Liturgy of the Eucharist—Breaking of the Bread Prayer



May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.

The Fraction of the Bread — "Fraction" comes from the Latin *fractio*, which means breaking into pieces. One of the earliest names for the Eucharist was simply, "the breaking of the bread," an expression even used by St. Paul (1 COR 10:16 and ACTS 2:46): "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

The *Catechism* teaches that they who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form one body with him (n. 1329). With this part of the Communion Rite, our last spiritual preparations are made before receiving Holy Communion.



As the celebrant breaks his host into pieces and prepares a fragment of it to place in the chalice, he quietly says this prayer: *"May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it."*

When the Eucharist was first celebrated the celebrant broke the consecrated bread into pieces in order to be distributed to those participating in the Eucharist; the one bread was distributed in order to enable participation in the body of Christ. Over time this became impractical due to the number of participants. However, even today in smaller celebrations and concelebrations this is done, reminding us of the night of the Last Supper when Our Lord broke the bread and distributed it to the Apostles.



In addition to breaking the break into pieces for distribution, a fragment, known as the fermentum, is placed in the chalice. Originally it was a way of symbolizing Christian unity and communion. Normally in the first centuries, the bishop would celebrate Mass with his priests concelebrating. Since the priests of Rome on Sundays had to celebrate for the faithful at their titular churches (the forerunner of today's pastors and parishes), the Holy Father would send out fragments of the Eucharist he celebrated. These were to be placed in the chalices at each Mass his priests celebrated, as a sign of communion with them.

In addition to this symbolism the breaking of bread and the commingling of the Body and Blood in the chalice remind us that the bread of life we receive is a bread that is broken. Just as the bread is broken, Our Lord's Body is broken on the cross, mingled with his Blood.

We are not just eating spiritual food; we are partaking of a sacrifice, a sacrifice voluntarily given so that we might have eternal life. The consecrated wine not only is the Blood; it is Blood that has been spilled for us.

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