

Futuring SSND Charism



*We claim in a new way
Eucharist
as the center of our lives*

EUCHARIST: A Community's Rite

I am convinced that Christianity is an explosion waiting to go off, a revolutionary idea still to be comprehended, a banquet in time and history that has barely been nibbled at, and a source of social change the dimensions of which are not even being dreamed of. These potentialities may remain unrealized because of the way we go about Eucharist—what we bring to it, what we bring from it. For that reason I think Christianity's potentiality will move to actuality only if Eucharist is celebrated in a different way and with a different perspective than it ordinarily is today.... We do not need to devise alternative forms of worship ...we need to worship according to the alternative we have become in Christ. (Haughey, 1987, 81-82)

Introduction

I concur with John Haughey's assessment: we need to worship according to the alternative we have become in Christ. We struggle to retrieve some early power of eucharist when the church clearly saw the relationship between the bread as body and themselves as body. Statements like these, of course, can be romanticized. But our eucharistic imagination should never settle for too little in the matter of a ritual life.

As we know from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul was clear about the splendor of the Eucharist, and just as clear about the liturgical abuses in that community. It will be instructive to see what conditions made those particular problems even noticeable.

A truly and deeply eucharistic community is hard to find. In Western culture generally and in the US specifically, there is an individualism that makes it difficult to construct the community base which Eucharist presupposes. By that I mean a community that is aware of what the Paschal mystery has done, is doing, and may yet do for it and within it and for the world through it. I mean a community that brings that explicit experience into the Eucharistic celebration of thanksgiving, with ritual drama, and "full, conscious, active participation." Finally, I mean a community that is commissioned anew by its Eucharist to the reign of God in ways specific to its resources and energies. I believe that religious communities are specially positioned as places where communities-in-permanent-mission, with significant shared experience, can best explore, in the name of the entire church, what it means to be a eucharistic community.

At one level, we might explain the ups and downs of eucharistic practice as the ebb and flow between **charism** and order. As members of religious communities, we have experienced the struggle to both keep the first fire (charism) alive and maintain the structures (order) necessary to interpret it, articulate it, and hand it on. But Haughey is basically correct: rarely do people assemble on the basis of shared experience that united them before they arrived at Eucharist and will keep them united when they go

forth, aware that they come to Eucharist as themselves the body of Christ.

The theses of this chapter are twofold. The first is that the recovery of the power of Eucharist in communities of religious life is about the best thing that could happen to us, especially when we connect our deep story to the missioning that happens in every Eucharist. The second is that our religious communities are in fact small church communities, so that our retrieval of eucharistic centrality may be done on behalf of everyone's church.

Over the years there have been multiple Catholic cultural identifiers, from "Catholics don't eat meat on Friday" to "Catholics go to confession" (though not like they used to). Certainly, Mary has a central place in Catholic piety. During the God is Dead movement of the 1960s, one often heard George Santayana quoted, that "God is Dead and Mary is his Mother." Catholics would get the point with a ready grin. But of all the cultural identifiers, surely the most central is that "Catholics go to Mass."

But Mass is in trouble today. In the early 1960s, Catholic Sunday Mass attendance was between seventy-five and eighty percent. In a 1993 study, the attendance rate was twenty-six percent. Gallup has a higher figure, based upon telephone interviews. In the study to which I refer, the research methodology included counting how many people actually showed up on Sunday in comparison with membership on parish rolls (Hadaway, Marler, Chaves, 1993, 741-752). The problem only gets worse as the number of priests decreases rapidly and parishes are combined into mega-parishes. Some thirteen percent of parishes do not have resident pastors, a number that is steadily increasing.

The issue is that Eucharist belongs at the center of a community's life, and whatever best serves that centrality deserves a hearing.

The history of Catholic eucharistic practices and eucharistic interpretations is rich and varied, filled with debate and controversy as well as fundamental agreement and deep satisfaction. There are swings back and forth between merely commemorative interpretations and highly physical interpretations of the body of Christ. And there are swings between a primacy of meal/banquet interpretations with the table at the interpretive center, and a primacy of sacrificial interpretations with the altar at the interpretive center. These emphases are sometimes signaled in language such as "the Lord's Supper" and/or "The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass." Some eucharistic theologies have focused on the eucharistic elements (e.g., transubstantiation) and others upon the eucharist as a liturgical action of a community.

There are tensions built into ritual texture. A particular celebration must not be so generic that the assembled community's life is not reflected. Nor should it be so locally specific that a member of another local church would not be at home.

In the reflections that are central to this chapter, I will focus especially (though not exclusively) on two factors: the first is the importance of the celebrating community as the body of Christ; the second, the relationship of Eucharist to the mission of the community. Every Christian community is both gathered and sent. Every community is a community permanently in mission. A religious community is a celibate community-in-permanent-mission, with mission further specified by its congregational deep story.

