

“In these pages, Torvend pushes beyond familiar personal and communal meanings of the Christian Eucharist to its large implications for social well-being and the good of the earth itself. The worldly ground and horizon of eucharistic practice emerges clearly here through fresh biblical reflections and many voices out of Christian history. Far more than an academic treatise, this is an urgent plea that Christian eucharistic feasting address the cries of the world’s hungry and poor, the afflicted and oppressed.”

— Thomas H. Schattauer
Professor of Liturgics
Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

“Samuel Torvend’s *Still Hungry at the Feast* is a beautifully written primer on the spirituality of living eucharistically; living what we pray and praying what we live. Continuing the work of Monika Hellwig and others, Torvend asks ‘who is hungry at the feast?’ and proceeds to expand that question into contemporary realities regarding the Eucharist as the liturgy of the world in the face of real hunger as well as real capabilities to distribute food equitably. Eschewing the facile trends of the casualness of ‘word’ and ‘meal,’ Torvend draws on Scripture, particularly the gospel of Luke, a breadth of early Christian tradition, and his own facility in Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholic theologies and practices to guide his readers toward the reality that every Eucharist is a ‘Mass of Creation’ rooted in the materiality that God has created and with which we are intimately related. Both generous in breadth and focused in intent, this small book exemplifies the ‘economy of grace’ in which the author places the Eucharist, gift of God, and work of human hands. May we take into action the ‘economy of grace’ at the heart of this writing!”

— Lizette Larson-Miller
Huron University College, University of Western Ontario, Canada
Author of *Sacramentality Renewed: Contemporary Conversations in Sacramental Theology*

Still Hungry at the Feast

Eucharistic Justice in the
Midst of Affliction

Samuel Torvend



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In ancient Mediterranean practice, women and children were normally separated from the men who reclined at table for a meal. In the Roman catacomb of the fourth-century martyrs Marcellinus and Peter, however, two women, three men, and two children sit together at an early Christian feast. To the left, the artist has written, *AGAPE MISCEMI*, "Love-for-others brings the mixed cup [of wine and water]." To the right, and barely discernible between the woman and the man, are these words inscribed on the wall: *IRENE DA CALDA*, "Peace gives food." Here, in this place that commemorates two Christians executed by Rome's violence, peace and love-for-others surround those gathered at table.

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With love and gratitude for Sean Horner
dilectus meus in fide et vita socium

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Introduction

By my calculation, I have participated in the Eucharist 8,050 times since I was five years old, a calculation that includes Sunday, daily, and feast day masses. I remember some of them because of the place in which the liturgy was celebrated—the shore of Similk Bay in my native Washington, the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, St. Paul’s in Seattle, the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, the medieval Selbu Kirke in central Norway, the monastic church of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville. Others I remember vividly because of the events that called for the Eucharist: the death of my father; the day I was married to my beloved; ordination to the priesthood; the Sunday liturgies after the assassinations of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.; the huge crowd crammed into our parish church during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

And yet, significant places and significant events have not obscured that dimension to which the eucharistic liturgy invites those who receive bread and drink wine—the ethical invitations and instructions offered in this ancient communal ritual: “Eternal God, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and have fed us with the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart.”¹ In the world of specialization that marks the

¹ A post-communion prayer in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 365.

academy and much of contemporary life, sacraments and ethics, liturgy and life are usually separated from each other in study and in practice—one of the reasons why the yearning for an integrated and holistic spirituality can be so easily thwarted. Such compartmentalization of Christian faith and life seems more the norm than the exception.

