

Insights In Liturgy

By DAVID E. NOWAK

The Communion Rite: Part II The Bread and Cup

The Christian eucharistic liturgy is a feast. The Mass is our family celebration, the celebration of the people of God bound to Him by baptism. As Christians we never eat alone, but only in the company of all God's holy people. Joined to the Body of Christ, the Church, by ties of the most intimate fellowship, it is essential to our "thanksgiving" meal that there be guests at table and enough food to eat.

It has always been a requirement of every eucharist that communion be received, at least by the celebrating priest. In fact, biblical texts on the meal character of the eucharist are so much in evidence that its sacrificial character is clearly a secondary development.

From the beginning, the offering (eucharistic prayer and acclamations) and the meal (communion) formed so complete a unit that participation in one appeared unthinkable without sharing in the other. Our eucharistic feast

is a deliberate symbolic action. It is a conscious ritual of human interaction which naturally climaxes when people eat and drink together with the Risen Lord.

Historically, Christians have given symbolic value to several foodstuffs, among them cheese, olives, milk and honey, and fish. However, bread and wine has been the food with special claim on the Christian palate age.

To understand how bread and wine have proven inexhaustibly rich symbols to this day, it is helpful to examine their natural characteristics. This is especially crucial for us since they are normally obscured in contemporary worship. Many Christians substitute insubstantial and virtually tasteless wafers for bread, while others either replace wine with grape juice or deny it to the assembly altogether.

In the early Church, bread eaten at worship was the same bread eaten at

home. Its everydayness was an integral part of its symbolism in the Eucharist. The bread of life looked and tasted like everyday bread.

Early Church Fathers were able to develop theologies of the strength and nourishment received from eating this common bread made uncommon in the Eucharist because they could start with good solid food. Only because our eucharistic food was taken from our daily bread could their imaginations play upon the process whereby our work and God's bounty resulted in the loaf about to be broken and shared.

Today Christians are once again emphasizing the use of loaves of good solid bread lest the real fruitful presence of the goodness of God be hidden by unreal sterile imitations. Not only does this make clearer two of the essential actions of the meal, breaking and eating the bread, but it also restores the natural thanksgiving for food which has always been a part of the eucharistic meal.

Likewise, the communion cup in the worship of the early Church contained ample quantities of wine. Interestingly, although the mixture of wine and water was considered significant by

some early commentators, the practice of "cutting" the alcohol content of potent Middle-East vintages by adding water was simply the everyday practice of a good host who did not wish his guests to be overcome by his hospitality.

Our contemporary focus is upon restoring the cup to the communion of the faithful. We need to regain the refreshing realism of early theologians about drinking wine. Cyprian of Carthage includes the report of Noah's being drunk (Gen. 9:20) among the Old Testament texts he lists to support the presence of real wine in the eucharistic cup. Similarly, St. Ambrose translates the famous line from Psalm 23 which he believed points to the eucharist to read, "my cup inebriates", instead of "my cup overflows."

Throughout our history bread for strength and wine for gladness have been the touchstones for our understanding of the eucharist. As early as the first century the eucharistic prayer of the *Didache* summarized the Christian meaning of this food and drink, of making eucharist: "You, Lord Almighty have created all things for the sake of your name and have given food and drink for all to enjoy, that we may give thanks to you..."

Charities Board

The following men and women have been elected to the diocesan board of Catholic Charities, each to serve three years:

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MOS History

The people of Mother of Sorrows are putting together a history of their parish, which will be 150 years old in 1979. Anyone who would like to contribute to this project, with news clippings, pictures, anecdotes, is asked to call Joan Stratton at 225-7259, or the rectory, 663-5432.

BUSINESS NEWS



THOMAS J. VAZZANA

Thomas J. Vazzana has been named regional manager in New York State for H.C. Copeland and Associates, an insurance firm. Vazzana is president-elect of Kiwanis of Eastridge and active in fund raising for Bishop Kearney High School. He is a graduate of Aquinas Institute and Rochester Institute of Technology.

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