



Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church
Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt

THE EUCHARIST

By Father
Daoud Lamei

Foreword

All along, I had a deep yearning to write down those reflections ... in the hope that it would be a source of consolation and depth for all who stand in front of the Sacred Altar ... worshipping ... prostrated ... penitent ... perplexed ... in tears ... joyful ... praising ... longing for the great moment of the Second Coming of our Lord ...

The Holy Eucharist ...

- The Sacrament of Sacraments ...
- The Sacrament of the Kingdom of God ..
- The Sacrament of Divine Love ...
- The Sacrament of the Church Unity ...
- The Sacrament of Sanctification of Life ...
- The Sacrament of Eternal Joy ...
- The Sacrament of the Tree of Life ...
- The Sacrament of the Crucified and the Risen Christ whose Second Coming we all long for ...
- The Sacrament of the Holy Spirit Who is at work in the Church.

All what I hope and pray for is that our dear Lord uses those weak words to grant each reader a new and special taste for the Holy Liturgy ... and for partaking of the Eucharist ...

— *foreword* —

with the goal of leading a better life ... both here and for Eternity ...

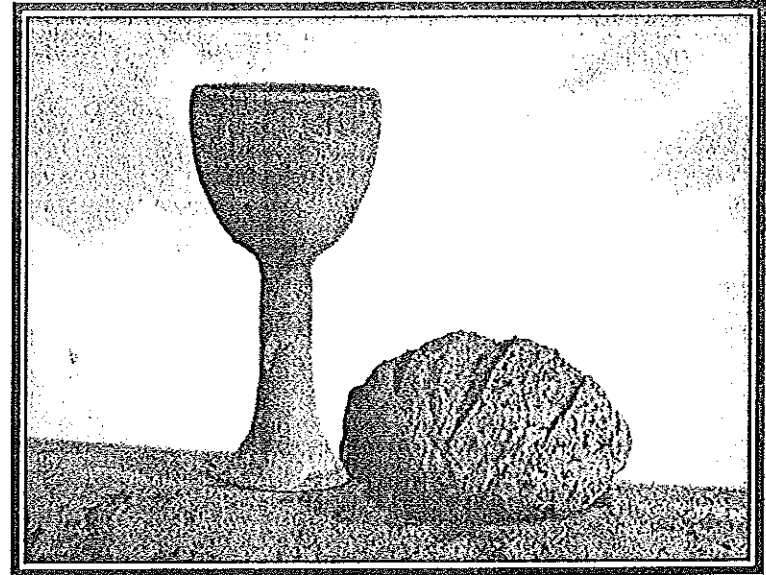
With the prayers of our Blessed Supreme Pontiff, Pope Tawadros II, who is always encouraging my weakness.

And with the prayers of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, who enlightened our intellects with his teachings (may our Lord rest his soul in Paradise).

Pray for me ...

Father Daoud Lamei

Part I



The Eucharist & Old Testament Scriptures

I - "AN ACCOUNT OF THE TREE OF LIFE"

- ❖ "And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The TREE OF LIFE was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." [Gen.2:9]
- ❖ "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [Gen.3:3]
- ❖ "Then the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the TREE OF LIFE, and eat, and live forever-- therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." [Gen.3:22-24]
- ❖ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the TREE OF LIFE, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." [Rev.2:7]
- ❖ "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the TREE OF LIFE, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve

Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." [Rev.22:1-4]

The Mystery of the Tree...

God created man, a creature vulnerable to hunger, feeding for survival. However, there were three types of "food":

- Eating for the survival of the earthly life:
"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" [Gen. 2:16]
- Eating from the "Tree of Life" in order to earn Eternal Life ...
- And Eating from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which is totally forbidden since the commandment of God was:

"for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die." [Gen. 2:17] ...

Therefore, man does need to eat ... but his first and main concern should always be: 'what is it that he should eat? ... and why should he choose to eat this particular food?! ...

Most people eat while their main concern stems from the same old philosophy:

"Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die." [Isa. 22 : 13]

They use "earthly food" with their eyes and minds set on the survival of their bodies ... on their life on earth – not worrying about any other ... for in their minds there is no other life but this one that they see and feel and know ... so they say to themselves: "let us enjoy eating and drinking for tomorrow we will perish" ...

Unfortunately, it is oftentimes the case that such people mingle their earthly food with evil, lust and sin ... Accordingly; they end up in corruption and eternal death.

Few people are concerned with the quest for Truth and for Eternal Life ... Few seek the life-giving nourishment that grants a life neither threatened by death nor defeated by corruption ... Few are interested in "the narrow gate" that leads to 'True Life, i.e. afterlife/eternal life'

"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." [Mat. 7 : 14]

Then comes the "Serpent", full of hatred toward humankind, with the only concern of driving man away from the live-giving food and making him totally taken up by deadly food.

We notice that our Lord mentioned of the "Tree of Life" ahead of the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" ...

"And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." [Gen. 2 : 9]

So much so, He makes two crucial points:

- **First:** Man was granted total freedom to choose the form of life he will lead whether on earth or in the hereafter, by choosing either to submit to our Lord's commandment, or to reject it.

- **Second:** Our Lord makes it clear that He is in favor of Man choosing to eat from the "Tree of Life" since He wishes for man to remain in His image and to earn Eternal Life.

Moreover, we notice that the Serpent ... Satan ... *"For he is a liar and the father of it."* [John 8 : 44] ... approached the woman with the words: *"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"* [Gen. 3 : 1], with the aim of causing man to suspect God's greatest Gift, namely the Gift of Freedom which is the greatest proof and crowing of God's love for man.

"And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. Then the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die." [Gen. 3 : 2 - 4]

Furthermore, we notice Eve's vague response, as if she is unable to distinguish which of the two trees is forbidden. Yet it is obvious that Eve made no attempt to know the difference between the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil"... It is true that both are in the midst of Paradise. Yet, what a world of difference there is between them!

Taking advantage of, or rather abusing this ignorance, the Serpent delved, with its lying nature, into the next stage.

"Then the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [Gen. 3:4-5]

Eve, and in turn Adam, forgot the value of the Tree of Life. The Serpent seized the opportunity to entice them with forbidden pleasure:

"You showed me the Tree of Life, and introduced me to the thorns of death. One seed You warned me against eating, saying 'Of this alone, you shall not eat', yet I ate of my own free will. I abandoned Your Law according to my mindset, I was remiss in Your Commandments. I snatched for myself the case of death." (Gregorian Mass).

Corruption thus erupted in the human soul exemplified in Adam and Eve ... Death was thus initiated into human nature and it was inherited by the entire human race ...

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." [Ro. 5 : 12] ...

Through Satan's envy, death was ushered in:

"Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world; and they that do hold of his side do find it." [Wis. 2 : 24]

And as a result ...

Life lost its primary purpose, i.e. enjoying Communion with God and His beneficence, forever.

For the first time there arose suffering, sorrow, sickness ... and most fatally, sin and corruption.

"Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field." [Gen. 3 : 18]...

Man was deprived of the Tree of Life, since he was now unworthy of eating from it ... and if he ventures to eat from it in his state of unworthiness there may be no way of reform or salvation for his soul ... For if he was to partake of the Tree of Life while he is unworthy he would continue in a permanent state of corruption and perish forever.

God's verdict was thus to prevent man from feeding on the life-giving Divine food of the Tree of Life, though He regretted what man had done to himself, abusing his own free will and yielding to Satan's deception.

The desirable food hence became prohibited; the path leading to it guarded by a turning sword of fire.

"So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life." [Gen. 3 : 24]

This fiery sword is the declaration of God's word, without which man is neither capable of accepting redemption and salvation, nor the light of the New Covenant. Without this fiery sword (God's Word) man cannot approach the Sacrament of Life.

Finally, at long last, in the fullness of time ... The Son of God came Incarnated and proclaimed:

"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." [Gal. 4 : 4]

❖ *"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* [John. 6 : 33]

- ❖ *"I am the bread of life."* [John. 6 : 48]
- ❖ *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."* [John. 6:51]
- ❖ *"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me"* [John. 6:57]

He Is Who He Is ... Indeed HE IS the Tree of Life ... Whoever partakes from IT lives by Him ... and by IT ... forever ... eternally ...

Yet the road is blocked because of sin and corruption ...

So the Word Incarnate emerges to announce "I'm the Way, the Truth and the Life", I'm the secret of the Tree of Life; and I'm the Way leading to IT; I'm the Truth and the unrevealed Mystery of Eternal Life that humanity had lost and that I have restored through Incarnation and Salvation!!

For this precise "TREE OF LIFE" the Scriptures conclude with the joyful announcement (Revelation 22: 1 – 5) ... "a pure river of water of life clear as crystal" ... to replace the very river that was once before in Eden. Now there is fresh water which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments, starting with the Sacrament of Water and Spirit, i.e. "Baptism" which creates the renewed, redeemed, pure Man who now deserves to partake of the Tree of Life, i.e. "The Eucharist".

"In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its

fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." [Rev.22 : 2]

For whoever is sick of sin has no cure other than immersion in Life-Giving Waters and partaking of the Tree of Life – a spiritual cure only attainable through being part of the Church by means of the Sacrament of Baptism, the Holy Chrism, and continuous partaking of the Eucharist through Repentance and Confession.

Only then shall we hear the Divine promise: *"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him."* [Rev. 22 : 3]. For the earth that has been cursed because of Adam, the first human... *"Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life."* [Gen. 3 : 17] ... has now been redeemed of such a curse through every human being who affiliates with the New Adam, i.e. our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❖ *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."* [1Co. 15 : 22]
- ❖ *"For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many."* [Ro. 5 : 15]

Just as the fall and disobedience occurred by feeding on the forbidden tree, Salvation and Redemption are attained by means of feeding upon the Life-giving Tree.

Just as Adam fell, craving on the tree of Death, every man is able to rise by being attracted to the Table of Eternal Life, i.e. "The Eucharist".

"They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." [Rev.22 : 4]

If man was deprived of being in the Lord's presence and of seeing Him on account of sin and corruption ... now a new emerging gate opens wide for him to "see Him and enjoy being in His Holy Presence" through the "Incarnated Only Begotten Son" ...

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" [John 14 : 9]

2 - "The Account of Melchizedek"

"And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him. Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he gave him a tithe of all. Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'-- except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."... "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." [Gen.14 : 17 -24, Gen. 15 : 1]

Lot abandoned his uncle Abraham, selecting for himself the land of Sodom and Gomorrah which was another attraction for the eyes, similar to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar." [Gen.13:10]

Lot distanced himself from the source of blessings and faith ... his household getting influenced by the people of Sodom.

"But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord." [Gen. 13 : 13]

A great war erupted, resulting in the captivity of Lot together with his entire household and belongings.

"Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people." [Gen. 14 : 13 - 16]

Abraham, the Lord's chosen man of faith, together with his 318 servants, triumphed over the kings of the earth. He rejoiced greatly at retrieving Lot, his brother (his brother's son), along with his possessions. But at this point a new spiritual battle started.

The king of Sodom - symbol of the evil one - went out to receive him. So did Melchizedek, king of righteousness and of peace ... king of Jerusalem who is likened to the Son of God,

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him" [Heb. 7 : 1]

We note that the Divine Inspiration mentioned the approach of Sodom's king before that of Melchizedek; yet we observe that the celebration of Melchizedek for Abraham comes prior to his conversation with Sodom's king. There are always of two voices: the voice of God inviting His children to rejoice and celebrate victory over evil ... and a different voice luring man into worldly treasures, in the hope that we forget the Divine Promise of Eternal Life and follow it.

Initially, Abraham triumphed over himself: he did not forget the covenant of love with Lot, taking it upon himself to save Lot despite Lot's selfishness and abandonment of Abraham in the desert, and committing the huge mistake of choosing to do wrong and to live away from God.

Good triumphed over evil; love triumphed over selfishness; faith triumphed over the force of time. Accordingly, Melchizedek, the likeness of God's son, held an extraordinary celebration for Abraham.

Melchizedek then brought out bread and wine, and lest it be thought a regular meal due to Abraham getting tired from the war, the Bible clearly refers to Melchizedek later on as: *"priest of the Most High God."* [Heb. 7 : 1] What an extraordinary Sacrament!

This incident is indeed an early indication at the dawn of history of the Sacrifice of the Eucharist that is offered as reward

to all who triumph over evil ... to those who cling to the doctrine of celestial love ... to those who are chosen to live a life sanctified by faith and good deeds.

Then we have another word, most profound, coming from this amazing priest **"and blessed him."** [Heb. 7 : 1].

Here, St. Paul meditates, Who blesses who? **"the lesser is blessed by the better."** [Heb. 7: 7] ... Abraham, the man of blessings, bows before the Christ-like figure to receive his blessings as if it were the New Testament blessing – a blessing of the salvation that has been prepared for all generations.

Our father Abraham could do nothing but grant a-tenth – for the first time in human history – of everything he owns to this amazing priest and king.

This was a secret meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek (the persona likened to the Son of God). Perhaps our father Abraham's eyes were opened and he could see across the generations our Lord and Good Savior, the Greatest Chief Priest, as He celebrates the triumph over Satan with the breaking of bread, His Life-Giving Body and Noble Blood ... life for all who partake of it and Eternal Salvation.

This amazing priest spoke, saying, **"And he blessed him and said: Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth."** [Gen. 14 : 19] For any blessing uttered by a priest stems from the Almighty Christ, the Great Chief of Priests, assigned for Himself "agents" whose words are uttered using the Sovereignty that He gave them; and who grant, in His name, blessings to all those who deserve them.

This king priest granted all blessings in the name of God, saying

"And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he gave him a tithe of all." [Gen. 14 : 20] ...

A priest is an agent – an extension to the agency of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Greatest Priest. A priest blesses God, i.e. thanks Him, and praises and assigns all Glory, Honor and Blessings to Him.

A priest blesses people in the name of God i.e. gives them all sorts of divine blessings

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." [Eph. 1 : 3]

Then comes Satan, the king of Sodom, to take his turn in trying to lure Abraham into the trap, even after having enjoyed partaking of the "bread and wine" at Melchizedek's hand. The king of Sodom offers Abraham a generous, devious proposal,

"Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." [Gen. 14 : 21]

The king of Sodom imagined that Abraham had the right to retrieve Lot by force since he had saved him from death, and that he could captivate all the people of Sodom - according to the laws of war. But Abraham, being the man of God, his conduct being in accordance to that of our Good Lord, granting everybody the freedom to choose their path, never obliged anyone to follow him to the life of the desert and of faith.

Satan then approached, as is his habit to come before and after one takes Holy Communion, to try to preoccupy man with money, in the hope of causing him to forget the more important matter, i.e. souls. As if to say,

"All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." [Mat. 4:9]

Let's be careful ... for it is the case usually after we enjoy attending the "heavenly wedding", and living the joy of partaking of the Eucharist, that spiritual warfare resumes ... and the need arises for a struggle of faith against the offers of Satan to own the world, anticipating that we would forget eternal life, which we attained through the Eucharist.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." [1 Tim. 6 : 12]

Awesome indeed is our Father Abraham, who triumphed once more after rejoicing in meeting Melchizedek, and tasting the Sacrament of the bread and wine, receiving blessings from the agent of God for we see him proclaiming:

"I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' " [Gen. 14 : 22 - 23]

Those who enrich themselves with the Eucharist, uniting with the Body and Blood of Christ, in the presence of the Heavenly King - the King of Righteousness and Peace - attaining

limitless heavenly blessings, would despise all the lusts of the world. Before him all temptations dwindle, as he fears to lose such blessing, and repeats with insistence, 'Not a thread, not a shoelace nor any of what you own, Satan'

"After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." [Gen. 15 : 1]

Eyes are opened through the Eucharist. We are assured of the fellowship with God. We hear His beloved Promise: "Fear not, I am your shield in every war, and all days to come. Your reward is abundant, unpronounceable celestial reward".

That is why we repeat during Liturgy:

"Those who offered You these sacrifices, those for whom and those by whom they were offered, bestow on them all the heavenly reward." [The Sacrifices Orison]

3 - "The Passover Account"

How glorious is this feast for Jews ... for in it the Jews crossed over from being slaves to the Egyptians to the freedom of Sinai and Canaan ... from a verdict of slow death, to the promise of a new life. Passover is the crossing that started by crossing death,

"Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." [Ex. 12:13]

Then came the crossing the sea ... culminating in finally partaking of the manna and the crossing over to Canaan.

The Pass-over is the first Salvation story in the Old Testament, narrated in the Book of Exodus, that speaks about the Lord's Divine Intervention and amazing work in salvaging His poor people.

Though the Old Testament agent "Moses", as though he had died and risen, when he was cast into the waters as an infant, arising alive, and receiving the name Moses: "son of water". He later on died by intention when he entered Sinai escaping the death sentence, returning to Egypt, as a prophet and savior for his people, by God's Grace.

"So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey..." [Ex. 3 : 8]

And yet, what effect did the Passover have on the Jews? Due to widespread lack of faith, out of the first generation that witnessed all those miracles, the only two attaining salvation were Joshua son of Nun, and Caleb son of Japhennah.

The Jewish Passover remained a mere feast to celebrate and to rejoice for 1500 years. The Jews slaughtered the Passover lamb and ate it according to the Law. They persisted in their wayward and stubborn ways. The Passover was later on more regulated when the Temple of Solomon was erected. But it was defiled over and over again till it descended to the most degraded level of "a den of thieves".

