



The Real Presence: Part 1

This two part insert will examine the good news - the amazing news - that the Eucharist is not a symbol but instead Jesus' Real Presence.

A friend of the Catholic-American novelist Flannery O'Connor once told her that she believed the Eucharist was a "pretty good symbol" of the body and blood of Christ - to which O'Connor responded, "If it's just a symbol, to hell with it." Unfortunately, according to the 2019 Pew Research Center survey, almost two-thirds of Catholics agree with O'Connor's friend.

One of the byproducts of this confusion is low Mass attendance on Sundays. It's no coincidence that, according to Pew Research Center, the percent of Catholics who believe in the Eucharist is somewhat similar to those who attended Mass regularly around the same time (4 in 10).

Indeed, If a person believes Jesus when He says:

- "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51)
- "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (Jn 6:53)
- "My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (Jn 6:55)

Then it follows that for them attending and participating in Mass on Sunday is a priority, not just because of the Sunday obligation or Third Commandment, but because they believe that Jesus is who He says He is - God - and that we can become one with Him by receiving the Holy Eucharist and in turn may be Christ for others.

We must remember first and foremost that the Eucharist is not a what but a who: Jesus Christ. He freely gave His flesh and blood out of love for us; making His whole self truly and substantially present under the appearance of bread and wine, so that we may have Eternal Life.

This, then, is what the Church means by the doctrine of the Real Presence. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes: "In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.' 'This presence is called 'real'...because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.'" (1374)

Truly, we can take Jesus at His word when, at the Last Supper, He "took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." and likewise when He "took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to [His disciples], saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt. 26:26-28)

This is what the Church has always believed and taught. We see this in various pieces of Biblical evidence, from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 to Jesus' words in all four Gospels, to Acts 2:42.

We see this teaching in every early Church Father from Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr, to St. Augustine, to St. John Chrysostom, who is known as the "Doctor of the Eucharist", to St. Thomas Aquinas down through the centuries to the present day.

No objection to the doctrine of the Real Presence was known for almost the first thousand years in the Church's history. Every time an objection was raised, every, single, solitary pope and Church Council in the last 2,000 years has affirmed the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.



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Take for instance the following brief excerpts from Church history depicting the congruency of belief regarding the Real Presence:

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord."

St. Justin Martyr, First Apology, c. 155

"And this food is called among us Eucharistia [the Eucharist], of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins...For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior...so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh."

St. Francis of Assisi, Admonitions - On the Body of the Lord, c. 1200s

"Every day [Jesus] comes to us presenting Himself humbly; everyday He descends from the bosom of His Father to the Altar into the hands of the Priest. And just as to the holy Apostles

in true flesh, so even now He shows Himself to us in the Sacred Bread...so even we seeing bread and wine with our bodily eyes, may see and firmly believe them even to be His Most Holy Body and Blood, living and true."

Council of Trent, Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist, 1551

"First of all, the holy council teaches and openly and plainly professes that after the consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those sensible things...For thus all our forefathers, as many as were in the true Church of Christ and who treated of this most holy sacrament, have most openly professed that our Redeemer instituted this wonderful sacrament at the last supper."

Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963

"At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."

Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter: "I longed for the desire", June 29, 2022

"Indeed, every reception of communion of the Body and Blood of Christ was already desired by him in the Last Supper...We need to be present at that Supper, to be able to hear his voice, to eat his Body and to drink his Blood."