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The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI¹

Abstract: One will encounter views that there was no Supper of the Lord with His disciples, with the character of a religious and soteriological mystery, and that it only had the character of a simple supper or at most a mere Old Testament ritual. This position is ahistorical and anti-mysterical, and thus Arian and even secularist. On the other hand, there are frequent attempts to confine the Eucharist to the private sphere of life of the believers. The article shows that Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI strongly challenges such views. For him, the Eucharist is not only the heart of his humble life and a theme of his extraordinary theological thought but also the central event, as well as the summary (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις: cf. Eph 1:10) of the entire history and of all creation, which tends towards union with God. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI argues that in the Eucharist the integral Christ is present, with His whole Person, historical and at the same time glorified, and with Him the entire Holy Trinity. Such an understanding of the Eucharist has important consequences for the faith and social commitment of the contemporary Church.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, Eucharist, thanksgiving, Passover, resurrection, bread and wine

Joseph Ratzinger starts from the conciliar understanding of the Eucharist as the source and summit of Christian life (*LG* 11). What this dogmatic expression expresses, to put it briefly, is that the Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love. This means the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself by revealing God's infinite love for each person. This gift, revealed in its fullness in the sacrifice of

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the Cross, continues in the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the Lord becomes sustenance for man, who thirsts for truth and freedom. This is why the Church, who celebrates the Eucharist, invites man to receive this gift of God's love, His agape. This mystery is expressed in faith, in celebration and in Christian life.

For Ratzinger, the Eucharist is also the central event and summary of all history and of all creation that strives for union with God. It is about man's history with God, which centers around the Lord's words: "Take, this is my body [...] This is my blood of the covenant, which will be poured out for many" (Mark 14:22.24). From the moment Jesus chose bread and wine as signs of His presence among us, He gives himself to believers in these signs as the Risen One. Thus, the Eucharist is Christ's Passover, the Sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, the sacrificial feast, the bloodless sacrifice of the Cross and the pulsating heart of the Church and the sacrament of the Church's unity. The theology of the Eucharist thus reveals its three fundamental dimensions: ecclesial, spiritual and liturgical.

The present article is not intended to delve into anti-Eucharistic concepts, which can be multiplied even further. For this would not only obscure the Mystery of the Eucharist, which must be brought out in the theological thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI but would also shatter the whole reality of Christian liturgy. The very authority of one of the greatest theologians of the turn of the century, who Benedict XVI certainly is, provides an objective defense against these views and a positive interpretation of the whole truth about the Eucharistic Mystery, which expresses the "love of God for man" (φιλανθρωπία, *humanitas* Dei: Titus 2:11). For the German Pope-Theologian it is certain that the Eucharist constitutes the real and true sacrifice of the New Covenant, that in the Eucharist Jesus Christ is present as historical and as heavenly, as incarnate and as paschal, in Humanity and Divinity, in one and the same Person. Through the Eucharist, Christianity is also intrinsically sacrificial and liturgical, and the Church is a sacrifice-offerer and sacrificial victim for humanity and on behalf of humanity. Thus, the Eucharist is not the private sphere of the believer, but is the offering of the whole Church, in which the one and the same sacrificial act of Christ and of priests and faithful is fulfilled.

The state of research on the Eucharist in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is not very extensive in Poland. They are mostly contributions, which took into account individual texts of Ratzinger as a professor and based on them there were numerous references to the Eucharist, e.g., in ecclesiology, liturgy, spirituality, dogmatic and moral theology. These were based on a collection of texts published by Ratzinger's disciples, Stephan O. Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, entitled, *Gott ist uns nah. Eucharistie: Mitte des Lebens*, Augsburg 2002 (Polish: *Eucharystia. Bóg blisko nas*, Kraków 2002). It is only the Polish edition of Joseph Ratzinger's *Opera omnia* (22 volumes have been published so far) which opened a wide field of research not only for theologians, but also for philosophers, historians and even political scientists. Interest in the Eucharist, however, has remained rather limited. As an example, let us recall the fact that out of about 150 master's theses defended to date at the faculties of theology in Poland only 4 about such a subject have been written.

