

If the Eucharist is "*the source and summit of the Christian life,*" then why are we fighting over it, especially the particulars?

We only fight over something that is really important to us, and as Christians the Eucharist is the most important event in our faith life. For that reason, we better know what we are fighting over or we may be on the wrong side and end up destroying what we really want to preserve.

The intention of Vatican II was to bring our Eucharistic celebration as close to the original celebration of the Last Supper of our Lord with his disciples as possible. The archives in the Vatican and the historical records allow us to put together a comprehensive picture of how the Eucharist changed over the centuries as contrary to what some Catholics believe that the Tridentine Mass was etched in stone. Quite the contrary!

There are **five** aspects of the Eucharist that have historical roots in the celebration of the Last Supper that are clear and easy to trace historically and some biblically. I will present them first as clear and distinctly as possible and then give each one in greater detail in the next section.

First Aspect of the Eucharist concerns language. Jesus never spoke Latin nor Greek. His mother tongue was *Aramaic*, the mother tongue of his people. We know that he could read Hebrew, since the Hebrew Scriptures were written in this language at that time, but the spoken language had been dead for generations. That is why part of the Jewish Sabbath This is similar to Church Latin which is no longer a living language. Actually, *Greek* was the main language first used in the Liturgy as well as the first language in which the Gospels were written, even in Rome until around the Fourth Century.

Second Aspect concerns the many different Rites in which the Eucharist was celebrated. The Roman Rite was just one of many Rites still active today. Those churches that are in union with Rome are called Uniate after their name. For example, the *Ukrainian Orthodox Uniate* still celebrate in their own mother tongue. To name a few, the following will be the ones mentioned in this article: Byzantine Rite, Coptic Rite, Ethiopian Rite, Armenian Rite, Syro-Malaukar Rite, Maronite Rite, Chaldean Rite, to just name a few.

Third Aspect concerns gestures, insignia and privileges used in the Eucharist. To name just a few, *full prostration* is used in ordination and some liturgies

for the Solemn Vows of religious even today. The colored cloth that priest used to wear over their left wrist is called the *mappula*, a ceremonial napkin of distinction in the courts of Constantine. The symbolic use of color came much later in the church. The right to *a throne* whose height and design were carefully prescribed was a privilege for the pope and bishops given to them by the State at the bequest of the Emperor.

The Fourth Aspect are the books used in the Liturgy. At the beginning, the celebrant improvised the prayers, but since some were better than others at improvisation, the best ones were written down in a book and were used on a regular basis. These collections of prayers and directions varied immensely over the centuries until they were systematically gathered into books and then were regularized by the Church especially during the time of Gregory the Great. With these liturgical books the liturgy became somewhat fixed around the 7th century, way before the time of Trent, but change still occurred throughout the intermediate centuries mainly by changing the Liturgical Books.

The Fifth Aspect concerns the actual liturgy itself, what I would call the layout and the specific parts that make up the Eucharist itself. This part is the most important since it clearly shows that the Eucharist was not etched in stone and was still flexible in even its different parts or Rites. For example, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Meal (Eucharist) were not yet united combined together and celebrated on the same day until later in the lifetime of Saint Paul. We read of this in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 11. In other words, the Liturgy of the Meal was celebrated on one day the Liturgy of the Word was celebrated by the Christians on Sunday morning.

Simply put, Jesus did celebrate the Last Supper (Seder Meal or Passover Meal) in Hebrew but not with his back to the disciples and in special vestments. We know this much because in John's gospel he mentioned what Jesus took off his garments and tied an apron around his waist, in order to wash his disciples' feet. There were certainly gestures that went along with the Seder Meal that is used even today by the Jews, as in the lifting of the Cup of Wine. One important distinction about the Seder Meal: it was always celebrated in the home by the head of the household since the time of Moses before the Exodus, not in the Temple or the synagogues as part of a Jewish

Service. Just watch *Fiddler On The Roof* and section on the ***Sabbath Prayer!***

The books used and the actual layout of the ***Seder Meal*** has not changed since the time Moses commanded the Passover to be celebrated. Simply because nothing was added or subtracted to their celebration. However, the part about the ***Unleavened Bread*** was added after the Jews entered the *Promised Land* and settled down to an agrarian lifestyle rather than nomadic. The Feast of the *Unleavened Bread* was actually a Canaanite Fest (at harvest time) that was incorporated into the Passover Celebration. Our Eucharistic Celebration still uses parts of the Passover Meal almost word for word.

