

The Eucharist

The next day, the crowd that remained across the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not gone along with his disciples in the boat, but only his disciples had left. Other boats came from Tiberias near the place where they had eaten the bread when the Lord gave thanks. When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal." So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written:

'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

So 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."

So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen [me], you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him [on] the last day."

The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets:

'They shall all be taught by God.'

Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 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."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you; unless you eat this 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. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."

--John 6:22-65

The Eucharist is the definitive characteristic of the Catholic Church. It is the one and only thing the Catholic Faith cannot survive without (with the possible exception of the priest, who is necessary to perform the sacrifice necessary to have the Eucharist). But amazingly, it seems to be missing from debates and discussions. Those who are hostile to the Catholic faith rarely, if ever, seem to seriously address it, although a fair amount of mockery does take place. More often, organized attacks against the Church are focused on the papacy, the matter of saints, and charges of idolatry. But any given pope can leave office and the church will go on no matter how long it might take to get a replacement elected. And while all efforts to include a crucifix during a mass are taken, it is the Eucharist that must not be denied to the faithful. Everything in a Catholic church and mass either directly supports or points towards the Eucharist. Without it, nothing else has a purpose.

This isn't to say there aren't any detractors at all, or that there aren't those who find it peculiar. The few arguments that do exist are generally unimaginative, biblically unsound, and seem to suggest that personal preference is proof that they are right. But I think the strongest evidence that shows skeptics don't really take the matter of the Eucharist seriously is that I have yet to hear an argument from them that wasn't already addressed to Jesus Himself. This debate was from 5,000 men and their families (it was the day after feeding them, John 6:10, 22), almost all of which walked away from Jesus

(presumably, only the twelve main disciples, Matthias, Barsabbas (Acts 1:21-23), and any family members who followed them remained). And clearly Jesus did not agree with these conclusions, as He continued to stress the need to eat His flesh and drink His blood.

I have heard arguments that question how Jesus can be the Eucharist, as it is obviously bread and wine. In comparison, the crowd that day asked, "Is this not Jesus ... Do we not know his father and mother? Then *how can he say, 'I have come down from Heaven'?*" (verse 42, italics mine) What we see here is a lack of faith in God, as the scripture "But for God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26) is conspicuously missing. I'll give my theory on "how" shortly. I have heard atheists mock the Eucharist by asking how long it would take for His body to be completely consumed. This is not original either, as the crowd asked, "How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?" (verse 52) This verse also echoes what non-Catholic Christians often say as well, when they claim Jesus was only speaking metaphorically (which was a common technique He used) and that His "flesh" was really His teachings. But if this is a case of Jesus being metaphorical, then why did He reply with, "For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" ? (verse 55) These are a poor choice of words for one trying to be metaphorical, but are very appropriate for an honest man trying to emphasize a truth that is incredible. I have had those who, unable to refute my arguments, claim my explanation is too complicated. The last thing the crowd said before they left was, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" (verse 60) If these skeptical arguments were found to be unimpressive to Jesus, then why should I be impressed?

In another paper I wrote ("Worship, Adoration and Idol Worship"), I pointed out that Jesus compared Himself to the Bronze Serpent from the time of Moses (Numbers 21:4-9), and how the serpent *only* healed those who looked upon it. By making this comparison, Jesus *implied* that one needs to look upon the crucifix to be saved, as His being raised off the ground would not be enough. The typical response to that is, "But He didn't say you would have to look upon the crucifix to be saved." Admittedly, Jesus rarely "spelled things out." But when talking about the Eucharist, we have a specific case of Jesus doing just that: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." (verse 53) Jesus is doing exactly what many skeptics say they want to see before they can believe anything a Catholic believes. Yet when Jesus does exactly what the skeptics want to see, they still find reasons to deny it. It is one thing to disbelieve what the Catholic Church teaches, but it's another to change the standard of proof just because the result is not what one wants. This is a hypocritical form of deceit known as "raising the bar." Whenever the evidence requested is presented, a new standard is demanded.

But the indifference of most Protestants does not concern me much. Those who deny it out of obedience to the clergy of their particular church are still acting virtuously. Their religious leaders "Have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you." (Matthew 23:2-3) However, I do advise those in leadership positions to at least address this matter seriously, as Jesus was quite explicit on what would happen otherwise: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves." (Matthew 23:15) I do not think it will be wise to rely on flippant answers on Judgment Day. But what *does* concern me is the growing number of Catholics who do not believe in this either. They are being disobedient to their leadership, however poorly the leadership may explain things. Sadly, it seems that the only demographic that has widespread belief in the Real Presence are Satan worshipers. I won't go into detail here, but those not familiar with distributing the Eucharist to the homebound Catholics would be quite surprised at just how hard Satan worshipers try to acquire it so they can desecrate it during one of their dark masses. There is testimony showing that they can actually tell what is merely bread and what is the Real Presence when tested with a line up. I suppose there are those who will consider this observation

scandalous, but it is in keeping with the Gospels. Devils and demons were quite good in recognizing Jesus as He walked up to them; never once did they have to be told who He was. The only humans recorded in the Gospels as being able to do that were Simeon, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, Saint John the Baptist, and (arguably) his mother Elizabeth.