1. Eucharist – the sacrament of love

St Thomas Aquinas described the Eucharist as “the sacrament of love.”² It is the gift “which Jesus Christ makes of himself, revealing to us God's infinite love for every man” (*SCa* 1) This gift, ultimately revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross, continues in the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the Lord becomes food for human beings to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom (*SCa* 2). Therefore, the Church, celebrating the Eucharist, sees it as her life-center and invites man to receive this gift of God's love, the *agape* of God.³ This gift opens before us as a mystery of faith, celebrating and living the Eucharist. The structure of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* constructed in this way reflects the whole theology of Benedict XVI's thought on the Eucharist.

² Cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Suma Teologiczna* [*Summa Theologica*], III, q. 73, a. 3.

³ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 14.

1.1. *Mysterium credendum*

God, who is the perfect communion of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reveals his plan of love in the Son sent into the world. Jesus makes an atoning sacrifice of himself on the Cross, offering his body and shedding his blood. In this way He gives in the Eucharist his whole existence, revealing the original source of Trinitarian love. “In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. At the same time, he reveals that he himself is the *true* sacrificial lamb, destined in the Father’s plan from the foundation of the world” (*SCa* 10). Jesus is the *true* paschal lamb who offered himself as a sacrifice for us, thus establishing a new and everlasting Covenant. The Eucharist contains this radical novelty of Christian worship in that it involves us in the sacrificial act of Jesus, in the very dynamic of his sacrifice. He “draws us into himself” (*SCa* 11), in the substantial transformation of bread and wine into His Body and into His Blood, accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Christ, who in the sacrifice of the cross gave birth to the Church as his Bride and his Body, actually lives the Eucharist which he celebrates. “The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body” (*SCa* 14). The Eucharist therefore constitutes the existence and life of the Church as a “universal sacrament of salvation” (*LG* 48), it reveals the indissoluble bond between Christ and the Church. The Eucharist calls us, like Christ – our Passover and Living Bread – to offer ourselves together with Him in sacrifice.

1.2. *Mysterium celebrandum*

There is an intrinsic connection between faith and the celebration of the Eucharist, which must be lived as a mystery of faith authentically celebrated, in the full awareness that “the *intellectus fidei* has a primordial relationship to the Church’s liturgical action” (*SCa* 34). This means that the relationship between the mystery believed and celebrated is expressed in the theological and liturgical value of beauty. Through the beauty of the liturgy one can reach the truth of the love of God revealed in Christ (*SCa* 35). For the beauty of the liturgy has its subject in the risen and glorified Christ. In the

Eucharistic liturgy it is expressed in an internal and spiritual way by making us conform to Christ. Following St Augustine, we can say that “if you have received the Body of the Lord well, you have become what you have received into your hearts, that is, Christ.”⁴ Thus, “not only have we become Christians, we have become Christ himself”⁵ (*SCa* 36). This expresses God’s action on us, who receive the body of Christ.

The Church celebrates the Eucharistic Sacrifice not so much for the external splendour of the liturgy, but because of Christ’s command: “Do this in memory of me.” This is why the celebration must preserve the art of the proper *ars celebrandi*, starting from the Liturgist himself, who is Christ, represented by the ordained bishop, priest and deacon, to the full participation of all the faithful.

1.3. *Mysterium vivendum*

The celebrated mystery of faith becomes a mystery of life, a new form of Christian existence: “whoever eats this bread will live for ever” (John 6:51). By receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we become partakers of the life of God (*SCa* 70). Through this food, Christ unites us to himself. This is how a new and definitive worship is fulfilled, to live in the manner of the Logos: *logikē latreia*. The Eucharist thus transforms our whole life into a spiritual worship offered to and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1), i.e., a self-sacrifice in communion with the whole Church, the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, as Christ’s sacrifice, is also the sacrifice of the whole Church, that is, of the faithful who also offer themselves as a sacrifice.