A Difficult Time for this Discussion

The sobering decrease in the number of priests for Catholic life cannot but frame a discussion like this. There was a time when women's communities and non-clerical men's communities had their own chaplains. Some men's communities, such as the Sacred Heart Brothers and the Marianists, have a majority of non-ordained members, with priests ordained *mensa communis*, i.e., for the community's life.

This means that many religious communities do not celebrate their own Eucharist, but rather participate in parish eucharistic liturgies, with the result that is often overlooked in the broader scheme. So I will reflect upon some ideal possibilities that remain open to us, aware that we make whatever adaptations our current and local situations require us to make. Another difficulty was perhaps presaged by *Sacrosanctum concilium* itself:

Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather, she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples. Anything in their way that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy, and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit. (#37)

This remarkably open invitation seems to allow for great adaptation. But in the following paragraph (#38) a directive insists "that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is [to be] maintained." The Roman rite itself is a particular cultural style that places considerable limitations on what might happen in Kenya, or India, or Japan—or, for that matter, in the United States.

The conciliar document also stresses in a number of places the role of "competent territorial bodies of bishops" in applying these adaptations to local cultures (e.g., #22.2). As I write, a recent document, *Liturgiam authenticam*, puts considerable restraints on bishops, for example, in overseeing the translation of both Scripture and liturgical texts, to best serve particular cultures, insisting on an increasingly literal translation from Latin (not even from the original Greek in the case of the Christian Scriptures, or Hebrew and Greek in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures).

Overview of this Chapter

I will begin with three of the earliest developed reflections on Eucharist: that of Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, that of Luke's theology of Eucharist in his narrative of the **Emmaus** appearance, and that of the eucharistic institution accounts. We will then consult the historical work of liturgist Nathan Mitchell on developments of eucharistic piety beyond the celebration of Eucharist on the Lord's day. There will follow a brief survey of the rich tradition of theological reflection on the Eucharist, after which we will review Louis-Marie Chauvet's and Kenan Osborne's very important recent work on sacrament and liturgy. Finally, we will consider some implications for religious life.

There is no unbiased approach to a topic like this. By bias I mean the presuppositions that we bring to a reflection, the starting points without which reflection cannot even occur. My bias is the reinvention of charism in active, apostolic religious communities, undertaken for the good of the church.

Three New Testament Traditions

A Pauline Tradition

What kind of relationship among those celebrating Eucharist, and between them and Christ, must be presupposed in order to understand what empowers and what debilitates the ritual celebration? And what might the implications for religious communities be? For answers, let us examine the eucharistic practices at Corinth and Emmaus.

Whether there actually was a Last Supper at which Jesus spoke the "words of institution" in the way they are reported has been called into question in some recent biblical scholarship, nevertheless, there is some agreement that the Last Supper is part of a pattern of table fellowship that defined the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.

The four accounts of the meal are not identical in detail, but agree in the ritual elements: Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples to eat. The earliest written account of the meal is in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. I am inclined to agree with Koenig that Paul's reporting of the meal event lends credence to its actual occurrence as a special instance of table fellowship (Koenig, 2000, 10-14). We cannot date exactly either Paul's persecution of Christians or his conversion experience. But his interaction with the followers of Jesus suggests that his engagement in the Christ event occurred perhaps less than ten years after the death of Jesus. Soon after his conversion, he spent time with Peter and James, and surely his understanding of Eucharist is nourished by what he learned from them, live participants in the Great Meal event.

What we later came to call Eucharist was originally embedded within an actual meal, a custom then still observed in the Corinth of Paul. The breaking of the bread almost certainly took place as the actual breaking of bread which began a meal; and the designation of the cup of the covenant in the blood of Jesus came at the end, "after the meal was finished."

Recall that Paul capitalized upon a social form familiar in the Greco-Roman world, the "household." The household is a recognizable group of people: usually a middle-class houseowner, his immediate family, but also servants, clients, and friends. The household thus included members from different social classes, a distinction not lost on those included, their close interconnections notwithstanding. The members are sufficiently bonded that we hear a number of times that a leader of a household and all the members of that household were baptized. There are people who know each other and who experience their connectedness as a household. Households that are baptized are the early house churches.

