



**Jesus took bread
gave thanks
broke it,
gave it to his disciples and said:
Take and eat:
This is my body.**

According the synoptic Gospels

+ Rome, March 15, 2008

Dear Sisters,

In a few days we will celebrate the highpoint of the liturgical year: “The Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, his death on the cross, the resurrection on the third day: therein the one incomprehensible truth is unfolding, that God loved human beings and continues to love them.” (German Missal) Without this synopsis of suffering, death and resurrection we would have to consider Jesus’ death on the cross as a violent end and his life a total failure. With the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper Jesus anticipates his passing over to his Father in death and resurrection. It is an act of love to the end: “This is my body which will be given for you. This is my blood, which will be shed for you.” “No man can pronounce these words of consecration for himself. Speaking in the first person – *my Body* – only Jesus himself can say.” (cf Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: God is near us)

In this letter I want to present some thoughts about the importance of consecration, of transformation and its reference to our life.

The consecration happens in two parts: through the invocation of the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine, and through the words of Jesus which he said to his disciples during the Last Supper: “He took the bread ... gave thanks ... broke it ... and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat. **THIS IS MY BODY.**” The picture which I chose for this letter impressed me because it reflects in three simple gestures that very moment of the Eucharist. “This is my Body.” Theologically this is called transubstantiation. But in the depth it remains a “mystery of faith,” for who can understand that the substance of bread is transformed into the substance of the Body of Christ?! “This is my Body” – that is beyond what can be measured and comprehended. It is a real transformation, a change of substance and not a pure change of function. “The Lord takes possession of the bread and the wine; he lifts them up, as it were, out of the setting of their normal existence into a new order; even if, from a purely physical point of view, they remain the same, they have become profoundly different. That has an important consequence... Wherever Christ has been present, afterwards it cannot be just as if nothing had happened. There, where he has laid his hand, something new has come to be. This points us back again to the fact that being a Christian as such is to be transformed.” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: God is near us.) It requires faith so that the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is not only “real,” but also “personal.” He is really present; but without our faith his presence would not touch our hearts.

The words of consecration are also spoken over us, because in bread and wine – “Fruit of the earth/fruit of the vine and human work” – we ourselves are on the altar. Are we ready to be transformed? Do we believe that we enter into Christ? We cannot make the transformation; it happens. “Here I am handing over control, I let the transformation happen with and in me, as I only can let happen the healing of wounds – but: I have to want it. Only in this way can I get well, only in this way can I become similar to Christ so that others perhaps can recognize HIM in me or through me.” (Elisabeth Meuser)

Let us contemplate the words of consecration in detail: He took the bread ... gave thanks ... broke it ... and gave it to his disciples. These words summarized the entire life of Jesus; this life which he received

from the Father, which he owes to the Father, but which has to be “broken” for us and for our salvation, so that it can be shared, distributed, and given to us.

These words of consecration, a summary of the life of Jesus, are also a summary of our life, because consecration has consequences for our life when we allow it to happen in us. When we put ourselves into the host on the paten we declare ourselves ready for our life to be united with the life of Christ. We agree that he takes our life into his hands, that he blesses it and that he finally will “break” it before we will be “communicable” and “edible” for others. “Also our life has to enter into the passion. It is not only the suffering of the One without sin who suffered for the sins of the world. He entered out of sincere surrender into the disruption of suffering and death. We know how much God has to “break” in us in order to make us free: the ties of death, the ties of guilt, the dark prison of our anxiety and loneliness, the illusion of being well-behaved, the self-satisfaction, the superficiality, our humiliating weakness. How much has he to break away! The castles of our arrogance; the fences which we build in order to separate ourselves from those whom we consider not likeable to us; the barbed wire fences against all the others; the chains of ambition, of greed, the imprisonment in our own ego, the repose in our possessions.” (Cardinal Alfred Bengsch)

I want to add another reflection. In the Gospel of John we do not find the report about the institution of the Eucharist; he refers to the washing of the feet. “You should also do,” Jesus says, which, with regard to the content, means the same as “Do this in memory of me.” In Jesus’ action and in his mandate we see very clearly that Eucharist and Charity are one. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Sacramentum Caritatis” Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes very clearly the social dimension of the Eucharist. The bread is broken so that it can be shared. No one can have Christ for oneself alone. “Our communities, when they celebrate the Eucharist, must become ever more conscious that the sacrifice of Christ is for all, and that the Eucharist thus compels all who believe in him to become ‘bread that is broken’ for others, and to work for the building of a more just and fraternal world.” (Sacramentum Caritatis, # 88) We know from the letter to the Corinthians how convinced the first Christians were about the deep correlation of Caritas and Eucharist. St. Paul considers it as a betrayal of the Lord’s Supper when the rich eat and drink after the eucharistic celebration, but the poor are excluded. (Cf. 1 Cor 11:17-22) “Hence we can conclude that one important feature of a eucharistic spirituality has to do with sharing what we are out of love, even at the cost of our lives. (Fr. Anthony McSweeney)

I want to close with - in some way – a provoking text which can inspire us to reflection . “Ask a hundred Catholics what they consider as most important in the Church, they will answer: the Holy Mass. Ask a hundred Catholics what they consider as most important during Holy Mass, they will answer: the consecration/transformation of bread and wine. Tell a hundred Catholics that transformation, change is most important in the Church, they will be shocked and say: No, everything shall remain as it is.” (Lothar Zenetti) The greatest danger for our daily celebration of the Eucharist is routine, spiritual tiredness. May each Eucharist keep alive in us the longing to be transformed, to become new, to set off. Sometimes we can learn that in an impressive way from non-believers. One man, a professed atheist, said to his Christian friend: “If I could believe what you affirm, that in this host the Son of God is really present I would kneel down and never get up again.”

Let us confess daily with our whole being the “mystery of faith” which we celebrate so solemnly especially during these days before Easter and during the Easter time: “When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory.”

- With all my heart I want to thank you for your prayers that accompanied us during the conferences with the provincial superiors. I will share with you details in a separate letter which your provincial superior will communicate to you in due time. Therefore I ask you to still have patience.
- The death of Sr. Joanne Kelzer has left behind a painful vacancy in the N.A. Western Province. Sr. Joanne was not only a competent treasurer for many years, but first of all a fellow Sister who was esteemed by all. The Province did not have a Sister who could assume the treasurer's responsibilities, therefore another solution had to be found. According to Canon Law there must be a Sister who administers the finances of a province. Therefore in agreement with Sr. Joan Daniel Healy, provincial superior of the N.A. Eastern Province, Sr. Anne Thérèse Peach, provincial treasurer of the N.A. Eastern Province, will also assume the 'canonical' administration of the Western Province. For the regular business the provincial leadership is looking for a trustworthy and capable lay person. Sr. Anne Thérèse will travel a few times each year to Wilmette in order to check the financial affairs. We are very grateful to the Eastern Province and especially to Sr. Anne Thérèse for the willingness to help the Western Province.
- A change of superior took place in the Generalate community of Villa Paolina on March 1. Sr. M. Judith Moran, who had led the local community for six years, turned over her responsibility to Sr. Cäcilia Struck, who at the same time was nominated as superior of the convent in Campo Santo-Collegio Teutonico. We thank Sr. M. Judith for her empathetic leadership service in our local community of the Generalate and Sr. Cäcilia for her readiness to assume the office in both Roman convents.

I greet you with the old Christian salutation "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed." Also in the name of the Sisters of our Generalate community I wish you a happy and blessed Easter season.

In gratitude, your

Sr. Adalberta