Until finally, our Lord of Glory arrived ... the true Savior came ... not just Moses the faithful servant: *"Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant."* [Heb. 3 : 5]. Rather, the Son ... the Incarnated Word, the Only One capable of attaining Salvation for Humanity. He arrived at His home to find it desolate. And He uttered His final words, *"See! Your house is left to you desolate."* [Mat. 23 : 38]

There had always been an Eternal Plan ... a Concealed Secret for a true Passover ... not a slaughtered lamb, unable to forgive the sins of man ... but a Meek Lamb, Holy, Perfect, a Mighty God, and a full Human. For Him testified the finest of prophets, and the last of them all,

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
[John 1 : 29]

Just as the Passover was preceded by various rounds of negotiation between Moses and Pharaoh – an unrelenting spiritual war – the same happened with our New Passover, *"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."* [1 Co. 5 : 7] ... Our new Table, the Eucharist, is preceded likewise by an ongoing struggle between good and evil ... between the voice of God and the voice of Satan.

There had always been the rod of Moses to resist evil; but here comes the Cross of Christ, through which, *"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."* [Co.2 : 15] ... and the blood of the Passover, *"And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it."* [Ex. 12 : 7] ... so that nobody may trample the blood of the covenant for this reason, our teacher St. Paul the Apostle says,



"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" [Heb. 10 : 29]

Then they partake of it ...

And here comes the very accurate reference to the Eucharist:

"And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 'Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 'Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire-- its head with its legs and its entrails. 'You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 'And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. 'Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance." [Ex. 12 : 7 - 14]

- The Lamb's Blood... is a symbol sufficient to have the angel of perdition pass without entering the house, despite the pressing need for escaping, the lamb should be eaten after slaughter, and he who does not eat of it, *"that person shall be cut off from Israel"* [Ex. 12 : 15] ...

So it becomes apparent that we do not only believe in Christ as a Savior and Redeemer ... through Whose Blood our salvation and redemption are attained ... but we partake of

Him – Holy Body and Noble Blood – that we may be in state of covenant with Him.

- **They eat it burned on fire...** we eat of Him remembering his pain and agony for our sakes.
- **With pastry...** Here the pastry symbolizes the New Covenant. It has no yeast of evil. *"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* [1 Co. 5 : 8] ... Thus, the sacrament of the Eucharist is closely connected to that of penitence and Confession, for it's a symbol of the pastry of loyalty and truth, and abandonment of the yeast of evil and wickedness.
- **They eat it with bitter herbs...** We partake of the Eucharist while drowning in our tears and shame, clinging to the sorrow of Holy Penitence, weeping for others who are not aware of the sacrament of Salvation and Redemption.
- **And thus you shall eat it:** with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand ... We present ourselves for the Eucharist through struggling against lusts ... through holy fasting ... controlling our senses, our thoughts and our bodies, *"and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace."* [Eph. 6 : 15] ... That is to say we cling in every Mass to the Word of God as an encyclopedia for our lives and as shoes for our feet, so that we may not be defiled by the world, adhering to the symbol of the Crucifix at all times "your rods in your hands", with which we expel all evil thoughts and every slip away from our faith.

- **Eat it in haste...** With every Liturgy, we hurry the arrival of the Bridegroom, and our meeting with Him on the clouds ... we hurry the Eternal Kingdom, crying out, "Thy Kingdom come."

Therefore, on account of this historic transition from the Jewish Passover to the Holy Easter ... from the feast of the dead to the feast of the living ... from the table of sinners to the table of saints, our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed,

"Then He said to them, with fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." [Luke 22 : 15]

And now while the Jews eat the Passover - as per the Law - annually and celebrate it along seven days, we eat it anew without the "old lamb" and "the old blood". We celebrate it throughout our lifespan, so that we live through it a Holy life, and through it we are relieved of the verdict of death.

"This You have bestowed on us sinners, that we may serve and be purified through it, when you set for us the Providence of Your Only Begotten Son, and the hidden secret of this Sacrifice, this which is not surrounded by blood of Law, nor piety of body. As for the sheep, it is spiritual, as for the knife it is intellectual, not physical, such is the sacrifice we offer You. [From the secret of reconciliatory prayer of John, thrice beatified, to the Father]

For this reason, St. Paul the apostle demonstrated that we Christians still have an altar, but not as that old altar for the animal sacrifices ... rather it is an altar for the Eucharist.

"We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose

blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." [Heb. 13 : 10 - 13]

We are now outside the Jewish temple and outside the tabernacle. We bear His shame, as those who put on the Crucifix in pride ... for we are aware of the true secret to Salvation ... the secret of the real Passover ... the secret of the Eucharist.

4 - "The Manna Account"

At the outset of the people's journey through Sinai, there was insufficient food for several days.

- ❖ *"And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."* [Ex. 16 : 1 - 5]
- ❖ *"And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, What is it? For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, this is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."* [Ex. 16 : 14 - 15]

Manna ... a puzzle ... Who was "He"?!! ... Indeed, He was a life-granting Person ... "He" was their food in the wilderness for 40 years.

The Jews tried to bargain with Christ (Glory to His Name) because of "manna", imagining He would give them heavenly food again without effort ... But He confronted them with the truth:

"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead"
[John 6 : 49]

So although manna was real, yet it was also a symbol of the Eucharist. For it neither saved the Jews from perdition, nor prevented them from sinning. They would eat manna and grumble. They would eat manna and yet make the golden calf as a god to worship!

An amazing daily miracle was manna. But they grew accustomed to it, and thus despised it. *"And the people spoke against God and against Moses: Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread"* [Num 21 : 5] Manna did not cease until they entered Canaan. [Joshua 5 : 12], [Ex. 16 : 35]

We also note that a strong connection existed between "manna" and "the Glory of God".

"Then Moses spoke to Aaron, Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints.' Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud ... And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground" [Ex 16 : 9 - 10, 14]

Manna was as white as snow, in reference to the purity and sanctity that is derived from the life-giving Body of Christ.

"And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." [Ex. 16 : 31].

And it tastes as sweet as honey, for, *"His mouth is most sweet, Yes, he is altogether lovely"* [Song 5 : 16].

Moses always kept manna in an "omer", as per God's commandment, as an everlasting reminder of the miracle of manna. [Ex. 16 : 33 - 34]

The Psalms referred to manna by a novel name: "the bread of angels",

"Instead whereof thou feddest thine own people with angels' food, and didst send them from heaven bread prepared without their labour, able to content every man's delight, and agreeing to every taste." [Wis. 16 : 20]

Through all this, we are made to grasp the magnificence of the Eucharist Sacrament. For if the redeemed of the people of Israel through crossing the sea, are in need of adequate miraculous nourishment, all the more worthy are those who have been redeemed with Christ's Blood and the Waters of Baptism. Indeed, the latter are in need of some sort of "Holy Heavenly Food" to grant them eternal life.

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." [John 6 : 27]

Just as Manna was the source of daily nourishment for the Jews, the Bread of Life is now the source of our spiritual satisfaction and inner peace. We partake of It to live, and to be joyful and in order to become, thanks to IT, "a Holy Chosen People".

Just as our Lord miraculously preserved the memory of manna, such that the morsel of manna contained real manna,

"So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it." [Ex. 16 : 24],

In the same way the living Body of Christ continues to be a renewable living memory ... He Is Who He Is ... The Body born of the Virgin Mary, crucified on a Cross, and risen on the third day to ascend into the heavens ... He Is Who He Is ... The Body taken by our Good Savior, on the night of His Crucifixion, saying, *"He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* [1 Co. 11 : 24]

Here we stand in awe and praise, repeating: Who Is He?!!!
Chanting ...

He is indeed the Manna most heavenly

Eaten to grant life to humanity

Pours life into the soul

Perfection and tranquility

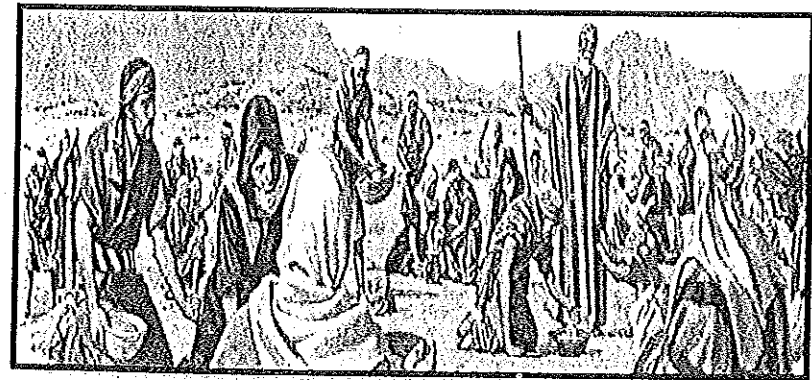
Behold the celestial food

The Body of our Savior Noble

Pure Blood is bestowed

Against the forces of Evil

(From the Fraction Chant)



5 – "The Account of The Bread of Faces"

The Jews lived in the Sinai wilderness for forty years, witnessing and living consecutive miracles: crossing the sea ... water erupting from a rock ... manna and quails descending from heaven ... the war of Amalek ... Moses forming the tabernacle of meeting as described by God on the Mount, which comprised three sections:

- The "outer hallway" that was specified to receive the Jewish masses, and it contained the laver and altar of the sacrifice.
- The "Holy", where only priests were allowed, and which contained the altar of incense, the golden lamp and the table of the bread of faces.
- The "Holy of Holies", where the chief priest was the only one allowed to enter just once a year, and it contained the Ark of the Covenant.

As for the table of bread of faces, we read, *"He put the table in the tabernacle of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil; and he set the bread in order upon it before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses. He put the lampstand in the tabernacle of meeting, across from the table, on the south side of the tabernacle; and he lit the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses."* [Ex. 40 : 22 - 25] The table's law is recorded in [Lev. 24 : 1 - 9]

This "table" is one of the symbols of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We note that it is faced with the "golden lamp" on one side and the "altar of incense" on another. Accordingly, we note that to approach the Eucharist table, we need the "light of the Word" (Mass of the Converted), and we need to raise "incense" (Vespers + Matins). That is to say, enjoying the Body and Blood of the Lord needs to be preceded by the life-granting Word of God (the lamp), and fervent rising prayers (like incense).

That bread was a reference to the Bread of Life that no one can approach to eat except the sanctified ... that is why it was eaten in the Old Testament only by the Jewish priests ... but, by our Lord's Grace in the New Testament, we have indeed taken one step forward as He dwelt in all of us ... we who are the believers ... the baptized with the Chrism ... the Holy Spirit sanctified us ... rendered us holy ... dedicated for Him ... and thus we have been made worthy of approaching the "Holies" ... "The Holies are for the holy".

"And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the Lord. And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the Lord." [Lev. 24 : 5 - 7]

The numerical "twelve" always stands for the Tribes of the Old Testament, and the Disciples of the New Testament. It refers to the Church, looking at the face of its Bridegroom at all times ... as He also looks at it at all times ... In that way, the

"Table" has been called "the Bread of faces" ... "towards our eyes".

The numerical "Twelve" also refers to faith in the Trinity, evangelized throughout the world's four corners, (3 x 4 = 12)

Pure frankincense was placed as symbol to the Spirit of constant prayer, for in order to partake of this Divine Sacrament; we must have a life full of prayer ... and pure frankincense.

A famous account regarding this bread occurs in the Old Testament ... when David fled Saul for Nob, to Ahimelek, the priest, [1 Sam. 1 - 6] David and his men partook of the bread of faces, which was prohibited **except** for priests. Our Lord Jesus (Glory to His name) referred to this story when justifying His Disciples' eating the grain on a Sabbath [Mark. 2 : 23 - 28] ... Our Lord was emphasizing to the people that David, who symbolizes Christ in the New Testament, will give us holy bread on our trip of escaping from evil (Saul).

The true bread of faces is the Body of the Living Christ, Who revealed to us the secret of His Incarnation.

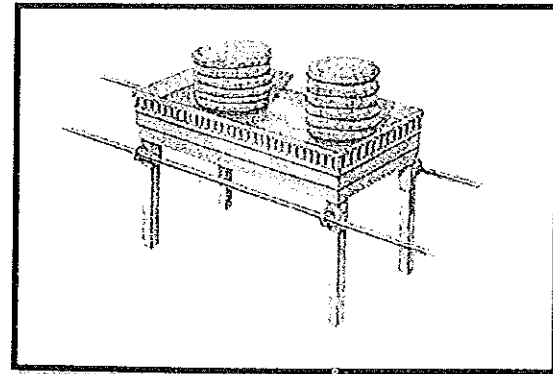
❖ *"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* [2 Co. 4 : 6]

❖ *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."* [2 Co. 3 : 18]

We recall that Moses wore a veil in the Old Testament, as we read the account of St Paul, *"But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ."* [2 Co. 3 : 14].

On the table of the Eucharist, the veil is lifted, and the truth revealed. We see the face of God ... as our eyes are opened ... and we recognize Him ... He at whom the angels cannot look or gaze.

"And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations." [Is. 25 : 7]



6 - "The Account of Offering Sacrifice"

- ❖ *"When anyone offers a grain offering to the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. 'He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. 'The rest of the grain offering shall be Aaron's and his sons'. It is most holy of the offerings to the Lord made by fire."* [Lev. 2 : 1 - 3]
- ❖ *"And what is left of the grain offering shall be Aaron's and his sons'. It is most holy of the offerings to the Lord made by fire. 'No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire. 'As for the offering of the firstfruits, you shall offer them to the Lord, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet aroma. 'And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt."* [Lev. 2 : 10 - 13]

After the Divine Inspiration explained the burnt offering in detail in Leviticus Chapter 1, as a direct reference to the offering of Christ on the Crucifix, with all its pain and agony, He moves on to explain the "offered sacrifice" as an extension of the work of the Cross.

From this we understand that everything granted to us by our Lord Christ on the Cross we enjoy at the Table of the

Eucharist: forgiveness, redemption, liberty ... a full declaration of love ... and we observe that "the offering" refers to the Eucharist in many ways, including the following:

FIRST... FLOUR AND WHEAT

Flour often refers to the nature of the human body, that we all share, *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil"* [Heb. 2 : 14], but this flour is kneaded with oil, as a reference to the union between the Divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (oil) with our human nature (flour) ... for our Good Holy Lord is a complete God and a complete human in One Person. Thus Only HE can attain our Salvation and our Redemption.

SECOND... FRANKINCENSE

Sweet-smelling frankincense is a sign of the blending of this offering with prayers, praise, and incense, offered only by the priest, in accordance with the Law ... ignited by an aroma of Joy to the Lord. For the church's assembly around its Savior ... around the altar ... the prayers raised ... the petitions ... the pleas... and the longings are always an aroma of joy to the Lord.

The Secret of Raising Incense in Vespers for the priest - from the liturgy

"Oh, Christ, our Great Lord, Fearsome, True, the Only Son, and the Word of God the Father, ointments poured out is Your

Hallowed Name, and in every place offering incense for Your Holy Name, a pure raising."

"We ask You, Lord, accept our petitions; and may our prayer be straight before You like incense, the raising of our arms is an evening offering, for You are the True evening offering, raising Yourself for our transgressions, on the Noble Cross, as per Your Father's will, You are thus blessed with Him and with the Holy Spirit, the life-giving, equivalent to You now and at all times, to the end of time. Amen."

"Accept this incense from our hands, we the sinners, the aroma of incense, as a pardon for our sins, with the rest of Your people, for Blessed and full of Glory is your Holy Name, O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and at all times, to the end of time. Amen."

A constant warning remains present, *"No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire."* [Lev 2 : 11]. This is a reference to the fact that ONLY Christ is without sin (yeast) or earthly lusts (honey) ... and also a petition that the lives of all who partake of "IT" may be purified of all the yeast of evil and the honey of corrupt pleasures.

THIRD... SALT

Finally, the offering must be seasoned with salt.

❖ *"And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt. "* [Lev. 2 : 13]

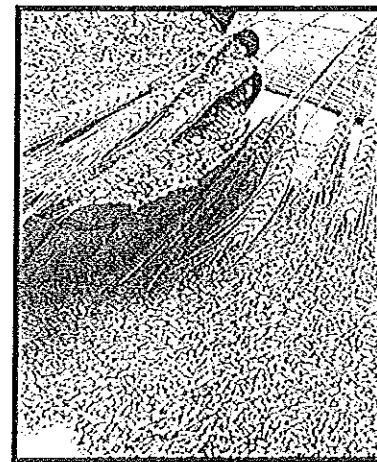
❖ *Salt here signifies the Word of God. "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."* [Col 4 : 6]

For we read the Scriptures before and during lifting the offering, so that the words of the Bible get mingled with our prayers ... never separating the Mass of the Converted (that of words and teaching) from the Mass of Believers.

The word "covenant" asserts this concept. For this new offering ... and the Blood of Christ in the Chalice ... is the sign pointing to the New Testament.

At this point it has to be mentioned that, according to the Coptic custom, we make sure the bread offered for prayer (the lamb) is leavened, as a reference to the Holy Christ bearing our sins on the "Piece of Wood",

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." [2 Cor. 5 : 21]



7 – "The Account of The Powerful Meal"

"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers! Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise and eat. Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you. So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God." [1 Kings 19 : 1 - 8]

This is the fiery Elijah, who appeared with Christ during the Transfiguration, representing all prophets, along with Moses the prophet, who appeared to represent the Law.

Elijah got terrified ... and his will weakened ... despite God's work with him ... for he had seen the fire descending from heaven in response to his prayers ... and he witnessed the return of the repentant people who cried,

"Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" [1 Kings 18 : 39]

Nevertheless, he sought death ... and fell in the pit of despair and fear ... abandoning his message as a prophet ... seeing nothing but darkness and failure:

"So he said, I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." [1 Kings 19 : 10]

Such is the case of many of us as we tend to forget the work of God with us ... succumbing to fear or despair ... even after a long life journey full of memories and experiences that confirm:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" [Romans 8 : 31]

Despair could well lead us to plead for death ... a state not far from any of us ... for our great preacher Paul tasted the same bitterness, saying,

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead." [2 Co. 1 : 8-9]

When Elijah abandoned his lad, he was shaking off anything that should remind him of his mission ... and all who

supported him ... so there was no longer anyone able to console him as he fell into the depths of despair and frustration.

