

The Eucharist, Sacrament of Nonviolence

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THE EUCHARIST: SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Reality of Violence in the World

Violence is a reality spread all over history since Cain until now. In the last century violence made more victims in one hundred years than all the centuries since the beginning of humankind. And today we are living in an atmosphere of violence, terrorism, and fear of the complete destruction of humanity by the nuclear weapons stored in the civilized and so-called Christian countries, and that can destroy for all time all life on earth: human, animal and vegetal.

The Way of Jesus to Conquer Violence

In this context of universal violence, the Gospel has Good News, which states, to say it in the words of Pope John Paul II in Ireland: "Violence is not the Christian way; violence is not the Catholic way; violence is not the way of Jesus." In his teaching Jesus commanded us "not to resist evil," but "to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" (CF. MT 5:38-47). And when he was arrested, Peter wanted to defend Him by his sword, but Jesus said to him: "Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father who would promptly send more than twelve legions of angels to my defense? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that say this is the way it must be so" (MT 26:52-54). This is the way of Jesus: "Never repay evil with evil" (ROM 12:17); but conquer the evil by love and forgiveness. And when he was crucified the first sentence he said, according to the Gospel of St. Luke, was: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (LK 23:34).

The way of Jesus to conquer evil and violence must be the Christian way: the way of nonviolence, of love and forgiveness. This is the way of Jesus, and since Jesus is the Logos of God and the Wisdom of God, this nonviolent way is the way of God. This is

the way all humanity is called to follow in its process of divinization. We, Christians, believe that Jesus is "the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Him" (JN 14:6). In order to help us to remember this Divine way, Jesus instituted the sacrament of Eucharist in which he anticipated His death and gave it its full significance: His body broken and His "blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins" (MT 26:28).

The Nonviolent Way of Jesus Must be Remembered in the Eucharist

The nonviolent way of Jesus is historically at the heart of his teaching, and at the same time at the heart of his passion and death. And since the Eucharist is the summary of all the teaching, passion and death of Jesus, his nonviolent way must be at the heart of the Eucharist. It is the nonviolent Lamb of God, whom the Eucharist empowers us, individually and as a Church, to imitate, to become and to proclaim. The passion narrative is about the Lamb, who goes to His death rejecting violence, loving enemies, returning good for evil, praying for His persecutors—yet conquers and reigns eternal.

Atonement and redemption, sanctification and salvation are the fruits of nonviolent, unconditional love made visible at a terrible cost to Jesus from Gethsemane to Golgotha. Therefore, what is made visible in the Gospels at the spiritual and revelatory apex of the life of Jesus should be made luminously visible in the re-presentation of the passion and death of Jesus in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Eucharistic Prayer That Embodies Nonviolent Love

However, until this very day, in the Eucharistic Liturgies of all the Churches, a solitary word, "suffered" or "death," has normally been quite enough memory, commemoration, remembrance, or anamnesis for

fulfilling the Lord's Command, "Do this in memory (anamnesis) of me." Of course, technically the words "suffered" and "death" are theologically correct, but are they pastorally sufficient for the sanctification of the Christian, the Church, and the world?

In the context of what has just been said and to underline what has been previously stated, a historically, theologically, liturgically and pastorally accurate addition could be made to the institution narrative-anamnesis of the Eucharistic Canons which could read as follows:

...On the night before He went forth to His eternally memorable and life-giving death, like a Lamb led to slaughter, rejecting violence, loving His enemies, and praying for His persecutors, He bestowed upon His disciples the gift of a New Commandment:

"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

Then He took bread into His holy hands, and looking up to You, almighty God, He gave thanks, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His disciples and said:

"Take this, all of you, and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you."

Likewise, when the Supper was ended, He took the cup. Again He gave You thanks and praise, gave the cup to His disciples and said:

"Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven."

"Do this in memory of me."

Obedient, therefore, to this precept of salvation, we call to mind and reverence His passion where He lived to the fullest the precepts which He taught for our sanctification. We remember His suffering at the hands of a fallen humanity filled with the spirit of violence and enmity. But, we remember also that He endured this humiliation with a love free of

retaliation, revenge, and retribution. We recall His execution on the cross. But, we recall also that He died loving enemies, praying for persecutors, forgiving, and being superabundantly merciful to those for whom justice would have demanded justice.

Conclusion

The Eucharist is the mind-changing, converting, healing, empowering, life-saving Divine gift given to a humanity being shredded by evil presenting itself as inevitable and inescapable violence and enmity. However, the Eucharist can only be this transforming Presence if it is made fully visible and available to Christians and through Christians to the world. Made available, that is in a ritual atmosphere that permeates the senses and the consciousness, the will and the heart, the soul and the conscience of Christian after Christian, person after person, generation after generation, with the specific details of the nonviolent love and the Nonviolent Lover, Our Savior and the Savior of all humanity, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

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