

all (Heb 7:25, 9:24-28), in order that we, throughout history, might consume or partake of Christ, our Passover Sacrificial Lamb, the perfect sacrifice, in the New and final covenant.

In the former covenants God made with the people of Israel in the Old Testament, as with Abraham and in the Exodus from Egypt, the Lamb was consumed. These were but types and “*shadows*” of the perfect sacrifice which is Christ. We partake of his Body and Blood so that we may have life (John 6:50-51). From this sacrifice we have life in abundance.

□Role of the priest (presbyter)

Regarding the “priest” who presides at or celebrates the Eucharist, this is no medieval invention. By the late first century these “elders” were known as bishops, presbyters (priests), and deacons. This three tiered leadership was the norm for the entire Christian world. The Catholic Church has preserved this basic pattern of official leadership and succession from the first or second century to the present day. One can refer to this in Acts 6:5-6, Acts 13:2,3 and 2 Tim 1:6, 7; 2:1, 2. All believers are a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people (1 Pet 2:9) and the above leadership reflects the “ordained” priestly ministry in the Church.

St Justin Martyr has left us in his first century: “First Apology” (c 67 AD) a description of the Mass or Liturgy in the early Church, which in embryo form is exactly as enacted in the Catholic Church today:

“And on that day which is called after the sun, all gather together for a celebration. The prophets and the writings of the apostles are read. After the reader has finished, the one presiding (the priest) gives an address urging all

to practice these teachings in their lives. Then all stand and recite prayers. The bread and wine mixed with water are brought and the priest offers up prayers and thanksgiving. The people chime in with: “*Amen*”. Then takes place the distribution to all present of the things over which the “*thanksgiving*” has been said, and the deacons bring a portion to those absent. This food is known among us as the Eucharist. No one can partake of it unless he is convinced of the truth of our teachings and is cleansed in the bath of baptism. Those who are well-off give whatever they will; it is gathered and given to the one presiding, who therewith helps widows and orphans”.

The priest presiding at the Eucharist, by definition offers a Sacrifice; in this case the “making present” in an “unbloody manner”. It is the complete, once and for all sacrifice of the Cross for our participation. “The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: you are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4) It was bread and wine that Melchizedek brought to Abraham as an offering (Gen 14:18). Also, the Greek word for: “remembrance” is “sacrifice” as in 1 Cor 11:24-25, Lev 24:7 and Heb 10:3. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is foretold in Zech 14:20,21: “on that day all will come to sacrifice” the “pure offering” which Malachi 1:11 speaks of.

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THE EUCHARIST AND THE TRUE PRESENCE

The word “Eucharist” means thanksgiving. *This was the common name in the early Church for the re-enactment of Jesus’ Last Supper with his apostles. The essence of the Eucharist is the re-enactment of Jesus’ action of distributing the bread and wine with the words “Take, this is my body.” (Mk14:22).; “This is my blood” (Mk 14:24); “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19).*

How is the Greek word “*estin*” that is used in Jesus’ saying “This is my body” really to be understood –“literally” or “figuratively”?

□Scriptural support for Catholic beliefs

Catholic Christians understand Jesus’ words in the light of chapter 6 of John’s gospel, Paul’s letters and the testimony of the early Christians. Chapter 6 of John’s gospel, the last gospel written, implies that the early Christians had insisted that the eucharistic bread and wine were truly the body and blood of Jesus and that this had become a scandal to the Jews and others who were considering becoming Christians.

Previously, Jesus had fed five thousand people with a handful of food. He had then preached a sermon which drove many of his disciples away. The sermon makes complete sense when understood in the context of the Last Supper. The timing of this sermon is important; it occurred at Passover, one year before the Last Supper, which also occurred at Passover.

The Bread of Life discourse occurs in Jn 6:26-59. “This is my flesh which I give for the life of the world.” Lest we do not understand whether

he means flesh in the real, physical sense, he tells us next that it is the same flesh that will be given up on the cross that must be eaten by his followers. Jesus equates this “bread” with the physical flesh of his crucifixion. I can think of no way for Jesus to have affirmed more clearly that he would literally give us his flesh to eat for our salvation. Because the sacramental meaning of the “True Presence” is so clear in this passage, some liberal Protestant theologians assume the passage is a later fabrication, since it so clearly reflects Catholic understanding of the Eucharist.

Jesus repeats the command to “eat his flesh” six times in different ways. Four times the word used is “chew” or “gnaw”, which is very graphic. The word is never used symbolically anywhere in the Bible, or in ancient secular literature. Jesus makes it clear that the flesh to be eaten is as literal as the body on the cross was literal.

□Jesus insists that his body must be eaten

This is the only place recorded in the gospels where disciples left Jesus over a doctrinal issue. He does not ask them to stay, explaining they have misunderstood, and that what he means is symbolic. At their grumbling, Jesus merely intensifies what he has previously said. This is also the first time we hear of Judas doubting the wisdom of the Master. There is a Church that has always accepted Jesus’ teaching here as truth: the Catholic Church.

□Not recognising the body of the Lord

Catholics believe that Jesus is really present in the consecrated host. This is the only way to explain adequately Paul’s assumption in 1 Cor 11:25-32. “Whoever drinks the cup of the Lord or eats the bread in an unworthy manner, will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of

the Lord for everyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement to himself”.

How can one be guilty of the body and blood of Christ if the service is only a memorial in the normal sense of the word? How much clearer could Paul be on this? I can find no contextual basis for the Protestant teaching that Communion is only a memorial.

The bread and wine are changed into the body, blood, soul and divinity of the risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit at the words of consecration by the ordained priest in the Mass.

The concept of the True Presence was not invented sometime in the Dark Ages as a ploy for the priesthood to gain power. Furthermore, the most elementary reading of primary sources for the first three centuries of Christianity will show the theory of “priestly invention” put forward by some, to be the result of ignorance of almost unbelievable proportions.

□Testimony of the Fathers

In the early Church, the Real Presence of Christ in the elements of Communion was universally believed. Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch and died a martyr at about the same time the apostle John died. Speaking of the Docetist heretics who denied the humanity of Jesus, he wrote: “They confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father, of his goodness, raised up again”. (Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Smyrneans, 7). Ignatius equated the flesh of the Eucharist with the flesh of the Cross just as John had done in John 6.

Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who remembered Polycarp’s firsthand stories about the apostle John. He used the real presence in the Eucharist to prove the resurrection of the Christian dead: “The Eucharist becomes the Body of Christ” (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5, 2, 3). “How can they say that the flesh which is nourished with the Body of the Lord and with his blood passes into corruption and partakes not of life?” (4. 18. 5).

Evangelicals and others believe that a “golden thread” or remnant of true Christianity was there in the first three centuries. Yet there is no evidence in the fair amount of literature of the time to prove anything remotely related to evangelical notions concerning the Lord’s Supper.

Among a veritable treasure trove of those who wrote on the belief in the True Presence as universally believed in the early Church, also, are Irenaeus of Lyon (185 AD see above: Book 5, Ch 2), Cyril of Jerusalem (c 250 AD: 4th Address on the Body of Christ), St Augustine (c 400 AD, Sermon 272) and many others.

□Transubstantiation

Medieval Catholic theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas used the term “Transubstantiation” to describe what happens, in our own poor human understanding, when the elements are changed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. This was not the “invention of a manmade doctrine”, but an official clarification, or definition of authentic Catholic belief, from the beginning, now set forth at the 4th Lateran Council of 1215.

The Catholic Eucharist, or “Mass” is the Sunday worship service which “makes present” the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, once and for