

The Holy Eucharist  
By Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

The Eucharist is a mystery, the very mystery of joy, the mystery of all mysteries, the mystery of the Church.

The Eucharist is a joyful gathering of those who are to meet the risen Lord, and they enter with him into the bridal chamber.

The Eucharist is an action, by which a group of people become something corporately, which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals. It is the essential attitude, and the essential act of the Church, which is the new humanity, restored by Christ, one transforming act, and one ascending movement.

The Eucharist is a procession of the Church following the ascension of Christ.

The Eucharist is a journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom.

The Eucharist is a real separation from the world. We always want to make Christianity understandable and acceptable to the mythical modern man on the street, and we forget that the Christ of whom we speak is not of this world, and that after his resurrection, he was not recognized, even by his own disciples. We do not realize that we never get anywhere because we never leave any place behind us.

The Eucharist is an entrance of the Church into the joy of its Lord, and to enter into that joy so as to be a witness to it in the world, is the very calling of the Church, its essential ministry, the mystery by which it becomes what it is. It is an entrance into the risen life of Christ, the very movement of the Church, as passage from the old into the new, from this world into the world to come.

The Eucharist is a manifestation of the Word of God. God will speak to us. His eternal Word will be given to us, and we will receive it.

The Eucharist is a movement, the movement that Adam failed to perform, and that, in Christ, has become the very life of man—a movement of adoration and praise, in which all joy and suffering, all beauty and all frustration, all hunger and all satisfaction, are referred to their ultimate end, and become finally, meaningful. It is real life, a movement of love and adoration toward God, the movement in which, alone, the meaning and value of all that exists can be revealed and fulfilled.

The Eucharist is an offering. It is our offering to him of ourselves, of our life, and of our whole world, “to take into our hands the whole world, as if it were an apple,” said a Russian poet.

The Eucharist is a sacrifice, but it the most natural act of man, the very essence of his life. Man is a sacrificial being. Because he finds his life in love, and love is sacrificial, it puts

the value, the very meaning of life, in the other, and gives life to the other, and in this giving, in this sacrifice, finds the meaning and joy of life. It is, indeed, a sacrifice offered on behalf of all, and for all.

The Eucharist is Christ, himself. The Eucharist is his Eucharist, and he is the Eucharist. It is he who offers, and it is he who is offered. Christ is the perfect man, who stands before God. Christ, alone, is the perfect Eucharistic being. He is the Eucharist of the world. In and through this Eucharist, the whole creation becomes what always was to be, and yet, failed to be.

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ. It is the mystery of cosmic remembrance. It is, indeed, a restoration of love as the very life of the world. Remembrance is an act of love. God remembers us, and his remembrance, his love, is the foundation of the world. In Christ, we remember. The church, and its separation from this world, on its journey to heaven, remembers the world, remembers all men, remembers the whole creation, and takes it, in love, to God. We remember his life, his death, his resurrection, one movement of sacrifice, of love, of dedication to his father, and to men. This is the inexhaustible content of our remembrance.

The Eucharist is the lifting up of our offering, and of ourselves. The Eucharist is the ascension of the Church to heaven. We have entered the Eschaton, and we are now standing beyond time and space. It is because all this has first happened to us, that something will happen to bread and wine. It is our ascension in Christ.

The Eucharist is the state of perfect man. When man stands before the throne of God, when he has fulfilled all that God has given him to fulfill, when all sins are forgiven, all joy restored, then there is nothing else for him to do, but to give thanks. When a man stands before God, face to face, when he has been accepted into his presence, when his sins are forgiven, and he has recovered his pristine beauty, the Eucharist, thanksgiving, adoration, worship, is truly the ultimate and the total expression of his whole being. It is the divine element, the image of God in us, the life of paradise, the one essential relationship with God, the only full and real response of man to God's creation, redemption, and gift of heaven. It is a new style of life, the only real life, of creation with God, and in God, the only true relationship between God and the world. In sin, man has lost that pure Eucharist. He has directed his life, his love, his care, toward other objects. He has become incapable of Eucharist, thanksgiving, which is the state of man in paradise.

The Eucharist is the breakthrough that brings us to the table in the Kingdom, raises us to heaven, and makes us partakers of the divine food.

The Eucharist is the end of the movement. We are at the Paschal table of the Kingdom, the end of the journey, the end of time. It is the arrival at a vantage point from which we can see more deeply into the reality of the world.

The Eucharist is the mystery of unity and the moment of truth, the very expression and

edification of the Church. Here, we see the world in Christ, as it really is, and not from our particular, and therefore, limited, and partial, points of view.

The Eucharist is communion with the whole Church. It is the supreme revelation of the communion of the saints, of the unity and interdependence of all the members of the Body of Christ. It is judgment and condemnation to people who do not see Christ in the Church, but see in it merely human pride and arrogance, selfishness, and the spirit of this world. It is the breaking of the bread, the one source of life that brings all to it, and redeems the unity of all men under one head, Christ, the mystery of forgiveness, the mystery of reconciliation achieved by Christ, and eternally granted to those who believe in him. It is the essential food of the Christian, strengthening his spiritual life, healing his diseases, affirming his faith, making him capable of leading a truly Christian life in this world, the gift of eternal life, an anticipation of the joy, peace and fullness of the Kingdom, a foretaste of its light. It is both partaking of Christ's suffering, the expression of our readiness to accept his way of life, and sharing in his victory and triumph—a sacrificial meal, and a joyful banquet. His body is broken, and his blood is shed, and partaking of them, we accept the cross. Yet, by the cross, joy has entered the world, and this joy is ours when we are at the Lord's table. It is given to me, personally, in order to transform me into a member of Christ, to unite me with all those who receive him, to reveal the Church as a fellowship of love.

The Eucharist is the mystery of the Kingdom, the fullness and manifestation of the Church as the age to come.

The Eucharist is our secret joy and certitude, the source of inspiration and growth, the victory that overcomes evil, the presence that makes our whole life, life in Christ.

The Eucharist is the beginning, and things that were impossible are again revealed to us as possible. The time of the world has become the time of the Church, the time of salvation and redemption.

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