

SESSION TWO: THE EUCHARIST OF THE FIRST CENTURY AND THE VOICE OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

In the 19th century, St. John Henry Cardinal Newman (d. 1890) illustrated his ideas on the advance of doctrine (and worship): “It is indeed sometimes said that the stream is clearest near the spring. Whatever use may fairly be made of this image, it does not apply to the history of a philosophy or belief, which on the contrary is more equable, and purer, and stronger, when its bed has become deep, and broad, and full.” (from *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*)

Here, he writes of the profound richness of the Church’s theology, morality, and liturgy (worship) as it has unfolded over the centuries to provide for the progression of our understanding of Christ and His doctrines from its beginning when the ‘seeds of Faith’ were sown and planted to the present reality when the grand tree of Faith has reached a certain maturity. With the Church’s institutions of sanctification, education and healing, clergy and laity enjoy the domain of the Kingdom of God in the blessings of the New Covenant under the strength of deep roots, large trunk, and sturdy branches.

Indeed, the Church was not born from the pages of a book, even a book so esteemed and worthy as the Bible, but out of the flesh of the Son of God, only-begotten of the Father and from the miraculous womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary: “And the Word became flesh (*sarx*) and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The birth of Christianity arose from the flesh and blood of Christ and, from the glory of His love and mercy, by which He sustained and established the message of salvation through the dedicated zeal and unquenchable energy of the Apostles and disciples of the first century.

To be clear, the flesh of Christ, which is the living Body of His physicality and spiritual nature, is unified and therefore nourishment and nourishing for the one who believes and receives: “Whoever eats my flesh (*sarx*) and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them” (John 6:54-56). This is the significance of the rite of Holy Communion, that He gives one hundred percent of Himself to His Church and to His faithful sons and daughters and children. Had not one word of the Gospel been put onto paper, its truths would hold fast and its teachings continue to bring the grace of His life-giving mystery!

Likewise, the Holy Eucharist represents the Sacrament of Christ’s life and legacy as conveyed in these essential aspects by its Institution and usage:

- 1) The two-fold Oblation of Bread and Wine, which become the fullness of His Presence (and parallels the Bread of the Presence in the Holy of Holies)

- 2) The Sacrificial Act of Thanksgiving, which affords gratitude to God for the ultimate gift of Salvation (and parallels the weekly sacrifice of the Temple)
- 3) The Memorial and Meal Rite of the Passion of Christ (parallels the Passover idea of remembrance as an actual reliving of the moment of deliverance from slavery)
- 4) The Declaration of His New and Eternal Covenant (parallels the sacrifice of young bulls by Moses to seal the old covenant in blood)
- 5) The Eucharistic Mass/Liturgy as a True Sacrifice and True Re-presentation of Calvary (parallels the Exodus of the Old Testament, which becomes the Exodus of Christ Himself from life through death to life again!)

Of course, the reason for His Death and Resurrection was and remains to establish the Redemption of humanity from sin and the Reconciliation of humanity with its Creator, God the Father. This truth is a mystery embodied in the Word and Sacramental rites of the Church— taught and proclaimed by those generations of shepherds who have both preserved the Faith and adapted its message to every new circumstance through the prevalent presence of the Holy Spirit.

As Christianity expanded beyond the confines of Israel (the Roman Province of Judea), an important transition took place in which the language of Christ, Aramaic/Hebrew, was replaced by the common language of the Hellenistic/Latin world, Greek, as the language of the new Israel— it is an astounding fact that the teachings and life of Christ, originally in Aramaic, the tongue spoken in the Holy Land at that time (with Hebrew as the sacred language of the Jews) was translated no more than twenty years after the Ascension of Christ, by the era of St. Paul, into the language of the empire, that is, common (*koine*) Greek as the principle language of the Church! How, despite this linguistic shift, did the message remain consistent and constant, with little instability and fluctuation? Of course the role of the Holy Spirit kept things together and so too the leadership of the Church in Rome. As the Apostolic age passed, the bishops of Rome at the center of the Empire and successors of St. Peter gave advice and direction to the bishops of the Church under the authority of the Keys of the Kingdom.

