

## EVANGELIZATION AND RENEWAL: EMBRACING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE MODERN WORLD

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### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the transformative theology of the Eucharist of Pope Benedict XVI in the modern world and its relevance. It emphasizes the sacrament of transformation and the purpose of the Eucharist in the transformation of individuals who partake in communion. The paper also highlights the significance of active participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice and the need for the transformative character of the Eucharist in renewing the Church and in addressing social struggles and realities. The goal is to provide principles and guidelines for incorporating the transformative character of the Eucharist in the pastoral approaches and ministries of the Church.

**Keywords:** Evangelisation, Renewal, Eucharist, Transformation, Remembrance, Sacrifice, Communion.

### **Introduction**

For Pope Benedict XVI, the Church's primary duty in the modern world is to "evangelize and guide the cultural, social, and ethical

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transformations; to offer Christ's salvation to the people of our time..."<sup>1</sup> However, this was hardly ever done in most significant Christian institutions, especially in the parishes,<sup>2</sup> because the Church does not seem to stress enough on parochial formation in non-vocal prayer of love of God and neighbour. The Eucharist holds a central position in Christian life as the Paschal Mystery and is interconnected with other sacraments and ecclesiastical ministries. The transformative character of the Eucharist is crucial for the renewal of the Church and addressing social struggles such as poverty, inequalities, caste system, secularism, and religious pluralism. By incorporating the transformative character of the Eucharist of Pope Benedict XVI, the paper aims to provide principles and guidelines for the renewal of the Church in pastoral approaches and ministries.

### **Transformative theology of Eucharist from the perspective of Pope Benedict XVI**

The foundation of this paper is the theology of Pope Benedict XVI, who says that the "Eucharist is the Sacrament of transformation"<sup>3</sup> and the purpose of the Eucharist is the transformation of those who partake in real communion with his transformation. The Synod Fathers regularly emphasized the significance of the faithful's active participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice on the basis of these foundational tenets of the Second Vatican Council. Provision may be provided for a number of things to encourage this engagement, including modifications suitable for many situations and civilizations.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI says that "In order to foster this participation, provision may be made for a number of adaptations appropriate to different contexts and cultures."<sup>5</sup> The *transformation* that a faithful experience after coming into contact with Christ is a topic that Pope Benedict XVI frequently brings up in his writings. This article seeks to relate the concept of *transformation* to Christians who celebrate the holy

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, "World Mission Day 2007." [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/missions/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_2007\\_0527\\_world-mission-day-2007.html/](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/missions/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_2007_0527_world-mission-day-2007.html/) (Retrieved 7 April 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Dilip Mandal, "Don't Listen to VHP and Panic. Christianity Is a Failed Project in India," September, 2020, <https://theprint.in/opinion/vhp-rss-panic-christianity-religious-conversion-failed-project-india/498698/> (Retrieved 7 April 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, "The theology of Liturgy," *The Sacramental Foundation of Christian Existence*, Vol. 2. ed. Michael J. Miller, San Francisco: Ignatius press, 2008, 399.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation, February 22, 2007, no. 70.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation, no. 70.

Eucharist and its impact in their regular, everyday lives by examining the theme in Pope Benedict XVI's writings on Eucharistic transformation. In fact, "The ultimate purpose of Eucharistic transformation is our own transformation in communion with Christ."<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to popular belief, Pope Benedict XVI sees Christianity as an encounter with the person of Christ, who comes to show God's face, transforms us from the inside out in order to deliver us from the grip of evil, and grants us a role in his divine life. This actually occurs during Eucharistic celebrations because, as the Holy Father teaches, "it is precisely by our gaze in adoration that the Lord draws us towards him, into his mystery, in order to transform us as he transforms the bread and the wine."<sup>7</sup> This transition entails a process of metamorphosis, a "letting go" of one's old nature and "putting on" a new nature, as St. Paul commands in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Put off the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error, and be recreated in the spirit of your mind" (Eph 4:22-24). The profound changes that St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Frances of Assisi, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta underwent could only be brought about by a close encounter with a loving God who deigns to bring man to new heights. This kind of development, in the opinion of Pope Benedict XVI, characterizes what it means to be a Christian. "A human person must change, not only in this place or that, but unconditionally, down to the very core of his being," he wrote.<sup>8</sup> Such transformation helps a person to decrease in himself so that Christ may increase.

