

SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

The Holy Eucharist completes the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Unlike the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, which are received only once and imprints upon the soul an indelible seal or character, the Eucharist is referred to as the “repeatable Sacrament of Initiation” and is “the source and summit of Christian Life.”¹ All the other Sacraments are oriented towards the Eucharist for it contains Christ Himself whose presence heals, restores and forgives us.²

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood that perpetuates and continues His sacrifice through the ages. He entrusts to the Church the memorial of His Death and Resurrection in this sacrament of love, a sign of unity and a bond of charity. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates and makes present that sacrifice of Christ --- the sacrifice that Christ offered once for all mankind on the cross and which remains ever present.

St. John reports in his Gospel the words of Jesus, that prefigure the institution of the Eucharist, by calling Himself the Bread of Life that has come down from heaven, “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*”³

Prologue: Promise of the Eucharist

1. All four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) recount the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish which fed more than 5,000 people who had sought and followed Jesus to hear His message by a hillside of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was moved with compassion toward the crowd --- it was late in the day and the crowd had not yet eaten. There was in the crowd a young man with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus, after giving thanks, blessed the loaves and fish and instructed his disciples to distribute the food. Gathering the fragments after they had eaten, the disciples were able to collect twelve wicker baskets full.⁴
2. The next day, the crowd that remained again sought Jesus and found Him in Capernaum, a small town by the Sea of Galilee. Jesus berates them saying, “*Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you say signs (miracles) but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not seek for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you.*”⁵ His reprimand to these members of the original crowd was to emphasize their lack of faith by missing the truth, --- of His demonstrative power to act in manner beyond the natural order. Rather, the crowd had marveled at the

¹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 368, para. 1322) Print.

² Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 368, para. 1324) Print.

³ John 6:35

⁴ Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13

⁵ John 6:26-27

material good of satisfaction of the human appetite.

*“So they said to him, Sir, give us this bread always“. “Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”*⁶

So, the people accepted Jesus’ reprimand and anxiously sought to learn of that *“bread that does not perish, a bread that endures for eternal life.”*

3. Jesus, before explaining the nature of this life-giving bread, reiterates their lack of faith in Him, saying, *“But I told you that although you have seen me, you do not believe. . . . I came down from heaven to do the will of the one who sent me --- the Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believe in Him may have eternal life and I shall raise him on the last day.”*⁷ And still, the crowd is not convinced of Jesus being sent by the Father, nor of Jesus being the *“bread that came down from heaven.”* *“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, I came down from heaven?”*⁸
4. Jesus re-emphasizes his remarks and adds, *“I am the living bread of life that came down from heaven (Unlike the manna in the desert that the ancestors had eaten and they died) so that one may eat it and not die . . . and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”* *The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat.’ Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you do not have life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.”*⁹
5. Many of His followers who were listening said, *“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”* *Jesus said “Does this shock you? . . . There are some of you who do not believe . . . For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.”*¹⁰

It is only by faith that we can accept the reality and the promise made by Jesus as spoken here candidly, very openly, and without parables, with no possibility of misunderstanding. Jesus did not recant His words nor recapitulate his terminology, nor did He speak figuratively.

6. *“As a result of this, many disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you want to leave? Simon Peter answered him, Master to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”*¹¹

⁶ John 6:34-35

⁷ John 6:38-40

⁸ John 6:41-42

⁹ John 6:48-58

¹⁰ John 6:60-65

¹¹ John 6:66-69

Jesus' words were not meant to be metaphorical; in fact, He repeats it six times and allows the world-minded, even some of his followers, to leave Him rather than to withdraw His words.

The Promise Fulfilled

7. Jesus knew very well the needs of our sense-base human nature so he did not leave His disciples without the aid of an external system of beliefs. He willed the Sacraments to be indispensable channels of the Christian life. Also, He did not want His Disciples then and now be left alone to make the arduous journey to eternal life alone. Therefore He willed that His Disciples, until the end of time, be formed into a living and hierarchical society, His Church.
8. Jesus chose the time of the Jewish feast of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum; Jesus sat at table with His apostles and said to them, "*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat of it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God . . . and He took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my Body which is given you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* And likewise the cup after supper, saying, '*This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my Blood.*'"¹²
9. By celebrating the Last Supper with His Apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to the Father by His Death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the Kingdom.¹³

Just as the Jewish Passover was a means of freedom from physical death, the New Passover of Christ, the Eucharist, is liberation from the clutches of sin, which causes "spiritual death."
10. The account of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is not found in the Gospel of John. John was the last to write his Gospel; the other three Gospels were already known and the celebration of the Eucharist was already practiced. In the very body of his Gospel, John clearly indicates his purpose is to give an exposition of the divine nature and mission of Jesus so "*That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name.*"¹⁴
11. The command of Jesus to repeat His actions and words "*until He comes*" does not only ask us to remember Him and what He did. It is directed at the liturgical celebration (the Mass) by the Apostles and their successors of the memorial of Christ, of His life, of His death, of His resurrection and of His intercession in the

¹² Luke 22:7-20; Matt. 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

¹³ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 373, para. 1340) Print.

¹⁴ John 20:31

presence of the Father.¹⁵

12. In the celebration of the Eucharist, ordinary unleavened bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit at the actions and words of the ordained priest.

The whole Christ is present: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the **appearance** of bread and wine; it is the **Glorified Christ** who had risen from the dead. **The whole Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially contained In the Eucharist.**¹⁶

13. In the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Glorified Christ becomes present under the appearance of bread and wine at the moment of the recitation of the words of Consecration uttered by the Ordained Priest and through the power and action of the Holy Spirit. At that moment the “substance “ of bread and the “substance” of wine are changed into the Substance of the glorified Body and Blood of Christ while the “accidents” or “appearance” of bread and wine remain.