The meal/Eucharist combination is clearly reflected in Paul's interaction with the Corinthian community and his chagrin at their meal behaviors:

Now that I am on the subject of instruction, I cannot congratulate you on the meetings you hold.... I hear that when you meet, there are separate factions among you, and to some extent, I believe it.... So when you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat; for when the eating begins, each one of you has your own supper first. So then there is one going hungry while another is getting drunk. Surely you have homes for doing your eating and drinking in.... All of you should examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink from the cup, because those who eat and drink without recognizing the body are eating and drinking their own condemnation.... Now each of you is Christ's body, each of you with a part to play in the whole. (I Cor 11:17, 20-22a, 28-29; 12:27)

At their gathering, they are not behaving towards each other the way the body of Christ should comport itself. Socio-economic factors are subverting appropriate eucharistic behavior. When Paul chides them for not recognizing the body, it is not that they do not recognize the changed reality of the bread as body, but that they do not recognize themselves as body or the essential relationship between their own reality and the reality of the bread.

Their sin was not a lack of faith in Jesus. It was erroneous judgment. They were in error about who they were because they were in error about who he is now. They conveniently sacramentalized the second part of the evening (Eucharist) after having profaned the first eucharist: part (the table fellowship) by inappropriate sociability. (Haughey, 1980, 117, 118)

I agree with Haughey's assessment that our theological tradition has been overly preoccupied with attention to an individuated Christ and too little concerned with what he calls the social flesh of Christ, which so engaged Paul (Haughey, 1980, 108-109). Nathan Mitchell observes the following about the Pauline tradition:

Paul represents a tradition that stresses the community and its new covenant relationship

with the Lord. The meal seals and ratifies this covenant, and in the context of the meal the Lord is experienced as powerfully present "eating and drinking along with his people." (Mitchell, 1982, 26)

What he says of the Pauline tradition is equally true of Luke's Emmaus tradition.

A Lukan Tradition

The narrative of the disciples heading for Emmaus is a Lukan summary of the dynamics of Christian life. In is the bridge between the life of Jesus in the Gospel and the life of the community in Acts. We begin with the text (from Luke 24):

On that same day two [disciples] were walking towards the village of Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking together about all the things that had been happening. While they were walking and talking together about those things, Jesus himself joined them and walked by their side, but their eyes kept them from recognizing him. He said, "What are the events you are talking about as you walk along?" They stopped, and their faces were downcast. One of the two, the one named Cleopas, responded to him, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who is not aware of the things that have been occurring there the last few days." Jesus asked, "What things?" "All about Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "He showed himself to be a great prophet, powerful in his action and his speech before God and before all the people. But then our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to a death sentence and they had him crucified. We had hoped that he would be the one to set Israel free.

And this is not the whole story. Two days have passed since these things happened. And some women from our group have astounded us. In the early morning they went to the tomb, and they could not find the body. They returned to tell us that they had seen a vision of angels who told them that he was alive. And some of our other friends went to the tomb, and everything was just as the women had described. But they saw nothing of him." Then Jesus said, "You foolish people. You are so slow to believe all the things the prophets have said. Was it not necessary that the Messiah had to suffer before he entered his glory?" Then, beginning with Moses, he went through all of the prophets, explaining the passages that were about himself.

When they were close to the village to which they were going, he acted as if he would continue further. But they urged him to stay with them. "It is nearly evening," they said, "the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

Now when he was at table with them, he took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened. They recognized him. But he had vanished from sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us, as he spoke with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

They set out that very moment, and returned to Jerusalem...They told their story of what had happened on the road, and about how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

Two people identified only as followers of Jesus are on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, some seven miles distant. Although often pictured in Christian art as two male disciples, the likelihood is that the two people heading home together are husband and wife. In the patriarchal writing of history in Luke's time, it was commonplace regularly to give men's names, but to name women only when they had done something out of the ordinary. We learn that one person's name is Cleopas, a man's name; but the other is unnamed, and is, therefore, almost certainly a woman.

They are discussing the recent events—the news—that happened in Jerusalem. Jesus, whom they are not able to recognize, catches up with them and joins in the conversation and the walk. They tell him what happened, and share their deep disappointment. They describe Jesus as a great prophet, who they had hoped would be the one to set Israel free. They are interpreting the news, and their hopes, aspirations, and disappointments around the news. Jesus then begins to interpret Scripture, and to relate it to the news of the day.

As they near Emmaus, the two disciples invite Jesus to stay for the night, since it is late. A meal is prepared. In the language of eucharistic ritual, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them to eat. They recognize Jesus in their midst in the breaking of the bread, and at that point Jesus, who walked and talked with them, disappears from their midst. Immediately they recognize that already while walking and talking about the news and the Scriptures, their hearts were burning within them. One thinks immediately of Karl Barth's characterization of Christians who keep the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.

This new experience of Jesus is such good news that they cannot simply keep it to themselves. It missions them. As late as it is, they set out immediately on the seven-mile walk back to Jerusalem to tell others what they have experienced.

