

Saint Thomas More  
**Newman Center**  
at the University of South Dakota

Eve of All Saints, 1996

Mrs. Virginia Barkley  
P.O. Box 15  
Geddes SD 57342

Dear Mrs. Barkley,

I am sorry that I have not gotten back to you more quickly. The past couple weeks have been very busy, and I wanted to be able to respond to your important question more carefully than would have been possible had I tried to 'squeeze in' time for responding prior to now.

I appreciated hearing of your concern about the bread that we bake here at the Newman Center for our celebration of the Eucharist. I will surely respond to your question ("How can this be valid for consecration when it is not unleavened?"), but it also seems important to place that response in a larger context.

This context will unfold in four steps. First, I'll write a little about why we think it's important to use substantial bread for the Eucharist. Secondly, I'll address the issue of validity. Thirdly, while I can assure you quite surely that our bread is valid matter for the Eucharist, our practice is in tension with some liturgical regulations; while these do not have anything to do with validity and therefore are not immediately pertinent to the precise question that you asked, I want to be fully honest with you and write about those tensions. And fourthly, since I'm aware that our use of substantial bread makes Mollie uncomfortable and I feel very badly about that, I also want to share with you the fact that many, many people have had precisely the opposite experience, namely, they have expressed to us how their Eucharistic spirituality has been deepened by this very practice.

1. Why do we use substantial bread?

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states the following general principle in section 283: "The nature of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic celebration appear as actual food." Then, remembering that the earliest name for the Eucharist in apostolic times was "the breaking of the bread," the

Instruction continues to state that the Eucharistic bread “should therefore be made in such a way that the priest can break it and distribute the parts to at least some of the faithful.” This gesture “will more clearly show the eucharist as a sign of unity and charity, since the one bread is being distributed among the members of one family.” This same section states that “small hosts *may* be used,” if the number of communicants is too large, but that is clearly not the preferred form of bread.

We try here to celebrate Eucharist in a way that is faithful to this principle. It is our hope that our Eucharistic bread *clearly* “appear as actual food.” This is how the Church celebrated Eucharist for its first thousand years. People brought to Eucharist the bread that they baked in their homes, the same bread that they ate at meals. This kept a vivid awareness of the fact that Jesus chose to be present to His Church in the form of true food for us to eat and drink. The Eucharist is a sacrifice, but there are many forms of sacrifice, and the Eucharist is a *sacrificial meal*. In the first centuries of the Church’s life, to which we look to find the immediate impact of the tradition handed on by the apostles, not a single one of the Church Fathers that I am aware of ever wrote of unleavened bread being used for Eucharist; many of the Fathers, though, insisted on the symbolic significance of the Eucharist being celebrated in such a way that the faithful could receive communion from the one loaf that is broken by the presiding priest. [To be sure of this, I’ve checked all the indexed references to ‘Eucharist’ in Johannes Quasten’s classic three-volume *Patrology*, Utrecht, Holland: Spectrum, 1950.]

The *General Instruction* (which can be found in the front of any copy of *The Sacramentary*) clearly encourages us to do what we can to reconnect with that ancient tradition. It means a great deal to me that at the Newman Center we celebrate Eucharist in a way that connects us with the way of celebration that fed the faith of the martyrs of the early Church.

We are able to *break bread* and to have many in our assembly share communion from the one loaf, the sign of unity to which the *General Instruction* refers. We join the nameless disciples of Luke’s Gospel on the way to Emmaus: “. . . they recounted. . . how they had come to know him in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24.35). This also makes possible a more vivid experience of the Eucharistic meaning of Jesus’ multiplication of the *loaves* and fishes, especially in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, which the Catholic Church has always seen as a revelation of the meaning of the Eucharist. In Jesus’ ‘Bread of Life Discourse,’ he counters the people’s uncomfortableness with His talk of *eating* His body with an intensification of the verbs referring to ‘eating.’ In John 6.54, when we are instructed to ‘feed on [Christ’s] flesh,’ the Greek very *trogein* carries the connotation of “gnawing,” which is further intensified in the following verse which insists that Christ’s body is “real food” and His blood is “real drink.” [This is

extensively analyzed in the classic Catholic commentary on the fourth Gospel by Raymond Brown: *The Gospel According to John (I- XII)*, NY: Doubleday, 1966, pp. 281-294.]

We try to make it very evident that the bread is *actual bread*, and the breaking is *actual breaking*. And in this effort, I think we're being faithful to what the Church asks of us in the *General Instruction* to the reformed liturgy of Vatican II.

