

THE EUCHARIST AND THE VISIBILITY OF KOINONIA

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We stressed, in the first stage of our reflection on koinonia, the function of the Eucharist as constitutive of ecclesial communion, both in each christian community and between all the communities. On the basis of Paul's assertions in First Corinthians - the only New Testament document to speak explicitly of the ecclesial effect of the Lord's Supper (1) - essential points emerged. They touch on what is called the sacramentality of the Church of God.

We thus affirmed that the Eucharist is at the heart of the Christian koinonia because, in the celebration of the gift of grace made by Jesus Christ, it accomplishes the work of reconciliation with God and between believers which the Scripture presents as salvation. Further, it gives christians the power necessary to spread about them this Salvation, by engaging themselves together to transform this world into the world God wants. We saw too that this engagement ad extra is wholly inseparable from the welding together of the Church itself in sharing, mutual care, concern for each other.

But seeing the ecclesial Tradition as a whole, and taking seriously the wishes expressed almost everywhere that ecumenical concern is felt, it is impossible to be content with these two thoughts. They call for a complement. The eucharist is not only "what makes the Church". It is also the key event in which the Church visibly shows its unity (or in our present situation, its division). My assertion has a nuance. I speak of a 'key' mani-

festation to avoid giving the impression that this is the sole manifestation of Christian unity. None-the-less it is the manifestation par excellence, i.e. the only one which expresses ecclesial communion fully, and without which this communion is not adequately made perceptible. That is why it is essential to the being and mission of the Church of God in this world.

THE EUCHARIST AS 'SYMBOLIC' MANIFESTATION OF THE KOINONIA

To understand the depth of the relation between the Eucharist and the visibility of the Church, it is useful to begin by recalling one of the points most dear to the Western Tradition since Augustine. It is true that at the time of the Reformation controversy broke out about it. But thanks to contemporary philosophy we can re-open the question peacefully. Like every sacrament, but in a unique way, the Eucharist is of a symbolic nature.

1. Obviously we must begin by being clear about what "symbolic" means here (2). For, contrary to a usage current in spontaneous theological language, symbol is not to be confused with sign in the habitual sense of the word. It expresses something beyond the immediately perceptible, a genuine reality (not a dream or figment of the imagination) which would otherwise remain secret, beyond grasp. For in and through its texture and what it evokes for the mind, that reality is manifested and thus made present. The reality emerges in the symbol, reaching the intelligence and human heart, awaking the imagination. It is freed, exposed. In this way something inexpressible, eluding the

power of words and concepts, can be transmitted as it is experienced. But the transmission is not a flat account, fastened to what is immediate in experience. By dwelling on what is thus transmitted, given, offered, "revealed", the mind discovers a beyond, a depth of field, a hidden meaning, to which the symbol belongs but which infinitely surpasses it. There is communication not of an idea but of a situation, the meaning of which is opened up and illuminated without however giving itself totally. The symbolic is epiphanic; it has not the cutting edge of the idea. It comes between the indefinite extension of the imaginary and the precision of the concept (3).

But there lies its richness. Even in everyday human relations "what is there" does not exhaust reality - far from it; the symbol among other things is equally an integral part of reality and certainly no less important (4). This leads to the thought that "to symbolise, to be drawn to symbolise, to exist in a condition of symbol" are primary data on the existential plane, as much as (if not more than) "to be there" (5).

2. The Eucharist is in this sense the symbol of the koinonia, first because it makes visible and tangible before the world the communion of christians, but also because it shows the source and cause of that communion, neither of which can be grasped by human senses but are known only by faith. The koinonia, experienced hic et nunc by the participants is revealed as infinitely deeper and broader than is perceptible at a superficial glance which recognises nothing of the evocative wealth of the gestures, the elements, the images used. Crystallised in the rites, but everywhere going beyond them, is a significance which reaches to

the heart of the divine design for Salvation and sends us back to it as to the reality we are concerned with. Within the confines of the symbol, the entire reconciliation achieved by Christ is expressed, made perceptible, manifested with its overtones. It would be fascinating to show this in detail, but I have no space for that. I must be content to recall the main lines of this eucharistic symbolism, a visible affirmation of the koinonia of the Church, the Body of Christ.

A. The first group of symbols is there in the biblical reading of human experience of a meal. This is not seen simply as a means of giving nourishment to the body. It is also a special occasion for expressing friendship, solidarity, brotherhood, covenant. For it is not just eating that counts, but eating together. Around the same table, sharing the same food, gathered at the invitation of the same friend or because of the same ties of blood, human communion is explicit in the very act of bringing us close.

