

The Eucharist: Catholic Beliefs and Practices  
*The second in a series of teachings on the Eucharist*

Archbishop Fulton Sheen, when teaching about the Mass, emphasized the notion of sacrifice. If we take time to ponder the notion, there is little in life that does not require sacrifice. This especially applies to relationships between people. A fundamental principle of life is that there is no communion or exchange of love without sacrifice. Even with the most mundane daily actions, sacrifice is necessary. By way of analogy, every day we must take in food for nourishment. If we do not eat, we become weak and can even die if we go too long without food. To eat something,



whatever it is, be it a vegetable or a steak, requires the substance to sacrifice its life in order for us to take on its nourishment. Relationships too require sacrifice. Parents and spouses will readily recognize this. What marriage does not require making significant personal adjustments for one's spouse! What parent has not had to pour themselves out to take care of infant children! Understanding the significance of sacrifice helps us to perceive the element of sacrifice in Eucharist.

Through the elements of bread and wine transformed into the presence of Christ, we receive the spiritual nourishment provided as a result of his sacrifice on the Cross. The reason why Jesus instructed his disciples to continue to gather for this meal was so that they could ingest his sacrifice. By ingesting the Eucharistic elements, we ritually ingest the sacrifice of the Cross that he embraced for us. Very much like the Hebrews of old who were instructed to eat a roasted lamb at Passover, its blood having marked the lintels and door posts of the homes of Hebrews to protect them from death, Christ is our saving Lamb. The sacrifice of Jesus is his total gift of self to the Father on our behalf. He sacrificed himself, not for himself, but for us. Christ did not need to sacrifice himself on the Cross. We needed him to sacrifice himself for our eternal well-being. As we partake of the sacred elements of bread and wine transformed into Christ, we participate in his sacrifice. And as simple elements of bread and wine are transformed, we who partake of these elements are being transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. When ingesting regular food, the elements of what we eat are assimilated into our bodies for our nourishment. Ingesting the Eucharist, however, is the opposite. By ingesting the Body and Blood of Christ, we are assimilated into Christ for our spiritual nourishment. Eucharist transforms us spiritually into a closer image of the Lord with the hope that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. St. Paul once said it so well, "I no longer live. It is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).