

**TEN ESSAYS
ON
THE LORD'S SUPPER
BY
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I Dedicate This Book

To My Friend,

Bill Israel,

With Gratitude

For All He Has Done

To Encourage Me

In Ministry

And In Life

In

JESUS CHRIST

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CAVEAT LECTOR

READER BEWARE

The ten roughly composed essays in this collection are unrelated independent statements made at different times. Other than the Lord's Supper as a common theme, these essays are not connected. In addition to redundant expressions within any one of them, there is some repetition of the same ideas in several of the essays.

Let the reader decide if there is enough value in these essays to justify their existence. I present them because I believe there are some precious stones of profound insights and strong encouragement embedded in this plethora of words. Mine the gems. Toss the dross.

William Wilson

INTRODUCTION

From Whom, to Whom, How, and Why

These pages express my devotional thoughts about Holy Communion. I hope this composition will illumine and inspire some of my sisters and brothers in Christ. Only you can judge if it is effective. I am neither a scholar nor a theologian, just an elder brother in the Lord. Any truth you find here comes from the Holy Spirit working in my reflections and interpretations of the mystery of the Lord's Supper.

As reader, you have a right to know where I am coming from. I was a Roman Catholic monk and priest until I married at fifty-one years of age. Much of the richness of my understanding of the "Mass" comes from the Latin tradition. For the past twenty years I have belonged to the broader, non-Roman, "catholic and apostolic" church. The influence of Protestant thought has enabled me to see beyond the limits of my former Roman Catholic perspective. These essays, therefore, are a contemporary reformation of Roman Catholic thought and devotion to the Lord's Supper.

I am no longer a member in good standing of the Church of Rome. I felt obliged to follow my conscience even when it led me to transgress the canons of that church. I owe very much to my Roman Catholic formation. I have great love and gratitude toward the ancient Church of Rome. She will always be my first mother church. I have great sorrow that I cannot submit to some of the more onerous traditions of men that have crept into its faith and practice. The "holy, catholic, and apostolic church" that is now my mother is the whole Body of Christ that consists in the sum total of all faithful Christians throughout the world. That is the true, original, and forever authentic "catholic" church.

The Roman Catholic Church is the oldest continuously existing organization in the world. With more than a billion members, it is by far the largest church institution. However, the Roman Catholic Church remains only a part of the whole catholic church, the Body of Christ'.

I address these essays, in the first place, to Christians who are not in the Roman Catholic Church.

Roman Catholics, with few exceptions, do not read religious writing whose author does not belong to their denomination. Not until my life-time have Roman Catholics even been allowed to read books that do not have official church approval, the "imprimatur", granted by a Roman bishop. This book would certainly not receive an "imprimatur"! The concepts in it are too revolutionary. Some of the ideas in these essays would be scandalous to many Roman Catholics. Yet there may be some brothers and sisters in the Latin Church who

would discover in these pages deeper meaning and greater devotion to the mass.

PROTESTANTS AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Greek Orthodox and the Latin Church have preserved the mystery of the Eucharist. However, both traditions have completely “clericalized” it as an exclusive power and province of ordained priests. They, unwittingly no doubt, have taken the Lord’s Supper away from the whole body of Christian people to whom Jesus gave it and have reserved it as the special domain of ordained (male only!) clergy. In this arrangement, all “lay” followers of Christ are totally dependent upon ordained clergy for access to the mystery of the Lord’s Supper. This human tradition in these churches confers a supreme spiritual power exclusively upon the clergy while it leaves all women and non-ordained men in a position of need and dependency. The imposition of this hierarchical social arrangement upon the baptized, who are all one and equal in Christ, hardly seems to be what the Lord Jesus had in mind at the table on the night before He suffered.

At the time of Luther, the clergy received income in the form of stipends for multiplying ‘masses for the dead’—a practice far removed from the intentions of the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper. The mass was recited by the priest in Latin—a dead language not understood by the people.

The late medieval mass seems to have become a ritual performed for spectators, in an unknown tongue, by a profession priest thought to possess personal supernatural power to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The priest “said” mass. The faithful “heard” mass. This form of the Lord’s Supper has very little to do with what Our Lord meant when He told His friends to “do this in memory of me.”

Understandably, the Reformers tended to move away from the “mass” in reaction to these spurious traditions of the Roman Church. Instead, the Reformers emphasized the Bible as the center of their faith and worship. Over the last five centuries, the Roman Church has taken lessons from the Reformers by giving greater emphasis to the Bible in its theology and devotion. Now, contemporary Protestant Christians are thinking more deeply about the mystery of the Lord’s Supper and taking it more seriously. These essays are meant to stir the faith and devotion of the non-Roman catholic Christians in their experience of the Lord’s Supper.

FAITH IN THE MYSTERY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Let no Christian Gnosticism be insinuated in these essays. From the beginning of our faith communities in the first century, there were Gnostic tendencies. These deviant expressions of faith maintained that “knowledge” of the secret teachings of Jesus was the privilege of a higher class of “spiritual” Christians.

Therefore, from the outset, let it be clearly stated and understood that having more knowledge or devotion in regard to the Eucharistic mystery does not make a Christian morally or spiritually better than any other baptized believer. Growth in Christian moral and spiritual maturity is a matter of increasing in the life of sacrificial love empowered by the Holy Spirit. Period!

Faith, “sola fide”, in the apostolic gospel confers eternal life. Baptism brings us out of death into life in the family of believers. The newly baptized believer is a full member of the church equal to all others. Christians cannot allow ‘clerical ordination’ or ‘higher knowledge of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist’ or anything else to create a false hierarchy of status in the Life we share in Christ.

Sola Fide! We partake of this Supper as an expression of our faith that all salvation and all sanctification come only from the sacrificial Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, offered once and forever upon the cross.

If it is not necessary for salvation and sanctification, why should we seek or promote renewal of understanding and devotion to the Lord’s Supper?

A deeper understanding of the mystery of the Supper is simply another way in which Christians can experience in their hearts and minds the Gift that is given in its entirety to every believer at baptism. Christians who see much precious divine meaning in the Supper desire that their brothers and sisters in Christ enjoy same spiritual treasure.

STARTING POINT FOR CONVERSATION ABOUT THE LORD’S SUPPER

Our Lord Jesus wants the Bread and the Cup we share to give witness and strength to the unity we have in Him. It grieves Our Lord when those who receive the holy mystery from Him use their interpretation of it as a sword to divide the Body of believers. Instead, we should hold our own understanding of the Lords’ Supper without judging others who have a different understanding of this sacrament.

The devotional thoughts offered here are humbly presented to be evaluated by my brothers and sisters in the faith. Most of these ideas have come down to us from Christian antiquity.

Christian traditions, Greek, Latin, and Protestant, have produced many interpretations of the Lord’s Supper. The present writing continues that tradition of interpretation. I want to suggest a starting point for conversation about the Supper that can be most widely acceptable to my fellow believers in various denominations.

Most Christians agree that, in the Lord's Supper, we are experiencing a mystery beyond human comprehension. Knowing that the mystery transcends all thought and speech, we can talk to each other about it with all humility and without dogmatism. We are all in this Christian experience together. We all have one Spirit. We may, therefore, and we should, humbly share our devotional thoughts and feelings about the mystery of Lord's Supper which we all eat.

On one side, we do not want to be slavishly confined to the perceptions and suggestions left to us by Christians of the past. On the other side, we are sure to go off course if we place ourselves entirely outside the main stream of the ancient tradition of Christian faith and devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

The Lord Jesus referred to the bread and wine as His body and blood and told us to eat and drink. We neither fully understand these words nor should we try to explain them away. We just surrender to His words. We humbly accept them as an expression a mystery beyond our human ability to understand.

These essays do not put forward the dogmas and doctrinal explanations of the mystery that Christian organizations have officially propounded over the centuries. (Notions like "transubstantiation", "transignification, etc.) Skipping the theological conflicts of nearly two milenia, I would like to converse with you about the mystery of the Lord's Supper in the way Christians might have done in the first hundred years after Our Lord's Resurrection. Today, with the freshness and innocence of those early days, let us tell each other what we think our Blessed Lord Jesus might want the Supper to mean to us.

The simplest form of faith in the mystery of the Eucharist in which all Christians of good will must be united is this: *We all want to believe, to understand, and to do what our Lord Jesus at the Last Supper meant for His disciples to believe, to understand, and to do.* This simple agreement gives us holy communion in mind and heart. Any further interpretation of the mystery may be suggested and decided by individual discernment.

Christian faith is the experience of mystery. We know by experience Realities that cannot be comprehended in thought or word, Realities like Trinity, Incarnation, and Final Glory, to name a few. After all of our conversation about it, the Lord's Supper remains a divine mystery that cannot be contained or adequately expressed in the categories of the human mind and language. After sharing our thoughts and our minds rest quietly, we will be like little children who do not try to understand things too high for us. Believing and obeying Jesus, we will take the Bread and Cup that He gives us and surrender ourselves to the mystery, the power, and the love in His words: "Take eat. This is My Body... Drink. This is the Cup of My Blood."

MYSTERION

[This essay engages in metaphysical discussion of intellection. If you are not interested in metaphysics you should skip this chapter altogether. If you do have a hunger to understand 'being and knowing' you may keep on reading, but expect challenges along the way.]

We call the Lord's Supper is a sacrament. The word 'sacrament' is the English translation of the earlier Latin word, 'sacramentum'. The word 'sacramentum' is the Latin translation of the Greek word from the New Testament, 'mysterion'. Therefore, we must delve into the divine revelation conveyed to us from God by this inspired word: mysterion.

THE UNKNOWABILITY OF GOD

We must begin by fully grasping that God is transcendent, supernatural, and entirely beyond the scope of human sense perception and understanding. The ultimate reach of all philosophical reasoning is the correct conclusion that: "There is a super intelligence beyond the material universe that is the origin of the order and design we see in the cosmos." The same philosophical insight is the conclusion from the observation that every being in the universe comes into existence and goes out of existence. For us human beings, we are talking about birth and death. If everything in the immanent material world of time comes into existence and eventually ceases to exist, it is reasonable to think that these contingent beings must have their origin from a transcendent, eternal, "Ground of Being," a "First Cause," or a "Prime Mover".

In the course of human history many people never arrived at a final conclusion that "God Exists". Either they didn't think about it at all or they got lost in the labyrinth of the metaphysical speculation. Those who did, or do now, come to realize the existence of God still do not know God. They do not know God at all. All they know is their correct rational conclusion. To "know that God exists" is not at all to "know the Existence of God". What is known in the former knowledge is our thought, a being of our mind. What is known in the latter is the very Being of God.

Who could know the Divine Being? Only God...and those to whom God chooses to reveal His Divine Being.

MYSTERION

We cannot begin to appreciate the significance of the sacraments until we have some understanding of the "mysterion", the mystery, revealed in Christ.

The "mystery of God" and "the mystery of Christ" of which Paul speaks refer to the same supernatural reality. Let us begin with a broad description of this eternal "mystery" hidden for ages and now revealed to the believers:

The mystery is God's eternal plan to share the divine life with all redeemed humankind. According to the plan, God's eternal Son was to become human, suffer, die, and rise again and then to send His Holy Spirit to renew all things. The Spirit fulfills God's eternal plan by drawing every willing human heart to Jesus, even to the end of time.

