

## “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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop whose memorial was just celebrated on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. 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.”