Yet, an angel came to touch him. *"Suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, Arise and eat."* [1 Kings 19 : 5]. This is the angel of the church [the priest], who touches the lips of the miserable and desperate with the "Living and Life-giving Body of Christ", to tell him 'rise from your despair, fear and depression, rise and eat

"that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." [Phil. 3 : 10 - 11]

Here is a clear reference to the Sacrament of the Eucharist as a secret to Resurrection ... not just the rising of the dead to life ... but of the rising of the desperate to be full of hope ... the rising of mourners to be full of solace and comfort ... and of the rising of the fearful to earn strength and consolidation.

Yet, we might very well do what Elijah's did: eating and drinking, then returning to a state of "sleep", [1 Kings 19 : 6] Despair could defeat us a second time for the battle of thoughts never ends. The battle of fear is indeed quite bitter as it drains all human energy. Man escapes to a state "sleep", as though willingly surrendering to a state of death.

"And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." [1 Ki. 19 : 7]

Here is yet another reference to the necessity of partaking of this "Heavenly Angel" and this "Heavenly Bread" repeatedly all the days of our strange sojourn on this earth, and for the purpose of getting support during our battle with our human weakness ... especially that the journey is indeed too lengthy.

This distance, from earth to heaven ... from death to resurrection ... from impotence to strength ... from despair to hope ... from failure to victory, is far too lengthy for us. However, with the power of this "Amazing Meal" we are able to proceed towards Horeb, the mountain of the Lord,

"So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God." [1 Ki. 19 : 8]

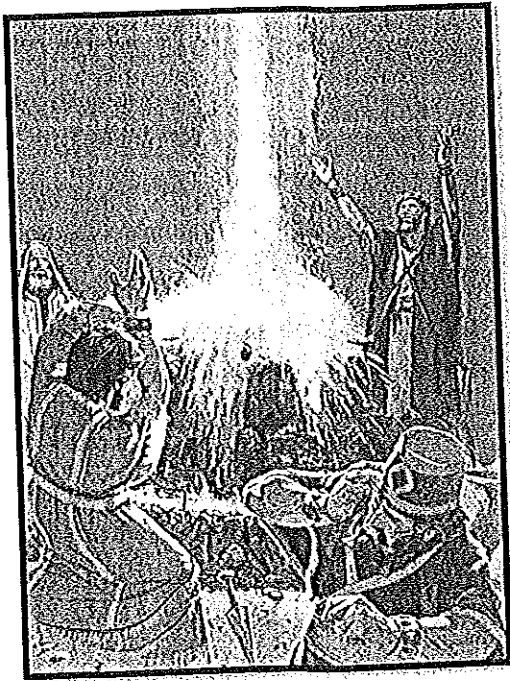
The Strength of Eucharist grants firmness and persistence in spiritual life, until we arrive at Horeb, God's mount ... to the Eternal meeting with our Lord ... to exiting this age of time ... towards hearing the "Consoling Voice".

Most likely it came to pass that this amazing "Heavenly meal" caused Elijah to transcend earthly matters ... rising towards "Heaven" ... until he ended up in a fiery vehicle, before shedding this earthly body,

"Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." [2Ki. 2 : 11]

We need the power of this meal during the forty days' fast, as much we do all through our time of estrangement on

this earth ... We need the strength of this Holy Meal to console and encourage us ... to lift us to God's mount Horeb ... then to the fiery vehicle ... then to the "Eternal Encounter".



8 - "The Account of The Shepherd"

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever." [Psalm 22 in the Book of Hours]

This psalm has become closely connected to the Sacrament of Communion ... having been occasionally chanted in praise following Liturgy ... as it preoccupies many who approach the Eucharist, with its profound meanings.

Throughout this psalm, we stand by the psalmist David as the lost hungry sheep, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* [Isa. 53 : 6] Such is true of all those stepping forward to partake of the Sacraments, *"I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You."* [Ps. 73 : 22] ... We confess our poverty, inability, ignorance, weakness and sin, awaiting to receive everything from our Holy Shepherd.

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures." He consoles us via the words of the Liturgy, nourishing us with the graceful words of the Bible. We rejoice in the freedom that is ours ... that of the Glory of God's children, as proclaimed in the Bible.

"To the waters of comfort, he leads me." During Mass, we are filled with the Holy Spirit which is the Water of Comfort. Thus we find satisfaction, peace and joy most glorious and unutterable.

"He restores my soul." We retrieve our souls, which are lost and wayward, lest they fall victims to Satan, to fear, to despair, to lust or to greed. The Shepherd restores it to us, and to His bosom ... He restores our souls to His own Hand from which nobody can snatch anyone away.

"He guides me to the paths of righteousness." The Shepherd walks the earth, with the sheep closely following. His presence precedes us through the Words of the Holy Bible ... through the praying priest ... through the mist of incense ... through praise and prayers. He guides us from Glory to Glory in the paths of righteousness.

"For His Name's sake." ... This is the song of lost sheep. **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** [Acts 4 : 12] **"Your Holy Name is on our lips, revive our souls with Your Holy Spirit, such that we Your servants and all Your people are invincible to the death of sin."** (From the Great Orison of Peace).

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me." During Holy Mass, we leave the valley of the shadow of death – that is the life outside the walls of the church – the world that was placed in evil, judged, sentenced to perdition. Here, before the table of the

Eucharist, we fear no evil, for He, the Prince of Life is with us, and inside us, forever.

"Your rod and Your staff comfort me." During Holy Mass, before approaching the Holy table, the Lord's words come as a rod and staff ... words of discipline and rebuke ... but also words of comfort and encouragement ... Both the rod and the staff are signs of the love of the Good Shepherd ... We weep with the Bible's words ... and we also rejoice at the Bible's words ... Those words are the promises and commandments of our Good Shepherd – the heavenly Bridegroom – Who is capable of attaining our Salvation.

"You have set a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." What table could possibly be laid for the sheep?!! Have those sheep been elevated to the status of the Shepherd?!! Have they become His friends and chosen ones?!! Do they eat of Him or with Him?!! What was the cost that He paid for this "table"?!! Why is it written "in the presence of His enemies"?!! Indeed, they are really many!!! The Eucharist is both the solution and the remedy for all kinds of sins and warfare ... it is a solution and remedy for all pride, condemnation, anger, greed, lust, self deprecation, despair and fear.

"You anointed my head with oil." Following Communion, one is filled with the Holy Spirit (oil) and one's mind is filled with pure thoughts, for his calling as "the anointed of God ... and anointed by God", is asserted ... His Holy name "Jesus Christ" is called upon us, so we became "Christians."

"Your cup satisfied me powerfully." When I drink of the Eucharist Chalice, my cup is filled with love and gratitude ... overflowing with bliss and peace ... satisfying not only my sick heart, but also the hearts of those surrounding me.

"Your mercy is with me all the days of my life." With the Eucharist, the promise of eternal life is consolidated through God's mercy which overwhelms me and follows me through a life full of goodness and peace.

"My home is in God's house for the remainder of my days." When we leave church after Mass, we wish we could have never left ... we wish to remain with Him forever ... to stay there before Him forever. This is the promise for all who partake of Him.

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name." [Rev. 3 : 12]



9- "The Account of The king & His Chambers"

❖ *"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth -- For your love is better than wine. Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, Your name is ointment poured forth; Therefore the virgins love you. Draw me away! The Daughters of Jerusalem We will run after you. The Shulamite The king has brought me into his chambers. The Daughters of Jerusalem We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. The Shulamite Rightly do they love you."* [Song 1 : 2 - 4]

❖ *"Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, So is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, And his fruit was sweet to my taste. The Shulamite to the Daughters of Jerusalem. He brought me to the banqueting house, And his banner over me was love."* [Song 2 : 3, 4]

The Book of the Song of Songs is a song of those who love God ... It is the love of the heavenly Bridegroom to the human soul and the submission of this soul to its Owner and Good Shepherd.

No one can enjoy the Eucharist, except those soaked in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ ... a beloved of our Lord would imitate St. John the beloved, who realized the value of leaning on the Savior's Shoulder, and would repeat the Holy Words:

"His left hand is under my head, And his right hand embraces me." [Song 2 : 6]

Touching the Body of Christ is equivalent to the desire of a bride:

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth -- For your love is better than wine." [Song 1 : 2]

The aroma of incense during Mass is likened to the bride's saying:

"Because of the fragrance of your good ointments, Your name is ointment poured forth" [Song 1 : 3]

A single glance by a repenting soul to the icons all around would make it sing, **"Therefore the virgins love you."** [Song 1 : 3]

As for the soul's cry: **"Draw me"**, it is indeed a summary of all petitions of High Mass: 'Draw me, O Lord to Your Bosom ... to Your commandment ... to Your Heaven ... to Your Holiness ... to Your House ... to Your service.'

Draw me behind You ... that I may run towards you ... not alone ... but with the people of my house ... with my thoughts ... my sentiments, my children ... my friends ... with all my people and my church.

Draw me ... that I may progress in that image, and unite with You eternally.

When the Bridegroom responds, sending His angel, saying 'Come forth, come forth, to this image; our spirit replies joyfully, 'The King has allowed me into His chambers ... Shall I truly partake of His Body!!! Shall I touch Him!! Shall I be united with Him!!! Shall I enter His Sacrament of Sacraments!!! Out there ... where lies the chambers and sacraments ... to reunite with all who preceded me of His heavenly beloved ones ... and those yet

on earth seek to reach Heaven ... at which time I would chant joyfully,

"We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will remember your love more than wine. The Shulamite Rightly do they love you."
[Song 1 : 2 - 4]

During the readings of Holy Mass, the spirit (bride) chants, **"I sat down in his shade with great delight."** [Song 2 : 3] **"Lord, it is good for us to be here."** [Mat. 17 : 4] At Your feet with Mary, Lazarus' sister, having made the good choice, which can never be snatched from her.

And I enter the house of wine ... Wine represents love and supreme happiness, consolation and joy **"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."** [1 Cor. 2 : 9] ... Finally we hear the prayers of angels and saints, **"Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones! The Shulamite"** [Song 5 : 1] Drink with such Divine love... Forever.

As for **"his fruit was sweet to my taste"** [Song 2 : 3], His words, first in the Mass of the Converted, and finally His Body in the Mass of the Believers, are the most wonderful and beautiful to enter my mouth, that I may praise Him, repeating His Name, and calling others to Him:

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." [Psalm 24 : 8]

10 – "The Account of The Wisdom's Call"

"Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city, Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding." [Prov. 9 : 1 - 6]

In this rich text, the Person of Wisdom (our Lord Jesus Christ) reveals His being the Secret (and Essence) of Eternal Life and that of Complete Wisdom.

In the previous chapter (Proverbs 8), Wisdom proclaims that He loves those who love Him. [Pro.8:7] ... those who seek Him diligently will find Him. [Prov. 8 : 17], that through Him, everything was [Prov. 8 : 22], that He is eternal with no beginning [Prov. 8 : 23], that He is Creator of all [Prov. 8 : 30], and that He is the bliss of the Father [Prov. 8 : 30], that His joy is in the human race [Prov. 8 : 31], and He who finds Him, finds life. [Prov. 8 : 35]

Next, Wisdom (Our Lord Jesus Christ, Glory to His Name) announces that He's the cornerstone ... Wisdom built its house *"and on this rock I will build My church."* [Mat. 16 : 18] This rock is faith in Christ, our Lord Jesus Son of the Living God. *"and that Rock was Christ."* [1 Cor. 10 : 4]

This house has seven pillars, seven ranks or levels, the seven life-granting sacraments: Priesthood, Baptism, Chrism,

Penitence and Confession, Communion, Unction of the sick, and Matrimony.

Wisdom then focuses on the Sacrament of the Eucharist ... *she slayed her offering* ... It is quite obvious here that "Wisdom" here is not intended to denote the characteristic of wisdom of human beings. Rather, its intended meaning is "the Word of God" (the Logos) ... the Wisdom of God being our Lord Christ, Who presented Himself as an offering on the Crucifix, as redemption for our sins.

"She mingled her wine." This signifies preparing the secret supper, His Flesh and Blood for His Church and people which is why He goes on to say, *"she prepared her table"*, the selfsame phrase in the Psalm, *"He prepares the table before me"* [Psalm 23 : 5], and almost the same uttered phrase *"And they prepared the Passover."* [Mat. 26 : 19]

"She prepared her servants." The servants of Wisdom are the saints and servants of the Word. They call upon the summits of the city. In every spot, there is a call to approach the Incarnate Christ, with faith, repentance and partaking of the Holy Sacraments.

"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed." [Prov. 9 : 4 - 5]

The call is for the ignorant and sinful, for He said,

❖ *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."* [Lu. 5 : 32]

❖ *"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty."* [1 Cor. 1 : 27]

"Come, eat of my food and drink the wine I have mixed." For Wisdom finds His joy and pleasure in the human race. His joy comes from His children eating His Blessed Body and drinking His Noble Blood. However, the condition is very clear *"Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding."* [Prov. 9 : 6]... None can approach the table, but the repentant -- those who gave up their ignorance ... No one can approach but those who hear the Word and understand -- those who try to walk along the path of understanding.

To this very day, Wisdom is calling,

❖ *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* [Mat. 11 : 28]

❖ *"Take, eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many."* [Mark 14 : 22 - 24]

11 - "The Account of The Fattened Banquet"

"And in this mountain The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees. And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." [Is. 25 : 6 - 9]

Isaiah prophesied ... he saw God preparing a banquet ... a wonderful banquet ... for all nations. We note that God in Jewish thought is the God of the Jews alone. But as far as the prophesies that refer to the New Testament, God is the God of all.

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." [John 1 : 11 - 12]

But what is this banquet that our Lord prepares by Himself, of which we read,

"A feast of choice pieces ... A feast of wines on the lees ... Of fat things full of marrow ... Of well-refined wines on the lees." [Is. 25 : 6]

God had set a banquet for His ancient people ... in the Passover, but they denied Him; He prepared a banquet in the wilderness with manna and quails, but they grumbled against Him.

But today, in the New Testament, He prepares a fattened banquet with the offering of His own Body and Blood – the most precious and filling humans can eat. This is a banquet of the New Testament's wine ... His reviving Blood ... and as such this wine is described in detail, "*A feast of wines on the lees ... Of fat things full of marrow ... Of well-refined wines on the lees.*" The wine on the lees is the most refined, the purest and the most expensive wine of those days.

Therefore, this chapter starts,

"O Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, For You have done wonderful things; Your counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." [Is. 25:1]

How Amazing ... absolutely amazing ... that the God of Hosts would create a banquet for humans, from an offering of Himself!! This has been His intent, since the old days, that we partake of Him to live by and with Him, to abide in Him and He in us ... as a covenant of truth, honesty and loyalty.

The ancient people will not partake of this banquet, for they shall be desolate. "*For You have made a city a ruin, A fortified city a ruin, A palace of foreigners to be a city no more; It will never be rebuilt.*" [Is. 25 : 2] It's as if to say, "*See! Your house is left to you desolate.*" [Mat. 23 : 38]

This banquet ... is exclusively for 'a new people' ... "*Therefore the strong people... The city of the terrible nations... For You have been a strength to the poor, A strength to the needy in his distress, A refuge from the storm, A shade from the heat; For the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.*" [Is. 25 : 3 - 4].

This is "a new people" ... their power not lying within or of themselves ... nor in any old Law or regulations ... their power is in their Lord and Savior. These are the people who believe in Christ, bearers of His Name, His Spirit and His New Covenant.

Then comes yet another proclamation ... That it is "*on this mountain*" [Is. 25 : 6] that He's preparing a banquet for all nations. What could such a mountain be?! ... Well, it is the church of the New Testament, founded on her Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, "*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.*" [Eph. 2 : 20] This is the mount that Daniel saw, commencing as a solid rock, changing into an immovable mount.

❖ "*You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*" [Dan. 2 : 34 - 35]

❖ "*And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume*

all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold -- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure." [Dan. 2 : 44 - 45]

"Eradicated on this mount is the face of the veil" ... how meticulous is the Divine Inspiration! In the New Testament's church, with the Eucharist Sacrament's grandeur, the veil is eradicated, meaning that truth is revealed crystal clear before all eyes.

❖ *"But blessed are your eyes for they see."* [Matt. 13 : 16]

❖ *"The covering cast over all people."* [Is. 25 : 7]

The mysterious truth, that humanity had been ignorant of all through the old times - *"And the veil that is spread over all nations."* [Is. 25 : 7] - the ignorance and the darkness, in which all humans, even Jews, were living.

"And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering." This reminds us: "Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." [2 Cor. 3 : 16] When the priest lifts the "Eprospharine", secrets are revealed before all eyes ... and along with this wondrous privilege *"He will swallow up death forever."* [Is. 25 : 8]

What magnificent news ... and how adequate is its very place and timing!!! for whoever approaches the Eucharist the power of death loses all its authority over him ... For It is the medicine of Immortality.

Death, where is your thorn before the glory of Resurrection in the life-giving Body (of our Risen Lord)!!

"I believe, I believe, I believe, and confess to my last breath, that this is the life granting Body." (from the Holy Liturgy)

"And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces." There are tears in every Mass ... tears of the repentant ... tears of the wounded ... tears of the mourners and those in tribulations ... tears of the self-conscious and desperate. Yet, with this banquet, "of fat things full of marrow" the Lord wipes away tears ... and this truth is fully completed on Doomsday. *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death."* [Rev. 21 : 4]

As if the Liturgy is the introduction to Resurrection (The Last) Day, and the Eucharist is the down payment for Eternal joy

"And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations." [Is. 25 : 7]

And since the shame of all nations is sin, God eradicates all sins from His people ... as we cast off all our sins on the altar with our tears and sighs ... for it is only He who can erase them carrying them on His Holy shoulders.