The apostolic Church gives to this symbolic force a particular meaning derived from its experience of the Covenant. In other words it plunges this (natural) symbolism into the universe of faith. At the heart of every eucharistic celebration there is the memorial of Jesus' last meal with his disciples, the night he was betrayed. Paul at once presents as the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) taken at the Lord's Table (10:21) what we call the Memorial of the Lord. In the gospel traditions - perhaps even in First Corinthians, with the allusion to the fact that Jesus was "betrayed" (6) - the comradeship of the table is evoked by the

quotation which the Johannine gospel puts into the mouth of Jesus.

"He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me" (Jn 13:18). (7)

It is evoked too by the explicit placing of the last supper of Jesus in the atmosphere of the paschal seder (Mt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:12-16) Lk. 22:7-13, 15), even if it was probably not the paschal meal (8).

The paschal feast was the moment par excellence for refastening all the ties which united the people of God in vocation, destiny and hope. At the Exodus God had literally brought to birth the People in transforming a multitude of slaves into "his son", "his first born" (Ex. 4:22; Nb. 11:12) (9). Moreover the narratives stress the "breaking of bread" which was very soon to designate the Christian Eucharist as such. It probably says much more than the simple rite of beginning a meal (10). In fact, in a broader sense, the formula "to break bread" described the group of rites which created the community at table; praise, breaking of bread, distributing the broken pieces (11). The significance of the one shared cup has also been noted (12): it evokes destiny, lot in life (Mk. 10:38; 14:36). So much so that to drink from the same cup indicates a communion at the deepest level of being (13). Everything here makes visible koinonia.

With this remembrance of Jesus' last meal before his death the Tradition very soon links the remembrance of the meals of the risen Lord, "gathering" his own to confirm them in their faith (Lk. 24:30, 36-43; Mk. 16:14; Jn. 21: 5-13; Acts 1:4; 10:41). Except for the appearance to the women, the narratives of the risen Lord present him eating with his disciples. The connection is so clear that it has been written:

Against this background, the frequent mention of meals suggests that quite probably the eucharistic liturgy was the occasion of the meeting of the risen Lord with his disciples. Were these meals eaten in common already Eucharistic, or did they become such because of the arrival of Christ? It is difficult to decide; it seems more likely that the gatherings were originally prompted by fidelity to the still vivid memory of Jesus of Nazareth and that the apparitions of Christ transformed them into the paschal reality." (14).

Each time the community gathers for the Lord's Supper, it connects again with that experience. His Supper, which puts them in touch with the risen Lord, recalls also the effect that encounter had on the gathering in faith, despite the scandal of the Cross, the defections of disciples, the difficulties of believing. And there too they hear, as addressed to themselves, the Lord's command "Go you into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature".

Moreover, since apostolic faith perceived (by the power of the Holy Spirit) the sacrificial value of what Jesus lived through in the days following his last meal, it makes those meals celebrated in remembrance of this last supper, the memorial (zikkaron) of this sacrifice offered once for all. It is clear too that the same faith sees this sacrifice as the Event of the reconciliation of humanity with God and among themselves, the Event in which the new Covenant was sealed (1 Cor. 11:25; Lk.22:20; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6), the Event of the death of him who was to "gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad,"

(Jn. 11:52) (15), the Event putting to death hatred and demolishing the wall dividing humanity into two parts (Ep. 2:13-17) (16). The Tradition asserts that the sacrificial force of that Event is made present in the eucharistic meal. It is a meal of communion with tôdah, in which all receive and share the Body and Blood of him who was offered in sacrifice, a Sacrifice approved by the Father who sacramentally gives it back to his people after having "glorified" it, so that they may live (17). The statements of Paul about communion at the altar (1 Cor. 10:18-22) are not without affinity with this view (18). In the visibility of symbol this communion becomes perceptible.

The eucharistic ritual then within this simple compass, under its immediate symbolism, has the function of manifesting koinonia with Christ Jesus and between Christians. From what I have shown it follows that the Lord's Table makes tangible (in its symbolism) the koinonia of Christians with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, with those who took part in his farewell supper, with those who ate with the risen Lord before Pentecost, as well as attesting their fraternal koinonia with each other. It makes present the koinonia while expressing its breadth. It makes it visible, with the visibility proper to the symbol.

