



THE EUCHARIST



"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 within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.'" John 6:53-54 (NABRE)

The Catholic Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist completes the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. While Baptism and Confirmation are received only once and imprint an indelible spiritual mark on the soul, the Eucharist is unique as the “*repeatable sacrament of initiation.*” It is also “the source and summit of the Christian life,” because it contains Christ Himself, who nourishes, heals, restores, and forgives us (CCC 1322, 1324). The Eucharist is the “source” because it contains Christ Himself, the source of all grace and life, and the “summit” because it is the highest form of worship and the most profound encounter with God available on earth.

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist, offering His Body and Blood as a perpetual sacrifice for all humanity. He entrusted the Church with this sacred memorial of His Death and Resurrection, calling it a sign of unity and a bond of charity. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, Christ’s one eternal sacrifice on the Cross is made present, bringing the faithful into communion with His saving act (CCC 1323).

The Promise of the Eucharist

Jesus promised the Eucharist in His “Bread of Life” discourse in John 6. After feeding a large crowd with five loaves and two fish, Jesus revealed that He is the true Bread of Life: “*Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst*” (John 6:35). He explained that the bread He gives is His flesh, offered for the life of the world.

Many found this teaching difficult to accept, and some followers left Him. Jesus did not soften His words, repeating: “*Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you*” (John 6:53). When asked if they would leave, Peter responded on behalf of the Twelve: “*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*” (John 6:68).

The Institution of the Eucharist

At the Last Supper, Jesus fulfilled His promise. Taking bread, He said: “*This is my Body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.*” Likewise, with the cup, He said: “*This cup is the new covenant in my Blood, which will be shed for you*” (Luke 22:19-20). In this act, Jesus transformed the Jewish Passover into the new Passover of His sacrifice, liberating us from sin and leading us to eternal life (CCC 1340).

The Real Presence of Christ

The Eucharist is not merely a symbol. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of consecration spoken by the priest, the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ. This transformation is called “*Transubstantiation*” (CCC 1376). While the appearance of bread and wine remains, the substance is entirely changed into Christ’s glorified Body and Blood.

Jesus is fully present—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—in the Eucharist. This Real Presence is based on His own words: “*This is my Body*” and “*This is my Blood*” (Mt. 26:26-28). Receiving the Eucharist allows us to abide in Christ and Christ in us, as He promised: “*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him*” (John 6:56).

The Effects of the Eucharist

The Eucharist brings profound spiritual benefits to the faithful:

- **Union with Christ:** The Eucharist deepens our communion with Jesus, nourishing our souls and strengthening the grace received at Baptism (CCC 1392).
- **Forgiveness and Renewal:** Receiving the Eucharist worthily forgives venial sins and strengthens us against the temptation to commit mortal sin (CCC 1416).

- **Unity with the Church:** The Eucharist unites us with the Body of Christ, the Church, strengthening the bonds of love within the community of believers (CCC 1396).
- **Spiritual Strength:** Like physical food nourishes the body, the Eucharist sustains our spiritual life, reviving our love for God and helping us grow in holiness.

Receiving the Eucharist

To receive the Eucharist worthily, one must:

- Be in a state of grace, free from mortal sin.
- Fast from food and drink (except water and medicine) for at least one hour before receiving.
- Approach the sacrament with faith, hope, and love, believing in Christ's Real Presence and desiring to grow closer to Him.

Non-Catholics and the Eucharist

The Church teaches that only Catholics in communion with the Church may ordinarily receive the Eucharist. This is not an act of exclusion but a recognition of the unity required in belief and practice. Offering the Eucharist to those who do not believe in the Real Presence would reduce its profound spiritual significance.

A Mystery of Faith

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a profound mystery that cannot be fully explained by human understanding. As St. Augustine said: *"If you understand, it is not God."* Through faith, we accept Christ's gift of Himself in the Eucharist and are drawn deeper into the mystery of God's love and saving plan for humanity.