

## Summary of Lesson Content

### Lesson 1

The Holy Eucharist is prefigured by manna in the Old Testament.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. We receive this Bread of Life in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is Jesus, really and truly present—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—under the appearances of bread and wine.

### Lesson 2

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Jesus demonstrated his power to change substances when he miraculously changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana.

Bread and wine and the words of consecration are necessary for the Eucharist.

### Lesson 3

During the prayers of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into Jesus, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The substance changes, though the appearance remains the same. This change in substance is called transubstantiation.

The Holy Eucharist is reserved in a tabernacle inside the church.

### Lesson 4

To receive the Eucharist worthily, one must be free from mortal sin, observe the eucharistic fast, and know whom one is about to receive.

The effects of the reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist (called Holy Communion) include an increase of grace, the forgiveness of venial sin, strength to overcome our faults and protect us from future mortal sin, and union with the Mystical Body of Christ.

## CHAPTER 21

# The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:26

One day during his public ministry, Jesus found himself in the midst of more than five thousand people. They had all come to hear him preach about the good news of salvation. Before they knew it, it was dinnertime, and the people were extremely hungry. Jesus looked with love upon them and said to his apostles, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (Jn 6:5).

Now Jesus knew exactly what he was going to do, but he wanted to test his friends' faith in him. Philip reminded Jesus that it would cost over half a year's wages to feed such a crowd. Andrew brought the Lord five loaves of bread and a couple of fish, but wondered what good they would be for so many. Jesus blessed these small portions and told the apostles to hand them out to the crowd. A miracle! There was more than enough food, with twelve full baskets left over!

### Jesus, the Bread of Life

The people were amazed and wanted Jesus to do this again. "Why not send bread (manna) down from heaven just as God did for our peo-

ple during the Exodus?" they asked. Jesus revealed to them that God was going to give his people a much greater bread; he was telling them about the Holy Eucharist:

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. 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?" 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 at the last day" (Jn 6:48-54).

The listeners were horrified! Eat his flesh and drink his blood! They did not understand. Even having seen this great miracle, they did

not trust Jesus enough to know that he would not ask such a thing. He was going to change bread and wine into his Flesh and Blood. It would still taste like ordinary food, but it would *really* be Jesus himself. Many disciples left our Lord that day, but the twelve apostles remained firm in their faith. They awaited the day when he would give them this holy bread of life.

### Jesus Gives Us the Holy Eucharist

At the Last Supper, Jesus kept his promise and gave God's people the bread of eternal life. The evangelist Saint Matthew, who was an eyewitness of this event, tells us about it in his Gospel:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26–28).

Just as he had changed water into wine at the beginning of his ministry, so now he was changing bread and wine into his very Body and Blood. This was the first Holy Mass, or *Eucharist* as we often call it today. The word "eucharist" is from the Greek word for "thanksgiving," and it is used as a name for the Mass



because Jesus gave thanks to the Father while *consecrating* the bread and wine. There are many other names by which this holy Sacrament is known: Lord's Supper, Blessed Sacrament, Sacrament of the Altar, Bread of Life, Holy Communion, and Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

### The Sign of the Sacrament

We can learn the most obvious purpose of the Eucharist by looking at the **sign of the Holy Eucharist**: bread and wine, together with the words of Consecration ("This is my Body. . . . This is the cup of my Blood. . ."). They tell us that food is being given to us, but it is supernatural food—the Flesh and Blood of the Son of God!

These two sources of nourishment, bread and wine, were an important part of the diet of the people of the Holy Land. Bread was their main food and wine was the most common beverage. To them these two items meant life and health for the body; Jesus made them the life and health of the soul as well. Without the Holy Eucharist our souls would starve to death!

Today, with so many different kinds of foods available to us, we do not see the importance of bread and wine as clearly as our ancestors did. But if you think about it, you will realize that so many of our favorite foods are made out of wheat flour, "which earth has given and human hands have made" (Offertory prayer over the bread). And even to this day wine is used as *the* celebration drink at weddings, parties, and many other get-togethers.

### The Mystery of the Eucharist

At the Consecration of the Mass, the priest changes the bread and the wine by the power which he received at ordination. This change is known as **transubstantiation**. If we break

this word apart we can see what it is trying to express. *Trans* here means "change" and *substantiation* comes from "substance" or what a thing is. At Mass the "things" are bread and wine, so the word is simply saying that these things change into Jesus Christ.