B. The New Testament symbolism of the meal of the new covenant is, itself, set within a wider symbolism, going deep into the history of God's relations of communion with his chosen people. For the God present at the meal of the covenant sealed in Jesus Christ is he who, in the night of time, intervened "in a certain spring" - an intervention made present in the annual paschal meal and uniting the present generation to that of Exodus. (19). It is also the God who, at the end of the wandering in the desert,

sealed with a sacrificial meal the covenant with his people (Ex. 24:5-11). It is he again who through the prophets invites his People to a Banquet for the "last times", when the messianic hope will be fulfilled (Is. 25:6).

Much more, if we are to believe the synoptic traditions, Jesus himself adopted this symbolism in his preaching, in harmony with the Judaism of his time. He proclaimed the kingdom under the image of a banquet (Mt. 22:1-14; Lk. 14:15-24), described the feast at which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will sit with many come from east and west (Mt. 8:11; cf. Lk. 13:9). The accounts of the last supper, especially Luke's, set the words and actions of Jesus in the atmosphere of the people of God waiting for the final meal and definitive salvation (Lk. 22:14-16; cf. Mt. 26:29). There too, in Luke's version, he promises the twelve that they will eat and drink with him in his kingdom (Lk. 22:30) (20). We then understand why the Apocalypse can sing: "Blessed are they who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb..... these are true words of God" (Ap. 19:9).

Immersed in this dense symbolism, the eucharistic meal takes on a very wide and deep meaning. While it makes perceptible (in the light of faith which gives the meaning of the symbolism) the koinonia with the apostolic community of the Last Supper and of the meals of the Risen Lord, this eucharistic meal shows too that the koinonia is rooted in what God has done with his people from the beginning, that the latter is steeped in the power of all the meals of the Covenant. It thus becomes clear that the Church of God here on earth is in solidarity with the whole work

of the living God. What the Spirit does in and through the Church, since the Lord's Supper, is the fulfilment of God's design which is to reconcile humanity with himself and among itself so as to bring it into the eternal koinonia of the kingdom.

The spontaneous uneasiness, almost mistrust, of the rational West towards symbolism gives our communities a poor grasp of the richness with which the Lord's Supper is charged. They tend to reduce it flatly to a matter of being together in order to receive the same benefits, when it is definitely more. It is indeed being together in visible fashion. But this being together is not simply a being there. It carries in its depths a web of relations extending over the generations. They knit together in the unique and unbreakable koinonia of the living God the immense throng of those whom God has clasped and ever will clasp in the grace of his Spirit to unite them to himself in uniting them with each other. If we place the eucharistic meal like a watermark under the light of faith, we read there all the meals of communion of God with his people, as completed in the Supper of the Lord Jesus, himself awaiting the great banquet of the Kingdom. They are there not as simple souvenirs, in the modern sense of the word, nor even as poor skeletons. They are there as integral parts of that visible whole, inaccessible to the sense, yet real, which we call the "communion of saints". And all this is accessible to human experience only through the symbolism of the rite which makes present the effects of Salvation in the community.

C. Such is the first level, entirely sacramental, of the relation which exists between the eucharist and ecclesial koinonia. Even if in the present situation of our Churches it is probably the least evident, nevertheless it is the most important. It belongs wholly to the very nature of the eucharistic rite, whatever the subjective disposition of the participants and however they understand the mode of the presence of the Lord's Body and Blood in his Supper.

THE EUCHARIST AS "EVENT" OF KOINONIA

Even when the symbolism we have been expounding is not perceived and its depth not understood, the Eucharist provides yet another visible manifestation of the unity of the Church. But then we are at another level. It is quite possible that in the present situation of our Churches this is the only one accessible to the majority of Christians. That is why I want to dwell on it.

1. The eucharistic assembly is the first of all the gathering in one place and for the same length of time of all those who make up the local Church. We recognise here the epi to auto, the being-together summed up in the Acts of the Apostles (2:44-47), with its probable reference to the yahad (21). Ordinarily these Christians are dispersed in their various places, separated by their civil functions, involved in walks of life where they meet only accidentally and rarely. Increasingly it is normal to find among them the whole range of political choices, human occupations, social conditions, even racial and cultural differences. For they come from what in contemporary society seems more a simple juxta-

position of closed (if not rival or even inimical) worlds than a fabric of friendly relations.

