

The bread of Heaven and the cup of salvation

On the night he was betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said: Take, eat: this is my body.” He took the cup, gave thanks and said: Take, drink: this is my blood.” Since Christ himself has declared the bread to be his body, who can have any further doubt? Since he himself has said quite categorically, *This is my blood*, who would dare to question it and say that it is not his blood?

Therefore, it is with complete assurance that we receive the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ. His body is given to us under the symbol of bread, and his blood is given to us under the symbol of wine, in order to make us by receiving them one body and blood with him. Having his body and blood in our members, we become bearers of Christ and sharers, as Saint Peter says, in the divine nature.

Once, when speaking to the Jews, Christ said: *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you shall have no life in you.* This horrified them and they left him. Not understanding his words in a spiritual way, they thought the Saviour wished them to practise cannibalism.

Under the old covenant there was showbread, but it came to an end with the old dispensation to which it belonged. Under the new covenant there is bread from heaven and the cup of salvation. These sanctify both soul and body, the bread being adapted to the sanctification of the body, the Word, to the sanctification of the soul.

Do not, then, regard the eucharistic elements as ordinary bread and wine: they are in fact the body and blood of the Lord, as he himself has declared. Whatever your senses may tell you, be strong in faith.

You have been taught and you are firmly convinced that what looks and tastes like bread and wine is not bread and wine but the body and the blood of Christ. You know also how David referred to this long ago when he sang: *Bread gives strength to man's heart and makes his face shine with the oil of gladness.* Strengthen your heart, then, by receiving this bread as spiritual bread, and bring joy to the face of your soul.

May purity of conscience remove the veil from the face of your soul so that by contemplating the glory of the Lord, as in a mirror, you may be transformed from glory to glory in Christ Jesus our Lord. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

From the Jerusalem Catecheses

O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the testament of God's mercy for us, and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus as proof of infinite mercy for us, and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained life eternal and of infinite mercy, dispensed in abundance to us and especially to poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the mercy of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit toward us, and especially toward poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the infinite price of mercy which will

compensate for all our debts, and especially those of poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the fountain of living water which springs from infinite mercy for us, and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the fire of purest love which blazes forth from the bosom of the Eternal Father, as from an abyss of infinite mercy for us, and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the medicine for all our infirmities, flowing from infinite mercy, as from a fount, for us and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom is contained the union between God and us through His infinite mercy for us, and especially for poor sinners. O Blessed Host, in whom are contained all the sentiments of the most sweet Heart of Jesus toward us, and especially poor sinners.

St. Maria Faustina Kowalska (1905–1938)

Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. Jn 6:31–33). The ancient world had dimly perceived that man’s real food—what truly nourishes him as man—is ultimately the Logos, eternal wisdom: this same Logos now truly becomes food for us—as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God’s presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus’ self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental “mysticism,” grounded in God’s condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.

Pope Benedict XVI (b. 1927)

Even before He ate the Last Supper with His disciples Christ Our Lord, since He knew He was about to institute the sacrament of His body and blood by the shedding of which the new covenant was to be consecrated, felt His heart roused by strong emotions, which He revealed to the Apostles in these words: “With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.” And these emotions were doubtless even stronger when “taking bread, He gave thanks, and broke, and gave to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you, this do in commemoration of Me.’ Likewise the chalice also, after He had supped, saying, ‘This chalice is the new testament in My blood, which shall be shed for you.’” It can therefore be declared that the divine Eucharist, both the sacrament which He gives to men and the sacrifice in which He unceasingly offers Himself “from the rising of the sun till the going down thereof,” and likewise the priesthood, are indeed gifts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Ven. Pope Pius XII (1876–1958)

People say that the doctrine of Transubstantiation is difficult to believe; I did not believe the doctrine till I was a Catholic. I had no difficulty in believing it as soon as I believed that the Catholic Roman Church was the oracle of God, and that she had declared this doctrine to be part of the original revelation. It is difficult, impossible to imagine, I grant—but how is it difficult to believe? Yet Macaulay thought it so difficult to believe, that he had need of a believer in it of talents as eminent as Sir Thomas More before he could bring himself to conceive that the Catholics of an enlightened age could resist “the overwhelming force of the argument against it.” “Sir Thomas More,” he says, “is one of the choice specimens of wisdom and virtue; and the doctrine of transubstantiation is a kind of proof charge. A faith which stands that test, will stand any test.” But for myself, I cannot indeed prove it, I cannot tell how it is; but I say, “Why should it not be? What’s to hinder it? What do I know of substance or matter? just as much as the greatest philosophers, and that is nothing at all;”—so much is this the case, that there is a rising school of philosophy now, which considers phenomena to constitute the whole of our knowledge in physics. The Catholic doctrine leaves phenomena alone. It does not say that the phenomena go; on the contrary, it says that they remain: nor does it say that the same phenomena are in several places at once. It deals with what no one on earth knows anything about, the material substances themselves. And, in like manner, of that majestic article of the Anglican as well as of the Catholic Creed—the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. What do I know of the essence of the Divine Being? I know that my abstract idea of three is simply incompatible with my idea of one; but when I come to the question of concrete fact, I have no means of proving that there is not a sense in which one and three can equally be predicated of the Incommunicable God.