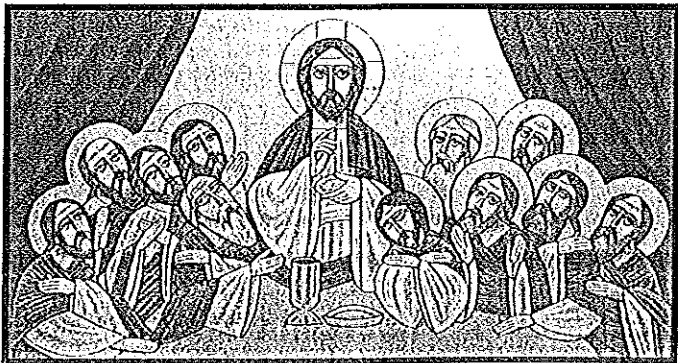
"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us."

"That day" is the New Covenant ... It is "The day" we now live ... "the day" God created ... "the day" in which we point at the altar acknowledging: "That is He ... our Lord on the altar: Flesh and Blood ... That is our Lord who we have waited for, for

so long (Old Testament) ... so He came to save us (through His Redemption). *"This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

"For on this mountain the hand of the Lord will rest." [Is. 25 : 10] ... "This is the spot of my comfort. Here will I dwell forevermore" ... And so ... the New Covenant lasts ... an Eternal covenant never ever to change...

"... not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." [Heb. 8 : 9 - 10]



12 – "Isiaha's Vision"

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory! And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us? Then I said, Here am I! Send me." [Is. 6 : 1 - 8]

In the 8th Century BC, our Lord sent Isaiah to the Jews calling them to repent and return to the Lord. None but a few responded to the message. During the year Azea the king died, corruption had increased remarkably. King Azea died of leprosy, a sign of God's anger at him. Isaiah found nothing to console him during such times except to submit himself in our Lord's presence. Solomon's temple had been erected at the time. Isaiah then witnessed a vision of the Lord Christ seated on His throne, as He appeared to John in the revelation ... Angels surrounded Him with their cries, *"Holy, holy, holy is the God of*

hosts, His Glory fills the whole earth." Then the house was filled with smoke.

During every liturgy* (High Mass), the Church elevates us to the status of Divine presence, so we may attempt to see the throne, (the chair at the altar), surrounded by angels, lights, and deacons ... We are elevated by praise and readings ... The priest shouts out to us, "*Lift your hearts, O You before whom stand cherubim and seraphim, chanting tirelessly, "Holy, Agius".*"

Isaiah could only feel immense fear, awe and unworthiness, so he cried, "*Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.*"

Towards such sentiments, the church tries to drive us during each Mass, before approaching the Eucharist – feeling ashamed of one's many transgressions, and feeling unworthy to stand before God ... grasping how defiled this life is in comparison with the grandeur and transcendence of Heavenly Glory.

Along with a growing sense of penitence, humility and confessing one's sins, comes a crucial moment

"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it." [Is. 6 : 6 - 7]

* Liturgy is a Greek word, meaning literally "popular work" or "work of the people", used to describe mainly Holy Mass or traditional prayers.

This is the amazing secret ... for as we confess our sins before God, He does not only allow us to approach Him, but also to touch Him and to unite with Him ... and God's angel (the priest) comes to take a fiery flame (or a gem), which is truly the life-giving Body of our Lord Christ ... Whose Divinity did not part from His Humanity ... just like the coal that parts not from fire (flame), to touch the confessor's lips with it.

Note that Isaiah focused on the defiled lips, "*For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" [Mat. 12 : 34] He received purity and pardon from God. "*Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.*" [Is. 6 : 7], "Given for the pardon of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it."

Isaiah must have been overwhelmed by a sense of joy and peace, following such promise and such a sanctified touch. So much so that when he heard the Lord asking, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*" [Is. 6 : 8], he responded joyously, "*Here am I! Send me.*" [Is. 6 : 8].

This is the same feeling of all who partake of the Sacrament of the Eucharist ... who recognize the mighty power of uniting with God ... and being in His presence. They are pleased to work with Him and in His service ... Each and every one of them forgets their own weakness, remembering only the force of Christ working within ... longing to have everybody enjoy what they enjoy, i.e. seeing God ... touching the flame ... and the promise of forgiveness.

13 – "Jeremiah's Vision"

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations. Then said I: Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth. But the Lord said to me: Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant." [Jer. 1 : 4 - 10]

God sent Jeremiah around 100 years after the ministry of Isaiah. The people were becoming increasingly stubborn and cruel, such that Menassah the king killed Isaiah by having him sawed.

God's calling for Jeremiah came during his early youth, that he may be a prophet to all peoples. Jeremiah was afraid and in awe, despite having been a descendent of priests. He asked to be excused of this mission, saying, *"Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth."* [Jer. 1 : 6] But our Lord Christ insisted on His calling, consolidating him with convincing arguments.

- First, that God knows him and had specified his mission before his birth, granting him the sanctity and strength needed, regardless of any weaknesses he may have.
- Second, God would guide him to whom he should go and what to say.
- Third, God would never part with him but would always be with him to rescue him.

However, despite all those comforting promises, Jeremiah must have remained unconvinced, until the hand of Christ Himself was extended to his lips, as was the case with Isaiah ... at which moment Jeremiah lost all fear, and moved on to be a new person, i.e. 'the man of God, holy and capable of serving him', *"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth"* [Jer. 1 : 9]

Through the power of the Eucharist, we bring Christ's message to the entire world, and in spite of human weakness and the evil surrounding us, we show no fear, for there is a powerful hand touching our lips and making us a new capable creation.

"See, I have this day set you over the nations." [Jer. 1 : 10]

Via the Eucharist, we become agents ... ambassadors, *"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* [2 Cor. 5 : 20 - 21]

It is not fitting that we should partake of Communion of Christ's Body and Blood then live our lives with no message to

convey ... or being preoccupied with earthly matters ... for this is not God's will in us ... He expects us to carry His message to everyone.

*"To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down,
To build and to plant."* [Jer. 1 : 10]

A weakling is transformed into a hero via the Eucharist: going out to uproot evil from his life and that of those around him ... destroying the devil's forts wherever he may go ... perishing all wicked thoughts ... and reversing disobedience and corruption ... building with Christ His heavenly Kingdom ... instilling His word in all human souls ... all with the power of the Eucharist.



14 - "Ezekiel's Vision"

- ❖ *"And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking."* [Ez. 1 : 26 - 28]
- ❖ *"And He said to me, Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you. Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me."* [Ez. 2 : 1-2]
- ❖ *"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it."* [Ez. 2 : 8 - 9]

Just as with Isaiah, then Jeremiah, the same happened with Ezekiel the prophet, during his captivity. The Lord wished to console him during his captivity in Babel, so He revealed to him His Glory, and Throne, carried by the four non-incarnated animals, [Ez. 1 : 8 - 10] He witnessed – just as those who preceded

him and those who came after him – the Divine Throne, and the Son of God in His Majesty. [Rev. 1], [Rev. 4]

Then He Who was on the throne spoke, the Logos Immortal Son of God, **"stand on your feet, and I will speak to you"** [Ez. 2 : 1] Ezekiel was incapable of getting to his feet independently, after viewing the Divine Glory **"Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet."** [Ez. 2 : 2] Resurrection is a gift of the Holy Spirit to baptized believers; it is renewed within them as they approach the Table of the Lord.

He received the message, as did Isaiah and Jeremiah, **"And He said to me: Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation... do not be afraid... or dismayed."** [Ez. 2 : 3 - 6] Yet, how?! And from where would he obtain such boldness?! He too is in need of eating this Celestial Bread, **"open your mouth and eat what I give you."** [Ez. 2 : 8]

Ask not often 'What is this bread?' nor as the Jews often did, **"How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"** [John 6 : 52] Simply open your mouth ... believe ... and eat, **"Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it."** [Ez. 2 : 9]

He is the Word of God once more ... He Who wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger ... He is Who He is ... He grants you His power ... and His word ... through the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

"He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll." [Ez. 3 : 1 - 2]

No true servant of the Lord can bear the message of Christ without partaking of the Eucharist ... for the Living Flesh of Christ and His Noble Blood carry the power of His word ... and its impact on the salvation of humanity. While we consume the Words with our hearts and minds, as we hear the Bible reading in every Mass, we should return to eat it via our mouths (through partaking of the Eucharist) that It may abide in us and we in It, and so that we may receive the ability to pronounce this Divine Revelation.

"And He said to me, Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness." [Ez. 3 : 3] God's word is delightful and comforting and the Eucharist is nourishing and solacing ... though occasionally it is mingled with the bitterness of one's sense of unworthiness, or with feeling sorry for those who have not known the grandeur of this Sacrament.

15 – "Daniel's Vision"

- ❖ *"In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."* [Dan. 10 : 1 - 3]
- ❖ *"Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands. And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you. While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling."* [Dan. 10 : 10 - 11]
- ❖ *"And suddenly, one having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me. Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong! So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."* [Dan. 10 : 16 - 19]

Yet over and again – as though the rule were unchangeable – the prophet was fearful, trembling, and weak ... representing the fallen, miserable, handicapped humanity. Then comes the vision, and he sees the truth ... the Incarnate God ... the Logos Son, in His Glory ... Merciful ... Compassionate ... Amiable ... touching with the touch of the Resurrection ... touching the lips so they might utter praise and evangelism ... raising the dead ... lifting all sorrow ... granting hope and anticipation of salvation and of eternal life.

Daniel, in sequencing, comes last out of the four great prophets. Chronologically, he came closer to the time of Christ's first advent than his predecessors Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Daniel lived through the days of bitter captivity, having been deprived of Jewish worship in the temple. Yet, he remained faithful to the Lord, chaste, honest, striving and patient.

Some vital concepts are added, in Daniel's vision, among them that he *"was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."* [Dan. 10 : 2 - 3] Here we see our church's adherence to receiving the joys of the Eucharist with fasting, asceticism, contentment, and mourning in repentance and adequate humility.

Yet I heard the sound of his words." [Dan. 10 : 9]

We must listen first prior to partaking, for the Voice of God prepares us for receiving His Divine touch, and celestial nourishment; along with listening to His Voice, adequate kneeling takes place, as is appropriate in His Holy presence. "I

was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground." [Dan. 10 : 9]

"A hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands." [Dan. 10 : 10]

How accurately Daniel describes the Lord's word as It uplifts him ... one phase after another ... from despair and total collapse onto the ground, to kneeling on his hands and knees. Then approaches the comforting word of Christ, *"And he said to me, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright."* [Dan. 10 : 11]

"One having the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth." [Dan. 10 : 16]

This is the decisive moment experienced by all the prophets ... longing to see what we see and hear what we hear. Then we hear our Savior say,

"Take, eat; this is My body... Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood." [Mat. 26 : 26 - 28]

"Then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength." [Dan. 10 : 16]

Truly, in every Liturgy, we experience a mixture of feelings of fear ... awe ... humility ... meekness ... joy and love ... longing and dread! And we need assistance and strength to continue with this Holy Sacrament.

"For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord?" [Dan. 10 : 17]

Therefore, the priests silently say, just before Mass, when preparing the altar, *"You, my Lord, know that I am not worthy, nor ready, nor deserving of this holy ministry, which is Yours. I haven't the nerve to come and open my mouth before Your Holy Glory, as You are most Merciful, forgive me the sinner, grant me Grace and mercy in this hour, send me power from on high to commence, prepare and continue Your Holy ministry, as pleases You, for the pleasure of Your will, an aroma of incense."* (Liturgy, prayer for preparing the altar).

"Then again, the one having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me." [Dan. 10 : 18]

Plenteous indeed are the Divine touches in Holy Mass: the touch of God's word ... the touch of the altar's curtain ... the touch of icons ... touching the saints' relics ... the priest's hand ... the incense ... the touch of praise ... and to surpass all: the Touch of Christ's Body. *"And he said, O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong! So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."* [Dan. 10 : 19]

Thus starts the message once more:

'Exit' ... 'Go' ...

'Preach' ... 'Save others' ...

and ... 'Declare the truth before all the world'.



16 – "Zephaniah's Prophecy ...

A Sacred Offering of His Called Ones"

After having tackled the visions of great prophets regarding the mystery of the long-awaited for Eucharist, let us take an example of younger prophets: the twelve.

- ❖ *"Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; For the day of the Lord is at hand, For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests. And it shall be, In the day of the Lord's sacrifice, That I will punish the princes and the king's children, And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel. In the same day I will punish All those who leap over the threshold, Who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit."* [Zeph. 1 : 7 - 9]
- ❖ *"The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out."* [Zeph. 1 : 14]
- ❖ *"Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord's anger."* [Zeph. 2 : 3]
- ❖ *"Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."* [Zeph. 3 : 14 - 17]

"Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; For the day of the Lord is at hand," Silence is indeed befitting before the Majesty of God ... tranquility, peace and meekness ... Silence also denotes human inability ... God alone speaks ... He alone saves humankind ... His day approaches ... the day that He will come as Savior ... That's quite soon after Zephaniah ... and we now are living this very day ... the day which the Lord has made ... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord ... He came and saved us ... Again, He will come in His Glory to judge the living and the dead.

For this reason men of the Old Testament were silent in reverence and submission awaiting the Savior. We, during the New Testament, are silent in reverence and submission, awaiting the Beloved Judge.

"For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice." [Zeph. 1 : 7]

1500 years after the Jewish offerings' time, we discover a new offering, of Whom Zephaniah speaks. God Himself prepares it. It is not an animal offering, nor do sinning priests offer it. It is a Sacred, Perfect offering ... the offering of His Body. He presents It Himself, as the Whole Sacred Priest. I wonder who deserves such an offering!!

If Jews earned the merit of eating the animal offerings, does anyone deserve to eat of the Divine Offering?

Thus says the Inspiration, *"He has invited His guests."* [Zeph. 1 : 7] Those invited, whoever they may be, are not worthy of approaching the Eucharist. They too must be sanctified. Sanctity is a blessing we request in every Mass. It is enjoyed only by

baptized believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, the humbled repenters. So they may receive joyfully these words,

"The holies are for the holy, blessed is the Lord Jesus Christ (He alone is Holy) and blessed is the Holy Spirit (source of all sanctity). Amen."

- ❖ *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* [2 Cor. 5 : 21]
- ❖ *"that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."* [Tim. 3 : 7]

"And it shall be, In the day of the Lord's sacrifice, That I will punish the princes and the king's children, And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel." ... On this new day ... the day of the New Testament ... the day of slaughtering the Eucharist ... on the day of Salvation for the humble repenters ... this day is a day of judgment for all leaders ... for great men ... proud men ... and those who count themselves worthy ... those wearing the costume of self-righteousness ... wearing the costume of ancient Jewish conceit ... those who cast away the outfit of piety that they took in Baptism ... those who cast away the repentance that alone renders us worthy of approaching the Sacraments.

We may recall here that the Lord's Supper was not enjoyed by the Jewish priests or chief priests, or Scribes and Pharisees, but by the meek disciples of Christ ... not by Judas who put on a strange garment of greed and pride, thus receiving nothing but judgment.

"In the same day also will I punish all those that leap on the threshold, which will fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit." Indeed, the Eucharist is "Light and Fire". Those who live with pagan practices ... their hearts filled with the love of the world and of sin ... without remorse or repentance ... leap over the threshold as if they were trespassing the commandment and filling their master's house with deceit and hypocrisy, taking upon themselves judgment in place of Blessing.

"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." [1 Cor. 11:27]

"The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out." Every occasion, on which we assemble to eat the Lord's Supper, we remember His coming ... hear the sound of His day ... and every one of us cries out in the bitterness of fear for our eternity, *"According to Your Mercy, Lord, not to our transgressions"*.

On every celebration of the Eucharist, we remember the Day of Judgment ... we are filled with sacred awe, lest our fate be with those who will scream that day,

"Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us! and to the hills, Cover us." [Luke 23 : 30]

With such meekness, we approach the Lord's table *"Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."* [Zeph. 2 : 3].

We approach humbly ... miserable yet not in despair ... asking Him for piety and meekness ... that He abides with and preserves us till the day He comes ... as we conceal ourselves in Him ... in His Body and Blood so Holy ... the day of His wrath ... as St. Paul tells,

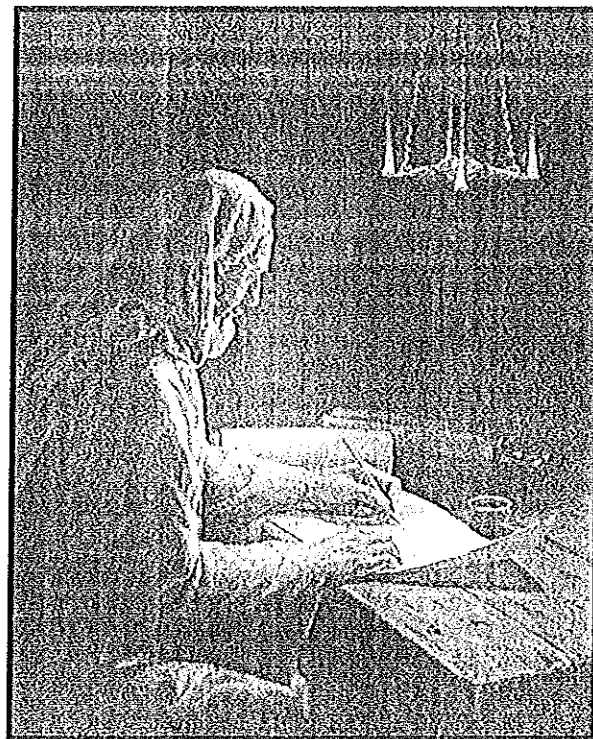
"For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." [Col. 3 : 3 - 4]

Zephaniah concludes his prophecy with a New Testament praise, blessing the church of a New Covenant, saying,

"Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!" [Zeph. 3 : 14]

What could this news be?!!

