

(English translation)

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The Eucharist

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A mixture of delicate sweetness and contained sadness, an atmosphere of solemnity invades the soul on remembering what happened that Thursday twenty centuries ago.

God became man. He could do everything. But it was in the logic of love that he, having fulfilled such a step in coming from the Trinity to earthly life, would not remain for only 33 years – even if he led an extraordinary divine life – but would find the way to remain for all centuries to come and to be present all over the world at the climax of his love: sacrifice and glory, death and resurrection. And he remained. Contrived by his divine fantasy, he invented the Eucharist. It's his name which reaches the extreme measure.

Theresa of Lisieux would say: "Oh Jesus, let me say, in my overflowing gratitude, let me say that your love reached madness...."

Luke described that evening: "When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I was eager to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' ... Jesus also took bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after eating, 'This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood which is poured out for you.'" (Lk 22:14-20)

If he were not God, I wouldn't know how Jesus could have exposed in so few solemn words such new, unpredictable, fathomless realities which lead one to ecstasy, because faced with these and if understood even a little, the human being would not be able to bear it.

Jesus, you are there, the only one who knows everything. You are aware that your gesture brings centuries of waiting to a close. You are there looking at the infinite consequences of what you are working in order to fulfil that divine plan which was always foreseen by the Trinity, the Church, which having its beginning on earth will penetrate into the future abysses of the Kingdom. I repeat, if you were not God, how would you have spoken and behaved in this way?

But something of what your heart felt in that moment transpires: "I ardently wished..." and there is an immense happiness, "before my passion" and there is the joyful embrace of the cross and the connection of one with the other, because what you were about to do was your testament and a testament only has value after one's death. You were leaving us an invaluable inheritance: yourself.

According to Thomas Aquinas, the Eucharist is the greatest of Jesus Christ's miracles. In fact, as Peter Julian Eymard said, "the Eucharist exceeds everyone because of its objective and dominates all because of its duration. It's the permanent incarnation, the perpetual sacrifice of Jesus, the burning bush that is always on fire on the altar, the true bread of life that daily descends from heaven."

And the Second Vatican Council affirms that "the most holy Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our Passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to all people."

Jesus celebrates his Passover like a banquet. In every house, supper is the family moment, a moment of brotherhood and often friendship and celebration. The banquet that Jesus presides over is celebrated like the Jewish Passover and, as such, it succinctly contains the whole history of the Israelites.

Like a father of a family, in his gestures and in the "blessing" Jesus repeats the Jewish rite. But in this banquet there is an immense difference and novelty in comparison with the Jewish Passover. Jesus'

supper is celebrated in the context of his passion and death and in the Eucharist he symbolically and truly anticipates his sacrifice and redemption: he is the priest and the victim of it.

Pope Paul VI expressed himself in this way on Holy Thursday 1966: "We cannot forget that the Supper ... was a commemorative rite; it was the Pascal feast, which had to be repeated every year in order to transmit to future generations the indelible reminder of the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt That evening, Jesus substitutes the Old Testament with the New Testament, he said: 'This is my blood of the New Covenant ...' (Mt 26:28); to the old historical and figurative Passover he connects and brings his Passover to pass, which is also historical and definite, but also figurative from another final event, the final *Parousia*"

In fact these are Jesus' words: "I will not taste the fruit of the vine from now until the day I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29), which were translated by the famous Scripture scholar, Benoit, as an 'appointment in paradise,' and they give the Eucharist the character of a banquet which will have its total fulfilment after our resurrection.

But right now the Eucharist is the sacrament of communion to the Pascal Christ, to Christ who died and rose again, who has passed over – Passover = passage – to a new phase of his existence, the glorious phase at the right hand of the Father. Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist means to already participate down here in his glorious life, in his communion with the Father.

John has his own way of speaking about Jesus in the Eucharist. He narrates that Jesus presents himself as "bread of life" and explains how he can be the bread of life: "The bread I shall give is my flesh and I will give it for the life of the world ..." (Jn 6:51b).

Jesus already sees himself as bread. Therefore that is the main reason for his life here on earth: to be bread in order to be eaten, and to be eaten in order to communicate life to us already from this world. But what is life? Jesus said it: "I am the life" (Jn 11:25; 14:6). This bread is nourished by him already from down here.

Jesus said again: "The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day" (Jn 6:54). The Eucharist also gives life for the world to come.

But what is the resurrection? Jesus said it: "I am the resurrection" (Jn 11:25). He is the one who begins his immortal life in us, the one that is not suspended by death. Even if the body is corruptible, life, Christ, remains in body and soul as the principle of immortality.

The resurrection is a great mystery for those who reason in a human way. But there is a way to live in which the mystery becomes less incomprehensible. If we put Jesus' new commandment into practice with as much commitment as possible, we experience that mutual love leads to a fraternal unity among people who overcome human, natural love itself. This result, this conquest is the effect of putting Jesus' commandment into practice. In fact, he knew that with our corresponding to his immense gifts we would no longer be servants or his friends, but his brothers and sisters and brothers and sisters amongst us, because we are nourished with his life, that is, we have become "one body and one blood with him," as Cyril of Jerusalem said.

Since this family of the Kingdom of Heaven has been built, how can we think of a death which puts an end to the work of a God, with all the painful consequences which this entails? No: God would not make us face an absurd separation, he had to give us an answer and he gave it to us by revealing the truth of the resurrection of the body. In this way it results as a logical consequence of Christian living; this truth is bearer of the immense joy of knowing that one day we will all find ourselves with that Jesus who united us in this way.

Then to highlight the great effect which this mysterious bread operates, which is communion with Christ and among us, I would like to recall what St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion with the blood of Christ? And the bread that we

break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ? The bread is one, and so we, though many, form one body, sharing the one bread " (1 Cor 10:16-17).

"One body!"

This is how John Chrysostom comments on this: "We are his very body. In fact, what is the bread? The body of Christ. And what becomes of those who eat of this bread? They become the body of Christ, not several bodies, but one sole body. In fact, just as the bread is made of many grains (of wheat) but are so united that you no longer see the grains ..., in the same way we are closely joined together with one another and with Christ."

Jesus, you have a great plan for us and you are carrying it out throughout the centuries: making us one with you so that we may be where you are. For you, having come down on earth from the Trinity, it was the Father's will for you to return, but you didn't want to return alone, but with us. Therefore this is the long journey: from the Trinity to the Trinity, passing through the mysteries of life and death, suffering and glory.

Thank goodness the Eucharist is also a "thanksgiving." Only with the Eucharist can we be adequately grateful to you.