

# St. Mark Study Guide

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## March 29, 2017: Eucharist as sacrifice, meal and real presence

The Church did not bring the Eucharist into being, the Eucharist, instead, brought the Church into being. The experience of the Eucharist is rooted in the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his Apostles. “In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; ‘thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament’” (CCC, no. 1337, citing Council of Trent: DS 1740). By the words “Do this in memory of me,” Jesus commanded the Apostles and their successors to repeat his actions and words “until he comes again.”

From earliest times, the Church has remained faithful to this command. Particularly on Sunday, the day of Christ’s Resurrection, the faithful has gathered for the Breaking of the Bread. This practice has continued unbroken for two thousand years right up to the present day. In the Gospel of John, instead of an account of the institution of the Eucharist, there is the narrative of the foot washing (Jn. 13:1-20) at the beginning of the Last Supper, which sets the tone of humble service, exemplified by Christ and fulfilled in his death on the Cross. The Church has selected this Gospel for the Holy Thursday liturgy, highlighting Christ’s teaching: “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn. 13:14-15). Christ’s Last Supper Discourse (Jn. 14:1–17:26) reflects Eucharistic themes of divine love, a union with Christ as intimate as a branch is to a vine, and a priestly prayer for the Apostles and those who would believe through them.

### THE MASS IS A SACRIFICE



The Mass is a sacrifice in the sense that when it takes place, Jesus Christ, through the bishop or priest celebrating the Mass, makes present sacramentally his saving, sacrificial death on the Cross by which he redeemed us from our sins. This Eucharistic sacrifice is the memorial of Christ’s redeeming death.

- **Memorial makes present:** The term memorial in this context is not simply a remembrance of past events; it is a making present in a sacramental manner the sacrifice of the

Cross of Christ and his victory. “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and ‘the work of our redemption is carried out’” (EE, no. 11).

- **Unbloody Sacrifice:** In this divine sacrifice which is made present in the Mass, especially in the Eucharistic Prayer, the same Christ who offered himself once in a *bloody* manner on the altar of the Cross offers himself in an *unbloody* manner. Present and effective, Christ's sacrifice is applied to our lives. "If the blood of goats... can sanctify those who are defiled... how much more will the blood of Christ... cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God" (Heb. 9:14).
- **Sacrifice of the Church:** The Mass is also the sacrifice of the Church. The ordained priest in the Mass links the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper (cf. EE, no. 29), thus making it possible that the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of all the members of the Church. In a self-centered culture where people are taught to extend themselves only for something in return, the sacrifices each of us make, following the example of Jesus, who freely sacrificed his life in love for all, point to the reality and power of God's love for us.
- **Unites Heaven and Earth:** The offering of Christ unites the members here on earth and those in heaven. The Pope, as chief shepherd of the People of God, is named at every Mass for the sake of the unity of the whole Church. The bishop of a diocese is named because he is the shepherd of the local Church and the instrument of its unity. The text of the Eucharistic Prayer also recalls the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints as they join us in this act of worship. Drawing from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, the Mass is also offered for the faithful departed—who have died in Christ but may not yet be totally purified—so they may enter the glory of heaven.



## THE MASS IS A HOLY MEAL

"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (Jn. 6:53). Jesus Christ shares with us his Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine. Thus the Mass is a sacred banquet that culminates in the reception of Holy Communion.

- **Preparation:** The Church urges us to prepare conscientiously for this moment. We should be in the state of grace, and if we are conscious of a grave or serious sin, we must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion. We are also expected to fast from food or drink for at least one hour prior to the reception of Holy Communion. St. Paul, wrote 'Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord' (1 Cor11:27). That means that all must examine their consciences as to their worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord. This examination includes fidelity to the moral teaching of the Church in personal and public life" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholics in Political Life, 2004).
  - **Humility before God:** The Church gives us the humble words of a Roman centurion to say as we prepare to receive Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed" (cf. Mt 8:8). Although the



Church urges us to receive Communion at each Mass, there is an obligation for everyone to receive Communion at least once a year some time during the interval between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday.

- **Bread and Wine:** Since Christ is fully present under each form of the Eucharist (that is, both the consecrated Bread and Wine), it is sufficient to receive him under the species (form) of bread or wine alone
- **Union with Christ:** Holy Communion increases our union with Christ. Just as bodily food sustains our physical life, so Holy Communion nourishes our spiritual life. This Communion moves us away from sin, strengthening our moral resolve to avoid evil and turn ever more powerfully toward God. “The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin” (CCC, no. 1395).

## **THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST**

The term memorial in this context is not simply a remembrance of past events; it is a making present in a sacramental manner the sacrifice of the Cross of Christ and his victory. (CCC, no. 1374, citing Pope Paul VI, *Mystery of Faith*, no. 39).

- **Transubstantiation:** Since the Middle Ages, the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ has been called “transubstantiation.” This means that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. The appearances of bread and wine remain (color, shape, weight, chemical composition), but the underlying reality—that is, the substance—is now the Body and Blood of Christ.
- **Eucharistic Adoration:** As a sign of adoration, Latin Catholics genuflect to the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle or genuflect or kneel when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for prayer. Reverent reflection led the Church to enrich its Eucharistic devotion. Such worship is expressed in many ways including genuflection and in adoration of the Eucharist.

## ***THE EUCHARIST TRANSFORMS THE RECIPIENT***

At Mass, we are an assembly of believers called to be a community joined in the praise and worship of God. We do this in the singing of hymns, psalms, recitation of prayers and responses, especially in our “Yes” to God in the Great Amen.

- **Active participation, inside and out:** We make an interior intention and a profound inner offering, as St. Paul urges in Romans 12:1: “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” When the assembly of the faithful, from the hands of the priest, offers the sacrifice of Christ to the Father, the members of the assembly are called to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. In using the word body, St. Paul does not mean simply our flesh and bones, but rather our very selves.
- **Spiritual sacrifice:** In the Eucharistic Prayer, we hear that Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, made it his Body, and gave it for our salvation. We make an offering of ourselves. This inner drama at each Mass contributes to the process of our spiritual transformation into Christ. It all takes time. As Pope Benedict XVI told the young people gathered for the Twentieth World Youth Day:

*The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world. (Benedict XVI, Homily at Marienfeld, Twentieth World Youth Day [August 21, 2005])*



- **Amen:** At Mass, when we are offered the Host and hear the statement “The Body of Christ,” we answer, “Amen,” that is, “Yes, I believe.” Only Jesus can transform us into himself. Our inner receptivity is critical. To receive love, we need to be open to it. The sacrificial gift of self at every Mass is the best way to be continuously transformed into Christ. Then in Christ we become bread for the world’s bodily and spiritual hungers.

### FOR DISCUSSION

1. What happens at the consecration in the Mass?
2. What are the effects of Holy Communion?
3. Why is it valuable to visit the Blessed Sacrament?
4. What is different about mass and other Christian worship experiences, if anything?
5. Catholics start every mass repenting of sin. Why do you think that is our practice?
6. Do you think the Eucharist is just a symbol of God or something more?
7. What does it mean when you are really present somewhere?
8. Is the Eucharist cannibalism?
9. Why is it necessary to salvation to feed both body and spirit?
10. Is the Eucharist the presence of Christ as he hung upon the cross 2,000 years ago or Christ risen from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father and living today?