But need it be? For centuries, the fathers and mothers of the church have unfolded the meaning of the liturgy for daily life because they understood that the words, gestures, and postures of the Christian assembly have the power to form the actions of the assembly in the world: *the rule of prayer shapes the rule of living*.² Consider, for instance, the mystagogical sermons of John Chrysostom and Ambrose of Milan; the sacramental poetry of Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena; the eucharistic hymns of Thomas Aquinas; the artwork of Giotto di Bondone and Andrei Rublev; the sermons of Martin Luther and the eucharistic collects of Thomas Cranmer; the writings of Virgil Michel, Romano Guardini, Photina Rech, Balthasar Fischer, Antonio Donghi, and Gordon Lathrop.³ All of these and many others

² But before we accept at face value the oft-used dictum about prayer and life, let us note clearly the insightful criticism of feminist Christians who expose the patriarchal power manifest in the use of exclusive language in worship and the rejection of women in liturgical leadership in some Christian communions; the deployment of strategies to limit or exclude the use of musical traditions of cultures different from the dominant one in a parish or cathedral; the use of insipid lyrics in the liturgy that obscure the rich metaphorical tradition across the centuries and across the globe; artwork that communicates racial bias and is historically inaccurate—all of these and more participate in the *deformation of common prayer and Christian witness in the world*.

³ Virgil Michel, OSB, *The Liturgy of the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1938); Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis: Pio Decimo, 1956/Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979); Photina Rech, OSB, *Wine and Bread*, trans. Heinz Kuehn (Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1966/Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998); Balthasar Fischer, *Signs, Words & Gestures*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1979/New York: Pueblo, 1981); Antonio Donghi, *Words and Gestures in the Liturgy*, trans.

recognized that the Mass, the Holy Communion, orients the worshiping assembly toward its life in the world, a life marked by an ethic of care for other people, their communities, and the earth.

In 1977, the Sri Lankan theologian and priest Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, published *Eucharist and Human Liberation*.⁴ In this provocative work, Fr. Balasuriya asked a number of troubling questions that startled readers who found it difficult to imagine any relationship between sacraments and ethics:

Why is it that in spite of hundreds of thousands of daily and weekly Masses, Christians continue as selfish as before? Why have the “Christian” Mass-going peoples been the most cruel colonizers of human history? Why is it that persons and people who proclaim Eucharistic love and sharing deprive the poor people of the world of food, capital, employment and even land? Why mass human sterilization in poor countries and affluence unto disease and pollution of nature among the rich?⁵

Exposing what he considered the compartmentalization of Christian faith and life—worship directed to the Holy Three yet separated from daily practice in the world—Balasuriya argued that the meal practice of Jesus, soon to be called the Eucharist, soon to be called the Mass, clearly expressed *Christ’s commitment to all* who participated in his ongoing table fellowship. But at the same time, participation in *the sacramental encounter asked for commitment from those who participated*—and that commitment “to love one another

William McDonough, Dominic Serra, and Ted Bertagni (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993/Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009); Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁴ Tissa Balasuriya, OMI, *Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: The Centre for Society and Religion, 1977 / Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

⁵ Balasuriya, *Eucharist and Human Liberation*, 2.

as I have loved you" was and is confirmed in action: "The Mass," he wrote, "leads us to respond to the suffering of the masses."

While J. S. Bach signed all of his sacred music compositions with the Latin phrase *Soli Deo Gloria* ("Glory to God alone")—and many church musicians since the eighteenth century have been diligent in copying his practice—this one phrase alone is insufficient and misleading. The lexicon of Catholic and historical Christianity, inspired by its central text, the Bible, is shot through with metaphor, with the linking of two images, two words, two phrases: an implicit antidote to the fundamentalist tendency that lurks in every human being. Praise of God—giving glory to God—never takes place in a vacuum. The assembly gathered for the liturgy gathers on this earth, in a particular place at a particular moment in human history. Set next to the praise or worship of God, set next to this acceptable sacrifice, is the suffering of the many and the earth itself. This should come as no surprise: in Jewish and Christian practice, thanksgiving to God always leads to supplication that God act in the present, in the world, with and through the people of God. Indeed, as I write these words, famine sweeps through large portions of the African continent. Species are dying rapidly for lack of sufficient food due to climate change. Child hunger and chronic malnutrition continue in the United States, though political leaders rarely mention the embarrassment of such statistics and the suffering they represent.

