



The Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist

~Review and Introduction~

Back in lesson six we looked at the Passover meal that God commanded the Israelites to celebrate before they left Egypt, and every year afterward as a memorial.

We also learned that the word 'memorial' didn't mean to the ancient Jewish people what it means to us today – it meant the God was working outside of time and space (which He can do since He created it) to make the one actual Passover present to the people each time they celebrated it. There was only one Passover meal – every celebration of it afterward simply made that one Passover present to the people celebrating it at that time.

We all know the story of the Last Supper, and most of us know that the Last Supper happened in the context of a Passover meal. It is very important to understand the connection between the Passover meal and the Last Supper to properly understand the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. Let's start by examining that doctrine.

Q and A

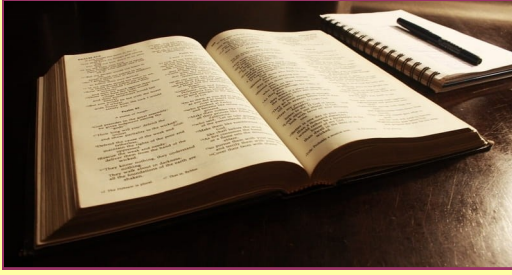


What does the word "Eucharist" mean? The word Eucharist comes from a Greek word meaning 'thanksgiving.' The Eucharist is another name for Holy Communion in the Catholic Church.

What do Catholics believe about the Eucharist? We believe that when the priest consecrates the bread and wine at Mass, that it truly and substantially becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. While the appearances of bread and wine remain, the substance is completely transformed, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into the real flesh and blood of Christ. Let's look to Sacred Scripture for the core basis of this teaching.

Read: John 6:32-36; 41-59; 60-69

Breaking Open The Word



Jesus very clearly tells His disciples that they will eat His Flesh and drink His Blood. Some counter this by saying Jesus was speaking symbolically, like when He said that He was the true vine and no one actually believed He was a plant. This is why it is important to know the correct context and interpretation of Scripture. Scripture shows us plainly that Jesus was not speaking symbolically in

John 6. When Jesus spoke symbolically in Scripture the people were always aware of it, and if they misheard Him, he corrected them. That does not happen here. Verse 60 tells us that the Jews knew that He was speaking literally and murmured about what a hard saying this was. And in verse 66 we see that they leave because the saying is too hard. And what does Jesus do? Does He call them back, clarify, and say that they misunderstood Him? No. He lets them go and asks His apostles if they also would leave. Peter, the leader, answers correctly in faith – “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

So, we see that Jesus has told His followers that they would be expected to eat His Body and His Blood. Where do we see Him putting His words into practice? Let’s move ahead to the Last Supper.

Read: Luke 22:14-20

Breaking Open The Word



Notice that Jesus does not say “This is a symbol of my Body or a symbol of my Blood.” He tells them that the bread IS His Body and the wine IS His Blood. And He also instructs them to “do this in remembrance of me.” Here is one of the main connections back to Passover – God instructed the Israelites to repeat the Passover yearly “as a memorial.” Remember what that meant? The Passover was made present outside of space and time when those God had instructed to celebrate it did so.

Who does Jesus instruct to continue with this new Passover? The Apostles, who He has already ordained through the ministry of binding and loosing. These are the first bishops who are instructed to carry on making Jesus’ actual Body and Blood present to us, and who pass that power down through Apostolic Succession. Here we see the words of Jesus fulfilled – this is how we are to eat His Flesh and drink His Blood – He comes to us in the humblest way, using simple wheat bread and grape wine.

Bringing It All Together

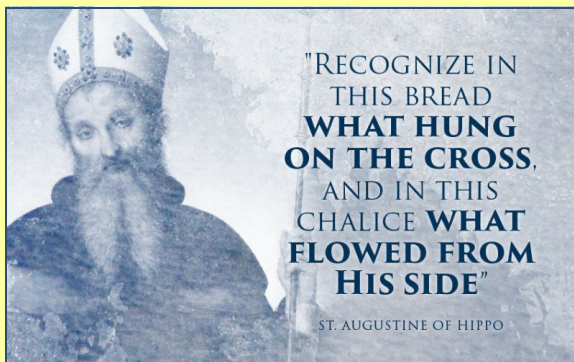
This process through which the bread and wine are changed into Jesus' Body and Blood is called transubstantiation. After the consecration, no bread and wine remain, it is fully the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. Only the appearances of bread and wine remain – the size, shape, color, etc. This is one of the greatest mysteries of our Faith.

What does history tell us? Did the early Christian believe they were eating the actual Body and Blood of Christ? They absolutely did. Let's look at a few examples starting with Saint Paul.

"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 Corinthians 11:27

"For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." – Justin Martyr (First Apology, 66)

"Christ has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own Blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own Body, from which he gives increase to our bodies." -St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, 180 A.D.



What do we see from these early Church Fathers, some of who were taught by the Apostles themselves? A unanimous belief that the Eucharist, Catholic Holy Communion, is the Flesh and Blood of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They took Jesus, God Himself, at His word, and have faithfully passed that teaching, and the power given them to consecrate the bread and wine, down to us today through the Apostolic Succession of Catholic Church.

The Eucharist is the central mystery and the source and summit of our Catholic faith, received directly from our Lord, and protected for over 2,000 years by the Church to this very day. Let's close out this lesson by reading what some of the Saints have had to say about the Eucharist through the years.

"There is nothing so great as the Eucharist. If God had something more precious, He would have given it to us." -Saint John Vianney

"This is the wonderful truth, my dear friends: the Word, which became flesh two thousand years ago is present today in the Eucharist." -Pope Saint John Paul II

"When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now." -Saint Teresa of Calcutta

"I will be with you always, until the end of the age." -Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:20)