If you know the truth of this description of the mystery of Christ, you are illumined by God. But knowing these true thoughts about the mystery is not the same as knowing the mystery. Whatever we think and say *about* the mystery is proceeding from a prior knowledge of the Reality of the mystery. Whether you are aware of it or not, you actually know the Reality of the mystery by experience before you can say or assent to any true thoughts *about* the mystery.

Before the creation of the world, the *mysterion* referred only the intention of God. Used in this sense, "mysterion" is a purely spiritual reality. After the creation, *mysterion* takes on a second level of meaning. It now refers both to God's eternal intention and to the temporal material reality in which it is realized and embodied. The material things that signify and actualize the spiritual reality are the sacraments. We may, therefore, use the word "mysterion" in both senses: (1) the purely spiritual reality of God's eternal plan of salvation, and (2) the material reality that embodies the spiritual reality in time.

Jesus is the original *mysterion* in both senses of the word. He is the inaccessible, unknowable, divine essence and the divine eternal plan present to us and known by us in His physical human being in our material world.

The Greek word "mysterion" and its Latin translation "sacramentum" (from *refer* to this whole reality of God in all of creation redeemed and united in Christ. The mystery of Christ means the sacrament that Christ is. In Jesus, God and creation are united. Eternity is wed to time. God became flesh and dwells among us.

Apart from any revealed knowledge of the *mysterion*, human beings are able recognize that the material universe points beyond itself to its eternal Ground and Source. In general, human beings have chosen not to recognize and honor the Transcendent God but formed religions or philosophies to suit their desires.

Although the intellectual recognition of the transcendent Power and Intelligence that accounts for the origin of the ordered universe is the highest possible achievement of the human mind, it pales to insignificance in comparison with the mystery revealed to us in Jesus.

In the light of Christ, we see the entire cosmos filled with the *mysterion*. Illumined by revelation, we know ourselves and every creature in the material world to be the object of God's incomprehensible love. In Christ, every person

and all creation are the intended recipients and the embodiment of the whole mystery of God. To each person and to the entire expanding universe united to Christ, God says: "My eternal plan was always the My love for you, My Beloved."

In Christ, every creature of nature, according to its unique role in the history of God's plan of salvation, participates in the mystery. Concretely, this means that a rainbow, a burning bush, a bird of the air or a lily of the field, a woman giving birth, a man dying by crucifixion, and even an empty tomb, now make us know God's Being and His eternal plan of love, the mystery.

Since His Ascension to the Father, our Blessed Lord Jesus, in his bodily presence, is no longer perceptible to us as an object of our sense experience in the external empirical world. We have a better more intimate knowledge of Him. In His Resurrected Body, free of space-time limits, Jesus dwells in our very selves. He is in us and we are in Him. God the Father reveals His Son in us, illumining our hearts from heaven. All who believe, by an act of inward attention, can gaze into their hearts with eyes illumined by revelation, and behold our Lord and God Jesus, one with the Father and the Spirit. We are no longer dependent upon limited and fleeting sense experiences of our Lord in His mortal flesh. Always and everywhere, now and forever, by inward experience we know the Reality of the mystery. All this may sound metaphysical and hard to understand. Yet it is simply the Christian life of incessant prayer.

We are not only unique individuals enjoying personally exclusive experiences of the mystery. We are member of one living Body, a Fellowship in the Spirit. The Lords' Supper is the assembly called by the Lord in which the community of faith shares the experience of the mystery. When we assemble, we first share the Word that contains and presents the mystery in human language and thoughts. Then, we enter the Christian Holy of Holies where we partake of the Supper-Sacrifice. Here we do not only share revealed thoughts *about* the mystery of God, but in the Body and Blood we experience the Reality in Itself.

SIGNS, MEANING, AND THE SIGNIFIER

Sacraments are sacred signs. To deepen our understanding of sacraments we will analyze the nature of signs.

A sign is a material thing that conveys an intended meaning. A sign proceeds from a source, a signifier; that is the person who intends to share meaning with another person. To illustrate, when I am asked if I would like more coffee, I might reply saying, "Yes". The sound "yes" is a verbal sign. I am the signifier, the source of the sign that I have filled with my meaning. The sign I create in producing the sound, "yes," conveys my meaning that I do, in fact, want more coffee.

A sign has a representative character. A natural sign is not the signifier, but it represents the signifier. Signs, in writing, sound, or symbol are like messengers. They have their own existence as vessels of meaning. Signs are not identical with the meaning, just as a glass is not identical with the wine it holds. In the natural world, signs do not have the power to cause what they signify. The powerlessness of human signs to effect what they signify is shown every time a car runs past a stop sign, or when a man is unfaithful to the woman who wears the ring-symbol of his promised fidelity.

A sacrament is a special kind of sign. It is a visible reality in our temporal experience chosen and endowed by God with supernatural meaning and power. More precisely, a sacrament is a temporal action shared by persons in a particular place filled by God with supernatural power to convey the divine mystery that they signify. I carry a sign of my wife, a photo, in my wallet. The photo is a good reminder, but it does not bring my wife into my presence. The sacramental action brings the eternal mystery of God in Christ into our place and time. Unlike merely human signs, sacramental signs have the power to cause what they signify. This is how we must understand the Lord's Supper. In the Supper-Sacrifice we partake, in our place and time, in the Eternal Sacrifice of our High Priest and the eschatological Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

To sum up: A sacrament is a material sign in our natural world of time that embodies, makes present, and participates in the supernatural eternal mystery that it signifies.

Jesus is the Sign in which all sacramental signs participate. God the Father is the Signifier. Jesus, divine the Word-Sign, is one with the Signifier and one with the meaning signified. He is the unseen divine Agent who confers all sacraments through the mediation of the Christian minister. He is the mystery experienced by Christians in the sacraments.

In the New Testament, the expressions "mystery of God" and "mystery of Christ" refer to God and all that God does in eternity and time. The sacraments, the mysteries of the Christian church, by which God grants us to partake in time in His eternal Mysterion.

THE SIGN OF THE COSMOSXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Everything in the material universe (except for the anomaly of human sin and its evil consequences) is a sign of God. Every creature is a word of God. Words are not identical with the speaker, but they make the speaker known. God is not identical with the natural things in the material universe, but they make God known as the Transcendent Other Who is the Author/Speaker of them. Finite beings are expressions of the Infinite Being. Beings that exist for a time inform us that an Eternal-Being exists. In an infinitesimal way, every created being we know in nature suggests something to us about the super-natural Creator we do not know.

What we are able to know with our human intellects is limited to the material beings in the physical universe and the thoughts in our minds that we use to represent them. That is all we can know as human beings. The sum total of all reality that falls within the possibility of being known by human beings is called the “natural world”. That which is beyond the field of potential human knowledge is called the “supernatural.” From our sense experience of the temporal and finite things we know by means of our sense experience, we come to be aware in our personal spirit that there must exist a permanent original Being. That Being is what we call God.

The universe as a whole is a sign that reveals God. The material cosmos is God’s word spoken to us. The word of the cosmos informs us of a Speaker Who is other than the cosmos. The “natural” universe makes us know that there is a “super-natural” Something. That supernatural Something is what we call God.

The material universe is the natural sign of God’s love addressed to us. But when the predestined time in history arrived, God gave us a new sign, a supernatural sign infinitely greater in meaning and in power than the sign of nature. He sent from heaven His Eternal Son to become incarnate among us as the man, Jesus of Nazareth. In the natural man Jesus, the supernatural fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

JESUS: THE SACRAMENT OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD

According to our Christian faith, the supernatural Being became a natural being. Secular history tells us of a man known as Jesus of Nazareth. He was a first century Jewish teacher reputed to be the Messiah of the Jews. He was put to death under Roman authority at the behest of the Jewish leadership. This much of the story is simply history, not Christian faith.

We Christians believe God has revealed to us that this man, Jesus, was (and is) the unique incarnation of God. We believe the historical witness that Jesus was a real human being with a true human body, soul, mind, and emotions. Beyond the historical evidence, it has been revealed to us that this man, Jesus, in his personal existence, is not merely human but divine. Jesus of

Nazareth is, for us who believe, the Supernatural Being, God the Word, living in human nature, a human life.

This one unique “natural” being does not merely point us to a transcendent “supernatural” being as do all other beings in nature. Because Jesus is the Person of God living in a natural human being everything this “natural being” does, says, thinks, and feels, and everything that He suffers is being done by God and to God.

For Christian faith, the Transcendent has taken up residence in the immanent. The Infinite Eternal Other has now become finite and temporal in our midst. The Pure Spirit of God has become material in the flesh of the man Jesus.

Jesus is the first century Jewish prophet who embodies the fullness of God Who is beyond space and time. When we see and hear and touch this Jesus, we know by our sense experience the unknowable Being of God. When we are illumined by faith to awareness of Jesus dwelling in us, we experience the Reality of the mystery we cannot comprehend in thought.

Jesus is the mysterion in both senses of the word: God’s eternal plan and its temporal realization. Only in the sacrament of Jesus are the sign, the meaning, and the signifier all one and the same: Jesus Himself.

THE THREE GREAT SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Everything that proceeds from God in nature and by grace participates in some way in the character of a sacrament. But God has chosen certain things in this world to fill with His meaning and power. These are the sacraments of the church. Chief among them are:

Baptism

Washing with water signifies cleansing from sin. Immersion or pouring of water signifies the enveloping (immersion) or anointing (pouring) of the Holy Spirit. Emergence from the baptismal water signifies and actualizes passage from death to life as children of God.

Marriage

The mutual gift and reception of selves between the spouses signifies the Gift of God and participates in the giving and receiving of selves between Christ and His Bride Church.

The Lord’s Supper

This sacrament is the subject of these essays and will be examined in detail in the pages that follow.

While we attend to these great sacraments, we must not undervalue the other sacraments given by God to the church. In the first place among these are the Holy Scriptures. The practice of confession and forgiveness of sins is also a traditional and important sacrament in the church. The church has recognized ordination of ministers as a sacrament. Beyond these, all of the good and beautiful things and events in the world of nature are in some way “signs” of the mystery of God in Christ. Think of the awe-inspiring mountains and oceans. Think of the blessedness of the birth of a child or the goodness of friendship love. Do not all of these in their own way signify and impart to us the eternal mystery of God and His loving plan of salvation in Jesus the Messiah?

This completes our introduction to the idea of sacrament. The essays that follow explore some of God’s revealed meaning of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

REAL PRESENCE AND REAL PRIESTHOOD

REAL PRESENCE OF THE WHOLE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

I was educated into the belief that the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist had to do only with the mystery of bread and wine becoming the Body and Blood of Christ. Over the years, I have come to realize that the Supper is a symbolic action which celebrates, signifies, and makes present in a particular place and time *the entire eternal mystery of Christ*. It is a sorry mistake to limit belief in the real presence to the consecrated elements. We must believe in the action of thanksgiving.

The act of giving thanks and praise in the Eucharistic Prayer embodies in mystery all of the past, present, and future of God’s Plan of Salvation. It completes, in the present, the entire history of the faith and worship of God’s people under the Old Testament and it makes present here and now the future Eternal Wedding Banquet.

Now at the beginning of these conferences, let me make clear what I mean by the expressions: the Lord’s Supper, the Holy Eucharist, the Mass, the Divine Liturgy, or Holy Communion. These traditional expressions refer to the Christian ritual meal that has its origin in a past event that took place in an upper room, in Jerusalem, on a Thursday evening. But, as a sacrament, these words refer to the whole eternal mystery of salvation in Christ.