Pope Benedict XVI made this point quite clear in his 2013 Lenten message: "It is not enough for God that we merely accept his gratuitous love. He doesn't just want to love us; He also wants to draw us to him and profoundly change us so that we might join with Saint Paul in saying, "It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me."<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the connection between transformation and contact with Christ, saying that when a person is genuinely open to that encounter with Christ, a dramatic transformation in that person's nature begins to occur.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the transformation that results

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily (Mass of the Lord's Supper) April 21, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, Audience, November 17, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Credo for Today. What Christians Believe*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009, 150.

<sup>9</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent, Message, Vatican Website, October 15, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Apostolic Exhortation, September 30, 2010, 50.

from coming into contact with Christ involves a renewal, a change, a “turning away” from one’s old way of life and a “turning towards” a new way of life. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul declared that “if anybody is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone away, look, the new has come” (5:17).

In order to understand *transformation* in Pope Benedict XVI’s writings, it is necessary to consider the various words he uses to describe it. Pope Benedict XVI uses words like “*metanoia*,” “repentance,” “conversion,” and “faith working through love” to describe the transformational process. All of them share the common topic of coming face to face with Christ and allowing oneself to be changed and moulded by him. One can only experience *metanoia*, repentance, conversion, and faith and become fully transformed from within, right down to one’s core, through that personal encounter with Christ. In the Credo for today, the definition of *metanoia* is stated as follows: “*Metanoia* is not just some type of Christian attitude but rather the fundamental Christian deed, understood, of course, in terms of one very particular feature: the aspect of change, the act of turning, of becoming new and different.”<sup>11</sup> The earthly offerings of bread and wine have been transformed into Christ Jesus. But, “it must not stop there,” taught Benedict, “on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood.”<sup>12</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI used a similar phrase when he discussed conversion during a visit to the juvenile detention center in Rome: “Conversion, which always, even before being an important effort to change our behaviour, is an opportunity to decide to get up and set out again, to abandon sin and to choose to return to God.”<sup>13</sup> On Ash Wednesday in 2010, he added that conversion involved changing one’s course in life. He said, “To repent is to change course in life: not, however, by means of a little adjustment, but with a real and proper about turn.”<sup>14</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI draws a link between faith and *transformation* as well. During his 2006 visit to Poland, he delivered a homily in which he stated: “Believing means making a personal relationship with our

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Credo for Today. What Christians Believe*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily (World Youth Day, Cologne, Germany)*, August 221, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Visit to Rome’s Prison for Minors*, Homily, March 18, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Ash Wednesday, Audience*, February 17, 2010.

Creator and Redeemer the cornerstone of our entire life.”<sup>15</sup> He discussed how faith gives Christians a new reality in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*. Man’s ideas and affections, brain, and action are “slowly cleaned and altered, on a journey that is never totally ended in this life, thanks to faith and collaboration.”<sup>16</sup> Another method to closely follow Christ and be changed by him is through the sacrament of reconciliation. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI referred to the sacrament of reconciliation as a “school of the heart” where a Christian might develop in his relationship with Christ by paying particular attention to the moral and spiritual implications of his deeds. One can approach life’s challenges in the spirit of the gospel and have a particularly powerful conversion experience thanks to the sacrament of reconciliation.<sup>17</sup> The humbling recognition of one’s need for God’s grace inevitably leads to conversion.<sup>18</sup> One cannot undergo a metamorphosis until they are able to acknowledge their need for God’s atonement.

The Eucharist is another element of change for Pope Benedict XVI. The Eucharist is the sacrament “in which the Lord gives us his Body through reconciliation and transforms us into his Body.”<sup>19</sup> He explained how the gift of the Eucharist transforms us and causes us to start enjoying eternal life even now in his Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Our existence can be changed by the Eucharist. According to Pope Benedict XVI, “we are mysteriously transformed by the Eucharistic nourishment, not the Eucharistic food being converted into us.”<sup>20</sup> The Eucharist has the ability to change not only individuals but also all of history and the cosmos.

