

### #24 WE ARE MANY PARTS, BUT ALL ONE BODY

As a catechist, I have encountered some very interesting questions from students. As I prepared to write this article, I remembered a young girl from my first grade CCD class in Quincy, Illinois who was intrigued by everything. Each Monday evening, she came to class with a new question about some ritual or action the priest did at Mass on Sunday. Out of all the first graders I have taught, she was the most perceptive. I can recall one evening, before class began, when she urgently waved her hand in the air with a question. She said, “Mr. Tim, I saw the priest put a host in the cup, why did he do that?” I chuckled because even the slightest action, that many miss, could not escape her keen eye.

As we continue to discuss the Communion Rite, we begin by addressing the young girl’s question.

After the Sign of Peace, the presider begins to break the large host and the assembly begins to sing (or recite) the Lamb of God. This section of the Communion Rite is called the *Fraction* or *Breaking of the Bread*, which was the name the early Christians used for their Sunday gathering. Today, this part of the ritual seems unnecessary, but in earlier centuries, this was a necessary and practical part of the celebration. Unlike today, the early Christians used one loaf of bread and one cup for the celebration of the Eucharist. Like Jesus at the Last Supper, the presider had to tear the bread into enough pieces in order for those assembled to commune. Even though many parishes use small wafers today, we still keep in mind, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (see 1 Cor. 10:17).



Once the presider has broken the bread, he “places a small piece in the chalice” (*Roman Missal* 129). This action is called the commingling and is a remnant of an ancient Roman practice called *fermentum*. The *fermentum* was a small piece of Eucharistic bread from a Sunday papal Mass that was sent to all the Roman parishes as a sign of ecclesial unity. This gesture today can help remind each of us of our unity in Christ through the Church.

These two actions are accompanied by the singing of the Lamb of God. Pope Sergius I added this litany from the Christian community in Syria to the liturgy in the late seventh century. Fortunately, this text is not changing in the new Missal. As we pray the words of the Lamb of God, we are invited to reflect upon God’s immense love for us. It is Christ, the Passover Lamb, who suffered and died to break us free from the chains of sin and death. It is Christ, the Passover Lamb, who we still plead to for healing and mercy. It is Christ, who rose from the dead, who we ask to grant us peace and lead us peacefully into the kingdom on that final day.

Next time, we will continue looking at the Communion Rite by exploring some of the new texts.