If such persons gather together at the eucharistic synaxis it is because they belong by baptism to Christ Jesus and his ecclesial body. They are there because of what they are. Their liturgical gathering is quite other than an assembly of partisans or sympathisers drawn together around a name or an idea. It is, in the strictest sense of the term the reunion between members of the same body of Christ, living the same life of grace, indwelt by the same Spirit, engaged in the same mission, called to the same glory in the same Kingdom. This is why in the synaxis those Christians, not only show themselves as members of Christ, but also as united in the same membership, on the ground of the same shared reality, in short, as Christians - in koinonia.

At its eucharistic assembly, the local Church emerges in a certain way from its human surroundings both in the plurality of its members and in their close-knit unity. So much so that if we want to know what the Church is in a given place, the surest way is to look at the eucharistic synaxis.

It must be stressed straightaway that the community is there shown in its "catholicity". Since the members of a normal eucharistic assembly are men and women of every culture, colour, race, social condition, language, the koinonia to which they belong is such as to embrace in the unity of Christ all human situations. It is the communion of persons who, we may say, would probably be parted by the barriers which grow in our society, ignorant of each other, perhaps even hostile to each other. But they are united in a koinonia of reconciliation around the Lord's Table. So what

would normally be divided is not, those who (in the fine phrase of Ephesians concerning jews and gentiles) "once were far off have been brought near" (Ep. 2:13), every man and woman becomes "the neighbour" of the other, and social distinctions are so much relativised that in the face of my most opposed and different neighbour I can discern the features of Jesus Christ. What people proclaim and practise at that synaxis shows that their reconciliation has its source in the work of Christ Jesus giving his life "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn. 11:52) (22).

At the synaxis, moreover, Christians are not content with reflecting on their mutual relations or affirming them. Together they bless God. They praise him precisely because they recognise and proclaim (in the tôdah) that the source of their reconciliation and hence of their Salvation is only in him and in the work of "the one whom he sent". On this point the Catholic traditions - with which many of the protestant traditions agree - are explicit. The eucharistic Anaphora (the canon) recalls what God has done to gather humanity in the Body of his Son by the power of his Holy Spirit. The AMEN which closes the Anaphora is the seal of the unity of faith.

A non-believer entering a Church where the Eucharist is being celebrated finds himself facing, if not the totality of the Church in this place, at least a visible manifestation of what that Church of God is in its constituent elements. He sees it as an "assembly" of men and women coming from all quarters and having all kinds of background, united by their common relation to the person and work of Christ Jesus, convinced that no divisive factors could break the fraternal bonds between them (though they acknowledge a wide difference of points of view),

supporting each other, solidly united in the same mission to live in the name of the Gospel, praying for the needs and sufferings of the whole world, recognising and proclaiming what God has done for them and humankind in Christ Jesus. This is what the synaxis itself and the words heard in it would tell such a visitor.

2. But the eucharistic synaxis does not only manifest before the world certain traits of ecclesial koinonia. It also reveals to the local Church its own identity, its koinonia, indicating in it the unique source of the unity I have been describing.

Indeed, our non-believer, even conscious of the strength of communion uniting Christians, simply cannot see in their assembly anything but an agglomeration of people sharing the same conviction and experience. In other words he perceives koinonia only in its horizontal dimension. If he is told that for Christians it has also a transcendental dimension, he cannot easily understand what this means. This discloses itself only in faith.

It is otherwise with believers. They know - by the witness of Scripture in one of the rare texts which deals very clearly with the Eucharist - that their fraternal unity and the fabric of exchanges or strong links to which it gives rise spring not from an abstract relation with the Dead and Risen Christ but from the practical sharing of His Body and Blood at the eucharistic Table.

For, as Paul said to the Church of Corinth, because the eucharistic cup is "a participation in the blood of Christ" and the bread broken at the eucharistic table is "a participation in

the body of Christ", "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). In the light of this faith, the gathered community faces a central affirmation which must illuminate its existence and guide its practical conduct: its fraternal communion is not just a sociological togetherness, sufficiently explained by group psychology. It comes from their being taken up in the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, the Body and Blood of reconciliation and communion. Further, at the Lord's Table - however they see the connection between what they receive and the Body and Blood of the Lord - it is to that Body and Blood that they are all united and by it that they are united with each other. Their shared koinonia with the Body and Blood of the person of Christ creates and explains their koinonia with each other. The visibility of this koinonia then comes out as an epiphany of Salvation itself, because to be saved is in fact "to be in Christ"

Thus the koinonia of the bread and cup reflects the nature of Salvation. For at the Lord's Table we are not only companions of Christ but "nourished by Christ" And Christian salvation consists not merely of being associated with Christ but of "living in Christ". Existence thus becomes an existence derived from Christ, indwelt by what the Tradition calls the habit (moeurs) of Christ, reaching out towards the goal which is Christ's. We know too that, for the apostolic tradition as a whole, this goal is always in some way connected with what is evoked by the term koinonia: gathering in unity, reconciliation reversing the situation of Babel, (23) encounter of multitudes in the one salvation that comes from God. The Eucharist thus makes 'visible' in the light of faith the link which exists between Salvation

'in Christ' and fraternal koinonia reaching out as far as the whole of humanity.