### **Eucharistic Transformation and the Effect on Relationships**

Eucharistic communion not only unites an individual to the person beside him, and with whom he may not even be on good terms, but also to his distant brethren in every part of the world.”<sup>21</sup> Relationships with people are significantly impacted by encountering Christ and becoming transformed by his love. The unbreakable connection

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<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Mass in Krakow, Homily, May 28, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, Apostolic Letter, October 11, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 19, 2011, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2010, Message, October 10, 2009

<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, Audience, January 30, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily (*Corpus Christi*), June 23, 2011.

between the love of God and the love of neighbour underlies this. The love of one's neighbour is a prerequisite for the love of God. The Christian life, in fact, is always ascending the mountain to meet God and then descending with the love and power derived from him in order to serve our brothers and sisters with God's own love, as Pope Benedict XVI said in his Message for Lent in 2013.<sup>22</sup> He emphasized this tight connection between love of God and love of neighbour on numerous additional occasions. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* he observed that love of neighbour is made possible via an intimate union with God in which one's will is unified with God's desire. This unification of will influences both our feelings and our behaviour. As we start to see others through Christ's eyes, we start to love everyone, including those we do not really like.<sup>23</sup>

The necessity of being in touch with Jesus Christ was emphasized by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Spe Salvi*. He pointed out that only through such communion are we able to live for and care for others.<sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI used St. Paul's life as an excellent illustration of how God's love improves interpersonal relationships:

Every direct experience with Jesus is an immense love experience. Paul himself acknowledges that he had previously "violently persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). But the force of Christ's love entirely vanquished the hatred and rage conveyed in those statements. Paul had a strong desire to spread the word of that love to every corner of the world for the rest of his life.<sup>25</sup>

### **Eucharist is a Call to Transformation**

Pope Benedict XVI explains that the Lord Jesus, who became for us the food of truth and love, talks of the gift of his life and tells us that "if anybody eats of this bread, he will live for ever" (Jn 6:51). As a result of the transformation brought about in us by the gift of the Communion, this "everlasting life" begins in us right now.<sup>26</sup> The very purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to re-transform the individual to the likeness and image of God and to transform the sinful world to a sinless world. The earthly Jesus underwent this transformation of

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2013*, Message, October 15, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical, December 25, 2005, 18.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Encyclical, November 30, 2007, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Meeting with Young People Malta*, Travel, April 18, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation.

individuals and society through his words and deeds.<sup>27</sup> The most basic transformation that takes place in the Eucharist is the bread and wine, becoming the body and blood of Christ. Eucharist, as the sacrament of love, calls for the transformation of persons and society. Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that the faithful need to be reminded that active participation in the sacred mysteries is contingent upon active involvement in Church life overall, including a missionary commitment to spread Christ's love throughout society.<sup>28</sup> The Eucharist can transform us only when we participate in it actively and meaningfully.<sup>29</sup> The invocation of the Holy Spirit is for the transformation of the bread and wine to the body of Christ and for the real presence in those who partake of the body and blood of Christ. All the sacraments are visible means of invisible grace conveyed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is the chief importance that participation in the Eucharist transform our private and public life from a selfish life to a loving, sharing divine life.

Thus, the Eucharist becomes a vital force in our lives because it allows us to put forth the best in the service of our neighbour, and harmonizes our egos. Pope Benedict XVI writes in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* that "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving,"<sup>30</sup> It brings us into an experience of love that keeps us away from worldly desires and needs. Reading, reflecting and sharing the word of God become another gift to his disciples. It is because "When the Holy Scripture is read aloud in the Church, God addresses his people directly, and Christ, who is present in his own word, preaches the Gospel" (135).<sup>31</sup> The Eucharist is the source of developing our Christian virtues.

### **Holy Eucharist is a Sacrifice**

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrifice that is a truth of faith that the Church has unquestionably taught since the time of the Church Fathers.<sup>32</sup> For Catholics, the Holy Eucharist is regarded as a sacrifice. What is the meaning of sacrifice in the Holy Eucharist? To understand

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<sup>27</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, Baharanaganam: Jeevan Books, 2017, 174.

<sup>28</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation, 70.

<sup>29</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Encyclical, December 25, 2005, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation, 70.

<sup>32</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 174.

this, it is good to remember what the New Testament and the early church fathers said about the spiritual sacrifice of Christians.

