

## **The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults**

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### **The Eucharist: The Source and Summit of the Christian Life**

Jesus said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.’ The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ “(**John 6:51–52**).

“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 at 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” (**John 6:53–56**).

In John 6:60 we read: “Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?’” These were his disciples. He warned them not to think materially, but spiritually: “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (**John 6:63; cf. 1 Cor. 2:12–14**). “After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (**John 6:66**).

Here, what we have to notice is that he never calls the disciples back to say to them that this was a symbolic expression, and not real, as the other denominations argue. Jesus chose the time of Passover to fulfill what he had announced at Capernaum: giving his disciples his Body and his Blood:

*“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us, that we may eat it. . . .” They went and prepared the Passover. And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. 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” (**Lk 22:7-20; Cf. Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; 1 Cor 11:23-26**).*

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages 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 consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us’ (**CCC. 1323**).

We find in history that during the first 1500 years there was unanimity of belief in the Church regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This unanimous belief of 1500 years is itself an argument for its truth. For it is impossible that the Holy Spirit could leave the Church in error over a long period of time about one of the central doctrines of Christianity.

Ignatius of Antioch, who had been a disciple of the apostle John about A.D. 110, said, referring to “those who hold heterodox opinions,” that “they abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in his goodness, raised up again” (**6:2, 7:1**).

The denials and doubts of the Real Presence appeared in the sixteenth century. The Protestant Reformers were all unanimous in rejecting transubstantiation and the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. As I understand it, the denial of the real presence is only for the sake of denial, and it is running away from the truth.

Because of the Protestant Reformers’ denial of the Real Presence, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) took up these issues and laid out for all the official and infallible teaching of the Church. The Council declared: “If anyone denies that 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 in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, but says that Christ is present in the Sacrament only as in a sign or figure, or by his power: let him be anathema” (**Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1651**).

At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood (**CCC.1333**). The presence of ‘Body and Blood’ ‘cannot be apprehended by the senses,’ says St. Thomas, ‘but only by faith, which relies on divine authority.’