The homiletic function is the connecting of lived experience and Scripture in such a fashion as to show the way to live the Christian experience. When religious communities facilitate the finding of our way through conversation between experience and Scripture, between Word and world, our deep story is a religious resource that belongs with Word because it is an important way in which God continues to speak to us.

It was clear to those of us involved in research on small Christian communities in the US Catholic Church that the dialogue between Scripture and experience was the central empowering and rewarding experience. These groups, which average thirteen adult members, are small enough that all regularly present take an active part in the homiletic conversation. Sometimes the naming of experience is more local and personal, and sometimes it is more communal and about the wider world. The Emmaus metaphor of walking and talking along the way is apt. It does more than just lead us to "fulfill our Sunday obligation." It leads us to hunger for the Eucharist of the Lord's Day, to both need and want it. What happens to people who share a history on the way to Eucharist is critical to what happens to those same people at the Eucharist. When the effective meeting of Word and world causes our hearts to burn within us on the way to Table, we are best prepared to meet Christ in the breaking of the bread. A meeting with Christ, like a meeting with anyone, is not simply a matter of being "there."

Meeting is dialogic. It depends on what both bring to the encounter. In the case of Eucharist, this means not just what individuals bring to the encounter one by one, but what a community brings in its communal heart. The density of presence may be fierce or negligible. Great presence is the congruence of the gift offered by God and the gift received by us with responsive awareness of how our reception implicates us. A regular prayer pattern that engages Word, world, and our community's deep story is, by Lukan logic, about the best thing we can do to give Eucharist the defining power that Catholic culture knows it can have.

The "Institution" Tradition

That theology is "diachronic" means that it cuts a wide swath through the centuries. If you ask "what is church," the full richness of the response includes what church means in Matthew's gospel (the only gospel where the word *ekklesia* is found), what it means before and after Constantine, before and after the Reformation, before and after Vatican I, before and after Vatican II, and so on. It is important not to read later interpretations back into early interpretations. I am interested in

loosening up the theology of Eucharist for the sake of its richness, and am suggesting that religious communities are in a privileged position to recover, not only for their own sake but also on behalf of church, a much wider and deeper appropriation of eucharistic life.

In Greek and Latin, as in most modern romance languages, gender does not necessarily name a male or female or a thing (neuter). Adjectives, like nouns, have gender, and the gender of the adjective agrees with the gender of the noun. Pronouns work that way too, as do demonstratives like "this" and "that" and "these" and "those." In Greek the word for bread is *artos*, and it is a masculine noun. If I want the word "this" to refer specifically to the bread in Greek, the word would be *houtos*. So when Jesus takes the bread and says "This is my body," we would expect to see the Greek word *houtos*. But instead, the word is *touto*, the neuter form, which suggests a wider applicability.

Jesus takes bread and then speaks, so certainly the bread is included in the *touto*/this; but, perhaps, so is the assembled community, for in a Pauline sense the community is likewise the body of Christ. Now Jesus spoke Aramaic, so we do not have his exact words. But the Greek interpretation of the experience seems to say grammatically that the "this" in "this is my body" obviously indicates the bread but also includes something wider than the bread, and that would surely seem to be the gathered community. The becomings that happen to the eucharistic elements and to the eucharistic community are of a piece.

The Complexity of Eucharistic History

In his recent book, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*, Kenan Osborne remarks that "contemporary sacramental theology for the first time in the entire history of the Christian Catholic Church has a scholarly grasp of the history of the ritual sacraments"; and he notes that "there is a clear dialectic between the historical data and the Christian doctrine on the sacraments" (Osborne, 1999, 45, 46).

The historical scholarship of the twentieth century has brought to fruition an interest in scientific historiography that takes shape as early as the late eighteenth century with Samuel Reimarus' *The Aims of Jesus and the Disciples*, which started the quest for the historical Jesus. Any college student today who has taken a course in the sacraments understands more about the varied interpretations and concrete expressions of them than did Thomas Aquinas when he wrote his treatises on the sacraments for the *Summa Theologica*.

As we learn more about the history of the Church, sacraments, and liturgy, we recognize a very wide range of interpretations and practices. I am mindful of a remark of Cardinal Ratzinger cited by Cardinal Kasper in their recent discussion about church. In the context of ecumenism, Cardinal Ratzinger referred to some of the earlier harmonious ways in which the role of the Bishop of Rome was understood in relation to patriarchs in other parts of the church. Perhaps an agreeable working arrangement from the past could work now; we should be open to the possibility.

I want to say something similar about Eucharist. There are multiple theologies of Eucharist, many ritual forms and interpretations, many devotional practices concerning the Blessed Sacrament. If any of them that served the Church well in the past could do so again, we should consider them viable options today. Similarly, as new insights and ritual practices evolved in the past, there will surely be new insights and practices again—new possibilities that do not yet have a history, but may create a history.