The Eucharist brings a radical newness into human life, so as to “live in the manner of the Lord’s day.” Celebrating Christ’s resurrection on the first day after the Sabbath means living in the awareness that Christ has freed us from sin and death, and thus gives us the possibility to realize our own existence as a self-offering given to God (*SCa* 72). The freedom brought by the Risen One makes it possible for

⁴ Augustinus, *Sermo* 227 (PL 38, 1099).

⁵ Augustinus, *Tract. Ev. Jo* XXI, 8 (PL 35, 1568).

the believer to live fully in the manner of a “new creation” (*SCa* 92), in communion with God and with all people for whom Jesus died.

2. Theology of the Eucharist

During the Angelus prayer on the feast of Corpus Christi in Italy (26 June 2011), Benedict XVI spoke words that expressed his ecclesiology very clearly: “Without the Eucharist the Church quite simply would not exist.” The argumentation of this statement is as follows: “The Eucharist is, as it were, the beating heart that gives life to the whole mystical body of the Church: a social organism wholly based on the spiritual yet concrete link with Christ.”⁶ This relationship has its source in the sacrifice of the cross, which is made present in a bloodless way in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the center of the Church. It is at the same time a new worship which is a call to the servant love of Jesus Christ, realistically present in the sign of bread. “Love is the bread that satiates – not only the stomach, but also the heart. The Eucharist is the bread of the new world: where it is celebrated, there God’s Tomorrow is already present for a moment, illuminating our Today. Where bread is broken, there is the new world; where people join in thanksgiving to the crucified and risen Lord, there *is* part of the new world; where the Eucharist is celebrated, there Tomorrow *is* for a moment already today.”⁷

2.1. The paschal mystery as the source of the Eucharist

The words of Jesus at the Last Supper: “take and eat,” “take and drink” summarize the earthly history of Jesus of Nazareth and at the same time set the future of His presence. Both vectors of the past and the future point to the source of the message to the world, which is love, which does not cease but endures forever. It reveals

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Eucharistie*.

⁷ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – ‘das Brot’,” 1108 (OO 14/2, 1009). Throughout the article, English quotations of Ratzinger’s works are my own translation. For the convenience of the Polish reader, references to the Polish translation (OO) have been added in brackets.

its center in the sacrifice of the Cross. “The Eucharist is a Sacrifice, the making present of the cross sacrifice of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Therefore “the institution of the Eucharist is the anticipation of death, it is an act of spiritual death. After all, Jesus distributes himself as divided, torn into Body and Blood.”⁹ In these words, Jesus transforms “death into the spiritual act of his ‘yes,’ the act of love that gives itself away, the act of adoration by which He gives himself to God and for God’s sake to men. The two things are closely connected: without death, the words of the Last Supper would be, one might say, a currency without worth, and on the other hand, death without these words would be a mere execution of a condemnation without an identifiable meaning.”¹⁰

This love of Jesus found its expression in another image from the Last Supper, in the washing of the Apostles’ feet (cf. John 13:1–20). He, the Lord, humbles himself and in the humility of a slave washes their feet. This is “the meaning of his whole life and suffering: he bends down to our dirty feet, the filth of humanity, and in his great love washes and cleanses us. [...] Jesus Christ enables us, as it were, before God and each other to sit at table together and to live in community.”¹¹ The washing of feet becomes a great gift of love, a gift of acceptance by God.

2.2. The Eucharist – the center of the Church

The love of the incarnate Logos is most fully and definitively revealed in His death on the Cross. This love, however, does not die on the Cross, but, as a transfiguration of death, continues eternally in the word of the Lord and in the sign of bread and wine, the Eucharist.¹² Thus the Eucharist is the gift of the Lord and the very center of the Church. It is the true sacrifice, “it is the word of the Word, in it speaks the One who as the Word is life.”¹³ In his word: Behold my

⁸ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 319 (OO 11, 300).

⁹ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 308 (OO 11, 289).

¹⁰ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 308 (OO 11, 290).

¹¹ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 308–309 (OO 11, 290).

¹² Cf. Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 327–308 (OO 11, 308).

¹³ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 324 (OO 11, 305).

flesh, behold my blood, the human word melts with the Word of eternal love, with the Son who continually gives himself lovingly to his Father. The priest who speaks these words of Christ in the sacrament of the Church, cooperating and co-sacrificing with Him, makes us partakers of this marvelous Mystery. He involves us in the prayer of the Sacrifice-Offerer Himself, and thus involves us in the transformation of His death into an event of love.