Here we ask the question, "Who is hungry at the feast?" To be honest, I think I am. I yearn for, I am hungry for the word, the image, the lyric, and the prayer that will invite many others and me to "redress the terrible injustices, deprivations, and imbalances that surround us."⁶ Who is still

⁶ Monika Hellwig, "The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World," in *Word and World* 17, no. 1 (1997): 65.

hungry at the feast? The many who will never read this text because they must work two or three jobs each day, six days each week, in order to feed their children in a society that rewards the wealthy and stigmatizes the working poor. Who is still hungry at the feast? The people of this world “deprived of food, capital, employment and land.”

Here we consider ethical dimensions of this ancient and contemporary practice. There is no prescription, only fragments of words and practices that offer an alternative to the perception alive in many ecclesial communities that the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, is really about this one thing: my personal relationship with the Lord, my union with Christ, my forgiveness of sin. Not so, I say, not so. One word is never sufficient. Set next to this communion is a sharing, an abundance, that extends beyond the assembly and me. The eucharistic table holds the finest wheat and the richest wine drawn from the earth and fashioned by human labor. But the stewardship of these gifts has been placed in the hands of the assembly who live in the world, a world marked by the many who continue to hunger for bread, for companionship, for justice—and yes, for nothing less than life itself.

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Samuel Torvend

August 10, 2017

St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr at Rome

Lectionary Abbreviations and References

References to readings in the *Lectionary for Mass* (LM), the lectionary of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW L), and the *Revised Common Lectionary* (RCL) follow the abbreviations listed below with day and year. Thus, Adv 1A refers to the First Sunday of Advent in Year A. Lectionary readings for the Sundays in Ordinary Time are listed by lectionary: LM Ord 13C; ELW L 13C; RCL: Pr. 8.

Adv	Advent
AllS	All Saints
AllSo	All Souls
Ash	Ash Wednesday
Assum	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Bapt	Baptism of the Lord
CKing	Christ the King
Corpus	Corpus Christi
East	Easter
EastEve	Easter Sunday Evening
Epi	Epiphany
EVig	Easter Vigil

HW	Holy Week
L	ELW Lectionary
Lent	Lent
LM	Lectionary for Mass
NewY	New Year's Day
Ord	Ordinary Time
Pass	Good Friday
Pent	Pentecost
Pr.	RCL Proper
RCL	Revised Common Lectionary
Trin	Holy Trinity

Chapter One

The Worldly Trajectory of the Eucharist

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. . . . While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. . . . He said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still [and] replied . . . "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place." . . . Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us. . . ." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their

2 *Still Hungry at the Feast*

companions gathered together. . . . They told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.¹

Whether they worship in a spacious cathedral or a small mission chapel, more than two billion Christians throughout the world follow a common pattern of worship, an order or *ordo*,² revealed in the Roman Missal, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Book of Common Prayer, and the books of various Protestant communions. While different words may be used to describe the pattern, they nonetheless reveal a fourfold movement: the baptized people of God *gather* for the reading and interpretation of *Scripture*, for thanksgiving over and *communion* in the gifts of bread and wine, and for *sending* into home, work, and public life.³ While a visitor in the liturgical assembly might imagine that this form of worship comes from a book, leaflet, or misalette, from a priest or a commission, the pattern, in fact, can be traced to the New Testament, to that encounter between the risen Christ and two of his followers on a Sunday, the day of his unexpected appearing after his execution by the Roman imperial army.

A Resurrection Appearance in Ordinary Time

Luke narrates this fourfold movement. A stranger joins two others and thus one is reminded that the Christian liturgy begins when at least two persons are present: “Where

¹ Luke 24:13, 15, 17, 19-21, 27, 28-33, 35; See Luke 24:13-35 (LM, ELW, RCL: EastEve ABC; East 3A).

² *Ordo Missae* or the Order of the Mass as found in *The Roman Missal*, English Translation According to the Third Typical Edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), hereafter RM.

