

## FUTURE CHURCH

### Thomas O'Loughlin on the Eucharist

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Hello. First, it's lovely to be with you on Future Church. This is my first time to do anything with your organization. It's also my first time to lecture, looking here at my computer screen and without human bodies actually in front of me.

The other thing I should tell you is, the campus has gone completely silent, because there is an event taking place in Moscow at the moment and I think I certainly am the only person in the building, and I think I'm probably the only person at the university who is not watching the television at the moment.

Okay. Earlier today, I read some of the questions you sent in, and it ranged from questions about our [praxis?] today to questions about some of the medieval theology of the Eucharist that have continued to play a major part in Catholic life, to questions about how did the Eucharist start.

One of the problems that Catholics and Orthodox in particular face when they look at the Eucharist, something they have been doing day in, day out, and certainly week in, week out, for the best part of 2,000 years, is that, very often, we get fascinated by issues that were terribly important at one point in the history of the Church and then the tape gets stuck and it just keeps repeating.

So, for instance, in the early 16th century, we became absolutely obsessed with the whole question of presence and how is Christ present. How is Christ present in the elements? And that led to a debate on the mode of presence. But often, we fail to realize that for the first thousand years, the presence of Christ is hardly ever mentioned, because the presence of the risen Christ with the community of the faithful, particularly when they gather in His name, is just taken for granted.

For the first thousand years, the question is, how are we adequately addressing the Father. So, rather than take one or two questions, I would like you to consider one of my favorite questions to try and get back to what is the core of the theology of the Eucharist, and that is, when was the first Eucharist.

Now, some of you are immediately thinking of Leonardo da Vinci's painting, the picture of the Last Supper, and saying, the Last Supper is the first Eucharist. [*Inaudible*], oh, well, that's still before the crucifixion. Or what about, maybe the first Eucharist is on Easter Sunday. It's an [amoss?] on Easter Sunday evening. Others may say, well, maybe the Eucharist is not any one meal that Jesus had; maybe it's all the meals together, because we find in Mark's Gospel, wherever we have any feeding story, we find the technical language of Eucharist.

But in a sense, all of that is focusing on the Eucharist as something that is completely new with Jesus. I'd like to suggest that we don't know when the first Eucharist was, but the first Eucharist that we can actually see some of the texts that were used for it took place sometime during the time of the Second Temple. Every morning and every evening in the Temple, there is a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

The priests, on behalf of Israel, present food to the Lord on His great table, the alter just outside the Holy of Holies on Mount Zion. And the idea that it is fundamental that one should give thanks to God for all His goodness is behind the idea of grace that is at every meal, made part of the law explicitly in the Book of Deuteronomy.

So we see, in the whole time of the Second Temple, a focus on the idea that the relationship of Israel and the relationship of every individual who makes up Israel, to the God who is the creator of all, is fundamentally one of thankfulness. But it's a thankfulness of a very particular sort: it's a thankfulness of joy; it's a thankfulness that rejoices that all that we have is God's gift, it is given to us for our enjoyment, and then we acknowledge God by sharing it with Him.

Writing sometime in the 90s of the common era, Josephus, in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, talks about the way the Jewish people--and he is writing for outsiders; he's writing to try to explain Judaism to the Roman world--how do they see their relationship. And he says they see God acting in their history and then they express a relationship with God, who acts, by thanking Him by prayer and by having a great communal feast.

[Bilo?], writing in the middle of the first century while the Temple is still working in Jerusalem, sees Eucharist as fundamental to the prayer of Israel. And he draws up a little quadrilateral. Israel must remember and must thank. So, [Aninessus?] leads to Eucharistia. And then he says, if that is the high point in Israel's life, then what is the greatest sin? And he says, forgetfulness, amnesia, and ingratitude—[acharistea?]

So he says, Israel is called to be the people of remembrance of the goodness of God, and then they express thankfulness. And what they must flee from is forgetfulness of God, forgetfulness of his goodness, and ingratitude. And if you think of the story of the healing of the ten lepers, only one remembers and then thanks. You will see that that language was passing over into the early communities.

So, what is distinctive about the way Jesus engaged in Eucharist? Well, for a start, his way is different to other Eucharists that were taking place at that time. Jesus is not a [comranite?]. But we see, in the Eucharists that were taking place in Qumran, that it is a community offering thanks and it says that its common refectory, its common dining hall, has now replaced the Temple of Jerusalem, and the table at which the community eats, this is a table which is replacing the altar in the Temple.

