The Traditions Of Eucharist In Africa

As we look throughout history norms and trends change, yet we can all agree when it comes to culture and traditions do not change or conform to the change of time. Within every culture in the world there are traditions, rituals and rites of passages that an individual must take to enter a new phase in their life, to signify that they are an adult within their community or clan. Such rites of passages are fundamental aspects that are ingrained into the individual which gives them a purpose in life and guides them in a way to better understand who they are, and the role that they have in their community. To understand what makes an individual an adult we shall look at the African perspective of male circumcision and the Catholic perspective of receiving sacraments such as baptism, communion and confirmation.

In Africa celebrating one's transition into adulthood through initiation rites is one of the most widespread practices in the continent. Initiation rites mark the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood, for example, "among the Bemba coming-of-age rites may last for a month and include secret sayings and special songs and dances performed in the woods and in an initiation house". In different societies in Africa, the process of adulthood varies from tribe to tribe, in Kenya the Gussi process of adulthood starts from the age of eight. The Initiation Rites document also points out that, "the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania initiate youths between ages 15 and 18". Paul Kyalo states in his journal titled Initiation Rites and Rituals in African Cosmology that,"rituals are capable of expressing and communicating several levels of meaning in societies, the meanings or functions of a ritual may not be manifest or obvious but only latent or hidden to the participants themselves". Rituals are symbolic, routinely done and are constantly being practiced in action and in routine, it connects us with what we consider the most valuable dimensions in our lives. When rituals take place often it is a significant event in an individual's life, it helps the individual understand the importance in how their life is going to transition once they partake in the ritual. This action provides a structure from what is familiar to the unknown, the transition of becoming an adult is an important event in the individual's life, this change causes the person to move from the familiarity of dependence and the protection of childhood to assume the mantle of responsibility in the adult world. Paul Kyalo made the observation that," in primal societies, transitions to adult status often coincide with physical puberty or sexual maturity…...social puberty rites have to do with the transition from the asexual world of childhood to an adult society that is differentiated by sexual roles". Rites are passed down from the elders to the young, this ensures that the young are handed down cultural values and beliefs for generations to come, taking part of the initiation rites symbolizes your place in your community.

In Africa initiation rites are what makes an individual grow and develop in their journey to adulthood, the rights came from the ancestors in order to form a connection between the individual and their community, and connect the community to the spiritual world. Initiation rites are a natural part of the community, the rites are essential to the community and the individual. If rites are done properly the individual becomes a responsible, community-involved adult, when someone is initiated they undergo fundamental sets of rites to prepare them for adulthood, each rite prepares them for a new phase of their life. Rites mark the end of one phase and begging into a new one, the process of initiation has to do with the individual's maturity from infancy to maturity, practicing such initiation rites have been a key component of the traditional African

culture since time immemorial. Professor Manu Ampim clarifies that “ a rite is a fundamental act (or set of rituals) performed according to prescribed social rules and customs”. The rite of adulthood where the male is circumcised is the second major rite of initiation in African society. Circumcision takes place usually on the onset of puberty, usually when the individual is around twelve and thirteen years old. Professor Ampim helps us understand that “once the children have reached the right age, they are taken out of the community and away from the concerns of everyday life, to teach them all the ways of adulthood: including the rules and taboos of the society; moral instruction and social responsibility; and further clarification of his/her mission or calling in life”. This helps the individual transition into adulthood by being guided and is taught what is expected from them and their new responsibilities within the community that is now established.

C.N Nwadiokwu, and E.S Nwadiokwu and her colleagues state, “the significance of the rites is to introduce the candidates to adult life. In the community they are allowed to share in the full privileges and duties”. Boys undergo circumcision, the specialists who perform the circumcision use a special kind of knife, the operation is painful but the males are encouraged by their parents not to cry or shout but to endure the pain. The male who manages to go through the procedure without crying or showing any sign of weakness (pain) is highly praised within the community, the community celebrates the new stage of life of the individual by dancing, singing, eating and drinking and making offerings to the living dead. C.N Nwadiokwu, and E.S Nwadiokwu emphasize, “ circumcision rites symbolizes separation from childhood, the dancing and rejoicing strengthen community solidarity”. The communities celebrate when a new member is inducted into the adult life, it marks an important part of the new adult’s life.

