

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—WATERS OF LIFE & DEATH—BY FR. STEVE LAPE

We’ve all seen it many times at Mass—the priest mixing water & wine at the altar. Many may understand its meaning; many don’t. This is a tradition that goes back to the early days of the Church. The ancient Greeks did it. The ancient Romans later adopted that practice. The Jews did the same, although they may have done so even before them, since it is written in the Book of Proverbs (which came out around the 5th century B.C.): “Drink of the wine that I have mixed.” (9:5) Jesus is believed to have mixed water & wine at the Last Supper. The practical reason for this was to temper the wine in its strong taste. Because Jesus is said to have done so in the very first Eucharist (the Last Supper), we continue to do this today at Mass, yet for more spiritual purposes.

Keep in mind that shortly after Jesus died on the cross, “one (Roman) soldier thrust his lance into (Jesus’) side (to check that He was already dead), and immediately blood and water flowed out.” (John 19:34) Some early heretics

Jesus didn’t but only gave appearance how can God in this Gospel offers the His death. Philippart this spiritual early as the century, explained represented the wine, Once you put wine, it’s take it out Because of



claimed that really die, the of dying (for die?) John, passage, reality about Writer David also offers insight: “As fourth catechists that the water humanity and divinity. the water into impossible to again. Jesus,

humanity can never again be separated permanently from God.” (from article “Your Faith,” *U.S. Catholic*, Jan. 2005, p.43) Considering that no living thing on earth can live without water, that human beings are born from water in their mothers’ wombs, that infants are composed of about 75% of water, and that adults’ bodies are, on average, about 60% water, this connection between Jesus’ humanity & water stands out even more. So, the next time you receive Christ’s Blood at Mass, remember these points, so that it’s clear we’re receiving Jesus’ full humanity & full divinity.

In addition to life symbols, water can be symbols of death, as Jesus’ own death showed. We know that water can be destructive. People drown in accidents, shipwrecks and floods. With that symbol in mind, consider the words of St. Ambrose, a late 4th century bishop whose memorial was just celebrated on Dec. 7th. In a letter sent to a newly consecrated bishop, St. Ambrose wrote words that all of us would do well to remember: “The Church’s foundation is unshakable and firm against the assaults of the raging sea. Waves lash at the Church, but do not shatter it. Although the elements of this world constantly beat upon the Church with crashing sounds, the Church possesses the safest harbor of salvation for all in distress....There is also a stream which flows down on God’s saints like a torrent....giving joy to the heart that is at peace and makes for peace. Whoever has received from the fullness of this river...lifts up his voice. Drink, then, from Christ so that your voice may also be heard....Fill your soul, then, with this water, so that your land may not be dry...He who is full, refreshes others.”