Historical Instances

In the very early church, Eucharist was above all a community celebration on the Lord's Day. Justin Martyr and Hippolytus both attest to this practice. A century later, the practice begins to develop (especially in North Africa) of celebrating Eucharist to honor martyrs. Mitchell also cites Augustine's report that Eucharist was celebrated at his mother's graveside at her burial:

Lo, when her body was carried away, we went out, and we returned without tears. Not even in those prayers we poured forth to you when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered up in her behalf, with the corpse already placed beside the grave before being lowered into it, as is the custom in that place, not even during those prayers did I shed a tear. (Mitchell, 1982, 31)

Early on, the eucharistic bread is reserved for the sick, and taken to them outside of the Eucharist when they are unable to attend. There is also an early practice of taking bread from the Sunday Eucharist into the home for consumption during the week. The eucharistic food achieves some independence outside of the Eucharist, yet it is not until the Carolingian period that we begin to find any extra-liturgical cult of the Eucharist (Mitchell, 1982, 66-67) I would like to focus on two related concerns: who presides at Eucharist, and the sense of Eucharist as an action of the community. The New Testament never identifies clearly who presides at Eucharist. Vatican II's central biblical commission twice sent a *relatio* (memo) to the bishops working on the Church document to the effect that in the early Church whoever was the leader of a community then also presided over that community's Eucharist.

Since already in the New Testament and in the post-apostolic era the Eucharist is known as sacrifice, and since the leaders of a community are leaders of Eucharist, the ministerial priesthood of the New Testament shows its own proper dignity from being instituted by Christ. The function of community leader appears to be conjoined with the cultic function.

A Christian community is by nature a eucharistic community, so it makes sense that whoever leads the community also speaks to God with and in the name of the community. A prayer leader can truly pray the prayers of the community only through consistent, active participation in the life of that community. That is how the leader knows and feels and articulates the community's mind and heart. Then, when the leader prays, the community recognizes that its prayers to God are being prayed and voices its recognition through its "Amen," which signals approval.

But somehow the presider became separated from the community. Once Latin was no longer a vernacular, the presider spoke in a language that the community did not understand. It is impossible for a community to experience liturgy as its action when it does not understand the liturgical language. Latin became a clerical language, foreign to the community. Chauvet, citing Heidegger, remarks that "to name things is not just, is not first of all, to attach a label to them for communication. To name is to 'call' things to 'come and be present,' so that they can speak to us" (Chauvet, 2001, 78). That mode of presence does not occur when the naming and calling are in a tongue foreign to those who pronounce the words.

The validity of a sacrament depends on God, which is what *ex opera operata* meant; but a sacrament's fecundity depends on the believing subjects (Chauvet, 2001, 124). The use of a foreign language limits what the believing subjects can experience, and distances them from the action and the presider.

Of much interest today is the renewed practice of taking communion in the hands, which was the custom in the early church. From the early Middle Ages, only the priests with specially consecrated hands could touch the eucharistic elements. A ninth-century council of bishops in Rouen declared, "Let not the Eucharist be put into the hand of any lay man or woman, but only in the mouth"

(Chauvet, 2001, 87). When only the priest could touch the eucharistic elements with his hands, the message was clear: it is largely the priest's ritual. Priests, not the community, "said Mass," or "offered Mass."

There is some recent backtracking in Liturgiam authenticam, which directs the presider to receive the eucharistic elements before any lay eucharistic ministers even approach the altar table. The document further indicates that the communion vessels are to be purified by the priest, not the lay ministers. Lay people with better learning in Scripture and theology than the parish priests are not allowed to give the homily at Mass, although lay preaching clearly has a history in the Catholic Church.

If the liturgy is to function once again truly and palpably as an action of the people as the body of Christ, some major adjustments need to be made. Whatever has been a helpful and valid manner of ecclesial experience anywhere in our history can be recalled.

Back to the Future

Back to the Future is the name of a well-known movie with Michael J. Fox. The title might well apply to liturgical renewal; the Rite of Christian Initiation is a stellar example. Every initiation happens to a community, not just in a community and not just for the person being initiated. The community is responsible for the socialization of a catechumen into the life of Christ and the life of the Church. Every sacrament is in some critical way an act of the whole Christ in the celebrating community.

In renovations of church buildings, the issue of whether or not the eucharist-communion rail should be removed caused many a pitched battle. The space on one side of the communion rail has traditionally been interpreted as sacred, and is called the sanctuary. It is the territory of the priest and altar servers. The space where "the people" are located is considered profane, or at least far less sacred. The communion rail was a highly charged symbol because it was thought to demarcate sacred and profane space. The fact that Eucharist "happened" in the sacred space made it very difficult to perceive the liturgy as an action of the community, albeit in union with the bishop and with a recognized community elder necessarily presiding. The Greek word *pres-byteros* means, in fact, an elder.