Further inspiration naturally came from the Word of God, but what was the Bible in St. Paul's lifetime? In reality, the Church had no sacred scriptures of her own in the first century of her existence— while the Jewish people possessed the Torah and the Prophets and certain books of history as acknowledged and known from the Dead Sea Scrolls (called the Masoretic text), there was no authority outside of belief and tradition that its twenty-four books were divine writ. On the other hand, the early Church utilized the Greek version of the Old Testament, a collection of books known as the Septuagint. Otherwise, oral or auricular tradition was the means by which knowledge and faith in Christ as Lord and Savior proceeded beyond the land of the Jews. When at last the four Gospels were written and compiled in their final forms, they endured as sheets of paper made of papyrus— fragile material that does not survive the ages intact except under ideal conditions. Later on, parchment replaced papyrus and became the predominate type of paper utilized for old books (made of

goat, sheep, and calves skin, manufactured by an elaborate process and much less delicate).

Throughout the first century, the various books we know as the New Testament canon were under construction and not yet recognized as Sacred Scripture. Only in the second letter of St. Peter, ascribed to the Apostle, do we come across a reference to St. Paul's letters upon the same level as scripture (ref., 2 Peter 3:15&16). In fact, there is no Bible as we know the Bible until the fourth century— meaning an actual book that starts with Genesis and ends with the Apocalypse or Revelation, containing two parts with the Old and New Testaments and an official order for those books from start to finish. The two oldest copies of the Bible are known as the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, each dated to the fourth century A.D., handwritten on parchment sheets, in all capitol letters, without punctuation or space between words, and no chapters and verses. Neither of these Bibles however contain the complete 73 books we acknowledge today, on the authority of the Catholic Church, as the Word of God.

Among the many Christian writings generated in the first and second centuries, those eventually accepted as Holy Writ were those that reflected the authentic doctrine of the Catholic Church and had been read in the liturgy of the Church along with the older writings of the Old Testament, considered important for their prophecies of promised Messiah. Composition, recognition, debates and discussions, and finally inclusion of a specific book within the canon of Sacred Scripture occurred over a process of decades. Its culmination happened after a definitive rupture happened between Christians and Jews; this break is amply demonstrated by the writings of St. Paul, who refused the observance of Mosaic practices, and was magnified as more and more Gentiles (former pagans) converted to the Faith. Soon, the shift from the Sabbath as the day of rest and worship to Sunday as the 'Day of the Lord' further illustrates the split between the two religious groups. For the Church, Sunday, the day of Christ's Resurrection to new life, now stood as the appropriate and definitive day of the week, the first day, in order to remember, to give thanks, and express worship and thanksgiving for His triumph over death.

Despite the separation of the Jewish community from the new generation of converts in the larger empire, the worship of the Church remained close to its Jewish roots. For example, the Synagogue service for the Sabbath set the basis of the first part of the Catholic Mass, the 'Liturgy of the Word,' with the second part structured as a modification of the rites of Passover, being the Eucharistic rite of the 'Lord's Supper' and called the 'Liturgy of the Eucharist.' This 'liturgy' in two sections affords the fundamental format of Christian/Catholic order of service and is the universal arrangement found in the Western and Eastern rites of the Church. Psalms, prayers and hymns initiate the liturgy, readings from the scrolls of the Bible and recitation of Jesus' words and deeds constitute that part dedicated to God's Word and, after a homiletic commentary, there follows a litany of blessings and intercessions as prayed by the bishop/priest celebrant into which the Eucharistic words of Christ are inserted with those words recited over bread and chalice of

wine, which are in turn distributed as Holy Communion by the deacons as the final leg of the ceremony. The central act of the conversion of bread and wine into the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ took place as integral to the Eucharistic Prayer, wherein these sacrificial offerings of bread and wine are lifted up, blessed, and prayed over within the Great Prayer, which started at the Preface Dialogue and ended with the Great Amen— the oldest of these Eucharistic prayers are the Roman Canon and the Anaphora of St James.

