

**by FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**

This week, we continue with the meaningful actions that are happening during the Lamb of God. The *Roman Missal* indicates that during the singing or recitation of the Lamb of God, the priest “takes the host, breaks it over the paten, and places a small piece in the chalice, saying quietly: ‘May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.’” We call this part of the Mass the **Fraction** or the **Breaking** and the **Commingling**. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* teaches that, “The ‘Breaking,’ from the Latin, *fractio*, is the act of breaking the bread of the species consecrated in the Mass” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 226), which is why the breaking is sometimes called the fracturing rite. “This rite, which is simple in its appearance, is full of ancient meaning. At the Last Supper, Jesus ‘broke the bread’ to distribute to the disciples. After the Resurrection, the disciples recognized Jesus in the ‘Breaking of the Bread.’ Both in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters of St. Paul, the Eucharistic celebration is often referred to as ‘breaking of the bread.’” (*A Study of the Mass*” p. 19). Dr. Edward Sri notes several Scripture passages regarding “Breaking the Bread,” including: Mt 14:19; 15:36; Mk 6:41; 8:6; Lk 9:16; Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24; Lk 24:30; Acts 2:42, 46 (*A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, pp. 132–33).

### **A Sign of Unity**

“Breaking Bread” is a sign of our unity, together sharing in the “one loaf.” Although for practicality many churches use smaller hosts for the distribution of Holy Communion, the symbolism of the fracturing reminds us that we are united together in Christ, not only in the Mass where we are but also with those present at Mass in every time and place. Another sign of unity is the Church’s direction that, if possible, the faithful should receive Communion from hosts consecrated at that particular Mass. We know Christ is truly present and remains so in the hosts reserved in the tabernacle. Receiving hosts consecrated in the Mass we are participating in provides a sign of unity and also strengthens our participation in the sacrifice of Christ. (Recall from the Old Testament/Temple times that people were given a portion of the sacrifice, and their participation was completed through eating that portion.)

### **A Symbol of Reality**

As mentioned above, after the initial breaking of the Host, the priest breaks off a small piece and places it into the chalice. This is called the “Commingling.” As the Diocese of Peoria explains, “Placing a piece of the host in the chalice is a very ancient custom dating back to at least the fourth century. Originally, it was designed to show unity and communion between the pope, bishops and their local Churches. Fragments of the host from the Masses celebrated by the pope or bishop were carried by the deacons to the local churches and placed into the chalices during the celebration of the Mass. It symbolized the reality that the entire [C]hurch is present at every Mass. Even though it is not practiced as such today, the commingling of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ remains a beautiful part of the Communion Rite as it expresses a great reality. When the consecration takes place, the bread and the wine are consecrated separately, for this is how our Lord instituted the memorial sacrifice of His death on the cross. He anticipated how His death would take place: the separation of His Body and Blood and He bled to His death on the cross. The commingling at this point during the Mass symbolizes the Resurrection of Jesus when on the third day His Body and Soul were reunited forever” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 19).

Reminding us that the whole Christ is present in either/both the Consecrated Host and/or the Chalice, Charles Belmonte writes, “Some say that the separated species signify the Victim in the state of death (the body in one place, the blood in another), whereas in reality our Lord is present in either and in both species, as he is in heaven, living and glorious. Therefore, the mingling symbolizes the re-union of Christ’s body and soul as in his resurrection. It is, however, probable that the mingling must have corresponded to the dogmatic need to show clearly the unity and indivisibility of the body and blood of Jesus Christ” (*Understanding the Mass*, pp. 179–80).

### **A Sacrament of Unity**

As a priest, I really enjoy thinking about the ancient custom of having the deacon bring a fragment of a host consecrated at Mass by the bishop. Sometimes after the commingling prayer, I will silently say a short prayer for the bishop. I ask the Lord to gift him with wisdom and strength to lead us well. I ask that he be strengthened through reception of the Eucharist and that his heart continue to become more like Christ’s. In that moment, this sign of unity recalls me back to ordination day, when priests promise respect and obedience to the bishop and his successors. The Eucharist truly is our sacrament of unity—drawing each of us into greater unity with Christ and with one another.

All that from the Fraction Rite and Commingling! This rite shows us very concretely that there are no parts of the Mass without deep meaning, even gestures that may seem small. Does this mean we have to pay attention at every moment? Do your best, and realize that if you wander off, you might miss something really special!