"The Lord has taken away your judgments, (judgments) He has cast out your enemy (Satan). The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; (Eucharist) You shall see disaster no more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, (Eucharist) The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, (a quiet piercing love of the Crucifix and the Eucharist) He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. (praise of celestial and earthly beings) I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly (the penitent), Who are among you, To whom its reproach is a burden (the Crucifix). Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you; I will save the lame, And gather those who were driven out; I will appoint them for praise and fame In every land where they were put to shame." [Zeph. 3 : 15 - 19]



Part 2



*The Eucharist
&
New Testament Scriptures*

1 - "The Eucharist, Manger & Bethlehem"

- ❖ *"Saying, Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" [Mat. 2 : 2 - 6]*
- ❖ *"And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." [Luke 2 : 12]*

Bethlehem ... (in Hebrew: the 'house of bread') ... was a tiny poor village, from which came David – in the old days – carrier of the beloved title ... who approached boldly one day ... and ate from the table of the bread of faces ... to be a symbol of the New Testament privileges ... for neither he nor those accompanying him were priests. Yet, he was permitted to eat this holy food, with which he escaped from the hand of Saul, the tyrant. He later on chanted saying, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over."* [Ps. 23 : 5]

Prophet Micah announced that it was not the final accomplishment of Bethlehem ... but that from there would arrive the True Bread descending from heaven, Who grants life to the world.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Thought you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." [Mic. 5 : 2] ... The True King, Owner of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Before Him bowed kings from the east (the Magi), offering Him their gifts, as we do in every High Mass. They offered Him gold (precious faith), along with myrrh (fellowship in Christ's suffering), as well as frankincense (fasting and prayer) *"and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."* [Mat 2 : 11]

The name Bethlehem is still the name given to the location of baking the holy bread in church, so the priest may say to the deacon, 'Go fetch the Lamb from Bethlehem (the house of bread)'.
As for the manger, it was yet another peculiar symbol, as it is most rare for anyone to place their newborn infant in a wooden manger. (The manger usually houses the cattle's food).

As for the manger, it was yet another peculiar symbol, as it is most rare for anyone to place their newborn infant in a wooden manger. (The manger usually houses the cattle's food).

The great Saint Cyril said that in accordance to our decline to the status of animals, Christ became incarnate to be our Food, so that we might eat Him and retrieve our stature as children of God, returning to our dominion over nature, as was God's will for us.

The Child of the manger, surrounded by the manger's wood (a reference to the Crucifix's wood), assures us that in this way He is an Offering of redemption and salvation, food for

quasi-animals, and glorification for our fallen nature. *'You blessed my nature in You, You completed Your law on my behalf.'* [Gregorian Mass]

When we approach the tray, on which lies the Divine Body, we approach with the Magi's reverence and the shepherds' delight, not merely to worship Him, but to eat of Him and live ... forever.

The tray becomes our manger, and the altar becomes Bethlehem, *'Worshipping with the remainder (angels) of those worshipping Him... Hallelujah.'* (From the chants of Christmas Mass).



2 - "The Eucharist & The Wedding at Cana of Galilee

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine..." [John 2 : 1 - 11]

Let's not forget that Christ is a Galilean, from Nazareth of Galilee, adjacent to where the beloved village, Cana of Galilee, is situated. During that era, Christ started His Ministry and teachings, but not His miracles [John 1] ... His disciples gathered around Him, but He had not yet sent them to evangelize or perform miracles.

Christ had come to share the joy of the wedding couple ... to bless and sanctify the marriage as He willed it to be ... But they ran out of wine ... those responsible panicked ... the servants didn't know what to do ... Our Lady, Virgin Mary sensed it ... and with very few words, leaned towards her only son, *"They have no wine."* [John 2 : 3]

His response came, more of a refusal *"Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."* [John 2 : 4]

To which hour was He referring, after coming with His disciples and being seen and known?! ... It is indeed the hour of Redemption.

The wise mother understood, for none other than she understood Him so well. He did not reject her request, but He could see His hour approaching ... The bitter hour of the Cross, in which His Mother shared like none other.

Therefore He responded, "*Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?* (My Lady)" [John 2 : 4]

My hour and your hour ... My fate and your fate ... My mission and your mission.

The Mother and Virgin went in to the servants and leaned amiably to them saying, "*Whatever He says to you, do it.*" [John 2 : 5] Her Son followed her obediently, "*Fill the waterpots with water.*" [John 2 : 7]

They now poured and served ... served and marveled ... tasted and realized ... the water had turned into real wine.

We should note that wine in the Holy Bible usually refers to joy or love. (Wine here is fresh squeezed grape that has not yet been fermented)

Holy Mass resembles that historic day. We are rejoicing in the union between Christ (the Groom) and the bride (humanity). However, we are lacking in joy, due to our sins. So the tender Mother comes praying on our behalf, "*They have no wine.*" [John 2 : 3]

But in order to reach this great Joy and this Divine love, "this hour" is necessary ... "the hour of the Crucifix" ... "the hour of agony". So Christ, the Source of all love and joy, comes to transform the waters of our flat lives, to the wine of His joyous

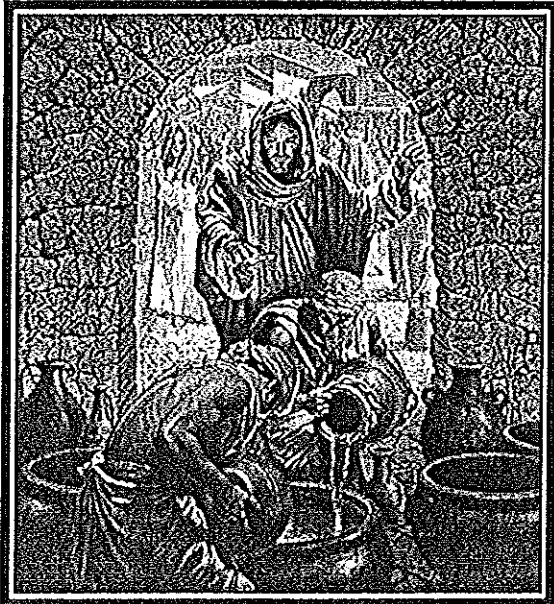
life ... He comes to transform the Waters from which one drinks only to find oneself thirsty for joy and love, to waters from which one drinks never to thirst again. We see in this meeting the steps of the transformation.

- Divine presence ... "*Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.*" [John 2 : 2]
- Fervent prayer ... "*They have no wine.*" [John 2 : 3]
- Awaiting the Hour ... "*My hour has not yet come.*" [John 2 : 4]
- The commandment of obedience (Readings) ... "*Whatever He says to you, do it.*" [John 2 : 5]
- Christ's commandment (The Bible) ... "*Fill the waterpots with water.*" [John 2 : 7]
- The marvelous transformation ... "*Draw some out now.*" [John 2 : 8]
- Fellowship of the Sacraments ... "*Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.*" [John 2 : 8]
- Testimony of the New Testament ... "*You have kept the good wine until now!*" [John 2 : 10]

In every Mass, we still await our Virgin Mother to intercede for us, to ask for the joy and love of the New Testament to dwell in us.

- **We await** ... our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; coming in the hour that no-one knows.
- **We submit** ... to her who submitted wholly to His will, that we may be worthy of uniting with Him.

- We taste ... a new wine in a new wineskin, in love, joy, peace and transformation.
- We rejoice with Him ... with His disciples ... with those who lean against Him.
- We know ... the secret of eternal life without asking theoretical questions, that we may be among His servants and evangelists of whom was said, *"but the servants who had drawn the water knew"* [John 2 : 9]



3 - "The Eucharist & Five Loaves

The mystery of the Eucharist was difficult to grasp for both the disciples and the simple people. To this very day, it may be incomprehensible for intellectuals and wise men, for it's a mystery beyond intellects, accepted only by the simple, the poor and the meek in spirit. Christ paved the way for this Sacrament with different acts and talks in different situations in order for us to be able to welcome His Grandeur and Blessings.

Over there on the Mountain ... our Lord Jesus sat teaching for long hours. This is what happens in Holy Mass (the Mass of the preached / converted). Disciples approached Him saying:

"Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." [Mat. 14 : 15]

His response was: *"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. And they said to Him, We have here only five loaves and two fish."* [Mat. 14 : 16 - 17]

Should we leave following the readings and preaching?!... Had we been part of the "preached", rather than believers, we would have left ... But now, we go forth for a deeper Sacrament and higher experience ... to eat of Him after we listen to Him.

This does not mean that we are insinuating that the five loaves were the Eucharist!!! What we mean here is that the five loaves are indeed a Biblical and Ritualistic introduction to explain this great Sacrament and mystery. That's why our teacher St. John, the Evangelist mentioned it at the beginning of the renowned Eucharist Biblical chapter [John 6]

Christ commanded His disciples to gather the masses ... They did ... Here we see the significance of the ritual (the order)... for our Lord is a God of discipline and order... that is why we must line up in queues and approach in discipline and humility.

He then asked them "What do you have?" ...

O Lord, we are humans, having nothing but food for our physical bodies – the earthly bread ... We eat it and die.

Our Lord Jesus Christ then held this earthly bread and blessed it ... granting it the potential of exceeding its physical limits and being transformed to Eternal Bread ... though it retains its quality of being consumable earthly bread, rather than lasting bread.

He Who is capable of feeding us all the days of our lives with earthly bread to sustain our bodies, will all the more rightly feed us with Celestial Bread to sustain our souls. However, this requires *"His two Holy hands, faultless and blemish-less, the Beatified & life-giving."* (from the Basili Liturgy)

"And He thanked" Christ thanked for the little bread and it became plentiful, leaving us the Sacrament of thanksgiving. In His presence, we thank joyfully and faithfully, transforming not only the few loaves into many, but rather into the Eternal Bread descending from heaven, granting "Eternal Life" to the whole world.

Thus, on the night of the last supper, *"And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* [Luke

22:19], *"Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you."* [Mat. 26 : 27]

Thanksgiving is the secret of faith ... the secret of transformation. We give thanks to the Lord for creating us ... for watching over us ... for redeeming us ... We thank Him for His presence among us and for promising us eternal life. All this we present in the Thanksgiving Offering – His Holy Body and His Holy Blood.

"He blessed." We bless God, in the sense that we attribute all blessings to Him ... and we ask Him for all blessings. And we then live in the abundance of His blessing. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."* [Eph. 1 : 3 - 4]

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is My body." [Mat. 26 : 26]

"And He sanctified." This act is specifically meant for the Eucharist. For this is not like the "blessings" of the Old Testament: blessings of long life, land, food, drink and offspring ... It is grander and grander ... It is the holiness of being united with the Holy Body and Noble Blood.

"He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down." [John 6 : 11]

This is an illustration of the discipline of distributing the Sacraments, as founded by our Lord Jesus Christ at the hands of

His agents: the prophets and priests. The people are made to group up in an orderly way to ensure that everyone takes part and eats their fill. Then the disciples go to gather the leftovers ... meaning there are always those whose spiritual growth is yet incomplete ... those who are not yet capable of realizing the value of this wondrous Sacrament, and therefore are in need of those who would always seek them out.

4 - "The Eucharist & The Transfiguration"

- ❖ *"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves."* [Mat. 17 : 1]
- ❖ *"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them."* [Mark. 9 : 2]
- ❖ *"Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray."* [Luke 9 : 28]

During the Transfiguration, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed His Divine Glory before His disciples. They tasted a sample of Eternity. What was foretold to them previously was realized.

"Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." [Mat. 16 : 28]

As for the six days, they refer to the days of creation, culminating lastly in the creation of man. On day six came man's fall. The Son, the Logos was incarnated to redeem man. He entered our imperfect world to give us His Body and Blood, revealing His Glory before us. We thus leave this earthly life, symbolized in the six days, heading towards Eternal Life, symbolized in the eight days.

Day seven came about and God rested from His work that He had done as Creator ... yet never resting from His work as Shepherd. *"As a Good Shepherd, You strove to seek the lost, as a*

true Father, You were wearied by me as I fell." (From the Gregorian Mass)

In the fullness of time, Christ was incarnate, to redeem us, dying on our behalf on day six, at the sixth hour, but He left us His Body and Blood on the altar as a New Covenant.

Never could the disciples see in Jesus, the Son of Man, more than a Mighty Human, great in works and speech, *"Mighty in words and deeds."* [Acts 7 : 22]

He wanted to reveal to them the mystery of His Divinity and immortality and *"led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light."* [Mat. 17 : 1-2]

In Holy Mass, we long to be elevated to that Mountain through prayer and praise ... to exit worldly matters and preoccupations ... So we can see Him as never before ... we see Him in the icons of saints ... in the words of the Bible ... in His agent the priest ... in a mist of incense ... in the true light that shines in our hearts ... We see Him pure, bright and shining, *"fairer than the sons of men."* [Ps. 45 : 2] So we repeat with St. Peter, *"Lord, it is good for us to be here."* [Mat. 17 : 4]

Our Lord took three with Him and ascended, 'Peter, James and John'. Those are the three that have to be there so that we may be able to enjoy His Divine Presence and Eucharist: Peter (Faith), James (Struggling) and John (Love), *"faith working through love."* [Gal. 5 : 6] This faith uplifts us to witness His Glory and taste His Eternity.

Over there on the Mountain, we struggle against sleepiness, *"But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep..."* [Luke 9 : 32], we struggle against the weakness of human nature. We are not able to continue in this endless enjoyment due to the heaviness of our bodies. But our Lord grants us a glimpse of His light and of His consolations.

There on the Mountain, in Divine Mass, we are accompanied by Moses, Elijah, the prophets and pious men of all generations, *'For this, Lord, is the commandment of Your Only Son, that we may participate in the remembrance of Your saints.'* (From the Basilian Mass).

Our eyes are on them while their eyes are on You Lord. We learn from them and they learn from You ... for You are the Lord of both Testaments ... Lord of the prophets and messengers ... Lord of the celibate like Elijah, and Lord of the married like Moses ... Lord of recluses like Elijah, and Lord of pastors like Moses.

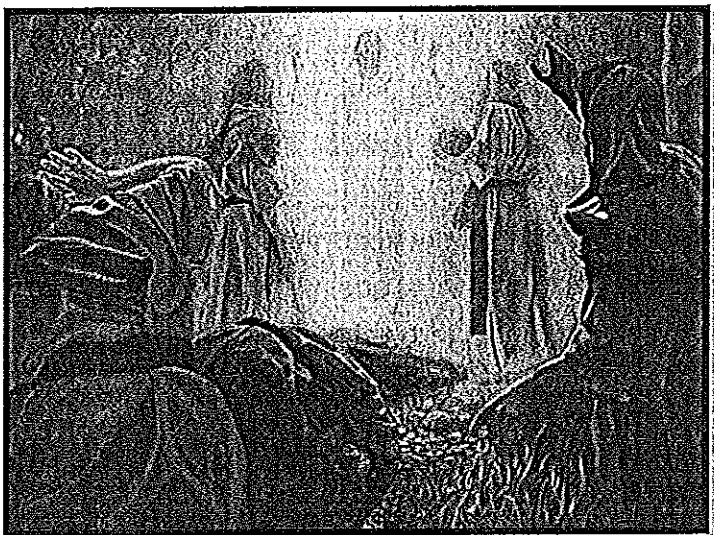
Then comes a single cloud that gathers all, and all vanish within It. They entered the cloud, as though entering to You and in You ... as though It were the cloud that moved in the olden days before Moses and his people ... In It, Moses entered to converse with God alone. And as they entered the cloud, *"bow to the Lord in awe and trembling"* (From the Basilian Mass).

"A voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" [Mat. 17:5]...

For the Holy Spirit pronounces in our hearts and testifies to our spirits that He alone is the Beloved Only Son, Savior of the

world ... To Him we must submit and Him we must follow ... Should we try with our earthly shelters to maintain this presence endlessly, we would fail. Rapidly, Mass comes to an end. Quickly, the spiritual lights are dimmed and Moses and Elijah vanish. The cloud is lifted from our presence but we continue to see *"Jesus is alone"*. [Mat. 17:8]

Following Holy Mass, and Communion, we unite with our Lord Jesus Christ, and come out to the world, returning to our people. Yet, we see not any, but Jesus alone in every person, every place and every circumstance.



5 - "The Eucharist & The Parable of the Invited"

❖ *"And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."*
[Mat 22 : 1 - 14]

❖ *"Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, Blessed is he who shall eat bread*

in the kingdom of God! Then He said to him, A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. 'For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' [Luke 14 : 15

- 24]

The supper of the wedding of the king's son The King's Son is truly the Son of God, the Owner of the Celestial Throne ... And humanity, which is invited to be His Church in faith and in the Sacraments, is His bride. Humanity (His bride) is invited to rejoice with Him and to unite with Him forevermore. In this supper, there is a calling and an announcement: "Come. Everything is prepared."

Everything is prepared ... for He came, was incarnated and taught us ... He lived amongst us, died for us, rising for us, and ascended to prepare a place for us. The only step remaining is to

go to Him, so that He comes to us. Despite everything being prepared, the guests apologized due to preoccupation, to possessions and belongings ... due to social life and due to the satisfying others ... Although, they unanimously said, "*I ask you to excuse me.*" in the eyes of the King, they became unworthy.

Here comes the answer to that commonly asked question:

"Who is worthy of the Eucharist?!"

- Nobody is worthy ... but all are invited.
- He who steps forth in faith, joy and gratitude, is counted worthy.
- He who excused himself in conceit, laziness and tepidity is considered unworthy.

Yet there is another reason of unworthiness which will be mentioned shortly!!

