

The Eucharist – Talk by Fr. Peter Hocken, at the Kerygma Teams Discipleship School, Dublin, Dec 2003

In speaking about the Eucharist, I want to begin from Advent. I love the season of Advent because I think it's the only time of the year when you can talk about the second coming of the Lord in the Catholic Church without people thinking it's a bit weird. For the second coming is at the heart of Advent, as is brilliantly explained in Paragraph 524 of the Catholic Catechism, *'When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah. For by sharing in the long preparation in the Saviour's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for His second coming.'* Most people assume the meaning of Advent is a spiritual preparation for Christmas, but that is not the main purpose of Advent. There is an element of preparation for Christmas, but there's an **essential link between the first and the second coming of the Lord.**

The Catechism says that in Advent each year we share in the long preparation for the Saviour's first coming. This especially happens through the reading of the Messianic promises from the prophets. So, in Advent the Catholic liturgy always has an Old Testament reading (mostly Isaiah) that contains promises about the Messiah and/or His kingdom. This year I've seen with a new clarity that something amazing happened 740 years before Christ with the beginning of Isaiah's ministry. There begins to be a whole lot of promises about the future of a whole different order than what there'd been before. There'd been a few promises about the future before, but now there a flood of them is unleashed - some about a person and some about the transformation of Israel, Jerusalem and the world.

Isaiah was called by the Lord as a prophet at a time of disaster, at a time of spiritual catastrophe. So the Book of Isaiah starts, *'I reared children and brought them up and they have rebelled against Me. They have forsaken the Lord. They have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him.'* It is a dire situation. But it is precisely in this extremity that the most amazing revelation and promises about the future are given. After this first chapter, all of which is about the sin of Israel, the sin of Jerusalem, and the disasters and punishments that will follow, chapter 2 is totally different. *'This is what Isaiah, son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways that we may walk in His paths. The Law will go out from Zion, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'* Years ago I used to think that all the promises of the Old Testament were fulfilled when Jesus came. In fact, that's not true. For example, there was a fulfilment in the coming of Jesus concerning the Word of the Lord going out from Jerusalem – with the sending of the apostles. But, it goes on to say, *'He will judge between the nations.... They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.'* You would have to be mad to think that this has already been realised. So, in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament there are some elements that have been fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus and some elements that are still awaiting fulfilment.

Chapter 3 contains a lot more reproaches: there is a heading 'Judgment of Jerusalem and Judah', where the Lord enters into judgement against the elders and leaders of His people. But in Chapter 4 v 2 – there is another promise about the future. *'In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.* In chapter 5 it says the Lord's done everything He could for the vineyard of Israel and yet it's not producing good fruit. Then there are more woes and judgements. In chapter 7 we have the famous passage, 'the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him Emmanuel', that was fulfilled in the nativity of the Lord. Chapter

9 – has more messianic prophecies: *‘the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. The government will be on His shoulders. He will reign on David’s throne and over His kingdom, partly fulfilled already, partly not.*

In chapter 11 we have *‘a shoot will come out of Jesse; from His roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him.’* We know Jesus applies that to Himself in the synagogue in Capernaum, but here again you cannot say this is completely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus, because this passage ends: *‘the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together and a little child will lead them’, etc. ‘They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.’* We cannot say that this is fulfilled. The interpretation is made more complex by the fact that different levels and times of fulfilment are all mixed up in the same passage. We find the same pattern in the sayings of Jesus in Matthew 24, when part refers to the destruction of the temple which happened forty years later – *‘a stone will not rest upon a stone’* – and part refers to the Son of Man coming in great glory on the clouds of heaven.

The prophet doesn’t see the future like a photo. The prophet sees the future in one line of vision, all at once: things that are nearer; things that are further away; things that are right at the end. Now, this is not confusion, but greater depth, because in God’s purpose they are all connected. We like to focus and say ‘this happened then’ and then ‘that is a separate event’. But we often miss the connections. So there is a great wisdom and depth in the way the prophets see things all in the same line of vision.