God’s complete eternal plan for human salvation by the Incarnate and Risen Son of God is the fullness of what is “really present” in sacrament in the Lord’s Supper. References to “real presence” in these essays mean the presence of the whole mystery of God in Christ, including but not limited to, the real presence of His “body” and “blood.”

We can experience God’s mystery. We cannot comprehend it. We can refer to it by name. We cannot contain it in a concept. Without the ability to understand, we surrender in faith to the Lord’s mysterious words over the bread and wine: “This is my body...This is my blood...”

We continue to hold the ancient faith in the real presence of Our Lord in the consecrated elements. However, the same mystery reveals that every Christian in the assembly is the Body of Christ and His Life-Blood makes them alive. Jesus is really present in each Christian at the Supper as much as He is really present in the consecrated elements. Traditional faith recognizes and reveres the Body of Christ present in the consecrated host. This devotion is only as authentic as our recognition and reverence for the Body of Christ present in the person of our Christian brother and sister.

SUBSTANCE AND CELEBRATION

Objectively, the Lord's Supper has to do with the sacramental substances of the Bread and the Cup. But our Eucharist is not just a substance, it is a sacramental action. The Lord's Supper is a communal act of offering a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is the holy meal the Risen Christ shares with His disciples. Awareness of the Lord's Supper as sacramental action is a necessary completion of our awareness of the sacramental elements.

These essays are designed to throw light on the Lord's Supper particularly as *action and celebration*. We begin our reflections with the awareness that when at least two or three gather in His Name to offer praise and thanks to God the Father for all that He has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus the Christ. The small local assembly offers the Eucharistic Prayer of praise and thanksgiving the name of the whole Body of Christ everywhere.

REAL PRIESTHOOD

The Risen Lord Jesus is the High-Priest and the sacrificial offering of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, He is the priest and the sacrificial offering *in* each believer at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. At baptism a person enters into Christ—not merely 'intentionally' nor only in a figurative sense, but in reality. By faith and baptism we are made one Body and One Spirit with Him. Therefore, if Jesus is the final and greatest Prophet, Priest, and King, all believers are baptized into Him and share in His Prophetic, Priestly, and Royal estate. We are all priests *in* the One High-Priest of the New Covenant according to the order of Melchizedek.

Centuries of focusing too narrowly on the physical elements of the Lord's Supper has contributed to the unfortunate establishment of a "sacred hierarchy" among Christians. After Constantine, priests and bishops—exclusively--came to be thought of as personally endowed with special supernatural powers to change, at will, any bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ. That is a strangely aberrant misunderstanding of the command of the Lord Jesus addressed to His disciples, "Do this in memory of me." Our Lord came to abolish all castes among human beings. By misconstruing ordination as if it gave supernatural powers to the clergy, His church established the most extreme form of hierarchy!

The church needs its ministers. The New Testament teaches us that those minister as elders and overseers are to be humble obedient servants of the community. For the sake of order and decorum, the priestly community chooses and ordains members it considers properly gifted to pronounce the words of their communal Eucharistic Prayer. But the whole assembly of believers remains the royal priesthood in Christ.

DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

In this essay, I offer for your discernment what I believe to be some of Our Lord's meaning and intention in giving us this command, "Do this in remembrance of me"

The Holy Eucharist is indeed a celebration of the Christian community led by human ministers. But the dimension of personal intimacy with our Lord Jesus is being neglected in our time. Jesus is the true Minister of the Mystery of the Supper and it is His desire to address each person in their heart.

So first of all, I call to awareness that the Eucharist is an exchange between Jesus and each one of us. It is an inter-personal communication between the Lord Jesus and the Christian. Although we are many, He speaks to us individually. Looking into your eyes, as His beloved personal friend, He says: "Take eat. This is my body given for you..." You, a personal friend who loves the Lord Jesus, hear His voice and you do what He tells you, surrendering to what you cannot understand.

The Eucharist takes place as two persons, one human and One Divine, have communion with each other in friendship love. We receive Our Lord in communion and He receives us. Jesus speaks to us and acts within us at Communion. He enters into us to give us His Life and His Love. He comes into us to accomplish divine things of unimaginable value in our spirits.

The things the Lord accomplishes in the Christian in the sacred meal are beyond all human understanding. They are the things intended by God to realize in us the plan of His eternal mystery: that we should share in God's life, God's nature, God's perfection, God's being, and God's beatitude.

In our Eucharistic assemblies we are surrounded by other busy Christians. A great many things are happening. Ministers read, teach, preach, witness and pray. They give reports, make appeals, sing, play instruments and collect money. Our attention is called to books, leaflets, projection screens, processions, people moving around, coming in and going out, and greeting each other, talking and looking around. All this activity is good, natural, and unavoidable. But all these other claims on our attention put us in danger of forgetting Jesus.

Jesus is the only true minister of the Lord's Supper. He, Jesus alone, says, "Take, Eat, Drink, in remembrance of me." He should be the object of our loving attention in response to His loving attention to each one of us as He gives us the blessed Bread and Cup.

There is only one Last Supper of the Lord with His disciples in this world. To gather for the Eucharist is to take our place at the same table with the original Twelve, with the Lord Jesus presiding in our midst. In our day, we make too

much of the other things we have added to the Supper. We are excited about the choir, the preaching, the children's program, etc. In word and song we acknowledge the presence of the Lord in our midst, but we really pay much more attention to the visible and audible human ministers. The presiding or preaching minister ends up, effectively, being the star and center of the event.

If Christ the Lord is the President of the assembly...if He is the one who offers the Eternal Sacrifice and gives us His Body and Blood...then let the human priest or minister be considered less important! The human ministers have the privilege of service in the assembly. Let them do their part by lifting up our hearts to the present Lord Jesus. As a brother in the ordained ministry I pray that we ministers may think, speak, and act only in a manner that aids the assembly to give their whole attention to Jesus. Members of the assembly should appreciate the human servant-ministers they appointed to lead the service. But it is the Lord Jesus Himself, united with His Bride Church, who offers the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Look at Him, love Him, and do what He does.

At our celebration of the Supper, the Lord Jesus offers His Eternal Sacrifice, through, with, and in, the assembly of His priestly people. Only Jesus Himself has authority to offer His Own Self-oblation to the Father. But He has conferred this authority also upon us to whom He says, "Do this..."

When the Lord Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant, told his followers, to "Do this," He was telling them to offer His Own Self-sacrifice. In effect, Jesus was ordaining His disciples into His own priesthood in the order of Melchizedek. We human ministers and priests are merely people designated by the assembly to speak aloud the Eucharistic Prayer in the name of the assembled people of God. Christ, in the whole assemble of believers, offers the one eternal sacrifice.

At the Eucharist, the chief concern of Our Lord Jesus is to make Himself our spiritual food and drink and to be our eternal sacrifice to the Father. In response, our chief concern must be to receive Him in the Bread and Wine He gives and to join Him in offering the eternal sacrifice to the glory of God the Father. Now let us examine more closely what we are doing at the Lord's Supper. We do what Jesus does.

WHAT JESUS DOES

Exactly what is Our Lord telling us to do by saying "Do this..."? He wants us to do what He himself is doing. What is He doing? At the never-ending Last Supper, Our Lord offers Himself as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin, for the salvation of the world, and for the sanctification of His disciples. He does all this in order to perfectly glorify God the Father. That original Supper ended. The offering of Himself as sacrifice for us is eternal, once and forever.

In this Supper, the Risen Jesus manifests Himself to us in the empirical world of time even while He dwells in the invisible eternity of the Father. He fills our human action of eating and drinking with His divine action of becoming our spiritual food. In the Eucharist, Jesus unites Himself with His Bride Church in each member.

In chapter six of the Gospel of John, Jesus is recorded as saying that whoever eats His body and drinks His blood abides in Him. At the Last Supper He said that we are united to Him the way a branch is united to the vine. Then He gave us His body and blood to eat and drink. The branch *abides* in the vine. These scripture texts enable us to know that in the Lord's Supper, Jesus is uniting us to Himself. Receiving the bread and wine of the Eucharist makes us experience that we are one living being with the Lord, just as a vine and its branches are one living being.

Those Jews who rejected Jesus were offended by His declaration that "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." They questioned, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They thought carnally. But Jesus' words are Spirit and Life. The simple act of eating a morsel of bread and drinking a sip of wine is all that our Lord meant. In the Lord's Supper, He gives us His Spirit and His Life.

The Supper of the Lord is the sacrament of friendship love. He is the servant at this table. He invites His friends. We are His friends, His guests. He serves us the spiritual Food of Immortality and the spiritual Drink of Eternal Life. In doing so, Jesus is expressing His love to each one of us personally. He visits, enters, and abides in each one of His beloved seated at this table. Every time Jesus presents us with this bread and this cup, He wants to make us know His eternal love in this moment of time.

WHAT WE DO

We do what corresponds to what He does. Our Lord Jesus is the only and eternal High Priest of the New Covenant. We are baptized into Him. Therefore we are all priests in Him, consecrated to His priestly order of Melchizedek by our baptism. At the Supper, the Lord offers Himself in sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Therefore, when we sit at the table, we, *very intentionally*, offer to God the Father Jesus' sacrifice of obedient love, love unto death, even death on a Cross. We offer His eternal sacrifice with the same intentions that He has: that God the Father be glorified and that the lost world may be redeemed.

We have become one with Jesus by faith and baptism. Therefore we offer ourselves, personally and corporately, as the Body together with our Head. Of ourselves we are unworthy, but *in Him*, as members of His Body, we have been made worthy to be priests and sacrifices acceptable to God. In this sacrificial meal, we put on the heart of Christ. With all that is within us, we yearn for the salvation of the world and the redemption of all people. We offer this one eternal

sacrifice earnestly praying for the sanctification of all who belong to Christ. We dare to hope that His eternal sacrifice, present now in our Supper with Him, will finally put a complete end to all evil, sin, suffering, and death. And so we cry: "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! And let the evil of this world pass away. Amen!"

Let us respond to His desire to abide in us, when we take Holy Communion, by desiring with lucid awareness and full intention, to abide in Him. In receiving the Bread and the Cup we surrender ourselves to His coming into us. When we partake of the blessed elements we intend to yield ourselves completely to His will to come into us and live in us.

When we are present at the Supper, our highest motive and our deepest desire is that God the Father will be perfectly glorified and that His Kingdom will fully come by means of the eternal sacrifice of Jesus. We offer the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist to hallow the Father's Name, to advance the coming of His Kingdom, and to pray that His will be done in all the earth.

Our hidden Lord Jesus manifests himself to us in the Supper. From the beginning of our love of Him, we "recognized Him in the breaking of the Bread". For those outside, what happens at the Christian Eucharist is nothing. But blessed are the eyes of our hearts, for we see the Lord by the vision of faith. The mystery of the Supper is the Lord's last Gift of love to us before He left us. The passion and death that followed were the carrying out of the words of love that He spoke to us at the Supper: "This is my body to be broken for you...this is my blood to be shed for you."