There is, however, one argument from some Protestants that does merit discussion. It raises the question of why Jesus has to be crucified endlessly in the Catholic masses. This does not really question the Real Presence itself, but it is intertwined with the argument for the Real Presence. Such observers point out (correctly) that we have a stone altar (in accord with several Old Testament descriptions) in the church and a "priest" instead of "minister" or "preacher." Both of these are requirements for a sacrifice, and the Eucharist is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus. But this observation, while true, is incomplete. And because the observation is incomplete, the conclusion (i.e., that Catholics crucify Jesus endlessly), is incorrect. It is not Jesus that is being sacrificed during the Catholic mass, but bread and wine. In a certain sense, Catholics are actually sacrificing themselves so as to join Him in His [one and only] crucifixion, but that is irrelevant to this paper. What is being sacrificed is exactly what Jesus Himself sacrificed during the Last Supper when He held up the Eucharist and called it His body and blood. So Jesus only went through the Passion once; He is not being crucified again. What is happening is that the bread and wine cease to exist and are being replaced by the essence of Jesus (more on that later). Once Jesus (and the Catholic priests) perform this sacrifice and the miracle takes place, it is no longer bread and wine but the body and blood of Jesus. And it is this sacrifice of the bread and wine that I want to explain biblically.

I want to begin with the obvious, that the Last Supper was a celebration of the Jewish Passover feast. To understand the Last Supper, one has to understand the Passover. There are many things both Protestant and Catholic agree on here, such that the blood markings on the lintels was made in the shape of a cross, which foreshadowed the execution of Jesus. The hyssop branch used in making this marking (Exodus 12:22) was a foreshadowing of the hyssop branch used to offer the crucified Jesus vinegar (John 19:29). Both meals marked a "Passover" from a land of slavery (Egypt for the Hebrews, Earth for Christians) to the promised land (Canaan for the Hebrews, Heaven for Christians). Both agree that the remembrance requirement of the Hebrew Passover (Exodus 12:14, 17-27) is continued in the new Passover, although most Protestants keep the same annual requirement instead of the weekly requirement of Catholics (daily remembrance is encouraged for Catholics although not required). But note the use of "our houses" in scripture as opposed to "our ancestor's houses." (Exodus 12:27) For the Jews, the remembrance is a *personal* connection between the original event and the contemporary feast, not a *symbolic* connection. Other details may or may not be recognized by Protestants, but for Catholics there is one detail that is of utmost importance here -- that eating the sacrifice was a critical part of the Hebrew Passover meal. It was not enough to merely offer a lamb as a sacrifice; the whole family had to *eat* it (Exodus 12:8-10). And the lamb was not eaten alone, it had to be eaten "with unleavened bread and bitter herbs." (Exodus 12:8). Indeed, it appears the bread was more important, as eating *leavened* bread during the week following the Passover Meal meant one would be cut off from Israel (Exodus 12:15, 20). In short, the blood of the lamb is what saved Israel from slavery, but to not eat the bread of the Passover was to be expelled from Israel. Note how this parallels Jesus saying, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." (John 6:53). In other words, to be "cut off" from Heaven. Unlike some of the requirements God gave Moses, there was no substitution for the eating requirements. If one did not have a lamb, one had to find a family willing to share theirs (and such families were told to do so for this very reason, Exodus 12:4). Jesus, as most Christians agree, *was* the Passover Sacrifice. He was not *just* a lamb, but the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). The blood of the lamb saved the faithful, but one has to eat of the Lamb of God to escape the slavery of the world, and has to eat the accompanying bread in order to participate in the Passover

to Heaven. Just as no substitutions were allowed for the original Passover, no substitutions are allowed in the new Passover by the very words of Jesus. The eleven faithful disciples were the first to partake of the new Passover meal (John 13:21-30), and it is only after this that Jesus says He has a place prepared for them in Heaven (John 14:1-3). Now that I've explained the biblical evidence for the Real Presence, it is fair to wonder how this can be.

