

WHY WHEAT AND WINE “MATTER” EUCCHARISTIC THEOLOGY I

Seminaries try to prepare men for the eventualities of difficult pastoral situations, but they cannot possibly envision every circumstance. A number of years ago, a pastoral flare up in New Jersey made the national news when presumably a host made of rice was used during a first Holy Communion Mass, in order to accommodate the rare digestive disorder of the intended recipient. To make matters worse, it was the little girl's First Holy Communion. Here's the pastoral question: "What would you say to the girl who cannot receive the host in her church, while her friends are all making their first Holy Communion?" As her mother said regarding the non-wheat host used at the girl's later voided First Communion: "How does it corrupt the tradition of the Last Supper? It's just rice versus wheat." When put that way, it is obvious that we are dealing with a highly emotional issue, and understandably so. Here, the bishop did his due diligence and sought clarification from Rome. The Vatican supported his judgment that the use of a rice host was invalid. Sadly, the episode caused tremendously hurt feelings, but I would say unnecessarily so.

First and foremost, sacraments are gifts to the Christian faithful from Jesus himself. Certainly, the Church has competency to regulate certain aspects of the sacraments (e.g. regulations for baptismal sponsors, pre-nuptial counseling before Matrimony). No one would dispute this duty of the Church, even if one may disagree with specific applications. When we priests gather this week in Rochester for our bi-annual Assembly, we'll likely end up in lively discussions (sometimes *ad nauseum*) about sundry ecclesiastical "hot button" topics, including the "proper" age for Confirmation, but always of course in a friendly manner! Nevertheless, the question raised above is both timely and relevant. What exactly is meant by the word 'bread,' and when is wheat bread no longer wheat?

It is equally important to point out that for centuries the Church has maintained that she herself lacks the ability to alter certain teachings. It is of the very faith of the Church that Jesus instituted **seven** sacraments, as the Ecumenical Council of Trent infallibly defined. (Session VII, canon I, 3 March, 1547 A.D.) Nor can the Church alter the substance (i.e. the most fundamental aspects) of each sacrament. Faithful to the testimony of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it has always been acknowledged that Jesus used **unleavened bread** at the Last Supper. He blessed bread and wine, and these are considered **absolutely constitutive** of the sacrament; they belong to the very nature of the sacrament. Wheat bread was by far the most common type of bread used at the Passover Meal. In Church parlance, we call the bread and wine the "matter" of the sacrament. The words of institution (consecration) are known as the "form" of the sacrament.

What is at stake here is not so much the seeming 'insensitivity' towards a first communicant, but rather a principle. If it is maintained that the Eucharist may be confected *without* wheat bread or wine, then it must necessarily follow that those elements are no longer essential to the sacrament. It may then be logically held that other materials may be substituted. Does the Church have the authority to determine that henceforth one may substitute any fruit juice for wine, or that a sugar cookie may be consecrated? It is certainly not my intention to sound sarcastic here. Rather, the Church does not believe that it even has the authority to alter the substance (the 'essence') of the sacraments.

The Council of Trent taught that the Church has the power to make changes in the *administration* of the sacraments, but always "preserving unimpaired their substance." That point appears not to have been adequately explored in the midst of what was a painful and emotional issue for the girl who suffered from celiac disease. It must be stated that while some wines also contain glutens, not all do, and it is a dogmatic teaching of the Church that one receives the whole Christ even under the form of wine alone. The Council of Constance in 1439 taught this, echoed later by other Councils. "Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace." (CCC # 1390) It follows logically that the same could be said of receiving only the Precious Blood.

Celebrating the Eucharist with wheat bread and wine is considered part of the substance of the sacrament. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads: The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of

consecration...” (CCC #1412). With the approval by the Church of both low gluten hosts (.01% gluten content) as well as special wine called *mustum* (alcohol content of less than 1.0%), the Church has tried its very best to accommodate people with various diseases (including celiac disease and alcoholism) while at the same time maintaining the principle of remaining true to Christ’s institution of the sacraments and the Church’s inability to alter the substance of the sacraments. (To be continued next week)

- It has certainly been a busy time since Easter: **20 Confirmations**, 4 Graduations/Baccalaureate Masses, 1 Priesthood Ordination and 1 Archdiocesan Marriage Mass. These events, when executed well, require the commitment of many staff (maintenance and sacristans), volunteers (flowers, altar linens), musicians and ushers to name but a few. I want them to know of my gratitude during this incredibly busy time. Though tiring, I find these events quite life giving and enjoy welcoming visiting priests and laity alike here to the Cathedral.
- “This Old House” indeed...As we limped through Mass last Saturday afternoon due to the power outage, I was grateful for two things: first, that it did not occur a few hours earlier during a wedding (how’s that for a memory!); and secondly, that we have such talented cantors who can really “crank out” beautiful *a capella* music. Yet, I cannot imagine giving 35-minute homilies (as did Archbishop John Ireland) *sans* microphone and a sound system!
- Fr. Jaspers and I will be attending the bi-annual priest Assembly in Rochester through Thursday morning. Please note that there will be **no 7:30 a.m. Mass on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday**. However, with deep gratitude to Msgr. Steenson– we **will** have afternoon confessions and Mass all week long. See the schedule on the sidebar.
- When I read that high school phenom **Hunter Greene** (Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, CA) plays the violin, likes to paint, and has learned Korean, I wanted the **Twins** to draft him with the first overall pick in the 2017 Draft. He also organized a sock drive for the homeless. Oh yea, and he throws a 100-mile per hour fastball! Instead, they drafted shortstop **Royce Lewis** from Junipero Serra High School in San Juan Capistrano CA, so at least he’s a Catholic school grad!
- Speaking of baseball, we are treating our youth altar servers to a Twins Game this Thursday afternoon. I am so grateful for their faithful service, punctuality and precision.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector