

## THE CATHOLIC MASS

Eucharist in the Catholic Church refers to both the celebration of the Mass, that is the Eucharistic Liturgy, and the consecrated bread and wine which according to our faith becomes the body and blood of Christ.

*Blessed Sacrament* is a devotional term used in the Catholic Church to refer to the Eucharistic species (the Body and Blood of Christ).

The Catholic Church sees as the main basis for this belief the words of Jesus himself at his Last Supper. The Gospels (Matthew 26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20) and Saint Paul's 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 recount the words of Jesus at the last Supper: "This is my body ... this is my blood." Many, but not all, Protestants tend to interpret this symbolically rather than literally, especially those of Calvinist theological views. They see "This is my body" as parallel with "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) or "I am the door of the sheepfold" (John 10:9), whose meaning is symbolic. The doctrine of a symbolic Eucharist was more expressly propounded by the 16th-century Swiss reformer Zwingli. But all the ancient Churches of the East believe as

the Catholic Church does, that in the Eucharist the bread and wine do become the body and blood of Christ.

The Gospel of John in Chapter 6, *The Discourse on the Bread of Life*, presents Jesus as saying: "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 remains in me and I in him" (John 6:53-56). According to John, Jesus did not tone down these sayings, even when many of his disciples abandoned him (6:66), shocked at the idea.

### **Historical development**

Early Christianity celebrated the Eucharist on Sundays which became known as the Day of the Lord, to recall the resurrection, the appearance of Christ to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the appearance to Thomas and the Pentecost which all took place on Sundays after the Passion. Following an ordinary meal, as at the Last Supper, the apostle, bishop or priest prayed several prayers in combination with the words of institution over bread and wine placed on a specially made and cleaned altar table; after which the Communion was received from their hands by all the faithful present. In the latter half of the first century, especially after the martyrdom of

Peter and Paul, passages from the writings of the apostles were read and preached upon before the consecration of the bread and wine took place. Justin the Martyr records that, in his time, the rituals for the Mass were already in place.

These meals and subsequent Eucharistic rituals evolved into more formal worship services, which became known as the Mass in the West and as the Divine Liturgy in the East.

The word *Eucharist* is from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which means *thanksgiving*. Catholics typically restrict the term 'communion' to the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ by the communicants during the celebration of the Mass

In about 106, Saint Ignatius of Antioch criticized those who "abstain from the Eucharist and the public prayer, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same Body of our Savior Jesus Christ, which [flesh] suffered for our sins, and which the Father in His goodness raised up again" (*Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 6, 7). Similarly, St. Ambrose of Milan countered objections to the doctrine, writing "You may perhaps say: 'My bread is ordinary.' But that bread is bread before the words of the Sacraments; where the consecration has entered in, the bread becomes the Flesh of Christ" (*The Sacraments*, 333/339-397 A.D. v.2, 1339, 1340).

The earliest known use, in about 1079, of the term "transubstantiation" to describe the change from bread and wine to body and blood of Christ was by Hildebert de Savardin, Archbishop of Tours (died 1133). This was long before the Latin West, under the influence especially of Saint Thomas Aquinas (c. 1227-1274) used the term.

In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council used the word *transubstantiated* in its profession of faith, when speaking of the change that takes place in the Eucharist.

In 1551 the Council of Trent officially defined that "by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made 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; which is properly called Transubstantiation." (Session XIII, chapter IV; cf. canon II).

### **The Word 'Mass'**

The term *Mass* is derived from the late-Latin word *missa* (dismissal), a word used in the concluding formula of Mass in Latin: "*Ite, missa est*" ("Go, the dismissal is made") [2].

## Transubstantiation

Transubstantiation (from Latin *transsubstantiatio*) is the *change of the substance* of bread and wine into that of the body and blood of Christ, "Substance" here means what something is in itself. A hat's shape is not the hat itself, nor is its color the hat, nor is its size, nor its softness to the touch, nor anything else about it perceptible to the senses. The hat itself (the "substance") *has* the shape, the colour, the size, the softness and the other appearances, but is distinct from them. Whereas the appearances, which are referred to by the philosophical term accidents are perceptible to the senses, the substance is not.

When at his Last Supper Jesus said: "This is my body", what he held in his hands had all the appearances of bread. However, the Catholic Church believes that the underlying reality was changed in accordance with what Jesus said, that the "substance" of the bread was converted to that of his body. In other words, it *actually* was his body, while all the appearances open to the senses or to scientific investigation were still those of bread, exactly as before. The Church believes that the same change of the substance of the bread and of the wine occurs at every celebration of the Eucharist.

The bread is changed in the Eucharist into Jesus' body, but, because Jesus, risen from the dead, is living, not only his body is present, but Jesus as a whole, body and blood, soul and divinity. The same holds for the wine changed into his blood.

The Catholic Church accordingly believes that through transubstantiation Christ is really, truly and substantially present under the remaining appearances of bread and wine, and that the transformation remains as long as the appearances remain. For this reason the consecrated elements are preserved, generally in a church tabernacle, for giving Holy Communion to the sick and dying, and also for the secondary, but still highly prized, purpose of adoring Christ present in the Eucharist.

### **Minister of the sacrament**

The only minister of the Eucharist (someone who can consecrate the Eucharist) is a validly ordained priest. He acts in the person of Christ, representing Christ, who is the Head of the Church, and also acts before God in the name of the Church.<sup>[6]</sup> Several priests may concelebrate the same offering of the Eucharist.<sup>[7]</sup>

"Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion" are not to be called "Eucharistic ministers", since that would imply that they, too, somehow transubstantiate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

"Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion. They may also exercise this function at Eucharistic celebrations where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion."<sup>[10]</sup> "Only when there is a necessity may extraordinary ministers assist the Priest celebrant in accordance with the norm of law."<sup>[11]</sup>

### **Receiving the Eucharist**

"A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible."<sup>[12]</sup>

"A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before Holy Communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine."<sup>[13]</sup>

Catholics may receive Communion during Mass or outside of Mass, but "a person who has already received the Most Holy Eucharist can receive it a second time on the same day only within the Eucharistic celebration in which the person participates", except as Viaticum (Code of Canon Law, canon 917).

In the Western Church, the administration of the Most Holy Eucharist to children requires that they have sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so that they understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity and are able to receive the body of Christ with faith and devotion. We are allowed to receive the Host on the hand as well as the tongue except when Communion is distributed by intinction (partly dipping the Host in the Chalice before distributing it).

**Matter for the Sacrament** ('matter' is a philosophical word)



The bread used for the Eucharist must be wheaten only, and recently made, and the wine must be natural, made from grapes, and not corrupt. The bread is unleavened in the Latin, Armenian and Ethiopic Rites, but is leavened in most Eastern Catholic churches. A small quantity of water is added to the wine.<sup>[15]</sup>

### **Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction**

Exposition of the Eucharist is the display of the consecrated host on an altar in a Monstrance. The rites involving exposition of the Blessed Sacrament are the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and Eucharistic adoration.

Consecrated hosts are kept in a tabernacle after Mass, so that the Blessed Sacrament can be brought to the sick and dying outside the time of Mass. This makes possible also the practice of Eucharistic adoration, worship of Christ present in the Eucharist, whether the sacrament remains enclosed in the tabernacle or is exposed to view in a monstrance.

It is not bread that is worshipped, but Christ, who becomes present under the appearance of bread and wine during the Mass through the Words of Institution.<sup>[16]</sup>