In His Passion and death, our blessed Lord Jesus gave us His final and greatest expression of His love for us. These historical events happened once and then disappeared into the oblivion of time past. However, He continues to express the same eternal love all through time in the mystery of His body and blood, as often as we eat and drink at the Supper. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus is present in our midst. He comes to us, as He promised, to make His home in us. He comes into our present moment, still bearing the marks of the wounds that He showed to Thomas...wounds now adorable in His glorious body. He comes in to dine with us at His Supper. At the hour we eat of this Supper, the death of the Lord Jesus in the past and His eternal Glory become present to us in mystery.

When we come to the Supper, we must come to it as the feast of Christ's love for us. Our Lord invests the Supper with divine power to make us know and experience His Love for us. We should be seeking to receive this 'knowledge-by-experience' of His personal love for each of us. Is there anything greater for us on earth or in heaven than this: to know the love of Christ that transcends knowledge? Well, we experience His love when we receive the Bread and the Cup from His hand. We cannot make it happen. Only Jesus can make us know

His love. Now that is exactly why He gives us the Holy Bread and Sacred Wine: to reveal His love to us.

Align yourself with His action. Start preparing yourself to know the love of Christ as you have never known it before. Although you cannot make the revelation of Christ's love happen, you can make yourself ready to receive it. Begin by surrendering yourself to the Lord Jesus when He comes to you in the Holy Eucharist. He comes to tell you--you personally--that He loves you. Be ready and willing to receive this revelation. Pray that you may be granted this surpassing gift of knowing more deeply the love of Christ. At the moment of Communion listen for Jesus to speak to you in your heart. In your heart speak to Him. Tell Him all of your deepest desires and your highest hopes. But what matters most is for you to desire and to ask Him to give you more revelation of His love for you and to increase your love for Him.

In the Sacrificial Supper, Jesus gives Himself *for you* as Gift to the Father. He also gives Himself *to you* as Gift from the Father. At every Holy Eucharist, give Jesus to the Father as the Lamb of God, as it were slain, and receive Jesus from the Father as the Bread of Heaven that has come down to give you Life.

“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in Him” says the Lord. God's gifts must be appreciated for their worth. It is a grievous sin to undervalue the precious things the Lord gives us. The gift of abiding in Jesus and He in us is of worth beyond all comprehension. Go to the Supper with a conscious deliberate choice to seek this ineffable Gift. For this to happen, you have to want to abide in Jesus and want Him to abide in you. Brothers and sisters, for God's sake and your own sake: Want this abiding!

At Communion, remember that He, The True Vine, is coming to you to engraft you more completely into Himself. By the intention and will of the Lord Jesus, His Supper celebrates and increases His abiding in you and you in Him. With bold expectation, ask Him to grant you the gift of new and deeper abiding in Him as a branch in the Vine. Tell Him you want to be more engrafted into Him. Hand yourself over to the Lord, asking Him to live in you so that you may live in Him.

We have no power to do any of this on our own. God the Father is the only Vinedresser. What is required of us is surrender ourselves to the power of His love. If we have even only a mustard seed of desire and willingness, the Father will graft us more and more into His Son. Holy Communion is the mystery of this grafting and abiding.

It is a delight to eat good food with friends. How great a delight it is to eat the Bread of Heaven from the hand of Jesus at the Supper? But food not only gives delight, it also nourishes. For too many Christians, taking Holy Communion is a rather dull routine church ritual. But if you will take on the mind

of Christ, you will take Communion as Bread from heaven for the life of your spirit. This Food has the power to make you alive with the very life of God. This is the bread from heaven that nourishes, restores, and empowers us to carry out our mission in the world until it is fully accomplished. If you would receive this spiritual nourishment, believe that Jesus wants to be for you the Bread of Life now in this time and in eternity to come. Amen.

ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HE SUFFERED

Reflections on the heart of Christ at that hour: His desires and intentions in giving us the mystery of His body and blood.

Let us re-create in our minds the intentional and emotional magnitude of those last few hours Our Lord spent with us before He was taken away...taken away from our empirical world.

He is seated with the Twelve to celebrate the Passover meal. Originally, "Passover" referred to the salvation God accomplished for His people when they were slaves in Egypt. The angel of death was to destroy the firstborn of man and beast in the whole land of Egypt. God instructed the Israelites to paint their doorposts and lintels with the blood of the Passover (Paschal) Lamb which was to be sacrificed and eaten that same night. When the angel of death went through all of Egypt destroying the first-born males in every household-including Pharaoh's, he "passed over" the houses of the Israelites and did not enter nor harm their firstborn. That is the first meaning of Passover.

With time, the same word, Passover, came to take on additional meaning, a meaning intimately continuous with the original but expanded to refer to the whole event of Israel's salvation and deliverance.

Upon the death of the first-born of the Egyptians, the King of Egypt released the Israelites. But very soon Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army in pursuit of the fleeing Israelites. They came to the Red Sea. The hostile Egyptian army was pressing down upon the Israelites. Then God worked a great act of salvation for the people. Through Moses, God parted the sea and the people "passed over" the floor of the sea as if on dry ground. They passed from slavery to freedom, from the kingdom of Pharaoh to the Promised Land of God.

These meanings and images were embedded in His soul as Jesus sat with his disciples to eat the Passover meal for the last time.

The hour had come. Jesus knows that the time for the conversion of the people in response to his message had passed. The chicks had refused to take refuge under His wings. The only way He can be their savior now is to die for them. Yet His divine heart is torn. On the one hand He desires to defeat Satan (Pharaoh) in hand to hand combat in His Passion so that His people may be freed from slavery. Jesus, the new Moses, must open the sea to allow those freed from slavery to enter the Promised Land. It is necessary for our sake that Jesus must accomplish His Passover in Jerusalem from this world to the Father. This final Moses must open a path for us through the impassible sea so that we can follow Him to the unreachable shore of Eternity with the Father.

On the other hand, He does not want to leave us. His love will not let Him leave us alone like abandoned orphans. Our loving Lord resolves His dilemma by inventing a new way to remain with us in this empirical world in time even though He will leave this world and go to the Father in Eternity. The mystery of His Body-Bread and His Blood-Wine is His way of remaining with us in the invisible world even to the end of time.

On that night before He suffered, our Lord told the disciples something that astounded and confused them. They had been expecting Him to reveal Himself in an overpowering way the whole world when He comes again in glory as He had told them earlier. Now He tells them that will reveal Himself to them and not to the world. Thomas expressed his surprise and confusion by asking Jesus, "How is it, Lord, that you will show yourself to us and not to the world?"

Our Risen Lord shows Himself to us in many ways, but all of them are expressions of faith. He shows Himself to us in each other, especially in the poor. He shows Himself to us in the wonderful things of the created world that He holds in being by His word of power. He reveals Himself to us in the Holy Scriptures and also in the secret place of our hearts when we pray alone.

Beginning that night, and lasting as long as time shall endure, Jesus chooses to reveal Himself to us and not to the world in the mystery His presence at the Supper. Those who do not believe in the Supper see nothing but a ritual meal with bread and wine. We who believe recognize Him in the breaking of the bread in this Supper.

The apostles seem to have no clue about what is to follow after the Last Supper. They are still thinking of power. They are still vying for first place at the right hand and the left of the Messiah King. They did not know that those places of privilege had been reserved by the Father for two murderous thieves who would be "enthroned" with Him on crosses, one on His left, the other on His right. According to their attitude toward the One crucified between them, one was taken to endless paradise with Jesus while the scoffing other went to hell forever.

"With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Why did our dear Lord have such ardent desire? I believe it was because He passionately desired to give Himself to them and for them at this Passover. The original Passover initiated the exodus of the children of Israel from the land of slavery into the Promised Land of freedom. In recounting the Transfiguration, Luke (9:31) tells us that Moses (representing the Law) and Elijah (representing the Prophets) spoke of the exodus that Jesus was to accomplish in Jerusalem. On the cross, Jesus made His exodus from this profane world, of which Egypt of old was a pre-figuration. From the cross, He passed into the Presence of the Father, of which the Promised Land of old was a pre-figuration.

In His exodus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith opened a new and living way, through His flesh, for us to follow Him into the Presence of the Father. At the Last Supper, Our Lord's heart was breaking with desire to become for us the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His whole soul was filled with emotion and decision—no matter what the cost--to become our New Moses, the One who opens a way for us from slavery to freedom and from death in this world to Life with the Father. Until that last hour at the Supper with the Twelve, Jesus had been a companion *beside* the ones He loved in the world. But now, loving His own to the end, He was about to give them the mystery of His abiding inside them. Before His death, Jesus lived *with* a few of us. After His resurrection, Jesus lives *in* all of us.

THE HEART OF CHRIST

Imagine the love our Lord Jesus feels for the men around Him at the table. That is the same love He has for every one of us. Jesus had accomplished deeds of awesome power that were never seen on the earth before or after. But now the time for miracles is over. He taught like no human had ever taught in the past nor can ever teach in the future. Not only did He teach with divine authority, but the content of His teaching has never been equaled and never shall be. But, at that hour in the Upper Room, the time for teaching was over.

The *hour* has come, His hour. The hour of the power of darkness which will put Him to death on the tree. The hour in which He will submit to suffering and death for love of His Father and for love of us....and so destroy the power of darkness.

This deed of love, His death on the cross, is a fleeting moment in the passage of time. From his agony in the garden until He expires on the cross can be measured in hours, less than twenty-four. Yet, from eternity, before the world was made, this short passage of time was the foreordained culmination of all human history. The old world, all previous human history, came to an end on the cross. The new world, the history of the redeemed human race until the end of time, began when Jesus breathed His last. He is the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world and His sacrifice is eternal forever in the Heavenly Sanctuary.

Jesus lived in time for a few more than thirty years. Finally, at the instant of perfect accomplishment of His sacrificial love, Jesus passed from time to eternity. When He died in the flesh on the Cross, in His personal spirit, our High Priest entered the Heavenly Sanctuary, bearing His own blood, to accomplish His eternal sacrifice. Marked with the glorious wounds of his death, our Risen Lord lives forever as the Lamb as it were slain.

This crucified and risen Jesus, at the apogee of His love for the Father and for us, comes to us in the blessed Bread and Wine. His sacrificial death on Golgotha on a Friday afternoon has disappeared into ancient past history. But

the living reality of that sacrificial love is eternal. In our Eucharist we do not merely remember the past event, nor do we simply repeat the action of Jesus at the Last Supper. When two or three or more of us gather to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the Lord of Glory Himself comes into our midst. He comes to us every time we break the Bread. He comes to us as He is forever: the Lamb that was slain for us. He comes as our High Priest who saves and sanctifies us by His self-offering once and forever. He comes as the True Bread of Heaven given by the Father to give life to the world.

It is the ardent desire of our Lord to come to us in Communion. Holy Communion is the invention of His love for us. What do you think will happen to the people to whom Christ comes to abide in them? More will happen than can be told, but let me say at least this. *They will experience the meaning of the words of Jesus: "...I am in you and you are in Me even as I am in the Father and the Father is in Me."*

THE CHILDREN'S BREAD

We might expect that the people chosen to be united to Christ in Holy Communion would be, or would shortly become, morally perfect. Not so. Neither are those invited to the Lord's Supper instantly healed of their afflictions of mind and body. God does not regard our moral, mental, or physical health, as conditions for union with Christ in Holy Communion. No saint is any more worthy of Holy Communion than any sinner.