³ The Roman Missal refers to this fourfold pattern as Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Concluding Rite.

two or three are *gathered* in my name, I am there among them” (Matt 18:20). While one may pray alone, Christian worship is always and profoundly communal, an action that draws one into relationship with others. He joins them on the first day of the week, on Sunday—not on the seventh day, the sacred day of the Sabbath set aside for worship and rest; he joins them, gathers with them, on a workday, in ordinary time as it were. These two followers, notes Luke, were saddened if not despondent: the One in whom they had placed their hope had been crucified, an ancient form of capital punishment. For them, the death of Jesus at the hands of the Roman army had seemingly closed off all contact with him. In their experience, he was moving away from them in time, never to be seen or heard again. Death had shut off all contact with him. This is the experience that accompanied them on their walk to a village.

The stranger, still unrecognized by these disciples, asks them what they are discussing. On this Sunday, they speak a story of failure and lost hope. They identify Jesus as a prophet, “mighty in deed and word,” who they hoped would redeem Israel. In response, the stranger narrates and interprets Scripture—*interprets the Scriptures*—in such a way that they are enlightened. His interpretation of the ancient text responds to their need: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). Luke offers no hint of that interpretation’s content and yet from their response—“our hearts were burning within us”—it was revelatory, pointing to the One they assumed had been silenced by death.

In the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean, a spontaneous invitation to *table fellowship* was nothing out of the ordinary, but the recipient was expected to decline until repeated urgings persuaded one to accept. Indeed, the sharing of food and drink at table among strangers presumed

that a social bond had been established among the participants.⁴ At table, then, their companion takes bread, blesses, breaks it, and gives it to them. He follows ordinary Jewish table practice and holds bread in his hands as he blesses God: “Blessed are you, LORD our God, King of the universe, you who have brought bread forth from the earth.”⁵ Did the companion say these words? Luke gives no indication and yet the practice of blessing God over bread and cup followed a standard pattern captured by this ancient prayer. For a loaf of bread to be shared, then, it must be broken, pulled apart, so that from the one bread the many might eat. It is in this moment and with this action that “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” Their hearts had glowed as the risen Christ opened to them the meaning of the Scriptures but, notes Luke, they recognized him—*recognized him*—in the ordinary and domestic action of taking, blessing, breaking, and offering bread to table companions.

He vanishes from their sight. To the now enlightened disciples, a number of options present themselves. They could stay at table, complete the meal, and grapple with this unexpected and unimagined encounter. They could travel beyond Emmaus and distance themselves from Jerusalem, that place marked by death and the fear that attended those who were his followers: fear that they, too, would be arrested. After all, the men had rejected as an idle tale the women’s message of his resurrection. But, instead, *they get up and go* to Jerusalem. They enter that place of seeming betrayal and loss with the news of resurrection. Their initial sadness, their disappointed hope, is transformed by this

⁴ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 323.

⁵ Lucien Deiss, *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1979), 6. The dating of the text cannot be secured in the first century CE.

encounter with Christ in the Scriptures and at table—a transformation that empowers them to enter the world with surprising good news.

At first glance, this lengthy resurrection narrative appears to be the recollection of an event in the past. After all, Luke begins his gospel by informing Theophilus, his reader, that after investigating “everything,” including the many “orderly accounts of the events that have been fulfilled among us,” he decided to write his own account so that his reader might know the truth (Luke 1:1-4). Indeed, we know that Luke was able to draw on the Gospel of Mark, a collection of Jesus’s sayings known as Q, and a collection of stories unique to this gospel, a collection not found in Mark, Matthew, or John.⁶ And, yet, while Luke draws upon oral and written sources as he fashions his gospel, he is not interested in simply writing a biography of Jesus, a historical timeline filled with insightful anecdotes and sayings. Rather, he offers his readers a proclamation and an interpretation of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, “a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:11).⁷ Rather than a mere narrative of past events, Luke’s intention in writing his gospel actually complements that of the risen Christ when he interprets the Scriptures for the two he meets on the road: as the risen Lord demonstrated how the ancient Hebrew texts hold meaning for despairing disciples in the present, so Luke presents the significance, the many meanings of Jesus, “mighty in word and deed,” for his contemporary listeners, for those who

⁶ Q from the German *Quelle*, for “source,” and what some scholars refer to as Special L or the L Source, that collection of material unique to Luke. See Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 262–267; Mark Allan Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 15–23.