Apart from the Epistle to the Hebrews, none of the New Testament mentions the sacrifice of Christ, but deals a lot with the sacrifices of Christians. In the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, he said that “Christ gave himself to God as a vision and a sacrifice for us” (Eph 5:2). This does not refer to the ritual sacrifice in the traditional sense, but rather to the self-dedication that Jesus gives to God as a manifestation of God’s love for people. This does not mean sacrifice in a technical or ritualistic sense, but rather the Christian life itself in relation to God and man.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the Christian’s sacrifice is a life full of praise and gratitude to God; it is love and self-sacrifice for people.

The word sacrifice is often used in the writings of St. Paul and also in the first Epistle of Peter. The background to this concern about sacrifice is the awareness that the life and death of Jesus marked the end of conventional sacrifices and that a person’s duty to sacrifice to God was to be performed in a different and new way. And it was at the Last Supper that he established this new Covenant with his followers and the entire human race, sealing it not with animal sacrifices as had previously been done but rather with his own Blood, which later came to be known as the “Blood of the New Covenant.”<sup>34</sup> The Christian sacrifice is to glorify God in a life pleasing to God and a death pleasing to God, just as it was a sacrifice and a complete self-sacrifice for men.<sup>35</sup> Here, the author of the epistle says that fulfilling God’s will in life and death are sacrifices more pleasing to God than burnt offerings and sin sacrifices. Even before becoming a Cardinal and a Pope, Joseph Ratzinger, who was still a professor of dogma and fundamental theology, explains that the sacrifice of Christ is “the victory of the person who gives himself”<sup>36</sup> in union with Christ.

### **Eucharist is a sacrifice for Jesus**

It is clear that the sacrifice of Jesus is not in the direction of the ritualistic sacrifices of the Old Testament or the history of religions. Then what is the sacrifice of Jesus? Jesus understood God as the secret of unspeakable love that loves man unconditionally and forgives him unconditionally. Jesus addressed God as *Abba, Appacha, and Daddy,*

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<sup>33</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 176.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Solemnity of Corpus Christi*, Homily, June 11, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 179.

<sup>36</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Is the Eucharist a Sacrifice?* Concilium, April 1967, 37-38.



from the first moment of His conscious life; Jesus gave Himself completely to the Father and was committed to fulfilling His Father's will perfectly. Jesus made this the most important goal of his life, realizing that the Father's will is for all people to be happy: He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all the diseases and sickness of the people. But Jesus saw that the true state of man is far from this happiness, this good condition. Many were suffering from poverty, hunger, disease, and all kinds of misery. Some were socially degraded, despised, and excluded, while others were persecuted, discriminated and deprived of their basic human rights. History has shown that some religions, including Christianity, have considered those afflicted with diseases such as leprosy, epilepsy, insanity as impure and, as a consequence, ostracized them from society. Because sickness and suffering were considered as the result of sin (Cf. John 9:2), cleaning, laundry, leather work, manual work, etc. were all dirty jobs that made people unclean. These marginalized people have suffered tremendously because of the religious justification of their impurities.

Jesus did not only take the side of the oppressed. He lived with them. The result was His torture and final humiliating crucifixion. His death on the cross was the culmination of His submission to the Will of the Father in His life. He was completely self-giving in life. His willful submission to death is the perfect expression of self-sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. So, it appears to us that Jesus anticipated and accepted his death when he instituted the Eucharist. Jesus' self-sacrifice at the Last Supper is an invitation for others to sacrifice themselves at the Cross, according to St. Ephrem the Syrian (cf. Hymn on the Crucifixion, 3, 1).<sup>37</sup> Even in his early writings, as Joseph Ratzinger, already describes sacrifice as a higher form of transformation: "All the doctrines of the sacrificial sacrifices are now violated. The new covenant is fulfilled and sealed by a true new sacrifice. One thing is clear. Jesus who sacrifices himself, is the ritual and authoritative way of worshipping God... Thus, we come to the essence of the New Testament sacrificial concept that stands out in the Last Supper narratives. Here, the law and prophecy, ritualistic worship and its critics achieve their ultimate goal; Here they are both fulfilled the concept of ritual and sacrifice with the individual".<sup>38</sup> Thus the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus consisted in the submission to the

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<sup>37</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Solemnity of Corpus Christi*, Homily, June 11, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Is the Eucharist a Sacrifice?* Concilium, April 1967, 38-39

Father in absolute trust, in the face of total failure and collapse, and in response to man's emancipation and suffering.<sup>39</sup>

