

Chapter One: The Mystery of Faith

Paragraph 11

“The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed” (*1 Cor* 11:23) instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and his blood. The words of the Apostle Paul bring us back to the dramatic setting in which the Eucharist was born. The Eucharist is indelibly marked by the event of the Lord's passion and death, of which it is not only a reminder but the sacramental re-presentation. It is the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated down the ages.ⁱ This truth is well expressed by the words with which the assembly in the Latin rite responds to the priest's proclamation of the “Mystery of Faith”: “*We announce your death, O Lord*”.

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as *the gift par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since “all that Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times”.ⁱⁱ

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and “the work of our redemption is carried out”.ⁱⁱⁱ This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived. The Church's Magisterium has constantly reaffirmed this faith with joyful gratitude for its inestimable gift.^{iv} I wish once more to recall this truth and to join you, my dear brothers and sisters, in adoration before this mystery: a great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes “to the end” (cf. *Jn* 13:1), a love which knows no measure.

1. Why does the Holy Father call the Eucharist the "gift par excellence" and not as "one gift among so many others"?
2. During the Eucharistic celebration the Lord's death and resurrection become truly present. In what ways can we "take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits"?

FRN CCC 1324, 1327, 1391-1401

Paragraph 12

This aspect of the universal charity of the Eucharistic Sacrifice is based on the words of the Saviour himself. In instituting it, he did not merely say: “This is my body”, “this is my blood”, but went on to add: “which is given for you”, “which is poured out for you” (*Lk* 22:19-20). Jesus did not simply state that what he was giving them to eat and drink was his body and his blood; he also expressed *its sacrificial meaning* and made sacramentally present his sacrifice which would soon be offered on the Cross for the salvation of all. “The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated and the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood”.^v

The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice; she approaches it not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact, since *this sacrifice is made present ever anew*, sacramentally perpetuated, in every community which offers it at the hands of the consecrated minister. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age. “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*”.^{vi} Saint John Chrysostom put it well: “We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and

another tomorrow, but always the same one. For this reason the sacrifice is always only one... Even now we offer that victim who was once offered and who will never be consumed".^{vii}

The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it.^{viii} What is repeated is its *memorial* celebration, its "commemorative representation" (*memorialis demonstratio*),^{ix} 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.

1. Why can we not separate the Eucharistic celebration from the sacrifice of Calvary?
2. How are they the same?

FRN CCC 1365-1367

Paragraph 13

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 (cf. *Mt* 26:28; *Mk* 14:24; *Lk* 22:20; *Jn* 10:15), 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".^x

In giving his sacrifice to the Church, Christ has also made his own the spiritual sacrifice of the Church, which is called to offer herself in union with the sacrifice of Christ. This is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning all the faithful: "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it".^{xi}

1. Why is the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of Calvary "first and foremost a gift to the Father"?
2. How can we offer ourselves to God the Father along with offering Him the "divine victim" in the Eucharistic sacrifice?

FRN 1359-1361, 1368

Paragraph 14

Christ's passover includes not only his passion and death, but also his resurrection. This is recalled by the assembly's acclamation following the consecration: "*We proclaim your resurrection*". The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the "bread of life" (*Jn* 6:35, 48), the "living bread" (*Jn* 6:51). Saint Ambrose reminded the newly-initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection to their lives: "Today Christ is yours, yet each day he rises again for you".^{xii} Saint Cyril of Alexandria also makes clear that sharing in the sacred mysteries "is a true confession and a remembrance that the Lord died and returned to life for us and on our behalf".^{xiii}

1. When we think of the Eucharist we often think only of the Last Supper and the Passion and death of Jesus. How is the resurrection an essential part of the mystery of the Eucharist?

Paragraph 15

The sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, crowned by the resurrection, in the Mass involves a most special presence which – in the words of Paul VI – “is called 'real' not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were 'not real', but because it is a presence in the fullest sense: a substantial presence whereby Christ, the God-Man, is wholly and entirely present”.^{xiv} This sets forth once more the perennially valid teaching of the Council of Trent: “the consecration of the bread and wine effects the change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. And the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called this change transubstantiation”.^{xv} Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith, as is often brought out in the catechesis of the Church Fathers regarding this divine sacrament: “Do not see – Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts – in the bread and wine merely natural elements, because the Lord has expressly said that they are his body and his blood: faith assures you of this, though your senses suggest otherwise”.^{xvi}

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, we shall continue to sing with the Angelic Doctor. Before this mystery of love, human reason fully experiences its limitations. One understands how, down the centuries, this truth has stimulated theology to strive to understand it ever more deeply.