⁷ Brown, *Introduction*, 227.

lived in the Roman Empire during the last third of the first century, some forty or fifty years after Jesus.⁸

Luke responds to the question of how that life then (Jesus's life, ministry, death, and resurrection) shapes and empowers Christian faith and life in the present. Thus, we find in Luke not only historical memory but also invitations, instructions, and questions for those who would hear his gospel read in the midst of the liturgical assemblies scattered throughout the ancient Mediterranean world: *instructions* as to where they would encounter the crucified and risen Lord; *invitations* to expand their understanding and practice of Christian faith and life; and *questions* to prod and stretch the imagination with the paradoxical news of a crucified Savior: How could that be? How could a Jewish peasant and preacher, crucified by Rome, be the Savior of the world?

To the question asked by late first-century Christians—"Where will we encounter the risen Christ, we who live some fifty years after 'he was carried into heaven'?"—Luke offered this instruction: you will encounter him when two or three or more of you are *gathered* for the *reading* and *interpretation* of Scripture, for *thanksgiving* and *communion* in his body broken and blood poured out, and in that world to which you are *sent*. While Luke narrates an encounter, a discussion, and a meal on a Sunday, he is, at the same time, inviting those who hear this story to recognize the presence of the risen Christ in one another (the gathering), the proclamation of the Word of God, their communion in the eucharistic gifts, and their sending into a world marked by much need. Indeed, the history of Christian worship and

⁸ See Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), in particular his discussion in 161–179 of Luke 24 as revelatory of the movement from nonfaith to faith.

Christian life manifests the ways in which diverse cultures in different historical epochs have embodied the pattern: some with rich elaboration (the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) and some with noble simplicity (the Mass of the Roman Rite). And yet we recognize not only a resilient pattern that has endured for two thousand years, a living gift as it were from the first Christians, but also significant moments in that pattern.

An Exhortation to Splendid Things

One of the earliest commentators on the emerging pattern of Christian liturgy was Justin of Rome, a Hellenistic convert to Christianity, a self-styled Christian “philosopher” who suffered martyrdom during the reign of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius some seventy years after Luke completed his gospel. In 150, he wrote an apology or explanation of the Christian faith addressed to the emperor and his son, Marcus Aurelius.⁹ In that defense of Christian faith and life, Justin narrated a second-century Roman enculturation of the Lucan pattern:

On the day named after the sun, all who live in city or countryside assemble. The memoirs of the apostles [and] the writings of the prophets are read for as long as time allows. When the lector has finished, the president addresses us and exhorts us to imitate the splendid things we have heard. Then we all stand up and pray.

When we have finished praying, bread, wine, and water are brought up. The president then prays and gives thanks according to his ability, and the people give their assent with an “Amen!” Next, the gifts over which the thanksgiving has been

⁹ Deiss, *Springtime*, 93–94; for the critical edition see *Apologie pour les chrétiens*, vol. 507 in *Sources chrétiennes*, Intro., critical text, trans., and notes by Charles Munier (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006).

spoken are distributed, and everyone shares in them, while they are also sent with the deacons to the absent brothers [and sisters]. The wealthy who are willing make contributions, each as he pleases, and the collection is deposited with the president, who aids orphans and widows, those who are in want because of sickness or some other reason, those in prison, and visiting strangers—in short, he takes care of all in need.

It is on Sunday that we all assemble, because Sunday is the first day: the day on which God transformed darkness and matter and created the world, and the day on which Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead . . . he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them what we have now offered for your examination.¹⁰

Whereas Luke's narrative sets forth an encounter between the risen Christ and two disciples on a road in Palestine, Justin describes a more substantial flowering of that pattern within a small Christian community located somewhere in the city of Rome.¹¹ Since Sunday was a workday, Christians would need to gather in the early hours of morning, most likely in a room attached to a house or in an apartment. There is a proclamation of readings by a lector from "the prophets" (the Hebrew Scriptures) and "the apostles" (the emerging Christian Scriptures). The leader is called a president, that is, the one who presides by giving an "address," giving "thanks" at table, and giving "aid" to all in need. A deacon extends the table's hospitality by bringing a portion of the bread and wine to those who are absent. A collection is taken among those who are able to give and deposited with the president, who is a guardian for all those

¹⁰ 1 *Apology* 67.