Words of worship that have survived the ages in their original form and remind us of the Hebrew/Greek linguistic origins of the Mass:

Alleluia (Hebrew, 'Praise to the Lord')

Amen (Hebrew, meaning 'May it happen' or 'So be it')

Hosanna (Hebrew, 'Praise')

Kyrie eleison (Gk, 'Lord have mercy!')

Phrases such as "The Lord be with you," "Peace be with you," "Let us pray," and "forever and ever," have been traced to Jewish sources of the first century along with particular structures of prayers such as the opening title by which the Almighty is invoked "O God" and described "who created the heavens and the earth"...

In addition, much terminology within the lexicon of worship and sacraments comes from Greek and Latin words:

Soma & sarx (Greek, for body & flesh)

Heima (Gk., blood)

Liturgy (Gk., *liturgia*, public work accomplished on behalf of the public)

Eucharist (Gk., *eucharistia*, *eucharisten*, thanksgiving, to give thanks)

Communion (Latin, *communio*, to be united with...)

Corpus Christi (Latin, the Body of Christ, i.e., His Eucharistic Body)

Fractio Panis (Latin, the 'breaking of the Bread')

Host (Latin, *hostia*, Victim, Christ the perfect sacrifice on the Cross)

For over three centuries, the Church faced persecution from the officials of the Roman Empire who looked with scorn on the Faith of Christians and their clergy of bishops, (presbyters) priests, and deacons. Emperors demanded a loyalty that included worship as if they were deities. Members of the Catholic Church refused such false worship, and denied to offer even the slightest tokens of idolatry such as burning incense before a statue of Caesar. As a result, thousands and thousands of believers faced and received martyrdom; but they were true heroes of the Faith and champions of Christ. In consequence, the worship, prayer, and identity of the Church went underground, figuratively and literally. Confidentiality in the practice of Christian devotion became paramount for survival. Simplicity became fundamental! Sunday Mass took place in the early hours before dawn, in the quietude of clandestine meeting places, such as a gravesite like the catacombs and the homes of wealthy believers.

Among the writings of the early Church fathers, you will find many passages, which affirm what is known as "Eucharistic Realism," that the Eucharistic Sacrament and Sacrifice truly conveys the reality and presence the Body and Blood of Christ with its saving graces and fruitfulness as the Paschal Mystery— a gift to nourish and sustain the souls of the Faithful in every generation "until He returns in glory." Redemption took place upon the Cross in 33A.D., but its effects must continue and be applied freshly to new souls in every generation who receive the rebirth of Baptism and thusly, whenever the holy Oblation is offered by the Church, the sons and daughters of God are reborn into His Heavenly company. Furthermore, as the Church expanded throughout the Roman Empire and increased in numbers, its liturgical rites of necessity developed beyond the usage of the first century to fuller and more perfect forms, often to explain and to bring forth the truths contained within the holy mysteries.

You will NOT find one quotation in the first thousand years of the Church that takes the Holy Eucharist as simply a symbolic remembrance of the life and legacy of the Son of God. Herein are a few of the receipts:

The Didache (c. 90 A.D.)

But concerning the Eucharist, after this fashion give ye thanks.

First, concerning the cup. We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine, David thy Son, which thou hast made known unto us through Jesus Christ thy Son; to thee be the glory for ever.

And concerning the broken bread. We thank thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou hast made known unto us through Jesus thy Son; to thee be the glory for ever.

As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and after it had been brought together became one, so may thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth unto thy kingdom; for thine is the glory, and the power, through Jesus Christ, for ever.