The servants went out, evangelist apostles, priests and servants, to gather the leftovers ... To call the poor, the sick, the handicapped from the alleyways and lanes ... all who were overcome by Satan ... all those devoid of Grace ... all who were stripped of righteousness ... all wounded by sin ... and all fallen prey to despair and evil misery.

Come ... the supper is prepared, the supper of the King's Son. They didn't believe the invitation was for them ... so they rushed hurriedly only to find a secure system at the door of the palace ... for they must first be cleansed. They gladly accepted the washing ... knowing very well how much defilement lay in them ... They dressed in a new attire, white and glimmering ... to

be considered worthy of standing before the King. These indeed are the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrism.

They entered ... in many long lines... incredulous in their joy ... then the Bridegroom of the wedding made His entry ... His eyes delighted to see the redeemed, the baptized, those anointed by the Spirit, wearing the righteousness of Christ ... but His eyes fell on that one who was deceitful ... who did not enter through the door ... who rejected being washed and refused the free clothing. He asked, "*Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?*" And he was speechless." [Mat 22 : 12]

There was no reply ... For the supper is free and the proper clothing also free ... He was therefore not considered worthy, having not entered through the door.

The door is Christ ... "*Then Jesus said to them again, Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.*" [John 10 : 7] That is the upright faith: all who have no true faith cannot share in the wedding supper and has no right to partake of the Divine Sacraments.

The door is baptism ... "*Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" [John 3 : 3] ... Accordingly, he has no right to partake in the Divine Supper.

The door is ongoing penitence ... which renders the clothing white ... forever white.

The door is the Sacrament of the Chrism ... which we received in order to be considered Christians ... through it we donned Christ and were sealed by His seal.

This adamant man was thrown out... coz he refused the upright faith ... he refused the life of repentance ... he refused the Holy Sacraments ... he was therefore considered undeserving.

On the other hand, the poor in spirit, the ailing and the suffering were considered worthy coz they came forth with faith and piety, submitting to the order of the Divine Wedding, enjoying the sight and touch of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

The invited first ... those are Jews who rejected the invitation. All who rejects faith in Christ the Savior is considered unworthy of baptism, hence Communion, hence eternal life.

Those invited first ... those are the proud and stubborn who are not able to see that they are in need of repentance, hence Communion, hence eternal life.

The accepted chosen ones at last ... those are the poor in spirit who stand in Mass, baptized, anointed by the Holy Spirit, penitent, worshiping before the altar, hence considered worthy of partaking of the Holy Sacraments, and hence worthy of eternal life.

6 - "The Good Thursday"

- ❖ *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread."* [1 Cor. 11 : 23]
- ❖ *"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."* [John 13 : 3 - 5]
- ❖ *"Then He said to them, With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."* [Luke 22 : 15]

This historic day, which is considered by our church a **grand feast*** remains immortal and joyful, amidst the agonies of Passion week. Before entering to the Holy Grail of Crucifix Day "Good Friday", our Lord wished to leave us the most valuable thing ... something much more valuable than anyone would think of or entreat ... He left us His blessed Covenant, His Holy Body and Blood on the altar every day.

* Grand Feasts "connecting to our Lord Christ":

Greater Grand Feasts:	Lesser Grand Feasts:
1- Annunciation	1- Circumcision
2- Nativity/Christmas	2- Christ's Entry to Egypt
3- Epiphany	3- Christ's Entry to temple
4- Palm Sunday	4- Cana of Galilee Wedding
5- Resurrection/Easter	5- Transfiguration
6- Ascension	6- Maundy Thursday
7- Pentecost	7- Thomas' Sunday

Our Lord Jesus Christ made very special preparations for this day, starting with St. Mark, our intercessor saint, and Evangelist of our Egyptian land. Our Lord realized St. Mark's heart's desire that this day be celebrated in his house (the upper loft), [Luke 22 : 12], which he prepared not knowing that it would bear this day a historic unprecedented event.

Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled His educational curriculum for His disciples on this day with a grand final lesson ... for He sat at the feet of His disciples and insisted on washing them, hence leaving them and all future generations this amazing role model of modesty and humility. *"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."* [John 13 : 13 - 14]⁶

Some lengthy conversation followed. [John 13 & John 17] ... Our Lord Jesus Christ announced what would happen to Him, and the disciples were disturbed, *"You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy."* [John 16 : 20]

Christ declared His Resurrection and reappearance before them afterwards ... His Ascension ... His coming Holy Spirit ... His work in the Church ... He even announced who would betray Him, without stating his name. The treacherous disciple left because he could not stand the Lord's love – his eyes blinded by the silver.

The hour approached, and He took bread and thanked, blessed and broke it (dividing), giving the disciples with these words, *"Take, eat; this is My body."* [Mat. 26 : 26] It came as no

surprise to them. They did not inquire about the meaning of the words, for it was not the first time they would hear about His edible Body and His drinkable Blood.

Back to John 6, "*For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.*" [John 6 : 55] ... Then many took steps backward, saying: "*This is a hard saying; who can understand it?*" [John 6 : 60] ... But Christ turned to His 12 disciples with the words, "*Do you also want to go away? But Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*" [John 6 : 67 - 68]

When the awaited day came and He told them, "This is My Body", they accepted joyously, in faith, as if they would have been waiting for this day.

Then the Cup following supper, "*Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*" [Mat. 26 : 27 - 28]

After eating in joy, they all praised and went out to the Mount of Olives. In spite of all our Lord Jesus Christ had told them, they, the eleven, got tired from the long day, and did not give full attention to His words, "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.*" [Mat. 26 : 38]

Hours later in Gethsemane, He told them, "*Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.*" [Mat. 26 : 46]

Events unfolded, the disciples doubted, feared, and escaped. He was followed only by John most closely, and Peter at a distance. Peter fell prey to what Christ had warned him of, denying, cursing and swearing, despite having partaken of

Christ's Body and Blood. Yet perhaps this was cause for his hope, as he went out and wept bitterly.

This magnificent day, when the Sacrament of Sacraments, the Eucharist, was established in the upper loft of St. Mark was mentioned in the Gospel of John commenced by saying: "*having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*" [John 13 : 1]

The Eucharist, after all, is the fruition of God's limitless love for man. "His own" were no longer born of flesh, as the Jews. Rather they became believers, born of the Spirit,

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." [John 1 : 12 - 13]

This beloved few deserved not just the washing of their feet (forgiveness for repenters), but also union with the Body and Blood of God's Son, for "He loved them to the end".

Thus this marvelous event started to be mentioned in Luke's Gospel, with Christ's words, "*With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*" [Luke 22 : 15] It's a longing in heart of Christ from the moment He embarked on His ministry, perhaps even from the moment of His Incarnation, or from the moment the world was created ... To give His Church ... His Bride ... His own people ... both His Body and Blood ... that she might abide in Him forever. We would then become "*of His flesh and of His bones.*" [Eph. 5 : 30] in a union that starts on earth and never ends forevermore.

7 - "The Two Disciples of Emmaus"

"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened." [Luke 24 : 13 - 14]

Sunday ... Dawn ... The events of the final week had unfolded rapidly and painfully ... The conspiracy came full circle... Christ was crucified and buried ... The Jews and Romans were triumphant ... Injustice and darkness were victorious ... The disciples feared and closed the upper loft upon them ... some of them preferred to escape.

There were two, believed to be of the 70 apostles, one named Cleopas, the other's name not mentioned - some consider him St. Luke himself - who travelled at dawn, fleeing to Emmaus – a village 60 galwas (around 15 miles) away.

However, there was some good news for which nobody paid attention: for according to the story told by those two disciples, some women confused them by stating that Jesus had risen. But the tomb was found empty [Luke 24 : 22 - 24] So in spite of this news, the two disciples thought it better to run away.

Our Lord Jesus Christ approached them but their eyes were withheld from recognizing Him. Was it due to a Divine purpose? Or was this as a result of their sorrow and doubt?!!

He then asked them: *"And He said to them, What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad? Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said*

to Him, Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days? And He said to them, What things?" [Luke 24 : 17 - 19]

The disciples began to complain ... to sigh ... reviewing their lives ... their calling ... their abandoning of everything in Christ' in order to follow our Jesus ... the lost promises ... the evaporated dreams!!!

Christ listened to them closely, like a strange visitor to this world. Our Glorious Christ began speaking with reproachfulness...

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." [Luke 24 : 25 - 27]

The hours slipped by swiftly ... They were nearing Emmaus ... They loved Him... their hearts grew fond of Him ... and hope returned. There are prophecies of the Cross ... of the Resurrection. He had to suffer ... to die ... and to rise in order to save humanity. The truth began to unfold... They enjoined Him: 'Stay with us'... He entered their home ... took bread ... thanked and broke it. It was then that they recognized Him.

He is Who He is ... The Living Dead ... The Teacher ... rather the Savior He is God Incarnate.

The two disciples rushed back to Jerusalem, entering the upper loft to say, 'Echristos Anesti'. The other disciples

responded happily, 'Alithos Anesti'. Christ then appeared to all, saying, "Peace to you." [Luke 24 : 36]

The journey of the two Emmaus disciples is a lengthy Mass ... It starts with sorrow ... escaping ... weakness ... misery and complaint. God's Grace approaches to reveal to us via the prayers and the readings, the secret of Christ,

"the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations." [Col. 1 : 26]

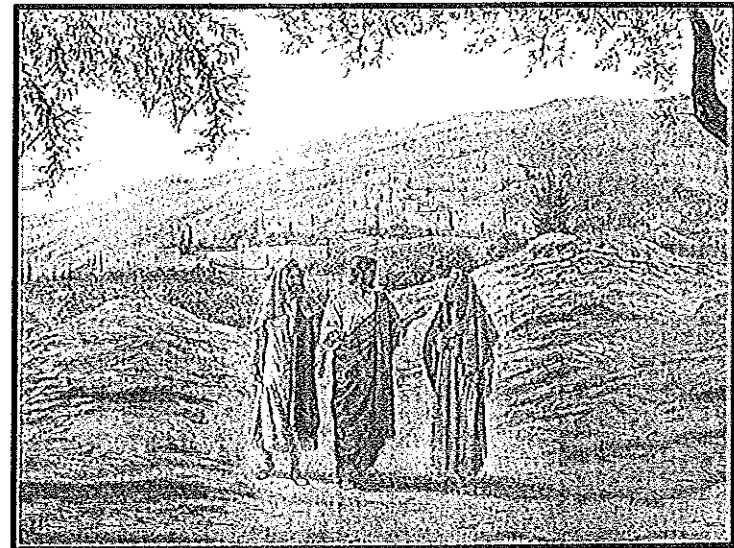
The heart is enflamed with love and longing ... we cling to Him: 'Remain with us', 'Leave us not', 'With You, we want nothing'. Finally comes the decisive moment ... We touch Him ... We eat Him ... He disappears within us ... Our sorrows and pains vanish, as we spring forth to the joy of Resurrection ... No fear ... no doubt ... no sorrow ... Christ is risen. Truly He is risen.

'Amen, Amen, Amen. Of Your death, Lord we preach, and Your Holy Resurrection and Ascension to heaven we profess. We praise You, we bless You, we thank You, Lord, and we entreat You, our God.' (The Basilian Mass).

Christ enters our home with His Grace. Peace to you all. *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* [John 14 : 27]

In every Mass, readings take us through a journey from the old to new ... to Eternity. Throughout this journey, we unveil the love of God and His purpose in creating us ... His work in renewing us. Prayers elevate us from glory to glory ... till the moment of our approach to the broken Body of Christ the

Glorious Our eyes swell with tears, as we cry out joyfully, *"Christ is risen. Truly He is risen."* We praise Him forever in all His sanctities.



8 - "The Eucharist & Bread Breaking"

- ❖ *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* [Acts 2 : 42]
- ❖ *"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."* [Acts 2 : 46 - 47]
- ❖ *"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* [1Cor. 11 : 23 - 24]

Many may get confused about the meaning of "bread breaking", imagining it to be merely ordinary bread that we break together for fellowship. So let's examine the text of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. St. Paul had not attended this event, yet he received it from our Lord and handed it over to all churches. He handed what he received from the apostles' hands and what has been acknowledged by the apostolic church, starting with ...

He took bread ...

- And thanked ... the Eucharist Sacrament (it is a Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving').
- And broke ... the Sacrament of breaking bread.
- He said, 'Take this and eat. It is my broken Body'.

So it is no longer ordinary bread ... But His real Body, broken for us ... that's why in the old days this Sacrament was named "bread breaking" ... It was not a strange matter to the disciples ... But on that night, it became new and indeed marvelous.

It was no strange thing for Christ to break bread, as He did with the five loaves and two fishes. Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. *"And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave."* [Mat 14 : 19]

Yet, He did not announce that this is His broken Body, nor did He command: *"do this in remembrance of Me."* [Luke 22 : 19]

Nor that it is *"shed for many for the remission of sins."* [Mat 26 : 28] nor eternal life for all who partake of it.

Dealing with the Eucharist as merely bread breaking takes us back to the five loaves ... which Christ announced to be perishable food.

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." [John 6 : 27]

Yet the Sacrament of the Eucharist kept its old name, since the act of bread breaking became a distinguishing feature of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is indeed the Giver of all gifts and Sacraments of the New Testament. We even see Him doing the same after His Holy Resurrection when He met the two disciples

of Emmaus who couldn't recognize Him, while He explained to them the prophecies, until He broke the bread with them ...

"as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight." [Luke 24 :30-31]

This name, bread breaking, continued being closely connected to the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the book of Acts, also penned by the physician Luke, who recorded, *"And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."* [Luke 24 : 35], And again he wrote, *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* [Acts 2 :42]

Here is a briefing of what the old Mass consisted of: gathering to listen and learn (Mass of the converted, based on the readings of the apostles' words) ... prayers, which is the total of (Prayer of reconciliation and anaphora, blessings, final confession, and orisons) ... **breaking the bread**, which is partaking of God's Body and Blood ... **fellowship** (the piece of Agape bread), or the blessing in which all participate, as they become one through the Holy Spirit, and through sharing the single Body. *"For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread."* [1 Cor. 10 : 17]

Luke, the physician, goes back to remind us that the Eucharist assembly could no longer be held in the old temple, where animal offerings are still presented, so he mentions, *"They would come regularly every day to the temple with one spirit"* (Psalm prayers).

"As they break bread in houses (Eucharist) they would eat meals (blessings) with merriment and simple hearts, praising the Lord (praise at distribution) and they had Grace with all the people, and the Lord would add to the church (founded on this Eucharistic assembly) those who were saved." [Acts 2 : 46 - 47]

The book of Acts refers to this Sacrament by the same name again during the raising of the young Eutychus. *"Now on the first day of the week, (Sunday) when the disciples came together to break bread, (Communion is the assembly's purpose) Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him. Now when he had come up, (Mass is usually in the highest spot in Church ... the upper loft) had broken bread (Eucharist) and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted."* [Acts 20 : 7 - 12] The Eucharist is indeed the down payment for the Resurrection and the Victory over death.

When there were doubts and belittling of this Sacrament, in Corinth, St. Paul the apostle strongly defended the sacredness and majesty of this Sacrament, reminding them that although the Jews had lived in a constant miracle and heavenly food [1 Cor. 10 : 1 - 5], yet they were not saved, due to their recklessness, grumbling and lack of repentance. Here he accurately narrates, *"All ate the same spiritual food."* [1 Cor. 10 : 3] ... That is the

heavenly manna which Christ considered a symbol of His broken Body.

Finally, he announces it powerfully, and with extreme frankness. *"I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, (bread breaking) is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"* [1 Cor. 10 : 15 - 16] ... And in case someone thinks that He is speaking of a symbol rather than reality, He goes back to mention, *"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons."* [1 Cor. 10 : 21] ...

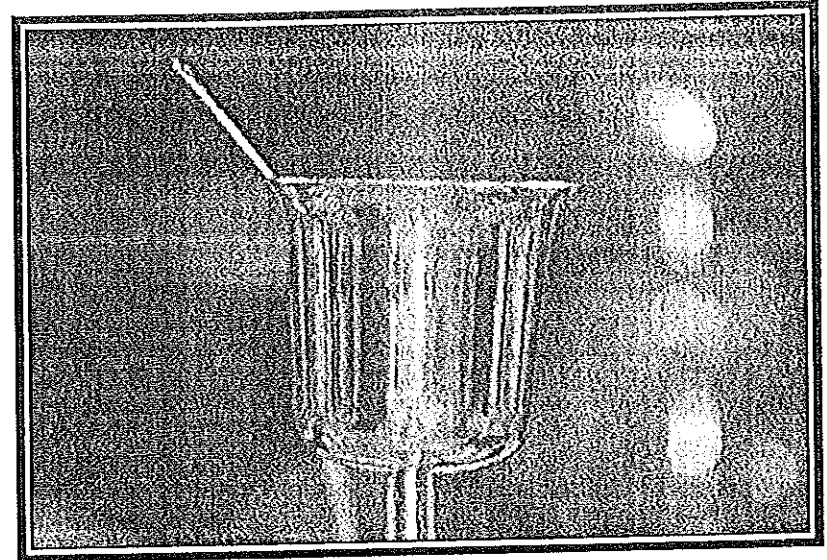
Once more he strongly warns against belittling the sanctified in the following chapter,

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, (of faith and penitence) and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (for not believing it's a real Body) [1 Cor. 11 : 26 - 29]

For this reason, the New Testament priest - Christ's agent - breaks the bread, and takes this broken gem, saying, "True Body of Jesus Christ, Son of our God. Amen". To this the believer, who is anointed with the Holy Spirit and is repentant, comes forward, mouth open, and says, "Amen", eats the True Body of Christ.

The term "True Body" does not mean, as many think, that it will be transformed in taste and appearance to real human flesh. "True" means "He is Who He is", Body of Christ the Incarnated, the Crucified, the Resurrected, the Eternally Living ... a Sacrament surpassing mind and senses.

