



Archdiocese of New York + 2011

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE "LAMB OF GOD"

The Breaking of the Bread: The Breaking of the Bread is an ancient rite that has its origins in the action of the Lord at the Last Supper: *He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to his disciples...* It was part of the Eucharistic celebration from its beginnings, and in fact, in the early Church the celebration of the Eucharist was known as the *Breaking of the Bread*.

Before the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest breaks the consecrated bread into smaller pieces, then takes a piece of this bread and drops it into the chalice. These actions have great symbolic value. The breaking of the bread which is to be distributed to all present is a sign that we who are many are made one body by receiving Communion which is Christ, the one Bread of Life. In Baptism we were given a share in the life of Christ; we became members of his body. Our common sharing in the life of Christ also unites us to one another and each time we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord in Communion our unity with him - and with each other - is strengthened. When we come to Mass we do not come simply as individuals; we gather as the community of the Baptized, made one by our common life in Christ. The common song of thanksgiving that we sing as we receive Communion is an expression of this unity: our voices joined in song express our oneness in spirit and our joy of heart as we receive the precious gift of the Lord himself.

Communion and Our Participation in the Sacrifice of Christ: While it is the custom in many parishes to consecrate small hosts, it is desirable that the host used at the consecration be of a size that permits breaking into pieces from which the priest will receive Communion, but which may also

be distributed to some of the faithful. From before the Council of Trent, the Church has emphasized the significance of distributing to the faithful hosts consecrated at the Mass at which they are present. Today's Rite of Mass re-emphasizes this: *It is most desirable that the faithful just as the priest is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass . . . so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.* (*GIRM* n.85)

The Commingling of the Bread and Wine: Following the breaking of the bread, the priest drops a small piece of the consecrated bread into the chalice. This action is accompanied by a quiet prayer in which he asks that we who receive the Body and Blood of the Lord may have eternal life. While this gesture has a long and varied history, it signifies the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord, the glorious, risen Jesus Christ, in the work of our salvation.

The Lamb of God. During the Breaking of the Bread, the *Lamb of God* or *Agnus Dei* is sung. This chant is in litaney style consisting of an invocation followed by a response. Ideally the invocation *Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world* is sung by a choir with the people responding in song: *Have mercy on us* to the first two invocations and *Grant us peace.* to the last. If the *Lamb of God* is not sung it is recited by the people. On occasions when there are many hosts to be broken the invocation is repeated for as long as necessary to accompany the fraction. Regardless of the number of times the invocation is repeated, the final acclamation is always *Grant us peace.*