### **Eucharist is Remembrance for Jesus**

The Old Testament Passover and the New Testament Passover have different meanings. In the Old Testament, the Passover feast represents to the Jewish people Yahweh's past saving works and in a special way, anticipates the fulfilment of the future. It is in this particular context and meaning that we should understand the "Remembrance verse" of the Holy Mass. After Jesus took the bread and broke it, he said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:24). Likewise, after Jesus offered the cup he said, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in memory of me" (1 Cor 11:25). Only Luke's gospel contains the explicit direction, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19), As we read in the institutional narratives of Paul and Luke, Jesus understood the Last Supper with his disciples at the level of the Passover feast as a commemoration of God's new saving action in his life and personality. He commanded his disciples to continue to celebrate this feast as an anamnesis of his life and death, that is, of his life sacrifice (1 Cor 11:24-25; Luke 22:19), and they and other believers after them celebrate this feast as an anamnesis of his sacrifice.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus implores his followers to be always with him by remembering the historic event of him breaking bread and sharing the cup with them. In human history remembrance is very important. Remembrance is a moment to reflect when the Church, the Body of Christ, assembles for the Eucharist. The commemoration takes place around an altar table and begins with the Liturgy of the Word, which includes Scripture readings that highlight God's wondrous deeds and recount crucial moments in salvation history. These readings all point to the Gospel, which reminds us of all that Christ has accomplished for us.<sup>41</sup> Those who participate in it are actually in the life and death of Jesus. Sacrifice is re-presented, reintroduced, so that they participate in the sacrifice of His life. In other words, be present at this feast in memory of him and the sacrifice of his life. It enables them to live daily in love, service, and self-giving to Jesus, sharing in Jesus' obedience and submission to the Father, as well as in his commitment to the salvation of men. It is this repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus that

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<sup>39</sup> R.J. Daly, *The origin of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, 135-40.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Jungmann, *The Mass, An Historical, Theological and Pastoral Survey*, 104-110.

<sup>41</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1103.

culminated at Calvary that makes the Eucharist a sacrifice.<sup>42</sup> The community of believers, together with the sacrifice of Jesus, consecrate themselves to the Father and commit themselves to work for the redemption and salvation of their brothers and sisters. Every person who participates in the Eucharistic celebration should lay down their life for the sake of others so that their lives will be remembered. Thus, the Holy Eucharist becomes the sacrifice of Jesus and the sacrifice of the community of believers. When the church's sacrifice is understood in this way, it will never go against the nature of Jesus' only one sacrifice as stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

### **Eucharist is Meal (Agape feast) for Jesus**

During his public life, Jesus celebrated an agape meal with his disciples and the crowds. The evangelists make special mention of meals together with sinners. These agape meals were to them a sign of reconciliation and communion with others, as a foretaste of communion with all at the evangelical feast of the kingdom of God. But in the context of the Passover feast, He and His disciples broke the Passover feast and violated all other feasts. It is precisely because there is a transition from merely ritualistic sacrifice to offering oneself as a sacrifice towards radical transformation. It is because, through His actions and words, He gave it a very special meaning and content that only He could give. He instituted this feast as a sacrament of His sacrifice, in other words, it is an invitation given to the community to celebrate with Him with a sincere love and humility up to death.<sup>43</sup> Thus, a feast is the counterpart of this sacrament.<sup>44</sup> In this transition from feast to sacrament, the emphasis shifted from the feast to the dishes of the feast, the bread and the seed. The presence of Jesus itself was thought of as a material presence. Through the consecration prayer, the bread and wine become the physical body and blood of Jesus, and practically all signs of the bread are lost. This was supported by the traditional theology that the reception of the Holy Blood was no more pleasing because Christ was fully present in every sacrament.

### **Reception of the Holy Eucharist**

If the Holy Eucharist is the sacrament of the sacrifice of Jesus symbolized by the feast, it is clear that it is possible to participate in the

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<sup>42</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 193.

<sup>43</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 197.

