

EUCHARIST - I

The Eucharist, which the Dogmatic Constitution “*Lumen Gentium*” defines as “the source and summit of Christian Life” (LG 11), makes us “really share in the body of the Lord”: in it “we are taken up into communion with him” (LG 7). That is where we realize Eucharist is prayer. There is no doubt about it. When we participate in the Eucharist, we experience the total essence of prayer and praise. One can term without hesitation that Eucharist is the best form of prayer, which carries a direct impact on us and in our relationship with God. It’s a sacrifice that enables us to go beyond every imperfect way of our daily prayer and praise because we commune with God through the best channel of grace.

There are no definite definitions for prayer. All the mystics and saints admit this fact. Prayer cannot be just limited to certain acts or words or gestures alone. Whoever may give an explanation or define prayer, it will fall short in its content and essence. We know that prayer is our efforts at being with God, conversing with him to comply with his will. Through our own experience we know that prayer can always help us live better, learn things well, relate with God and neighbour at a deeper level and do our work completely.

It has been clearly specified in documents and Encyclicals of Popes that Eucharist is the essence of Christian life and culmination of our worship. There is no argument against it. How can Eucharist be the essence, nourishment, and the centre of Christian life? We draw explanation from Jesus’ words: “Unless you eat his flesh and drink his blood you will not have life in you” John 6.53.

1. Eucharist is a Prayer of Blessing and Thanksgiving

The word “Eucharist” is made up of two roots *Eu* and *Charistia*, which come from the Jewish concept *berakah*, which means ‘blessing’. ‘Blessing’ the Latin word is “Bene-dictio” signifies

“good word”, which literally means ‘a word of appreciation’. The first part of the word ‘Eucharist’ comes from Greek root ‘*Eu*’ means *Eulogia* signifying ‘praise’, ‘good word’. The root *Charis* comes from *Charism* and *Charismatic*. Summarizing we can say that the word ‘Eucharist’ signifies ‘good word’, ‘good grace’, and ‘thanks’.

To elaborate the Hebrew word *berakah* in relationship with ‘Eucharist’ is ‘blessing’. Blessing is given and blessing obtained or taken. Ultimately ‘Blessing’ forms the integral essence of prayer. Eucharist is a blessing insofar it contains grace, thanks and praise. These elements certainly form the part of any type of prayer experience.

When we make efforts to understand these words, we begin to realize its essence as ‘comfortable atmosphere’, ‘pleasant surrounding’, ‘gracefulness’, and ‘thanksgiving’ and perhaps even to the extent of conveying a ‘word of appreciation’.

Through a blessing we obtain something, and we are strengthened. That means blessing contains a power. Usually whatever the power experienced in the presence of the divine, we term it ‘grace’. We know that grace is not a part of God, but God himself descending in our life to strengthen us, to encourage us and to make us happy. God’s grace in our life is of three types: the presence by essence: presence by grace and presence by friendship. In the Holy Eucharist, precisely, all these three types of presence are clearly seen or experienced.

Thanksgiving is an act of gratitude and appreciation. Jesus’ Last Supper was an act of thanksgiving prayer to the Father for all his help and closeness during his earthly life. Every meal for that matter is an act of thanksgiving. Of course life itself is an act of thanksgiving. We see in the Gospels, Jesus thanking the Father for his disciples, for his teaching, and other things in his life.

2. Eucharist is a Prayer of Memorial

‘Do this in memory of me’. The work *Zikkaron* in Hebrew signifies ‘memorial’. In memory of something or someone helps us to recall the past. It’s a reminder to us; reminder of the past in the present and as miserable we are, on our part a reminder to God. Every prayer is a memorial of the one, who created us, sustains and sanctifies us and it is a memorial to the one who has created and continues to sustain us. All the Psalms are a reminder of God’s deeds and a reminder to God that we are still alive through his mercy.

Memory – memorial is to recall to mind the wonderful deeds of the Lord. In the Eucharist we remember the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord as we remember through paintings and photos our dear and near ones who are abroad, or dead and gone before us. Memorial brings out all that we want to recall about a person: we become nostalgic, sad, happy, serene, upset, are filled with emotion etc.

Sin is forgetfulness: Israelites forgot God’s deeds and they sinned. We forget and we sin. We forget many good things of life and we sin. Forgetfulness means *amnesia*. Anamnesis is remembrance. Eucharist is Anamnesis, which means remembrance = do this in memory of me.

(Part II will be in the next issue)

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