



Memorable Rites

The liturgy today recalls the most famous celebration at the Last Supper. In fact, only 20 years after Christ's death – and well before the final writing of the synoptic Gospels – St. Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians of Christ's actions during the Last Supper with his Apostles. St. Paul had received some disturbing news about how the Corinthians celebrated the

Eucharist. The following information will help us understand the context of St. Paul's letter. Since there were no churches or places of worship where Christians could assemble, Eucharistic celebrations took place in the homes of wealthy members of the community in rooms that could accommodate a large group. In imitation of the Last Supper, the Christians celebrated the Eucharist during a meal. The worshippers came from various social classes. Those who were wealthy – and free citizens – came first and enjoyed a hearty meal with wine. Much later, poor people and slaves who had finished their day's work arrived and ate the leftovers. Recognizing this unfortunate practice, St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse* (1 Cor 11:17). Celebrating the Eucharist where social divisions were accentuated would not build but instead impede community. This practice proved that the Corinthian Christians had not grasped the profound meaning of the Eucharist. St. Paul continued: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes* (1 Cor 11:26). This meant that Christians should proclaim and remember Christ's encompassing love for us, since his death is both the consequence and symbol of this love.

We carefully examine St. Paul's statement: *When you come together* – this is a reference to the celebration of the Eucharist – *it is not for the better but for the worse*. This is almost scandalous. How could that happen? How could the Mass, the most beautiful Christian celebration be misrepresented? But it happened and St. Paul pointed out the inconsistencies. It was never Christ's intention to separate members of the Church by social and economic status. If a celebration of a liturgy relied heavily on pomp and ceremony which only accentuated differences, then Christ's message would be completely misrepresented.

Our celebrations of the Eucharist are meant to follow Christ's example of simplicity and meaning and support our commitment to fulfill God's will as we take our spiritual nourishment from the bread and wine.

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