It is in that community that we hear the first reference to a sung Eucharistic prayer, and indeed, it's a prayer that can sometimes be sung by a woman. It is in that community that we hear for the first time the reference to the one who stands in front of the community to offer the prayer of thanksgiving, the [prohistaminus?], what will later become standard Christian jargon. And it is in that community that the tables are set, served, and cleaned up by the young members of the community, who are known as the deacons.

On the other hand, [what?] [Qumran are people who have left the world and have gone out into the desert. They are a prototypical monastery. On the other hand, there are the Pharisees. The Pharisees are scattered through the land. But the Pharisees are so frightened of breaking the law of purity that they are afraid to eat together. Thankfulness becomes individual, and at most, a family.

Jesus, on the other hand, goes out into all of the land--in that, he shares with the Pharisees, and is completely unworried about the purity regulations. Wherever a community gathers, that is a community that can offer thanks. Like the community down in Qumran, the table becomes a very sacred place. Indeed, for [John], time will come when it will neither be [mancaretzim] nor Mount Zion, but wherever people gather in spirit and in truth.

But there is also a difference in Jesus's practice, and it is that practice that forms a continuity over all the different explanations of the activity that we find in documents like 1 Corinthians, the Synoptics, the Didache, the Gospel of John, Acts, and that is, first of all, the table is open. No one is excluded from the table because of fears about impurity. Indeed, there are men, women, there are tax collectors, there are

the positively impure. But they gather and they address their prayer to the Father. God is no longer the unknown one, the one whose name may not be uttered. He is addressed relationally as Abba.

Jesus has a different way of praying. For an [ordinary man] in Comran, the blessing was said by a priest. Now, anyone can say the blessing. The Didache assumes that every Christian, every follower of Jesus in the Didache is older than the name 'Christian,' can learn off a prayer and use it for memory. Special visiting people, like the prophets, they can come in and they're to pray as they like. But if there is no one there who is a visitor from another church, you just use a standard prayer. It is adopted from the standard prayer that every other community who served God as Jews would have used except it ends, "through Christ, our Lord."

And also, he does something differently. The leader of the table in a Jewish household at a Shabbat meal, prayed a blessing over his own bread, and by extension, that became the blessing for everyone. Jesus blesses a loaf and asks that everyone share it. They're actually to share one with another.

This is fundamentally breaking down the idea that this is a gathering of just individuals. Everyone must see themselves as forming a new Israel around the table, and indeed, the loaf for the Didache is the symbol of the regathered Israel, as Israel was scattered on the mountains as grain is scattered in the field. Now the loaf represents the transformation and the reunification of Israel, and each gets a share in it. It's not a case that they're all getting communion; they're each sharing in a single loaf.

For sharing in a single loaf is actually tapping into something that is very standard in human culture, because we are meal-sharing animals. But what about sharing a cup? There is no mention in the ancient world of sharing a cup. Homer makes one reference to it, but on one island the people are so barbarous that they have to use a common cup. We might all share a birthday cake, but if we are having a glass of wine for our birthday, we would all have our own individual glasses.

But the Jesus ritual asks us to share a cup, and sharing a cup is counter-intuitive. It's something we don't like doing, and it's something that, right through the history of the Church, we have found reasons to try and dodge. And yet it's there. It is so hard--in fact, I believe it is virtually impossible to get back to the very words of Jesus, "[inaudible absissima vera Christi]"--because we always get to them through the redactive lens of the communities that were retelling the story.

But we can get back to the very actions of Jesus. It is the very action that is unique to him of sharing a loaf and sharing a cup.

Just imagine that you are present at one of the meals of Jesus and had, through some wonderful time machine, a tape recorder. You have only one minute's worth of tape. What will you record? Well, surely you would record his actual words of prayer, his Eucharistic prayer, his prayer of blessing the Father. And yet, that is precisely what we don't have.

The Synoptics and Paul both say that he took a loaf of bread and he blessed. It's not, "he blessed the bread." That's late Medieval confusion. "He blessed the Father". Mark worried about the difference between [Eracha] and [Odei], rendered in Greek, [Eulagein] and [Eucharistine]. He says, "He blessed and thanked." So, he took a loaf of bread and he blessed and thanked the Father.

But in the Synoptic tradition, the whole of the tradition, didn't turn on the tape recorder. Rather, it recorded the [Rubrics]. [Here], take it. This is what you are to do with it. Then, after supper, he took the cup. Again, he thanked, again he blessed the Father. But again, they didn't turn on the tape. Each of you drink this.