By the term “substance” we refer to the “reality of essence” of its very existence. The terms “substance” and “accidents” used here are philosophical terms that have been adapted by Church theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas and others, in an effort to better understand and explain the faith; to convey the fact that what appears to be bread and wine is in every way and in fact the Body and Blood of the resurrected Jesus Christ; a belief through the gift of faith, and on the authority of Jesus as revealed in the divinely inspired word of God found in Sacred Scripture.

14. This change of “substance” from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is called “**Transubstantiation**”. This is a great mystery of our faith and can only be known by the very teaching of Christ and understood in the Tradition of the Apostles and of the early Church Fathers. At every Eucharist, Christ offers Himself as nourishment and strength to unite us with Him and lead us to God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

15. In our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, we receive a strengthening of our union with the Lord, forgiveness venial sin, and assistance in avoiding mortal sin. Receiving this Sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity/love between the communicant and Christ, and reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁷

Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. Indeed, the Lord said, “*He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.*”¹⁸ What material food produces in our bodily life, the Eucharist

¹⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 373, para. 1341) Print; 1 Cor. 11:26

¹⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 383, para. 1374) Print.

¹⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 395, para. 1416) Print.

¹⁸ John 6:56-57

wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. It preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism.¹⁹ As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to weaken in daily life. It revives our love and enables us to break our disordered attachments to creatures and root ourselves to Him.²⁰

16. Why does Jesus give of Himself to us in the Eucharist?

Because of His love for us, Jesus gives of Himself in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment in our journey to eternal life through the graces, which have been purchased by Jesus Himself in the divine plan of Salvation through His Passion, Death and Resurrection. The whole plan of Salvation is directed to our participation in the life of communion with the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. That communion is deepened beyond Baptism and Confirmation through our participation in the Eucharist.

17. In the reception of the Holy Eucharist, we need to remember that we are not changing Christ into ourselves; rather **Jesus is transforming us into Himself**. This requires a proper understanding of the Real Presence of Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine.²¹

For proper reception of the Eucharist, the person must be properly disposed, be in the “state of grace” free from serious sin, and fasting from food and drink for at least an hour.²²

Furthermore, the recipient of the Eucharist should approach the Sacraments with interior attention, be free from external distractions of the moment, (such as greeting others in the congregation), and devotion infused with the virtues of Faith, Hope and Love:

With Faith - In a firm belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

With Hope - In a trust of Christ’s promises and of His graces to attain the Kingdom Heaven and Eternal Life.

With Love - In an act of Love of God for His own sake and in gratitude for His gifts.

18. Most often, the Eucharist is distributed under one species only, the Host; are we receiving the entire Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ is truly and wholly present under the appearance of either the bread or the wine in the Eucharist. Furthermore, Christ is wholly present in any fragment of the consecrated Host or in any drop of the Precious Blood. Nevertheless, it is especially fitting to receive Christ in both forms. This allows

¹⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 389, para. 1392) Print.

²⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 390, para. 1394) Print.

²¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily 20th World Youth Day, 8/21/05

²² (1996, November 14). In *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Retrieved from <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/guidelines-for-the-reception-of-communion.cfm>

the Eucharist to appear more perfectly a banquet, a banquet that is a foretaste that will be celebrated with Christ at the end of time.²³

The whole person of Jesus Christ, His living Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, is truly present in the Eucharist. So, then, by reception of only the consecrated Host, we are receiving all of the aspects and makeup of the same living person of Jesus Christ. As such, there is no obligation to receive the Eucharist under both species.

The efficacy of the Eucharist does not depend on the minister giving the Eucharist. Whether the Eucharist is distributed by the Pope, a Bishop, a Priest or a Eucharistic Minister, the spiritual effect of the Eucharist is the same on the recipient.

19. Can non-Catholics receive the Eucharist?

The Church says, No! Is the Church being rude and exclusionary by not offering the Eucharist to non-Catholics? Everyone is welcome to celebrate the mysteries of our faith with us, however the Church considers itself as the “custodian” of the sacredness of the Eucharist as a source and summit of Christian life. To offer the Eucharist to those who do not believe in the **Real Presence** would reduce the Sacrament to a social act with little spiritual significance. The Catholic Church asks that the recipients of the Eucharist be in communion with each other, the Mystical Body of the Church, and with God.

20. The Real Presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist is an inexhaustible mystery that the Church cannot fully explain in words. We must remember that the Triune God is the creator of all that exists and has the power to do more than we can possibly imagine. As St. Augustine said, ‘If the word of the Lord Jesus is so powerful as to bring into existence things which were not, then, a fortiori, those things which already exist can be changed into something else.’²⁴

God created the world in order to share His life with persons who are not god. This great plan of salvation reveals a wisdom that surpasses our understanding. But we are not left in ignorance; for out of His love for us, God reveals His truth to us in ways that we can only understand through the gift of faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are thus enabled to understand at least in some measure what would otherwise remain unknown to us, though we can never completely comprehend the mystery of God.²⁵

²³ Eucharistic Mysterium, no.32

²⁴ De Sacramentis, IV, 5-16

²⁵ Committee on Doctrine of the USCCB. (2001, June). The Real Presence Of Jesus Christ In The Sacrament Of The Eucharist. In *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*. Retrieved from <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/order-of-mass/liturgy-of-the-eucharist/the-real-presence-of-jesus-christ-in-the-sacrament-of-the-eucharist-basic-questions-and-answers.cfm>