Indeed, the open side of Christ is the birthplace of the Church, the place of efficacy of the sacraments that constitute the Church: the Eucharist and Baptism. "From His side, from the side opened in loving self-giving, shoots the spring that fertilizes all history. From the sacrifice of Jesus' death flow blood and water, the Eucharist and Baptism as the source of a new communion."¹⁴ According to the account of John the Evangelist, Jesus died at precisely the hour when the Passover lambs for the Jewish Passover were being slaughtered in the Jerusalem temple. "Jesus here proves to be the true Passover Lamb."¹⁵ God himself gave Him to us when He sent Him to the world with the message of reconciliation. Similarly, God gave to Abraham, in a test of his faith, a lamb entangled in a bush of thorns as a sacrifice instead of his son Isaac (cf. Gen 22:13). This Old Testament lamb is a foreshadowing of the New Testament lamb, Jesus Christ, who bears the crown of thorns of our sins in order to give us what we in turn can give.

2.3. The theology of the words of the institution of the Eucharist

The four New Testament accounts of the institution of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:24–25; Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20), while differing in emphasis, become united in expressing a great prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God through the establishment of the New Covenant. Paul and Luke say, "This is the New Covenant in my Blood" and refer to the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer 31:31), indicating

¹⁴ Ratzinger, "Eucharistie – Mitte," 317–318 (OO 11, 299).

¹⁵ Ratzinger, "Kreuzigung," 584–585 (OO 6/1, 537).

that this Blood will be shed “for you,” pointing to the community of disciples.

Therefore, the sign of the New Covenant is the *Eucharist* – thanksgiving for the blood of the Son of God shed for us (“for many”). It is expressed in the “breaking of the bread,” in the distribution of the bread, and thus in the communion of the table. Jesus also gives a new depth to this gesture: “He gives himself. [...] In the bread the Son gives and distributes himself.”¹⁶ The breaking and distribution of the bread is thus an act of love towards the one who needs it. This gesture expresses the intrinsic dimension of the Eucharist and has thus become a symbol of the Eucharistic mystery, has become a definition of the Eucharist (cf. Acts 2:42; 20:7).

The New Covenant is based on the principle of obedience. It is no longer the fragile fidelity of the human will, but the obedience of the Son, who has made himself the Servant and accepts all human disobedience, overcoming it in death. The Son’s faithfulness consists in the fact that he acts “no longer merely as God towards man, but also as Man towards God, and thus establishes the covenant as binding and irrevocable.”¹⁷ Therefore the figure of the Servant of God, who takes upon himself the sins of all (Isa 53:12), is linked to the promise of the indestructible New Covenant. The obedience of the Son opposes all evil.

2.4. Christ’s real presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist

God, through the incarnation of his Son, became man among men and remained with us, giving himself, in the mystery of the transfigured bread, into our hands and hearts.¹⁸ The body of the Son of Man is henceforth our spiritual food which leads us to eternal life (cf. John 6:53.55). It is not Christ’s physical body, but His whole person existing in the flesh which, as “flesh given up for us,” is pro-existence,

¹⁶ Ratzinger, “Das letzte,” 515 (OO 6/1, 472).

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Das letzte,” 517 (OO 6/1, 474).

¹⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 343 (OO 11, 323).

being-for-others.¹⁹ The Risen Lord as crucified Love thus became the self-giving in a piece of transubstantiated bread, became a gift to others, gave Himself to others. In the reception of this bread, communion is built up with Jesus Christ, who gives himself to us personally. In him, the God-Man, we touch at the same time the living God. Then receiving communion becomes at the same time the adoration of the majesty of God, and not simply “taking bread.” The spirit of adoration “means truly coming out of oneself, giving oneself, freeing oneself from oneself and finding in this way also human communion.”²⁰