¹¹ For the possible location of the small Christian house church assemblies in Rome during the second century, see Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 17–47.

in need, a second extension of hospitality into the larger world beyond the liturgy.

Let us note, then, that reading from Scripture leads to an exhortation to “imitate the splendid things we have heard.” That is, the president offers an interpretation of the Scriptures for a liturgical assembly living in a different culture and removed in time from the Palestinian context in which the writings of the prophets and the apostles first emerged. What meaning, what good news, can be found in an ancient Hebrew text for Gentile “Christ followers”? What good news can be heard in the writings of the apostles for an assembly of Christians who refuse to worship a deified emperor or the gods of the state? These are some of the questions Justin’s preacher faced. The proclamation of Scripture thus seeks, needs, even demands interpretation if it is to become “good news” for an assembly. Such good news is not necessarily self-evident. There is thanksgiving over bread and wine (cut with water?) following the Jewish pattern of blessing God. Yet, the ancient blessing has now become a “eucharist,” a thanksgiving, “glorifying the Father of the universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”¹² Justin writes that “just as Jesus Christ our Savior was made of flesh through the word of God and took on flesh and blood for our salvation, so too through the word of prayer that comes from him, the food over which the eucharist has been spoken becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus, in order to nourish and transform our flesh and blood.”¹³ Thanksgiving is made in order that, after giving their assent, the people might eat and drink, the gifts “nourishing and transforming” their flesh and blood, that is, their lives, their way of perceiving and living in this world. Yet, the liturgy does not end with the Communion.

¹² 1 *Apology* 65.

¹³ 1 *Apology* 66.

While the deacons take the eucharistic food to those who are absent, the president receives a collection so that he might care for all in need: the assembly will disperse it but its dispersal is suffused with generosity. That is, the liturgy simply does not end: it continues into the larger world among those who are most vulnerable in a society in which little if any private or public program of welfare existed.

Drawn from city and countryside, Christians assemble, assemble around the Scriptures proclaimed and then interpreted. One can thus detect a movement here, one action purposefully leading to another. Indeed, Justin narrates an ensemble of actions signaled by the word *giving*: the president gives an exhortation to these “splendid things”; the president then gives thanks over the gifts of bread and wine. The president offers or gives the assembly’s gifts to all who are in need, the assembly now open to the needs outside its gathering. The reading of Scripture yields to exhortation: what will come to be called a sermon or homily. Giving thanks over bread and wine yields to sharing in them—the assembly’s eating and drinking. Giving gifts to the president yields to care for the poor. In other words, this ensemble of actions, of one thing purposefully yielding to another, forms a *trajectory*, a movement from gathering around the Scriptures to gathering with the poor. While the assembly moves out into work (it is a workday after all), the liturgy continues through lives “nourished and transformed,” through the giving of eucharistic gifts to the absent, through the assembly’s care for the orphans and widows, the sick and imprisoned, the homeless stranger and anyone else in need.

It should not surprise us, then, that Justin ends his description of this early Roman liturgy with an explanation of why Christians gather on Sunday. On the first day, “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen 1:3). On the first day, writes Justin, God transformed darkness and created the world. On the first day of the week, Jesus Christ

rose from the dead (Luke 24:1-12). On this day, filled with the promise of light and life emerging from darkness and death, the Christian assembly gathers as a living sign of God's life revealed in Jesus Christ; gathers around the One who speaks, who "interprets to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:27); gathers around the One who transforms their flesh and blood so that they might live as his body in the world; gathers around the One who leads them to those who are in want and need. The cosmic symbol of the life-giving sun—for without the light there is no life—has become, in Justin, a metaphor of the community and its ensemble of actions: preaching speaks of splendid things, a revelatory act of enlightenment, a shedding of light on the meaning of the ancient text for this assembly's life; giving thanks to God over bread and wine includes thanksgiving for creation, for sun and earth, for the life and light revealed in Jesus; gathering a collection draws the attention and the charity of the assembly outward—its care for those who "sit in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79) intended to feed the hungry, strengthen the weak, and support the stranger.

