

THE EUCHARIST

SACRED MEMORIAL, SACRED PRESENCE (Nos. 1322–1381)



“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. 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.”

-John 6:53-56

“The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ”

-St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c.350), *Catechetical Lectures* 19:7

The most important sacrament of all is the Most Holy Eucharist. All the other sacraments point toward it, and prepare us for it in some way. It is the new covenant (the new promise) which God made with us through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Last Supper of Jesus was the Jewish Passover Supper. It was the yearly renewal of God’s old covenant with the people of Israel. On the night God slew the firstborn of the Egyptians so that they would release the Israelites from slavery, the people of Israel were ordered by God to celebrate the Passover Supper. They were to kill a lamb, smear its blood on the doorposts of their homes, and then eat the lamb. As the Angel of God came to kill the firstborn, he would “pass over” any house which was marked by the blood of the lamb – the blood of the covenant – and those inside would not die. The next day the Israelites left Egypt and God brought them eventually to the land He had promised, and made them His special people: the people through which Jesus would come into the world!

At the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated the Passover, but then He did something new: He took bread, gave thanks to His Heavenly Father, and said, “This is my body.” Then He took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and said, “This is my blood.” The word “eucharist” is a Greek word which means “to give thanks,” and

refers to Jesus giving thanks to the Father as He blessed the bread and wine. After this blessing, the bread was no longer bread, and the wine no longer wine: they had become Jesus' body and blood! What Jesus would do the next day on the cross – that is, lay down His body and blood to the Apostles, and through them to the Church. We receive this gift of Jesus when we celebrate this sacrament. It may not look, taste, smell, or feel like Jesus, but it is His body and blood being given to us in a mysterious way.

We call the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus “transubstantiation.” This is a fancy way of saying that the bread and wine really become Jesus' body and blood. They are not just symbols, but the real thing! Who performs this miracle? Only a priest or a bishop can change bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. They have been given this power at their ordination, but it is not any human power which does this; it is Christ Himself working through the priest or bishop. Once bread and wine have been consecrated (blessed) and have become Christ's body and blood, we show them every respect. The consecrated hosts (blessed bread) are kept in the tabernacle, which should always be respected because it is Christ's throne on earth. Deacons, and even laypeople (with permission) can take the body of Christ from the tabernacle for Communion services, but this is not the same as Mass, which only a priest or bishop can celebrate.

What happens at Mass? The one crucifixion of Jesus is made present in a miraculous way at each Mass. This is why we call Mass a “sacred mystery.” We do not see them, but at Mass all the Angels and Saints of Heaven are present and celebrating with us. When we receive Holy Communion, we are receiving Jesus Himself: His life and all that is His to give. In exchange, we pledge our lives to Him.

Source and Summit of Christian Life

According to the Catechism, “The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Passover (CCC 1324).

Our whole life as Catholics is oriented towards worthy and fruitful reception of the Eucharist, and this life begins with the Eucharist as well. It is the source of all grace.

According to the Catechism, the Eucharist is:

- The source and fountain of grace
- The cause of our communion with the Church
- The culmination of God's saving actions in the world
- The anticipation of and participation in the heavenly liturgy

St. Irenaeus said, “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.”

Names for the Eucharist

The Eucharist goes by many names, each revealing a different aspect of this most wonderful sacrament.

1. Eucharist- From the Greek *Eucharisein*, which means “thanksgiving,” and expresses our gratitude to God for creation, redemption and sanctification.
2. Lord's Supper- Because of its connection to the Last Supper, in which Jesus instituted both this

sacrament and the sacrament of the priesthood. It also anticipates the wedding Feast of the Lamb at the end of time in the heavenly Jerusalem.