In receiving the communion, we encounter the real Christ, in the whole foundation of His being. The body of Christ, that is, the risen Christ, existing in the flesh, does not exist like ordinary bread, measurably and materially, but He exists in a new order, in a deeper dimension which is still a mystery to us. And although bread and wine remain the same from a physical point of view, in their deeper dimension they have become something else. It is not the priest who celebrates the Eucharist who brings about this transformation of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ (transubstantiation), but it is the Lord himself who acts here, bringing about something new, this extraordinary transformation of the substances offered. This means that his presence is permanent,²¹ not limited to the moment of the Eucharistic celebration, and that is why we adore the Lord in the Host. So, the reception of Christ in communion means going out to meet Him, adoring Him, entering into the mystery of God.

3. The Eucharist as the source of the Church's life and mission

Saint Justin Martyr († c. 165) gives in eloquent words one of the oldest extra-biblical testimonies to the celebration of the Eucharist: “And on the day called the Day of the Sun, there is a gathering in

¹⁹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 346 (OO 11, 326).

²⁰ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 350 (OO 11, 329).

²¹ Cf. Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 354 (OO 11, 333).

one place of all together, both of the cities and of the country. Then the Apostolic Memoirs or prophetic writings are read [...] Then we all rise from our places and pray [...] when the prayer is over, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president offers prayers and thanksgiving [...] Finally, there is a distribution to each and a participation of what has become the Eucharist.”²² This testimony links together the most important events in the life of the Incarnate Son of God – death on the Cross and Resurrection. At the same time, it shows that through these events Christ remained with us in the sacrament of the Eucharist. His presence in the sign of bread and wine becomes for the baptized the source of their Christian life, which becomes living out the Divine Love. This life has three fundamental dimensions: ecclesial, spiritual and liturgical.²³

3.1. The ecclesial dimension

Ratzinger rightly says that there can be no alternative here: the people of God or the Body of Christ. When speaking of the people of God we, as a rule, refer to the chosen people of Israel, but it is a concept in close connection with the new people of God – the Church. But this new people of God is the Church by becoming the Body of Christ through the celebration of the Eucharist. So, the Church is the people of God on the part of the Body of Christ, it is not an imitation of Israel. The Church is understood anew as the Body of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Accordingly, the Church is the community constituted by the Eucharist. John Paul II expressed this in the first words of his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.”²⁴

Hence one can speak of a “Eucharistic ecclesiology.” “Therefore, the summit of the Christian’s sacramental life is precisely the celebration of the Eucharist as the real making present by the Holy

²² Justinus, *Apologia* I, 67, 3–5 (PG 6, 429).

²³ These dimensions reveal the three most important thematic circles of J. Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s understanding of the Eucharist, cf. Voderholzer, “Eucharistie,” 357–370; cf. also Müller, *Die Messe*.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 1.

Spirit of the one Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and thus the continuous personal transformation by which we become one body and one spirit with Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:17). This is reflected in the theological category of transubstantiation, that is, the transformation of the substance of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The paschal mystery thus becomes the source of the Eucharist and the center of the Church's life, thus determining the form and content of the celebration as well as its mission."²⁵ The Eucharist has therefore as its content the union of Christians in one bread and one body. The Eucharist is the living event through which the Church's becoming takes place. The Church is therefore a community of the Eucharist. She is not simply a people, but she exists out of many peoples who become one people through the one table which the Lord has set for us all. The Church is like a network of Eucharistic communities and is constantly united by the one Body which we all receive. "In the Eucharist we receive the Body of the Lord and therefore we become one Body with him; we all receive the same Body and therefore we ourselves become 'one in Christ' (Gal 3:28). The Eucharist takes us out of ourselves and incorporates us into Him, so that consequently we can say with Paul: 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:20). I, but no longer I – a new, greater 'I' is formed, the one Body of the Lord, which is called the Church. The Church is built on the Eucharist, even more: the Church is the Eucharist."²⁶ Ratzinger can rightly conclude this: "And this is the deepest meaning of the Eucharist: by eating *one* bread, we ourselves enter into this *one* center, and in this way, we become one living organism, *one* Body of the Lord."²⁷

3.2. The spiritual dimension

Ratzinger clearly presents the Eucharist as devotion and sacrifice: "The institution of the Eucharist is the anticipation of death, it is an act of spiritual death. After all, Jesus gives himself as divided, as torn

²⁵ Góźdz, "Przedmowa," IX.