Canon law reflects the Catechism's affirmation that liturgy is an action of the whole community (#1140): "Liturgical actions are not private actions but celebrations of the Church itself, which is the 'sacrament of unity,' namely, a holy people, assembled and ordered under the bishop" (Canon #837). What we want to recover is a deep understanding from the past (some pasts shouldn't be reclaimed) that liturgy is an action of the people of God, presupposing God's initiative for its validity and the community's responsiveness for its fecundity. This, of course, is everyone's quest. It is the quest of religious communities because they belong to the "everyone."

Liturgy as the Action of a Community

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says "You are Peter, and upon the rock I will build my church." The translation used in the New Jerusalem Bible has Jesus say, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my community." The New Jerusalem Bible's editorial note on the verse says that the Greek word *ekklesia* probably renders the Hebrew word *qahal*, which means "an assembly called together." The English word "community" conveys that sense more clearly, because it is difficult to hear the word "church" without thinking about the institution that came into existence later, but did not exist as such in Jesus' time.

The emphasis is not only on community as the liturgical subject, but on the fact that liturgy is community action.

One of the major characteristics of rituality is surely that it aims at being operative. In contrast to scientific discourse, which pertains to "-logy," that is, structured discourse (biology, sociology, musicology, theology, and so on), the liturgy pertains to "-urgy," a term that conies from the Greek *ergon*, designating precisely "action" or "work," in contradistinction to *logos*. Terms like "metallurgy" and "chemurgy" designate an activity, a work. However, liturgical action belongs to the symbolic not the technical order: it aims at establishing communication between the participants and God and as a consequence among themselves. (Chauvet, 2001, 99)

I would substitute "conversation" for "communication." The ritual promotes a conversation between the participants and God and, as a consequence, conversation among the participants themselves. Conversation and conversion are two English words made from identical Latin roots. There is truth to the observation that one cannot exit from a true conversation exactly the same as one entered the conversation. True conversation is never just talking. And transformation is the nature of the liturgical action.

Since the early medieval period, the liturgical tradition has tended to focus its attention on interpreting the transformation of the eucharistic elements. And since the high Middle Ages, the transformation of the elements has been expressed through the concept of tran-substantiation. In the eucharistic ritual, the bread and the cup of wine become something other than what they were before the ritual.

In both formal theology and in popular devotion, the efficient causality (what makes it happen) of the transformation has been identified with the consecratory words of the priest over the eucharistic elements, further isolating the eucharistic transformation of elements from the transformation of the community more fully into the body of Christ. But the deeper eucharistic tradition tells a different story which is reflected in the Catechism.

The eucharistic presider regularly prays through "we" and not merely as "I." The presider says the prayers of the community in the name of the community. In the epiclesis, "the priest begs the Father to send the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, so that the offerings may become the body and blood of Christ..." (Catechism, #1105). It is our faith that when the priest prays the community's prayer, the Holy Spirit acts. The Catechism approvingly cites St. John Damascene:

You ask how the bread becomes the Body of Christ, and the wine...the Blood of Christ. I shall tell you: the Holy Spirit comes upon them and accomplishes what surpasses every word and thought... (Catechism, 1106).

Article #1105 on the Epiclesis says that the Holy Spirit transforms the elements, and "that the faithful, by receiving them, may themselves become a living offering to God." The community is also transformed. Reflecting further on the epiclesis, we hear that God sends the Spirit to makes people's lives (like the bread and wine) into a living sacrifice "through their spiritual transformation into the image of Christ...by taking part in [the church's] mission through the witness and service of charity" (#1109). The mission of the community receives specific definition from the Liturgy of the Word so that the faithful and the ministers "can live out the meaning of what they hear, contemplate, and do in the celebration" (#1101).

The transforming work of the Holy Spirit, therefore, acts on the elements ("especially in the eucharistic species" #1088), the community, and the world through the community missioned in

Eucharist. The eucharistic liturgy is, therefore, not merely an action of the community but a transformational action of the community.

What does this mean?

As I have previously indicated, everything said so far is not specific to religious life, but applies to every Catholic and every Eucharist. I believe, however, that communities of religious are in a particularly good position to help the church return to eucharist as an action of the community in conversation with the action of God, because we are an interactive community outside of and before and after the eucharistic ritual moments. If we make Word and Eucharist utterly central and defining, our religious exercises will take on some new configurations for us, and can enrich the church's recovery of liturgy as an action of a community within the universal ecclesial community. I will speak to this under two topics: rhythm and scale.

