

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

June 2, 2013. Year C

Theme: Take, Bless, Break, Give

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How astounding, how awe-inspiring to think the same Eucharistic tradition and words used by Christians within twenty years of the Master's death and resurrection will be exactly what we will use here today.

Despite the accretions of two millennia of history's developments and diverse cultures additions we will do what the first generation of Christians did, namely:

Take bread, bless it, break it and then give it to be eaten.

Early on, maybe even from Jesus himself those four verbs -- take, bless, break and give -- took on sacred significance when used in this order together.

Our patron St. Paul recorded that earliest known use of the sequence in First Letter to the Corinthians as we heard today.

He wrote to this community of believers in about 48 to 50, so about twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

He described Last Supper and Jesus' own actions at that meal: he took bread, he blessed it, he broke it and distributed it to the disciples.

This same Eucharistic sequence, instructed Paul, is what the Corinthians were to follow.

Clearly, he was not alone in this tradition, however.

If we scour the Gospels, we find no less than ten more example of the take, bless, bread, give tradition:

Three are the other Last Supper accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke, parallel to what Paul wrote though some twenty to thirty years later.

Then would you believe we have six different versions of today's Gospel story: the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and in every single one of them Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the people to eat.

Clearly this story was much beloved by the early church to appear so often.

And for every single version of it to include to four-verb formula -- take, bless, break, give --- it must have carried precious memories and special Eucharistic meaning for those earliest believers.

There's one more take-bless-break-give text, and an extremely important one because it is an after the resurrection appearance of Jesus; it is an action of the risen Lord.

Recall the story of the two disciples leaving Jerusalem on their way to Emmaus on Easter evening.

They were dispirited and depressed over all that that happened when suddenly Jesus was walking with them though they did not recognize him.

In the course of the conversation he began to explain the scriptures to them and how the messiah had to suffer and die.

When the two arrived at their destination they convinced him to stay with them and when at the evening meal he -- you got it -- took bread, blessed, broke, and gave it to them, their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

The two rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the others how they had met the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread.

So there we have eleven New Testament instances of a four part ritual - take, bless, break, give - likely used by Jesus himself, clearly used by the earliest church, historically used in the liturgy and in just a few moments to be at the heart of our own worship.

Okay, some might say, that's interesting or entertaining or boring, but so what: what's it got to do with us?

Fair enough.

First, to be repeating, to be continuing precisely the same ritual action the Lord Jesus did with his disciples is sacred reason enough to repeat them again and again in his memory.

Taking, blessing, breaking, and giving makes his presence alive in our midst again.

But secondly, and here we are again going to find our patron Paul a help, the four verbs are not only descriptive of what we do with bread.

They also describe the paschal mystery which as we know the bread and cup represent:

Did not the Son of God take on our human nature?

Did he not bless our humanity by the way he lived among us with compassion and goodness?

Was he not broken on the cross?

Did he not give his own life for the sins of the world?

Or as St. Paul reminded the Corinthians:

As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of The Lord until he comes.

In other words, every time we take the bread and bless it and break it and give it to each other we are yet again proclaiming the death of The Lord until he comes.

In response to the word of God today may I invite you to listen especially carefully for the four verbs of Jesus in today's liturgy.

Hear him saying them in the hillside of Galilee.

See the Corinthians praying them just twenty years after his death.

See Christians through the centuries saying them over bread and wine.

Hear them - take, bless, break, give - echoing across the face of the earth this lord's day.

On this feat of the body and blood of the Lord let's also see if we can't bring real spirit of sacredness and even class to our communal reception of the sacrament.

A several of our masses we do really well at standing together as a community until all have received and then observing our personal time of silent prayer on our knees or seated.

But our attitude and postures in the procession needs attention.

We are processing to the table of the lord to receive the bread of life, the most precious and powerful gift possible.

We should approach the table then in a spirit of reverent awe - never non-chalance, or casualness or thoughtlessness.

Nor is the communion procession the appropriate time to greet and socialize with others - that time is before the liturgy or at the greeting of peace.

Two things I believe can help us stay in the moment of the communion procession:

First, engage in a ritual as you come to the table.

Instead of just clasping your hands down in sprint of you, do what St. Augustine once told his people to do: form a kind of throne to receive The Lord of your life.

From the lamb of God until the bread is placed in your hands, keep them outstretched and ready to receive the bread that is about to be (remember the fourth verb!) given to you.

Then as you return to your seat and stand at your place, cross your arms in front of your chest as gesture of welcome.

Imagine if most of us in the room did such gestures the impact it would have on us all.

The second thing that would keep us in the moment is singing the communion processional song.

It's possible to carry the song sheet and make the throne and receive communion.

And just listen to how the song helps to keep us in the moment.