

## THE EUCHARIST AS AN EXPRESSION OF “TOGETHER IN CHRIST”



The Eucharist or Holy Communion was the final rite in the initiation practices of the ancient church. As the concluding rite of Christian initiation, the Holy Communion opens our eyes so that we understand that God's image in us is restored; we once more are called into a priestly ministry on behalf of creation. The Eucharistic prayer gives God thanks for creation and redemption and teaches us to interpret the longing of creation for their Creator, and at the same time it makes us understand that we are called to be the embodiment of this hope of creation's redemption. This redemption or restoration of the created world is depicted representatively in the bread and wine as gifts from God's gifts to us, created entities given back to God, and received anew as carriers of Christ's presence. The Eucharist pictures all of creation as created by God through the Word to bear witness to him who called creation into being from non-being, in existence from non-existence. And like the Creator has become our neighbour, so we are the neighbours of creation. Like the Creator meets us person to person, and calls us by our name, we'll meet creation responsibly, and name it in the presence of God.

The Eucharist will open us for looking upon creation with new eyes and glimpse the fullness of Christ as the goal, fulfilment and consummation of creation and redemption.

What is true in relation to creation is also true - and to a higher degree - in relation to our fellow humans, not the least those who have not heard the Gospel or received Jesus Christ as their master and saviour. We are also priests on behalf of the unsaved world, and we are witnesses for Christ and live as a sign of God's kingdom to the world: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1. Peter 2:9-10).

### Seeing creation with new eyes



The vision for Christfulness is a renewed and redeemed humanity, which is the body of Christ. This reality is rooted in hope and comes to expression when we celebrate communion together and share bread with each other with the words of Jesus, "This is my body!"

But we may enlarge the perspective to say that Christfulness is about a sacramental worldview. This means that we look upon creation and upon our fellow creatures with new eyes; we are aware of the potentialities

in our fellow created beings and entities, and we see them as fulfilled in Christ. Examples of this is the blessing of the baptismal water and holy water, and it is unfolded in the communion service.

The physical properties of water are pointing beyond themselves since baptism is the bath of regeneration or of a new birth. Thus, the ritual for the blessing of the waters has a creation-theological significance. The ritual is creation-theology expressed as liturgical praxis. The ritual is about the sanctification of creation and signifies that every created being is created for serving its fellow creatures, and that every created being is a gift of God for its fellow-creatures. Water is not just H<sub>2</sub>O, but what water is physically, it is also designed to be spiritually, because everything is created through Christ and to Christ.

The blessing of water as well as the blessing of any other created entity puts a consumerist attitude towards creation right. The blessing lifts creation out of reification (i.e., considering creation as a thing) and commoditisation and sets it free to serve according to God's ordinances - according to its original calling from God. The blessing of the baptismal waters starts with an exorcism in order to remove or expel those elements that are against God and life and which cling to the created world because of the failures of humanity. This frees creation to become what it was created to be. The following blessing appreciates creation and honors the intentions of our God-Creator for creation. The blessing opens our eyes to the full significance of the created entity, e.g., water: water cleanses refreshes, fertilizes and produces fruits, and it quenches the thirst of other creatures. And as we ask the Holy Spirit to descend upon the water, we understand that the water's gift of service is fulfilled

in the water of the bath of regeneration, which opens us to receive the Holy Spirit as the water of life. This is the reason for many churches to bless the baptismal waters and not only in a consumerist manner simply to take water from the tap into the baptismal font.

Nowadays we meet a need for re-enchantment and re-ritualisation of existence, and to experience how all of creation bear witness to God's presence. We're longing to see creation set free in its logos-quality. Every created being and all of creation is created by the Logos, the Word, and will only become itself, if it serves the whole and the other parts of creation because God served us in sharing God's own being with us and in calling us to existence through God's creating Word. There is a need to experience salvation in concrete and specific ways. We can't only believe in abstract thoughts, but we believe in and trust the Word of God, who became flesh. Faith receives a salvation for the whole human being, not only for the mind.

The same thing is happening at the Eucharist when the bread becomes the body of Christ. The communion service becomes a microcosmic event through which we experience how creation is fulfilled and consummated in Christ, and how we only have our part therein, if we follow the logos of life: to share and to live in serving love.



