

Interrelationship of the Freshman Students' Knowledge, Participation and Witnessing of the Eucharist as Presence, Sacrifice and Communion

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Abstract - This study examined the interrelationship of the freshman students' knowledge, participation, and witnessing of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice and communion. There were two hundred sixty-five freshman students involved in this investigation. Data were gathered using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings reveal that the students' level of knowledge of and participation in the Holy Eucharist were average and high, respectively. Also, their lived experience of Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion was to a high extent. Results of the study also show that students' extent of knowledge of and participation in the Eucharist were significantly contributed to the extent to which they lived the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice and communion. Results further point the need of the campus ministry and religious studies instructor to emphasize strongly the teachings of the Church especially the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist through catechism.

Keywords: knowledge, participation, Eucharist as presence, Eucharist as sacrifice and Eucharist as communion, catechism

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Eucharist, in its entirety, is a sacrament, a sacrifice, and a communion. It is the basic and highest form of prayer among Catholics. In the Holy Eucharist, the Catholics believe that under the appearances of bread and wine, the Lord is contained, offered, and received. To live effectively as disciple of Christ, one should know the importance of the Eucharist as Christ, who substantially gave His whole to us, gave the gift of Himself, all that He has, and all that He is [1]. Recalling these words of Jesus, the Catholic Church professes that, in the celebration of the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the priest. Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (John 6:51-55). The whole Christ (body, blood, soul, and divinity) is truly present under the

appearances of bread and wine—the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins. This is what the Church means when she speaks of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. This presence of Christ in the Eucharist is called "real" not to exclude other types of his presence as if they could not be understood as real, cf. Catechism, no. 1374 [2]. The risen Christ is present in his Church in many ways, but most especially through the sacrament of his Body and Blood [2].

The Church establishes her own schools to promote the formation of the whole being of a person through the systematic transmission and integration of culture with faith and of faith with living. Hence, Vatican II emphasizes the development of personal spirituality and participation in the highest form of worship - the Holy Eucharist, which are among the principal aims of a Catholic school [3]. It is within this respect that the words of the Lord were shared to

mankind, specifically through the Church, religious school ministry, and the like.

Lourdes College, among the other Catholic educational institutions in the country, is committed to fulfilling its mission that allows students to encounter the Living God. The Holy Eucharist is primarily one of the spiritual celebrations provided by the school to enrich the faith and the life of the students as mandated by the Vatican. However, despite the efforts, interventions, and activities done by the Religious Studies (RS) teachers and the Campus Ministry, still majority of the students do not have a thorough understanding of and an active participation in witnessing the living sacrament of Jesus. This observation is also in consonance with the observation of Albino and Alduca [3] that today's youth educated in Catholic schools seem to have negative attitude towards various ways in which Christian life is expressed. Hence, it has become a challenge to the school administration to instill fully among its Catholic students the faith and life that the Church propagates. It is in this light that this study was conducted.

FRAMEWORK

This study is based on Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory [4] in spirituality. The transformative learning theory in spirituality tells about how educators affect students' life in the process of learning and experiencing spiritual development. Tisdell [5] and Wiltse [6] espoused that educators can foster transformative learning through creating learning strategies that touch the human spirit and allow educators the greater opportunities for transformative learning to occur. Building on this holistic definition of transformative learning theory in spirituality, Koth and Welch [7] posited that students' spiritual development is relegated to the courses in religious studies. In this way, spirituality can be taught in different contexts, thereby creating a rich learning environment with vibrant learning strategies designed to engage one's whole-person, so that learners will gain deeper knowledge and understanding regarding life's experiences.

Moreover, the transformative learning theory can also be gleaned in the theory of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development [8]. The Zone of Proximal Development identifies the range of tasks that a child can perform with the help and guidance of others but cannot yet perform independently. Given this

definition, *if students are guided with the basic principles of the Eucharist through their teachers' guidance and assistance in the classroom, they are more likely to become participative in witnessing their encounter of Christ in the Mass. Inversely, if teachers fail to strengthen the knowledge of students in the Eucharistic celebration, they are likely to lack the expression of appreciation of the Eucharist.*

Hence, the above theory offers a basis for the teachers of religious studies and the Campus Ministry in performing their role as significant adults in the lives of students that they may respond to the call to be witnesses of the loving compassion of Jesus and Mary.

Figure 1 shows the study's schema reflecting the interrelationship among the variables. The students' knowledge of participation in the Eucharist are the independent variables while their witnessing of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion is the dependent variable.