And let none eat or drink of your Eucharist but such as have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for of a truth the Lord hath said concerning this, Give not that which is holy unto dogs. (9:1-5)

On the Lord's Day of the Lord gather together, break bread and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions SO THAT YOUR SACRIFICE MAY BE PURE. Let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled by the Lord: "In every place and time let there be OFFERED TO ME A CLEAN SACRIFICE. For I am Great King," says the Lord, "and My name is wonderful among the Gentiles." (14:1-2)

St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 A.D.)

I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, WHICH IS THE FLESH OF JESUS CHRIST, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I DESIRE HIS BLOOD, which is love incorruptible. (Letter to the Romans 7:3)

Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: FOR THERE IS ONE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, and one cup IN THE UNION OF HIS BLOOD; one ALTAR, as there is one bishop with the presbytery... (Letter to the Philadelphians 4:1)

They [i.e. the Gnostics] 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 the Father, in his goodness, raised up again. (Letter to Smyrnians 7:1)

St. Justin the Martyr (c. 100 - 165 A.D.)

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 [Baptism], and is thereby living as Christ has 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 nourished, IS BOTH THE FLESH AND THE BLOOD OF THAT INCARNATED JESUS. (First Apology, 66)

Moreover, as I said before, concerning the sacrifices which you at that time offered, God speaks through Malachi [1:10-12]...It is of the SACRIFICES OFFERED TO HIM IN EVERY PLACE BY US, the Gentiles, that is, OF THE BREAD OF THE EUCHARIST AND LIKEWISE OF THE CUP OF THE EUCHARIST, that He speaks at that time; and He says that we glorify His name, while you profane it. (Dialogue with Trypho, 41)

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 140 - 202 A.D.)

...He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, "THIS IS MY BODY." The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, HE CONFESSED TO BE HIS BLOOD.

He taught THE NEW SACRIFICE OF THE NEW COVENANT, of which Malachi, one of the twelve prophets, had signified beforehand: [quotes Mal 1:10-11]. By these words He makes it plain that the former people will cease to make offerings to God; BUT THAT IN EVERY PLACE SACRIFICE WILL BE OFFERED TO HIM, and indeed, a pure one; for His name is glorified among the Gentiles. (Against Heresies 4:17:5)

But what consistency is there in those who hold that the bread over which thanks have been given IS THE BODY OF THEIR LORD, and the cup HIS BLOOD, if they do not acknowledge that He is the Son of the Creator... How can they say that the flesh which has been nourished BY THE BODY OF THE LORD AND BY HIS BLOOD gives way to corruption and does not partake of life? ...For as the bread from the earth, receiving the invocation of God, IS NO LONGER COMMON BREAD BUT THE EUCHARIST, consisting of two elements, earthly and heavenly...(Against Heresies 4:18:4-5)

If the BODY be not saved, then, in fact, neither did the Lord redeem us with His BLOOD; and neither is the cup of the EUCHARIST THE PARTAKING OF HIS BLOOD nor is the bread which we break THE PARTAKING OF HIS BODY...He has declared the cup, a part of creation, TO BE HIS OWN BLOOD, from which He causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, HE HAS ESTABLISHED AS HIS OWN BODY, from which He gives increase to our bodies.

When, therefore, the mixed cup and the baked bread receives the Word of God and BECOMES THE EUCHARIST, THE BODY OF CHRIST, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, WHICH IS ETERNAL LIFE -- flesh which is nourished BY THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD...receiving the Word of God, BECOMES THE EUCHARIST, WHICH IS THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST... (Against Heresies 5:2:2-3)

Tertullian (c. 155 - 250 A.D.)