Some Christians are intellectually less gifted. Some have psychological wounds that prevent them from enjoying the full richness of personal relationships. Others have been so neglected or abused that they can hardly endure their broken lives, much less enjoy a sense of wellbeing and happiness. These are tragic losses of human fulfillment in time. But, thanks be to God, the poor, the sick, the lame, and the mentally wounded are not disqualified from enjoying the fullness of eternal union with Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. Indeed, the Bread of Heaven is intended in the first place for those who are poor, humble, weak, and lowly in this world.

The Lord's Supper does not bring material wealth. Yet, if a person is materially poor, does not union with Jesus in Communion make him rich beyond the telling? Does not this Bread give eternal life to the sick and the dying? The wise and the learned important people of this world who despise the mystery of the Lord's Supper exclude themselves its blessings. The uneducated and the little people of no account in this world who have simple faith in the Lord's Supper are the honored guests of God and they sit at Table with the King of Kings.

We first received Jesus into ourselves at our baptism. In Holy Communion, we remember, celebrate, and experience anew the Risen Life of Jesus in us. This Gift of God does not give us biological health or material wealth

in this world, but it enriches our personal life with such divine riches that we can consider all the good things of this material world to be so much rubbish.

Union with the Son of God, our Risen Lord Jesus, is the mystery of grace that we celebrate when we eat His Body and drink His Blood. This Supper does not protect us from the innumerable losses and tragic sufferings that happen to every human being in this fallen world, but it makes all these evils unworthy to be compared with the eternal Goodness that we receive in Holy Communion.

The Father's Gift of the Body and Blood of Christ is given to the children, the lowly, the poor, the sick, the penitent sinner...to all those who are insignificant and despised in this world. These chosen little ones cannot, and do not even try to understand the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. They simply surrender themselves in trusting love to Him and to His words when they receive Holy Communion.

THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN AT COMMONION

How, then should we approach the Passover Supper of the Lord Jesus? What should be our inward dispositions? Consider...

The Greek word "menein", means "to abide". "Abide" refers to a divine mystery that transcends the categories of human understanding. However, our Lord gives us a sense of its divine meaning when He describes in terms of the living relationship between a branch of a vine and the vine itself. He is the Vine, we are the branches. We abide in Him. Blessed Lord Jesus told us that whoever abides in Him has eternal life and will bear much fruit in deeds of faith and love. The Lord created the mystery of the Supper to signify and to actualize His abiding in us and our abiding in Him. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I abide in him," says the Lord.

At communion time, let us desire to abide in Jesus and desire Him to abide in us. When we approach the mystery with these sentiments, we are responding to His own desires as He comes to us in Holy Communion. If we do not have these holy desires, we will fail to receive the Bread and the Wine in the way He wants us to. Nor will we receive the full benefits of His grace that He wants to impart to us in the gift of His Body and Blood. Sisters and brothers, please, desire to abide in Him and Him in you.

Before we reach out to take the Bread and the Cup, let us become sharply aware of why, and how ardently, Jesus wants to come to have personal communion with us. At the Last Supper, Our Lord offered to His Father the sacrifice of obedient love: His Body broken for us and His Blood poured out for us. He commanded us to "do this" in His memory. He is telling us to become aware of His love by remembering, and to offer to the Father His One Eternal Sacrifice of obedient love consummated on the Cross. He wants us to unite ourselves to Him in His eternal and living sacrifice, by offering ourselves through

Him, with Him, and in Him, as living sacrifices. The High Priest of our Eucharist sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offers the final and perfect expression of His sacrificial love for the Father and for us sinners. At the moment of Holy Communion let us unite our hearts to His by offering His sacrifice as our expression of love for the Father and for the salvation of the world that “God so loved”.

In the Eucharist, He wants to show us the immeasurable greatness of His love for us as individual persons. In the Old Testament pre-figuration of the True Bread of God, manna fell from heaven. The people went out and gathered it from the ground. That was a very public and impersonal experience. In the New Testament fulfillment, the Son of God gives the Bread of Life from His own hand to each person individually to signify His unique love for each one. Christian, never receive the blessed Bread and Cup from anyone but Jesus. Look beyond the human being who passes the elements to you physically. In your spirit see only Jesus. Look into His eyes as He, the Lord Jesus Himself, speaks to you by name and says, “Take, eat, this is my Body given for you. ...My Blood shed for you.”

In giving us the mystery of the Lord’s Supper, our Beloved Jesus gives us Himself. Giving us His Body to eat signifies that He is making us one Body with Him. Giving us His Blood to drink signifies that He is placing His Life-Spirit in us (because, in biblical understanding, “the life is the blood”).

In offering His Body to the Father *for us*, Jesus became the Lamb of God Who takes away our sins, and indeed, the sins of the whole world. In offering His Blood to be shed *for us*, He sealed us in the New and Eternal Covenant of God’s grace-love.

The Lord Jesus wants to give Himself to us as the Bread of Heaven that we may eat and live forever. He wants to purify, protect, and sanctify us by offering us His life-giving Blood to drink. The Eucharist is the Food of immortality and the Drink of imperishable love. These are the things our dear Lord earnestly desires to do *for us* and *to us* in Holy Communion. We, then, should stir our desire to receive these gifts He wants to give us. We should give our attention to what the Lord Jesus is doing to us as we partake of His Supper. At Communion we should give ourselves to Him as He gives Himself to us.

In Holy Communion, the Lord of Glory comes to us to do a sanctifying work in us. Let us be completely attentive to *what* the Lord is doing to us and not concern ourselves about *how* He does it. Let our minds be silent of questioning. This Mystery is far too transcendent to be reduced to the thought categories of the inquiring human intellect. Those who know the Mystery with their hearts do not insult the Mystery by questioning it with their minds. God, the Living God, the Almighty, is coming to us in Communion! Let all mortal flesh and human minds be silent! Simply receive the Lord with grateful love and self-surrender.

At the time of Communion, desire to receive all that Jesus wants to give—good things beyond our mental comprehension. We should open ourselves to the Lord Who comes into us as into His chosen temple. He knows how to bless us. He has the power, the wisdom, and the love to do to us and in us all that His Heart desires for us. The Lord is coming to us and into us in the Mystery. Let us trust Him, entrust ourselves to Him, and allow Him to do unto us as He will when we receive Him in Holy Communion. Let us give ourselves in love to the Divine Lover Who gives Himself to us in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist. Come, eat and drink without money without price. Come, drink deeply O lovers.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE: ETERNITY IN TIME

DISCERNMENT OF THESE THOUGHTS

We Christians have been thinking and talking about the Lord's Supper from the time He gave it to us even to this day. In glory, Our Blessed Lord continues to give us increasing personal understanding of the mystery. When any Christian says something about the meaning of the mystery, the Christians who hear that word weigh it. The listeners discern whether or not that word is true or false. No individual Christian has any divine revelation that is not subject to the discernment of faith made by other Christians. All of us have the Spirit. Every one of us has the anointing of the Spirit to be able to distinguish the revealed Truth from its counterfeits.

We know that no one can know God the Father unless the Son reveals Him. No one can know that Jesus is the Lord unless the Father reveals the Son in the believer. Similarly, no one can say anything about the reality and meaning of the Mystery of the Eucharist unless it is revealed to her or him by the Lord.

Now I am saying things about this Mystery. I do so in the honest awareness that I am prone to confuse my own human ideas with understandings given to us by the Spirit. Therefore, in putting before you, my fellow believer, these expressions of my personal faith in the transcendent mystery of the Eucharist, I submit my words to the discernment of your faith. If I speak revelation from God, your faith will recognize it and you will confirm my word. If I speak in error, your faith will discern it and dissent. Your dissent will call me to question or even to abandon my belief. I will gratefully bless the person of faith who calls me back to God's truth. With these agreements in place, I can now begin to speak and you begin to discern.

JESUS, THE LAMB SLAIN IN TIME AND THE PRIEST IN ETERNITY

Our Lord suffered and died in time. On a Thursday evening, while He sat with His disciples at the Passover meal, Jesus revealed His will and decision to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the world's salvation. He carried out that decision in historical time after the Supper. In the Garden of Olives He went through the agony of acceptance and submission. Then the soldiers seized Him and his physical passion began. At one definite moment of human history, the Lord Jesus completed His work of salvation when He died on the cross. The salvation of all worlds took place on a Friday afternoon in spring at a place adjacent to Jerusalem called Golgotha. At that instant, the Lord Jesus left this empirical temporal world and entered the invisible Eternal world of the Father. Our Lord passed from space-time to eternity when He breathed his last breath on the cross.

The scriptures tell us that after His death Our Lord went to Hades to release the souls of the just who were waiting for His salvation. Our Lord also

made many appearances to His followers after His resurrection and before His ascension to the Father. Upon His resurrection, Our Lord was freed from the boundaries of space and time. He could appear in different places on earth at the same time because He was no longer living within the limits of space and time.

We know from the book of Hebrews that our Lord is an eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek and that He offers Himself in one eternal sacrifice. So we have this conundrum: His death takes place in time on Golgotha but His sacrifice is eternal in the heavenly sanctuary. How can this be understood? How do time and eternity come together in the sacrificial death of Christ?

REFLECTIONS ON SACRIFICE IN THE OLD COVENANT

Remember that the act of slaying the sacrificial victim did not constitute the sacrifice in the religion of Israel. The putting to death of the animal victim was a preparatory act. The sacrifice itself consisted in the act of transferring the offering from the human temporal world to the divine eternal world. The victim was offered as a gift to God. By being sacrificed, the victim-gift was believed to pass from this visible temporal world to the invisible eternal God. Part of the victim's body (or all of it in the holocaust) was consumed in fire. The symbolism here suggests that the offering disappeared in the flames and went up, as the smoke of it rises, to the invisible realm of God.

In most sacrifices, part of the body of the victim was given as food to the priest and part was eaten by the person making the offering. The portion that was burned was thereby consecrated to God. The symbolism here suggests that the worshipper and God have communion by sharing the body the one victim.

In the 'blood ritual' of every animal sacrifice, the priest took some of the victim's blood and put it in contact with the altar. The blood was treated as the life of the animal and the altar represented the presence of God. Pouring the blood at the base of the altar signified giving the life back to God. Humans are allowed to eat the flesh of animals, but the life is holy. The life belongs to God alone. Therefore, in Jewish religious devotion, the blood is never consumed.

The point to note is that the sacrifice does not consist in killing. Sacrifice consists in consecrating the offering by actions that remove it from the profane sphere of our empirical world and translate it to the invisible holy sphere of God. These actions were performed by the priest.

Let us summarize. The worshipper presents the animal for sacrifice. The priest slaughters it in preparation for the sacrificial action to be performed by the priest. The sacrifice itself consists in the action of the priest that removes the sacrificial victim from the earthly sphere and transfers it to the realm of God. This priestly action is the blood ritual. The blood, that is, the life of the victim, was

returned to God when the priest poured it out at the base of the altar. The altar represented the presence of God.

THE ETERNAL SACRIFICE OFFERED BY JESUS

Our Lord Jesus is the worshipper, the priest, and the sacrifice. Jesus, the only true worshipper of the Father in Spirit and Truth, presents the offering for sacrifice at the Last Supper: "This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you." Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, is slain on the altar of the cross at the Place of a Skull.