The important thing to remember is that no one was excluded, even Judas received from the Unleavened Bread at the Passover Meal ***before*** Jesus sent him to do what Judas chose to do!

In the Next Section we will go into more detail about all five aspects of the Eucharist.

Let's go into more detail now with each aspect of the Eucharist.

The ***First Aspect of the Eucharist*** is language. Jesus did not speak Latin. It may be the language of the Church but not Jesus' language, since he spoke Aramaic, the common language of his people! The Early Church spoke mostly Greek and the Gospels were first written in Greek. Matthew's Gospel may have first been written in Aramaic. In the synagogue, *Hebrew* was used exclusively, just as Latin at one time was used exclusively in the Liturgy. Pope Damasus commissioned St. Jerome to translate the New Testament in Common or *Vulgate Latin* for the Roman Catholic Church.

One part of our Liturgy always retained the original Greek, *Kyrie Eleison*, until the Second Vatican Council when it was replaced by the vernacular or language of the people.

Many words for the parts of the Liturgy are from Greek, and those parts themselves came from Hebrew: The word for *thanks* – Eucharist, *praise* – Doxology, epiclesis, anamnesis, Epiphany, Eulogy, Mystery, etc.

The ***Second Aspect of the Eucharist*** is that there are many different rites besides the Roman Catholic Rite of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church! Unfortunately, most Roman Catholics are ignorant of these Rites and do not even realize that many are in union with Rome and have the word "Uniate" added to their name. The most popular and well known one is the ***Byzantine Rite***, whose tradition is from Antioch and founded by St. John Chrysostom, whose influence was mainly in Asia Minor and Jerusalem. There is the ***Coptic and Ethiopian Rite*** influenced by the Alexandrian Rite and founded by Saint Mark. ***Armenian Rite*** founded by the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus which follow closely the Byzantine Liturgy. The Antioch Rite was influenced the ***Syro-Malankar Rite*** and is still in India and founded by the apostle Thomas. The ***Marionite Rite*** is in western Syrian. The ***Chaldean Rite*** can be found today in India, Central Asia, China, and Iraq and founded also by the apostle Thomas.

The Roman Rite founded by Saint Peter held sway over the ***Latin Liturgy in Africa***, the ***Gallican Liturgy***, and closely related to the ***Celtic*** and ***Old Spanish*** or ***Mozarabic*** Liturgy. Eventually the Roman Rite appropriated the Gallican Rite up to Vatican II.

The ***Third Aspect of the Eucharist*** is gestures used throughout the Eucharist. For example, sitting, standing, kneeling, genuflecting, (and even prostration) is used in the Liturgies. We will also include insignia and privileges.

The Emperor Constantine transferred the privileges and ceremonial belonging to the ***imperial court*** and the ***highest ranking officials*** to the bishops and other clergy, and thus made their way into the Liturgy. In association with this rose the system of *insignia* and *special liturgical dress*. During the period between 312 and 337 AD the ruler persuaded the bishops to take over and to exercise some of his own prerogatives. The State had also logically to grant to the bishops the titles, insignia, and privileges which corresponded to the rank with which they had been supplied. They received in addition a number of insignia such as the pallium (which archbishops and the pope wear), mappula (ceremonial napkin worn on the left sleeve of the priest's alb), the campagi (kind of footwear for bishops), the camalaucum (distinctive headgear), and probably the golden ring. In the same way they held certain privileges such as the right to a throne whose height and design were carefully prescribed, the right to be accompanied by lights and incense, and the privilege of being greeted with a kiss of the hand.