Likewise, in regard to days of fast, many do not think they should be present at the SACRIFICIAL prayers, because their fast would be broken if they were to receive THE BODY OF THE LORD...THE BODY OF THE LORD HAVING BEEN RECEIVED AND RESERVED, each point is secured: both the participation IN THE SACRIFICE... (Prayer 19:1)

The flesh feeds on THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST, so that the SOUL TOO may fatten on God. (Resurrection of the Dead 8:3)

The Sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord commanded to be taken at meal times and by all, we take even before daybreak in congregations... WE OFFER SACRIFICES FOR THE DEAD on their birthday anniversaries.... We take anxious care lest something of our Cup or Bread should fall upon the ground... (The Crown 3:3-4)

A woman, after the death of her husband, is bound not less firmly but even more so, not to marry another husband...Indeed, she prays for his soul and asks that he may, while waiting, find rest; and that he may share in the first resurrection. And each year, on the anniversary of his death, SHE OFFERS THE SACRIFICE. (Monogamy 10:1,4)

Origen (c. 185 - 254 A.D.)

We give thanks to the Creator of all, and, along with thanksgiving and prayer for the blessings we have received, we also eat the bread presented to us; and this bread BECOMES BY PRAYER A SACRED BODY, which sanctifies those who sincerely partake of it. (Against Celsus 8:33)

You see how the ALTARS are no longer sprinkled with the blood of oxen, but consecrated BY THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST. (Homilies on Joshua 2:1)

But if that text (Lev 24:5-9) is taken to refer to the greatness of what is mystically symbolized, then there is a 'commemoration' which has an EFFECT OF GREAT PROPITIATORY VALUE. If you apply it to that 'Bread which came down from heaven and gives life to the world,' that showbread which 'God has offered to us as a means of reconciliation, in virtue of faith, ransoming us with his blood,' and if you look to that commemoration of which the Lord says, 'Do this in commemoration of me,'

then you will find that this is the unique commemoration WHICH MAKES GOD PROPITIOUS TO MEN. (Homilies on Leviticus 9)

You are accustomed to take part in the divine mysteries, so you know how, when you have received THE BODY OF THE LORD, you reverently exercise every care lest a particle of it fall, and lest anything of the consecrated gift perish... how is it that you think neglecting the word of God a lesser crime than neglecting HIS BODY? (Homilies on Exodus 13:3)

... now, however, in full view, there is the true food, THE FLESH OF THE WORD OF GOD, as He Himself says: "MY FLESH IS TRULY FOOD, AND MY BLOOD IS TRULY DRINK." (Homilies on Numbers 7:2)

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - 216 A.D.)

Calling her children about her, she [the Church] nourishes them with holy milk, that is, with the Infant Word...The Word is everything to a child: both Father and Mother, both Instructor and Nurse. "EAT MY FLESH," He says, "AND DRINK MY BLOOD." The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutriments. HE DELIVERS OVER HIS FLESH, AND POURS OUT HIS BLOOD; and nothing is lacking for the growth of His children. O incredible mystery! (Instructor of Children 1:6:42,1,3)

St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200 - 258 A.D.)

And we ask that this Bread be given us daily, so that we who are in Christ and daily receive THE EUCHARIST AS THE FOOD OF SALVATION, may not, by falling into some more grievous sin and then in abstaining from communicating, be withheld from the heavenly Bread, and be separated from Christ's Body...

He Himself warns us, saying, "UNLESS YOU EAT THE FLESH OF THE SON OF MAN AND DRINK HIS BLOOD, YOU SHALL NOT HAVE LIFE IN YOU." Therefore do we ask that our Bread, WHICH IS CHRIST, be given to us daily, so that we who abide and live in Christ may not withdraw from His sanctification and from His Body. (The Lord's Prayer 18)

Also in the priest Melchisedech we see THE SACRAMENT OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE LORD prefigured...The order certainly is that which comes from his [Mel's] sacrifice and which comes down from it: because Mel was a priest of the Most High God; because he offered bread; and because he blessed Abraham. And who is more a priest of the Most High God than our Lord Jesus Christ, who, WHEN HE OFFERED SACRIFICE TO GOD THE FATHER, OFFERED THE VERY SAME WHICH MELCHISEDECH HAD OFFERED, NAMELY BREAD AND WINE, WHICH IS IN FACT HIS BODY AND BLOOD! (Letters 63:4)

