

The Role of the Eucharist in the Evangelization in Asia
Pontificio Comitato per i Congressi Eucaristici Internazionali
26 September 2014

The most recent reflection (both "official" and theologico-pastoral) on the topic happened at the IX Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Manila on August 10-16, 2009. The theme was: Living the Eucharist in Asia. I quote excerpts from the document.

General Pastoral Context: "Living the Eucharist' springs from and in turn nurtures 'believing in the Eucharist' and 'celebrating the Eucharist.' Our discussion on 'living the Eucharist' is deliberately set within the framework of a living faith and a living celebration.

But far from neglecting the concerns of life in Asia, we bring and relate them to our faith in the Eucharist and to its celebration. We never leave behind the dreams, hopes and pains of our people when we come to the Eucharist. In fact our communion with Jesus in the Eucharist renews our engagement with the realities of life in our world and gives form to Christian life in the world. Thus our present reflections attempt to follow the methodological 'circularity of life-belief-celebration-life.

Theological-Pastoral Flow of the Eucharistic Celebration

In Asia where the characteristic mode of the Church's existence is that of dialogue, the Eucharist is a unique experience of God's dialogue with us and our response to God: a dialogue of life, a dialogue of love.

This dialogue of life and love takes on a liturgical form in the Eucharist. We see, hear and touch the life of Christ and its dynamism in the celebration of the liturgy. Its various parts enable us to share in the rhythm of Christ's life offered for our salvation...Every Eucharist embodies in a sacramental way the life of Jesus so that we who celebrate it may live as Jesus lived.

I. Gathered as a Family in God. Recognizing God, Acknowledging our Sinfulness

The first moment in the Eucharist is the gathering of a community or a family. We believe that it is the Lord who calls, invites and convokes...As evidenced in the life of Jesus, meals were one of the privileged occasions to gather a people, not just to taste food but also "to taste" the Reign of God. God's invitation, unlike ours, gathers for the Eucharistic meal people from different economic, social, political, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and even of different geographic and time zones...The fruit of God's encompassing love is a community of brothers and sisters, sharing the common dignity of being God's children

[Asia: - belonging and loyalty to family, clan, community and ethnic group ; meals through which the community shares life moments ; in Eucharist Christians are called to live as a gathering rather than a scattering community ; infrequent family meals ; rigid caste system prevents sharing of meals ; loyalty to family leads to rejection of outsiders. Living the Eucharist involves a new way of coming together as a family because it is God who gathers.]

The grateful recognition of this reality intensifies our sense of being a community of sinners...We recognize our participation in the common brokenness of humanity. Ours is a community of needy supplicants before God and each other. We are all poor. We all need God's mercy. We all need our neighbours' prayers. We dialogue with God and neighbours in humility.

[Asia: religious and philosophical traditions at root of humility, non-violence, patience and harmony ; but blaming, scapegoat ; Living Eucharist involves humble admission of sin and seeing the presence of God's action and grace in other people.]

II. FAITH; Listening to the Story of Jesus. Building a Common Memory. A Joyful but Risky Act of Professing one's Faith

The gathered community will now be fed with the Word of God. What does the Word of God awaken in us? Is it faith. ..(2006 Asian Mission Congress on Telling the Story of Jesus in Asia: We can consider the Liturgy of the Word as a storytelling moment of the Eucharistic memorial. God speaks. God always initiates a dialogue. God tells God's story of love for us. God's Word acts. God's word is alive. God's word effects life...We need to realize that faith involves listening to the Word, accepting it in one's life, allowing it to transform one's life.

The faith generated by the Word of God is not simply personal and individual. It is also communal faith. As we receive and transmit memory, we constitute the community as a community of faith...It is interesting to note that people are usually gathered in family or community meals on which occasions their stories are also gathered into a 'reservoir' of common memory.

In union with the Church of generations past and with the believers of the future, a Eucharistic community joyfully professes its faith in the Triune God.

