

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—The Piece of Host in the Chalice—Fr. Steve Lape

+++ *Why does the priest break a piece of the host off and place it in his chalice at Mass?* This refers to the action of the celebrant around the time of the “Lamb of God” response before Communion is offered. The priest breaks off a little piece while saying silently, “May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.” This uniting action of the Body and Blood of Christ symbolizes several things:

1—Jesus, who is fully divine and fully human, is truly present for worthy believers to receive in the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion at Mass. As Jesus gave up His full self—body, blood & soul—on the cross, for the hope of our salvation, our Risen Lord comes to us fully in the Sacrament of Eucharist for us to be united in the fullness of Christ. We receive the fullness of Christ when we receive either His Body or Blood in Communion, so that this heavenly food may nourish our journey to hopefully keep us on the path to eternal joy in Heaven.

2—It’s a sign of the unity of Catholic believers with all the lawful authority in the Catholic Church—the Pope, the bishops, and the priests who continue to serve in good standing in the Church. In the early centuries of the Church, this customary practice began in Rome, as the Pope of the time (who is also known as the Bishop of Rome) would break off pieces of the consecrated Host (the Body of Christ) to offer to representatives of the various area parishes who were present in the Eucharist celebrated by the Pope. (He would celebrate Mass each day at different locations around the city and within his diocese.) The representatives (usually priests) would then bring their piece of this Eucharist from the Pope’s Mass back to their own parish to use as part of their own parish’s Mass, as it symbolized their unity in Christ through their unity with their bishop. This practice underwent some re-interpretations over the later centuries. Today, this ritual in each Mass points to the presiding priest’s unity not only with the faithful who gather and would be receiving Communion (which is meant to convey united belief and united respect & acknowledgment of the rightful authority within the Catholic Church, going back to the time of Christ and the Apostles), but also unity with the priest’s bishop, who, in turn, is united with the Pope.

3—It points to the saving action of Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, was buried, and rose again (which is all a part of what we call “the Paschal Mystery”), in the hope that “all may be one” in Him, just as He prayed for in John 17.

Just as Jesus prayed for all of us and sacrificed His life for oneness in truth, love and faithful service among all humanity, so we are called by our Lord to be strengthened by such Eucharistic nourishment to do what we can to help make our Lord’s dream of total oneness become a reality in the world.