We know from the Gospel of John that Jesus is the Word of God. (John 1:14), and we know that God *spoke* reality into existence (*ex nihilo*, Genesis 1:1-2:3). Jesus, being the Word of God, is who made reality possible (John 1:3). And reality can only remain in existence by the will of God, so it follows that reality will cease to be if God so wills it. At the Last Supper, the bread and wine ceased to exist when Jesus spoke them into becoming His body and blood (something all three synoptic Gospels thought important enough to note: Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20). The void that was created by their removal was immediately filled by the Godhood of Jesus who, while sharing in our humanity, remained the Word of God. And since God is infinite, this can be done any number of times without "taking away" from God. He inserted His essence into the void and gave it the characteristics of bread and wine. Two thousand years later, Catholic priests (through the power of Jesus) use the same words of Jesus while participating in the same Passover Jesus celebrated that night, just as Jews still participate in the same Passover the night before the Hebrews left Egypt (Exodus 12:27). In doing so, Catholics not only remember what has happened (like the Hebrews), but also have a personal and physical connection to the Eucharist Jesus created on Holy Thursday. Catholics are not crucifying Jesus all over again, but rather are participating in the same physical manifestation of the body and blood of Jesus from the original Last Supper. Again, the only thing being sacrificed is bread and wine.

And such multiplication is *extremely* biblical. Elijah is famous for ensuring the flour and oil of the widow would never run out during the famine (1 Kings 17:14). God told Ezekiel that his food would never diminish for as long as he lay on his side (Ezekiel 4:9-11). Jesus Himself is recorded to have fed vast numbers of people twice with a handful fish and bread loaves (5,000 men in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:34-44, Luke 9:12-17 and John 6:1-14; and 4,000 in Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 8:1-9). Perhaps not so ironically, the most He fed in a single day was the day before the Bread of Life Discourse.

This line of thought, however, still leaves us with two questions that need to be addressed: why have the Eucharist as often as daily as opposed to annually, and how can a sacrifice be eaten instead of destroyed? We actually see the need for a daily feeding twice in the Bible. The first was the manna that God fed the Hebrews with during the time of Exodus. While the sacrificial lamb was necessary to *start* the journey, a source of heavenly sustenance was still needed *during* the journey. Exodus 16:4 says "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion." The crowd mentions this (John 6:31), and then Jesus claimed to be that bread (John 6:41 and 51). Just as Jesus needed to be the sacrificial lamb to start our journey, we still need heavenly sustenance for our pilgrimage. And note that Jesus specifically claimed that the food He was offering (i.e., His body and blood) was even better than the manna the Hebrews had because those that ate it would still die (John 6:49-50), whereas His would lead to eternal life. So, what was better about the bread He is offering than what the Hebrews ate? Is it because it only needs to be consumed annually?

There are two problems with this interpretation. The first is that the Bread of Life Discourse comes from the Gospel of John, the most spiritual of the authors. It seems out of place to have Jesus make such a materialistic judgment of value even in the synoptic Gospels, and it's much harder still to accept it in John. The other is that it doesn't fit the pattern of sacrificing the lamb to start the journey

and then eat bread while on the journey. Indeed, close attention to Exodus 12:15, 20, shows that unleavened bread was to be eaten for a week after the feast with the lamb. We also have the Lord's Prayer, which also talks about having "daily bread." Again, a skeptic can claim this is a prayer for material necessities, but if one looks at the whole prayer, every other line points to spiritual needs. And there is simply no question that having "daily bread" was critical for the early Christians. Acts 2:46 tells us that the early Christians, who would have personally known the apostles, "[Met] together in the temple area and to *breaking bread in their homes*." (italics mine)

The second question that needed to be addressed is how can a sacrifice be eaten and not destroyed? To a modern way of thinking, a sacrifice means to give up something and to do without. To the modern mind, to benefit from a sacrifice one is offering is absurd. In other words, if one benefits from a sacrifice then it means it was not a sacrifice at all. But the Bible tells us differently.

The Passover itself was a sacrifice that was eaten, so that alone answers the question. But there is still more. The priestly class lived on the sacrifices the non-priests offered ("the priestly share" from Deuteronomy 18:3-4). Jesus, as High Priest, is therefore allowed to eat from the sacrifices. And since we share in His priesthood by being His body (1 Corinthians 13:27), we are also allowed to eat from the sacrifice. Indeed, as a priest, we *must* eat from the sacrifice: "The whole priestly tribe of Levi ... shall live on the oblations of the Lord and the portions due him." The priests were not allowed an inheritance, so they had no other means to survive (Deuteronomy 18:1-2). The Eucharist makes this connection a material reality as well as spiritual, as by partaking in the Eucharist we have literally become a part of Christ as Christ is literally in us.

In conclusion, we find in the Eucharist a perfect example of Jesus not abolishing the law, but rather fulfilling it (Matthew 5:17). He did not stop the Passover or the manna, but achieved their fullness by not only making it accessible to all of mankind, but by elevating it from the earthly realm into the heavenly. Much of His teachings actually pointed towards this, the Bread of Life Discourse spelled it out, and the Passion made it possible. The sacrificial lamb of the final Passover could only have been Jesus, yet we cannot survive the pilgrimage without the bread from Heaven. Through the Eucharist, all who come to this table while in communion with the Church Jesus established through Saint Peter can truly eat of the Passover Lamb and eat heavenly bread as well, because the two are now one.

Raymond Mulholland
Original Publication Date: 10 April 2025