Rhythm

I would propose for consideration, for example, that Eucharist may be served well by reserving it for the Lord's Day and other truly major feasts. I would include eucharistic observances that belong to a religious community's deep story (but in moderation so that the church cycle does not get drowned). I do not mean that every or any religious community should go this way, although that idea merits consideration.

The practice of daily Eucharist has a long, noble, and continuing history. John Foley's rationale for it is stated clearly and convincingly in *Review for Religious* (Foley, 2001, 342-364), and I recommend his presentation. The theo-logic is sound. But it is not the only sound option, as the Church's earlier practice testifies.

I offer three reasons for considering a more restricted practice. First of all, the careful preparation that liturgy deserves is truly time consuming. The selection of music alone is challenging. Thomas Day's book, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, is a sound commentary on music. Preparing the liturgy of the Word requires, often with some urgency if the texts are complex, some research among good scriptural commentaries. To find an effective mix of any good liturgy's repetitive and universal elements with the community's local life takes any celebrating community's resources.

Second, a community's adequate preparation of itself for Eucharist also takes time. Assessing a community's present experience as Word's dialogic partner requires not just a homilist's attention, but also that of the community. The reflective time of the heart and mind before Eucharist, and the processing time during and after Eucharist require focused, deliberate commitment.

God's validating presence is always there. The community's work (the -urgy of liturgy) has a profound effect upon the Eucharist's fecundity. Or, to recall an earlier motif, the issue is not presence/absence, but the density of presence (another way of describing fecundity). Presence is whatever has a hold on a community's becoming, and on an individual's becoming as a member of that community.

Third, and perhaps the most controversial point, daily Eucharist runs the risk of turning Eucharist into a devotion more than a ritual with the gathered community as the liturgical subject. Repetitive elements are essential to every effective ritual, but repetition can also trivialize. Devotion is indeed fitting for Eucharist, but above all, it is a community action.

In my Marianist history there is an interesting section on the community's religious practices in the first Constitution for the Society of Mary, approved in 1839:

Mental prayer is the common and unique source of all the virtues... If, by reason of

indisposition or pressing affairs and while traveling, a member is obliged to suppress a part of his customary exercises, he retains mental prayer in preference to all that is not of precept, such as Mass on Sunday or the Breviary for priests.

We have not followed this directive in our time.

I would consider the encounter with God's presence, by an individual or a community, in dialogue with lived experience to be a contemporary form of mental prayer. A community can make mental prayer (meditation) together as well as engage in mental prayer as individual prayer. I understand easily (and experientially) how anticipating the Eucharist of the Lord's Day is nourished by meditation, and how remembering it in the week following inserts itself into meditation.

Scale

I want to note the importance of what might be called "scale" in church life. Paul is able to recognize the failings of the Corinthian community because the scale was small enough for their behaviors towards each other to be clearly noted, so that both their successes and failures as a house church are quite visible. If Paul scolds the house church at Corinth, he also sometimes praises these early communities for their fidelity. Something very important characterizes the celebration of the Eucharist when the assembly is a group of people who share some significant memories and hope—namely, they have some experiential awareness of themselves as the body of Christ.

It is important that the gathered community is small enough for its relational behaviors to be visible and nameable. If for the most part the only gathering of a parish community is the Sunday Eucharist, the small scale that operates in Corinth cannot happen. This dimension of ecclesial life is being brought back into focus by small Christian communities throughout the world.

How large, then, is a small group, a small community? The dynamic of a small group starts with five. Five is not just one more than four, but represents a different dynamic. If two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, Jesus is there. But that is not the issue. The issue is what promotes a healthy interactional dynamic that has the feel of a group. At the other end, twelve is about the limit if regular interaction between all of the community members is an ideal. If there are more than twelve, the group can be divided into smaller segments which report in to the whole community.

I am currently in a house church community with more than twelve. We look after our community life under three headings: our inner life (*missio ad intra*), our public life (*missio ad extra*), and all of the practicalities that concern our community life (calendars, communications, and so on). Every member of the community belongs to one of these three committees. The three committees do not assume responsibility for the activities in each of these three areas, but for animating the entire house church in each of these areas.

A Christian community that is the body of Christ is also and always a social system. What affects the whole affects all the parts; and the condition of any part has effects upon the whole. Paul is clear about this, especially in chapter 12 of the First Letter to the Corinthians. This interrelatedness presupposes a pattern of interaction and mutual presence, and creates a sense of the Christian calling at odds with American individualism.

In the United States, parish assemblies are rarely that kind of a group. A parish is a geographically defined entity. Geographical closeness was once a natural form of community (and perhaps still is in a few rural areas), but this is not the case in modern urban and suburban life. The exceptions, and they are recent, are parishes that follow something akin to the models being developed by the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities.