What has this got to do with the Eucharist? Much, as we shall see. With the first coming of Jesus, some prophecies were fulfilled, but others not. Some were fulfilled in His earthly ministry and some were fulfilled in His resurrection and ascension. But prophecies like *‘there will be no more war any more’* and *‘the earth will be full of the glory of the Lord’* – these are not yet accomplished. But the Jews had expected the Messiah to bring in the kingdom totally when He came - they were only expecting one coming of the Messiah. When Jesus came, He made clear that there are two comings and He begins to speak of His coming in glory. And so, some Messianic prophecies are fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus and others will not be fulfilled until his second coming. Another thing to bear in mind is that these prophecies by Isaiah are about total existence; so they concern this world, they concern all dimensions of life, they concern the body, the land, everything. It’s a total salvation, a total deliverance, a total new creation that is promised.

I want to read now a paragraph from the Catechism about the Church’s liturgy and the Sacraments (thus including the Eucharist): *‘The Church was made manifest to the world from the Day of Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the dispensation of the mystery, the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present and communicates His work of salvation through the liturgy of His Church, until He comes. In this age of the Church, Christ now lives and acts in and with His Church in a new way appropriate to this new age.’* (para. 1076). What this is saying is this unexpected vision of two comings of the Messiah has opened up a new period between the two comings: with his first coming, there is a decisive beginning of the kingdom, but it is hidden in the form of signs. There is this new space that we now know lasts at least twenty centuries between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus, when all will be fulfilled. The Catechism says this is the age of the Church, the age of the Sacraments. What the Catholic Church calls Sacraments belong to this period of the Church. There weren’t Sacraments in this sense before the first coming and there won’t be Sacraments after the second coming. This is the age of signs, because it is the age of the real presence of Jesus and a real working of the Holy Spirit, but the full glory of the Lord remains hidden.

Highlighting the space between the first and the second coming of Jesus is the right framework to understand the Sacraments and to understand the Eucharist. They belong to this period and reflect the characteristics of this period. The characteristics are – first of all Jesus has come and secondly He has poured out the Holy Spirit on the believers. But He has poured out the Holy Spirit as first fruits, as first instalment, so the gift of the Spirit is not directly visible and the presence of Jesus is not directly visible. That does not mean that the work of the Spirit is totally invisible. So, this introduces us to the idea of signs, because the Sacraments are signs. But they are signs in the strongest sense for they make present in the hidden power of the Spirit what they signify. But the reality is not totally unveiled, it's something so big that it can't be totally seen, but it is uncovered to us through the sign. The relationship of word and sign of course is very important. I wanted to talk about the Eucharist in this way, because I think it's not the way it is normally presented; it often doesn't go deep enough, so you get presentations on the Eucharist which say Jesus instituted so many Sacraments, seven if you're a Catholic, two if you're a Protestant, unless you're a Lutheran, when it's three. This puts it in a legalistic framework, but the Catechism starts from the very nature of the way that God is saving us. When Jesus was present in His earthly life, He was not being seen in His divinity, what people saw was a baby first. They saw a man do things. But in fact what He did showed forth in His actions and gestures that He was more than just a man. And so His humanity was a sign. It helps to understand what sign means. But what sign indicates is that the reality that is signified is even bigger. The sign does not exhaust the reality that is behind it.

In the Old Testament, right from the beginning in the history of Israel, you have memorial, this very important idea. You see it with the Passover. The people of Israel were commanded to celebrate the memorial of the Passover, which was the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt and their passage through the Red Sea. Now they were commanded to remember that and the remembrance involved doing something. This was important. The remembrance wasn't just listening to a reading; it was taking the paschal lamb, killing and eating it, according to a particular rite; as the Jews did this they were reminding themselves of the exodus, of the escape and deliverance from Egypt. One of the key elements in it from the beginning was memorial or remembrance. From the beginning there was also an element of promise, that was looking to the future. The promise is there from Genesis 12 – those who bless Abraham, God will bless – and that his descendants, his seed, will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. From the time of the prophet, Isaiah, you get a whole explosion in the number of promises. The spiritual life of Israel involves both memorial and promise.