These are praiseworthy efforts, which are all the more helpful and insightful to the extent that they are able to join critical thinking to the “living faith” of the Church, as grasped especially by the Magisterium's “sure charism of truth” and the “intimate sense of spiritual realities”^{xvii} which is attained above all by the saints. There remains the boundary indicated by Paul VI: “Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery, in order to be in accord with Catholic faith, must firmly maintain that in objective reality, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the consecration, so that the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus from that moment on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine”.^{xviii}

1. Jesus is truly present in His word, His people, His ministers, and various other ways. Why then does the Church give the Eucharist the title "Real Presence"?
2. What are some difficulties that may be experienced in believing or understanding the true or Real Presence in the Eucharist.
3. What are some ways to overcome those difficulties?

FRN CCC 1333-1336, 1378-1381

Paragraph 16

The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realized when the Lord's body and blood are received in communion. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is intrinsically directed to the inward union of the faithful with Christ through communion; we receive the very One who offered himself for us, we receive his body which he gave up for us on the Cross and his blood which he “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). We are reminded of his words: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). Jesus himself reassures us that this union, which he compares to that of the life of the Trinity, is truly realized. *The Eucharist is a true banquet*, in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. When for the first time Jesus spoke of this food, his listeners were astonished and bewildered, which forced the Master to emphasize the objective truth of his words: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life within you” (Jn 6:53). This is no metaphorical food: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:55).

1. Why must we not only recognize the Eucharist as the "sacrament of our salvation" but also receive this sacrament into our very bodies?

Paragraph 17

Through our communion in his body and blood, Christ also grants us his Spirit. Saint Ephrem writes: “He called the bread his living body and he filled it with himself and his Spirit...

He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit... Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life”.^{xix} The Church implores this divine Gift, the source of every other gift, in the Eucharistic epiclesis. In the *Divine Liturgy* of Saint John Chrysostom, for example, we find the prayer: “We beseech, implore and beg you: send your Holy Spirit upon us all and upon these gifts... that those who partake of them may be purified in soul, receive the forgiveness of their sins, and share in the Holy Spirit”.^{xx} And in the *Roman Missal* the celebrant prays: “grant that we who are nourished by his body and blood may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ”.^{xxi} Thus by the gift of his body and blood Christ increases within us the gift of his Spirit, already poured out in Baptism and bestowed as a “seal” in the sacrament of Confirmation.

1. How is our receiving the Eucharist an outpouring and reception of the Holy Spirit?

Paragraph 18

The acclamation of the assembly following the consecration appropriately ends by expressing the eschatological thrust which marks the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. *1 Cor* 11:26): “*until you come in glory*”. The Eucharist is a straining towards the goal, a foretaste of the fullness of joy promised by Christ (cf. *Jn* 15:11); it is in some way the anticipation of heaven, the “pledge of future glory”.^{xxii} In the Eucharist, everything speaks of confident waiting “in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ”.^{xxiii} Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace man in his totality. For in the Eucharist we also receive the pledge of our bodily resurrection at the end of the world: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (*Jn* 6:54). This pledge of the future resurrection comes from the fact that the flesh of the Son of Man, given as food, is his body in its glorious state after the resurrection. With the Eucharist we digest, as it were, the “secret” of the resurrection. For this reason Saint Ignatius of Antioch rightly defined the Eucharistic Bread as “a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death”.^{xxiv}

1. Why is the Eucharist considered a foretaste of heaven?
2. How does our reception of the Eucharist affect us in this life?
3. How does our reception of the Eucharist affect our future life?
4. Why does St. Ignatius of Antioch consider the Eucharist the "medicine of immortality, and antidote to death"?

Paragraph 19

The eschatological tension kindled by the Eucharist *expresses and reinforces our communion with the Church in heaven*. It is not by chance that the Eastern Anaphoras and the Latin Eucharistic Prayers honour Mary, the ever-Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God, the angels, the holy apostles, the glorious martyrs and all the saints. This is an aspect of the Eucharist which merits greater attention: in celebrating the sacrifice of the Lamb, we are united to the heavenly “liturgy” and become part of that great multitude which cries out: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (*Rev* 7:10). The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey.