It is right and necessary for us to count the days and hours we experienced in our earthly time between our Lord's death and His rising. However, in the experience of Jesus, there was no time-lapse between His death and resurrection. The temporal instant of death on the cross gave way to the eternal instant in which He lives forever. His life in eternity was revealed to us by the resurrection on the third day, but it began when he completed His life in time on the cross. From the instant of his death He lives in the indivisible instant of the Father's Eternity. The Eternity of His Risen Life contains and is concomitant with every moment of time past, present, and future.

On the cross, His last words before bowing His head in death were: "It is finished". In death, He finished the work He was sent to accomplish: to atone for all sin, redeem all sinners, obtain eternal life for all the blessed, and to give perfect and eternal glory to His Father. Once He was finished His mission with us in our temporal world, He immediately entered upon His Eternal Life with the Father in heaven. The man dead in the flesh on the cross was alive to God in the Spirit.

Jesus began His eternal life by entering the heavenly sanctuary in eternity as our Immortal High Priest. There, separated from the sinful world, for our sake, He presents Himself to God His Father as the true sacrificial lamb. Our High Priest, Jesus, performs an eternal blood ritual. No longer, as in earthly sacrifices, is the victim's blood brought into contact with an altar that merely symbolizes the divine presence. He gives His Life of immeasurable and ineffable sacrificial love directly to His Father in Face to Face union. This is the manner in which Jesus consecrates Himself to God forever. He does it for our sake, that we may be consecrated with Him in truth. In the heavenly sanctuary, our High Priest lives forever to make intercession for us.

The inspired author of Hebrews depicts Jesus as our *seated* High Priest. He sits down at the right hand of the Father having fully completed an eternal sacrifice. Our Lord in His glory *offers* no more sacrifices. He *is* the one and eternal sacrifice. He is forever removed from mortal life in this temporal world. Now He lives eternally to God His Father. Christ Our Paschal Lamb has been sacrificed for us. Let us keep the eternal feast, Alleluia! This is the feast we keep every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, until He comes again.

EUCCHARISTIC SACRIFICE

I draw your attention to three things our Lord Jesus did at the Last Supper. First, He *offered Himself as the sacrificial lamb to God for us*. He did this by declaring His will to hand over His body and shed His blood “for the forgiveness” of our sins. Second, He *gives us a share in the sacrificial meal*, “take eat...drink”. And thirdly, He *makes us partakers in His priesthood* by telling us to offer His sacrifice: “do this in memory of me.”

We have seen that Jesus was the Lamb offered and slain in time. We observed that He became the High Priest of an eternal sacrifice when He transferred the sacrificial Lamb, His own Body, from the earthly tomb to the heavenly realm of God by His resurrection.

The Sacrifice of Christ began in time at the Supper (the offering of the victim by the worshipper) and on Golgotha (the preparatory rite of slaying of victim). The Sacrifice itself, however, was only completed in eternity when the High Priest appeared in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf bearing His own sacrificial blood.

The Gospel of Mark: 15:37, notes that the curtain of the temple was torn in half immediately after our Lord Jesus bowed His head in death. The entire history of sacrifice in Israel was a foreshadowed of what the Messiah would accomplish. When the promised Reality came, the foreshadow served no further purpose. That is why God will never inspire the Jewish people to restore Temple sacrifice.

When our High Priest passed out of time at death on the cross, He entered the heavenly sanctuary of God’s dwelling. There He makes intercession for us by offering the eternal sacrifice of the New Covenant once and forever. Old Testament sacrifices were only shadows and figures of the reality that was to be accomplished for eternity by the messianic High Priest according to the Order of Melchizedek.

Our Lord’s words at the Supper concerning His blood to be shed “so that sins may be forgiven” refer to His atoning death accomplished in time. These words also refer to the sacrifice He was about to accomplish in eternity as our High Priest when He would present His life-blood to God the Father in the heavenly sanctuary. [In speaking this way, I am using material images drawn from the Letter to the Hebrews to describe purely spiritual realities. This manner of speaking is symbolic, not to be taken literally or physically. There is no material sanctuary in heaven. The Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the sanctuary in heaven. (Rev 21:22).]

“And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Mt. 26:27. The Greek verb here used for “poured out” is the same verb that is used in Leviticus (LXX) when it

describes the blood ritual in sacrifice. In all sacrifices, the blood of the victim is “poured out” at the base of the altar, symbolizing the consecration of the blood-life to God. This usage shows that in Mathew’s text, Jesus is portrayed at the Last Supper as voluntarily giving His blood as an atoning sacrifice by being “poured out”. In time, His blood was physically poured out in His crucifixion and, figuratively speaking, it flowed down to the base of the altar of the cross. In eternity, He presented His poured-out blood as an atoning sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary of God’s presence.

When Christians celebrate the Holy Eucharist, Christ our High Priest becomes invisibly but really present in the midst of the assembly. Before He becomes present in the consecrated elements, our High Priest comes into our midst as the invisible Leader and Celebrant of the Eucharistic Prayer. Do not think that the human priest and the priestly assembly are the main celebrants of the Eucharist. It is the Lord, Jesus Christ our High Priest, who offers the Eucharistic Prayer in and through us when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. As one Body, Christ the Eternal High Priest united with His priestly people, offers the Eucharistic Prayer to God the Father. Our High Priest is present with us in every celebration of the Lord’s Supper. He is present in His eternal act of Self-Sacrificing love. The Risen Lord Jesus is the High Priest Who makes the offering and He is the Victim offered in our celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Because He is in us and we are in Him, we share His Priesthood. His command, “Do this”, calls and ordains us to offer the sacrificial Lamb of God, slain on the cross, whose Life-Blood He consecrated to the Father in the eternal sanctuary.

In the visible celebration of the Eucharist, Christians offer their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. In the mystery of the Eucharist, the Eternal Sacrifice of our great High Priest enters into the temporal sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered by His priestly people. Reciprocally, in the Eucharist, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered by His priestly people in time enters into the eternal Sacrifice of our great High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

When we celebrate the Mystery, we do what He did and what He told us to do. We offer His Eternal Sacrifice and we offer ourselves as living sacrifices, through Him, with Him, and in Him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father and for the salvation of the world. Amen.

GOSPEL AND EUCHARIST

During the first fifty years of the existence of the church, Christians did not have a New Testament bible. Mark may have been composed as early as the middle of the sixties. That is about thirty years after the Lord Jesus ascended to the Father out of our visible temporal world. The Gospel of John was composed around 95. That's more than sixty years after the birth of the church. How many more years elapsed before the gospel compositions were copied and gradually distributed around to other churches? At least twenty and perhaps more than forty years.

The churches of the first century gathered on the first day of the week to worship God without New Testament readings and sermons thereon. What did they do when they gathered together?

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, we see that the assembly welcomed personal gifts of the Holy Spirit that had the power to edify the assembly. These gifts included prayer in tongues with interpretations and prophecy, in which one of the Christians received a revelation that was shared with the assembly: "Thus says the Lord..." Although they did not have the inspired gospels, they did receive from the Risen Christ in their midst words of divine revelation. The writings of the elder, John, who wrote the Book of Revelation are a powerful example of this experience of revelation in the church of the first century.

Certainly, the members of the first Christian assemblies shared the memories of the sayings, miracles, and events in the life of the Lord Jesus. They also shared and interpreted their own lives, especially their experiences of persecution, in the light of the teaching and life of the Lord Jesus as they remembered Him together. We know from the Pastoral Epistles that the assembly also made intercessory prayers for the church and for world leaders. As we do in our churches today, we may assume that the earliest Christian assemblies included times when individuals would give testimony to the wonderful works of grace in their lives and families...conversions, healings, and special experiences of visitation from the Risen Christ in prophecy and dreams.

Analysis of the texts of the passion accounts in the four gospels strongly suggests that in these earliest Christian assemblies, it was common practice to have a verbal recitation, in detail, of the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord as they had received the story from apostolic eye-witnesses.

THE GOSPEL

These first Christians had no New Testament. They had only parts of the Old Testament and only in its Greek translation, the Septuagint. They had no central church authority or structures beyond the local gathering. They had no creeds. They had no canonical prayers for celebrating the Holy Eucharist. They

had no ancient traditions of worship. Rather, without being aware of it, they were being guided by the Holy Spirit to invent the original forms of Christian worship that would develop into traditions for all later generations. These Christian worship communities were the seedbed out of which grew the culture of faith that produced the first forms of the Eucharistic Prayer and a little later, the writings of the New Testament. To note the obvious, Christian worship assemblies preceded and engendered the writings of the New Testament.

If we can understand the heart of worship in the first Christian assemblies, we will identify the essential act of worship of the church for all time until Christ returns in glory.

In a broad and very real sense, every loving thought, word, and deed of every Christian's life is an act of worship. Each Christian offers his or her body as a living sacrifice through, with, and in the Sacrificial Lamb of God. However, we are not seeking the personal worship of the first Christians. Rather, we trying to identify *the central and original act of worship offered to God the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ by Christian Assembly.*

To identify the heart of this communal act of Christian worship we must first ask: Precisely what makes this group a *Christian* assembly? The answer is that they have all believed the oral gospel preached by the apostles and their followers.

The oral gospel was the practically only way to spread faith in Christ during the first century and beyond. When a pagan found grace to hear, believe, and be baptized, she or he became a member of the church, the Body of Christ in a local assembly.

This oral gospel contains a narrative of specific human events that took place in historical times and in geographical places. But this gospel also proclaimed a revelation of what God had accomplished for the world in those events in human history.

First, the oral gospel tells us about the human life, ministry, death, and the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus. That is human history. Then the gospel tells us that God had made the death of Jesus the atoning sacrifice for the salvation of the world and the resurrection of Jesus to be the beginning of the resurrection to eternal life for all who believe. Finally, the oral gospel invited the hearers to believe in the Risen Lord Jesus and promises that the believer will be reborn as children of God, sharing the life of Christ, the only and eternal Son of God.

People who believed this gospel were born again in baptism and became the members of the first Christian assemblies. Filled with overwhelming joy in the newly received Gift of Eternal Life in Christ, what do you think would be their

chief sentiment? What would be the main purpose of their meeting? To give thanks to God for His inestimable Gift! That is, Eucharist.

Once we receive all the good things of the gospel, nothing else is more right, proper, always and everywhere, than to give thanks to God the Almighty Father for all He has done for us in sending His Son. Our response to God for His inexpressible Gift must be an entire life of grateful praise. The first, the primary, and the perennial response to the Gospel is thanksgiving! Thanksgiving, Eucharist, was, I submit, the center of the original Christian assemblies. This assertion is supported by references to the Eucharist in the extant letters of Ignatius who was martyred about 114 and in the earliest section of the Didache which may have been written before the year 70. St. Justin Martyr, writing around 150, also mentions the Christian Eucharist. From then onward in Christian history the Eucharistic tradition is increasingly copiously attested to.

There are good things of eternity that we do not yet see. There are sufferings on earth that we continue to endure. There are dangers and temptations that still assail us and all whom we love. And we rightly pray for mercy, help, and deliverance for ourselves and for others. However, the Gospel tells us that all our particular prayers *have already been answered in the death and resurrection of Jesus*. In other words, we do not pray for any good thing that has not already been given us in the good news of the death and resurrection of Christ. We need to believe and wait patiently until we see the answer to our holy hopes. God's answer may not be concretely what we asked for in our ignorance, but the good news of grace tells us that God will give us *every good thing we ask in the Name of Jesus*.

