of the word and the table of the eucharist, are transformed, like the bread and wine, into the Body and Blood of Christ. Such spirituality has roots, as well, in the sacrament of baptism.

When we were washed in water and the Holy Spirit, we were anointed with holy chrism, and the priest said: "As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life."

Eucharistic spirituality, of course, does not stop with the liturgical celebration. Living what we have done in service, love, and witness is an essential part of active eucharistic spirituality.

You must have noticed that the Gospel Book, the book of God's word, is always carried *into* the assembly when we begin Mass, but never carried *out* at the end. The reason is that, having been nourished with that word during the Mass, we are to be that word of life as we leave the assembly. We leave the church as eucharistic people. We *are* eucharist the rest of the week.

And what happens inside the church and what happens outside are intimately connected. If eucharist hasn't happened for us in the church, it can't happen when we leave. And if it's not happening 'out there' in our daily lives, it can't happen when we gather together in church.

Eucharistic spirituality has to do with all of this. And we'll explore it in subsequent articles of this series.



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