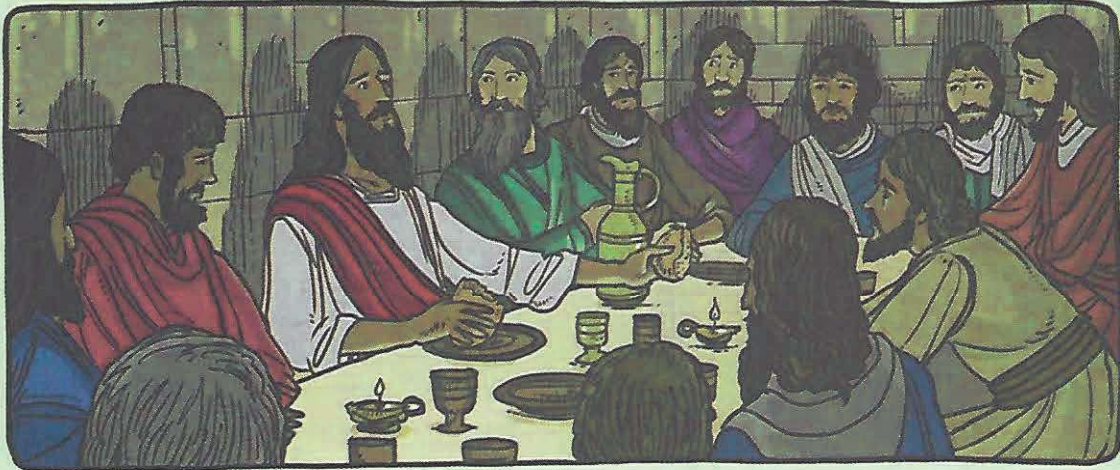


Chapter 7:

We Celebrate the Gift of the Eucharist



Introduction

Good friends like to share things with each other. You might share toys and games. You might share food and even clothes. Even more important, you do things together and share your ideas with each other. In all these ways, you are sharing a part of yourself with your friend.

Jesus is our special friend. He does not give just a part of himself to you. He gives his whole self to you in the Eucharist. What a wonderful and amazing gift from God!

Scripture Story: The Last Supper

In the Gospels, there are many stories of Jesus sharing meals with his friends. The night before he died, he had his last meal with them. It was a very special meal, called the Last Supper. During the Last Supper, Jesus gave us the Eucharist. This is what he did and said:

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and

gave it to his disciples. "Take it," he said, "this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. Jesus said, "This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God's covenant." (Mark 14:22-24)

Do these words sound familiar? These are the same words that the priest says at Mass during the Eucharistic Prayer.

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted, or created, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. He blessed bread and wine and changed them into his Body and Blood. Then he shared them with his friends. The Church has been celebrating the Eucharist ever since the Last Supper. At every Mass, the bread and wine become Jesus' Body and Blood, with his soul and his divinity. This means we receive all of Jesus when we receive the Eucharist, just as the Apostles did at the Last Supper. Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, is completely and entirely there for us.

Jesus' Saving Work

During his earthly life, Jesus shared his life with his friends through his words and actions. But Jesus Christ is not just a human being. He is both God and man. Because he is the Son of God, he taught his friends God's Law and showed them God's love for them. Because he is the Son of God, he forgave their sins. Because he is the Son of God, he was raised to new life after his Death. He appeared to his friends and promised them that they could have life after death and live with him in Heaven.

Now through the sacraments, Jesus shares his life with us, just as he did with his friends during his earthly life. In the Eucharist, we remember how Jesus saved us through his life, Death, and Resurrection. He saves us from our sins, and we can look forward to being with him forever in Heaven. In the words and actions of the Mass, Jesus' saving work is made real and available to us.

God's Treasure of the Eucharist

Do you remember the four main parts of the Mass? The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the third part of the Mass. It follows the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with people bringing the gifts of wheat bread and grape wine to the altar.

After the gifts are brought forward, the priest leads the assembly in the Eucharistic Prayer. The Eucharistic Prayer is a prayer in which we give thanks to God for the gift of his Son, Jesus, and for all of the blessings in our lives. The key moment of the Eucharistic Prayer occurs when the priest asks God the Father to send down the Holy Spirit over the gifts of bread and wine. He repeats the words that Jesus said, "For this is my body, which will be given up for you . . . for this is the chalice (cup) of my blood. . . ." (*Roman Missal*, page 639).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become wholly and entirely the real Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus is alive and completely present to us as the bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood, with his soul and divinity. This is called the **consecration**.

Only an ordained priest can lead the Mass and consecrate the bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ.

Jesus himself works through the priest to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Bible calls Jesus our "eternal high priest." He offered the best and most complete sacrifice possible: his very self. There is no other sacrifice needed to save us from sin and death.

After the consecration, we proclaim the mystery of our faith. We pray or sing:

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

(*Roman Missal*, page 640)

We then conclude the Eucharistic Prayer with the Great Amen. When we say "Amen," we are saying yes to the gift of the Eucharist.

Things to Remember

- During his earthly life, Jesus shared himself with his friends through his words and actions. Today he shares himself with us through the words and actions of the sacraments.
- Jesus gave the gift of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.
- The bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus at Mass. When we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving all of Jesus.
- The Eucharist strengthens us to follow Jesus more closely.