<sup>44</sup> N. Lash, *His presence in the world. A study in Eucharistic Worship and Theology*, London: Sheed Ward, 1968, 63.

sacrifice only by participating in the feast.<sup>45</sup> To participate in the feast does not mean to sit and watch, but to partake of the food of the feast. In other words, when we receive the Holy Communion, we partake of the Holy Eucharist. The form of the feast and participation in the feast are essential to the celebration of Jesus' sacrifice. Another important consideration is personal preparation. This inner tendency can be strengthened, for instance, through sacramental confession, fasting, and at least a few seconds of reflection and calm before the start of the liturgy. Real engagement is only made possible by a heart at peace with God.<sup>46</sup> So, the faithful might be commended for their careful preparation by the formation program. One is unlikely to actively engage in the Eucharistic liturgy if one approaches it superficially and without carefully examining their lives.<sup>47</sup> The reception of the Holy Eucharist is itself a sacrifice. According to the Congregation for the Sacraments, "In the Holy Eucharist, the sacrifice and the sacrament are parts of the same mystery united by the most intimate relationship... Participating in the Lord's Supper is always communion with Christ who offers himself to the Father as a sacrifice for us."<sup>48</sup> The reception of the Holy Eucharist is actually the culmination of the Holy Eucharist. It is in the reception of the Holy Eucharist that the power of the Holy Spirit leads us to a deeper fellowship where Jesus dwells in us and us in Him. It is obvious that when the faithful approach the altar in person to receive communion, they are engaging in full participation in the Eucharist.<sup>49</sup> The person receiving Holy Communion is deeply united by faith, hope, and love with Christ, and so with humanity.

For this reason, the Mass does not end in the church it flows into our lives and letters.<sup>50</sup> By participating in the body that was cut for us and the blood poured out for the forgiveness of our sins, we receive the mission of giving birth and serving others, especially those who are most in need. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist transforms us into an active awareness of brotherhood and mutuality in the Lord, which is the culture of the early Christians. There was no one among them who suffered from poverty or hardship. They see these works of mercy as a programme of their own Christian life. The Eucharist extends to the community sharing and helping with one another. The Eucharist

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<sup>45</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation.

<sup>47</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation.

<sup>48</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 210.

<sup>49</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Exhortation.

<sup>50</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 203.

builds and sustains their communion and cooperation with the Church in their own daily endeavors. It enriches their social, political, economic relations, and all other aspects. Thus, the Eucharist is a social cohesion practiced through mutual cooperation, assistance, caring, and loving one another in the concrete day to day experiences. This is the missionary spirit, for which every individual is transformed in the Holy Eucharist.

What the poor and suffering need today is more than just acts of mercy. We have to ask ourselves. Why there are so many people who are poor, hungry, and suffering? The answer is obvious to everyone. The reason why so many are poor in the world is because some are holding for themselves the resources of the world that God created for everyone. The injustice, exploitation, and corruption of a few are the reasons why many are struggling and impoverished. The Eucharist demands us to be like Jesus, the sacrificial lamb that will give life to the poor and the oppressed. Thus, we must raise our voice against the abuses and selfish interests that make the poor poorer and oppress the weak and helpless. The Eucharist is the radical transformation that makes us commit to Christ to strive for a just society where everyone can live in equality, freedom and fraternity is a sacred fruit.

### **Pastoral Reflections, Recommendations and Conclusion**

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. It was for this that he lived, worked and spent himself. He powerfully opposed all the injustice and oppression used by the powerful against the weak. Ultimately, it was his service to the poor and his stand against the rich and powerful that brought Jesus to the cross.<sup>51</sup> But before his death, his entire life of love, service and self-giving was given to us to celebrate in the Holy Eucharist in his memory. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist obliges us to live and act like Him for the salvation and well-being of our sisters and brothers. The Eucharist is seen as the sacrament of transformation, with the purpose of transforming individuals who partake in communion and renewing the Church in the face of social struggles and realities. Active participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice is emphasized, based on the foundational tenets of the Second Vatican Council. The transformative character of the Eucharist of Pope Benedict XVI provides a theological framework for analyzing and addressing the concrete influence of the Eucharist in daily social struggles. The Eucharist, viewed as the source and center of the

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<sup>51</sup> Cyprian Illickamury, *Visuddha Qurbana*, 207.

Christian life, is our genuine encounter with Jesus Christ that will radically revitalized our personhood towards a deeper and more humane inter-personal and ecological relationships. The Eucharist is a radical personal transformation *par excellence*. It is through this experience that we sustain the communion in our Church that serves with love and sacrifice the greater body of Christ, the world, especially the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed.