

Eucharist Is a Verb – reflections on the meaning of what we do at Mass

By Sr. Louise Gannon, RSJ

Eucharist is something we do liturgically so we can live it daily. We come together on Sunday and other days, firstly to listen to the Word of God and reflect on its meaning for life now. Then we respond to that Word by doing as Jesus commanded us to **do** in his memory. The emphasis is on the word '**DO**'.

Eucharist is a verb, an action. In fact, it is a four-part action: Take, Bless, Break, Give. We find these four verbs in the synoptic gospel accounts of the feeding of the five thousand. (Mt 14:13-21, Mk 6:30-44, Lk 9:10-17) We also find them in the accounts of the Last Supper. These actions sum up and embody Jesus' life. This is the action we are commanded to do in Jesus' memory and so our celebration of eucharist embodies this same four part action, specifically the Liturgy of the Eucharist.



At the Presentation of the Gifts, our gifts of bread and wine are **taken**. They represent the gift of Jesus' life and ours.

In the Eucharistic Prayer, these gifts are **blessed** – the bread and wine and the community – becoming the Body and Blood of Christ.

In the Fraction Rite the bread is **broken** and the cup poured out.

In Communion Rite, the Body and Blood are **given** that we might become more truly what we receive [cf. General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 72]

We are not watching the priest do this action. We are doing this action together with him. We are giving thanks. We are remembering Christ's offering. We are offering ourselves to be taken by God, blessed by God, broken open and poured out by God and given by God in love for the life of the world. We do this by joining ourselves to Christ **so that we will be changed**. [cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. 48]

This is amazing. God invites us to join our lives to his. We not only come to Eucharist to get something. We celebrate eucharist **to become** who we are most deeply called to be. We celebrate Eucharist to put on the mind and heart of Christ. We sometimes hear people say about Mass, 'I

don't get anything out of it.' That is to miss the point entirely: I am there to give myself to God in Christ.

Eucharist is infinitely more than a moment when a bell rings during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is infinitely more than a personal 'me and God' moment. It is infinitely more than adoration and devotion as those are traditionally understood.

When understood as this four-part action that begins with the Presentation of the Gifts, it becomes obvious that the gifts must be presented by those who are fully initiated. The Presentation of the Gifts and the Communion Procession are two aspects of the same action. You can't present your life to be offered with Christ if you are not going to receive back your changed self and give your AMEN to who you are becoming and the responsibility this entails.

When understood as this four-part action, we appreciate why the Church repeatedly stresses the need for everyone to receive Communion from the bread and wine presented at this Mass. We receive back the offering we have made. We receive back who we have become through, with and in Christ. This is what full, conscious and active participation is.

This understanding also helps us know why the Church considers it to be serious when a community cannot celebrate Eucharist on Sunday. When we receive communion outside of Mass there is no giving, no blessing, no breaking. The action of the Eucharist is missing. This is why the Liturgy of the Word is the focus of a *Sunday Celebration of the Word*. In this liturgy, the main event is the proclamation of the Word, not Communion.

This understanding of Eucharist deepens our appreciation of why the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* says that people must be called to faith and conversion before they can come to the liturgy (a. 9). We cannot act in Jesus' memory unless we know Jesus, love Jesus and desire to be constantly changed by Christ.

Eucharist is a choice to gather to do something: to fully, consciously and actively participate in offering ourselves with Christ to be taken, blessed, broken open and poured out in love every day. To celebrate Eucharist is a dangerous life changing activity because the truth is, God will change us in ways beyond our imagining!

To paraphrase St Augustine, the 'Amen' we say at Mass must ring true in our lives. We are to become what we receive: the Body of Christ. Eucharist is a verb and we want to be part of the action in the liturgy and in life.