1. How does the Church attempt to remind us at Mass that we are actually participating in the Heavenly Liturgy?
2. How can we better realize this fact?

FRN 1354, 1370

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 318

Paragraph 20

A significant consequence of the eschatological tension inherent in the Eucharist is also the fact that it spurs us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us. Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of “new heavens” and “a new earth” (*Rev* 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, *our sense of responsibility for the world today*.^{xxv} I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world. Theirs is the task of contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan.

Many problems darken the horizon of our time. We need but think of the urgent need to work for peace, to base relationships between peoples on solid premises of justice and solidarity, and to defend human life from conception to its natural end. And what should we say of the thousand inconsistencies of a “globalized” world where the weakest, the most powerless and the poorest appear to have so little hope! It is in this world that Christian hope must shine forth! For this reason too, the Lord wished to remain with us in the Eucharist, making his presence in meal and sacrifice the promise of a humanity renewed by his love. Significantly, in their account of the Last Supper, the Synoptics recount the institution of the Eucharist, while the Gospel of John relates, as a way of bringing out its profound meaning, the account of the “washing of the feet”, in which Jesus appears as the teacher of communion and of service (cf. *Jn* 13:1-20). The Apostle Paul, for his part, says that it is “unworthy” of a Christian community to partake of the Lord's Supper amid division and indifference towards the poor (cf. *I Cor* 11:17-22, 27-34).^{xxvi}

Proclaiming the death of the Lord “until he comes” (*I Cor* 11:26) entails that all who take part in the Eucharist be committed to changing their lives and making them in a certain way completely “Eucharistic”. It is this fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel which splendidly illustrates the eschatological tension inherent in the celebration of the Eucharist and in the Christian life as a whole: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (*Rev* 22:20).

1. How can we approach the Eucharist in a way that will lead us to re-direct our vision toward the Heavenly Jerusalem?
2. How can we make our lives "completely Eucharistic"?
3. How can our sharing of the Eucharist enable us to see Christ in every person?

FRN CCC 1396-1401

ⁱ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47: “... our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of his body and blood, in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout time, until he should return”.

ⁱⁱ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1085.

ⁱⁱⁱ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

^{iv} Cf. Paul VI, *Solemn Profession of Faith*, 30 June 1968, 24: AAS 60 (1968), 442; John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dominicae Cena*e (24 February 1980), 12: AAS 72 (1980), 142.

^v *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1382.

^{vi} *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1367.

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- ^{vii} *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homiliae, Hom. 17,3*: PG 63, 131.
- ^{viii} Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XXII, *Doctrina de ss. Missae Sacrificio*, Chapter 2: DS 1743: "It is one and the same victim here offering himself by the ministry of his priests, who then offered himself on the Cross; it is only the manner of offering that is different".
- ^{ix} Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mediator Dei* (20 November 1947): AAS 39 (1947), 548.
- ^x John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (15 March 1979), 20: AAS 71 (1979), 310.
- ^{xi} Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.
- ^{xii} *De Sacramentis*, V, 4, 26: CSEL 73, 70.
- ^{xiii} *In Ioannis Evangelium*, XII, 20: PG 74, 726.
- ^{xiv} Encyclical Letter *Mysterium Fidei* (3 September 1965): AAS 57 (1965), 764.
- ^{xv} Session XIII, *Decretum de ss. Eucharistia*, Chapter 4: DS 1642.
- ^{xvi} *Mystagogical Catecheses*, IV, 6: SCh 126, 138.
- ^{xvii} Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8.
- ^{xviii} *Solemn Profession of Faith*, 30 June 1968, 25: AAS 60 (1968), 442-443.
- ^{xix} *Sermo IV in Hebdomadam Sanctam*: CSCO 413/Syr. 182, 55.
- ^{xx} Anaphora.
- ^{xxi} Eucharistic Prayer III.
- ^{xxii} Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Second Vespers, Antiphon to the *Magnificat*.
- ^{xxiii} *Missale Romanum*, Embolism following the Lord's Prayer.
- ^{xxiv} *Ad Ephesios*, 20: PG 5, 661.
- ^{xxv} Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.
- ^{xxvi} "Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: 'This is my body' is the same who said: 'You saw me hungry and you gave me no food', and 'Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me' ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well": Saint John Chrysostom, *In Evangelium S. Matthaei, hom. 50:3-4*: PG 58, 508-509; cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 31: AAS 80 (1988), 553-556.