



Hope, from the Eucharist: A Key to Rebuilding after the Pandemic

After the waves that have marked this pandemic, the question of hope arises: what future awaits us, and can our action engender a new future that brings us closer to the fullness of the future? These questions are answered precisely from the Christian action par excellence: the Eucharist.

The relationship between Eucharist and hope is rooted in Jesus' Last Supper. The Lord celebrates the Eucharist looking to the future, giving thanks for the risen body that the Father will give him. And the Church also celebrates it looking to the future, so that the Eucharist may transform us according to the model of the glorious body of Christ, with its energy to submit everything to him (Phil 3:21).

If St. Augustine called the Eucharist "the sacrament of hope," this means that hope becomes visible and concrete in the Eucharist. Tell me what the Eucharist is like and I will tell you what Christian hope is like. And also: tell me how you celebrate the Eucharist, and what place the Eucharist has in your life, and I will tell you what your hope is like.

It is time to rekindle hope, rekindling the energy of the Eucharist to transform man. We can break this energy down into three aspects: a) the new man; b) the new communion; c) the new fruit.

a) The new man

Let us begin with the transformative power of the Eucharist. Theology has described this power as something only comparable to the creative power, and therefore only attributable to God himself. For it belongs to him alone to produce being out of nothing, creating the world, and to him alone to transform being into being, the substance of bread into the substance of the body of Jesus. In every Eucharist we contemplate and receive the same energy that unfolded the universe.

To refine, one would have to say: the Eucharist concerns God alone because it is not simply a change between two substances (from bread to body), but it is the transformation of the substance of this created world (represented by bread and wine) into the risen body of Jesus. That is to say, it is the passage from this created world to its definitive goal in God, since the body of Jesus is the one who sits at the right hand of the Father. It is a body, as St. Irenaeus of Lyons says, that has forgotten itself and has assumed the qualities of the Spirit. This is why the Eucharist is not only compared to the act of creation, but surpasses it, because, greater than the passage from nothingness to clay, it is the passage from clay to God.

This implies that the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus is preceded by another change, by another radical transformation, which is the change from the mortal body of Christ to the risen body, which not only returns to this mortal life, but rises filled with the Holy Spirit. Christ transformed death into an act of love, so that the Father would transform his mortal body into a risen body full of vitality. And to this body we are assimilated in the Eucharist.



Now, this transforming power, from the substance of this world to the substance of the body of Christ, is the measure of our hope. To see this we can turn to Benedict XVI, who in *Spe Salvi* 7-8 comments on Heb 10:34: "You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one." There the Pope says that it is proper to hope to recognize that our substance, that on which our life is sustained or supported, is not perishable material goods. The believer has another substance, and this substance is in the future, in the risen Christ who has penetrated the heavens. For this reason he can renounce his goods and even endure persecutions with patience and attain the promise (Heb 10:36).

In Heb 10:36, "patience" translates the Greek *hypomoné*, which in reality says something deeper than a simple ability to wait. He has *hypomoné* who is rooted deeper (*hypo*) than in transient goods, and therefore can renounce them and confess his faith in the midst of the persecution that deprives him of goods, because his roots are already in the fullness to which those goods point, in the risen Christ. Property assets and real estate are not the most real assets for the believer, who has his *real* assets planted above, that is, in the risen body of Jesus.

So the Eucharist has to do with hope because in it there is transubstantiation, the passage from one substance to another substance, which is the movement proper to this virtue. In the Eucharist we become rooted in the body of Christ, so that our roots become rooted in the future fullness of all things. No wonder the Fathers called the Eucharistic bread "tomorrow's bread," thus translating the petition of the Our Father ("our daily bread"). Nor that the cry of the Eucharist is the "marana tha," "Come, Lord Jesus!"

St. John Henry Newman speaks, in one of his sermons, of the "invisible world," which exists and surrounds us without our perceiving it with our senses. It is the world of grace, of saints and angels. We could say, in the light of hope, that this invisible world that surrounds us is the future world, which has already been anticipated. What already exists, although we do not perceive it, is the fullness to which everything is called. According to this, the ultimate vocation of things and persons is not for the Christian a mere possibility, but a reality, since it already exists in the body of Christ and he lives with it. It is guaranteed that we can reach the fullness to which we are called. And this is the firm basis of our hope.

This relationship between the Eucharist and hope is very present in the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch. The saintly bishop lives in hope, anticipating his martyrdom, for a voice cries out within him: "Come to the Father! At one point Ignatius affirms that "faith is the beginning, charity is the consummation" (Eph 14:1). He then adds that "the two together are God himself", and here we have an allusion to hope, which completes the triad of virtues. If faith is the beginning and charity is the consummation, it can be said that hope is the "more," that which surpasses all expectations, and to which faith and love propel us to union with God himself.

Ignatius also refers to the Eucharist as "the medicine of immortality, the antidote so as not to die, but to live forever in Christ Jesus" (Eph 20:2). For Ignatius, the Eucharist contains in itself the overcoming of death, because it unites us to Jesus Christ, whom he has just called "the new man".



In fact, the divine plan consists "in faith in him, in love for him and in his passion and resurrection" (Eph 20:1). Here, the trio faith, charity, hope, seems to evoke this other: faith, charity, resurrection. In this way hope is personified in the Risen One, who is associated with our life, so that Jesus Christ is called "our inseparable living" who "in death became true life" (Eph 7:2). But this transformation of the new man does not exhaust all the Eucharistic energy. What is still missing?

b) The New Communion

St. Ignatius of Antioch repeatedly refers to Jesus Christ as "our common hope" (Eph 21:2). Just as there is a common good, a good that is not only our private good, but is born of the communion among us, we must speak of a common hope. And the Eucharist contains this common hope. What does it consist of?