Looking at specific nations in Africa, the Xhosa and Kurya, are all about tradition and how tradition stood as the test of time, to them circumcision is sacred and necessary and is the ultimate step to be taken as a proper way for the males to enter their manhood. Without the traditional rite of passage, there can not be a transformation of being an adult because,“the traditional rites of passage, communal or individual, continue to form an essential part of the transformation process by which young people in many South African communities are formally guided to adulthood”. Male circumcision is known to be one of the oldest procedures known, it can be traced back to the time of Christ, when it comes to Africans circumcision is both a social and cultural aspect that is significant to who they are and their identity. Xhosa people are more likely to value traditional circumcision than medical circumcision, they engrave this mindset into the youths' heads by ridiculing them if they are not circumcised or they are but by medical means. A male child must undergo the circumcision rite as a transitional period into manhood, and the expectation thereafter is to become a father. Lungelo Manona, Andrea Hurst state, “it is, therefore, the period of preparation for the young male to begin undertaking adult and family responsibilities as a man”. During the period of a boy’s circumcision, he is trained to keep the tradition and customs of his forefathers so that he may attain power within his community and beyond, before the initiation take place clan leaders with performing traditional rituals to be in good spirits with their ancestors and to ensure the safety of the participants to be initiated. Lungelo Manona, Andrea Hurst brings an emphasis on the Kurya on the importance of circumcision,“to the Kurya circumcision shows that a son is ready for marriage - with women reported having a negative attitude towards uncircumcised men”. The whole procedure is painful, and pain is an important aspect, the boys who are being circumcised need to show that they can withstand the pain, any male who does not show pain is seen as brave and courageous, which is important that males display to the Kurya. Communities take circumcision very seriously, and weakness is not favored, “for this, and other traditionally circumcising

communities, the non-expression of pain during traditional circumcision is viewed as a 'test' that initiates must undergo and 'pass' in order to acquire responsibilities that come with manhood". Those who have successfully gone through circumcision have earned the title of adult and gain respect in their community.

When we look at religion throughout history sacraments have remained as they are, and they do not go through the cycle of change or modification, we must know that sacraments are not traditions or rituals. Through the sacraments we can better who we are as people and live the way God intended us to, the sacraments strengthen our connection with God and our faith. The three sacraments of initiation in the church are baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Baptism frees us from original sin, by washing away our sins we are renewed with new life, Eucharist allows us to taste the body and blood of Jesus, in this sacrament we remembered how he sacrificed himself for us so we could have eternal life. confirmation strengthens your faith and affirms your maturity within the church. Christian initiation benefits everyone, not just the initiated but the whole community as well when Christians get initiated into the mystery of God, who guided our ancestors to the path of salvation. In Christianity, there are three sacraments of initiation Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation. Baptism is the focal point in Christian life, it cleanses our spirit and opens us to receive the other sacraments. Through Baptism our original sin is washed away and we are reborn, through baptism, we become members of christ. The document Receiving the Sacraments states, "baptism imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and so can only be received validly once". Baptism is the first step to be initiated, when presenting a child for baptism parents have to make sure that their home is stable and nurturing for the child so their faith can flourish. The child needs to have an atmosphere where their faith can grow and develop. Once we receive baptism it is within us forever, "baptism imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and so can only be received validly once". The Eucharist can only be given to baptized Catholics, receiving the sacrament unifies the individual with other Catholics. Eucharist is only for those who fully believe within the faith,"Those who obstinately doubt or deny any of the required beliefs of the Catholic faith are not permitted to receive this Sacrament". The Eucharist is the second sacrament of Initiation, the Eucharist is a great mystery because in this sacrament ordinary bread is turned into Jesus's body and wine is turned into his blood. Participating in the Eucharist we partake in the covenant which Jesus had with his disciples at the last supper, the Eucharist joins the individual and his family in the body of Christ. Father Grzegorz Py?lak states, " a Christian sacramental lifestyle arises from worship, and the Eucharist leads the baptized person into the fullness of his initiation". The Eucharist brings us fullness, by eating the body of Christ, and drinking his blood just as his apostles did at the last supper.

