

## Monastic Scribe XXVIII: May 27, 2022

### Take and Eat...and Drink

According to the Second Vatican Council the celebration of the Sacred Eucharist (Mass, Communion) is the source and summit of the Church's activity. This does not mean it is the only activity but that the Mass lays the pattern for all activity of the Body of Christ. I think most Catholics appreciate this. While many Catholics ignore much of the church and its activity, they hold on to the Eucharist and receive holy communion. Our American Bishops are concerned that too many Catholics do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. I question the way they have surmised this. My observation of people receiving communion is usually that of great devotion. They know they are in contact with something sacred though many could not explain exactly how that is. The Bishops are presently putting a lot of attention and money into a Eucharistic Congress. I think they would do better in helping priests to preside more reverently, preach more in tune with Christ and the gospel, and make the celebration dignified with good music and good ritual.

A Eucharistic piety is a lot more than a theoretical belief in real presence though that has its place. The Eucharist has many facets. There are many ways to look at it. It is truly a sacrifice but in the form of a meal. The Eucharist is where God touches us physically. Sacraments are fleshly, human experiences and the Eucharist is the pinnacle of these experiences. The Eucharist is the manifestation of union with one another in the Body of Christ. We make the body of Christ visible when we gather for Mass. Thus it is always a communal event.

The Eucharist is the new manna in our desert of life's journey. God is feeding us for our spiritual pilgrimage. The Eucharist is the washing of one another's feet. It expresses the kind of humble action to one another. The Eucharist is not a private encounter with God but a reaching out to all our brothers and sisters. The General Intercessions express this prayer for the world and all its people. The Eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation and forgiveness. We are at Mass as sinners at table with Jesus.

But the central feature of the Eucharist is one that can easily be lost in our emphasis on real presence. The clue to this is the memorial acclamation we make after the words of institution. We proclaim the death of the Lord and profess his

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resurrection. This is what the Eucharist is really about - the death and resurrection of the Lord, the paschal mystery. It is an action – dying and rising – and not an inert substance. And this is the pattern of all Christian living – to die and rise with Christ, to die and rise with all people, especially those who suffer with Christ.

All baptized Christians are celebrants at Mass. We offer ourselves, as well as those we love and care for, whether living or dead, all those in need, along with the bread and wine. When the presider lifts up the bread and wine at the preparation rite, all of us should be actively offering ourselves. Through the prayer of consecration with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine along with all of us are changed into the body and blood of Christ.

It is appropriate to adore the presence of Christ, especially after communion. But Christ didn't say "This is my body, take and adore", but "This is my body, take and eat". We are there not just to adore Christ but to be Christ. We pledge ourselves to embrace the paschal mystery, to die to self daily and rise with Christ.

I get the impression that some confuse Mass with Benediction. The latter is a passive act, to behold and adore. But the Mass is an active act of worship. It is not priest-centered but community-centered. The Mass of the post-Reformation period focused on real presence because many reformers denied it. Mass developed as a very passive, clerical event. Until vernacular missals were finally allowed for people to follow the Latin readings, people prayed the Rosary or other private prayers while the priest recited the Mass in a low voice. The Council restored the full meaning of the Mass as an active prayer, active firstly interiorly as the faithful offered themselves and reflected on the readings. Active secondly as people were now to sing and take part in the prayers externally. I often observe people standing mute and staring into space as the prayers are sung or sitting in the same mute way while the scriptures are proclaimed. Still being passive!

This active participation is also how the faithful of the church are to claim their rightful role in taking part in the Synod preparations and other church gatherings to truly be the People of God, the Body of Christ in the world today. I hope you appreciate the role you have in the church today. You can contact me at:

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.