The bishop of Rome himself had acquired almost the same degree of dignity as the Emperor. He could claim the right to have his portrait hung in public buildings, to be greeted on his arrival at church by a choir of singers, to be waited on at the throne, at the altar with covered hands, and to have people genuflect to him and kiss his foot.

The insignia and privileges which were once the symbol of secular power have been so transformed that they now suppress the individuality of the human person who temporarily holds the office and brings to the forefront of our attention the spiritual nature of the high office which he holds.

The ***Fourth Aspect of the Eucharist*** will concern some of the more interesting additions and changes to the actual book that were used. Eventually any changes or modifications were simply made to the books used, and we see this especially after Vatican II.

Probably the biggest move towards establishing a common liturgy throughout the Roman Catholic Church was the consolidation of Liturgical

Books! These began with the Gregorian Reform. Because the history of the Liturgical Books is complicated, I will not dwell on them here but give the date and books that were reformed in Pope Gregory's time and other major changes after.

The Gregorian Reform was between 590 and 604 AD. The first important book was called the ***Gregorian Sacramentary***, which contains the prayers to be recited by the Celebrant at the Eucharist throughout the Liturgical Year and those to be said at the administration of the Sacraments. This book still exists even today in almost its present format. The second of importance was the ***Capitulare Evangeliorum*** which showed the Deacons which section of the four gospels he had to read on each Liturgical day. This would be the precursor to the modern "Lectionary." The ***Ordines*** gave directions to the Clergy concerning the ritual procedure to be observed at each Liturgical function. This would be the precursor to the modern "Ordo." The fourth was called the ***Antiphonary*** and provided the Schola (trained choir in Gregorian Chant) with its parts in the worship of the celebration of the Eucharist. That left the congregations with only the common Hymns at the beginning of the Mass. This book would be the precursor to the modern "Hymnal."

Popes took firmly into their own hands once more the task of leadership in the realm of the Roman Liturgy which for almost three hundred years they had left to rulers and bishops on the northern side of the Alps. The pope now demanded that the Episcopal Sees of the Western Church should follow exclusively the liturgical customs of the Roman See and rigidly obey all liturgical prescriptions issuing from this source.

The demand for conformity to Roman practice would have remained largely theoretical even in places other than Milan or Spain, had the new order of Saint Francis of Assisi, whose efforts since the 1320's had been wholly concentrated on an itinerant pastoral ministry, not become without meaning to be, the apostle of a quite distinct form of the Roman Liturgy. It was only practical considerations that made the Order adopt the convenient and relatively easily carried Liturgical Books which were in use at the papal court.

The Roman Liturgy that was contained in these books had been relieved of many of the accretions that had developed in more recent years, primarily out of consideration for the Pope who quite often had to travel. Through the agency of the Franciscan itinerant preachers, these serviceable editions,

principally the **Missale** and the **Breviarium** of the Roman Curia became well known, were well received with respect, and were copied everywhere in the world at that time. Thanks to the disciples of Saint Francis, the Western Liturgy achieved a measure of unification.

The **Fifth Aspect of the Eucharist** concerns the many changes that were added or deleted to the actual Liturgy and will continue to do so. Let us start at the very beginning. The Last Supper was a *Seder Meal* usually celebrated during the Passover after sundown. This was a special meal that the Jews still today celebrate in their homes, the meal of the Exodus. However, on every Friday evening, more specifically, after sundown, the Jews also celebrate the *Sabbath Meal* in the home and led by the head of the household. I stress after *sundown* since for the Jews, this is when the "new day" begins. "It was *evening* and morning the first day." In the Western world the new day begins at *midnight*, 1200 am. In African countries the new day begins at *sunrise!* This is important since the Early Church also celebrated the *Sabbath Meal* at this time, Friday Evening. Saturday morning, or the Sabbath morning, the Jews would then go to the synagogue for prayers.