Religious communities are often the kind of group that can enrich the texture of any eucharistic assembly, if the intention is there. We know each other. We share a life. We participate in a common history. For us, for example, the kiss of peace can be a very awkward moment when we know that alienation exists, as in the Corinthian community; or it can be a powerful positive moment for those who know they are the body.

Ecclesiologically, it is not enough to be only a small community. We are church with every other community and with the universal church. But if the small building blocks are not reasonably strong and secure, neither is the whole Church. And the small building blocks are basically communities that assemble, not individuals who come one by one without mutual relationships with others who assemble. This is when scale shows its importance. And this is why the eucharistic practices of religious communities have a great gift to offer the church today. We often have the scale and the community life. We do not, however, always have an awareness that it is our body-of-Christ reality that justifies our Eucharists. We are not there, ought not to be there, as solitary individuals without relation to the whole body.

When Christians travel or visit, we still belong even in a new place where we do not have existential relationships, for our baptism has long since joined our destinies. But in our own local churches we are called to be there as community.

The Churchhood of Religious Communities?

Paul sometimes spoke about the church at someone's house, the early House Church. He also sometimes addressed the church at Corinth, where there were multiple house churches. Churchhood applied to both the small community and the community of communities. The small Christian communities throughout the world have a growing sense that churchhood is theirs too.

Four descriptors of church are: *koinonia*, the inner life of community and its connection to the larger ecclesial community; *diakonia*, the ministry through which a community serves to the larger world; *kerygma*, the grounding of its life in the Good News of Jesus Christ; and *leitourgia*, a ritual life that church knows and practices, usually liturgy of the Word in the small Christian communities. These do not "constitute" churchhood, much less exhaust the idea. But wherever there is church, these are found. The self-perception of themselves as small churches has led the Latin American communities to add the word ecclesial to their naming: basic ecclesial communities. The language for small Christian communities in the US Catholic Church is beginning to shift similarly to "small church communities."

Though never separated from the hierarchical structure, religious communities do have something of a parallel structure. Religious communities regularly had their own established chapels. Some men's communities still have ordained members and non-ordained members. Women's and men's nonclerical communities often had their own chaplains. In these arrangements there is a kind of recognition of the churchhood of communities of religious. It may be helpful to us today, as we grow and define ourselves in new ways, to think of our individual communities as small churches, deeply influenced by the community's deep story, on the way to becoming charism for the Church.

Let us conclude with three reflections on liturgy. The first is from one of Christianity's early testimonies about eucharistic practice, that of Justin Martyr (mid-second century), the second from a contemporary writer, Annie Dillard, the third from Alfred North Whitehead:

At the conclusion of the prayers we greet one another with a kiss. Then bread and a cup containing wine and water are presented to the one presiding over the brothers [and sisters]. He takes them and offers praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and he makes a lengthy thanksgiving to God because he has

counted us worthy of such favors. At the end of these prayers and thanksgiving, all express their consent by saying "Amen." This Hebrew word, Amen, means "So be it." And when the one who presides has given thanks, and all the people have acclaimed their consent, those whom we call deacons summon each one present to partake of the bread and wine and water over which the thanksgiving was said, and they carry it to those who are absent. We call this food "Eucharist," literally "Thanksgiving." No one is allowed to partake of it except one who believes that our teachings are true and has been cleansed in the bath for forgiveness of sins and for regeneration, and who lives as Christ commanded. Not as common bread and drink do we receive these, but just as through the word of God, Jesus Christ, our Savior, became incarnate and took on flesh and blood for our salvation, so, we have been taught, the food over which thanks has been given by the prayer of his word, and which nourishes our flesh and blood by assimilation, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus. (First Apology)

Here is Annie Dillard's poetic and rousing exhortation never to minimize the power of worship: Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? We should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to the pews, for the sleeping god may awake some day and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return. (Dillard, 1982,41-42)

And lastly, from the concluding paragraph of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World*: The power of God is the worship [God] inspires. That religion is strong which in its ritual and its modes of thought evokes an apprehension of the commanding vision. The worship of God is not a rule of safety—it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure. (Whitehead, 1925, 268-269)

For Discussion

1. One of the toughest challenges to building the power of Eucharist is for the celebrating community to have consciously shared community experience, and to recognize how that experience gathers them to the Table. What kinds of living promote that kind of eucharistic celebration? What kinds of things get in the way?
2. A related and equally challenging issue is the connection between effective community leadership and eucharistic presiding. Identify some of the concrete issues around this issue, and ways to address them.
3. What are your preferences about the rhythm of eucharistic celebrations: daily? Sunday and feasts? And for what reasons?

Used With Permission Lee, S.M. Bernard J., *The Beating of Great Wings*. New York: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004

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