

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The Eucharist has a Scriptural context.
- Jesus is truly present to us in the Eucharist.
- Through the Eucharist we are called to imitate Christ.



- How would your best friends or parents react in this situation?
- Do you think those reactions might change as the meal went on and people got to know each other?

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Imagine your parents have given you permission to host a summer barbecue in your back yard.

On the evening of the barbecue, your best friends are the first to arrive. They help you prepare the grill and refreshments. They eagerly anticipate the arrival of the rest of the guests so the evening of fun can begin. But when the doorbell rings, your friends seem confused. You haven't invited the usual crowd of kids from school but the ones you and your friends tend to ignore. In walks a young man who once got into trouble for using illegal drugs. With him is another teen whose family lives in a poor part of town. Following them are the kids who don't seem to fit in anywhere; kids who are normally shunned and made fun of.

You greet everyone warmly, shaking hands and offering refreshments. You introduce them to your best friends and your parents. Then you invite everyone to sit down together and enjoy the food.

This might sound strange, but it's exactly what Jesus did in his ministry.

"By this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body."

CCC 1331

It's part of our nature to want to belong to a group of people whose common interests and values we share. It is, unfortunately, also part of our nature to exclude those we perceive as different or whose behavior we decide is unacceptable. Sometimes we exclude others only because it makes us feel better about ourselves. We all want to be "in" and not "out." This same behavior was part of Jesus' culture when he preached here on earth.

Unlike others in his time, Jesus enjoyed table fellowship with anyone who wished to eat with him. He didn't just eat with his regular followers and best friends—who were themselves simple, uneducated Galilean fishermen—but also with the despised tax collectors and sinners.

Hundreds of years of tradition had given all Jewish formal meals a great religious and social importance. The Jews at that time actually believed that by eating meals with sinners, especially non-Jews, Jesus was offending God. Jesus' choice to welcome outcasts into the community by sharing meals with them

scandalized the Jews of his time. They would have been much less offended had Jesus chosen to become an outcast himself.

"While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many who followed him."

Mark 2:15

What Was Jesus Telling Us Through His Actions?

The Jewish people had long believed that God was on their side, and it was this belief that upheld them through centuries of struggle. Then Jesus came along, claiming that God was also on the side of the outcasts and the non-Jews. Through his words and actions, Jesus let his people know they were mistaken about God's attitude toward those they viewed as outcasts.

Table fellowship, a very important part of Jesus' Jewish culture, was more than sitting down and grabbing a quick meal with someone. Eating carried a great deal of significance. Sitting down and eating with someone was a way of showing your comradery with the person. By sharing table fellowship with people condemned by the Jews, Jesus was preaching forgiveness of sins and the offer of a new kind of relationship with God, as well as a new kind of relationship with all people. Clearly Jesus ate with outcasts not only because he loved them but also because he wanted us to understand the nature of the reign of God. God does not wish salvation and eternal happiness for just one group. God's love is for everyone, and it's our mission to bring this good news to the ends of the earth.

- Find some instances of Jesus sharing a meal with sinners in the Bible. What can you learn from them?



The Eucharist as Meal

It was this very important experience of table fellowship that Jesus brought with him to his farewell meal with his friends: the Last Supper. During this meal, Jesus told his most beloved followers: *"This is my body... This is my blood"* (Matthew 26:26–30). Through the action of the breaking of the bread, Jesus spoke of the New Covenant and of God's forgiveness. He also spoke of the terrible price he must pay so we might live.

This meal was a powerful message for the disciples. If they truly listened to Jesus' words and understood his actions, if they lived up to what this meal required of them, then they—like Jesus—must be ready to lay down their lives for others if called.

The Eucharist as Sacrifice

The Church teaches that the Eucharist is both meal and sacrifice. We have tried to understand how important sharing a meal was to Jesus and to the culture in which he lived. We must also try to understand the meaning of sacrifice in biblical times.

Although we no longer offer sacrifices as people did in the ancient world, during the time of Jesus, Jewish households offered **sacrifices** to God. The offerings were usually something connected with life, such as a living animal or fruits of the harvest. When the living offering was made, the people made an internal offering at the same time. They offered their lives to God's service. The most important part of the sacrifice was what went on in their minds and hearts—the offering of their lives to God.