According to Pope Benedict XVI (from his homily in Altötting at the Basilica of St. Anne, 2006), the profound knowledge of the Eucharist radically modifies our hearts and makes us capable of gestures that, by the contagious power of goodness, can transform the lives of mankind. Similarly, Gautier [11] espoused that knowledge is a key doctrine of the faith and a teaching that sets Catholics apart from most other Christians. Another variable assumed to have an influence on the students' witnessing of the Eucharist is participation. In the encyclical letter of *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI stated that an active participation in the Eucharist marks the concrete practice of love. Also, participation in the Holy Eucharist demands that all of us give witness to the truth and love that Christ taught us [10].

At this point, it is imperative to examine the students' witnessing of the Eucharist. Foremost, the doctrine of the real presence asserts that in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is literally and wholly present [9]. Likewise, Fay [2] encouraged that when one joins the celebration of the Eucharist, one should embrace its real presence. Such presence speaks the Christ in them and from within. Secondly, the highest form of honor to God is sacrifice. The Mass is a continuation of Christ's sacrifice of praise and gratitude to God the Father. Likewise, students' active participation in the Eucharist serves as their sacrifice of praise as they make an encounter with God during the Mass. Lastly, the sacrament of the Holy Communion emphasizes

that God makes use of physical elements, the bread and the wine, so that with prayer and faith they become means of experiencing God's grace in a special way (John 6:53). It is believed that through the Holy Communion, we express our desire to be united with Christ.

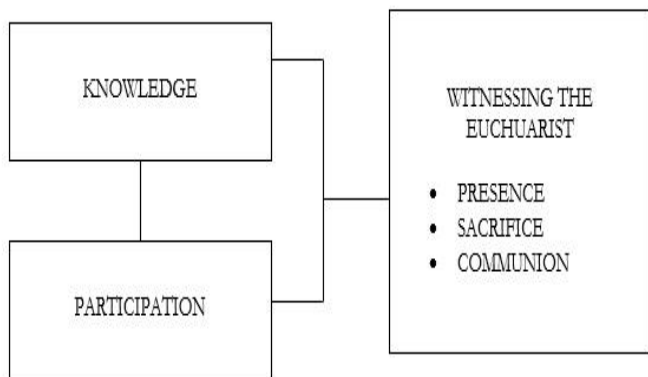


Figure 1 Schema showing the interrelationship of the variables in the study

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study assessed the interrelationship of knowledge, participation, and witnessing of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion among the two hundred sixty-five (265) freshmen of Lourdes College during S.Y. 2015-2016. Specifically, the study determined the following: (1) the students' level of knowledge of and participation in the Holy Eucharist; (2) the students' extent to which they live the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion; and (3) the association between the students' knowledge of and participation in the Eucharist and the extent to which they witness the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion.

METHODS

The study used the descriptive research design with survey questionnaire as tool for gathering data on the participants' knowledge of, participation in, and witnessing of the Eucharist. The frequency percentage distribution and Pearson r correlation were used to determine the interrelationship of the study. There were two hundred sixty five (265) students enrolled in the Religious Studies (RS1) classes for the first semester of the School Year 2015-2016. The researchers chose the entire population to be their participants of their study. Purposive sampling was then used in the selection of the participants. Hence, among the students in Lourdes College, only the

Catholic first year students were chosen to participate in the investigation process. This qualification ensures that the participants understand the nature of the study since all of them are Catholics and are able to witness God's presence, sacrifice and communion during the celebration of the holy Eucharist. A validated and pilot-tested questionnaire was used to generate the findings of the study to establish the internal consistency of the items. This was done to ensure if the main constructs of the study were being measured. Having established the validity and reliability, the questionnaire was distributed to the intended participants. Proper protocol for distributing the research questionnaire was strictly observed. The participants' responses for the questionnaire were statistically process to generate the findings of the investigation. The given scale was used to interpret the result of the study: 3.51-4.00: Always (A); 2.51-3.50: Most of the time (MT); 1.51-2.50: Sometimes (S); 0.51-1.50: Rarely (R); 0.00-0.50: Never (N).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' knowledge of the Holy Eucharist. Data show that 105 (39%) of the students had an "average" knowledge of the meaning and essence of the Holy Eucharist. However, 99 (37.2%) had good knowledge that the Holy Mass is a time of worship and repentance. These students have an understanding of the deeper meaning of the sacrament – sacrifice, communion and presence.