## 2. The Question of Validity

Quite simply, whether the bread is unleavened or leavened does *not* affect the *validity* of the Eucharist. The Ecumenical Council of Florence in 1439 formally presented the definitive teaching of the Catholic Church that the Eucharist can be validly consecrated "in unleavened or leavened bread." [This can be found in the official compilation of Catholic Teaching, the *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, #1303.] This teaching was repeated by Pope Pius X in his apostolic constitution *Tradita ab antiquis* in 1912.

If leavened bread rendered the Eucharist invalid, then virtually every Eucharist celebrated from apostolic times through the tenth century would have been invalid, as would the Eucharist celebrated to this day in Eastern Churches that are in union with Rome (such as the Ruthenians, Ukrainians, and Maronites).

Josef Jungmann's classic study, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (NY: Benziger Brothers, 1959), gives a brief, but fascinating history (pp. 330-333). He notes that both literary accounts and pictorial illustrations show that the bread used for Eucharist in the early centuries was the same leavened bread that was used for domestic purposes. As mentioned above, none of the Church Fathers refer to *unleavened* bread in connection with the Eucharist, and any who do make any reference to specific types of bread used (e.g., St. Gregory the Great) clearly refer to bread that is leavened. Only in the ninth century did unleavened bread begin to be widely used, and this usage was resisted strongly by the church of Rome, which did not adopt it until late in the eleventh century.

The Eastern Churches have a deep reverence for the ancient tradition, and no movement away from the ancient tradition toward *unleavened* Eucharistic bread ever occurred in the East. The uniate Eastern Churches, whose priesthood and Eucharist are recognized as valid by Rome, continue their unbroken continuity with the ancient tradition of the church in their use of leavened bread.

It was in view of both the tradition of the first ten centuries in the West and of the unbroken tradition in the East, that the Council of Florence gave its definitive teaching that both leavened and unleavened bread are valid matter for the Eucharist. That is the formal, definitive teaching of the Catholic Church.

And while the bread we use may perhaps not be technically unleavened, it is unleavened in the sense of not being yeast bread. The basic meaning of the bread of Passover being unleavened in the book of Exodus is that in their haste to depart from Egypt the Israelites did not have time to let bread rise, and so it needed to be unleavened. The ingredients of our bread are mixed together and it's put in the oven. We try in this way to include the symbolic meaning of the unleavened Passover bread.

But, back to your actual question, whether our bread is regarded as leavened or unleavened does not affect the validity of Eucharist celebrated here.

Related to this, you also allude to the "flavoring (honey)" used in our bread. As to any possible affect of this on *validity*, a 1929 instruction of the Congregations for the Discipline of the Sacraments is significant. John Huels, a widely respected canon lawyer, summarizes this instruction as follows: "This dicastery of the Holy See affirmed the tradition that the bread must be made of wheat flour; if there are any additives in it, they cannot be such that the bread would no longer be considered wheat bread 'according to the common estimation.' This means, in effect, that if the bread contains substances other than wheat flour and water, it would still be valid matter provided it could be commonly regarded as wheat bread." [*One Table, Many Laws*. Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1986. Pp. 55-56.]

A similar instruction was given in 1979 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: ". . . where there is question of slight additions (e.g., salt, condiments) the matter will be valid but illicit." Huels comments on this instruction: "This is another way of saying that if the additives are of such a kind and amount that they would render the substance something other than wheat bread according to the common estimation, that substance would be invalid matter for the Eucharist" [p. 56].

No one who tastes (or even just reads the recipe for) the bread we use will have any doubt about its being wheat bread. The additions are slight, and according to any meaning of common estimation it would be regarded as wheat bread and nothing else. I've just checked five different recipe books at random, containing a couple dozen recipes for "wheat bread," and not a single one comes anywhere near being as purely "wheat bread" as does the recipe for our Eucharistic bread.

I haven't meant to belabor these points, but I wanted to be very clear with regard to this issue since this is the actual question that you asked. Our Eucharistic bread may be in tension with some liturgical regulations (and I will address those in the next section), but these have nothing to do with *validity*.

### 3. Other Regulations

There are, though, a number of liturgical regulations with which our practice is not in full compliance. And while these have nothing to do with the question of validity, I want to be very forthright with you and acknowledge that I am very aware of them.

Canon 926 of the Code of Canon Law states that “the priest is to use unleavened bread in the celebration of the Eucharist.” This is also stated in section 1.8 of the 1980 instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship *Inaestimabile Donum*: “. . . the bread. . . in accordance with the tradition proper to the Latin Church. . . must be unleavened.”

*Inaestimabile Donum*, in the same section, also states that the bread “must be made solely of wheat.” And canon 924.2 states that “the bread must be made of wheat alone.”

