

CHAPTER 12

The Breaking of the Bread

The people and presiding priest break the bread

Silence is kept when the action of breaking the bread is begun. Each of the Eucharistic Liturgies then has a sentence and a people's response for the fraction (e.g. "We break this bread..."). If much bread is to be broken, a fraction anthem (confractorium) may be sung. This could be "Lamb of God..." (page 426). The line "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us." can be repeated as long as necessary, with the ending "grant us your peace" used for the final repetition. "Jesus, Lamb of God ..." (page 427), the Easter Anthems (page 94), or another anthem could be used instead.

If wafers are used then as many as possible can be broken at the fraction or at least three or four large wafers can be broken so that a significant amount of bread is seen to be broken. All this can be done in the silence before the words "We break this bread ...". The *primary* purpose of breaking the bread is in order to share it. Only secondly has this developed a post-biblical symbolism of the brokenness of Christ in death. For this reason the breaking in half of a wafer in a communicant's hand is not recommended.

It is not *essential* at this point to break the bread into as many pieces as there are communicants. Individual portions may be more conveniently broken off during the administration of communion. It is important, however, that the symbolic character of the one bread broken for the many, so that the many may become one, is clearly seen by the whole community. This is one of the reasons why it is significant to distinguish between the breaking of the bread and distribution of communion. Breaking as much bread as needed at the fraction does this most clearly.

Further empty chalices, patens or baskets needed for the distribution of communion are brought up to the altar before the Invitation and filled with the consecrated bread and wine.

The Prayer of Humble Access and its alternative (page 425) are devotional texts perhaps best used only in penitential seasons or omitted altogether. If the congregation is kneeling for this prayer, those behind the altar bow rather than kneel as kneeling behind the altar can give a very disconcerting view of the presider - or occasionally, no view of the presider at all!

Some Questions

Does the bread received in your community speak of brokenness and of sharing or of private individualism?

Think through the practice of the fraction in your context. Are there ideas that have come to mind as you read this chapter?