[Asia: sacred books are treated with reverence; being true to one's word ; need for formation in contemplation ; BECs ; with many 'poisonous' words polluting the youth the Eucharist teaches us to discern God's word from other death dealing words ; individualistic tendencies, infrequency of family meals, migration, dispersal of victims of violence hinder flow of stories into communal memory ; suppression of stories ; professing faith can be dangerous in some parts of Asia ; martyrs witness to strength of faith.]

III. HOPE: Signs of Hope in a World of Injustice (Offering of Gifts). From Betrayal to the Sacrifice of Self-Giving and Service. Communion with the Living and the Dead.

The preparation of the gifts celebrates hope in Jesus' transforming power for creation and human labour...The transformation that the Holy Spirit will effect on these simple gifts brings sure hope to creation, to the earth and to labourers. Their gifts will become the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that re-creates the world and humanity.

[Asia: creation and labour as victims of commodification, profitability in place of awe before God's gifts ; bread reminds us of hunger, malnutrition, lifestyle gaps, food beyond capacity of poor to buy, wine reminds us of drunkenness and victims ; call to stewardship of creation and human labour.]

Eucharistic Prayer: What do we remember? The Church is admirable in its courage to remember. She could have glossed over embarrassing details but she chooses not to. So we declare 'On the night he was betrayed, he took bread.' The Eucharist teaches us to bravely confront even painful memories. For in every dark memory, we see the action of God transforming nights of betrayals into dawns of reconciliation...Remembering Jesus' commitment to and perseverance in His life-giving mission we are filled with 'memories of the future promise' already begun but awaiting fulfilment...In the supper before he died, Jesus transformed the betrayal of his life into a gift of life...Betrayal kills others while self-gift makes others truly live...His death was the culmination of his earthly service. Jesus, the Teacher and Lord, transformed Himself into a servant so that His disciples may also be transformed into servants washing each other's feet.

[Asia: purification and healing of memories of betrayals; arms race, poverty, abortion, domestic violence, illegal drugs, environmental pollution; body reminds us of sex tourism, sale of body organs, unbridled experimentation, human trafficking, mail order brides, mutilation of body as torture.]

We remember the saints who now share in the triumph of Christ's resurrection. Our remembrance of them inflames the hope that our earthly journey will find its completion in Jesus. By remembering the departed, we hope in God that they may share in the reality of Christ's resurrection as the saints do.

[Asia: victims of violence; the forgotten; Eucharistic memorial is our invocation of God's mercy and justice for victims buried in oblivion; we have reason to hope for God remembers and will restore justice.]

IV. LOVE: Communion and Peace

We address God as Our Father. We believe that God is the Father who will provide for our needs, especially our daily bread. Jesus is our daily Bread who will soon be given to us in communion. But belonging to the Father means belonging to the other children of God in God's family and breaking bread with them...The sign of peace after the Lord's Prayer puts in symbolic action the love of the Father that binds us to one another. Peace is the gift of the Risen Lord. He gives us his peace so that we could give it to others too.

We taste the extravagant love of God in Jesus who gives to us His very life. This gift we do not deserve. As gratitude wells up from our hearts, we thank and adore the God who is love.

[Asia: forces that undermine communion and peace like poverty, war, abuse, vices, rivalry, intolerance.]

V. MISSION: Witness to Jesus Christ. A Gift and Promise of Presence.

The rite is not just a declaration that the liturgy is over. Neither is it simply a dismissal of a group. It is a sending. This has become a 'missionary moment.' God sends missionaries into His harvest...This is the great harvest of the apostles of Christ: the poor, the neglected and the lost. They are the true wealth of the Church...But

this will happen only if we remain in His love. The one who is called to abide in God is sent by God. This is the mystery of mission: abiding as we go and going as we abide...What we have seen, heard and looked upon and tasted, we now witness to. Participation in the Eucharist brings with it a mission of testifying in word and deed to the life we have been graced to experience...We are consoled by the fact that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist already fulfils His promise of presence to those whom He sends out on mission.

[Asia: even as a small minority the Church shares the gift of Jesus to others; witness of heroic Asians; people who need witness of our simplicity, joy and compassion – migrants, refugees, women and children, political detainees, mutilated, suicidal persons.]