These are requirements for the *licit* celebration of the Eucharist, but make no claim to touch upon matters that affect validity. [This is made clear in the comments relative to canons 924 and 926 in the commentary on the Code of Canon Law, published by the Canon Law Society of America, NY: Paulist Press, 1985, pp. 657ff.] They are still significant, though, and it does trouble me for our practice to be in tension with these requirements.

Why, then do we do what we do? Because there is a tension within the body of Eucharistic law and instruction itself. The *General Instruction* is the basic law for celebration of Eucharist in the Church. Failure to observe its general principle that the Eucharistic bread should “appear as actual food” also renders the Eucharistic celebration illicit, though not invalid. The only exception states is that hosts may be used when there is such a large number of communicants that it is simply not possible to use substantial bread. When that situation does not hold, the use of hosts does not follow the prescription of this law and therefore is illicit.

John Huels [*One Table, Many Laws*, pp. 57-58] notes this tension between what is required by the *General Instruction* and by *Inaestimabile Donum*. He draws attention to the fact that the Code of Canon Law is aware that such tensions could arise and provides (in canon 34.2) for dealing with them: “Regulations found in instructions do not derogate from laws, and if any of them cannot be reconciled with the prescription of laws, they lack all force.”

We are trying to live within that tension as best we can. Our bread clearly “appear[s] as real food.” Yet we also refrain from yeast leavening, and the additives are extremely minimal and do not under any reasonable understanding of “common estimation” detract from the bread’s reality as “wheat bread.”

Huels concludes his discussion with the question, “Are these two requirements reconcilable?” and responds: “The law certainly poses a challenge to the baker’s art.” Our bakers sincerely try to do their best.

#### 4. Concluding Reflections

Finally, I would just like to share with you some typical reactions we have heard from people over the years about the tradition of using substantial bread for Eucharist. And it is a tradition here. I don't know how long it's been going on, as this was the bread being used here when I arrived in 1989. I purposely altered very little about the way liturgy is celebrated here, believing that it's important for a community's prayer to have continuity. On a couple occasions over the past eight years, we've provided people with formal opportunities to offer comments and to ask questions about matters pertaining to our celebration of the Eucharist. Many positive comments about our use of substantial bread emerged; none critical. And that was not because people were in any way hesitant to be critical; they were about many things, and from many different perspectives. But prior to Mollie's question and your note this Fall, we had only heard comments from people expressing their appreciation for the labor that Sr. Rosemarie puts into baking the bread, along with the students who help her.

Here is a sampling of the kinds of comments I've heard over the years:

- A student who helped bake the bread remarked as to how moved she had been at Mass the next day at the Preparation for the Gifts when I prayed: "Blessed are You, Lord God of all Creation, through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and *human hands have made. . .*" She felt that some of her own self had gone into the offering that was being made to God, and I think that's what the text of the prayer is trying to lead us to experience. It's harder for that meaning to be conveyed when there is no bread made by human hands, but wafers made by machines.
- Another student, who was received into full communion with the Catholic Church here, once commented that she viewed the commonly used hosts in this manner: "It's easier for me to believe that it's the Body of Christ than it is to believe that it's bread." And she proceeded to make very thoughtful observations, to this effect: "I'm supposed to have to *believe*, after Mass, that it's Christ's Body; but before Mass, I shouldn't have to *believe* that it's bread. I should *know* it, I should be able to know it's bread by tasting it."
- A similar comment that I treasure very much was made by a lifelong Catholic who observed that it had always bothered him that the hosts seemed almost as "special" before the consecration as we believed them to be after. He said that it struck him powerfully to come to Mass here, that we believe that ordinary bread, not anything special, truly becomes the Body of Christ. That's important to him, he said, "because I'm nothing special, I'm very ordinary, and if God changes

ordinary bread He can change an ordinary guy like me, too. If it's gotta be something special to start with, though, I guess I'm out of luck."

- There is a woman in her mid-sixties here, who bakes tens of dozens of rolls whenever we serve at the Banquet, the soup kitchen in Sioux Falls. It has touched many of our students so deeply to realize that Florence wants to serve more than food to the Banquet's guests, she wants to serve love. One student who had also watched Sr. Rosemarie bake our Eucharistic bread, said she felt that she was serving love when she served Florence's rolls, just as she felt the love that Sister Rosemarie puts into the bread that we use for Eucharist.

There have been many other comments over the years, most of which I don't specifically remember. But these give a feel for the kinds of comments that have been made. Many, many people have remarked to us that our practice is not simply something that they 'like,' but that it is something that has deepened their Eucharistic spirituality.

I think those who wrote the *General Instruction* knew that would happen, and that's why the Church asked that our bread for Eucharist "appear as actual food."

If you have any further observations or questions, please feel to write or give me a call and I'd be very happy to discuss those matters with you.

Sincerely,

(Reverend) James O. Englert

Director