II THE EUCHARIST AS MANIFESTATION OF A TRUE KOINONIA

I have been presenting the eucharistic synaxis as the event of koinonia. But this event has nothing about it of a mere "happening". It is the event of a community already constituted. When all the members are dispersed about their ordinary tasks, it expresses what that community is at the deepest level of its daily life. The synaxis is, so to speak, the downbeat, the moment of concentration, the kairos (24) of gathering together, when all are called to come out of the world to the Lord's Table, to be sent back afterwards to the world. The sending back is as important as the bidding.

Moreover in the Christian initiation of adults in the West, exactly as in that of children in the East, the Catholic traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Old Catholic) and nearly all the Protestant are careful to admit no one to the eucharist until he or she has been reborn by water and the Spirit. The Eucharist presupposes life. And this life is given in baptism, made explicit in the daily conduct of individuals and of the community as such. The eucharistic synaxis assembles the baptised to make them in truth bearers of their baptismal life.

This position of the eucharist as kairos of community, wedged between a before and an after of the same baptismal life, has very weighty consequences. Indeed, there ought to be homogeneity between what happens in the synaxis assembly and what happens before and after. For if the Lord's Supper is a visible manifestation, an actual witness, a revealing in action of the

koinonia the community lives in its day-to-day relations and of the invisible depth of grace, (25) the manifestation would be false or empty of meaning if daily life denied what is affirmed in the celebration. The "truth" of the rite would be in dispute, whatever its 'validity' and whatever might be the faith of its participants about the Lord's presence at his eucharistic Table. "Validity" (in the canonists' sense) and the faith of the participants are only two elements (important but not isolated) in what I call - in line with the oldest Tradition - the truth of the Eucharist. In that truth the constituent element which is the quality of the koinonia that the synaxis brings together, is also essential.

Certainly no one will deny the purifying or healing effect of the Lord's Supper. All the great liturgies attest it, and the Church's Fathers never cease to insist on it (26). The Lord's Body is the Body in which the mercy of God is truly incarnate, in a love stretching to the utmost limit, and this for the reconciliation of humanity with Himself and among themselves.

But the effect of the Lord's Body is neither magical nor violent. It does not deny the essential part played by freedom in the Salvation of the creature "made in the image and likeness of God". Hence the constant call to conversion which is the proper reaction of the free person to the invitation and action of the grace of the Spirit.

Moreover forgiveness would not be simply pin-pointed, that is applied to actions taken in isolation, cut off from the decisions of whoever receives it, person or community. It would be a caricature to imagine pardon not connected with newness of conduct or at the very least with decision to do better. In

short the kairos of the eucharistic assembly will lack its truth unless it is evident in a community at least united in some way in daily life, at least engaged in the quest for a koinonia of faith and sharing, at least ready to pay the price which this demands. It is hard to see how two Christian communities remaining separated and aware of it can in truth live the kairos of the eucharistic assembly.

It is important that for Paul in I Corinthians the eucharistic assembly (epi to auto. I Cor. 11:20) puts the community under the judgement of God (11:27-31). To be sure, the immediate context here is that of a fault against solidarity; snobbery and cliqueishness. But does the Tradition falsify Paul's insight when it says that this holds a fortiori for disunion in matters of the faith and life of the Church? "Not discerning the Body", failing to "examine oneself" before eating the bread or drinking the cup, meeting only for condemnation: what are these things but to celebrate the kairos of the assembly without being (outside the synaxis) a people solidly united in communion of faith and life?

2. I am not dealing here with the conditions required for intercommunion, but with the relation between the eucharistic synaxis and the visibility of the Church's unity. What I am saying is not to be understood as a statement on admission to the Lord's Table. All the same I want at least to stress that this question of admission cannot be discussed without linking it with an ecclesial option. It is no simple matter of discipline. It belongs to the nature of the Church. Further, if the eucharist is of its nature the sacramental moment of ecclesial koinonia

become visible, it is obvious that the problems of recognition of ministries come in here.

