

The Breaking of the Bread and the Lamb of God

The breaking of the consecrated bread was, in the first years of the Church and during several centuries, a practical gesture necessary to prepare the particles that would be distributed in Communion. Since small hosts didn't exist, the Mass was celebrated with unleavened bread that later had to be broken in order to be distributed to the faithful. However, this gesture also had other symbolic meanings in reference to the Eucharist. The connection between that moment and the moment of the institution of the Eucharist where Jesus, as the Jewish paterfamilias, nourished His disciples with His Body and His Blood, was clear to everyone. Many people saw this sign as a memory of the multiplication of the bread as Jesus broke it (cf. Mt 14:19; Mk 6:41). Another common interpretation is the memorial of Emmaus, where the discouraged disciples whose hearts had been enflamed once more with Jesus' words, recognized the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:30-35). **All of these images caused the Eucharist at first to be referred to as the breaking of the bread, "fractio panis" (cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 10:6).**

Later on, during this liturgical moment, the singing of the Lamb of God was introduced (Agnus Dei). In this way, a new reality is underlined, the sacrificial and salvific dimension of the Eucharist. Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. The nourishment that He gives is His immolated Body. In this way, the sense of communion and sacrifice is presented united. The breaking of the bread prepares the nourishment of the Christians, the sacrificed Body of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of the new Easter (cf. Apoc 5:6,13).

In this way, the surrender that Jesus Christ makes of Himself as a sacrificed Bread-Body is clearly made manifest. When the faithful worthily receive the Eucharist, it makes both of them (Christ and the faithful) one united thing. The Mystical Body of Christ is thus constantly renewed and can live His life (1 Cor 10:17).

A simple and at the same time important gesture is the commixtio. It consist of the introduction of a small particle of the Body of Christ in the chalice. Its origins date back to the beginning of Christi-

anity. The Pope celebrated the Mass and sent the priests to celebrate in the churches on the outskirts of the city. He gave each one of them a small particle of the Eucharist that he had consecrated, and that received the name of fermentum. Each priest, during the celebration of Mass, introduced the fermentum into the chalice as a sign of communion with the Pope. Thus the Eucharist was made manifest as the sacrament of unity. **Later on, another theological meaning was developed. The union of the two species of the consecrated bread and wine, which until that moment were separated, symbolizes the sole, glorious person of Christ, vivified by the Holy Spirit.** The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says: “The priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the living and glorious Body of Jesus Christ.” (GIRM, 83)

Then the priest, presenting the consecrated Host to the faithful, repeats the words of St. John the Baptist: “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). And adds the words that, according to the Apocalypse, the celestial liturgy proclaims: “A voice coming from the throne... like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said:... ‘Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.’” (cf. Apoc. 19:1-9) In fact, the priest says: **“Happy are those who are called to his supper.”**

Then, the faithful respond with the words of the Roman centurion, who was awestruck by Christ’s humility and daring trust: **“Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say a word and I shall be healed.”** (Mt. 8:8-10)

Knowing the meaning of the words and gestures of the liturgy will, without a doubt, help us to enter into communion with the Lord. However, **a lively faith is essential in those who participate in the Eucharist.** Discovering the presence of the Lord, His love that becomes a gift in order to come into communion with us, is key. In the words of Benedict XVI, **“The Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, thus revealing to us God’s infinite love for every man and woman.”** (SC, 1)

Let us ask Mary, the Eucharistic woman, once again, to help us not to miss the treasure that God has given us in the Eucharist, rather than in loving and living the mystery of Christ, we may be transformed in Him.

The Story of Suzanne Aubert

When a young Suzanne Aubert left home in 1860 to join a mission on the other side of the world, she began a New Zealand adventure that would last for 66 years.

The early days

Suzanne Aubert was a determined young woman who, as soon as she was legally free to decide her own future, left Lyon in France to begin her life-long spiritual journey.

As a young woman, Suzanne had repeatedly but unsuccessfully asked her parents' permission to join religious life. Finally, with the freedom to decide, at the age of 25 she accepted an invitation to become a missionary for Bishop Pompallier's Auckland diocese.

After working initially at a boarding school for Māori girls, Suzanne left Auckland to work at the Marist Māori mission station at Meanee in Hawke's Bay with the Third Order of Mary. She became well-known in the area ministering to Māori and Pākehā, Catholic and non-Catholic without compromising her own beliefs. Tolerance and friendship became strategies for her mission.

In 1874 Suzanne was pinning her hopes for a revival of the Māori mission on the new Bishop of Wellington, Bishop Redwood, who was to become her lifelong supporter. In 1883, by invitation of the Māori from the Whanganui River area, Suzanne left Hawke's Bay for Hiruhārama/Jerusalem – to revive the Catholic mission.

It's here that the home-grown Catholic congregation – the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion – was born.

The birth of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion

“Never forget that we were first instituted for the Māori, that we began in the bush, that by our vows we are concentrated to their service. They have the first claim on our love, on our care. A Māori village was the cradle of our institute”.

On Christmas Day 1885, Bishop Redwood blessed St Joseph's Church. When it was burnt down three years later, Suzanne set off on a collecting tour of New Zealand, returning in 1893 with £1000 – enough to build a new church and convent.

In 1892 Archbishop Redwood appointed



Suzanne as Mother Superior of the newly established Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion.

During her tour, Suzanne had become acutely aware of the challenges faced by poor and unmarried mothers and their babies. She took 74 babies and children into their care but Hiruhārama was too isolated from medical services. So Suzanne set her sights on Wellington, arriving unannounced in the city in 1899 with two Sisters.

Work starts in Wellington

The Sisters immediately started work with Wellington's suffering and destitute planning a much-needed home. They set up a soup kitchen (that still operates today) and a crèche for children of working parents. Land was bought in Island Bay and, in 1907, the Our Lady's Home of Compassion was opened.



Suzanne never stood still, her reputation spread far and wide. She rose to every challenge that came her way, travelling to Rome in 1913 at the age of 78 to present her case to the Pope.

More than four years later, Pope Benedict XV granted the Decree of Praise to the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion. The Decree changed everything:

- It protected all the works she had started
- It widened her scope for healthcare
- It protected her resolution that their work would be for everyone

It recognised her interpretation of New Zealand society and spirituality

In early 1920 a frail but triumphant Suzanne returned home to Island Bay to the Sisters who, in her absence, had remained true to her cause. Back at the helm, she arranged for extensive alterations to the home for a surgical section and, in 1922, the Sisters began nursing training for the new hospital.

On 1 October 1926 at the age of 91, Suzanne died in the presence of her Sisters. As word spread, the crowds gathered to pay their respects. Wellington's streets and roofs were packed with people silently watching the hearse pass by. It was widely reported to be the greatest ever funeral accorded to a woman in New Zealand.

Suzanne Aubert was buried at Karori cemetery, her remains being transferred to the home she founded in Island Bay 25 years later.