



What is the Holy Eucharist? by Joe Sixpack

One day a messenger came into the court of King St. Louis of France all out of breath from excitement. He exclaimed, "Your Majesty, hurry to the church. A great miracle is taking place!"

"What kind of miracle?" asked the saintly king.

"A great miracle! A priest is saying Holy Mass, and after the Consecration, instead of a host, there is visible on the altar Jesus Christ Himself. Hurry before it disappears!"

The king remained quiet, which greatly surprised the messenger. "Well, isn't Your Majesty coming?" asked the messenger.

"No!" replied the king. "Let them who have any doubt about the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist go and see. *As for me, even if I saw Jesus on the altar in His visible form, and touched Him with my hand, and heard His voice, I would not be more convinced than I am now that He is present in the consecrated Host. My faith is sufficient for me! I need no miracle.*"

King St. Louis' faith is the faith that all Catholics should have, but that is not the case in our modern, cynical world. Surveys show that 70% of American Catholics in the pew don't believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Non-Catholics claim the Church's belief in His Real Presence is merely a "Catholic invention". They say there is no scriptural proof of what the Catholic Church teaches. Guess what? They are again wrong. Jesus did indeed talk about it in the New Testament, and we're going to begin by looking at that.

The 6th chapter of John begins with Jesus feeding 5,000 men with a mere five loaves of bread and two fish. That evening Jesus worked yet two more miracles. He sent his apostles across the sea, while He went into the hills to pray. Late that night, He came to his apostles walking on the water. As soon as He got into the boat, it ceased being where it was in the middle of the sea and was suddenly at their destination.

The next morning (vs. 22-24), the people who had eaten the loaves the previous day arrived, surprised to find Jesus there waiting for them. Of course, they wanted to know how He had arrived ahead of them, since He didn't get into the boat with His apostles. But Jesus cut right to the chase and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves" (v. 26). Jesus went on to tell them to work for the spiritual food that would get them to heaven, instead of temporal food that spoils. He told them to do this by believing in Him (v. 29).

These hard-headed followers from the day before now wanted a sign from Him to prove He was worthy of their belief. They told Jesus that Moses had given their fathers manna from heaven to eat. They wanted to know if He could top that!

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst’” (v. 35). He went on to explain through verse 40 that He was the bread sent from heaven by the Father.

Up to that point, Jesus’ followers understood Him to be speaking symbolically. Jesus took this misconception away from them. He went on to tell them that He was the bread they would have to eat to inherit eternal life.

“The Jews disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so *he who eats me* will live because of me’” (vs. 52-57).

The people now understood Him to be speaking literally rather than figuratively. The followers’ literal understanding of what Jesus said repulsed them: “After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer with about with him” (v. 66).

“Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Will you also go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the holy one of God’” (vs. 67-69). The apostles had been with Him from the beginning. They also understood what He said to be literal. They didn’t know *how* He would do what He said, but they believed that He would eventually show them.

Jesus finally explained the *how* to them at the Last Supper. In Luke 22:15 Jesus said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Does a man who knows he is about to die *earnestly desire* to eat what he knows will be his last meal? Of course not! But Jesus earnestly desired to give them His Flesh and Blood since He first made the promise. “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” (vs. 17-20).

There is something else important to note here. The Gospel writers never devoted time and energy to writing about the ordinary. They only focused on the *extraordinary*. John 6:22-71 is an entire wast of time and energy if Jesus is merely speaking symbolically. And His language is far from symbolic. The Last Supper narrative is also a waste of time if what is happening there is just a typical Passover meal. Notice that He never said that the bread and wine was to represent His Body, nor that it was a symbol of His Body; *He said it is His Body*. Definitive. A statement of fact. No analogous phrasing.

Christianity makes absolutely no sense without the Most Holy Eucharist. Without It, Christianity is merely nothing more than just another philosophy, like the Eastern mystical philosophies; it is nothing more than a philosophy about how to live a better life. But that isn’t what Christianity is at all. It is the worship of God Almighty, and our living the Christian life is obedience to that one true and living God.

This is just our first look at the Most Holy Eucharist. We will delve much deeper into It so you can know What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

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