The person who presides at the celebration of the Memorial of the Lord is not there for the sole purpose of carrying out the prescribed rites in the name of the participants, because somebody is needed to do it. He has also a symbolic function in the sense I have defined earlier. It falls to him in particular to "make present" the link between this community and the apostolic community. The latter is, let us repeat, the normative one with which every ecclesial community must remain in communion, under pain of putting in doubt its fidelity to Christ Jesus himself. When a minister is recognised as ordained "in the Tradition of the Church" he is recognised as in communion with what the apostolic community has understood as Christ's intention and has carried out in many ways but all of them meant to be faithful to Christ's will.

Thus the synaxis at which the minister presides manifests the koinonia of his community with that of the Last Supper, that of the meal of the risen Lord, that of Pentecost. It is a koinoni bestriding history. It is essential, a prerequisite of the koinonia of all the communities hic et nunc dispersed throughout the world. For it alone through the ages gives assurance that what is lived hic et nunc is securely in the direct line with the "once-for-all" of which the apostolic community is the only authentic witness. Thus it is necessary - especially if there has been an explicit break with many of those who lived with the Church until then - to verify this continuity. The problem is to know how. (27). Apostolic continuity cannot be restricted to apostolic succession, even if this is an essential part of it.

3. Understood in the light of the great Tradition, the eucharistic synaxis illustrates another requirement of the koinonia, one which also seems to me essential. I refer to the solidarity with the poor and the suffering. Again, the remarks of Paul in I Corinthians point to one of the most important features of ecclesial koinonia. The close link which the little "summaries" of Acts make between unanimity, common prayer, mutual sustenance and the sharing of goods to help those who have nothing is put into practice in the first centuries during the eucharistic celebration. That is the moment when each member supplies for fraternal mutual aid, what the Shepherd of Hermes calls "the subsistence of widows and orphans, the supplies received for giving help" (Sim. IX, 26:2). We know too the important witness of Justin in his first Apology (I, 67) where he is describing the Christian Sunday:

After that we continue subsequently reminding ourselves of these things. Those who have plenty come to the help of those in need, and we help each other. In all our offerings, we bless the Creator of the universe through his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. On the day which we called the day of the sun, all who live in the towns and the countryside meet in one place. The memorials of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read as far as time allows. After the readings, he who presides speaks to remind us and exhorts us to imitate these fine teachings. Then we all rise and pray together aloud. Then, as I have said, when the prayer is finished, bread is brought with wine and water. He who presides sends up prayer and thanksgiving to heaven with all his strength, and all the people answer with the acclamation

Amen.

Then comes the distribution and sharing out of the consecrated elements to everybody, and the deacons take those who are absent their share. Those who are well off and wish to give, give freely each what he or she wishes. What remains is given to the president and he helps the orphans, the widows, the sick, the need, prisoners, foreign guests, in a word all who are in need.

We meet on the day of the sun, because it is the first day when God, fashioning matter out of darkness created the world, and on that same day Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead.

What I have said of the mutual relations, the reciprocal care which makes up, so to speak, the flesh of the koinonia and hence of the local Church is involved here. The mere gesture of putting money in the collection plate becomes an empty formality, even if the money is given for "works of charity", when the celebrating community lives without worrying about the human wretchedness within itself and round about. There is no genuine koinonia except where the injunction of Deuteronomy - transformed into a promise by the Septuagint which the Acts summarises as follows - is taken seriously: "There will be no poor among you" (Deut. XV, 4). The synaxis should crystallise a communion of mutual help diffused throughout daily life. Thus can ecclesial koinonia become in truth the vehicle of God's care for his own.

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At the end of this over-rapid presentation I cannot do better than quote Augustine. He has put into marvellous words what I have painfully tried to express:

This bread, which you see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. The cup, or better the contents of the cup, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. By them the Lord Christ has willed to entrust to us his body and his blood, which he shed for us in remission of our sins. If you have received them with the right dispositions, you are what you have received. Indeed the apostle said "we are many, but one bread, one body". It is thus that he explains the sacrament of the Lord's Table: "we are many, but one bread, one body". With this bread it is shown to you how you should love unity. For is this bread made of one grain? Are not the grains of wheat on the contrary very many? Yet before becoming bread, they were separate; they were bound together by water after having been ground. If the wheat is not milled and kneaded with water it will never come to form the thing called bread. (...). Let the Holy Spirit come, after the water the fire, and you will become the bread which is the body of Christ. Thus in some fashion unity is symbolised.

(Sermo. 227)

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