

## The Breaking of the Bread

The “breaking of bread” is what the early church called their weekly gathering – what we now call “Mass ” or the celebration of the Eucharist. At that gathering, they remembered the Last Supper, when Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to His disciples.

Our current “Breaking of the Bread” comes right after the Sign of Peace. In this liturgical action, we again recognize Jesus. When bread is broken, it is diminished, split, torn apart from the whole. By breaking bread we understand the virtue of humility, by which Christ—the bread of life — broke, split, diminished himself. And by breaking himself, Jesus gave us a glimpse into his true nature—one who was broken and poured out for us.

At the same time, the Breaking of the Bread recalls how we join the sacrifices and sufferings of our own lives to that of Christ’s Paschal Mystery. In this liturgical action, we acknowledge the presence of Christ not only in the Eucharist, but also his presence in our lives. As this fractioning occurs, the liturgical documents indicate that the *Lamb of God* should be sung. To strengthen the meaning of this action, we sing a litany form of the *Lamb of God* with various invocations to Christ.

At the end of the singing of the *Lamb of God*, we remain standing in preparation for our procession to Communion. We stand until all have received, out of respect and reverence for this action of Communion, where our ministers of the Eucharist offer “holy food to holy people in the holiest of all communions”. (Austin Fleming, *Yours is a Share*)

The Breaking of the Bread is addressed in an instruction from Rome -- “Redemptionis Sacramentum”. This instruction led to a change in the time we pour the wine into separate cups. Rather than pouring at the same time the bread is distributed, the deacon now pours the wine at the Preparation of the Gifts. This was done out of reverence for the Eucharist, which is transformed into the Blood of Christ during the consecration. The instruction says we should avoid pouring the Precious Blood, “lest anything should happen that would be to the detriment of so great a mystery.” (RS 106).

“Their eyes were opened... he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” This line from Luke’s Gospel still resounds in us - nearly 2000 years after it was first recorded.

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