

The Eucharist—Scriptural Roots

The word *Eucharist* means *thanksgiving*.

Then taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: “This is my body to be given for you. Do this as a remembrance of me. He did the same with the cup after eating, saying as he did so: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.” Luke 22:19-20

Setting: Feast of Passover, the Jewish celebration of their freedom from Egypt.

Jesus was aware that he would be the “lamb” sacrificed for their freedom from sin.

Eucharist at its roots is a sacrificial meal and all who share in it are challenged to offer themselves for the benefit of others. Without sacrifice, there would be no Eucharist.

During the meal he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. “Take this,” he said, “this is my body. He likewise took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them: “This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many. I solemnly assure you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the reign of God.” Mk. 14:22-25

“Can you drink the cup I shall drink, or be baptized in the same bath of pain as I?”

Mk. 10:38

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2: 42-47

The Significance of the Eucharist in the early Church

The celebration of Eucharist or the “breaking of the bread” was a central part of the early community’s spiritual growth.

“I received from the Lord what **I handed on to you**, namely, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes! 1 Cor11:23-26ff.

Teaching on the Eucharist was essential. It was crucial for their life that they understood the power and significance of this meal.

Two disciples returning home to Emmaus after the resurrection (Lk 24:13-35)

It tells us that, for all who invite Jesus to “stay with them,” there is the setting for Eucharist.

As the church continued to reflect upon the words and actions of Jesus, it recognized in his earlier ministry some “Eucharistic” events.

Multiplication of the loaves Mk 6:34-44; Mt. 14:13-21; Lk 9:10-17; Jn 6:1-13.

Note especially Mark and Luke as they describe Jesus’ actions during that event with the exact same four verbs that they use to recount the last supper.

“Then **taking** the five loaves ...Jesus raised his eyes to heaven, **pronounced a blessing, broke** the loaves, and **gave** them to the disciples.”

In John’s gospel, John reflecting on the multiplication of the loaves recalls Jesus’ words, and how he was ready to be consumed for the life of the world:

“I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” Jn. 6:51

Celebration of the Eucharist, especially in times of persecution, became so central to the life of the church. Celebration of their unity. An encounter that empowered them to face life and death with the vision of the risen Lord in their eyes.

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf.” 1 Cor. 10:16-17

The Corinthian community had its own divisions.

First of all, I hear that when you gather for a meeting there are divisions among you, and I am inclined to believe it.

Abuses....church began limiting the sacrament of the Eucharist to the sharing of the bread and wine only. These elements captured the memories of Jesus' gift of himself and the sharing of them made his presence real o all who participated.

Core teaching of the church on the Eucharist:

“Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes! 1 Cor 11:26

Early church's belief regarding the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:

“This means that whoever eats the bread or drinks of the cup of the Lord unworthily sins against the body and blood of the Lord. A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks a judgment on himself.” 1 Cor. 11:27-29

These words form the basis of the Catholic Church's teaching about the **real presence of Christ** in this sacrament. The church from earliest times has always taught that the bread blessed and broken in Jesus' memory becomes his body and the wine becomes his blood. No scripture explains exactly how this happens, but **that** it happens is very clear. We face the mystery of how Jesus remains present in these sacred elements.

We do not fully understand the mystery of Christ's presence in Eucharist, but we are convinced that he is truly present. We feel his personal love, his healing; his presence brings new peace and wholeness. Eucharist is the primary sacrament of the church for all of history.

The Eucharist in scripture is a profound gesture of love expressed in sacrifice: Jesus giving himself to his disciples and the disciples giving themselves to him and to each other. It is a celebration of the victory of life over death, forgiveness over sin, and unity over division. A victory that is won by those who dare to say with Jesus, “This is my body; this is my blood for you.”