²⁶ Ratzinger, "Eucharistie und Mission," 407 (OO 11, 383).

²⁷ Ratzinger, "Predigten," 483–484 (OO 11, 453).

into Body and Blood.”²⁸ The words of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper are a response to the interpretation of His death that it is a consequence of the preaching of the kingdom of God and, in the gesture of the breaking of the bread, they capture His whole existence as a giving and sacrifice and thus as an anticipation of the death of the cross. In the words of the Last Supper “the spiritual process of death takes place or, more correctly, in these words Jesus transforms death into the spiritual act of His ‘yes’, into the act of love which gives itself out, into the act of adoration through which He gives himself to God and for God’s sake to men.”²⁹

The Eucharist, then, is not a repetition, supplement or completion of the sacrifice of the cross of Jesus Christ, but a memorable and sacramental making present, which includes an interior acceptance of this attitude of sacrifice.³⁰ “The Christian celebration, the Eucharist, reaches that depth of death. It is not a pious amusement or entertainment, a kind of religious embellishment or decoration of the world. It descends into the deepest abyss, which is called death, opening the way to life which conquers death.”³¹ The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice following the model of the Logos, to which St Paul calls us.

The Apostle calls this *logikē latreia*, which means expressing in words the service oriented towards the Logos. This means that “the sacrifice expressed in words referred already the Greek thinkers to the Logos, to the Word itself and to the fact that the sacrifice of prayer should not be just speaking, but a profound transformation of our being in the Logos and a union with Him. Worship consists in conforming ourselves to the Logos, uniting ourselves in perfect harmony with the creative Reason.”³²

Becoming conformed to the Logos is therefore a call for the believer to spiritually enter, already now, into the movement of the very Word of God, returning gloriously to the bosom of the Triune God, and ultimately to enter into the circle of God’s eternal life. This

²⁸ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 307–308 (OO 11, 289).

²⁹ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 308 (OO 11, 290).

³⁰ Cf. Voderholzer, “Eucharistie,” 362.

³¹ Ratzinger, “Eucharistie – Mitte,” 319 (OO 11, 300).

³² Ratzinger, “Die Diskussion,” 654 (OO 11, 615–616).

entering is now accomplished in the Eucharist through adoration of God in His Son and in the Holy Spirit. For the Eucharist is God's communion with us and grace-filled empowerment for communion among believers to form the one Body of Christ (the Church).

3.3. The liturgical dimension

The Eucharist in its Greek wording *eucharistoumen* expresses thanksgiving and love not only in a human sense, but in an even deeper sense which appears in the liturgy in the words “*gratias agens benedixit fregit deditque*” (giving thanks to You, blessed it, broken and distributed). “*Eucharistoumen* refers us back to this reality of thanksgiving, to this new dimension given by Christ. In this way He transformed the cross, together with suffering and all the evils of the world, into thanksgiving and therefore into blessing and in this way He substantially transformed life and the world, gave us and gives us every day the bread of true life, which surpasses the world by the power of His love.”³³ Thanksgiving for this continual transfiguration of life and the world is continually accomplished in every celebration of the Eucharist, celebrated above all on the Lord's Day – Sunday – the memorial of the Resurrection.³⁴ “To celebrate the Eucharist means: to enter into the mystery of the Cross made present, to place ourselves in the arms of Christ and to ask Him to take us and the whole world in His arms and to heal us. To celebrate the Eucharist thus also means to live personally the mystery of the Cross.”³⁵ And this means to live it in thanksgiving and love.

The name of Sunday in Latin comes from the word *dominicus*. It has many meanings. “It means first ‘the Lord's day’, but at the same time it points to its content, to the sacrament of the Lord, to His Resurrection and His presence in the Eucharistic event.”³⁶ In this word the whole essence of liturgy – celebration – is contained, i.e., anticipatory participation in Christ's resurrection. He who has

³³ Benedict XVI, “Address.”

