



FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE EUCHARIST

Receive. . . Give Thanks. . . Break . . . Share. . .

This is a document that explores five dimensions of the Eucharist, with thoughts and ideas on how to enter into this weekly practice. I'm personally choosing to use the term "Eucharist" instead of "Communion" or "The Lord's Supper," because its literal meaning is "gratitude." The Eucharist invites us to delve into a mystery that will result in a life in which we're constantly open to receiving everything as gift, thus living in continual gratitude, and breaking and sharing ourselves and the wild wonders of God to the world; this is the spirituality of the Eucharist.

I recommend for the next five weeks you practice a different dimension of the Eucharist each week as expressed in these pages. If you would like a simple liturgy to accompany and enrich your times there are a couple websites with prayers that you will find helpful. For some beautiful examples of Eucharist Prayers from Christian mystics, Google "Eucharist Prayers," and check out, "Eucharist Prayers, Holy Eucharist." For a basic Eucharist Liturgy visit the Church of England's contribution, "Additional Eucharist Prayers," and scroll to prayer one. Prayers such as Bonaventure's "Grant that my soul may hunger for Thee" or "A Meditation on the Precious Blood of Jesus" are very meaningful.

At the end of these five Eucharist dimensions there's a short article by Ronald Rolheiser on common misconceptions of prayer and liturgy that I have found very helpful and enlightening.

So let's get started, and enjoy the journey!

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THE EUCHARIST AS GOD'S PHYSICAL EMBRACE

For most of Jesus' ministry He used words. Through words, He tried to bring us God's consolation, challenge, and strength. His words, like all words, had a certain power. Indeed, His words stirred hearts, healed people, and affected conversations. But, powerful though they were, in time they too became inadequate. Something more was needed. So on the night before his death, having exhausted what He could do with words, Jesus went beyond them. He gave us the Eucharist, His physical embrace, His kiss, a ritual within which He holds us to his heart.

Ronald Rolheiser said, "To my mind that is the best understanding there is of the Eucharist. Within both my undergraduate theological training, I took long courses on the Eucharist. In the end, these didn't explain the Eucharist to me, not because they weren't good, but because the Eucharist, like a kiss, needs no explanation and has no explanation. If someone were to write a four-hundred-page book titled "The Metaphysics of Kissing", it wouldn't deserve a readership. Kisses just work, their inner dynamics need no metaphysical elaboration."

THE EUCHARIST IS GOD'S KISS. As Andre Dubus so succinctly puts it, "Without the Eucharist, God becomes a monologue." He's right. We need more than words; we need to be physically touched. This is what happens in the Eucharist and it is why the Eucharist, and every other Christian sacrament, always has some tangible, physical element to it - a laying on of hands, a consuming of bread and wine, an anointing of oil, an immersion in water. An embrace needs to be physical, not only something imagined. Skin needs to be touched. God knows that. It's why Jesus gave us the Eucharist.

APPLICATION:

SAY a simple prayer of blessing over the elements. Holding the bread in hand **UTTER** some prayers of thanksgiving for the many people, by name, that God has used to touch your life and to show you in some way His warmth, affection and kindness. **THANK** Jesus for showing us that love is not only a verb, but is more than a word; it's the act of His touch in some form or another. **CONFESS** your need to be touched by Him, ask His forgiveness for seeking unconditional love where it cannot be found. As you partake of the bread, with the eyes of your heart, envision Him as embracing you and giving to you all you need. **IN SILENCE RECEIVE** this great gift. Before drinking the grape juice or wine thank Him for shedding His blood on Calvary's hill, for embracing the world while we rejected Him, and for making a way for us to be free receivers and givers of His love, from now to eternity.

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THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION - AS NEW WINE

St. Augustine said that when we sit together to partake of the Eucharist with friends and sincerely pray the Lord's Prayer, any sins we have committed are forgiven. **THE EUCHARIST IS THE ULTIMATE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.** It is the ancient water of cleansing turned into the new wine of reconciliation that purifies us so that we can enter into each other's homes, and lives clean, and ready to give. How is this done?

A key to grasping the significance of the miracle at Cana, in the second chapter of John's gospel, where Jesus changes the water into wine, is the water Jesus changed was not drinking water, but wash water, the water you used to ritually cleanse yourself when you entered a house. What Jesus does at Cana is change this water, used for cleansing, into wine. He replaces the old rite of cleansing with something new - the Eucharist. **THE EUCHARIST IS THEREFORE BOTH THE SACRAMENT THAT CELEBRATES UNITY AND THE SACRAMENT THAT CLEANSSES US FOR IT.** At the Eucharist our sins are forgiven because to touch Christ is to be healed, even of sin. Jesus has come to make ALL things new.

APPLICATION

Begin by **SINGING** or listening to a couple worship songs and giving thanks. After praying a blessing over the elements, **PRAY PSALM'S 139:23**, "Search me, God, know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." **WAIT IN SILENCE** and respond to anything the Lord shows you. **THANK HIM VERBALLY** and specifically for His gift of forgiveness, and those things in the past that He has redeemed you from. Partake of the bread, thanking him for His death on the cross. Holding the grape juice or wine before you, thank Him for His new wine, and how He has not only forgiven us of the past but is making all things new; not only washing away the old habits, addictions and sins, but is replacing them with something beautiful, ex: exchanging selfishness for selfless love, worry with a ruthless trust, impatience with long suffering, etc. **ACKNOWLEDGE** how He is doing this in your life specifically in this present moment. **RECEIVE** cleansing and fresh hope for the day.