Curiously, the first communities were not concerned with the actual words addressed to the Father, because they all knew them. They all knew a Eucharistic prayer. They all knew a Eucharistic prayer in two pieces: one over the loaf, one over the cup, and in other churches, over the cup and over the loaf. And that prayer was probably different in the different language areas. It would have been different in Syriac-speaking areas, in Greek-speaking areas, in Coptic-speaking areas, and if [inaudible], Ethiopic-speaking areas.

But what is consistent is that it is a community at a single table with a single loaf and with a single cup, and the focus is on the Father.

Now, when we express it like that, we suddenly realize that the various pictures we have in the three Synoptic Gospels, in 1 Corinthians, and in the Didache, which we tend to view as slightly different from one another, and we see that they sing, actually, in harmony, because they give us the essential focus of what is an ongoing activity of the community of followers. They gather regularly to eat together, and this meal is a meal of rejoicing. And there, they engage in the activity of Eucharist with the risen Christ towards a Father.

We tend to think of the Eucharist as an object. We talk about receiving the Eucharist, getting the Eucharist, who can be admitted to the Eucharist. But the Eucharist is an activity; it's an action. Even the code of canon law, I think it's canon 899, says, the Eucharist is the action of Christ Himself and the Church. The Eucharist is something we do.

Another confusion is that we tend to focus on the Eucharist as an encounter with Christ. Well, the Didache says, whenever we talk about the things of the Lord, the Lord is present with us. We, as a virtual community tonight, are talking about things [inaudible] the risen Lord is present in our community over the Internet. The focus of the Eucharist is the focus of the thanking in the spirit with Christ towards the Father.

And lastly--and this is something that is particular to us as Catholics--we tend to focus on the Eucharist almost as the most sacred commodity, and yet it's the community's meal of thanksgiving, because the community becomes what it is, a body of Christ when empowered by the spirit which engages in rendering thanks to the Father.

So, when we look to the future of the Church, I think it's very helpful to try and focus on those kernels and then let all the other problems find their own location around that core.

Well, I was told to lecture for twenty to twenty-five minutes and I've lectured for twenty-four minutes, and so now I am going to hand back to Deb and your questions.

## Q&A

Deb: Very good. Thank you so much, Tom. What an inspiring and thoughtful presentation. Evokes a lot of questions for me. We're going to go into the question-and-answer mode here. [Explains how to use the system to pose a question.] So, if we could have the first person ask a question of Tom.

Q: Yes, I have a couple of questions. We have certainly gone a long way down the rabbit hole, from what you're describing as a different emphasis. How did we get this way?

Tom: We got this way through a series of 101 tiny, little steps, none of which were noticed at the time, but then suddenly we found ourselves a long way off. Can I give you a very simple one that happened? Sometime around the year 800, the language we now call Latin got its present sound system. Until the year 800--let's say the 750s/760s--if you were anywhere in France or Italy or Spain, you would have heard the prayers of the Eucharist in your own language. They would have looked the same on page, but there would have been three separate sounds.

Then, around 800, Charlemagne is gathering people from all over Western Europe to work in his court. They can all read one another's writing, but they cannot speak to one another, so they invent a special system of sounds that follows the exact form of the writing. And so they invented a thing called 'Literai,' the Latin we know today.

They then go back to their parishes. And they don't go back sounding the prayers in what they now call the 'servants' language' vernacular, [inaudible] now being a servant; they now sound it in the posh language of the court. But no one understands it. But if you don't understand what you're doing, you have to justify why you're there.

So we developed more and more interest in the Eucharist as the wondrous act, and that is why you should be present. You should be present not because you would understand what is said, or because you would eat or drink, because at the same time, fears that you are a sinner and would eat and drink [on word, though they take over?]. And so you now go to mass on Sunday, you don't understand and the language, and you don't eat or drink. You have to tell a new story.

And funnily enough, a hundred years earlier, you see, [Isadora Seville] had started telling a story that the Eucharist was the super-relic. For the relic of a saint, you had a bone, but for Christ Himself, you had his body and blood. So He takes over a theology of relics which goes on very well with his Visigothic, rather crude congregation, because they have a reason for why they should go to mass. Now, in 800, you need a reason for going to mass.

And that becomes the reason: you will be there at the great moment of change when Christ will become present. It's at this time ringing bells come in. [Insensing] elevations come in. But if you're not going to go to communion and only the priest is going to eat, why use a big loaf? That seems a waste. So you bring the loaf down to being a tiny loaf, just enough for one.