If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is Himself the High Priest of God the Father; AND IF HE OFFERED HIMSELF AS A SACRIFICE TO THE FATHER; AND IF HE COMMANDED THAT THIS BE DONE IN COMMEMORATION OF HIMSELF -- then certainly the priest, who imitates that which Christ did, TRULY FUNCTIONS IN PLACE OF CHRIST. (Letters 63:14)

Aphraates the Persian Sage (c. 280 - 345 A.D.)

After having spoken thus ["This is My body...This is My blood"], the Lord rose up from the place where He had made the Passover and had given His Body as food and His Blood as drink, and He went with His disciples to the place where He was to be arrested. But He ate of His own Body and drank of His own Blood, while He was pondering on the dead. With His own hands, the Lord presented His own Body to be eaten, and before He was crucified, He gave His blood as drink... (Treatises 12:6)

St. Ephraim (c. 306 - 373 A.D.)

Our Lord Jesus took in His hands what in the beginning was only bread; and He blessed it, and signed it, and made it holy in the name of the Father and in the name of the Spirit; and He broke it and in His gracious kindness He distributed it to all His disciples one by one. He called the bread His living Body, and did Himself fill it with Himself and the Spirit. And extending His hand, He gave them the Bread which His right hand had made holy: "Take, all of you eat of this, which My word has made holy. Do not now regard as bread that which I have given you; but take, eat this Bread [of life], and do not scatter the crumbs; for what I have called My Body, that it is indeed. One particle from its crumbs is able to sanctify thousands and thousands, and is sufficient to afford life to those who eat of it. Take, eat, entertaining no doubt of faith, because this is My Body, and whoever eats it in belief eats in it Fire and Spirit. But if any doubter eat of it, for him it will be only bread. And whoever eats in belief the Bread made holy in My name, if he be pure, he will be preserved in his purity; and if he be a sinner, he will be forgiven." But if anyone despise it or reject it or treat it with ignominy, it may be taken as a certainty that he treats with ignominy the Son, who called it and actually made it to be His Body.

After the disciples had eaten the new and holy Bread, and when they understood by faith that they had eaten of Christ's body, Christ went on to explain and to give them the whole Sacrament. He took and mixed a cup of wine. Then He blessed it, and signed it, and made it holy, declaring that it was His own Blood, which was about to be poured out...Christ commanded them to drink, and He explained to them that the cup which they were drinking was His own Blood: "This is truly My Blood, which is shed for all of you. Take, all of you, drink of this, because it is a new covenant in My Blood. As you have seen Me do, do you also in My memory. Whenever you are gathered together in My name in Churches everywhere, do what I have done, in memory of Me. Eat My Body, and drink My Blood, a covenant new and old." (Homilies 4:4; 4:6)

St. Athanasius (c. 295 - 373 A.D.)

You shall see the Levites bringing loaves and a cup of wine, and placing them on the table. So long as the prayers of supplication and entreaties have not been made, there is only bread and wine. But after the great and wonderful prayers have been completed, then the bread is become the Body, and the wine the Blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ.... Let us approach the celebration of the mysteries. This bread and this wine, so long as the prayers and supplications have not taken place, remain simply what they are. But after the great prayers and holy supplications have been sent

forth, the Word comes down into the bread and wine -- and thus is His Body confectioned. (Sermon to the Newly Baptized, from Eutyches)

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350 A.D.)

