

Pastor's Message

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian community we get the earliest account of the celebration of the Eucharist. This letter written between 50 - 52 AD recounts: *For I have received what I in turn passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said; "This is my body that is for you." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* Scholars believe that this first acknowledgement of the earliest believers gathering to celebrate the Eucharist indicates that the celebration of "Mass" began almost immediately after the death of the Lord. All four Gospels also recount the last supper and with small variations in the words of institution give us the simple elegance of the early church celebrating this sacrificial meal at the heart of our faith.

As time unfolded, the church in various locations began to embellish and augment the simplicity of St. Paul and the Gospel writers account of the last supper. For example, the Coptic liturgy in Egypt introduces the words of institution with: "He took bread in his holy, pure, blessed, and life-giving hands and gave it to his beloved apostles." The first revision of our Eucharistic prayers (EP) after the Second Vatican Council returned to the earlier, simpler texts of the prayers. The more recent revision (unfortunately in my analysis) has become more latinized and complicated in its wording.

One final point before we move on from the words of institution. In the western Roman Catholic church we have reserved the Eucharistic prayers by and large to the voice of the priest. The priest is doing the praying for us and we are participating, at least theoretically, by our active listening. In the eastern Catholic churches there are and have been EPs in which the people actively reply often during the prayers. For example, again from the Egyptian Coptic liturgy, the prayer reads:

Priest: Having resolved to give himself up to death for the life of the world

People: *We believe that this is the truth. Amen!*

Priest: He took bread into his holy, pure, blessed and life-giving hands.

People: *We believe this is the truth. Amen!*

Priest: He lifted up his eyes to heaven to you, his Father and the Lord of the universe. He gave thanks.

People *Amen!*

Priest: He blessed it,

People: *Amen!*

Priest: He sanctified it,

People: *Amen, amen, amen! We believe, we confess, we glorify.*

Priest: He broke it and gave it to his beloved apostles saying to them: This is my body which will be broke for many for the remission of sins. Do this in memory of me.

People: *We believe that this is the truth. Amen!*

In one of our children's Eucharistic prayers written for the English speaking world after the Second Vatican Council, the children were to reply throughout the Eucharistic prayer with phrases similar to this Coptic prayer. The children loved participating. This is simply another way to make it clear that we all are consecrating the bread and wine, that together we are calling down the Holy Spirit upon these gifts and our lives, doing what Jesus asked us to do at the Last Supper.

Fr. Chris