The empty tomb is God's "Yes" to all our prayers for deliverance from evil and all our desires for happiness for ourselves and for all whom we love. A woman or man of faith never prays with an uncertain attitude like, "I wonder if God will grant my prayer." Be it understood: when we do not get what we ask for in prayer it is because we have not prayed for the best gift that God has for us. Mature Christians have learned this lesson from painful, and at times excruciatingly painful, experience.

We have prayed with all our hearts for something wonderfully good and have not seen it fulfilled. For instance, I prayed that the child might not die and the child died. But the Spirit testified to my spirit that the child died only to this dying world of time. She is not dead, but asleep to this world. In the real world of God's eternity, she is fully awake, fully alive, even with the Life of God.

If all the evil of the past has now been undone... if all possible divine goodness has already been irrevocably given to us... if, until He comes again, we have divine power to do all things and to suffer all things necessary in order to love in the world...then the chief act of worship of Christians must be thanksgiving. We are indeed an alleluia people.

By the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus, God the Father has delivered us from all evil: sin, guilt, suffering and death and He has conferred upon us every blessing of life, love and goodness. That is what the Father has done for us. What is there for us to do but give God thanks and praise?

The climactic act of worship in the Christian worship assembly of the first century was the act of Eucharist, thanksgiving. In the context of a communal prayer of praise and thanksgiving addressed to the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the assembly recounted the story of God's salvation history. The history of God's saving work came to perfect fulfillment when Our Lord instituted the New and Eternal Covenant in His Blood at the Last Supper and consummated it on the cross.

In the communal offering of a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, our glorified and Risen Lord came to the first Christians, and comes today into the midst of our assembly as the eternal High Priest and Sacrificial Lamb. The temporal action of the assembly offering their sacrifice of praise and thanks becomes a sacrament that makes present in our midst, in space and time, the Eternal Self-Sacrifice of Christ Our High Priest.

The entire priestly assembly offers its visible sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Invisibly, however, it is Christ in them who offers their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

The glorified risen Christ is the invisible High Priest of our Eucharistic assembly. In the sacrament of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, our High Priest makes present His eternal Self-Sacrifice to the Father for the world's salvation.

The Eucharistic prayer is always and only a prayer of the whole priestly people. The role of the ordained minister or priest is to speak loudly and clearly the Eucharistic prayer of praise and thanks *in the name of the assembly*. The priest/minister does not have any special personal power from God to celebrate the mysteries *for* the community. He, or she, has been entrusted and honored by the royal priestly people with the privilege of serving them by expressing in loud voice *their* Eucharistic Prayer, *their* sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

In summary: The chief reason why we assemble on the Lord's Day is to respond to the gospel of our salvation by offering to the Father a temporal sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Our temporal sacrifice coalesces with the Eternal Sacrifice of Our Risen High Priest who is present with us in our Eucharistic assembly.

We are not always gathered as a church. Let each one of us, in our solitude, try to keep the gospel in our minds. We should remember it upon

waking in the morning, before sleeping at night, and often during the day. And every time we remember this overwhelmingly good news of the Gift we have in Jesus, let our hearts rejoice and offer to God a secret sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving...a Eucharist of the heart. Amen.

THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE NEW COVENANT

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANS

Name refers to person. Persons express their knowing of each other by calling each other by name.

No individual or group on earth was living in a person-to-person, 'first name', relationship with God until, at the burning bush, God revealed Himself to Moses and took for Himself a human name, "Yahweh".

In the course of human history, people have thought about God in many ways. Intellectuals conceived God abstractly as the ultimate Idea, Power, Intelligence, Principle, Being, Prime Mover, Reason, etc. Ordinary people imagined God in more concrete images by representing Him as a divine version of the sun, fire, ocean, animal or human bodies, etc. By choosing a personal name taken from human language, God revealed to us that the way we should think of God and relate to Him is as a person. Because of universal sin, there are no perfect models of personhood in creation. All fallen human beings have become distorted, warped, grotesquely twisted images of divine personhood. By sinning, we lost our likeness to Him who made us in His Image. (Jesus is His Image).

Until God made Himself present in human experience as a person with a name, "Yahweh", there was no possibility of interpersonal relationships of love between God and human beings.

Interpersonal relationships are naturally developmental. They are not complete from the first moment. Relationships between whole persons mature by degrees as the participants grow in mutual knowledge, love, and shared experiences. The process of maturation of personal relationship with God was compromised because the persons on the human side of the relationship were slaves of selfishness. If God nevertheless 'foolishly' insisted on having a love relationship with such troubled people, He was bound to suffer...even to the cross.

God began a personal love relationship with humans when He first revealed His chosen human name, Yahweh. God brought His personal relationship with us to full maturity when He fully revealed His Name to us in the Person, Jesus.

In Jesus, the personal relationship between God and human beings is made complete. The human word, "Yahweh", began our relationship to God as a Person. The Divine Word, "Jesus", is the final perfection of our personal relationship with God.

THE FIRST COVENANT

Between the dawn of human personal love relationship with God and its zenith in the Incarnate God, Jesus, there came the age of the first Covenant.

To secure His first personal love relationship by Name with human kind, God instituted an agreement, that is, a Covenant, with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. By that agreement, the Sovereign Lord of all creation bound Himself to a bellicose and rebellious ethnic group of Hebrews. The other party to the agreement, the people of Israel, bound themselves to make Yahweh their only God.

According to the Covenant, Yahweh would be their only God and they would be His unique people. They would obey God's laws and decrees and He would give them progeny, prosperity, and protection. The Covenant promised blessing upon those who keep the Law of the Covenant. However, a curse awaited those who would break the Covenant by transgressing the Law of the Covenant.

There was no provision in the Covenant for terminating the Covenant. God would never dissolve the Covenant, no matter how often and egregiously the people broke it. God would never disown the people, not even when they abandoned Yahweh for idols.

The first Covenant was sealed in blood. Blood was considered to be the most holy element in the material world. To the Hebrew mind, blood is life. Life, blood, belongs only to God. He gives it to whom He will. At death, the body returns to the dust from which it came but the life returns to God who gave it. In the temple liturgy, the 'return to God' of the life of the sacrificial victim was symbolized by pouring out the life-blood at the altar—the altar representing the presence of God.

Recall the institution of the Covenant on Mt Sinai. Moses read to the people all of the laws and commandments of the Lord. The people unanimously responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said." (Ex 24: 3) Moses took half of the blood of the sacrificial victims and sprinkled it on the altar, which was a symbol of the presence of God. The other half of the blood Moses sprinkled on the people, saying: "This is the blood of the Covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

In this ritual, life-blood is the common element shared by the Covenant God and the Covenant people. The blood rite is a seal of the Covenant. This 'shared life-blood' signifies that the two parties, Yahweh and Israel, are bound together in the Covenant. The Covenant, with its laws, decrees, rewards and punishments, defined the relationship between God and Israel.

Devout Jews dedicated themselves to the Law of the Covenant graciously given to them by God at Sinai. Observance of the Law was the expression of Israel's love for Yahweh. They loved the Law of God. It was more precious to them than gold and silver seven times refined. The Law of the Covenant was dearer to the psalmist than life itself. Israel received the gift of the Law as the ultimate expression of God's love for them. They offered their obedience to the Law as their gift of love for God.

They taught the Law to their children. They fastened the Law to their door posts. They carried the Law of the Covenant on their arms and on their foreheads as permanent reminders. They tried to keep the Law in mind day and night. Remembrance of the Law meant life. To forget the Law brought death.

In their great devotion to Covenant Law, the learned Rabbis prayerfully poured over the sacred text of the Pentateuch seeking the minutest details of the Will of God expressed there. They produced a code of 616 distinct prescriptions of the Law that they could observe in honor of Yahweh.

PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT

But who could bear the burden of perfect observance of the Law? St Paul declared that neither the Jews of his day nor the generations before them were able to fulfill the whole Law.

Who will deliver us from the Covenant of commandments? Thanks be to God, it is Jesus Christ Our Lord. He fulfilled the Law of the first Covenant by taking upon Himself the Law's curse: "Cursed is anyone hanged on a tree." Jesus died a sinner's death as the Law prescribes. The Lord Jesus brought the first Covenant to its fulfillment in His death and in that death Jesus instituted the promised New Covenant.

According to God's eternal plan, Israel was to learn her own weakness and depravity from her continually repeated experience of breaking the Covenant and falling into sin. Jeremiah spoke out of this experience of need for forgiveness and renewal. In God's name, Jeremiah promised a New Covenant. The New Covenant would be written within us on our hearts, not on external tablets of stone. In the New Covenant God would not only give us commandments; He would give us a new Spirit that empowers us to fulfill His New Covenant of love.

The New Covenant would be better than the first. The New Covenant consists in God's decision to forgive all the sins of all people and to give a new Spirit of Eternal Life to all who are willing to receive. God forgives sinners without asking for their consent. However, to preserve the freedom He created in us, God respectfully asks for the consent of those to whom He would give His Spirit.

By faith in the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus, we enter the New Covenant. Our choice to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ expresses our reception of forgiveness of our sins through the Blood of Jesus and our consent to receive the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is a new life-principle from God. Once received, the Spirit makes us one with Jesus and beloved children of God. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to do and to suffer all that is necessary to complete our mission from Christ to love in the world.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Our Blessed Lord Jesus instituted the New Covenant at the last supper. "This is my body, given for you. This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new covenant. It will be shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."

That first celebration of the Lord's Supper was the inauguration of the New Covenant, fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah. As long as Christians are on the earth, we will do what He did that holy night. We will bless bread and wine to be the body and blood of the Lord. In so doing, we will proclaim the salvation of the world by the death of Christ until He comes again. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we renew our agreement to the New Covenant of grace and our commitment to it. At least, this is what the Spirit of Jesus desires that we should do every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

The specific terms of the New Covenant can be expressed like this: we enter into agreement with God by believing that the death of Jesus takes away our sins and the resurrection life of Jesus is now given to us in the Spirit He pours into our hearts. In the Spirit of Jesus, we live a new life as beloved children of God. In this New Covenant, God obliges Himself to forgive all our sins and to pour His Spirit into our hearts. We oblige ourselves simply to believe God does this for us, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. We respond to God's gracious love to us by offering Him the Eucharistic sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

At the beginning of the first Covenant, the life-blood of the sacrificial victim was sprinkled on the Israelites. In the New Covenant, the Life-Blood of the Victim, Jesus, is given to us to drink...signifying that His Life, His Spirit, now abides in us. The immortal life of the Jesus Risen now flows in our mortal veins!

Not just for Israel; not only for Christians; the New Covenant is intended and offered by God to the whole world. For those who do enter it, the New Covenant is the final form of the personal love relationship God has established with the human race.

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, let us consciously, intentionally, and devoutly renew our commitment to the New Covenant in His Precious and Adorable Blood...to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE EUCHARIST AND WORLD SALVATION

At the end of His life, just before our Lord Jesus was about to depart from our physical presence in this world, His human heart was filled to overflowing with love for us. With great desire He wanted to have this one last meal with the disciples he loved so much. His heart was torn. On the one hand, it was necessary for our sake that he leave our world to go to His Father. Yet, how could he leave us! To resolve the conflict between His emotion of love for us and the greater love of His will to die for us, our dear Lord invented the mystery of the Supper. Revealed only to the eyes of believers, our Blessed Lord Jesus continues to be present to us in our empirical world in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

With the eyes of our believing hearts, we see Jesus, in His glorified humanity and in the fullness of His divinity, present with us in our Eucharistic assembly. He comes as the glorious impassible Victim, the Lamb as it were slain, yet the One Who lives forever. He comes to us as the One High Priest of the New Covenant according to the Order of Melchizedek. He offers His Eternal Sacrifice, through, with, and in our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. He promised us long ago that He would come to us and make His home in us. Fulfilling that promise, Blessed Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion. Our Holy Communion with Christ and each other climaxes when He gives Himself to us, as the Gift of God the Father: the Bread of Life and the Wine of God's Imperishable Love.