Part 3



*The Eucharist
&
Ritualistic Meditations*

1 - "The Mist of Incense"

❖ "Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." [Rev. 5 : 8]

❖ "Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." [Rev. 8 : 3 - 4]

The Jewish worship always required an altar for the incense. "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it." [Ex. 30 : 7] "Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil." [Lev. 16 : 12]

The incense offering is presented only by a priest, such as Zechariah the priest. [Luke 1 : 9] This is clear contradiction to all who consider incense a pagan worship ... For it is a Biblical commandment that did not end in the New Testament.

Malachi, the last of the young prophets, announced its extension in a new form in the New Testament, as its raising is not merely limited to the altar, but ... "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations, Says

the Lord of hosts." [Mal. 1 : 11] The term "Amidst the nations" refers to the "Church" of the New Testament.

The mist of incense vapor primarily represents God's unseen presence ... for God appeared long ago to His people "in a pillar of cloud by day" and "fire by night". Moses would enter the tabernacle and vanish amidst this Divine cloud. "So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was." [Ex. 20 : 21]

Upon consecrating the altar, God descended as a cloud, bringing fear to the priests, "And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." [1 Ki. 8 : 10 - 11]

So, in the church, incense is linked to praises, prayers, and readings. They all indicate God's presence.

Upon raising incense in Vespers and Matins, the altar is filled with incense or smoke ...

"And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke." [Is. 6:4]

And this vapor makes its way out to the nave of the church, to shelter all the attendees, for God is here among His people. For this reason, the priests prays silently, while raising the incense: "He Who raised Himself, as accepted Offering on the Cross, in the evening, on Golgotha, and was sensed by His Good Father, He opened the door to Paradise, and restored Adam to his supremacy once more." (Liturgy, raising the Pauline incense).

Incense-raising is also presenting an offering to God. That's why it's offered to the altar (the Divine Throne) ... and to the Bible (God's word) ... and to the icons and saints' relics, because they too have become a throne to God. It is also offered to the believers in whom lives the Spirit of God, from chief priests, priests, servants to all the congregation. God lives amongst His people and in His people with His Spirit.

Moreover, the mist of incense represents the unseen prayers of the Church, expressed by St. Paul in the words "*a cloud of witnesses.*" [Heb. 12 : 1] ... For the angels, the saints, the righteous and the martyrs surround us with their prayers and unseen presence. They participate with us in our celebration of the Eucharist. "*It is not that we, O Lord, are worthy to invoke such people's beatitude, but they are alive before the throne of Your Only Son, that they may be compensating by intervening for our humility and weakness.*" (The Fellowship - Cyrillic Mass).

Incense is elevated upwards, carrying with it our sense of repentance, our cries for mercy, our petitions for the salvation of our souls and those of our children. The incense offering is capable - as in the old days - of lifting Divine anger and of saving us from all tribulations, as was the case when God's anger was raised against His stubborn people, "*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell on their faces. So Moses said to Aaron, Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun. Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and*

ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped." [Num 16 : 44 - 48]

Incense is not exclusively for Vespers and Matins. It is also connected to the Mass of the Converted. As the people are seated and listening to the holy teachings, the man of God remains standing with the incense ... fervently entreating God to open their eyes and ears ... that His word may work in them ... and through them to be extended to the entire world.

For this very same reason, lifting incense precedes the biblical reading in the liturgy. Incense accompanies it, so that prayers may mingle with the readings that we may delve into the depths, listen, grasp and act.

Incense has another role, being offered before icons, in praise, and in processions (the procession of saints' feasts). We see their lives as though rising incense as we pray sincerely and struggle fervently to follow their good example ...

"Who is this coming out of the wilderness Like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, With all the merchant's fragrant powders?" [Song 3 : 6]

In Matins praise, we address the Virgin Mary thus: "*Like the chosen incense of your virginity, rising to the Father's Throne. It is far superior than the incense of cherubim and seraphim, O Virgin Mary. Peace to the new heaven that was made and rendered a place of rest for His Beloved Son.*"

2 - "The Flawless Lamb"

- ❖ *"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* [John 1 : 29]
- ❖ *"And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth."* [Rev. 5 : 6]
- ❖ *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth."* [Is. 53 : 7]

Mass starts with the rite of receiving and offering the Lamb (after raising incense of Vespers, Matins and the Psalms). The bread (offering) is labeled the Lamb ... it's round to symbolize His infinite nature ... imprinted on it are the signs of His wounds with the royal seal, referring to His Eternal Reign.

Then an odd number of bread loaves are placed on the Lamb platter, for the one flawless loaf to be selected to become a flawless Lamb, alone capable of attaining our salvation.

When the Lamb is chosen, the people cry out entreating salvation and pardon, with Kyrie Eleison 41 times. The priest - agent of God, begins his selection process.

He places his hands in the form of a crucifix in reference to the crucifixion of the Lamb, Who came to save us. He selects

the best and purest Lamb to touch with it all the other loaves, fulfilling the Bible's words,

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." [Heb 2 : 14]

He anoints the Lamb with the symbol of blood (holy wine), remembering the accepted offerings ... the offerings of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Melchizedek, which were always symbols of the true offering, **the Eucharist.**

Next, the Lamb is baptized. The priest dampens it with water ... covers it with a cloth – an indication of His secret that has been hidden over the ages, but which had now been revealed,

"the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints." [Col. 1 : 26]

The agent of God then places the requests of those who asked him to remember their entreaties in front of the Lamb, in a silent prayer.

He then steps forth to the congregation, to announce the presence of the real Lamb, as announced by John the Baptist (priest and son of priest) with a cry: *"Glory and Honor, Honor and Glory to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*

This Lamb is *"Peace and construction for the one Church of God, united and apostolic. Amen."*

And to this Lamb, *"Remember, O Lord, those who present these offerings to You, and those for whom they were presented and those by whom they were presented ... Grant them all the celestial reward."*

The deacon reaffirms this request, while the priest repeats silently, Lamb in hand, *"Now, Lord, release Your Servant in peace, for my eyes have seen Your salvation (the Lamb) which you prepared before all nations."*

The priest circles the altar with the Lamb, longing for salvation to encompass everyone in every place and at all times... he then proclaims the faith of the entire Church, offering blessings in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

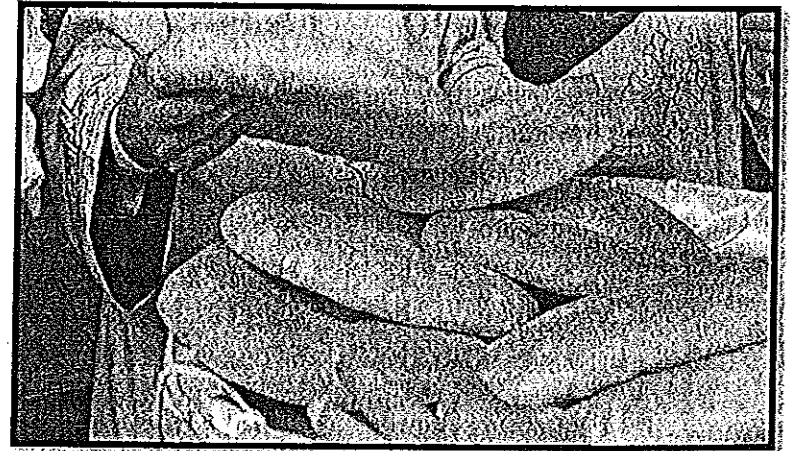
- "Blessed is the Father, Almighty ... Amen."
- "Blessed is His Only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."
- "Blessed is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Amen."

Because we are in front of the True Lamb, we must acknowledge His Good Father, and His Holy Spirit, Trinity in one, and one in the Trinity.

It is as though we are recalling this day the Theophania (Divine Apparition) ... the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit settled on Him like a dove, with a voice from heaven, *"And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* [Mat. 3 : 17]

It's the Lamb – flawless - slaughtered for our salvation. We eat It to come alive through It, and we too become lambs among wolves. We carry with Him the simplicity of doves, and

the wisdom of serpents. Yet, we are prepared to die with Him and for Him every day.



3 - "The Word: Do we Hear it Or Eat it?"

❖ "Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts." [Jer. 15 : 16]

❖ "So I went to the angel and said to him, Give me the little book. And he said to me, Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth." [Rev. 10 : 9]

Mass of the Word, or of the preached is the first part of Mass that starts with the Psalms ... then offertory of the Lamb ... then the absolution of servants.

The readings are from the Pauline (St Paul) and the Catholic (Catholicon), the Book of Acts (Praxis) and finally the Psalm and Bible reading. These readings represent the main part of this Mass, concluded by the sermon of the preached who have not yet been baptized, and are still children with regards to faith, needing further care, penitence and maturity.

After the preached leave, the faithful approach the altar. Their Mass (Believers' Mass) starts off with the Nicene Creed, in which they declare their belonging to the faith handed down to the saints and their worthiness of the holies. Orthodox thinking sees God's presence through the Bible, and in the Eucharist the True Body and Blood of Emmanuel our Lord.

As we stand in awe before God, to listen to the Holy Bible, we stand in awe before God to kneel in front of His Holy Body. And as we prepare to accept the word with fervent prayers, we

also prepare to accept the Eucharist with the prayers of Mass, while the priest says: "*As for you, blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear. May we be worthy to listen and act upon your Holy Gospels, through the petitions of Your saints.*" (The Bible Orison) "*Pray for Communion worthily of these holy celestial sacraments.*"

As we chant before the Bible, joyously, "*Hallelujah*" ... when we receive delightful news of salvation ... so we chant before the Eucharist, joyously, "*Amen, Hallelujah*", as we partake of the One Body in order to abide in It and have It abide in us.

As we hear the Bible ... understand it ... pray by it ... and consume it ... so it enters in us as a two-edged sword ... it purifies us like fire devouring our sins ... it lightens our way in the darkness of this era. In this way, we approach the Eucharist table, to partake of His life-giving Body. He works in us in an unspeakable secret manner, to purify us, fortify us, liberate us, bless us, and lighten our hearts, minds, understanding and eyes.

Christ came to earth as a Teacher, Whose teachings were accepted not by the wise and erudite, but the simple and children. Christ ended His ministry on earth as a Redeemer, offering His Body as a Sacrifice, again accepted not by the wise and erudite, but the simple and children.

The Bible perpetually proclaims to us the Supreme Truth: **God is always with us** whereas the Eucharist perpetually demonstrates the Ideal Truth: **God is inside us.**

3 We hear the words with our ears, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*" [Mat 11 : 15], yet when our hearts are moved,

our souls humbled, our bodies prostrated, our spirits cry out, we partake of His Holy Body, living by Him, hearing His word emerging from within us. *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."* [Heb. 8 : 10]

As Christ insisted in Ezekiel's vision that the Word be consumed... *"But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you. Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe, Moreover He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. So I ate, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness."* [Ez.2 : 8 - 10], [Ez. 3 : 1 - 3]

Again, Christ insisted in the New Testament, that the church partake of the Word's Body. *"Then Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me."* [John. 6 : 53 - 57]

4 - "First & Second Coming"

Celebrating the Eucharist is a daily or weekly event ... A living renewable memory of His coming on earth to save us ... and an awaiting of the final grand celebration of His Second Coming on the clouds.

In the chief priest's entry of celebration, melodies and bliss, comes the tune of "Eb Oro" (O Prince of Peace), and "Ephlegomanos" (Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord). This is a celebration of Christ entering our world.

Moreover, the Lamb's entry into the altar, is another celebration of Christ's coming to us ... which is emphasized by the rite of circling the altar announcing the Kingdom of Heaven "Glory and Honor ... Honor and Glory".

In placing the Lamb on the tray with a star above it, we proclaim the Incarnation of Christ, and birth in a manger, and in covering the altar with the Eprospharin, we announce His death and burial for three days.

As the priest, Christ's agent comes amongst the congregation with incense, we announce the coming of Christ to us and His bearing of our sins ... as His return to the altar once more is a declaration of His Ascension, entry into the everlasting Sanctities, which precede His Second Coming.

Thus the priest says, *"I lift my first fruits to heaven. You've shown me the proclamation of Your advent, when You come to judge the living and the dead and grant each according to his deeds."* (Gregorian Mass)

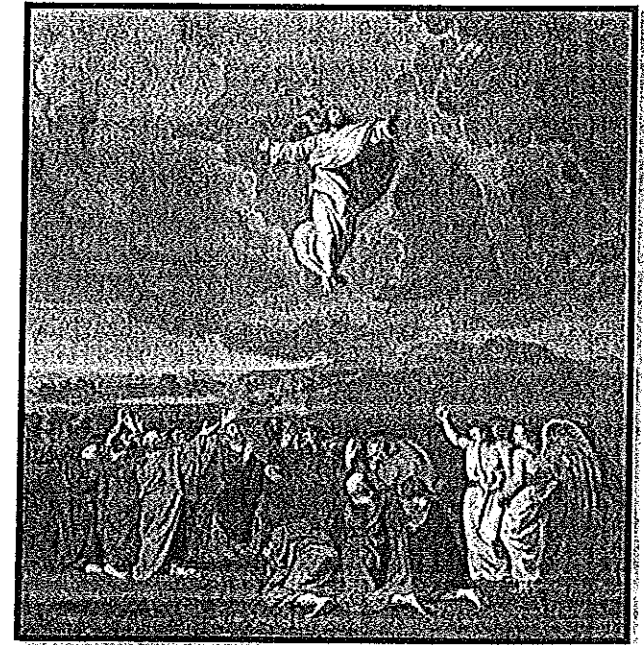
During Holy Mass, all events assemble before our eyes: creation of humans in His image and likeness ... fall of man by his own will and Satan's envy ... long awaiting Christ before His first coming ... then His wondrous incarnation and birth from the Virgin Mary ... His death ... burial and Resurrection ... His Ascension into heaven to sit by the right hand of the Father, *"Thus, Lord, as we work towards commemorating Your descent to earth, life-giving death, three-day burial, and resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven and sitting at the right hand of Your Father, and Your second advent from heaven, so awesome and full of glory."* (Gregorian Mass)

In anticipation of this Second Coming, we chant the end of the Nicene Creed. *"And we await the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life to come. Amen."*

In anticipation of this awesome day, we cry out: *"According to Your mercy, Lord, and not according to our transgressions."* In the hope of laying eyes on Him, face to face, seeing His angels and saints surrounding Him, we remember all the pious and all saints who intercede in our humiliation for a nearby encounter. *"For this, Lord, is the commandment of Your Only Son, that we join in commemorating Your saints. Lord, please remember all saints who have pleased You from the beginning."* (Fraction, Basilian Mass).

As Mass approaches its conclusion, the priest lifts the tray, carrying the true Body, and turns to the congregation, to joyously cry out, *"Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord"*, citing His first Advent, then he turns to the altar and returns from the other side, to look at the people, who now cry

out a second joyous time, *"Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord"*, in reference to His Second Coming. *"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."* [Acts 1 : 10 - 11]



5 - "Icons ... Windows into Heaven"

- ❖ *"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct."* [Heb. 13 : 7]
- ❖ *"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?"* [Gal. 3 : 1]

Icons, in the Orthodox concept, represent a true presence of the person depicted for that person is not dead, though invisible. For this reason, icons are blessed with Chrism oil, as the altar and the baptized believer are sanctified with the same oil.

The icon of the Virgin Mary reminds us that she is with us, praying for us, standing before us as a role model of submission, holiness and praise.

The icon of the resurrection makes us live the joy of the never-ending impact of that event *"and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* [Eph. 2 : 6]

As for the icon of the Crucifixion, we prostrate ourselves in front of it, so that our Lord Jesus Christ may render us worthy of His Passion, as we grant Him Glory, Honor, Majesty and Power, with the angels and saints forever.

The icon of Saint Antonius (Anthony) is a perpetual sermon on abandoning the transient pleasures of life and

seeking the Kingdom of Heaven via prayers, fasting, asceticism and vigilance.

St. George's icon makes us love agony for the sake of Christ *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* [Rom. 8 : 18]

An icon is itself an open Bible. There are icons that narrate to us the accounts of prophets and apostles, miracles of Christ in His parables and teachings. Through icons, we experience a speaking Bible before our eyes.

If we contemplate the eyes of saints in Coptic icons, we find them wide and shining with the joy of awaiting Christ in His Glory.

If we contemplate the bodies of martyrs and saints, we find them smaller than the size fitting the size of their heads, a hidden message to all the Church's children to lead our lives by the spirit, not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, to sanctify thoughts and hearts, rather than making carnal arrangements.

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." [Rom 13 : 14]

Icons are schools of spirituality in details, colors and glances of the eye, gestures of the hands, prostration, natural landscapes and mountains.

Icons participate in worship. When the priest exits the altar carrying incense, he gives Glory to the Holy Trinity, looking at the altar then turning to its right and telling the Virgin Mary,

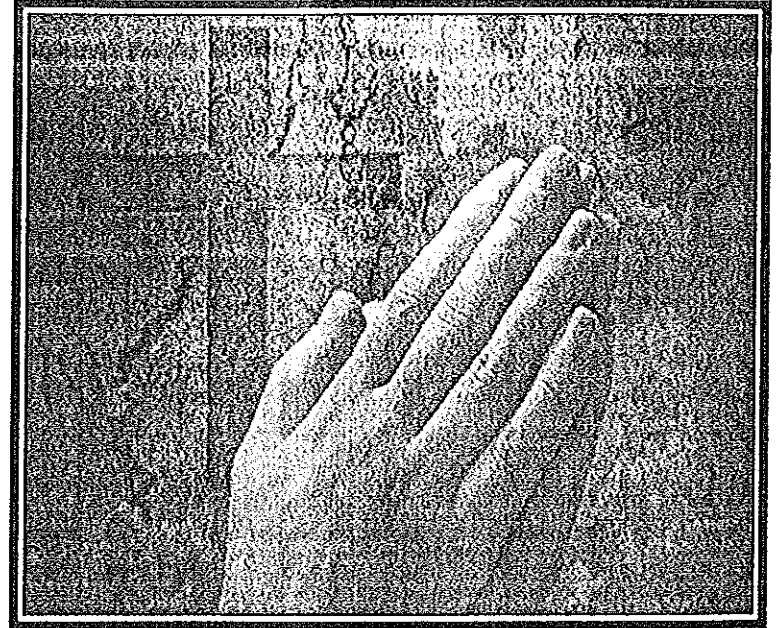
"We give you greetings along with the Angel Gabriel, saying 'Hail to you, O filled with Grace, may the Lord be with you.' "...