St. John Henry Newman (1801–1890)

And as we say Our Father—for He is the Father of those who believe and have understanding—we ask for our daily bread, because Christ is our bread. Indeed, it is His most precious Body that we receive. We ask that this Bread be given to us each day so that we, who are in Christ, receive Him daily as heavenly food. Yet, if we commit mortal sin, we make ourselves unworthy to receive His Most Holy Body and are forbidden to receive the Bread from heaven. And if we cease receiving communion [altogether], we will be cut off from His Body. ... St. John clearly teaches that Christ is this bread: “I am the Bread of Life that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this Bread, he will live forever, and the Bread that I

will give is my flesh for the life of the world” [John 6:51]. So we can say with certainty that this Bread is Christ. And when Christ said “those who eat this bread will live forever” [John 6:51], it is clear that an eternal giving is found in receiving Christ’s Most Holy Body in Communion.

O my Lord! I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I adore You with my whole heart, and by this visit intend to adore You in all those places where You are present in the Blessed Sacrament. I offer You Your most Precious Blood for all poor sinners. At the same time, I wish to receive You spiritually wherever You are sacramentally present.

St. Gerard Majella (1726–1755)

Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God, whom I believe is really and truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar: receive this most profound act of adoration as a token of my desire to worship You without ceasing, and in thanksgiving for the love Your Sacred Heart has for me. I cannot better repay your sentiments of love than by offering You all the acts of worship, of resignation, of patience, and of love that this same Heart made during Its mortal life, and that It still makes, and will eternally make, in heaven. This I offer in order to love You, praise and worship You through It as much as possible. I unite myself to this divine offering that You made to Your divine Father, and I consecrate to You all of my being, asking You to destroy the sin in me, and to not allow me to ever be separated from You.

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–1690)

Holy Communion is the most efficacious means of uniting the soul to God. The best preparation for the divine banquet is to keep ourselves well purified and to watch over our tongue, which is the first member that touches the sacred Host. On the day that we receive Holy Communion, we should endeavor to keep our hearts as living tabernacles of our Eucharistic Jesus, and then frequently visit Him with acts of adoration, love, and gratitude; this is what divine love will teach us. When a prince sends one of his ministers to a distant country, he provides him with all that is necessary for safely reaching his destination: the Lord, my God and my Father, has given me as my viaticum His only Son.

The Feast of the Blessed Sacrament is the feast of love. Oh, what great love! What immense charity! The moth is drawn to the light, and burns itself in it. May your soul likewise draw near to the divine light! May it be reduced to ashes in that sacred flame, particularly during this great and sweet octave of Corpus Christi. Ah! Eat, drink, run, sing, rejoice in honor of your Divine Spouse.

St. Paul of the Cross (1694–1775)

The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it. What is repeated is its memorial celebration, its “commemorative representation” which makes Christ’s one, definitive redemptive sacrifice always present in time. The sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic mystery cannot therefore be understood as something separate, independent of the Cross or only indirectly referring to the sacrifice of Calvary. By virtue of its close relationship to the sacrifice of Golgotha, the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the strict sense, and not only in a general way, as if it were simply a matter of Christ’s offering himself to the faithful as their spiritual food. The gift of his love and obedience to the point of giving his life (cf. Jn 10:17–18) is in the first place a gift to his Father. Certainly it is a gift given for our sake, and indeed that of all humanity yet it is first and foremost a gift to the Father: “a sacrifice that the Father accepted, giving, in return for this total self-giving by his Son, who ‘ became obedient unto death ’(Phil 2:8), his own paternal gift, that is to say the grant of new immortal life in the resurrection.”

Pope St. John Paul II (1920–2005)

“And if He is the son by adoption, how can it be explained that without eating the flesh of the Son of man and drinking His blood, you do not have eternal life? Christ says: Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink [John 6:54–55]. No one has the power to raise on the last day unless He is truly the ever-living God. For indeed, flesh and blood pertain to humanity, and by them He is Son of man; wherefore, these cannot refer to the divine nature. And yet, if he is the Son of man, to whom this flesh and blood is, He is one and the same both Son of God and Son of Man. For if He were not truly God, His flesh and blood that we eat and drink could not grant us eternal life. In this way, John the evangelist says: the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin [1 John 1:7].

