

**Liturgical Catechesis; Homily 5**  
**'The Liturgy of the Eucharist - Four Part Movement'**

Take a moment and recall one of the most famous and well-loved miracles of Christ - the feeding of the five thousand, recounted by Matthew (14:13-21) Mark (6:32-44) Luke (9:10-17) and John (6:1-15) - and listen for any patterns. In the story, the crowds are drawn to Christ and follow him into a remote area. As the day comes to a close, Jesus has the crowds sit down and he takes loaves and fish...

MATTHEW “And *taking* the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and *blessed*, and *broke*, and *gave* the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds...”

MARK “And *taking* the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and *blessed*, and *broke* the loaves, and *gave* them to the disciples to set before the people...

LUKE “And *taking* the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and *blessed*, and *broke* them, and *gave* them to the disciples to set before the crowd.”

JOHN “Jesus then *took* the loaves, and when he had given *thanks*, he [*implied breaking*] *distributed them* [i.e., gave] to those who were seated...”

There is also the feeding of the four thousand, as recounted in Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-10). Again listen for a pattern.

MATTHEW “And commanding the crowd to sit down on the ground, he *took* the seven loaves and the fish, and having given *thanks*, he *broke* them and *gave* them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.”

MARK “And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he *took* the seven loaves, and having given *thanks*, he *broke* them and *gave* them to his disciples to set before the people.”

I would suggest there are a number of patterns. First, Jesus is always motivated by a concern for the people. Second, he often uses loaves of bread and fish, but always loaves of bread. Third, his actions can be summarized as taking, blessing, breaking and giving. And, more often than not, he gives it to his disciples to give to the crowds.

I would go so far as to suggest that Christ performs these miracles so that the disciples would remember when it came to the Last Supper, that when he “takes, blesses, breaks, and gives” something miraculous happens. I’d also suggest that Christ performed these miracles for the disciples, so that the disciples would recall that the miracle was entrusted to them to distribute. Thus, the disciples were prepared for something miraculous when he said to them, “do this in memory of me,” something they must hand-on to others.

When it came time for that Last Supper, Jesus gathered his disciples during the feast of Passover...

MATTHEW “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.’”

MARK “And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

LUKE “And he took break, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

And after his resurrection, he appeared to the disciples. Luke reports an encounter with two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus...

LUKE “So [Jesus] went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.... Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

We can see how this pattern of “taking, blessing, breaking and giving” was lived out and handed down in the early Church. For example, we have St. Paul’s account in I Corinthians, written around 55 AD (only 22 years after

Jesus' death & resurrection):

1 COR. "I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took a cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

This "breaking of the bread" that Paul received from the Lord and handed on is also described in the Acts of the Apostles, written around 85 AD:

ACTS 2:42 "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers."

ACTS 2:46 "All who believed were together and had all things in common.... Day by day. . . they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people."

ACTS 20:7 "On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them..."

ACTS 27:35 "After [Paul] had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat."

The Didache was only first discovered around 1875 and is generally accepted as having been written in the first century, before the year 100. In it we read,

DIDACHE "On the Lord's day of the Lord, come together, break bread, and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."

Or... St. Justin lived around the year 150, and in describing how Christians worshiped, he wrote:

ST. JUSTIN “On the day called Sunday, there is a meeting in one place of those who live in the cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president in charge urges and invites us to the imitation of these noble things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying Amen; the distribution and reception of the consecrated elements by each one takes place, and they are sent to the absent by the deacons.”

Or... the account Hippolytus wrote around the year 250, or the *Anaphora of the Apostles* which is composed no later than 350, or what St. Ambrose wrote around the year 380, or... well, I think you get my point.

This same act, “to take, bless break and give,” handed to the Apostles by Christ and faithfully handed down through the ages, is what we are doing here. Taken from your hands and laid upon the Table of the Lord; blessed in the great prayer of Thanksgiving, the Eucharistic Prayer; broken and poured out at the Lamb of God. It is given back to you, as Christ commanded, for “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”