

THE PASTOR'S POINTS- June 3, 2018

Our table habits, formed at our kitchen and dining room tables, give us a sense of who we are as individuals, as family, and as community. Ingrained within us at an early age, patterns of eating and drinking with others give us a feeling of security and confirms our sense of belonging. We know who we are as well as who we are not by what and how we eat and drink, by when and where and with whom we share our food and lift our glass.

Our ways of preparing, serving and sharing food and drink unite us with the past and present communities of family (woe to anyone who wants to change either the menu – OR the dishes' ingredients for Thanksgiving dinner!), of region (Philadelphia 'cheese steaks' or Cincinnati chili) and of nationality ('7 fishes' for Italian Christmas Eve or Christmas tamales in the Southwest). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that most people are somewhat resistant to changes in their eating and drinking habits. Remember the first time someone said "Let's go to a sushi restaurant"? Trying to convince Americans to put mayonnaise on their French fries as the Belgians do is usually a futile effort. That may be acceptable on the other side of the Atlantic but here we seem to be firmly ensconced with ketchup!

Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholics have experienced more changes in *sacramental* table habits than in the previous 13 centuries. Our fasting is less rigorous. (If you can remember when it was from midnight then you are at least as old as me!) We receive the Body of Christ more frequently, usually standing, more often from a lay minister, and generally receiving the host in our hands. We also are encouraged to receive the Blood of Christ as well.

It's disappointing to see how many pass the cup by – when this is the blood that has redeemed us. Given our reluctance to change our table habits, we can have some sympathy about our *sacramental* table habits. But why? What are our reservations? And can our hesitation become an opportunity to investigate anew the Mystery of Christ among us?

Some reservations come from a fear of disease and the possible spread of germs. The early church would never have thought of anything BUT eating Christ's Body AND drinking Christ's Blood at the Eucharist. The cup disappeared originally in times of plague. The plague was spread from the fleas of rats; it had nothing to do with the common cup. Modern medical research has concluded that there is no known outbreak of disease directly related to this liturgical practice. Individuals with colds should of course use common sense and refrain from receiving from the cup.

But perhaps a deeper issue is reflected in the remark of one communicant who, in opposition to the practice of communion from the cup said: "That was fine for the Last Supper where only a small group of good friends were gathered together." The implication in this honest statement is that the Sunday Eucharist is a gathering of strangers, and we do not share drinking vessels with strangers.

Perceiving ourselves as a gathering of strangers may be the biggest and most consistent obstacle to all Church renewal. It's why we take the time at the beginning of each mass to introduce visitors and newly registered members, and why we should make the effort to know the names of those we sit near Sunday after Sunday. (I hope to have 'name tag Sundays' a

couple of times a year so that we can do that without embarrassment!) The gospel invites us to see one another with a new vision: we are, in fact, the family of God and never more so than when we assemble to hear the Word, break the bread, and take up this saving cup. The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist calls us to practice in our bodies what we profess on our lips. By responding to the Lord's invitation to 'take and drink' from the Eucharistic cup we are challenged to turn from a vision of Church where we gather with strangers to a vision where we assemble with friends – not so much because we perceive one another to be friends but because each of us has been called friend by Christ whose Blood was shed to make us one.

The Roman Missal states clearly: "Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it takes place under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clearer expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the connection between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Kingdom of the Father." (GIRM #281)

One further note. We are switching to red wine, an obviously easier symbol for blood than white wine. In doing a bit of research on this however, I must admit that I DID find out that IN THE EAST (Greek tradition) of the Church, there exists the tradition of using WHITE wine because it was seen as something new in the kingdom of God. Given that our western mentality is generally not so mystical (and this was news to me in my 64th year of being a Catholic!), I think we will more easily identify with the symbolism of red wine for blood.

As we strive to enter more fully into the Eucharist, it is good to remember that the liturgical renewal of our Sunday assemblies is a journey. We never arrive until we come at last to that gathering of God's children where there will be no blinding of our vision to prevent us from seeing one another as brothers, sisters, friends. Until that final and lasting feast of the Lamb we are given the Bread and saving Cup as strength for the journey. May our celebrations each Lord's Day prepare us for the great banqueting table of heaven. Amen! (adapted from Andrew D. Ciferni, O. Praem)