

The Offertory

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September 2025

The whole Mass is about transformation, and the Offertory sets the theme. One can identify this from the start in five stages: first transformation into creation from non-creation. “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation”. St. Gregory says we are intrinsically creatures of change, since obviously we go from non-created to a created state. And so the prayer begins “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation”.

Secondly, transformation takes place when earth and water become wheat, a grain; third, transformation from grain through human works to bread, an artifice made by “the work of human hands”; finally, transformation from food to a spiritual food, to ultimate life. Consequently, the offerings, bread and wine which are brought to the altar are already a manifestation of transformation. “The bread we offer” is “fruit of the earth”—earth, taken up as nourishment for wheat, becomes grain. The grain is then winnowed, then ground, mixed with water, molded, and baked into bread: “the work of human hands”. Creation, in the long view, is now made present and offered to “the Lord of all creation”, creation as something received “through Your goodness”. It is God’s goodness which bestows and activates the whole process towards what finally “will become for us the bread of life”. In that, we ourselves are part of the ultimate transformation.

In reply to these prayers, we say: “Blessed be God forever”, although in truth we are the ones who are being blessed, and we are offering blessing only in return.

Next, the wine is offered as: “fruit of the vine and work of human hands.” So again in this case, explicit mention is made of the vegetarian stage of life—the vine becomes grape—all this takes place within The Eucharist’s overall process of transformation. And again “human hands”, are designated as part

of that transforming process—or in the old more traditional procedures, one must say by “human hands and feet”, as in the plucking and trampling of the grapes. The eventual and ultimate transformation is that “it will become our spiritual drink”.

Further on, in the “epiclesis” before the Consecration (Eucharistic Prayer II), the agency of the Holy Spirit is invoked unto the eventual effect, invoked in continuity with the creative source mentioned at the beginning. Here the Holy Spirit is symbolized as “the fountain of all holiness”, and then, unfortunately, in an abrupt mixing of metaphors, “like the dewfall”. The sudden jump to another image is rather maddening to my taste. No doubt, reference to the manna in the desert during the exodus is meant, but for sticklers like me it is a brain-twister. Besides, dew does not fall; it condenses when the air cools.

The surprising thing is that, with a little reflection, condensation proves to be an excellent metaphor for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, like the moisture in the air, is everywhere present but not visible until conditions change. The air cooled. The consecration is a condensation, and we receive what is already everywhere present but invisible.

Finally, the greatest transformation is at communion when by consuming the body and blood of Christ, Christ’s body and blood become one with ours. All of us are transformed into the resurrected body of Christ. This is possible because the body of Christ is present in a resurrected state. That body no longer one individuated to the exclusion of other bodies, but one that is pan-individualized, so to speak. No longer one body as distinct from any other body. Its “oneness” is no longer non-dual. It is not a oneness in contradiction to “otherness”, but oneness in a divinized condition. The person of Christ, his soul, mind and body is totally given over to the Father who is the all in all. (I Cor. 15:8) One might be inclined to call it “a cosmic body” or “a universal body”, but even that would be inadequate. The root of this body goes deeper, deep into God the Father, source and origin of the Trinity—the Father, source and origin of all things, with the Son and Spirit.

At Communion, when I approach the altar and lift the chalice to drink, I am brought not only to the ultimate end of things, but also back to the beginning—to created elements already mentioned.

In a literal way, in the very act of drinking my sight is filled with the color of the metal cup. Sometimes it is gold, deeply rich with reflections of ceiling lights and with the weight of its own finest metallic color tone which is—well—golden. A feast for the eyes. But usually, in our community cup, what appears humble platinum, suitable metal for poor monks, a non-reflective alloy, shaped as in our community's cups, in a Federalist Era design.