The backdrop for the communion service is Jesus' meals with his disciples, with the outcasts, and occasionally with the religious elite. Among the meals we find the feeding miracles, The Gospels tell us, how Jesus a couple of times taught several thousand people until evening. He wouldn't send them away hungry, but since he and his disciples didn't have food for so many people, he blessed a few breads, broke them, and had his disciples share the bread with the crowd. Thus, some thousand men

and women were fed with a few breads. At one of these events, Jesus talked about himself as the bread of life:

”I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (John 6:51).

### **The Passover meal and the institution of Holy Communion**

But the meal that more than any other meal points towards ”the breaking of the bread” among the first Christians and the communion service of the church was Jesus’ last supper with his disciples before his death on the cross. The last supper was a Passover meal, i.e. the yearly meal that Jewish families celebrated to commemorate their liberation from slavery in Egypt. In the beginning of the meal Jesus took the bread and gave thanks. He probably used the words from the traditional Passover ritual: ”Blessed are you, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the Earth!” He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples. Jesus finished the meal with the cup of thanksgiving; traditionally this was giving thanks for creation, freedom or salvation, and it included a prayer for the people. What was different from any other Passover meal was some words Jesus added to the sharing of bread and wine: ”This is my body!” and ”This is my blood!” In this way Jesus linked the Passover meal to his death on the following day as a sacrifice of love, and he said that his disciples should remember or commemorate him doing what he did at this meal.



When we gather at the communion service, we do what Jesus told his apostles to do in remembrance of him. We do, what Jesus did – however in a simplified way:

He took bread, and he took the cup (Chalice). For this reason in many churches bread and wine are brought forward up to the altar, where the pastor (priest) takes the elements (bread and wine).

He gave thanks, i.e. he prayed the blessings on bread and wine as well as the great prayer of thanksgiving as mentioned above. For this reason the Eucharistic prayer is the central piece of the communion service in most churches. Eucharist means thanksgiving.

He broke the bread, and so do we. The one bread is broken into many pieces in order for us to share, and as all the pieces together is one bread, so we are parts or members of one body

He gave them the bread as his body and the wine as his blood. We receive Jesus and become what we eat, the body of Christ.

When we do what Jesus did, Holy Communion becomes a sharing of gifts.

### Sharing of gifts and transformation



At the communion service we bring the elements of nature forward. The grains and the grapes are gifts for us. Bringing the gifts from nature to the altar is a recognition of nature in its own right, and when we bring them forward with thanksgiving, we express that God has given Godself to us in nature, but also that nature gives itself to us for life and for joy. But we have processed God's gifts in nature, and now we bring them to God. We are like children coming to our parents saying: "Look, what I have made! This is for you!" It's like giving life, ourselves with all our faculties and everything that God has given us back to God, making grain into bread and grapes into wine and now presenting these to God. At the same time our processing grain and grapes expresses that we have seen a quality in these elements which we now have given the form of bread and wine. The offering of bread and wine is at the same time giving nature and its gifts and ourselves to God.



In the Eucharistic prayer we thank God for creation, freedom and life given to us in Jesus Christ, and we pray for the world, our fellow humans and fellow disciples, for unity and peace.

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But now God accepts our gift and processes it once more. God puts Godself into bread and wine and says with Jesus: "This is my body and blood!" God passes Godself to us and gives Godself anew to us in exactly that bread and that wine, that we at first had received as Gods creational gift, and that we gave

back to God as the work of our hands and as an expression of who we are.

Yet we only receive God and God's giving Godself to us, if we become like God as God meets us in our Master Jesus Christ. We can't receive the bread without breaking it and sharing it with one another. Likewise we can't receive the wine unless we pass the cup to one another. It's by sharing

that we receive God-in-Christ – the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, Holy Communion is the strongest expression of what the fellowship of Christ's followers is about: To serve as God has served us in creation and in Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist restores the pattern of servant love in the life we share with others. Every created being and entity becomes what it was created to be when we serve one another and the whole. Thus the Earth becomes whole. In this manner the Eucharist sets the norm for how to live in the disciples' fellowship as well as in the world, but it also helps us to look upon the world with new eyes, that aren't consumeristic, but see nature and creation as gifts and signs. The Eucharist helps us to see God's stamp upon and presence in our co-creation, so that we understand that the aim of creation is the sanctification of everything in Christ – just like the bread is transformed and sanctified as the body of Christ.