3. Breaking of the Bread- This was the first name for the sacrament of the Eucharist used by the early Christians and denotes its connection with the ancient Jewish rite of Passover. It is in the breaking of the bread that the disciples recognize Him after His Resurrection.
4. The Divine Liturgy- A common name in Eastern Catholic Churches. This name reminds us that the Church's whole liturgy finds its center and most intense expression in the celebration of this sacrament.
5. Holy Communion- Because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ and to our brothers and sisters in the Church, which is His Body.
6. Sacred Mysteries- An expression of the wondrous marvel of the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Our Lord upon the altar.
7. Holy Mass- Because the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (Latin: *missa*) of the faithful to fulfill God's will in their daily lives.
8. Most Blessed Sacrament: The Eucharist is the Sacrament of sacraments. The Eucharistic species reserved in the tabernacle is known by the same name.
9. Holy Sacrifice- This is the essential name for the Eucharist: before anything else, the Eucharist is a sacrifice in which Christ is truly offered.

Form and Matter

For a valid Eucharistic celebration, the proper form and matter are needed. The matter is wheat bread and grape wine (mingled with water). The form of the sacrament is the words of institution given by Christ at the Last Supper:

Take this, all of you, and eat it:

this is my body which will be given up for you. *Take this, all of you, and drink from it:*

this is the cup of my blood,

the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.

It will be shed for you and for many so that sins may be forgiven.

Do this in memory of me.

The essential form consists in the phrases "This is my Body" and "This is..my Blood," as taught by the Council of Trent

Proper Minister

The proper minister of this sacrament is a man who has been ordained either to the degree of the priesthood or the episcopacy. Members of the diaconate are not able to consecrate the Eucharist, as the institution of the Eucharist is connected especially with the priesthood.

How is the Eucharist a sacrifice?

Christ was sacrificed once in time upon the cross in Jerusalem. But the Eucharist is the means by which that one sacrifice and its fruits are perpetuated throughout time. In the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ offers Himself to the Father in an unbloody manner. The sacrifice of the Cross and the sacrifice of the Mass are the same: there is only one sacrifice. One happened once in time in a bloody manner, and one happens every time the Mass is offered in an unbloody manner. But the sacrifice is the same, and in both cases Christ is both the priest and the victim being sacrificed.

But what is the Eucharist exactly?

As with other sacraments, this reality is brought about by means sacramental signs and certain prayers. When this sacrament is brought about, the Church teaches that the substance of the bread and wine are entirely changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, in such a way that they are changed whole and entire, with all their parts, so that no bread or wine remains upon the altar after the change. Christ is truly present upon the altar offering Himself to the Father for the remission of sins.

In what way is Christ present?

This presence is called the *Real Presence*. Christ's presence in the sacrament is true and physical: His body, blood, soul and divinity. This Presence is the reason for many Catholic devotional and liturgical practices connected to the Sanctuary of the Church. It is the reason why we genuflect when entering or leaving (a bend of the knee acknowledging Christ's presence), why certain decorum is appropriate (or inappropriate) for the Liturgy, why some women choose to veil their heads, why the altar is kissed (as the place of sacrifice). So important is Christ's presence in this sacrament that almost all of what the Catholic Church does and believes is incomprehensible without it.

In stressing this Real Presence, we must understand it to be opposed to any purely symbolic or spiritual understanding of Christ's presence. When Christ is present in the sacrament, He is present in such a way that he who handles the consecrated host is said to be handling God.

Christ's presence is also full and entire in every particle of the Sacred Host and every drop of the Precious Blood. This is the reason why it is not necessary to receive from the chalice as well to receive the Body and Blood. He who receives even the smallest fragment of a consecrated host receives the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ.

The Signs of Bread and Wine

Bread and wine are important symbols in salvation history. The Catechism says: "In the Old Covenant bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator." But they also received a new significance in the context of the Exodus: the unleavened bread that Israel eats every year at Passover commemorates the haste of the departure that liberated them from Egypt; the remembrance of the manna in the desert will always recall to Israel that it lives by the bread of the Word of God; their daily bread is the fruit of the promised land, the pledge of God's faithfulness to his promises. The "cup of blessing" at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup.

The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist. The sign of water turned into wine at Cana already announces the Hour of Jesus' glorification. It makes manifest the fulfillment of the wedding feast in the Father's kingdom, where the faithful will drink the new wine that has become the Blood of Christ.