Table 1. Frequency, Percentage and Mean Distribution of Participants' Knowledge of the Holy Eucharist

Scores	Description	f	%
9-10	Very Good	5	1.9
7-8	Good	99	37.2
5-6	Average	105	39.5
3-4	Below Average	46	17.3
0-2	Poor	10	3.8
Total		265	100%

Overall Mean: 5.77; SD: 1.66 (Average)

There were only 10 (3.8%) who had below average knowledge of the Eucharist, which means they have not fully grasped the real meaning of the celebration. The reason for which could be that they have not been given formal instruction concerning the Holy Mass. Overall, the students had an average understanding of the Eucharist.

Table 2. Participants' Extent of Participation in the Mass

Quality of Participation in the Mass	Mean	SD	VI
1.I come to mass on time	2.75	0.98	MT
2.I actively respond to Mass responses	2.93	0.92	MT
3.I actively participate in the singing	2.95	0.99	MT
4.I generously share my money during offertory	2.87	0.85	MT
5.I listen attentively to the reading of the Word of God	3.09	2.05	MT
6.I do not use my mobile phone during mass	2.82	1.15	MT
7. I wear decent attire	3.21	0.98	MT
8. I go out of the Mass after the end of recessional song	2.48	1.46	S
9. I do not talk with my seatmates during Mass	2.67	0.93	MT
10. I am attentive in the whole process of the celebration	2.93	0.92	MT
Overall Mean	2.87	0.6	MT

Table 2 shows the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' extent of participation in the Holy Mass. Findings indicate that the students participated most of the time in the Mass. The students' active participation manifests their understanding of the Eucharist as a highest form of celebration in which one glorifies and honors God. Highest among the indicators was the wearing of decent attire (3.21). In the worship of God, the students observe decorum particularly the wearing of decent attire as a show of their deep respect for God. Also, the students understand that listening attentively to the reading of the words of God is very essential (3.09). God communicates to His people very powerfully during the proclamation of the words. Listening to His words is a way of welcoming Him and letting Him direct our lives. Lowest among the indicators was leaving after the recessional song (2.48). Generally, the students finish the celebration until the end of the recessional.

Table 3 presents the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' lived experience of the Eucharist as presence. The overall mean of 3.39 indicates that most of the time the participants manifest in their lives Christ presence by showing concern for others and the environment, indicators that obtained the highest mean. The presence of Christ is also shown through living a life of prayer (3.68) and simplicity (3.48). Moreover, the participants also

witness the living presence of God by being more compassionate, truthful, and honest. This finding implies that as Christ in the Eucharist enables the participants to become sharers of His love and goodness.

Table 3. Participants' Lived Experience of the Eucharist as Presence

<i>The Eucharist enables me to...</i>	Mean	SD	VI
<i>Eucharist As Presence</i>			
1. be more forgiving	3.45	0.67	MT
2. be more sensitive of the needs of others	3.33	0.73	MT
3. help the poor	3.32	0.77	MT
4. care for the environment	3.33	0.79	MT
5. respect other religions	3.5	0.75	MT
6. to get involved in justice and peace issues	3.19	0.9	MT
7. be honest	3.4	0.72	MT
8. tell the truth	3.41	0.71	MT
9. be more prayerful	3.68	2.57	A
10. live a simple life	3.48	0.67	MT
Composite Mean	3.39	.054	MT

Table 4. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Lived Experience of the Eucharist as Sacrifice

<i>The Eucharist enables me to...</i>	Mean	SD	VI
<i>EUCARIST AS SACRIFICE</i>			
1. offer to God my works and daily activities.	3.38	0.78	MT
2. bear with patience the problems ,difficulties & challenges encountered in life	3.33	0.75	MT
3. render service to others even if entails sacrifices on my part.	3.13	0.81	MT
4. be more kind and considerate to others even if at times they neglect me.	3.21	0.81	MT
Composite Mean	3.26	.62	MT

Table 4 reveals the frequency, percentage, and mean distribution of the participants' lived experience of the Eucharist as sacrifice. The overall mean of 3.26 indicates that most of the time the sacrifice of Jesus offered in the Mass is an experience lived by the participants by way of offering and submitting to God their daily activities as well as bearing with patience the problems, difficulties, and challenges in life (3.38 and 3.33, respectively). The catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. Hence, as the participants participate in the sacrifice of Jesus

in the Eucharist, they also share in the sufferings of Jesus by patiently enduring difficulties life may bring them.