He then faces west to the congregation and church icons, saying, "Hail to all ranks of angels, my lords, the father apostles, all ranks of martyrs and all saints."

As he turns to the left of the altar, he gives greeting to the icon of John the Baptist, "Hail to John the son of Zechariah, peace to the priest son of the priest". The priest approaches the relics, if any, lifting incense before them, entreating that they pray for us to attain pardon for our sins. He gives greeting to all icons of saints, asking for his prayers that our sins be forgiven, so all the praying congregation senses a cloud of saints (martyrs).

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." [Heb 12:1-2]

Part 4



The Eucharist & The Spiritual Life

1 - "The Eucharist & Perpetual Repentance"

The Eucharist is the desire of the repentant and the joy of those who return to God.

Repentance, in Orthodox thinking, is neither mere remorse over sins nor just abandoning evil, nor is it an event that took place one day and ended.

Repentance is the very nature of the New Life that starts with Faith and Baptism. It's the continuous change by renewing one's mind to arrive at what God desires for us to reach the likeness of Christ:

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." [Rom 12:2]

Repentance is discovering God's love on the Cross ... His everlasting love ... and embarking on a never-ending love story. *"Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."* [Luke 7 : 47]

Repentance is a joint work between God's Grace (the Holy Spirit's work) and the continuous human struggle to fulfill the Divine Commandment.

Repentance means death and Resurrection through free will ... every day and every hour ... moved by the power of the Resurrection that stems from the power of the Holy Spirit's reservoir inside our hearts. For as I fall (dying through sin), I rise (through Grace). *"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I*

will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me." [Mi. 7 : 8]

Hence, we finally grasp the relationship of the Eucharist with repentance. Holy Mass is the laboratory in which human will is incinerated to be freed of the old human to be able to retrieve the glory of the New Human born in Baptism.

Through the collective prayers and chants, readings and prostrations, all bonds and fetters are loosened. The soul melts through loving the Crucified Lamb, crying out from the depths, Kyrie Elaison, O Lord, show mercy, O Lord, show mercy, O Lord, change me, O Lord, accept me, O Lord, forgive me, O Lord, liberate me, O Lord, relieve me, O Lord, make me a chosen vessel.

The more the Mass procession moves forward, the more fervent the repentance. For it all starts with the psalms, then the Lamb is chosen, then we prostrate ourselves to receive ablution as New Testament servants, then comes God's living effective Word, then the Bible which penetrates our souls, then the Conciliatory Prayer, then the Mother of God's intercession, O Lord, bestow on us pardon for our transgressions.

Then we stand with the angels and archangels, in a state of shame and fear, crying with them, *"Agius"*.

Then once more the story of Redemption moves us to tears to recall Judgment and the Second Advent, so our hearts shriek, *"According to Your clemency, Lord, not according to our sins."*

Then comes to our attention the presence of the Holy Slaughtered One. We bow to His Holy Body and Noble Blood. We confess our sins and unworthiness before Him. We long to approach Him and pour forth our sorrow and joy sorrow for our transgressions and joy at His advent and limitless condescending.

Finally we pray, "*Pray to partake of Communion worthily from these Holy Celestial Sacraments, O Lord, and show mercy.*"

To prepare for the Eucharist, there comes a life of continuous repentance, crowned by the Holy Sacrament of Confession, for the genuineness of penitence and to enjoy the ablution of forgiveness, spiritual discipleship and growth into the depths.

Caution following Communion is but a continuum of the ongoing life of repentance, with excess caution and zeal "*that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*" [Rom. 6 : 6] ... We grow with His Grace to the measure of His magnitude.

2 - "The Eucharist & Orthodox (Upright) Faith"

The Eucharist, on earth, is a reward for the Orthodox (upright) faith.

The preached awaits patiently the day of Baptism, for he may spend months and years learning the faith, becoming complete in repentance, asking and knowing, reading and grasping, entering and exiting, until he finds the pasture.

The preached memorizes and perfects the Nicene Creed, as his faith in the One God deepens ... God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. he acknowledges His Only Son, our God, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Light from Light, True God from True God, confessing the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, life-giving Lord, emerging from the Father.

The preached believes that our Lord Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, becoming a whole Human Being, His Divinity and Humanity never parting for one moment or the blink of an eye, He suffered agony, died, was buried and arose, ascended and will come in His Glory.

The preached confesses a single church, one Head for one Body, blessed with the Holy Spirit, assembling every tongue and people, Apostolic, founded on the Bible and Apostolic teaching.

The preached believes that to join this one body, one must die to the world, be separated by it through baptism, in which one's sins are forgiven, and one becomes a true child of God adoptively.

Through this upright faith, the converted earns the right to enter the sacred place, and so gets baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, dying with Christ in the water by spirit, to rise with Him a new person, celestial, to be anointed with the Chrism, a chosen holy vessel.

The preached then enters in the joyous procession to receive the Eucharist before the entire congregation, after becoming an active living member, with a share in eternal life. *"Oh Lord, make us all worthy of partaking of Your Holy Body, and Noble Blood, to purify our souls, bodies and spirits, and forgiveness for our sins and transgressions, that we may be one body and one spirit with You, and receive a share and inheritance with all the saints, who have pleased You from the start."* (Prayer succeeding sanctification).

Thus we see a crystal-clear connection, between the orthodox faith, and the Eucharist Sacrament, for we repeat the Nicene Creed more than once during the Liturgy, especially following Scripture reading, before we embark on the Mass of the Converted.

Then comes the final confession in the Liturgy, summarizing the faith:

"I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath, that this is the Live-giving Body of Your Only Son, our God, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, taken from our Lady and Queen, the pure Saint Mary, rendering it one with His Divinity, without intermingling, joining or alteration. He confessed the proper confession before Pontius Pilate, and delivered Him on our behalf on the Holy Wooden Crucifix, by His sole will, on our

behalf. I truly believe that His Divinity and Humanity never parted for a moment nor the blink of an eye. It is given on our behalf for salvation and a pardon for our sins, and eternal life to whomever partakes of it, I believe." (Confession - Basilian Mass)

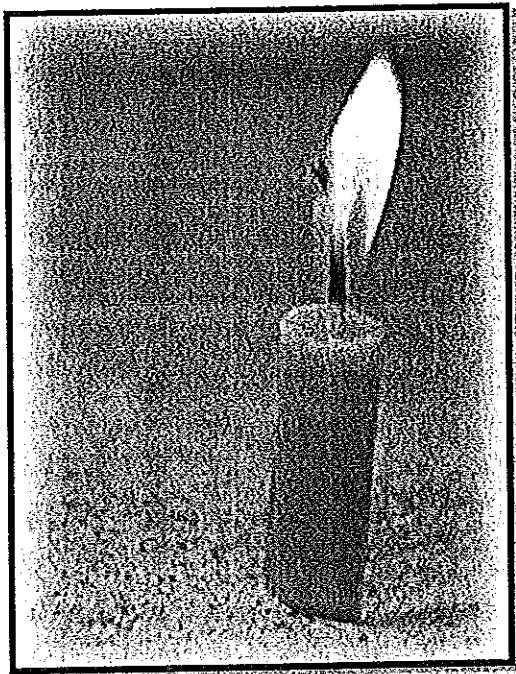
Within the prayers of Mass, words like Amen and I believe are repeated endlessly. Each time, God's agent, the priest, announces part of the truth, which the congregation receives with the word *"Amen, we believe"*. For instance, *"He was incarnated and became Human."* ... *"Truly we believe."* ... *"He arose from the dead."* ... *"Amen."* ... *"He took bread."* ... *"This is true, Amen."* ... *"The Cup also after supper... we believe, confess and praise."*

Confessing the faith remains with us until the decisive moment, when the deacon concludes prayer, *"Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen."* Therefore, nobody approaches this Holy Table who does not believe in any part or in all of this truth. For those who don't believe in God will have no salvation, nor a specimen of salvation, which is the Eucharist. And those who have no faith in the Son of God have no life. *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* [John 3 : 36] Those who don't believe in His Humanity or Divinity cannot join us in saying, "Amen."

If one does not believe in the Holy Sacraments, one cannot repeat with us, "Truly this is so, Amen". And he who is not baptized by the water and spirit in the proper faith at the hands of God's agent is also not entitled to enter the holies.

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." [Mark 16 : 16]

The Eucharist is the summit of the Liturgy. And the Liturgy (Mass) is the pure vessel, which preserves our Orthodox faith, handed down to us. *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."* [Jud 1 : 20]



3 - "The Eucharist & The Commandment of Love"

"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." [John 13 : 1]

How amazing is it that John the Beloved commenced this great day with this proclamation that Christ loved His own (humankind) ... loved them infinitely and unconditionally (to the end).

These are some clues to His love: Washing feet ... the Crucifix and the Eucharist. For the Eucharist is a gift of love from the Bridegroom to His Bride (the redeemed Church). It's a symbol of the everlasting New Testament the love that never fails. That's why the Eucharist Sacrament is connected to the commandment of love. We all know how unworthy of approaching the Holy Sacraments is anyone who violates the commandment of love, by animosity, hostility, revenge, or...

We remember the teachings of our Good Savior, *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."* [Mat. 5 : 23 - 24]

It is insufficient for one to be a believer, or a baptized person or even a minister. One must be repentant, struggling

throughout one's life in the commandment of love. "*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*" [1 John 4 : 8]

This is the banquet of love, the specimen of eternal life, which consists of eternal love as well as eternal joy. So the church insists, following the prayer of reconciliation, to call on its people asking them to, "*Greet each other with a holy kiss, O Lord, show mercy, O Lord, show clemency.*"

Lord, have mercy upon me for I am a sinner who still falls in the sin of judging my neighbor. Forgive me, the sinner, for not serving others as should be. Forgive me, the sinner, for not pardoning or forgiving as I must. Forgive me, the sinner, for not overlooking wrongdoing against me, nor tolerating others as You commanded me.

Thus, this is an opportunity, not merely to offer love to those around us, in the form of a holy kiss, but an opportunity to revise our actions, offer true repentance, and resolve to leave each Mass with a stronger will to offer the required Christian love.

As the Holy Spirit descends upon us in every Mass, rendering us holy and worthy of holiness, so it also works upon us to broaden our hearts, bestowing on us from the overflowing Divine love. "*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" [Rom5:5]

If you fail to love your brethren as you should, kneel before the altar, and cry out seeking pardon and Divine

assistance from the source of all love, so you may be counted worthy to approach the sanctities.

Because the heart is expanded and blessed in each Mass, we find ourselves seeking nothing for ourselves, but for the construction of the church, priests, peace of the country, and for the sick, the poor, travelers, widows, orphans, strangers, and guests, for the sake of the whole world's salvation.

It seems as if each human being enters the liturgy as an individual, worried about his own affairs, and himself, but is transformed within it to a Christ-like figure who carries along the whole world, sacrificing himself for its sake.

The Enemy of Good attempts to spoil this celestial atmosphere, with his evil plans, so he penetrates us at the time of prayer, with thoughts of judgment, grumbling, condescension, boasting, and anger, which are all enemies of love, to deprive us of the gifts of the Eucharist, so that the Sacraments turns into judgment against us.

For this very reason Judas was considered unworthy, not only for losing his faith because of greed, but also for breaking the commandment of love in various ways, till evil got the better of him, and filled his heart, such that he could no longer love ... not even himself.

A private prayer of the priest, from the Basilian Mass, when the Holy Spirit descends, "May Your Holy Spirit descend upon us and upon these Sacraments, to transform them and render them holy for Your saints.

4 - "The Eucharist Among Fasting & Feasts"

As the Bible is our daily nourishment, by which we live and move, the Eucharist too represents the true Sacrament behind our enjoying fasting and feasts.

Our Coptic Church is distinct with an annual program of seasons that bring us into the depths of meditation, proximity and living the events that Christ lived on earth.

During the Nativity Fast, we anticipate Christ's coming on the clouds, longing, praising, and vigilant ... We perpetually await Him through partaking in the Holy Communion of the Lord's Body and Blood.

During the forty days' Holy Fasting, we offer our repentance with tears ... we sacrifice of our bodies in asceticism and austerity ... First nourishment to enter our mouths after fasting is the Body and Blood of the Lord.

During the Apostles' and St Mary's Fasts, we rejoice at our discipleship to those who went ahead of us to paradise ... we follow their example ... and we ask their intercession ... uniting secretly with them through our union in Christ's Body and Blood.

Every Wednesday and every Friday, we recall the Passion of our Savior, participating with Him through our physical struggle in fasting, so we receive His Body and Blood as reward for our struggle, our fasting and our prayers.

And when we celebrate feasts, we are unable to feel their taste except through uniting with our Lord Jesus Christ Body and Blood.

During Christmas we kneel with the Kings and Shepherds ... approaching the altar ... just like they approached the manger ... not just to touch Him ... but to partake of His Body and Blood ... living through and by Him.

During Palm Sunday we shout singing with those who shouted then: "Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Blessed are You who came descended to us the Heavens... we enter with Him to the New Jerusalem ... to His Holy Altar ... to partake of His Holy Body and Blood ... to live through and by Him.

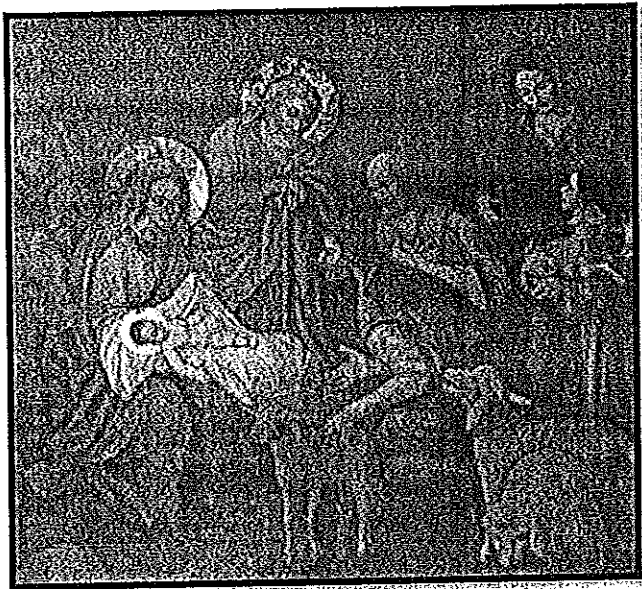
During the Resurrection ... we are full of Joy at His Victory over death for our sakes ... at His breaking the old thorn of death... at His breaking the authority of the devil on our behalf ... and we take all those blessings through our union with Him ... and our partaking of His Holy Body and Blood ... to live through and by Him.

During the Ascension ... we raise our eyes and hearts to Him ... towards the Heavens ... longing for the time He takes us with Him ... longing for His quick re-advent ... to carry us with Him over the clouds ... and we unite with Him ... through partaking of His Holy Body and Blood.

We don't know how to fast without partaking of His Holy Body and Blood right after ... and we are unable to taste the joy of feasts without uniting with Him through partaking of His Holy Body and Blood.

The Eucharist raises the Christians ... Just as the Christians raise the Eucharist during Holy Mass ...

This is the teaching of our Church and indeed this is the only way we know how to proceed in life.



5 - "The Eucharist Person"

The goal of all Christian life is to render each of us a Eucharistic person.

The literal meaning is intended to mean a person perpetually grateful

"What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord." [Ps.116 : 12 - 13]

For those who partake in the Holy Body and Blood, know nothing but to give thanks ... coz through partaking one is not only considered upright but indeed a saint ... Via partaking of the Holy Body and Blood one's sins are abolished and one is proclaimed worthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven ... what would remain after all this but continuous Thanksgiving?!!

In its depth, the meaning refers to a person who LIVES the Eucharist's Sacrament ... for he prays to be worthy of Holy Sacraments ... saying "Give us this day our daily bread"... Nothing is able to grant sufficiency in our alienation on earth except your "Heavenly Bread" ...

So Grant us Lord this "Daily Bread" ... today and every day.

A Eucharistic person ... repents in order to prepare for partaking of the Holy Sacraments ... kneeling in front of the altar worshipful ... crying for mercy ... crowning his struggle in his seclusion, and before the altar through partaking of the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord.

A Eucharistic person ... is the servant of the Eucharist ... who gets ready each day and every moment ... for this precise moment ... the sacred moment of meeting the Groom ... always keen on inviting all others for this Holy Meeting with our Lord.

A Eucharistic person ... finds happiness in the repentance of those most distant ... his blessing is fulfilled by means of their partaking in the Holy Sacraments.

A Eucharistic person ... preaches the Eucharist ... for in so doing he is indeed preaching of the incarnated Lord Christ ... he is preaching of His being tangible, sensed, observed through His Body and Blood on the altar ... as if he is saying,

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." [Ps. 3 : 8]

A Eucharistic person ... is a person who clings to the new Covenant ... in order to be counted among the choice few. *"Gather My saints together to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."* [Ps. 50 : 5] ... tolerating everything for the sake of the Eucharist ... being patient with all things and believing everything ... because he lives the true love that never fails ... the true love that is marked by the title of this great Sacrament ... the Sacrament of Eternal Love ... the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing, spanning the width of the page.