The first announcement of the Eucharist divided the disciples, just as the announcement of the Passion scandalized them: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" The Eucharist and the Cross are stumbling blocks. It is the same mystery and it never ceases to be an occasion of division. "Will you also go away?" the Lord's question echoes through the ages, as a loving invitation to discover that only he has "the words of eternal life" and that to receive in faith the gift of his Eucharist is to receive the Lord himself" (1334-1336).

The Institution of the Eucharist

The giving of the Sacrament of the Eucharist is narrated in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke as well as in the writings of St. Paul. Though St. John does not report the narrative of the institution, he relates for us the words of Jesus to the Jews of Capernaum, in which Christ states that He Himself is the bread come down from heaven, the true manna which gives eternal life. This is known as the "Bread of Life" discourse and is found in John 6.

The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving, Memorial, Presence

We must consider this Eucharist in three different aspects: as thanksgiving a praise to God the *Father*, as a sacrificial memorial of *Christ*, and as the presence of Christ by the power of His word and *Spirit*.

Thanksgiving: The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the work of Creation, in which Creation is presented to the Father through the death and Resurrection of Christ. We thank God for all of His works in creating, redeeming and sanctifying us, all through the work of Christ.

Memorial: Ever since the beginning of the Church, Christians have carried out this Sacramental offering of the Eucharist in obedience to Christ's command on the night of the Last Supper: "Do this in memory of Me." In Scripture, a memorial is not simply a retelling of past events but the mystical proclamation of those events, in which they become in a certain way present and real. When the Church celebrates the Passion of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ is remembered and made sacramentally present. It is a true sacrifice because it re-presents the sacrifice of Christ and applies its fruits. *The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Mass are but a single sacrifice.*

Presence: As we have mentioned above, in the Eucharist, Christ Himself becomes present among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. His presence is called the Real Presence, not to exclude other types of presence, but to denote presence in its fullest sense. The transformation of regular bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is given the name *transubstantiation*, which in Latin means "change in substance." The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species endures.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read what St. Paul says about the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, and answer these questions:

1. Where did Paul get his information on the Eucharist?
2. When we receive Communion, what are we doing? (see verse 26). Read #1403- 1405.
3. What does Paul warn us against in verses 27-29?
4. The Catechism (Nos. 1328–1332) identifies nine terms that are used to describe the mystery of the Eucharist. As a group, choose two and discuss how they deepen your appreciation of this sacrament.
5. What significance do bread and wine have in the culture and life of Israel, as described in the Old Testament? What does this reveal about the mystery of the Eucharist?
6. From the very beginning of the Church, the Mass has had a basic—and essentially unchanging—structure. What elements still form the core of the Eucharistic liturgy today?
7. What does the Church mean when it refers to the Mass as a memorial (anamnesis)?
8. How does the Mass unite us with Christians who have died?
9. How has your understanding of the Eucharist been enriched by your study of this section of the Catechism?
10. How is the Eucharist both a sacrifice and a sacred meal? Why are both aspects indispensable to our understanding of this profound sacrament?

Glossary Terms

Anamnesis

The “remembrance” of God’s saving deeds in history in the liturgical action of the Church, which inspires thanksgiving and praise (see No. 1103). Every Eucharistic prayer contains an anamnesis in which the Church calls to mind the passion, death, and resurrection and looks forward to the second coming of Jesus (see Nos. 1354, 1362). This is not a mere recollection, but a mysterious act which causes the power of God’s past works to be present to us in the liturgical action.