“Whose flesh and blood can give life to those who eat and drink it except the Son of man, on whom God the Father has set his seal, who is the true and almighty Son of God? For, the Bread of Life came down from heaven for our sake to give life to the world, and whoever eats of Him shall never die. For this reason, He says: I am the living bread that came down from heaven [John 6:51]. St. Paulinus II of Aquileia (c. 726–802)”

“I cannot pass over in silence that grace of graces, that sacrament of sacraments, whereby God is pleased to dwell with us on earth. And He does so in order to give Himself as our food and sovereign remedy each day. Though He was sacrificed on the cross once only, He is daily offered to His Father upon the altar as a propitiation for sin. This is my body, which

is given for you, He says, do this in remembrance of me [Luke 22:19]. O precious pledge of our salvation! “sacrifice! O most acceptable victim! Bread of life! Most delicious nourishment! Food of kings! O Sweet manna, which contains all that is pleasing and delightful! Who can praise you as you deserve? Who can worthily receive You? Who can honor You with due respect and reverence? My soul quite loses itself when it thinks of You. My tongue fails me and I am unable to express the least part of Your wonders as I desire.

Ven. Louis of Granada (1504–1588)”

“If those of the world ask why you receive communion so often, tell them that it is to learn to love God, to purify yourself from imperfections, to be delivered from your miseries, to be comforted in your afflictions, and to be supported in your weakness. Tell them that two sorts of persons ought to communicate frequently; the perfect, because being well-disposed, they would be greatly to blame for not approaching to the source and fountain of perfection; and the imperfect, that they may be able to aspire to perfection; the strong, lest they should become weak; and the weak, that they may become strong; the sick, that they may be healed; and the healthy, lest they fall into sickness. Tell them that for your part, being imperfect, weak, and sick, you have need of frequent communion with Him who is your perfection, your strength, and your medicine. Tell them that those who do not have many worldly affairs to attend ought to communicate often, because they have the time for it; and that those who have much business on their hands should also communicate often, because they have need of it; that he who labors much and “and is burdened with cares ought to eat solid meats, and that frequently. Tell them that you frequently receive the Holy Sacrament to learn to receive it well, because one hardly performs an action well that he does not often practice.

Communicate frequently then, Philothea, and as often as you can with the advice of your spiritual Father. And believe me, as hares in our mountains become white in winter, because they neither see nor eat anything but snow; so too, by approaching and eating beauty, purity, and goodness itself in this divine sacrament, you will become fair, pure, and good.

St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor (1567–1622)”

“The confirmed experience of those who have served in the education and formation of the youth is this: the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion are the best safeguards and the strongest supports for that critical period of their lives. If you can show me a boy who frequently receives the Holy Sacraments, it will be enough to convince me that he will pass through his years of youth, reach maturity, and (if God so disposes)

arrive at a venerable old age, having always lived as an example for others. This should be impressed upon the young so that they may form this excellent habit. This should also be seriously considered by all those who form them so that they may assist them in cultivating this practice. St. John Bosco (1815–1888)”

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, as though all the other proofs of his mercy were insufficient, institutes the Eucharist so that he can always be close to us. We can only understand up to a point that he does so because Love moves him, who needs nothing, not to want to be separated from us. St. Josemaria Esriva; Christ is Passing By, no. 84

“I know of a young man whose loneliness was cured by a priest’s simple reminder during a Sunday homily: ‘With Jesus always present in the tabernacle, we never have a reason to feel lonely. ’Sometimes we need to be reminded of the obvious, and perhaps it takes a particularly difficult moment for a familiar truth to hit home: Jesus is ‘here on earth for you’ (St. Josemaria Esriva, The Way, no. 539).”

The Lord does not remain with us in the Eucharist for His own sake, but to meet our deepest human needs for love and friendship: “Jesus, who has encouraged this feeling of emptiness in us, comes out to meet us” (Christ is Passing By, no. 170). In some, like that young man, the Lord allows a certain loneliness so that they will seek Him out and discover the truth of another equally simple reminder: “When you approach the Tabernacle remember that he has been awaiting you for twenty centuries” (St. Josemaria Esriva, The Way, no. 537).

During the ministry of the divine gifts, the spreading of the pure linen cloth is as the same service performed by Joseph of Arimathea. When Joseph wrapped the Lord’s body in the linen cloth, he brought it to the tomb from which our entire human race enjoyed the fruit of the Resurrection. So too, when we consecrate the bread of presentation on the linen cloth, we undoubtedly find the body of Christ, and from that body there gushes forth the incorruption that Jesus the Savior graciously grants; this same Jesus who was buried in Joseph’s tomb and rose from the dead. St. Isidore of Pelusium (d. c. 450)

Concerning the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ that lies upon the divine table: let us humbly abstain from fixating upon the [visible] bread and cup presented upon it. Rather, lifting up our minds in faith, let us fix them upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, lying upon the altar; the Lamb sacrificed by the priests in an unbloody manner.

