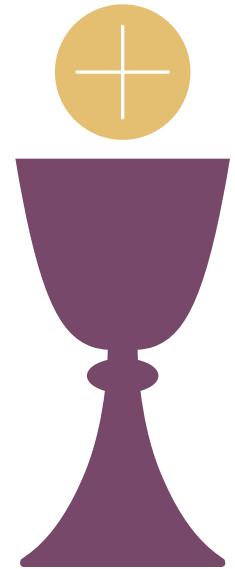


# Becoming Bread for Others

**“What the early Christians thus did at the altar of God, in the central act of Christian worship, they also lived out in their daily lives. They understood fully that the common action of worship was to be the inspiration of all of their actions.**



They knew well that their common giving of themselves to God and to the brethren of Christ was in fact a solemn promise made to God that they would live their lives in this same love of God and of God’s children, their brethren in Christ, throughout all the day. Unless they did that, their action before God’s altar would be at best lip-service, a lie before God” (*Orate Fratres*, Vol. XIV, February 1940, p. 156).

Thus wrote Dom Virgil Michel, OSB, one of the pioneers of the Liturgical Movement in the United States. His reflections on the liturgy—its origins and present meaning—emphasized the Mystical Body of Christ, which is a way to define and understand the Church. The unity of the Mystical Body, he believed, calls all Catholics to the practice of justice. The poor and the oppressed are not in some different category of persons, but are part of that same Body of Christ that the privileged and prosperous share. The Mystical Body of Christ, experienced in the liturgy, made justice and respect for the human person imperative for the faithful. Engagement with the liturgy, he taught, is the necessary path to transformation, leading to a more just and peaceful society.

Servant of God Dorothy Day was one of the noteworthy people persuaded by Virgil Michel’s vision. Co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Day had long been influenced by Benedictine spirituality, which prized prayer and work and unified them in the practices of daily life. Under the influence of Virgil Michel, she grasped the role of liturgy in building a just society. The Catholic

Worker movement, founded in 1933, with its coffee lines, hospitality houses, and farm cooperatives, may seem a surprising venue for liturgical piety, yet a strong alliance formed there. Catholic Worker houses in St. Louis, Detroit, New York, and more, incorporated Scripture, the Divine Office, and Eucharist into their daily routine.

## THE CHURCH’S SOCIAL MISSION AND YOU

Beginning in the nineteenth century, with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *On Capital and Labor*, popes and bishops have given voice to the teaching of the Church on social mission in the modern world. The resulting body of teaching, called Catholic social teaching, has brought the light of the Gospel into focus on the harsh and continuing problems of modern life. Industrialization, urbanization, changes in the means of production and the distribution of this world’s goods, as well as the horrors of modern warfare, have required a thoughtful and disciplined response.

Catholic social teaching makes it clear that personal charity alone is not sufficient to the task we must embrace to build God’s Kingdom as followers of Christ. The members of Christ’s Body must also be committed to the transformation of unjust structures of society, so that the common good is fostered in all realms of life. All people share in the responsibility for helping their neighbor attain the necessities of life. As Catholics, we are also responsible for arranging our common life so that it corresponds, as much as possible, to Christ’s teachings of mercy and love.

It follows, therefore, that believers must work together to promote the common good. Widespread problems require the faith-filled response of individuals, but they also require organized, communal efforts. Rarely can we find the strength to tackle social problems alone—be they in our neighborhood, workplace, family, or wider community. Yet, as a community, we can truly become bread for others.

As individuals search their consciences, and pay attention to the needs around them, they are also called to band together to address these needs. At times, we may push aside the issues of the day, because they seem complicated and overwhelming. What gives us courage, however, is Eucharist.

### EUCHARIST AND THE SOCIAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH

What we find in the Eucharist is the strength of connection—through our faith and through the life of Christ, given to us in the sacrament. The Eucharist fortifies us for the work of bringing gospel values to the world in which we live. Parish communities, dioceses, agencies, and movements can be the vehicle for working together to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, build respect for all human life, and promote the common good.

The Eucharist gives us a rich witness, through sign and symbol, of what it means to be the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, empowered for mission. As we gather at one table, eat of one bread, and drink from a common cup, our unity—our oneness in Christ—is powerfully symbolized. As we exchange the sign of peace, we are renewed in solidarity, which empowers us to be bridge-builders and healers. As we are sent forth from the celebration, we are reminded that Christ established the Church with a mission to bring about God's Kingdom. It is a mission that we must undertake together—all of us—day by day, as the Spirit of God works among us and within us to bring about a civilization of love.

### REFLECT

Where do I hear a specific call to bring gospel values to my world? How am I responding to that call? Do I find myself making excuses, or putting off to tomorrow the actions I may be called to take today? Or do I embrace my part of the Church's social mission eagerly and readily?

### ACT

Choose one action that will contribute to the Church's social mission, and do it this coming week. Whether it is volunteering an hour of service, sharing material possessions, or giving your know-how and skills to make the world a better place, do it in a spirit of gratitude and joy—the spirit of Eucharist.

### PRAY

Lord Jesus, you taught us to seek your face in the lowest and the least among us. Help us to see the needs of our brothers and sisters with the same love and passion with which you see them. Give us strength together, through the Eucharist, to become peace-makers and bridge-builders, to be your hands and your heart in our world.

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