Eucharist

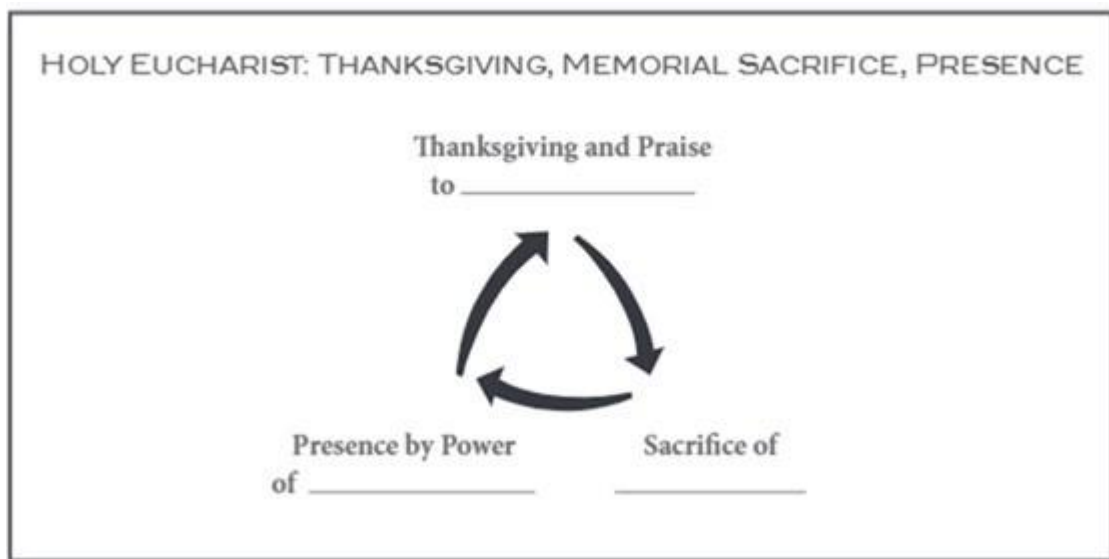
Meaning “thanksgiving,” this sacrament—the “source and summit” of Catholic Faith—makes present the sacrifice of Christ on the cross under the appearance of bread and wine; it is the liturgical celebration of Christ’s paschal mystery.

Real Presence

The unique, true presence of Christ in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine (see Nos. 1378–1379). The doctrine of the real presence involves the affirmation that Jesus is present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharistic species.

In persona Christi Capitis

In the Eucharistic celebration, it is Christ himself who presides; the bishop or priest representing him acts “in the person of Christ the Head,” that is, with a share in his authority given him by virtue of his ordination (see No. 1348). 73



Altar

Represents the two aspects of the Eucharist: 1) altar of sacrifice and 2) table of the Lord; “the symbol of Christ himself, present in the midst of the assembly of his faithful, both as the victim offered for our reconciliation and as food from heaven who is giving himself to us” (No. 1383).

Eucharist

This comes from a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.” The “source and summit” of the Catholic Faith