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THE EUCHARIST AS THE ULTIMATE INVITATION TO MATURE DISCIPLESHIP - SERVICE AND INTERCESSION

At the first Eucharist Jesus got on His knees and washed the disciples feet to teach us that the Eucharist is not a private act of devotion meant to square our debts with God, but a call to, and a grace for service. **THE EUCHARIST IS MEANT TO SEND US OUT INTO THE WORLD** ready to give expression to Christ's hospitality, humility and self-effacement. The Eucharist is a call to move from worship to service, to take the nourishment, the embrace, the kiss, we have received from God and the community and translate it immediately and directly into loving service of others. Through our intercessions around the Communion Table we begin to wash the feet of others, especially of the poor and those with whom we struggle most relationally. The Eucharist is both an invitation that invites and a grace that empowers us to service.

APPLICATION

After blessing the elements, **THANK** the Lord specifically for those who have loved you well and served you before you began a relationship with Him. Speak blessings over their lives. Before taking the bread and wine thank the Lord for His personal service to you, in washing your feet, by cleansing you of all sin and self-centered attachments. Thank Him for the gift of service we now have to give His love and healing away to others. After partaking of the bread and wine **PRAY** for those you will come in contact with today, and for creative ideas on how you can love and serve them. After praying for these people pray for those in your area who suffer from injustices, poverty, loneliness, etc. May the primary focus of this Eucharist meal be **INTERCEDING** for those both locally and internationally who are in great need.

Prior to this focus you may want to read some recent world news reports so you can be acquainted with any current needs. (You may want to have one Eucharist meal that concentrates specifically on the needs of the neighborhood and city you live in, and the next week international needs.)

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THE EUCHARIST AS AN INVITATION TO JUSTICE

In the New Testament, one line out of ten is a direct challenge to reach out to the poor. In Luke's Gospel, we find this in every sixth line. In the Epistle of James, this occurs in every fifth line. The challenge to reach out to the poor and to level the distinction between the rich and poor is an integral and non-negotiable part of being a Christian, commanded as strongly as any of the Commandments. The Eucharist commemorates Jesus' brokenness, His poverty, His body being broken and His blood being poured out. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin expresses this aptly when he suggests that the wine offered at the Eucharist symbolized precisely the brokenness of the poor.

"In a sense the true substance to be consecrated each day is the world's development during that day - the bread symbolizing appropriately what creation succeeds in producing, the wine (blood) what creation causes to be lost in exhaustion and suffering in the course of that effort."

THE EUCHARIST OFFERS UP THE TEARS AND BLOOD OF THE POOR and invites us to help alleviate the conditions that produce tears and blood. As mentioned in the Axiom Introduction handbook, Theresa of Lisieux invites us to "gather up the blood of Jesus so it will not be lost," signifying her belief that the blood of Jesus is still flowing through suffering humanity and the many injustices inflicted on the innocent. The act of justice is first done to our God as we remember what He is enduring this very hour, and gathering up his blood through remembering, praying, and compassionate action. **AT THE EUCHARIST TABLE WE IDENTIFY WITH HIS PAIN** and realize that the validity of all worship will ultimately be judged by how it affects "widows, orphans, and strangers."

APPLICATION

After praying a blessing on the bread and grape juice or wine, **GAZE** upon a picture of the suffering Christ on the cross, as many have done over the centuries. Envision that His blood is still flowing and moving down his body, onto the floor and throughout the world. As you hold the bread in hand **REMEMBER** His broken body, the injustices done to the persecuted Church, part of His bride, to the poor and the oppressed. **IDENTIFY** with His pain. **PRAY** for His broken Heart, for the persecuted church, and that the ministries around the world who care for "the least of these" may be blessed, so the body of Jesus may be comforted this day as we pray. May we gain hope in the day that His body will not be broken forever, as is the bread. Before taking the grape juice/wine, pray for His church around the world in whatever form or manner it exists. Pray that Christians around the world will be forerunners in working alongside the oppressed and comforting the heart of our God.

As some of us may clearly remember at the end of the old movie "BenHur," when the blood of Jesus flowed down the weathered veins of the wooden cross, it also dropped upon the rainy soil of earth and began to color all the streams and rivers in the world.

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THE EUCHARIST IS A CELEBRATION OF OUR HEALTH AND JOY, AND OUR PAIN AND SORROW

We sometimes forget that Jesus was born in a barn, not a church, and that the God of the Incarnation is as much about kitchen tables as ecclesial altars. **GOD IS AS MUCH DOMESTIC AS MONASTIC.** This is important to keep in mind as we try to understand the Eucharist. The Eucharist in a sense is a continuation of the incarnation, and, like Jesus' birth, is meant to bring the divine into concrete, everyday life.

Hence, among its' other attributes, the Eucharist is meant simply to be a family meal, a community celebration, a place, like our kitchen tables and living rooms, where we come together to be with each other, to share ordinary life, to celebrate special events with each other, to console and cry with each other when life is full of heartaches, and to be together simply for the sake of being together. This is no less sacred than the other dimensions of the Eucharist.

APPLICATION

Before partaking of the elements, have a time of **SHARING** and getting current with each other. Nothing in the dialogue will be too ordinary, too funny or too painful or serious . . . whatever is on anyone hearts! Avoid the tendency to try and fix anyone or a situation. **ALLOW THE PERSON TO BE HEARD.** One Communion you may want to have a time to pray for each other's needs, others times just laugh and listen and enjoy the naturalness of being together.

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