³⁴ Cf. Krakowiak, “Kult Eucharystii,” 67–91.

³⁵ Ratzinger, “Glaube,” 1740 (OO 14/3, 1579–1580).

³⁶ Ratzinger, “Von der Bedeutung,” 235 (OO 11, 221).

believed in the Risen Christ cannot fail to speak of it and cannot live without Him, without the Lord's Day. The mandate stemming from faith does not allow us to remain silent, but commands us to proclaim the miracle of the Resurrection. Just as Peter and John said boldly before the Sanhedrin: "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Christians believe that Sunday, the Lord's Day, expresses Christ's victory over death. At the same time, in the Resurrection eternity received into itself body, humanity which proved itself capable of eternal life and of receiving God.³⁷ This means the salvation of man, the salvation of humanity in general, which the divine Logos took upon himself. Thus God, in the event of the Resurrection, shows himself to be the Lord of the whole creation, of the whole cosmos, because God here definitively tells the creature that it is "good" and receives it anew and thus transforms it into a permanent reality, free from all transience.³⁸ He shows the creature the way to the future city (cf. Heb 13:14), the way to the holy Jerusalem, the way to God as the supreme Good. This path is the liturgy of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, accomplished in virtue of the new covenant in the Blood of Christ and built upon the reality of the Paschal mystery. "In the Divine Sacrifice of the Eucharist the work of our Redemption is accomplished" (*SCa* 2), accomplished "once for all" on the Cross, and constantly continuing to be accomplished in believers in the Church.

Conclusion

The Eucharist, as the bloodless Sacrifice of Christ, is the center of the Church's life. Thanks to it the community of the Church lives, and within it every believer is directed towards eternal life with God and in God. The Eucharist is therefore the *anakephalaiōsis* (St Irenaeus of Lyon) of the whole Event of Christ, which leads to the final union of creation with the Creator. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14) so that it could always be our bread. The Blood of the Son of God became the atonement for the sin of the personal creation. It is made

³⁷ Cf. Ratzinger, "Von der Bedeutung," 240 (OO 11, 226).

³⁸ Cf. Ratzinger, "Von der Bedeutung," 241 (OO 11, 227).

present on the altar of the offered gifts of bread and wine until the end of the world. This sacrifice has an ontic dimension in the Cross and Resurrection, and it takes place continually in the Church as Eucharistic celebration and adoration. In this way it becomes for believers an active vertical and horizontal love, a not-fully-comprehensible thanksgiving for God's being with us and a constant desire for peace during the breaking of the one bread. Thus Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI is a faithful preacher of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and of living the Eucharist daily, in which He offers himself to us as Love, Thanksgiving and Peace.

Eucharystia w teologii Josepha Ratzingera/Benedykta XVI

Abstrakt: Można spotkać się z poglądem, że Wieczerza Pana z Jego uczniami nie posiadała charakteru misterium religijnego i soterijnego, a miała ona tylko charakter zwykłej wieczerzy lub co najwyżej prostego rytu starotestamentalnego. Stanowisko to jest ahistoryczne i antymisteryjne, a przez to ariańskie i nawet sekularystyczne. Z drugiej strony próbuje się często zawęzić Eucharystię do prywatnej sfery życia ludzi wierzących. Artykuł wskazuje, że Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI stanowczo się takim poglądem sprzeciwia. Eucharystia jest dla niego nie tylko sercem jego pokornego życia i tematem jego wspaniałej myśli teologicznej, ale przede wszystkim centralnym wydarzeniem i streszczeniem (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις; por. Ef 1,10) całej historii oraz całego stworzenia, które dąży do zjednoczenia z Bogiem. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI dowodzi, że w Eucharystii jest obecny Chrystus integralny – z całą swoją Osobą, historyczny i zarazem uwielbiony, a z Nim całą Trójcą Świętą. Takie pojmowanie Eucharystii ma ważne konsekwencje dla wiary i społecznego zaangażowania współczesnego Kościoła.

Słowa kluczowe: Jezus Chrystus, Eucharystia, dziękczynienie, Pascha, zmartwychwstanie, chleb i wino

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