What happened next after the Jewish Christians were kicked out of the Temple and the Synagogues, they gathered for prayers in their homes **Saturday mornings**. This was soon moved to Sunday mornings, for obvious reasons, the day of the Resurrection. The *Sabbath Meal* continued for a while to be celebrated on Friday evening because it was celebrated in the homes, but this was soon moved to Saturday evening, since for Jewish Christians this was the start of the new day, Sunday! But then things got out of hand with a meal called the *Agape Meal* (or Love Feast) that was already being celebrated by the Jewish Christians on Saturday evenings. Now we have two celebrations, the *Agape Meal* and after that the Christian would then move into a larger room to accommodate the other Christians for the *Liturgy of the Meal* (the Last Supper that Jesus reminds us to "...Do this in memory of me." Only this "Last Supper" replaced the *Friday Sabbath*

Meal but ran into conflict with the *Agape meal* that really the rich Romans celebrated in their homes before the *Liturgy of the Meal*.

I hope you are not lost at this point. If you can keep in mind that the synagogue was used only for Saturday (Sabbath) for the Jews to meet for prayers. The Friday (Sabbath) Meal was always held in the home, even today by the Jews. Also keep in mind that the Friday Meal for Jews began the new day Sabbath (or Saturday for us Christians) after sundown. That is why they requested Herod to remove the body of Jesus since it was nearing the Sabbath (Friday sundown). The Agape Meal is what Paul refers to in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 11 verses 17-22. In that letter Paul berates the wealthy Corinthians to drop this Agape Meal where they were stuffing themselves and getting drunk before they went into the ***Liturgy of the Meal***, especially since the poor and hungry were waiting outside for the Liturgy of the Meal to begin!

Eventually the Agape Meal was dropped and the Liturgy of the Meal, which was celebrated on Saturday evening after sundown, was moved to Sunday morning. It was here at this moment that that we have our first Eucharist that now resembles somewhat the Eucharist that we celebrate today. That is, the Eucharist began with the ***Liturgy of the Word*** and then moves into the ***Liturgy of the Meal***. The structure of the Liturgy of the Word somewhat resembles ours today except that the added prayers and the Gospel were not yet present, simply because the first "Good News" was not written until around 65 AD by Mark!

In the *Liturgy of the Meal* many more changes were added over the centuries. Since we do not have the space in this (short?) essay, let me just mention a few. The Kiss of Peace (*Pax Christi*, Latin) was probably given after the Prayers of the Faithful then moved to after the Our Father (Pater Noster), Catechumens dismissed in the Early 2-3 century after the homily, Prayers of the Faithful dropped and not added until after Vatican II, Special Vestments added in the 6th century, Lamb of God (Agnus Dei) added during the Breaking of the Bread.

The celebration of the Eucharist went from the time of Christ, a simple meal in the home; to the time of the Basilica with all its empire-like pomp and ceremony; to the Papal Mass which was imitated everywhere with even the

simple priests courting the rites of a Pontifical Celebration; to the sad state of the Private Mass said in silence and where even the presence of the people did not count and were only spectators praying their private devotions. What matter? Most of the common people by now could not understand Latin anyway, and neither did most of the simple priests who could only imitate the sound as best they could. What little the people had, even that was taken away! Fortunately, they could still pay for a private mass to be said for themselves and for their loved ones. It would not be until the Council of Trent that this practice of Simony would be corrected. In the meantime, it would generate big income for the monasteries and the parishes through the stipends.

The celebration of the Eucharist enters the Dark Ages of liturgy, and with the Council of Trent just around the corner, the chance to reform the Eucharist will have to wait almost 400 years until the Second Vatican Council!

After Trent, while the celebrant read the mass at the altar with his back to the people; the faithful were busy with other devotional exercises. They sang hymns in the vernacular, whose content had little or even nothing at all to do with the liturgy. They read, wrapped up in themselves, a mass devotion or prayed the Rosary silently to themselves. At the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion of the faithful raised their eyes by the Server's Bell, turned their attention briefly to the sacred action that was being performed at the altar, in order that they might make certain recommended affections. Since communion was given preferably before or after the Mass or quite apart from the mass, it was not clear to the faithful during this period how it stood in relation to the Eucharistic Celebration!