Rather than experiencing the liturgy as a list of rubrics or a series of things to do for a "valid" celebration, Justin describes an ensemble of actions, one leading to the other, in which the worshipping assembly encounters the presence of the risen Christ mediated through word and action. The people gather but not simply to be together, as if "community" or "hospitality" were its ultimate end or purpose. Rather, the people gather in order to hear and respond to the Word of God proclaimed, sung, interpreted, and prayed. And yet, that proclamation and interpretation yield and point to the tangible encounter with Christ in his "flesh and blood," through the earthy gifts of bread and wine: the proclamation and interpretation of Scripture—"Were not our hearts burning within us?"—point toward the Word of God

coming to the assembly as food and drink—"they recognized him in the breaking of the bread." And yet—and yet—that profoundly communal and personal reception of "the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus" is not an end itself. The movement, the trajectory, of the liturgy draws those who receive the body and blood toward all those who are in want and need. Nourishment in "flesh and blood" is not only the reception of Christ's self-giving to others but also one's commitment to serve the flesh and blood of those in want and need.¹⁴ Justin's ancient Roman assembly gives their assent with an "Amen!" not only as a word of agreement with the president's thanksgiving but also as their assent to the ethical implication of the gifts received: care for the orphans and widows, the sick and imprisoned, and the stranger. Here one begins to recognize the inextricable bond between sacrament and service, worship and welfare, liturgy and living in the world.

Following the Ritual Flow

The contemporary and ecumenical liturgical pattern reveals this ancient sensibility. In the Roman and other Western Rites, the people stand as they sing an acclamation to welcome the proclamation of the Gospel. In many churches, candles and incense—light, fire, and smoke—surround the proclamation. Members of the assembly may trace a cross on their foreheads, lips, and heart as they silently pray: "May the words of the Gospel be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart." Some assemblies bow as the announcement of the Gospel is spoken and as it is concluded. In some

¹⁴ See an earlier work by Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Du symbolique au symbole: Essai sur les sacrements* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1979), in which he notes the movement of the liturgy as: Word given and received, Word celebrated (sacramentally), and Word lived.

rites, the priest or deacon will kiss the Gospel page at the conclusion of the reading. All of these ritual elements—standing, singing, incense, candlelight, signing the body, bowing, reading or singing the Gospel, and kissing—communicate the significance of this solemn proclamation in the liturgy: “[T]hrough their acclamations the faithful acknowledge and confess that Christ is present and is speaking to them and stand as they listen to the reading; and by the mere fact of the marks of reverence that are given to the *Book of the Gospels*.”¹⁵

The proclamation then yields to preaching, to the interpretation of the ancient text for the assembly’s current need, for its hunger to hear good news. Such preaching, therefore, is not simply an “explanation” of the Scriptures, as if the preacher’s purpose is to reduce the meaning of the texts in a univocal manner. Rather, preaching is intended to provoke and nurture the faith of the gathered assembly, *their trusting receptivity to the sacramental encounter with Christ in the Eucharist*: “The sacraments are sacraments of faith, and since ‘faith is born of the Word and nourished by it,’ the preaching of the Word is an essential part of the celebration of the sacraments.”¹⁶ The “preaching” of the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus was a revelatory interpretation of the texts that responded to the needs of two despairing disciples, a revelation that led to the breaking of the bread. The disciples’ faith in God was awakened, encouraged—“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Set next to that awakening was their ability to recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

¹⁵ “General Instruction of the Roman Missal” (hereafter GIRM), in *The Roman Missal* 60.

¹⁶ “Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly,” in *The Liturgy Documents*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 347.

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