The Christian community has always believed that Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest of all sacrifices. This is because of what went on in his mind and heart. Jesus succeeded in doing what human beings have always struggled to do; he made an offering of himself.

While the Mass recalls Jesus' offering of himself out of his love for us, it is not attempting to reenact the ancient sacrifices or the execution of Jesus. Christ died only once (Romans 6:9–10). The Mass does re-represent the one sacrifice of Jesus at the Last

Supper and on the Cross. Through our participation in the Mass and partaking in the Eucharist, this one sacrifice is made present to us. The Mass offers us a chance to dedicate our lives completely to God and to one another. Our offering is our own free will, united with Jesus' ultimate act of will.

"Faithful to the Lord's command the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion."

CCC 1333

The Real Presence of Christ

Catholics believe that when Jesus said, "This is my body....This is my blood," he meant exactly what he said. For Jews at the time of Jesus, body meant the person, and blood was the source of life within the person. So Jesus was saying over the bread and cup, "This is myself." We believe that the consecrated bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Christ present in the Eucharist.

The New Testament speaks to the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. Chapter 6 of John's Gospel is devoted to Jesus as the "Bread of Life." Jesus multiplies loaves and fish, a miracle that symbolizes his ability to multiply his presence in the Eucharist.

But most important, Jesus himself tells us:

"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."

John 6:51, 53

Many of Jesus' followers found these words intolerable and left him. But Jesus did not say, "Wait, I meant that the bread only represents my body." Instead, he asked the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Peter answered, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67–68).

Like Peter, Catholics don't claim to understand how bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. We accept, as Peter did, the "words of eternal life" on the authority of Jesus. This has been a firm part of the Christian faith since its beginning.

"It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament."

CCC 1375

In the twelfth century, the Church began using the word **transubstantiation** to describe the change from the substance of bread to the substance of the flesh of Christ. The problem is that the modern word substance has a different meaning than its Latin root. When we think of a substance, we think in terms of weight and volume. However, the original meaning of substance had less to do with appearances and more to do with the inner reality of a thing, the deepest level of its being.

Take yourself as an example. You are flesh, bones, muscle, a little fat, lots of water, and so on. But that doesn't describe what you really are. You are a human person, created in God's own image, full of feelings, thoughts, and ideas, and blessed with the uniquely human capacity to love. Your appearance and who you are two distinctly different things.

This is the same with the bread and wine we receive at Mass. While the outer appearances (taste, color, weight) of the bread and wine remain the same before and after the consecration, the inner realities have changed from bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This is transubstantiation.

When we receive holy Communion, we receive the whole person of Christ as he is at the present moment, that is, as risen Lord, with his glorified body and his full divinity or godliness. When we hear the priest say to us, "The body of Christ" or "the blood of Christ," our response is "Amen!" In other words, "Let it be so. I believe!"

- How would you describe the presence of Christ in the Eucharist to someone else? Write a response, draw an image, or anything else you can think of.



Complete the following sentences about the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Church teaches that the Eucharist is both _____ and _____.


The part of the Mass when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus is called the _____.

The Church teaches that although the bread and wine still appear as bread and wine, they have become the Body and Blood of Christ through the power of God.

This teaching is called _____.

Catholics believe in the _____ Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

When the priest says, "The Body of Christ" to someone receiving Communion, that person should respond, _____.



When we share the Body and Blood of Christ with our brothers and sisters in faith, we are both nourished and challenged.

Are there times you refuse others a place at your table? Are there ways you can change your actions or attitudes to become more open and accepting?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C5 (826290)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSSR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

Imprimatur: "In accordance with CIC 827, permission to publish has been granted on March 23, 2016, by the Most Reverend Edward M. Rice, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of St. Louis. Permission to publish is an indication that nothing contrary to Church teaching is contained in this work. It does not imply any endorsement of the opinions expressed in the publication; nor is any liability assumed by this permission."

Journey of Faith © 2000, 2016 Liguori Publications, Liguori, MO 63057. To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, stored, transmitted, or posted in any form by any means without prior written permission.

Text: Adapted from *Journey of Faith* © 2000 Liguori Publications. Editors of 2016 *Journey of Faith*: Theresa Nienaber and Pat Fosarelli, MD, DMin. Design: Lorena Mitre Jimenez. Images: Shutterstock. Unless noted, Scripture texts in this work are taken from *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity