

MYSTAGOGY:

Presenting the Gifts of Bread and Wine

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA

*Almighty God,
through your goodness
we have bread and wine
to offer.
They become life-giving
food for us,
the Body and Blood of
Jesus Christ.
May we ever be
nourished at his altar,
the Table of Life.*

Recall the Easter Vigil

After the Prayer of the Faithful, the gifts of bread and wine were presented to the priest celebrant and prepared at the altar by him.

It is a relatively simple gesture. Gifts are offered and then placed on the altar.

Probe the Mystery

How often do we offer another a gift? And how does that gift represent one's self to the other or an aspect of one's self, such as the desire for reconciliation or the sheer joy that is found in the relationship?

Walking forward to present the gifts of bread and wine to the priest celebrant, we offer our own lives in union with Christ. Our lives—our selves—are placed upon

the altar. We pray that we ourselves are transformed through the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Each time we approach the altar through representatives of the assembly and offer the gifts and bread and wine, we each walk with awe and humility. "Here, O God, am I. Take me as I am and by your grace transform me!"

Savor the Sweetness of Salvation

The gifts of bread and wine are "ordinary" in the sense that they are actual bread and wine. The bread itself is unleavened. The wine does not have a high alcohol count. Yet both are—by all accounts—perceptible bread and wine. They become, however, by the power of God, so much more than ordinary bread and wine. They are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

We are "ordinary" too, in the sense that we are much like the rest of humanity. We are men, women and children. We have many of the same concerns, the same types of joy and hope, grief and anguish as anyone else. Except that we are baptized into Christ—into his saving sacrifice. His self-offering has the power to transform us.

The altar where the gifts of bread and wine are placed is describe as the "Table of the Lord." And yet, because we have been baptized into his mystery, that same altar is the place where we offer ourselves as gifts, united to him by his own sacrifice.

After the typical Passover meal was over and he had eaten the flesh of the lamb with his apostles, he took the bread that strengthens human hearts and moved on to the true sacrament of the Passover. Thus even as Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God, had prefigured Christ by offering bread and wine, so Jesus would exemplify this with his real body and blood.

Saint Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 4.26.27: PG 58:738; NPNF 1 10:491

Inspire Others

Whom do you need to thank for the sacrifices they made so that your own life could be better? Who helped you along the way in the initiation process? Can you, once again, express your appreciation for their help and guidance?