Table 5. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean Distribution of the Participants' Lived Experience the Eucharist as communion

<i>The Eucharist enables me to...</i>	Mean	SD	VI
EUCHARIST AS COMMUNION			
1. get involved in parish activities	2.75	1.08	MT
2. get involved in the school's BEC session	2.71	1.08	MT
3. become more concerned in strengthening the bond of relationship with my family	3.34	0.83	MT
4. deepen my relationship with others	3.28	0.89	MT
5. deepen my relationship with God	3.56	0.66	A
6. become more responsive to the call of discipleship.	3.28	0.85	MT
Composite Mean	3.23	0.62	MT

The overall mean of 3.23, as shown in Table 5, indicates that most of the time the celebration of the Eucharist enables the participants to be in communion with God and others. Thus, the expression of being "One" with God is witnessed by the participants by becoming more solicitous in strengthening relationship with the members of the family and by actively engaging in the school and parish activities (3.34, 3.28, and 2.78, respectively). It can also be gleaned from the table that the participants manifest union with God by becoming more responsive to the call of discipleship (3.28). Thus, the unity experienced in the family as well as in the community, sustained or deepened through faith and works, is a living witness for God, who really binds Himself in the believing community.

Table 6. Pearson r values showing the relationship between the students' knowledge and their witnessing of the Eucharist

Quality of Participation	Knowledge	
	r	sig.
	.045	.468
Living the Eucharist as Presence	.157*	.011
Living the Eucharist as Sacrifice	.115	.063
Living the Eucharist as Communion	.097	.115

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows the Pearson's r values showing the extent of relationship between knowledge and participation and witnessing of the Eucharist. Findings

reveal that only knowledge and living of the Eucharist as presence were significantly associated. This finding implies that a deep understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrament enables one to live and witness the Eucharist. Further, the more knowledge of the Eucharist a student has acquired in class, the more he or she is likely to feel the presence of God during Mass; hence, it can be deduced that full understanding or deep knowledge of the Eucharist translates to an active engagement in the call of the Church to become sharers of God's mission. Thus, everyone who partakes in the Eucharist and follows Christ is called to be a servant to all.

Table 7. Pearson r values showing the relationship between the students' participation in and their witnessing of the Eucharist

	Quality of participation	
	R	Sig.
Living the Eucharist as Presence	.436**	.000
Living the Eucharist as Sacrifice	.371**	.000
Living the Eucharist as Communion	.353**	.000

Table 7 reveals that the students' extent of participation in the Eucharist was significantly associated with their witnessing of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion. That is, living the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion is significantly linked to students' extent of participation in the Eucharist. When students actively engage themselves in their teacher's discussion in class about the Eucharistic celebration, they likely participate in the Mass and therefore become witnesses of God's presence, sacrifice, and communion. Participation in the Holy Eucharist demands that one has to give witness to the truth and love that Christ taught us. Pope Benedict XVI (2012) in his encyclical letter "Deus Caritas Est" cited that participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice is a union with Christ in the outpouring of His life for love of God and of our brothers and sisters. Further, he said that the love of God, given to us in the Holy Eucharist, is a gift meant to be shared with others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing findings, the freshman students' knowledge of and participation in the Holy Eucharist are associated with living the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion; that is, both knowledge and participation contribute to the

witnessing of God during Mass. The finding confirms Tisdell [5] and Wiltse's assertion [6] that transformative learning theory in spirituality tells about how educators affect students' life in the process of learning and experiencing spiritual development. Evidently, teacher's guidance and assistance in the classroom teaching of the Eucharist help students to become more participative in witnessing their encounter of Christ in the holy Mass.

Findings of the study imply that both the Campus Ministry and the Religious Studies teachers play a crucial role in the spiritual formation of the students, the Catholics in particular. Hence, it is important for the Campus Ministry to promote further knowledge of and participation in the Eucharist to make them active participants in the celebration of the Holy Mass. Moreover, it is necessary for the Religious Studies teachers to emphasize strongly through catechism the teachings of the Church especially the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. By that, the students will be led to reflect critically on the importance and meaning of the Mass as means of responding to the call of the Church to exercise their missionary role as living witnesses of Christ's presence in the world.

For further recommendation, the study is limited to cover only the interrelationship of the freshman students' knowledge, participation and witnessing of the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice and communion, to strengthen their knowledge and participation during the celebration of the holy mass. Thus, it is recommended that future researchers may investigate other reasons concerning the extent of knowledge and participation of the students in the Eucharist. Future researchers may also endeavor to investigate on the other experiences of the students based on how they lived the Eucharist as presence, sacrifice, and communion. Lastly, future researchers may also explore other variables that may possibly link to students' extent of knowledge and participation of the Eucharist as means of strengthening their encounter of the Living God.

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