

## WHY WHEAT AND WINE “MATTER” EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY II

Continuing my reflections from last week, it is critical to convey a sense of the importance that the Church attaches to the theology of the Eucharist. It is done out of a keen sense of reverence for the tradition coupled with the realization that at its core, the Eucharist is a gift received, much more than it is a liturgical ceremony developed over the centuries. This distinction is too often lost on those who tend to see everything through the lens of the Church as an organization that freely alters its teachings and laws. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches clearly regarding the administration of the sacraments: “For this reason no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community. Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy.” (cf. CCC para. #1125).

This teaching follows upon a much earlier one from the **Council of Trent**, wherein regarding the sacraments, the Church defined that “this power has always been in the Church, that in the administration of the sacraments, *preserving their substance*, she may determine or change whatever she may judge to be more expedient for the benefit of those who receive them or for the veneration of the sacraments, according to the variety of circumstances, times, and places.” (Council of Trent, 1547 emphasis added) It is vital for us to remember that the sacraments are both **by** the Church and **for** the Church. They are ‘by the Church’ because the Church is the instrument of Christ’s saving work in our lives today. They are ‘for the Church’ because the sacraments exist for the salvation of our souls. St. Augustine even once wrote, “the sacraments make the Church.” (*City of God*, 22, 17) Indeed they do, and for this reason she must preserve them intact.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote in his *Summa Theologica*: “. . . the Church is said to be built up with the sacraments which flowed from the side of Christ while hanging on the Cross.” (*Summa* III, Q. 64, art. 2, *ad* 3). Furthermore, while the Church has never definitively taught **why** wheat bread alone may be used for the Eucharist, the testimony of a great theologian such as Thomas Aquinas bears special weight. He wrote: “Christ is contained in this sacrament, and He compares Himself to a grain of wheat, saying (John 12:24): “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone.” Therefore bread from [grain], i.e. wheat bread, is the matter of this sacrament. . . [F]or the use of the sacraments such matter is adopted as is commonly made use of among men. Now among other breads wheat bread is more commonly used by men; since other breads seem to be employed when this fails. And consequently Christ is believed to have instituted this sacrament under this species [i.e., kind] of bread. Moreover this bread strengthens man, and so it denotes more suitably the effect of this sacrament. Consequently, the proper matter for this sacrament is wheaten bread. (*Summa Theologica*, III, Q. 74, art. 3)

The rubber meets the road when discussing the difference between making changes in the *administration* of the sacraments (which the Church believes she has the authority to do) and changing the very *substance* of the sacraments. In the case of the little girl diagnosed with celiac disease who received a host made from rice, it was most unfortunate that she was even placed in this situation— it should never have happened. Nor do low-gluten hosts solve all problems, as a small percentage people cannot partake of them. Some receive Holy Communion by means of partaking of the chalice, receiving the Precious Blood. Here, it is vital to recall that Christ’s grace is never lacking to those who seek to do his will, and in fact his grace is abundant to those who suffer on account of his name. While some theologians may argue that the use of wheat bread vs. other grains falls under the category of the administration of the sacraments versus the substance of them, the constant tradition of the Church is weighty against this proposal.

Have I forgotten about the eight year-old first communicant whom I mentioned last week? Absolutely not. I would tell her: “God loves you more than she can possibly know. Sometimes people have diseases that make it impossible for them to eat certain foods. God’s graces will never be lacking to any who for special reasons cannot receive Communion bodily. You are not being punished, but like Jesus, you are carrying a heavy Cross. God will always draw you very close to his heart.”

If some of you are unable to receive a wheat host due to celiac disease, we are happy to provide the option of receiving a low-gluten host. Generally, people visit the sacristy ahead of Mass to inform us. They often come up towards the end of the line, and the priest or deacon distributes the host out of a pyx containing the low-gluten host set aside for this purpose. For those members of the faithful with gluten intolerance, even trace amounts can be problematic. If we distribute the Precious Blood, it is from a separate small chalice used only for this purpose. A Mayo Clinic-lead analysis in 2012 estimated that nearly 1.8 million Americans have the disease, the vast majority of whom do not even know it.

- One hundred years ago tomorrow (June 26) the first troops from the American Expeditionary Forces arrived in France under the command of General John Pershing. Our foray into World War I (as it was later called) had begun.
- Let us continue to work and pray for civility in our Capital City, striving to be beacons of peace in the midst of some of the tensions following the high profile acquittal of Officer Jeronimo Yanez. It is imperative that we acknowledge the raw emotions of all parties, and the gut-wrenching decision faced by the jurors.
- After agreeing to mediate talks between the Venezuelan government and opposition leaders, the Vatican backed away when the talks stalled due to the government's refusal to fulfill the agreed-upon conditions, including the scheduling of elections. The Venezuelan Bishops condemned regime statements that call into question people's rights to protest of governmental policies. Please pray for our Archdiocesan mission in Venezuela.
- Our U.S. Catholic Bishops met last week in Indianapolis. They agreed to continue their important work on Religious Liberty and Immigration issues by voting to extend the committee and working group. The *ad hoc* Religious Liberty committee will continue for at least three more years.
- I'm not into "pub crawling," but I have been watching the construction progress at the foot of the High Bridge. A lawyer purchased a building on a hunch, painstakingly researched it, only to discover that it was built in 1857 as a pub, making it the oldest commercial building in the city. He is naming it **Waldmann**, after its original owner, barkeep Anthony Waldman. I guarantee I'll drop a few dollars to have a beer, if for no reason other than to thank him for preserving a piece of St. Paul history. Check it out at the foot of the High Bridge on Smith Ave. It's slated to open this fall.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector