

Dear friends,

Today I am continuing my series of columns on the Mass. The topic for this column is the bread and wine presented at the altar at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

First, why do we use bread and wine? The answer is simple: This is what Jesus used at the Last Supper. Jesus used these elements, the ordinary food and drink of his day, as the way for us to remember him and for him to be present to us. As he says, “Do this in memory of me.”

The bread we are to use must be made of wheat and, in the Latin Rite of the Church, must be unleavened (no yeast). Why? Again, Jesus would have used bread made of wheat at the Last Supper, and in all likelihood, this was unleavened. Jesus was celebrating the Passover meal with his apostles. God, as recorded in the Old Testament, directed that this meal be celebrated each year to remember the passing over (Passover) from slavery to freedom and new life in the event called the Exodus. That Passover meal was to be celebrated with unleavened bread, recalling the unleavened bread with which the Israelites fled Egypt.

So, at Mass, we use thin wafers of bread that we usually call hosts. This type of unleavened bread is practical because of the quantity needed for so many persons receiving Communion. It also minimizes crumbs.

As a sidebar, for those who have a gluten allergy, low-gluten hosts can be used. We make them available at every weekend Mass at Saint Margaret and at Saint Mary Magdalen. Just sign your name to the form on the table at the back of the seating area indicating that you require a low-gluten host. An appropriate number of such hosts will be consecrated and then those requesting them are to receive Communion from the priest who is celebrating the Mass. He will have these hosts in a special container called a pyx. By the way, gluten-free hosts cannot be used because then the substance is no longer truly wheat. If someone cannot tolerate even the slightest amount of gluten, then they can receive Communion under the form of wine only, since Jesus is fully present in each of the Eucharistic species.

The wine to be used must be made from grapes, naturally fermented, and unadulterated. Again, the effort is to be faithful to what Jesus used at the Last Supper. In using bread and wine, in making this His Body and Blood, the way for us to remember Him and for him to be present to us, Jesus makes this meal the new Passover. It is our way of celebrating his passing over from death to resurrection and drawing us into the same mystery.

Next weekend I will continue these columns on the Mass. You can find all 17 of them on the parish website at www.stmargaret.org, clicking on the Information tab and then clicking on Bulletins. They are listed at the top of that page.

May the peace of the Lord be with you.

Father Mike