Let us also understand that we truly receive the precious body and blood, believing that these things are our symbols of the resurrection. For this reason, we do not receive a great portion, but a little, that we may know that they are not for satiation, but for sanctification. Gelasius of Cyzicus (c. 475)

Once the words of consecration are spoken, the entirety of the Divine Liturgy is accomplished, complete, and the gifts sanctified. The sacrifice is complete, and the great and divine Sacrificial Victim, slain for the world, is seen lying upon the holy table. The bread of the Lord's body is no longer a type or simple gift, as if it merely bore an image of the true gift. Nor does it merely bear in itself an inscription of the saving sufferings as upon a tablet. Rather, it is the true gift, the all-holy body of the Master who truly endured all those insults, arrogant mistreatment, and bruises. After truthfully testifying before Pontius Pilate, His body was crucified and slain: this body was beaten, tortured, endured spittings, and tasted gall. Likewise, the wine is the blood that gushed forth from that slain body. This is the body and the blood that was conceived from the Holy Spirit, born of the blessed Virgin, buried, rose on the third day, taken up into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. Nicholas Cabasilas (c. 1322–1392)

In the Gospel reading, dear brothers, you heard your instructions and also our danger. For behold: He who is good, not by an occasional gift, but in essence, says, "I am the good shepherd" [John 10:11], and we imitate a kind of His goodness. He added, " The good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep" [John 10:11]. He accomplished what He counseled and demonstrated what he commanded. The Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep that He may turn His body and blood into our Sacrament and that He may fill those sheep whom He had redeemed with the nourishment of His flesh. Pope St. Gregory the Great, Doctor of the Church (540–604)

Again, go to the Blessed Sacrament, and pray to Jesus Christ that He may have mercy on you. Present yourself to Him as a poor and unhappy soul, full of leprosy and bound by a million chains so that He will see the state that you are in. Then, allow Him to touch you. Above all, however, I recommend that you receive Communion. Afterward, pray in astonishment, remembering the life you have led, and present the thoughts of your heart to Jesus Christ, allowing Him to repose therein. St. Claude de la Colombière (1641–1682)

As previously stated, Christ our Lord first instituted the Sacrifice that Christians offer to God. For, He entrusted the Apostles with His Body and Blood before being handed over as it is written in the Gospel. There it

records, Jesus took bread and the chalice, blessed and gave to them. Melchizedek, the King of Salem, was the first to offer a type of this Sacrament, which is the Body and Blood of Christ, and the first to distantly express the mystery of so great a sacrifice, thereby forming a likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the Eternal Priest, of whom it is written: You are a priest forever, according to the line of Melchizedek. The sacrifice celebrated by Christians is indeed a precept, fulfilling and relinquishing the Jewish sacrifices that men of old were commanded to offer. It makes present to us what our Lord Himself fashioned, the fruit of His offering at the evening Supper. St. Beatus (d. 798)

This is the unity of the Church that St. Paul speaks of when he says: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body” [1 Cor 10:17]. So great is the unity of the Church in Christ that all those throughout the entire world are one in the bread of Christ’s body and one in the chalice of Christ’s blood. For, just as the divinity of the Word of God is one and fills the entire world, so it is possible that the body of Christ is consecrated in many places and on many different days; yet, there are not many bodies, but one body of Christ. And as the bread truly changes into the body of Christ, so those who are in the Church rightly perceive that, without any doubt, all are made one in the body of Christ as He Himself testified when He said: “He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me, and I in him” [John 6:56]. St. Peter Damian (1007–1072)

My daughter, I am dead in most men of this age as far as their interior lives are concerned; for, few are those in whom I dwell by grace. Their offenses are so great that if sorrow could enter me, their God, I would cry out, bursting into tears at the sight of their horrible vices when they communicate. They crucify me again by receiving me unworthily, giving me a drink more bitter than that given me by [My persecutors] ... as a rule, I am grievously offended in communion by persons in the world and by their lives. Woe to the souls that sin unceasingly and dare to receive me without correcting their faults. There will be a strict account for them at a future day. St. Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297)

The blood of the Lord is twofold. There is His blood of flesh by which we are redeemed from corruption, and there is the spiritual body with which we have been anointed. And to drink the blood of Jesus is to partake of the Lord’s incorruption. The Spirit is the power of the Word, just as blood is of the flesh. Just as wine is mingled with water, so the Spirit is with men. The one mixture nourishes faith, while the other, the Spirit, leads to incorruption. The mixture of both, the drink and the Word, is called the Eucharist. It is lauded as grace and beauty, and those who partake by faith

are sanctified in body and soul. By the Father's will, the divine mixture mystically mingles men with the Spirit and the Word. Indeed, as the Spirit truly dwelt in the soul sustained by Him, so also the flesh is sustained by the Word, for which reason the Word became flesh. St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215)