

# Why Do We Do That: The Eucharist

Have you ever heard questions like this:

“Why do Catholics have to fast one hour before receiving communion?” or “Why do Catholics have all these strange postures at Mass like genuflecting, bowing and kneeling? Why can’t ya’ll just sit down and be still?”

Or perhaps you’ve heard some people question why the Catholic Church should let protestants receive communion at Mass. Look at the news and you’ll see some person here or there wondering why the Church can’t use rice cakes and grape juice instead of insisting on using unleavened bread and grape wine.

Is the Catholic Church just a bunch of old fuddie duddies? Do we hold on to “traditions of men?”

NO!!

As Catholics, we believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist!! So, there’s something to be said for proper preparation and respect when it comes to receiving Holy Communion. The fast before Mass assists us to have a “hunger” for the Lord. We must be in the state of grace, lest we “eat and drink condemnation upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:23-29). We must show respect in our manner of dress and behavior since we are in the Real Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ!!

Our Priests follow the “formula” that Christ Himself gave at the Last Supper when He commanded the Apostles to “Do this in remembrance of me.” Christ used specific matter (unleavened wheat bread and grape wine) and specific form (the words “This IS MY BODY... THIS IS MY BLOOD), so our priests are simply following Christ’s instruction. Therefore crackers, rice cakes, or Wonderbread and grape juice cannot be used at Mass.

The word “Communion” means “mutual participation.” When we receive Communion we are all literally united as the Body of Christ! We are all together and we are all one, and we all profess the same belief. Now, how can we allow someone who doesn’t believe as we do to be in “Communion” with us? They are not in communion with us because they hold different beliefs. To allow this would be a contradiction, therefore we cannot allow protestants to receive the Eucharist.

So, why do we believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist? Because it’s in the Bible!!

## Old Testament Roots:

- Exodus 12:5-8 – Passover Lamb must be 1) Male 2) Without Blemish 3) Sacrificed 4) Eaten. This was the Old Covenant.
  - Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God (as proclaimed by St. John the Baptist in John 1-29. Also, St. John the Evangelist refers to Christ as the Lamb 28 times in the book of Revelation) is 1) Male 2) Without Blemish 3) Sacrificed 4) .....how can it be that we must EAT Christ?! John 6 is where Christ Himself commanded it. At the Last Supper He showed us how it would be made possible.
- Exodus 16:4-35 – God provides bread from Heaven (Manna).
  - In John 6 Christ explains that He is the bread from Heaven.
- Exodus 12:18 – Unleavened bread is to be used for the Passover meal
  - Unleavened bread is the only valid matter for the host. (Unleavened means no yeast, so the bread is flat and will not rise.)

## New Testament Proofs:

- John 6:35-69

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. But I told you that although you have seen (me), you do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it (on) the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him (on) the last day."

The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever." These things he said while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Then many of his disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father."

As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

- Matthew 26:26-28 – This **IS** my body; this **IS** my blood.
- Mark 14:22-24 – This **IS** my body; this **IS** my blood.
- Luke 22:14-20 – This **IS** my body; this cup **IS** the new covenant **IN MY BLOOD**.
- 1 Corinthians 10:16 – The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 – Unworthy reception of communion brings condemnation upon yourself.

### **Early Church Fathers:**

- Ignatius of Antioch - "Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. . . . 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 that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes" (Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6:2-7:1 [**A.D. 110**]).
- Justin Martyr - "We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus" (First Apology 66 [**A.D. 151**]).
- These are just two of many, Many, MANY who show that the Catholic Church has always taught this doctrine since the very beginning of the Church.

### **Important Notes:**

- Transubstantiation – the substance of bread and wine become the substance of Jesus’ body and blood through the consecration, but the “accidents” of bread and wine remain. Accidents are the appearance, the taste, the smell, etc.
- Transubstantiation was NOT invented at the Council of Trent.
- God’s wisdom is great . . . if Jesus wasn’t under the appearance of bread and wine, we’d all be on our faces and communion would take a really long time.
- Pay attention at Mass:
  - Before Mass we fast for one hour (no food or drink except water or medicine) to prepare for reception of Holy Communion. We dress with respect, and above all, we must be in the state of Grace to receive Communion.
  - We genuflect to the tabernacle when we pass in front of it before entering the pew as a sign of reverence and respect for the Blessed Sacrament housed therein.
  - At the words of consecration during the Canon of the Mass, the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ. That’s why we are kneeling.
  - Each Eucharistic species is the Body AND Blood. When you separate blood from the body you die. Jesus did die, and that is why there are separate consecrations. But, Jesus rose from the dead, and we partake in the Risen Lord (The priest breaks off a tiny piece of the host and places it in the chalice); therefore the host is Jesus Christ and the Wine is Jesus Christ whole and entire.
  - After the Agnus Dei we all kneel and the priest says “This is the Lamb of God!” Jesus Christ is present and we all speak to Christ, “Lord I am not worthy. . . .”
  - We bow before receiving Holy Communion to give proper reverence to Christ Truly Present in the Consecrated Host
  - When you are shown the host the Priest or EME says, “The Body of Christ” and you answer “AMEN”, which means “I DO BELIEVE.” In other words you are saying that yes, you believe the consecrated host is in fact the body of Christ.

### **“Understanding” the Mystery:**

- As with all the mysteries of the Church, we will never fully understand this. We must have faith “I do believe, help my unbelief!” Mark 9:24
- Eucharistic miracles have occurred (ex. The Miracle of Lanciano <http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/lanciano.html>); however for the most part a host consecrated at Mass will not reveal the DNA of Jesus. However, neither would a blood test on Jesus have shown Him to be Divine.