

Bread and Wine

As a church we know the **ambiguity of Water**: It both refreshes and cleans, it brings new life and at the same time it can kill. And so water is used to symbolize both life and death and “**we use water as a rich symbol of God’s grace**” and the invitation to ‘New Life’ by entering the waters of rebirth, dying and then rising again in Christ Jesus.

What we don’t think of very often is that **bread and wine are equally ambiguous**, both in life and in the Eucharist.

On the one hand, bread is perhaps our primary symbol for food, health, nourishment, and community: **Give us this day our daily bread!** Let us break bread together! Bread is a symbol for life and coming together.

Few things speak as wonderfully about life as does the smell of fresh bread.

Yet there is another story to bread. Out of what is bread made? **Kernels of wheat that had to be crushed in their individuality to become something communal-- flour, which then had to endure fire to be baked into the substance that gives off the smell of life itself.** As St. Augustine once said in a homily:

For surely this loaf was not made from one grain of wheat? The grains were separate before they came together to become one loaf. They were joined together by water, after first having been ground. For if the many kernels are not ground and are not moistened by water, they could not come to this form, that we call a loaf. ... And then without fire, there is still not a loaf of bread. (Sermon 227)

Jesus said, **Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat;^r but if it dies, it produces much fruit. (Jn 12:24)**

Bread then speaks of both joy and pain. And is itself an ambiguous symbol. We like the life part and seldom reflect on the pain part!!

Wine too speaks in this double way: On the one hand, it is a festive drink, perhaps our foremost symbol for celebration. Wine has nothing to do with basic nourishment or necessity. It is not a protein needed for health, but an extra that speaks of what lies beyond the hard business of making and sustaining life. Wine speaks of friendship, community, celebration, joy, recreation, victory. We celebrate everything, not least of all love, with wine.

But, like bread, wine has another side.

Of what is wine made? Crushed grapes. Individual grapes are crushed and their very blood becomes the substance out of which ferments this warm, festive drink. No wonder Jesus chose it to represent his blood.

It is helpful to keep this ambiguity in mind whenever we participate in the Eucharist. **Bread and wine are held up to be blessed by God and to become the flesh and blood of Christ, and they are held up precisely in their ambiguity.**

On the one hand they represent everything about life in the world. They represent the goodness of this earth, the joy of human achievements, celebration, festivity, and all that is contained in that original blessing when, after the first creation, God looked at the earth and pronounced it good.

But that's half of it. The Eucharist also holds up, in sacrifice, all that is being crushed, broken, and tried by fire (or baked). The wine, fittingly, is also blood. At the Eucharist, we hold up both, all that is good and holy, along with all that is toil and labor, trial and pain, and ask God to be with us in both. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once put it this way:

*In a sense the true substance to be consecrated—the bread symbolizing appropriately what creation succeeds in producing, the wine (blood) what creation causes to be lost in exhaustion and suffering in the course of that effort.**

This bread, our toil, is of itself, I know, but an immense fragmentation; this wine, our pain, is no more, I know, than a draught that dissolves. Yet in the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted—and this I am sure of, for I sense it—a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike, “Lord, make us one.”

Like the waters of Baptism, Bread and Wine invite us into the deep symbol of Christ and his cross and resurrection. In the gift of the Eucharist we are invited into the Pascal or Easter mystery of the pain and triumph of Jesus. Life is not one sided or one demintional. And neither is the Eucharist. We bring our lives to this place and recognized in the gift of Eucharist, that like bread itself, the very life of Christ. His body, broken but not defeated.

By the very act of being here today in faith. And by receiving the Bread of Life, we to proclaim, **we can be broken but never defeated**. We will rise with him again.

I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

In John's gospel, water becomes wine and wine becomes blood and blood and water both eventually flow out of the pierced side of Jesus. That happens too in the Eucharist and it happens in our lives. The task is to hold them both in our hands, as happens at Eucharist, and then offer them up to God. AMEN!

This homily is inspired by the words of Fr. Ron Rolheiser, St. Agustine and Fr. Teilhard de Chardin.