And then, if you're going to store some of it for Viaticum [?], well, unleavened bread is cheaper and doesn't go off. Suddenly, the West goes to an individual-sized loaf just for the priest, and it becomes unleavened because it doesn't go moldy. And if you are going to go to communion, well, the great cups, they now become individual drinking classes and the cup now becomes the image of the priest himself.

But if the priest is the only one doing any speaking, now the priest will start thinking of himself not as the leader of the community, but as the one who prays on behalf of the community, and even though, technically, they will still be called presbytery, technically they will identify themselves as sacerdotess, they will start thinking of themselves as Cohanim and apply to themselves all the special ideas of the Book of Leviticus.

So there is no one moment. And then, once you've started using unleavened bread, then the Eastern Church says, but unleavened bread belongs to the time of sorrow, but [leavened/

living?) loaf is [for OR what] Christian [Jews/choose], because it's not ['azims']--that's the word used in the Scriptures--but ['arthus']. And suddenly the Eastern Church says, oh, well, if you're not going to use leavened bread, you're actually denying the newness of Jesus Christ and we will have nothing to do with you. And then we say, well, if you're having nothing to do with us, you're actually [over\_power?] and we end up mutually excommunicating each other.

So there is no one major moment; there is a whole string of little moments that lead us, to use your lovely phrase, down the rabbit hole.

Deb: Thank you. Tom, this is Deb. There were two question that were sent in that I thought were interesting. And you may have in some ways covered this, but someone asked, what do we really mean by the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist? Also, someone asked, what happens when we have priestless parishes? What happens to the Eucharist then? So, I think they're somewhat connected, but it would be good to have you speak to those two questions.

Tom: Well, the notion, this phrase, the "real presence," is one that develops out of controversy. And it develops out of the controversies of the 1520s. And it's not a very useful phrase, because if you want to actually start thinking theologically, it's always best to say, should you start with the wrong ideas and countering wrong ideas, or should you try to get to the right idea.

Let's think of the notion of presence. At the core of the Christian religion is [thus], the word [made] flesh is present to the whole community. Lo, I am with you always, yes, until the close of the age. It is central to the proclamation of the good news, the Kerygma, that the risen Christ has conquered death and is risen and is both with the Father and with us. And so, the risen Christ is present when we as a community remember Him. And so when we, as a community, read the Gospels, so that we can say, when we read the Gospels and the liturgy, it is the risen Christ Himself who speaks to us.

Now, the risen Christ is also present in the [whole] assembly because we are the people who confess that we have died and have entered into the risen Christ in baptism. And he's present in the table, and he's present in what we do at the table, and he's present in our meal.

All of those presences are connected, and it's that presence that transforms our prayer from being just our prayer as a group into being His prayer as we address the Father. And that's far more useful than trying to start off with a sort of 16th century theological microscope: Is he here or is He not here? Is He here before or after? Is it a sort of change? Because all of those presuppose a very limited vision of God with the Church.

[Also?], priestless parishes, to a certain extent, within Catholic theology, a vocations crisis is a contradiction in terms, because wherever there is a community, a community should offer the thanksgiving sacrifice, the meal of the Lord, the Eucharist. But the task of the bishop is to actualize that by authorizing someone in every community who leads that. That is why, throughout the Middle Ages, there was never a shortage of clergy, and there were tiny churches, usually with no more than twenty or thirty people. There is no evidence, until the 18th or early 19th century, of the Eucharist ever being celebrated for a community of more than seventy or eighty people.

So the idea of a priestless parish is taking a structure and legal prohibitions and absolutizing it. If there is a community, there are enough people to gather for a Eucharist. It has been the

task of the bishop to authorize someone to be the one who stands in front of that community and leads that community in its Eucharistic prayer.

And, of course, that means that things like the idea of, we may need a professional ministry because we need special skills. But to lead the Eucharist is something that is a function of the community and it is the challenge of the bishop who actualizes and authorizes that community as a Eucharistic community.

At the moment, it's the canonical need to have professional clergy, who are celebrate, that is limiting priestless parishes. We need to see parishes as just room and [taxing?] structures that we're taking over for administration on behalf of the empire by the Church. We need to think about real communities and actualizing the Eucharistic praying within those communities.

While we're waiting for a question, a lot of what I have been saying tonight, if you want to read more about it, go to my academia.edu site and you can download papers that will give you--on various aspects you'll find papers. There are several on what happens in the seventh and eighth centuries to the Eucharist that were so important in transforming the Eucharist in late antiquity into the Eucharist that we know today.

