

Holy Communion - The Body and Blood of Christ

What is the Eucharist?

'The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian Life'

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324



The Eucharist is at the heart of our lives of faith. It defines who we are as disciples of Christ: it is our source, our strength, our sustenance in all that we do to be Church. Christ gifts us with himself, for the Eucharist is the abiding memory of his love and all that his life, death and resurrection offers us. As we receive Christ in the Eucharist, that memory prompts us to **be** Christ for others.

The word 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving' and in receiving communion we give thanks and praise for all that Christ has done for us. We receive Christ's Body and Blood in order that we, too, might become his Body and Blood - broken and poured out for our world. We are to be reasons for others to give thanks and celebrate. As St Augustine said, 'We, the Body of Christ, receive the Body of Christ, in order that we might become the Body of Christ for our world'.

What we believe about the Eucharist is central to our faith. In the New Testament we hear that Jesus gathered with his disciples on the night before he died. Even knowing what lay ahead he said to them, 'I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (*Luke 22:15*). He shared the meal with them in which he took bread, blessed and broke it, then gave it to them saying 'This is my body'. He took a cup of wine and shared it with them saying 'This is my blood'. Having eaten and drunk with his disciples, Jesus said 'Do this in memory of me' (*Luke 22:19*).

We gather to do as Jesus commanded us, to eat and drink a sacred meal - his Body and Blood - when we celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is, for us, both a meal and a sacrifice. We are 'caught up' with Jesus in the events of the Last Supper, his Passion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. We believe that Christ becomes truly present in the bread and wine consecrated at Mass, for Jesus said, 'my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him' (*Jn 6:55,56*).

At Mass we encounter the presence of Christ in four distinct ways – in the gathered assembly, throughout the Liturgy of the Word, in the person of the priest acting 'in persona Christi' and, most particularly, in the Eucharistic species. Before the Consecration, the bread and wine are just that, bread and wine. But after the Consecration they become the Body of Christ under the appearance of bread and the Blood of Christ under the appearance of wine, so we refer to them as the 'Body of Christ' and 'the Blood of Christ' or 'the Precious Blood'.

Communion under both kinds

Receiving both the Body and Blood of Christ, i.e. 'communion under both kinds' has been an option in our own parishes for many years but, sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to very legitimate concerns about distribution under both species and therefore dioceses and parishes worldwide stopped offering communion under both kinds. Now, thankfully, after an absence of over two years, the Bishops of England and Wales have decided that we will be able, once again, to start offering the opportunity to receive the Precious Blood from the Chalice during Mass. Put simply, Jesus said 'take and eat, take and drink...' It will, of course, be each individual's choice whether they receive from the chalice or not and, as we know, the Church teaches that the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ is present in both the Sacred Host and Precious Blood, so there is no *obligation* to receive Holy Communion from the chalice.

For those parishes who wish to reintroduce communion under both kinds it may be made available from **Maundy Thursday evening**, at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