In the Eucharist, we undergo a transformation and elevation to who we are as people. In receiving the Eucharist parents play a crucial role of introducing their child(ren) into the sacrament, parents are often active in preparing their child(ren) to receive their first communion. Parents can attend Sunday classes with their child or attend their communion practices if they wish to. Father Grzegorz Py?lak brings attention to us that not only the parents should but effort, so should the child," children, in turn, should be instilled with a sense of the solemnity and importance of their First Communion, which will enable them to fully participate in the Mass by receiving Jesus in the Eucharist". Receiving the Sacraments talks about the importance of confirmation, "the third sacrament of initiation is confirmation imprints in the soul a character, a certain spiritual and indelible Sign, and so can only be received validly once". Once you are confirmed in the church you are to profess your faith openly, spread the gospel, during confirmation the individual receives seven gifts. Confirmation gives us many gifts such as, "

wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord”. This final sacrament completes the initiation process that deems an individual an adult within the catholic church. With confirmation we are called to strengthen and develop our spiritual life, it should also, “strengthen the bond that already exists between the baptized and the Church by establishing a more complete union between man and Christ”. Before an individual receives confirmation, the church makes sure the individual is prepared and understands the deeper meaning of the sacrament, usually the person must meet requirements and attain moral qualifications. The goal of confirmation is to prepare the person to be an active participant in the church, with this the person becomes responsible for themselves and their fellow community, when you receive confirmation you are seen as an adult in the church and you are now able to take on responsibilities. The requirements needed to be fulfilled by the participants give them knowledge and make sure they are familiar with the teachings and practices of the church and the faith, this helps the individual navigate through their life especially when they are found in difficult situations. The process of confirmation should be taken step by step, and happen gradually so the participants can immerse themselves in understanding the significance of this sacrament. Having an attitude that focuses on your faith,“ helps individuals understand the sacrament of Confirmation, youth who are raised in a spirit of authentic faith easily and courageously witness Christ in their lives”. Christian maturity is seen within confirmation, individuals should live out their faith through their action and their faith, they should resist to fall from grace and resist any temptation that goes against their professed faith.

Jesus Christ introduced us to the sacraments in the New Testament and was entrusted to the church to carry out his message and teachings, the apostles went through initiation in order to become Christian their journey of initiation helped them deepen their understanding of their newfound faith and the importance it has in their life. Together at one altar states, “certain essential elements will always have to be present: the proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, the profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion”. The basis of Christian initiation are the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist which give the foundation to live our Christian life as Jesus intended, participating within the sacraments bring development, nourishment to our life. The sacraments change us spiritually,“the faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life”. Through Baptism we become we bond with Christ and we become children of God, receiving baptism, washing away our sins, granting us eternal life when we die our spirit is renewed through water and the Holy Spirit. When we partake in the Eucharist we eat the body of Christ and drink his blood, we do this so we have eternal life and show our unity with God, by doing an act Jesus’ disciples did at the last supper. Confirmation helps us become more righteous within our faith,“confirmation fills us with the Holy Spirit and makes us more completely the image of the Lord, so that we bear witness to him before the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness”. Family in every community is responsible to raise the child and bringing them into the faith, it is the family's job to pass on the faith, the values, and the message from one generation to the next. An individual can live their life with much ease when they know the meaning and importance of Christian initiation.It must be emphasized that those who want to partake in the initiation process should be introduced slowly and gradually so that the individual can be fully immersed and present in the process to get a deeper understanding of the step they are about to take.