



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

June 10, 2018 ~ Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Altar Stuff

A question was asked why the priest or deacon mixes water with the wine at the altar during Mass, and also why the priest breaks off a small piece of the Host and places It in the chalice?

Regarding the wine/water mixing, this harkens back to a practical reality of life long, long ago. After the fruit of the vine fermented sufficiently and wine was created, it was kept stored in a concentrated form until it was needed for consumption. The concentrated wine needed to be mixed with water in order for it to be palatable. This is actually not that unfamiliar to us today; many folks today buy frozen concentrated juice to keep in the freezer until it is needed, and then it is opened up and put in a pitcher and then mixed with water to make some tasty, tasty juice.

The wine that we use at Mass does not come to us in concentrated form but already is ready for consumption. But as with many things Catholic, when a practical thing needed to be done, it is frequently done with a spiritual component; prayer is added to the action. And so, it is probably on account of the spiritual component that the action has been retained, and the prayer that is said as the wine is mixed with water is: "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity."

Now, why is a small piece of the Host broken off and placed in the chalice? This happens during the *Agnus Dei*, while the congregation sings the "Lamb of God." The main celebrant takes up the main Host, breaks It in half, and then breaks off another small piece of It and places it in the chalice as he prays, "May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive It."

This entire action is called the Fraction Rite, and it, too, harkens back to the early Church, when each local church (i.e. "diocese") was very small and required only one priest (that is, the local bishop). Saint Paul established many such churches, as we know from his letters and from the Acts of the Apostles; for example, the Church in Ephesus. Perhaps the number of Christians living there in Ephesus were a couple dozen at most; only one priest would be needed.

However, as the Church began to grow and more people were becoming Christian (after the Edict of Milan in 315 AD especially), the local churches (such as Ephesus) began to number a whole lot more Christians. The one priest in that local church therefore could no longer provide for all of the people. The ministerial rank of presbyter, (or "priest"), which has existed from the beginning of the Church, came into greater prominence, so that now, there are several priests throughout the one local church all celebrating the Mass for the people.

And so, as something of a reminder that though there are many priests serving many people, we are all one Church. The local bishop would offer the Sunday Mass, and he would break up his Eucharistic Host into smaller pieces and send each piece with a priest for the priest to mingle with his own Eucharist at his own Mass. Therefore, the Fraction Rite and that little piece of Host that is broken off and put in the chalice all symbolize Church unity.

~ Fr. Lewis