

Day 162 – Saturday, August 29

I came across this six part series on the history of the Eucharistic Liturgy. And I thought you might be interested

Eucharist - A Short History By Alfred McBride, O.Praem; St. Anthony Messenger Press

It is a very human trait to treasure the last words of a dying person. In the case of Pope John Paul II, his encyclical *The Church of the Eucharist*, published in his final year, aptly captures his desire to awaken in the Church a new appreciation of the Eucharist. I have been able to celebrate Holy Mass in chapels built along mountain paths, on lakeshores and seacoasts; I have celebrated it on altars built in stadiums and city squares. This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, its cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation (*The Church of the Eucharist*, 8). In this Catholic Update we respond to Pope John Paul's Eucharistic desire with this reflection on six stages in the history of the Eucharist in the Western Church.

1. FROM PASSOVER Whatever changes and variations occurred in history, the Church has always preserved the core ritual. Early Christians viewed the Last Supper from the viewpoint of the Passover meal. It was held in an "Upper Room," a place often used for rabbinic Scripture discussions. The apostles would have seen a short-legged table surrounded by cushions where they would sit. On the table was a bowl of saltwater in memory of the tears shed during the slavery in Egypt. A dish of bitter salad recalled their crushing slave days. A container of mashed apples, raisins and plums coated with cinnamon looked like the bricks they made. Platters of unleavened bread stood next to the large Cup of Blessing filled with wine. A roasted lamb (part of a lamb sacrificed at the Temple) symbolized the sacrificial quality of the meal and recalled the blood of a lamb on their doorposts that saved them from the avenging angel in Egyptian times. Jesus opened the meal with a psalm that praised God for his mighty deeds of salvation in the Exodus. Then he took the bread, gave thanks for it and, breaking tradition, followed this with new words: "Take and eat. This is my body that will be given up for you." This bread was now his body. It would be given up, that is offered on the cross. Pause for a moment to consider what the apostles might have felt and thought at participating in the first Eucharist in history. At the end of the meal, Jesus took the Cup of Blessing filled with wine and instead of making the usual toast he again broke tradition and said, "Take and drink... This is my blood... It will be shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins." Once more Christ referred to his forthcoming passion where he would shed his blood. As they drank of the one cup and ate of the one bread they experienced their unity in Christ. Finally, Christ gave them and their successors the power to celebrate Eucharist: "Do this in memory of me." They all sang a psalm and Jesus went forth to his saving death and resurrection. In this event Jesus gave us the sacraments of the Eucharist and the ordained priesthood.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein