

Year of the Eucharist

October 2004 to October 2005

Part 36 in a series on
The Year of the Eucharist
from
The Office of Rites and Sacraments
Department of Worship & Spiritual Life
Catholic Diocese of Memphis
in Tennessee

The Structure of the Mass The Liturgy of the Eucharist

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Breaking of the Bread

The Breaking of the Bread is also called the *Fraction Rite*. In the first few centuries of Christianity, the Celebration of the Eucharist was called the "Breaking of the Bread." Today at Mass, after the Sign of Peace, the priest takes the Eucharistic Bread in his hands and breaks it. This ritual originated with the Jewish Passover meal. Just as Jesus did when he shared this meal with his disciples before his death, the priest breaks the Bread. If necessary, he is assisted by concelebrants or deacons.

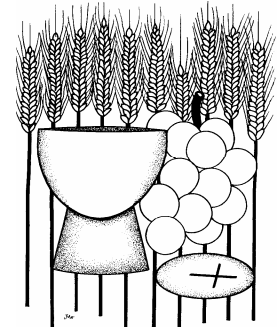
As we watch this ritual action, we are aware that, just as the bread which has become the Body of Christ is now broken to be shared with all, we are one body of Christ, broken in many ways, also to be shared with all. St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (10:17). The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* tells us that we are made one body by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ (#83).

After the Bread is broken, the priest places a piece into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in our salvation. This ritual action is called the "Commingling."

During the Breaking of the Bread and the Commingling, the *Agnus Dei*, the "Lamb of God," is sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation responding. This litany is meant to be sung; if it is not sung it is, at least, recited aloud. The music continues until the presider has completed the breaking of all of the Bread and the Commingling. If there are many concelebrants and a large assembly at a particular Liturgy, the Lamb of God litany is extended by adding invocations until the presider is ready to continue. We invoke Christ under various titles by which we have come to know him through the centuries, e.g., Jesus, Prince of Peace; Jesus, Hope for All; Jesus, Lord of Lords; etc. After each invocation, we pray, "Have mercy on us." The last invocation always ends with the words, "Grant us peace."

If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are needed, they approach the altar after the priest receives Communion.

During the Breaking of the Bread, the Commingling, and the Lamb of God, we pray for God's mercy. We pray with faith in a merciful God, believing that it is God's desire to have mercy on us and to grant us peace. We open our hearts to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, broken and poured out for us. Knowing our need, we also open our lives to become even more fully, the body of Christ on earth, willing to pour out our lives for God's people.



FROM *MUSIC IN CATHOLIC WORSHIP*

#68. "The *Agnus Dei* is a litany-song to accompany the breaking of the bread in preparation for communion. The invocation and response may be repeated as the action demands. The final response is always "Grant us peace." Unlike the "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord," and the Lord's Prayer, the Lamb of God is not necessarily a song of the people. Hence it may be sung by the choir, though the people should generally make the response."

Text: Judy Gray
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