If you say that everything in the Old Testament was fulfilled when Jesus came, this tends to suggest that Christian worship is nearly all memorial and very little celebration of promise. If everything has been fulfilled when Jesus came, then what is there left to look forward to? If you go through the New Testament carefully with this in mind, what you see is, from the beginning, Christian worship had both the elements that were present in Jewish worship. It has the memorial element and the promise element, but there's been a change, there has been a major shift. First of all, the remembrance of the Christian Church now centres on what Jesus did. So you see this particularly in the Last Supper, in the Eucharist, 'Do this in memory of Me', Jesus said. He brings the celebration of his own Passover into the middle of the Passover memorial which was remembering the deliverance from Egypt. Now there is this huge new step in Jesus' Passover to the Father, and they're told, 'Do this in memory of Me.' But the promises are still for the coming of the King and the coming of His Kingdom. But the difference now is we know the identity of the Messiah. We know that He is not just a prophet, but the unique Son of God. We know that He has been glorified and so we know that our destiny is resurrection glory. We also know something about the transformation that He will bring when he comes.

A passage that is very interesting for this transformation of understanding is in Acts 3 v18 where Peter is preaching to the men of Israel, *'For this is how God fulfilled what He has foretold through all the prophets saying that His Christ would suffer'*. Peter is saying some of the prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled, but the ones he instances are those that relate to the suffering of the Messiah. But then he says verse in 19-21, *'Repent then and turn to God so your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord and that He may send the Christ who has been appointed for you, the Messiah, even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.'* Here in this one passage we have references to Old Testament prophetic promises already fulfilled and then to those that are still to be fulfilled. In fact, the whole implication of this prophecy is that the promises still to be fulfilled are huge. So Christian worship involves both memorial and promise every bit as much as Jewish worship. In fact both elements are absolutely essential. When the Catechism says that the Sacraments belong to the time of the Church, between the first and the second coming of Jesus, it is underlining that they **involve a memorial of the first coming and are signs and promises of the Second Coming**.

In paragraph 1099 of the Catechism it says, *'The Spirit and the Church co-operate to manifest Christ and His work of salvation in the liturgy, primarily in the Eucharist and, by analogy, in the other Sacraments, the liturgy is the memorial of the mystery of salvation.'* Then it has rather an amazing sentence, a very striking sentence, *'The Holy Spirit is the Church's living memory'*. It then speaks about the role of the Word of God in the Sacraments, in the liturgy – this is very important. So it says that the Holy Spirit first recalls the meaning of the salvation event by giving life to the Word of God. There is an essential combination of word and action, just as there was in Jewish worship. For example, in the Passover they read the account of the deliverance from Israel, but they just didn't read the account, they sacrificed and ate the paschal lamb. But there is a connection between the word that's read and the action that's done and that is part of our renewed Catholic understanding of the Sacraments. In fact, for much of the history of the Catholic Church we haven't really had a theology of the Word. If you read anything written about the Eucharist two, three or four hundred years ago, you probably won't find anything about the role of the Word of God. This is one of the great advances of Vatican Two. So, in paragraph 1103 of the Catechism, it says: – *'In the liturgy of the Word, the Holy Spirit recalls to the assembly all that Christ has done for us. In keeping with the nature of liturgical actions and the ritual traditions of the church the celebration makes a remembrance of the marvellous works of God. The Holy Spirit, who thus awakens the memory of the Church, then inspires thanksgiving and praise.'* From the Holy Spirit's role in the Word, it goes on to the Holy Spirit making present the mystery of Christ through the sacramental signs.

Paragraph 1104 of the Catechism is really important: – *'Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us, but actualises them and makes them present.'* So, in the Catholic understanding, what is being remembered is actually made present in sign form.– it's not like when you look at a photo taken at an event ten years ago and you recall that event. This is the real answer to all the post-Reformation arguments about the Eucharist between Catholic and Protestant. The Eucharist is not a repetition of Calvary. Paragraph 1104 says, *'The paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated.'* It is the celebrations that are repeated, the celebrations of the unique event. And in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present. That is very important when we are discussing the Eucharist and its relationship to the unique sacrifice of Jesus. If this had been said in the year 1500, there might not have been a Reformation, at least if this had been said and lived and understood.