As in a micro-cosmic action the Eucharist heals the imbalance of Nature. The missing harmony and peace in Nature was caused by human's abuse of Nature, because we had subverted it into a commodity or a consumable item. Our lust and desire had brought suffering into the world. A pattern of abuse was formed, and we got the feeling that nature is a wilderness and a wasteland that we have to conquer; through this we have made our fellow creatures and each other into objects for us to desire. The Eucharist sets another pattern, characterized by serving love, which breaks the pattern of abuse. That's why we not only give God thanks for creation, but also for the deliverance from enslavement under the pattern of abuse. And that's why the Eucharistic prayer includes an intercession for the world. Through communion we have an intimate relationship with Christ as members of his body. Thus, Holy Communion is the heart of a Christ-focused life – both for the fellowship of disciples and for the individual believer – a life following Jesus Christ.

## **A Eucharistic ritual**

The ritual below is formed in accordance with the original pattern for the celebration of Holy Communion:

- He took bread and wine → Hymn and bringing bread and wine to the altar
- He gave thanks → Eucharistic prayer following the pattern of thanksgiving over the last cup
  - giving thanks for creation
  - giving thanks for freedom or salvation
  - a prayer for the people → intercession
- He broke the bread → Breaking of the bread
- The meal → Communion, sharing Christ's body and blood

*Hymn* (offertory, bringing bread and wine to the altar)

### *Eucharistic Prayer*

*Priest:* The Lord be with you!

*Answer:* And with your spirit!

*Priest:* Lift up your hearts!

*All:* We lift them up unto the Lord!

*Priest:* Let us give thanks unto our Lord God!

*All:* It is meet and right so to do!

*Priest:* It is very meet and right, that we should at all times give thanks unto thee, Father God, Almighty, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

#### *Giving thanks for creation and salvation*

Through Him you did call forth all creatures out of darkness. Also humans were created by you; in your image you created us. You gave us responsibility for this earth, and you allowed us to recognize your presence in all which you have created, that we as one human race of brothers and sisters would serve you and worship your presence. We confess that we have broken your confidence, but when we sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, you did send to us. Christ your Son, the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings. He did show us the kingdom of Light, men descended through the cross into the darkness as a corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. But he rose from the dead as the first fruit of restored humankind.

#### *Intercession*

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ we approach you as members of the earthly creation and as those to whom you have called to be responsible for our fellow creatures. We offer the world, ourselves and our fellow creature to your healing love.

*Deacon:* We will unite in love for the Earth and all living beings and ask God, that God's love in Jesus Christ will enlighten the Earth... enclose all of humanity... and especially heal XXX (*mention an area in need of prayer*) and seal the door of the house of the evil and all destructive energies.

*Silent prayers*

Let us pray for persons we know in need of help because of suffering in mind, spirit or body, or for those who feel trapped in destructive patterns of life or lost in a darkness without God, that God renews, restores and heals their lives.

*Silent prayer.*

*Priest:* Lord, thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created!

*All:* And thou renewest the face of the earth!

*The intercession ends up in the concluding praise of the Eucharistic prayer:*

*Priest:* Father! You are God, greater than principalities, powers, authorities, or names in this age, but in the age to come, yea in all ages. Thus the entire creation will be fulfilled in the worship of you, and thus we with your congregation on earth as in heaven, chorusing with all angels sing the praise of your glory:

*All:* Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

*Priest:* See to us, o God, [*he takes the bread in his hands*] and bless, and sanctify this bread, yea send your Holy Spirit, and make it unto us the body (+) of your Son Jesus Christ,

*All:* Who in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread, and, when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.

*Priest:* See to us, o God, [*he takes the cup in his hands*] and bless, and sanctify this wine, yea send your Holy Spirit and make it unto us the blood (+) of your Son Jesus Christ,

*All:* Who after supper took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.

***The breaking of the bread***

*During the breaking of the bread all may sing Agnus Dei; after the breaking of the bread all pray The Lord's Prayer*

***Communion***