



## FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 28

### THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

One of the most ancient names by which Christians called the Mass was “the breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:46). In the Mass, after the Sign of Peace while the Lamb of God is being sung or recited, the priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread. The acclamation ‘Lamb of God’ goes back to John the Baptist’s proclamation at the Jordan River when he sited and pointed out Jesus to his disciples: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!”

The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name, signifies that the many faithful are made into one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again. Thus, St Paul says: “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?” This is also called ‘The Fraction of the Bread’ derived from the Latin *fractio*, which means breaking into pieces.

The priest breaks the bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious. He says quietly: *May this mingling of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.* Furthermore, the symbolism of this is commonly explained today as representing the resurrection of Christ—the reuniting of his Body and Blood.

Historically, the Fraction of the Bread goes back to the tradition where the head of the house broke bread with his family. The Jews also broke bread at the Passover before retelling the story of God’s salvific action in redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was done by Jesus at the Last Supper (Lk 22) and again at the Emmaus event (Lk 24), in which he opens the scriptures to the disciples and breaks the bread and they recognized him.

The breaking of the bread also recalls the Body on the cross, by whose death the stronghold of sin and death was broken. There are various ancient traditions dating back to the seventh century where the bishop, as a sign of communion, broke a piece of the bread and put it in the blood. This practice is known as *fermentum*; this is where we got the idea of *fractum* (fraction), the piece broken from it. The *fractum* is then sent to priests in the parishes as a sign of unity with the bishop and as communion to those gravely ill. As the yeast binds the dough and makes one whole loaf, so is the Eucharist the bond and sign of unity between the pastor and his flock and a sign of unity in the hierarchical order of the priesthood.

In addition to this symbolism the breaking of the bread and the commingling of the Body and Blood in the chalice reminds 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.

*And that is your Mass Moment for the week.*