I turn now from the passages in the Catechism on the Sacraments in general to the teaching explicitly on the Eucharist. Paragraph 1357 says, *'We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the memorial of His sacrifice. In so doing we offer to the Father what He has Himself given us, the gifts of His creation,*

bread and wine, which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made present.'

Paragraph 1363 says, *'In the sense of sacred Scripture the memorial is not merely the recollection of past events, but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men.'* In the liturgical celebration of these events they become in a certain way present and real. *'This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt. Every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers, so that they may conform their lives to them.'* It's saying that the **Christian memorial of the actions of Jesus follows the same pattern as the Jewish memorial**. But there's a difference because Jesus is the Son of God and because of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This memorial is made in the power of the Holy Spirit that was not present in the same way in the Old Covenant. This is something that wasn't really present in the post-Reformation Catholic theology of the Eucharist. The emphasis was on the sacramental powers given to the priest in ordination. There was little mention of the role of the Holy Spirit. Now that there has been a Biblical renewal in the understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit, there's an understanding that this memorial is made in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So then it says in Paragraph 1364, *'In the New Testament the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist she commemorates Christ's Passover and it is made present. The sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the Cross remains ever present.'* So, it's a once and for all sacrifice, a unique sacrifice. This is what a lot of the Protestant objections were about, saying it contradicted what it says in the book of Hebrews. Some Catholic presentations of the Mass at the time of the Reformation were open to the objection that it wasn't clear enough that Calvary is not repeated in any way; it was a once and for all unique sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

This raises the question about the Mass as a sacrifice. At the time of the Reformation, with all the arguments about this, the Catholics said the Mass is a sacrifice and the Protestants said, *'No its not, it's a memorial.'* There was a whole opposition between a memorial and a sacrifice. This discussion was tragic really because neither side got it completely right. The Catholics didn't understand the memorial part, because they weren't anchored enough in the Scriptural understanding, so they just insisted it was a sacrifice. In reaction, the Protestants mostly denied the real presence and said it is just a memorial. But this was a very weak and unbiblical understanding of memorial, without any sense that this memorial makes present what is being remembered, in line with the Jewish understanding.

The statement in the Catechism that sorts out this confusion is in Paragraph 1365: *'Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover the Eucharist is also a sacrifice'*. The Eucharist is a sacrifice because it is a memorial of the unique sacrifice, and because this memorial makes it present. There are a lot of Catholics who are not really aware of this. Last year I met a young guy in an Eastern European country, who had recently left the Catholic Church largely because of this issue of the mass as a sacrifice. He took his biblical arguments to his local priest, who had obviously not read this part of the Catechism, and who gave polemical answers from a pre-conciliar past.

The other aspect I want to treat is the Eucharist and the Second Coming. I've already said that the nature of the Sacraments is they belong between the first and Second Coming. This tension between memorial and promise is built into their structure. If you have celebrations of any Sacrament where there's no sense of promise, then there's something seriously defective in it. It belongs to the nature of the liturgy and the Sacraments both to look back to what Jesus did and to look forward to the coming kingdom. So, the Eucharist is a sign of the banquet in the kingdom of God. Remember the parable in Matthew 22, where the king prepares a wedding banquet for his son. The Eucharist is the memorial of the Passover of the Lord

Jesus, but it is also an anticipation of the heavenly glory. Paragraphs 1402-1405 deal with the Eucharist and the Second Coming. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist she remembers this promise of the Lord – *‘I tell you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine till the day I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’* and she turns her gaze to Him who is to come. In her prayer in the Eucharist, she calls for His coming. Maranatha – come Lord Jesus! So, in the Eucharist, first of all there’s the reading of the Word and the Word always has this element of memorial and promise – the Scriptures speak of the first coming and then the Second Coming; then in the Eucharistic action, the priest takes the bread and the wine and this is recalling what Jesus did and making present the saving sacrifice of Jesus Himself. *‘This is My Body given up for you. This is the Blood of the New and everlasting Covenant’*. This is made present, but it is also making present the glory that is to come. When we say that He is made present in His self offering, it is the glorious Jesus who is present, though in hidden form, and so there is already in the Eucharist a presence of the age to come.

