
The Body of our Lord Jesus
Christ, which was
given for thee,
preserve thy
body and soul unto
everlasting life.

Take and eat
this in remembrance
that Christ
died for thee, and
feed on him in thy
heart by faith with
thanksgiving.

The Blood of our Lord
Jesus Christ, which
was shed for thee,
preserve thy
body and soul unto
everlasting life.

Drink this in remembrance
that Christ's Blood
was shed for thee,
and be thankful.

The Book of Common Prayer

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Christian Faith
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Christian Faith

Belief in the Eucharist



The Eucharist is the sacrament in which the people of God gather around God's table to celebrate his presence with us and his ministry amongst and through us.

In the early Church people were largely content to accept Christ's presence in the Eucharist without clearly defining it. In the Middle Ages, however, the Western Church came to believe that when the priest repeated Jesus' words: 'This is my body . . .' and 'This is my blood . . .' the substance of the bread and wine were transformed into the body and blood of Christ, although the 'accidents' (that is, the externals) remained bread and wine. This doctrine, called 'transubstantiation', was taught from the thirteenth century.

In the sixteenth century, the Reformers found it impossible to accept this explanation of what happened at the Eucharist. They believed Christ is present when the people of God gather to share bread and wine, but they disagreed about how. Luther was convinced that at the Lord's Supper the bread and the wine truly become the body and blood of Christ, but he rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation because it used philosophy to try to explain a divine mystery. He thought it better to trust Christ's words – 'This is my body' – and not to worry too much about how Christ is present. The Swiss reformer Zwingli did not believe that Christ's body is physically present at all, but thought of the Lord's Supper as a fellowship meal, a remembering of all that Christ has done for us, which feeds us spiritually

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and strengthens our faith. He favoured calling the meal the Eucharist, from the Greek word for thanksgiving. Calvin believed that Christ is truly present through the Holy Spirit who takes us up to heaven to partake of him there. Martin Bucer, who influenced his friend Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, spoke of Communion as the experience of a sacramental unity with Christ through the sharing of bread and wine. The Anglican divine, Richard Hooker, wrote of the transubstantiation, not of the bread and wine, but of the worshipping community: those present are transformed into the body of Christ.

These differences gave rise to many of the different confessions and denominations that exist today – Reformed – Lutheran, Catholic – and to the many different names for what we do as we celebrate the Lord's Supper – Holy Communion – the Eucharist – the Mass. Each of these reminds us of a different and important aspect of the meaning of this sacrament.

To speak of the LORD'S SUPPER is to remember the Last Supper before Christ's crucifixion: to remember that when we gather at the Lord's table we receive Christ's gift to us of himself, given to make us whole.

To speak of HOLY COMMUNION is to focus on how we are invited into (comm)unity with Christ and with each other: how we are called to *be* the body of Christ, not just to partake of it.

To speak of the EUCHARIST is to express our gratitude and joy at God's gifts to us in creation and salvation.

To speak of the MASS, from the Latin *mitto*, to send, is to honour our call to mission, as God sends us out, fed and sustained by Christ, to transform his world.