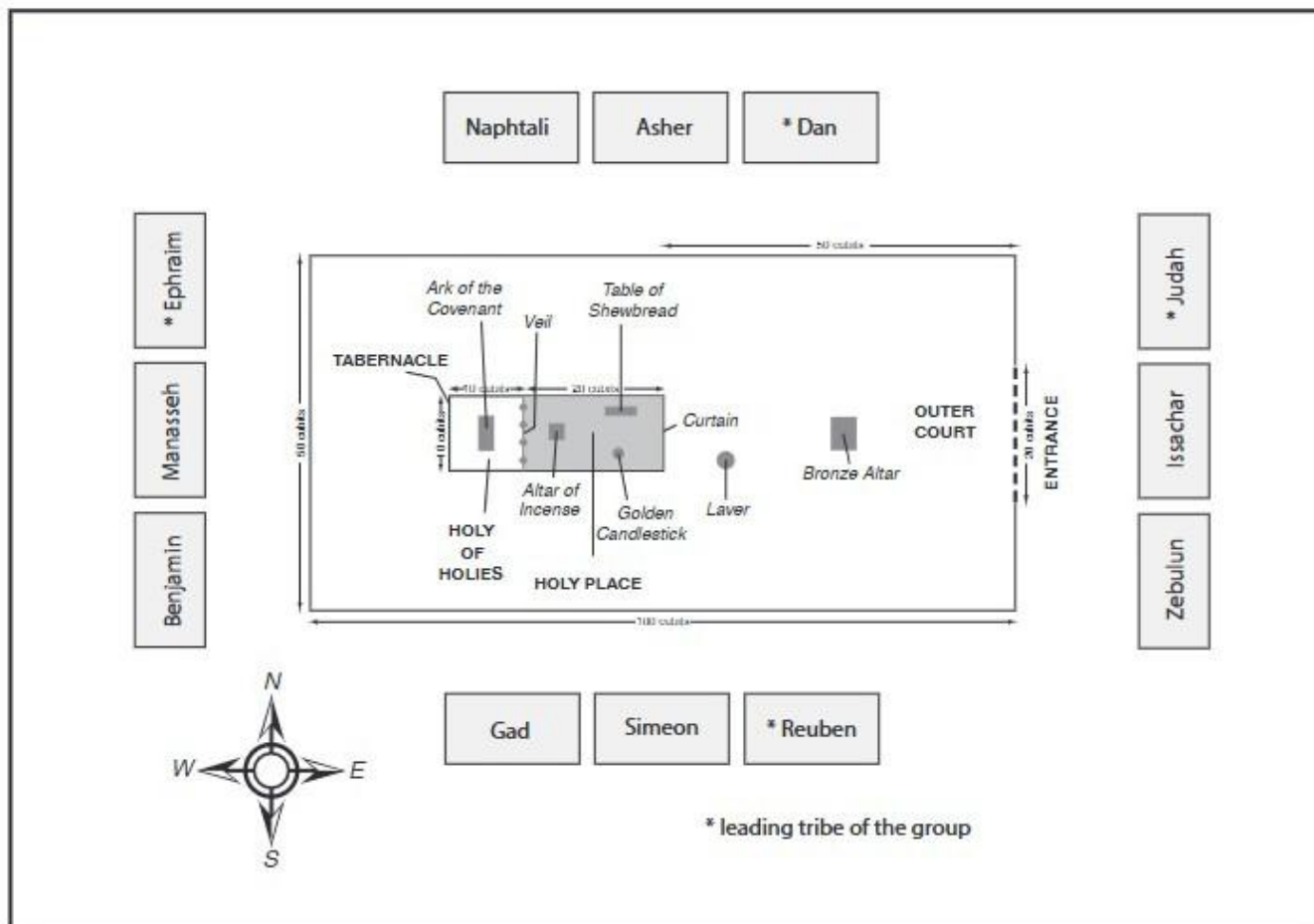
Glory

The Latin word gloria means “fame” or “majesty” The manifestation of God’s presence, called kavod in the Hebrew Old Testament, was translated into the Greek word doxa, which is the common word used for God’s glory in the New Testament; this word is the root of “orthodoxy,” which can mean either “right belief” or “proper worship.”

Koinonia

This is a Greek word meaning “participation” or “communion.” This term is used in reference to the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and also in reference to our fellowship in the Church in Acts 2:42.

Temple Fulfilled in the Mass



HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

Name: _____

From the Catechism Nos. 1322–1355

1. All of the sacraments and ministries of the Church are linked to the Eucharist and directed toward it.

As such, “The Eucharist is the _____ and _____ of the Christian life.”

2. The signs of bread and wine are the very heart of the Eucharist. How were these signs foreshadowed in the Old Testament?

3. “By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the

_____ its definitive meaning.”

4. When Jesus commands his followers, “Do this in memory of me,” to what is he referring?

5. T or F The writings of St. Justin Martyr in the early second century present a structure of the Eucharistic celebration that substantially differs from how we celebrate the Mass today.

From the Catechism Nos. 1355–1381

6. According to the Catechism, the Eucharist is considered as three things: _____,

_____, _____.

7. The Eucharist is the _____ of Christ’s Passover. It “makes present” sacramentally his sacrifice on the cross, as is seen in the _____ (or memorial) that follows the words of institution in the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass.

8. How does the Catechism describe the relationship between the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist?

9. "To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here _____, but also those already in the _____ of _____.

10. Christ is present in the Eucharistic species in a unique manner. What does the Catechism say about the relationship of the Eucharist to the other sacraments?
