

Pastor's Message

I want to end these reflections on the first part of the Eucharistic liturgy, the preparation of the gifts, by addressing some minor points that still need further reform and consideration.

First, often a drop of water is added to the wine at Mass and a prayer is said by the priest "in secret". That prayer states: "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity". The original reason water was put in the wine was because ancient wine was often very strong and needed to be mixed with some water to make it drinkable. That ritual of mixing water with wine was given the meaning of God's divinity (wine) mixing with humanity (water). But does a little water mixed in with good wine that doesn't need to be cut really symbolize anything anymore?

Second, the priest washing his hands after preparing the gifts was originally necessary because people brought all kinds of gifts to the church for Mass, e.g., garden vegetables, chickens, bottles of wine, flowers, candles, etc. After receiving these gifts the priest needed to wash his hands. Again, does that ancient ritual that once had meaning still need to be performed when (hopefully) the priest has washed his hands before the Mass and has not had occasion to get them dirty yet?

Third, although bread and wine are staples in western culture and symbolize well the essential elements of food and drink, in Africa the staple of the meal is often ground cassava leaves or millet and palm wine and in Asia the staple is rice and tea. As the church has reached beyond western culture should we ask ourselves whether when Jesus says "*Do this in memory of me*" does "*this*" mean take bread and wine or does it mean celebrate a meal that invites one to see that just as food is essential to life so is our relationship with Christ Jesus essential to life. This conversation, although fascinating and troubling to some, was engaged after the Second Vatican Council but has disappeared in our time. As the church moves into disparate cultures might we want to consider how best to celebrate Eucharist in those cultures even if the "elements" that we use are different?

These are considerations for the next reform and have no real bearing on the essence of our celebration today. But they are fun to consider, no?

Next week we will begin to consider the heart of the Eucharistic liturgy, the Eucharistic Prayer itself.

Fr. Chris