In the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the human minister presides *visibly*. The Lord Jesus presides *invisibly*. Just as on the night before He suffered, still today the Lord Jesus is the High Priest Who offers His eternal sacrifice in the mystery of the Supper. Our Blessed Savior is the only one who could make the offering of Himself. He offered Himself at the Supper, saying, "This is my body given ...this is my blood to be shed." The offering He made at the Supper was completed on the Cross when He uttered His last words, "It is finished".

His self-offering at the Supper, His immolation on the Tree, and His rising to eternal priesthood was all His work alone, without us. But after He was glorified, He shared His life and His priesthood with us. We were baptized into His risen life and into His eternal priesthood. All Christians are a priestly people and a royal priesthood because they are in the One High Priest and He is in them.

What sacrifice do we offer to God? The devout Jews of the Old Covenant offered praise, thanks, and their lives to God along with the animals they sacrificed. But those devotional sacrifices neither permanently sanctified the people nor adequately glorified God.

At the Lord's Supper, we Christians also offer devotional sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving and we offer our selves to God as living sacrifices. But we have a better

sacrifice to offer, one that is not of this creation. We have a heavenly sacrifice that is pure, holy, without blemish, perfect; the only sacrifice that worthily glorifies God forever. The sacrifice we offer is the Lamb of God, whose self-offering in obedient love completely redeems and forever sanctifies all worlds and perfectly glorifies God the Father for all eternity.

At the Holy Eucharist, Christ the High Priest presents His eternal offering of Himself to the Father in the sacrificial love He expressed on the cross. This High Priest offers Himself for us, through us, with us, and in us. We offer His sacrifice through Him, with Him and in Him. The offering of this eternal sacrifice by our glorified High Priest in His priestly people gives all honor and glory to God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

With hearts aflame with love and minds humbled to stillness by so great a mystery, we receive the Lord in Person under the signs of bread and wine. In Holy Communion we submit ourselves in love and in trust to the mystery of His Body and Blood. We give ourselves to Him who gives Himself to us as the Bread of Life and the Wine of Immortality. Leaving behind our sense impressions and going beyond the reach of human reason, we surrender ourselves in loving trust to Jesus Who comes to us in our spirit. When we receive Holy Communion we allow the Lord to do unto us according to His word whatever He will.

In the sacred actions and elements of the Supper, we experience consummate personal and communal union with Jesus Christ. When we bless the bread and the cup to become for us the Body and Blood of Jesus, we offer the Sacrificial Lamb of God for the world's salvation. When we eat and drink the elements, we have fellowship with each other as we have fellowship together in the Body and Blood of Christ. In Holy Communion, He causes our material action of eating and drinking to become a sacrament of His spiritual indwelling in our hearts. Under the sign of Bread, Jesus enters into us in time and makes us know that we live in Him in eternity. Under the sign of Wine, He makes present to us the Precious Blood once and forever shed for us. His life is in His Blood. When we drink from the cup of His Blood, we drink His divine Life into our human life.

The worship offered by the Eucharistic assembly is the culmination of all human acts of worship in history. Our Eucharistic sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving embodies the eternal sacrifice of the Jesus Crucified. Therefore, our celebration of the Lord's Supper, alone in all human history, rises from this world to worthily glorify God the Father

Christians receive the forgiveness of their sins once and forever when they first receive by faith the shed Blood of Christ. Therefore we do not offer the Eucharist as a sacrifice for our sins over and over again. Now that we have been permanently cleansed of sin and guilt, the only sacrifice we can offer is one of praise and thanksgiving for the salvation God has wrought for us in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

While we rejoice in the favor we have received, we remember with compassion our fellow human beings who are still walking in the darkness of sin and death. The lost world desperately needs the Sacrifice that takes away its sin. The unbelieving world is unaware that it is starving unto eternal death for the Bread of Heaven that comes down to give life to the world.

We are children of God Who loved the sinful world so much that He gave His only Son for it. God poured this love into our hearts by the Spirit and it causes us to do what we see our heavenly Father doing. In our Eucharist, we in Christ and He in us, offer the eternal sacrifice for the salvation of the lost world. Our High Priest first offered Himself on the Cross and He continues His one eternal sacrifice in His priestly people when they celebrate the Eucharist. The eternal sacrifice of Jesus in heaven, offered on earth in the Christian Eucharist, is the lost world's only hope of salvation.

From the Last Supper, today, and until He comes again, Our Blessed Lord ardently desires to give Himself to us and for us in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and not for us only but also for the whole world. Jesus Christ died for the salvation of all sinners, all human beings. We must be like Him and offer His sacrifice for the salvation of the lost.

The One Who came to save the lost desires to offer His eternal sacrifice in our midst whenever we have the faith and devotion to offer the Eucharistic prayer. When we celebrate the Eucharist, our Blessed Savior desires us to join our Him in offering His eternal sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

PRIESTS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Our Lord does not give us a static inert substance in the bread and wine of the Supper. He makes Himself present to us *in the act of offering Himself as the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and the sins of the world*. The Holy Eucharist is our experience in space and time of the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, offering Himself for the salvation of the world. In the first place, originally and eternally, the Lord Jesus is the Priest of the Lord's Supper.

Christian worship consists in prayers, readings, preaching, and song. All of these are the words and actions of the worshipers. Christians pray, read, preach, and sing. But when we make the Remembrance, according to His word on the night before He suffered, what takes place is not something Christians do by themselves. In the mystery of the Supper, it is the Risen Lord of Glory who acts. Jesus, in all His human and divine reality, becomes present to us. He is presides in the mystery of the Holy Table. In silent adoration, Christians receive the Lord in Person and they allow Him to sanctify them by coming to them in Communion.

From that first Supper, today, and until He comes again, Our Blessed Lord ardently yearns to give Himself to us and for us in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Who among us is qualified to carry out these holy mysteries? Every baptized Christian with living faith is a priest in the One High Priest, Jesus Christ. By baptism into Christ we all became priests and together we are a royal priesthood to God. Grace has made us priests, sinners though we are, worthy to offer the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

We need to put some kind of order in our assembly. Therefore, we Christians take note of each others' spiritual gifts. Then we assign duties according to the gifts...evangelists, teachers, prophets, helpers, etc. In any assembly, we recognize who has a deep and reverent understanding of mystery of the Lord's Supper. We assign these persons, with prayer and the laying on of hands, to lead the narrative Eucharistic Prayer addressed to God the Father. So doing, we "ordain" them to the eldership of the Lord's Supper, that is, we ordain them priests (presbyteroi, elders). These servants exercise no power over the community. They have no special "supernatural power" to convert bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. They have the honor of articulating the priestly prayer of the priestly people in which he or she has a place as an equal, not as a superior. These priests are simple Christians ordained by the community to eldership of the Lord's Supper. Their role is to be obedient servants in the performance of the duties of the "order" to which the church assembly appoints them.

In the long course of Christian history, the church assemblies grew beyond the size of house churches. After Constantine's conversion, from the year 314 onward, the church became more and more institutionalized as a state sponsored public service. This involved increasing institutionalization of the priesthood. Progressively in the fourth century, church leaders fused and confused the secular model of authority in the Roman Empire with the ministry of service in Christ's church. Since then, priests and bishops have thought

that they are ordained to rule over the Christians in their care. These developments reverse the explicit gospel teaching of the Lord Jesus and the practice of the first Christian assemblies.

It was never the will of the Lord Jesus for any Christian to rule over another. He desires all of us to make ourselves obedient servants of one another. He would have us confer the authority to serve upon those endowed by the Spirit with gifts of service. These spiritual gifts include leadership, administration, and presidency, but these personal spiritual gifts are to be called into action by the community of faith.

In the Spirit of Jesus, all Christian ministers, including priests and bishops, are to be humble, obedient servants, charged by the community of faith with the duty and privilege of speaking the words of faith of the believing community. Clergy are accountable to God and to their community of faith for the orthodoxy of their teaching, the integrity of their morals, and the quality of their ministry.

Ordained clergy have been entrusted by the community of faith with many functions over the centuries. I believe the first duty of ministers is fidelity, in their lives and in their teaching, to the apostolic gospel. I believe their second duty, inseparable from the first, is the stewardship of the Eucharistic mystery. Priests are ordained to preach and teach the gospel among their people and to pronounce the Eucharistic Prayer in the name of the assembled priestly people. Clergy are also pastors. After feeding the sheep with the bread of heaven in the Eucharist, the main goal of the pastoral ministry of priests and bishops is to equip all of the saints for their ministries.

Deacons are ordained to serve in the ministry of the word, in the assembly and beyond. At the Holy Eucharist, deacons have the honor of reading the gospel and assisting the priest at the altar-table. Deacons also have a ministry of the Eucharist in helping in the distribution during the service and they carry the sacred elements to those who cannot be present. Bishops are consecrated to the ministry of encouraging and empowering priests and deacons for their high calling to be pastors and table servants of the people of God assembled for worship.

The local church ordains men and women to serve the community with their gifts. By ordination the church gives communal recognition, affirmation, and activation of the ministry gifts of the individual member. The clergy are entrusted by the people to teach, preach, counsel, organize, direct, and call the members to the fullness of love and purity of faith. They represent the body of believers to the larger society. All of these sacred ministries are of inestimable worth. Above them all, I believe there is no greater reason, no holier purpose, for ministers, bishops, priests, and deacons to exist in the church than to be protectors and stewards of the meaning and the ministry of the Mystery of Christ's Body and Blood.

Prophets, teachers, preachers, and evangelists have the grace of a very special anointing of the Holy Spirit that empowers them to carry out their ministry of the word. They may also be called to the ordained ministry of the Lord's Supper. But priests are ordained

above all to serve the mystery of the Lord's Supper. A pastor feeds his flock. How could a wise and faithful pastor fail to feed his people with the Food of Immortality?

Inspired ministers of the Lord's Supper consider the Holy Eucharist as greater than their preaching, greater than their prayers and works, even greater than themselves. They tremble when they remember what they believe: the Holy Eucharist is the Presence of the Lord! All Christians share equally the priesthood of Christ. But those who have been set apart by priestly ordination owe it to the church and to God that they should rather die than betray the revealed meaning and the sacred ministry of the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ.

All these holy mysteries take place in the sacrament of the Eucharist: The supreme glorification of God the Father; the Eternal Sacrifice of God the Son Incarnate for the salvation of the world; the Exaltation of the Risen Lord Jesus; the union of all the saints in One Risen Body; their participation in Christ's Life and Spirit, their abiding in Him and He in them; and more great mysteries of God than all we can think or imagine.

May God raise up a band of Christians, priests by baptism or also by ordination, who will share a deep devotion to the mystery of the Lord's Supper and a pastoral passion to bring to others this ineffable joy of the Fellowship of Jesus in Holy Communion.

Amen.