

# The type of bread used at Mass matters



**Question:** Regarding the bread that Jesus used at the Last Supper, would it have been unleavened, and if so, what did it look like and how was it made? What is the theological significance of unleavened bread?

– **Gordon Curtus**, Salt Lake City

**Answer:** It seems clear that Jesus would have used unleavened bread at the Last Supper. The ancient Jews were instructed to use unleavened bread during the feast of Passover. This is scripturally and historically linked to the fact that, in their hasty exodus from Egypt, there was no time to fully knead the dough and allow the bread to rise before baking it (cf. Dt 16:3). Thus, they baked it quickly without yeast. The Passover meal that commemorated the Exodus was, therefore, to be eaten with unleavened bread (cf. Ex 29:2, Nm 9:11).

Theologically and spiritually, yeast or leaven in the New Testament often is equated with sin, impurity and hypocrisy (cf. Matt 16:6, Lk 12:1, 1 Cor 5:6). And thus, unleavened bread comes to symbolize sincerity, purity and integrity. This, however, is a symbolic meaning, and there is nothing intrinsically evil about leavened bread.

Regarding what the bread was like, we must keep in mind several factors. Wheat bread, which is most common today, was far less common in the ancient world. Breads were more often made from other grains like barley. Second, bread can be baked in such a way that it has a dry, crackerlike quality. Bread also can be baked in a way so that it has a doughy, more pitalike quality. And this is so for both leavened and unleavened bread. Thus other than affirming the bread at the

Last Supper was unleavened, we cannot be utterly certain of its other qualities.

Today, however, we must be clear: The Church requires that wheat bread, without any other admixtures such as honey or grains, is necessary for the valid celebration of the liturgy.

## **Jesus exposed or enclosed**

Question: I am wondering about the difference between praying before the Lord when there is Eucharistic adoration versus simply praying before the tabernacle? Is one better than the other? I always stop by my church and pray before the tabernacle because the times for Eucharistic adoration at my parish do not work with my schedule.

**– Name withheld via email**

Answer: The Church does not assign an essential difference between praying before the tabernacle and exposition where the Lord is displayed in the monstrance in Eucharistic adoration. A Vatican document on the Eucharist says: “The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, for which either a monstrance or a ciborium may be used, stimulates the faithful to an awareness of the marvelous presence of Christ and is an invitation to spiritual communion with him. It is therefore an excellent encouragement to offer him that worship in spirit and truth which is his due” (*Eucharisticum Mysterium*, No. 60).

So both forms of adoration are commended. But while there is not an essential difference, there can be a subjectively different experience. In adoration with the Blessed Sacrament exposed in a monstrance, there is a visual aspect that helps many to stay more focused. In this sense one may argue that Eucharistic adoration before the monstrance is more beneficial. But as you point out, personal factors such as schedules or a preference for quieter, briefer or more solitary visits can also influence what is preferred.

The bottom line is that the Church encourages devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Such devotion, through visits, adoration, signs of respect through kneeling, genuflection and making the Sign of the Cross as one passes a Catholic Church, acknowledge the sublime presence of the Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

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