

# A Mission Church

What does the Church believe and teach concerning the Eucharist? It is the Catholic belief that at the moment of consecration (when the priest says the words “This is my body..., This is my blood...” Christ is truly sacramentally, substantially present, soul and divinity (human and divine), under the appearance of bread and wine. This is really the fullness of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, offered for us.

This is a stumbling block for our brothers and sisters of various Christian professions. Lutherans and Episcopalians have a sacramental approach to the Eucharist that is close to that of the teaching of the Catholic Church. And yes, most Christian expressions of faith have a reverence for the Last Supper.

Let us go back to the Passover event of the Old Testament which prefigures the sacrifice of the cross and the Last Supper. There is a direct parallel between the Passover and Christ’s eternal sacrifice. The lamb was sacrificed and its blood was sprinkled on the doorposts of the homes of the faithful Israelites as God directed through Moses. The Israelites were awaiting freedom from captivity of the Egyptians. Christ becomes the lamb sacrificed for the salvation of all — freedom that allows believers to become sons and daughters of the Father, freed from sin and alienation.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus’ suffering and death occurred at Passover? John the

Baptist identifies Jesus as “...The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” [see Jn. 1:29] Jesus is the one who will be offered at the Passover. It will no longer be the ritual Passover lamb with its blood being sprinkled. It will, in Old Testament fulfillment, be Christ, whose body and blood is eaten (taken in). True believers will now seek the forgiveness of sins and the freedom to live as sons and daughters of the Father.

In Exodus 12:8 the Israelites are given instructions as to how the “lamb” was to be prepared and eaten. In Exodus 12:48 the instructions for who could share in the Passover meal were explicit. The non-believer was not to be admitted to the meal. The required circumcision of the male was a show of unity of belief. Baptism into Christ Jesus is now required along with an understanding that through the Eucharist, the Lamb of God will shield us from death as we’re given to eat and drink of the real food of heaven.

John’s Gospel, 6:22-59 the “Bread of Life Discourse” needs read a few times.

*“Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (6:27)*

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’” (6:32)*

*“I am the bread of life; whoever comes*



**THE MASS**  
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*This is my body...*  
*This is my blood...*



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*to me will never hunger; whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (6:35)*

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” (6:47-51)*

*“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. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven...whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (6:53-58)*

Just as the Israelites were commanded to partake of the Passover meal, in comparison we are commanded to partake of the life-giving meal that comes through Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. Paul speaks of this connection in 1 Cor. 5:7 when he calls Christ “our paschal lamb” who was slain for our sake. And what do we receive? A sharing in the life of Christ, a unity in his passion, death, and resurrection.

First, as Catholics we believe that this truly is the body and blood of Jesus. Second, we believe that it is the eternal offering of the Father, meaning Jesus died once and for all for our sins, and to bring us to the fullness of life. The sacrifice, the giving that “many” will have new life, is eternal. Remember, it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that God became man. It was the power of the Holy Spirit in which Christ was baptized and recognized. It is now the power of the Holy Spirit that we pray will change these offerings of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, joining

them with the everlasting offering made in our behalf. If we would believe otherwise, then only those present who shared in the Last Supper would be able to fulfill the words of Jesus. And only those who shared in the Passover in Egypt would have found freedom from oppression.

In both cases, we know that such thinking would be erroneous.

Finally, the words of Jesus are meant to direct us to the full sharing of his life, including his death and resurrection for the sake of all. Remember when we discussed offering ourselves along with the bread and wine in preparation for the consecration. If, as true believers, we have joined ourselves with Christ in offering our lives for the sake of others, we are now, by the power of the Holy Spirit once received at baptism, drawn into the sacrificial offering of new life for the world.

So yes, we believe Christ becomes sacramentally present in the form of bread and wine through the Holy Spirit and the words of Christ spoken by the priest. This we call transubstantiation. And in yet another mysterious way, he becomes present sacramentally in the Church through its members joining themselves to the sacrifice of Christ with whom they are one. It is mystery, believed a reality. It requires an ascent of our faith.

We also remember that those who are not of this belief, and/or are separated from the grace of God by sin, need instruction and/or reconciliation to truly grasp this gift and embrace it as their own way of fulfilling God’s plan of salvation. For the believer, the consecration is not a profession of faith in a symbolic remembrance, but rather, is found in a reality of the gift of God himself, and in the Body of Christ, the Church, lived out today. It is divine love poured out for all eternity.

#### **OTHER CITATIONS**

1 Corinthians 11:17ff  
1 John 5:16-17  
Matthew 26:1-2, 26-28  
Mark 14:22-25  
Luke 22:14-20  
1 Corinthians 5:7  
1 Corinthians 10:16  
1 Corinthians 11:23-29