Our Lord chose appropriate means by which we could receive this Sacrament: he gave it to us under the *appearances* of bread and wine. When we go to Holy Communion we see and taste ordinary food, but our faith in Jesus tells us that it is not what it seems. We are really eating the Flesh of the Son of Man and drinking his Blood.

This is why the Eucharist is called the **Mystery of Faith**. We accept it as true on God's word. At every Mass, right after the Consecration, the priest says to us, "Let us proclaim the Mystery of Faith." We profess our faith in Jesus whose presence before us in this sacrament we call the **Real Presence**.

The bread and wine are not changed into Jesus' Flesh and Blood just for a time during Mass. They remain the Body and Blood of the Lord after Mass, and the hosts are reverently kept in the **tabernacle** in the church. This is a special, solid, immovable container that is decorated with symbols of Jesus. A vigil lamp (candle) is kept burning before the tabernacle day and night as a way of honoring Jesus in the Eucharist.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) was a holy bishop and doctor (exceptionally great teacher) of the Church. He used to encourage the Catholics in his diocese to have faith in the Real Presence saying:

When Christ says, "This is my Body," who should dare to doubt him? When he says, "This is my Blood," who dares to say that it is not? Once he changed water into wine. Does he not deserve our faith in being able to change wine into his Blood? Do not think of the Blessed Sacrament as

ordinary bread, for according to the words of Christ, it is his Flesh. Even though your senses do not convince you, let your faith strengthen you that you do not judge according to your taste (*Catecheses mystagogicae*, 4).

### The Effects of the Holy Eucharist

When we receive the Blessed Sacrament worthily—that is, free from mortal sin, having fasted from food and drink (except water and medicine) for one hour beforehand, and approaching the altar with faith—Jesus does wonderful things for our souls!

He increases the life of grace within us and takes away our venial sins. He actually makes us one with him. He is truly within us after Holy Communion.

He unites us with one another, for we all are made one with the same Eucharistic Lord. Holy Communion helps us to love one another.

He helps us to overcome our faults and sinful desires. By the frequent reception of the

Eucharist we are given the power to give up all our sins and even our selfish desires.

With each Holy Communion Christ's life increases in us. Those who receive the Eucharist often and worthily will have a deeper relationship with Jesus in heaven.

Lastly, our Lord prepares us for the resurrection of the dead. The Creed tells us that everyone will rise from the dead at the end of the world. Those who go often to Communion with faith, hope, and love will be more sure of being in heaven, body and soul, someday.

But if we do not receive him *properly*, we will not profit from this Sacrament. As a matter of fact, to receive Communion with a mortal sin is one of the worst offenses against the Lord. It is called a **sacrilege** and must be confessed as soon as possible.

### Words to Know:

sign of the Holy Eucharist  
transubstantiation Mystery of Faith  
Real Presence tabernacle sacrilege

### Q. 159 *What is the Eucharist?*

The Eucharist is the sacrament that contains the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine (CCC 1333).

### Q. 160 *When did Jesus Christ institute the Eucharist?*

Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, when he consecrated and changed bread and wine into his Body and Blood and distributed it to the apostles, commanding them to “do this in memory of me” (CCC 1337, 1339).

**Q. 161** *Why did Jesus Christ institute the Eucharist?*

Jesus Christ instituted the Eucharist to be a perpetual Sacrifice of the New Covenant, a memorial of his Passion, death, and Resurrection, spiritual food to nourish his Church, and it is wholly directed toward our intimate union with him (CCC 1341, 1365, 1382).

**Q. 162** *Is the same Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist who was born on earth of the Virgin Mary?*

Yes, the same Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist who was born on earth of the Virgin Mary (CCC 1373–75).

**Q. 163** *What is the Host before the Consecration?*

Before the Consecration, the Host is bread (CCC 1376).

**Q. 164** *What is the Host after the Consecration?*

After the Consecration, the Host is the true Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread (CCC 1376).

**Q. 165** *What is contained in the chalice before the Consecration?*

Before the Consecration, wine and a small amount of water are contained in the chalice (CCC 1376).

**Q. 166** *What is contained in the chalice after the Consecration?*

After the Consecration, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is contained in the chalice under the appearance of wine (CCC 1376).

**Q. 167** *When do the bread and wine become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ?*

The bread and wine become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ at the moment of the Consecration (CCC 1353, 1376).