Deb: I have a question about--this happened to me many decades ago, so this is very particular to the community I was in at the time. I was at a Eucharistic mass with my daughters, and the priest was giving the vocations talk and, of course, talked only to the males in Church. And it struck me at the time, when he said to me when I went up for the Eucharist and communion, he said, "body of Christ," and it struck me as to how much I was left out of the body of Christ. Can you talk a little about the sense of justice and how that impacts this idea of the Eucharist? I really did not feel like it was truly the body of Christ. I felt like half of us were left out of this body.

Tom: Well, can I just tell you a little story? For the last 230 years, and certainly, between the 1790 and 1960, it was an unwritten given that the Catholic Church didn't like the French Revolution. The French Revolution stood for godlessness, modernity, danger, anti-clericalism--certainly for anti-clericalism.

And I know a parish in France where a local mayor, to annoy the parish priests, sometime in the 1950s, went out to the front of the church and painted, "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" as much to say, you in there need to know that you're in France and these are French values.

Curiously, the very first community that said, whether you're a slave or not, before God you are free, were the Essenes, and this becomes part of Christian liturgy. Christian liturgy--it doesn't matter whether you're a slave or free; we are all equal around the Eucharistic table. And that's one of the reasons Paul has to give [out?] and criticize the community in Corinth, because the community in Corinth is bringing all the statist distinctions of the Roman Empire and they are destroying this new equality before God that every Christian has.

So, the liturgy is the place where we celebrate equality and liberty. We also take the idea of fraternity for granted, but the very first communities that refer to one another as brothers and sisters are, again, the community in Qumran, and this becomes part of the Christian [thing]. So, the command given by the leader to the community is, pray, brothers and sisters--*Orate, fratres*. That's a command.

So, the Eucharist, because it is the place where humans become most human with Christ before God, must be a place that is exemplary of human liberty, human equality, and human fraternity and sorority. And anything that doesn't see those as central values in [inaudible] we are doing and the message we are sending to the world has missed a crucial part of the new relationship that Christ establishes for us with God.

And that has a practical effect for our liturgy because our liturgy should look like the society we seek to create. We have to practice what we preach, and we have to perform the kind of society that we believe should exist and that we believe will exist in the [banquet] of heaven.

And that puts a major problem on the idea that someone, merely because of gender, cannot lead the Eucharist. Everyone must feel equally a brother and sister, equally free and equal around the table of the Lord, because we are literally elbow-to-elbow with our [inaudible] flesh.

Deb: Thank you so much. Very powerful. If there is one more question, we can take it, but we're getting close to the end of the house. So, please speak up if you have a question.

Q: I have a question. This is Patrick O'Connor from Cleveland, Ohio. I appreciate your comments today, Tom. And in closing, I would like to ask, how can Catholic parishes, how could a priest, before communion is distributed, make an announcement informing the congregation that unless you are a baptized Catholic, you cannot receive communion? I've been to several funeral masses where that announcement has been made before communion, and there are many parishes that have similar statements in their bulletin that they circulate as parishioners come in for mass.

Tom: Well, first, let me say, Connor, from whom your family descends, and Loughlin, from whom my family descends, were originally two brothers, so I greet you as a long-lost cousin.

Patrick: Thank you, Tom.

Tom: To leave our family history, the idea that one would put this on a bulletin board or in a bulletin or make an announcement, defeats the whole purpose of the Eucharist as the meal which is leading us towards the fullness of unity, and the fullness of unity will only be when God is all and in all.

Pope Francis, asked a question about this on November 15, 2015, said, we mustn't be thinking of the Eucharist as a goal in itself; we must be seeing it as [theaticum] for a journey.

So, all I can say to you is, that priest needs to think out his attitude to baptism; he needs to think out the grammar of meals, because a meal is fundamentally a place of welcome; and above all, he needs to think out his new methodology, because this is the spirit who actualizes us and makes us into the family of Christ. And if the spirit makes us into the family of Christ, there and then, you mustn't assume that these things cut across the work of the Holy Spirit.

But this is a very real and a very bitter thing, and as you know, in 2015, Pope asked theologians to go ahead and try and look at this problem and see ways that we can move towards seeing our activity in the Eucharist as [theaticum], food in our journey towards unity.

And I've written an article on this very topic for next week's The Tablet, and as soon as it is published I will send a copy of that article to Deb Milovec, and I'm sure she will be able to make it available to the network in Future Church.

Anyway, Patrick, long-lost cousin, it's been good talking to you.

Patrick: Thank you. Likewise.