Jesus says in John 6, *‘He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood I will raise him up on the last day.’* Amazing words because if we’re going to die, except those who are here when the Lord comes, how can receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord now prepare our bodies for resurrection? Jesus says it does, even though we can’t understand how. The past is made present, but also the future is made present and so it is building on everything that Jesus did in His first coming to prepare us for His Second Coming, making the Church ready for the final transformation. This prayer about the coming of the Lord is expressed particularly in the acclamations after the consecration, “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” – “when you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes”. There is also the Our Father: The Catechism says ‘Thy kingdom come’ refers first of all to the Second Coming of the Lord. After the Our Father there is the prayer ‘deliver us ...’ which ends up ‘as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.’

Paragraph 1107 of the Catechism says, *‘The Holy Spirit’s transforming power in the liturgy hastens the coming of the kingdom and the consummation of the mystery of salvation.’* This is another consequence of the Sacraments belonging to the period between the first and Second Coming. One of the great tragedies today is that many Catholics who celebrate the Sacraments really don’t have a very good understanding of what this means. On the other hand, there are a lot of Charismatic and Evangelical Christians who are very fired up for the Gospel, but have no understanding of the signs that belong to the period between the first and Second Coming. This is very tragic because there’s something very Biblical about this idea that we are not just given the Word and a promise, but what is being promised is actually made present, but in a hidden sign form that prepares us for what is to come. The tragedy is that a lot of Catholics don’t know the Word and don’t know the promise. But if you do not know the Word and the promise you cannot understand the Sacraments properly.

If somebody says that the Mass is boring, it may be due to the fact that they have never had any Biblical teaching on the Mass. Or it maybe they have never experienced any kind of conversion and they are just told to go to Mass. Today people want instant results. They assume they ought to be able to understand everything fast. But this cannot apply to the deepest things of life. I understand more about the Mass now than I did in various times in the past. People have to get used to the idea they may have to do some work to find out what the meaning is – they may have to dig. You might tell them it’s said that there’s diamonds in this area under the surface, but have you ever dug to see if there are – people have to dig.

Question: *I understand that in the early church, when people were becoming Christians, they had to go through a kind of a Catechumenate period, a discipleship or a training period, which sometimes could last from one to three years during which the evidence of conversion needed to be visible to the church before*

they were invited to the celebration of the Eucharist. Are we not now so post-Christian that the things we once took for granted can no longer be taken for granted.

The Catechumens had to leave after the liturgy of the Word and they weren't allowed to be there for the rest of the Eucharist. There are quite a lot of communities where you have closed meetings for members and people can only attend when they've been through a form of training and formation and made a commitment and then they're invited in to the community meeting. It was more like that in the early church. In fact a major Vatican document of recent years is the General Directory of Catechesis, which came out in 1997 after the Catechism. It says that the first stage is really initial proclamation and that Catechesis, that is systematic teaching, shouldn't begin until a person has responded to the primary proclamation and there has been an initial conversion. But often this isn't what has actually been happening, so there is a lot of re-thinking going on. The re-think is partly because a lot of practices are not really working and some are counter productive, but there has also been a major Biblical renewal in the Catholic Church – we're looking at the New Testament and the early church and saying, 'we've got to go back and look at what we've done at the beginning and re-think what we do now in the light of that.'

Question: *In Acts 3v 18-21 Peter refers to prophecies fulfilled and some not yet fulfilled such as in verse 21 'He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.' Would you include the restoration of Israel as something that must happen before Jesus can come a second time?*

Answer: I think that the prophecies that belong to the end indicate that some things are to happen in order that Jesus may come and there are some things that will happen because they're what He does when He comes. Like the resurrection of the dead. In the Catechism it says explicitly that His return in glory is suspended at every moment till His recognition by all Israel – paragraph 674. So it's saying that that's something that has to happen. It's like a condition of His coming. We can't tell what that means in terms of the percentage of Jews being converted, but there is something that has to happen in relation to the Jews before He will come again.

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