

The Odyssey of the Grape Deacon George Collins

The introduction of wine is attributed to Noah. [Gen.9:20] Noah was the first recorded experience of intoxication. Wine became the usual drink with meals. Wine was considered as a gift and a blessing from Yahweh. Its use had many symbolic meanings and applications. It was used as a medication for the stomach. It was served to mourners as a cup of consolation. It cheers the spirit of depression. Wine is the delight of love and gladdens the hearts of man. Wine is a source of joy and prosperity. God and man rejoice with wine. Treading on grapes is a figure of the punishing wrath of Yahweh. Wine cut by water symbolizes a character weakened by sin. Most wine in the Holy Land was red. [the blood of the grape] It was a concrete part of Jewish life and culture. It took on many contexts connecting God and man.

The use of the imagery of a vineyard and grapes was used frequently by Jesus to make a very strong analogy concerning His message of salvation and eternal life. These are the concepts that the people of His time could fully understand and make a connection with to a deeper meaning in their lives. Bread and wine are the fundamental elements that constitute the enjoyment of life.

Metaphorically, the vine of the grape is Israel. The vine is also a sign of fertility. When the wine turns sour it is called vinegar, which became the drink for the common man. The life cycle of the grape can symbolically represent a relationship to God and man through the cycle of transformation and then to transubstantiation. The changing of life form physically and then spiritually.

The changing of form and appearance is one action not two actions. That which ceases to be and that which commences to be. Bread and wine cease, and body and blood commences. Physical to spiritual. [It is not that a block of marble becomes a statue as it continues to be marble] There is no explanation in the natural order of things. Total presence under each of the two species. Both species

are fully in each other and separately. The individual parts are no less than each other. One receives the whole in each without reduction. It follows that the multi-form is still one form. After consecration, the Body and Blood of Christ are permanently in the Eucharist; even to the crumbs. [minute particles]

TRANSFORMATION

Today we can make a connection to community. A bunch of individual grapes are attached to a single stem which form a community. Many grapes are drawing substance from one source. Many bunches of grapes [many communities] drawing substance from one branch and many branches drawing substance from one vine. All share in the juice from one root. [faith] Every branch that bears fruit the Father will prune, that it may bring forth even more fruit abundantly. [to prune may be a cause to suffer, even persecution] Such is the divine way to super-abundance [justice] so we may become intoxicated with wisdom.

In the spring the root sends out its life-giving juice which feeds the branches which produce new buds. The buds develop into grapes which grow and develop in the sunlight. [Gods' grace] At harvest, the vineyard workers harvest the bunches of grapes. They look over the grapes and discard the green, bruised, unripe and rotten grapes, choosing to put only the properly developed grapes into the wine press. In the wine press each individual grape gives up its juice, which blends together into a new life form called juice. A transformation. The juice is the sum total of each grape. The grape still exists but in a different form. It gives up its individuality to surrender to a more harmonious sharing in a new life form. It now exists in two forms blended into one. At death the winepress symbolizes our transformation into a new life form from physical to spiritual. The quality of the fruit proclaims the quality of the vine. By their fruits you shall know them. One does not gather grapes from thistles or thorns.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

If we can understand Transformation, which is a real life experience and is an observable change, then we are only a step away from understanding transubstantiation, which is a non-observable change as is the process of fermentation from juice to wine. A further non-observable change is when Jesus, through His authority as Son of God, changes the wine into His blood. Nothing is impossible for God, as God only speaks the truth. The wine press of the crucifixion purifies the wine into its most perfect state. The blood of Christ, which is the changing of the ordinary essence of wine into the divinity of His blood. The shedding of blood is the greatest proof of love, and His blood gives access to the true heaven and an abiding in Him.

THE BLESSING

"By the mystery of the mingling of this water and wine, may we become partakers in your divinity as You partook in our humanity."
"Blessed are You Lord God of all creation, through Your goodness we have this wine to offer---it will become our spiritual drink."

When supper was ended He took the cup, again giving thanks and praise He gave the cup to His Disciples and said, "Take and drink from it, this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me." [A commemoration of His death and resurrection.]

This is the mystery of our faith, and becomes the Church's greatest treasure. The visible sign of her unity which contains Christ Himself. We stand on this reality. It is unimaginable that the lowly grape could be raised to this high station to be the blood of Christ through the power of God. What a wonderful destiny that the grape should become the medium by which God communicates grace and life to His people of faith.

PERSONALIZATION

Consider that you are one of the grapes on the bunch of grapes. You belong to the community of grapes known as St. Thomas More parish, which in turn hangs from a branch known as the Diocese of Palm Beach, which in turn grows from the vine known as the Catholic Church, which in turn grows from the roots in Jesus Christ. [The worldwide community of faith.]

At the time of death [transformation] from worldly life to spiritual life; we are plucked from the bunch. We are inspected by the vinedresser [angel of death]. Un-ripened, sour or bruised fruit is discarded. [hell] The good fruit is put into the wine press and transformed from grape to juice. The individual grape is still there but transformed by its juices being perfectly blended together with other grapes. [heavenly community] As the juice of the grape blends harmoniously with the juice of other grapes it does not lose its individual history; but shares itself simultaneously with the history of the other grapes. It follows that we recognize ourselves at the same time that we recognize all the other individuals in the same harmonious existence. Self is in others and others are in self. Recognition of and by others all focused on the one sustaining entity-God. However, sharing in each others life does make us the family of God.

The juice is fermented into wine [fermentation may be seen as a perfecting process of a natural order] which is unobservable. Jesus took this wine and through consecration, the wine is transubstantiated into His blood for nothing is impossible for God. Transubstantiation is a reality of our faith, and a truth provided by Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus takes this wine and through consecration it is transubstantiated from wine into His blood. In transformation we physically see grapes transformed into juice. In transubstantiation the outward appearance does not change but the substance has changed and made holy and is recognized as such through the eyes of faith. It can no longer be transformed into any other substance except that which it is and it continues to be. When

we consume it the appearance may be destroyed, but the essence of what it is continues to be in the soul of the new host, to be accepted or rejected by the soul of the new host. The real presence continues as long as the species, which constitutes the sacramental signs ordained by Christ, remains.

A Christian will be nourished throughout his life by the wine turned into His blood that was shed for our sins. The joy that God promised is often expressed as a great abundance of wine. The new wine is symbolic of Messianic times. [the new and eternal covenant] To receive the life of Christ unworthily is to unite ourselves with Him in lust and not in love. Blood symbolizes the soul, and the soul of Christ is in His blood.

HOW IMPORTANT THE GRAPE IS IN ITS ODYSSEY TO HELP US EXPERIENCE AND RELATE TO OUR GOD.