It turns out that what we are called to be, in its overflowing fullness, cannot be realized without taking into account what our brother is called to be. True hope is a hope together, according to Gabriel Marcel's formula: "I hope in you (in God), for us". This is the opposite of Marxist hope, which is a hope for all, but not a hope together. Indeed, in the utopian state of total overabundance that will be the fullness of history according to Marx, everyone would live for himself, without needing others.

We can imagine this common hope in the light of parents who want to have a child. This is neither your hope nor mine, but ours, which depends on our unity. Precisely the hope born of the Eucharist is also based on belonging to a common body.

The capacity of the Eucharist to generate hope is perceived if we take into account that the Eucharist does not benefit only those who receive it, but that it can be offered for others and give life to those who are not present at the celebration. In this, says St. Thomas Aquinas, it differs from the other sacraments. In other words, the fruit of the Eucharist transcends the communicant and is communicated to the whole body of Christ, because in the Eucharist not only the local assembly is born, but the whole Church is built up. All this already makes the Eucharist the source of the "more" of hope, which spreads beyond the individual and beyond the concrete assembly, in order to vivify the whole body of the Church. Of course, to receive the effect of the Eucharist, one must be united to the body of Christ by love.

Well then, speaking of hope, St. Thomas himself asks if it is possible to hope for others, and not only for oneself. At first he answers that no, that hope is cultivated by each one for himself, because in it is given the search for that arduous good which is one's own eternal salvation. However, St. Thomas immediately clarifies that it is possible to hope for others to the extent that we are united to them by charity. Let us note that this is precisely what he said about the Eucharist: it can bear fruit in all those who are united to Christ by charity.

The logic of hope and the logic of the Eucharist therefore go hand in hand. They produce an overflow from union through love, from life shared in friendship. We can paraphrase what Aristotle said: what we desire for ourselves, we desire in a certain way for our friends. Let us remember the warning given by Ignatius of Antioch himself, where unity is associated with the impulse towards the future: "Work together with one another,



fight together, run together, suffer together, rest together, rise together, as stewards and advisors and ministers of God" (*To Polycarp VI*).

The Eucharist, we can summarize, does not contain only the future of each one of us, but it contains our common future. It contains not only the future of our individual paths, but the future of our relationships. In other words, it contains the power of all that we share and of all that binds us together. Our bonds are also transubstantiated and point to the fullness of life with God.

Returning to St. Ignatius of Antioch, the saint says to those who reject that the Eucharist is the resurrected flesh: "it was good for them to love, so as to rise" (*To the Smyrnaeans VII 1*). Many see in this "to love" (*agapein*) a reference to the Eucharistic celebration or agape, so it can be read: "it would be convenient for them to celebrate the Eucharist, in order to resurrect". It is thus seen that only from communion (of the Eucharist and of charity) is hope possible.

c) The New Fruit

The Eucharist gives us hope also for the work of man, for the fruit that our life is called to bear. It can help us to think that in the Bible the sacrifices (which prefigure the Eucharist) are united to fatherhood from the beginning. Sacrifice is a way of saving fatherhood. The father, like Abraham, and like all Jewish fathers who will rescue their firstborn, recognizes, by celebrating the sacrifice, that there is a source of life that precedes him, to whom he owes being a father, and on whom he relies to be able to be a father. By offering the animal, symbol of the son, they offer the life of the son, not to destroy it, but to recover it. For, recognizing that the son comes from God, they save themselves as fathers, since they can bear witness to the original source and thus open the way to the son's freedom.

This applies to the offering of the Christian sacrifice, which has a transforming and life-giving power. It happens first of all to the priest, who is able to say in the first person "this is my body, this is my blood". These words contain great hope. The priest confesses a union with Christ, his "inseparable living". And this union happens because they share a body that gives itself up, that is, the same capacity to give life to others, to transform them towards full life. "This is my body" and "my blood", and therefore my body and blood are capable of a transformed fatherhood, that which Jesus brought us in order to regenerate the desire of men and open them to the full gifts of God. And what the priest lives can be communicated to all the faithful, to every father and mother and to all the work of men, because their body is also assimilated to the fruitful body of Jesus.

From the Eucharist, then, hope is opened. Every attempt to revive hope passes through reviving the Eucharist: so that there will be more days with the Eucharist and more Eucharist in our days. And it is not only that the Eucharist gives us hope, but that the Eucharist contains all hope, that every little hope of ours can be assimilated to the great hope, if it participates in the Eucharist.

We are accustomed to call Christians "faithful" and also "believers". It does not seem strange to us to suppose that they have faith. And charity is also easily attributed to them: there are Charity organizations in all our parishes and we are generally proud of



how they work. The same does not seem to be true of hope, as if it were a virtue that cannot be taken for granted. Imagine if parishioners were called, not "faithful," but "hopeful." How many "hopeful" are there in this diocese or parish? Or let us imagine if one of our parish organizations were called, instead of "Charity," "Hope."

The use of language may indicate a forgetfulness of hope, and of the high destiny to which we are called, which is already anticipated. It may indicate a difficulty in looking at our lives from their fullness in Christ. It happens that, in reality, to be hopeful is as connatural to the Christian as to have faith and charity. For the Eucharist contains the dynamism of hope, and to participate in the Eucharist is to breathe in the atmosphere of hope. It is therefore good for us to "love in order to rise again". We should continue to celebrate the Eucharist in order to nourish our hope.