For just as the bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine the Blood of Christ...(Catechetical Lectures 19 Mystagogic 1, 7)

This one teaching of the blessed Paul is enough to give you complete certainty about the Divine Mysteries, by your having been deemed worthy of which, you have become united in body and blood with Christ. For Paul proclaimed clearly that: "On the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ, taking bread and giving thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying: 'Take, eat, This is My Body.' And taking the cup and giving thanks, He said, 'Take, drink, This is My Blood.'" He Himself, therefore, having declared and said of the Bread, "This is My Body," who will dare any longer to doubt? And when He Himself has affirmed and said, "This is My Blood," who can ever hesitate and say it is not His Blood? (22 Mystagogic 4, 1)

Once in Cana of Galilee He changed the water into wine, a thing related to blood; and is His changing of wine into Blood not credible? When invited to an ordinary marriage, with a miracle He performed that glorious deed. And is it not much more to be confessed that He has betowed His Body and His Blood upon the wedding guests?(22 Mystagogic 4, 2)

Do not, therefore, regard the Bread and the Wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but -- be fully assured by the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ.(22 Mystagogic 4, 6)

Having learned these things, and being fully convinced that the apparent bread is not bread, even though it is sensible to the taste, but the Body of Christ; and that the apparent Wine is not wine, even though the taste would have it so... (22 Mystagogic 4, 9)

Then, having sanctified ourselves by these spiritual songs, we call upon the benevolent God to send out the Holy Spirit upon the gifts which have been laid out: that He may make the bread the Body of Christ, and the wine the Blood of Christ; for whatsoever the Holy Spirit touches, that is sanctified and changed.(23 Mystagogic 5, 7)

Then, upon the completion of the spiritual sacrifice, the bloodless worship, over that PROPITIATORY victim we call upon God for the common peace of the Churches, for the welfare of the world, for kings, for soldiers and allies, for the sick, for the afflicted; and in summary, we all pray and OFFER THIS SACRIFICE FOR ALL WHO ARE IN NEED.

Then we make mention also of those who have already fallen asleep: first, the patriarchs, prophets, Apostles, and martyrs, that through their prayers and supplications God would receive our petition; next, we make mention also of the holy fathers and bishops who have already fallen asleep, and, to put it simply, of all

among us who have already fallen asleep; for we believe that it will be of very great benefit to the souls of those for whom the petition is carried up, while this HOLY AND MOST SOLEMN SACRIFICE IS LAID OUT.

For I know that there are many who are saying this: 'If a soul departs from this world with sins, what does it profit it to be remembered in the prayer?' ...[we] grant a remission of their penalties...we too offer prayers to Him for those who have fallen asleep though they be sinners. We do not plait a crown, but OFFER UP CHRIST WHO HAS BEEN SACRIFICED FOR OUR SINS; AND WE THEREBY PROPITIATE THE BENEVOLENT GOD FOR THEM AS WELL AS FOR OURSELVES. (Mystagogic 5, 8, 9, 10)

St. Hilary of Poitiers (c. 315 - 368 A.D.)

When we speak of the reality of Christ's nature being in us, we would be speaking foolishly and impiously -- had we not learned it from Him. For He Himself says: "My Flesh is truly Food, and My Blood is truly Drink. He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood will remain in Me and I in Him." As to the reality of His Flesh and Blood, there is no room left for doubt, because now, both by the declaration of the Lord Himself and by our own faith, it is truly Flesh and it is truly Blood. And These Elements bring it about, when taken and consumed, that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. Is this not true? Let those who deny that Jesus Christ is true God be free to find these things untrue. But He Himself is in us through the flesh and we are in Him, while that which we are with Him is in God. (The Trinity 8:14)

St. Basil the Great (c. 330 - 379 A.D.)

To communicate each day and to partake of the holy Body and Blood of Christ is good and beneficial; for He says quite plainly: "He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life." Who can doubt that to share continually in life is the same thing as having life abundantly? We ourselves communicate four times each week...and on other days if there is a commemoration of any saint. (Letter of Basil to a Patrician Lady Caesaria)

St. Gregory of Nazianz (c. 330 - 389 A.D.)

The tongue of a priest meditating on the Lord raises the sick. Do, then, the greater thing by celebrating the liturgy, and loose the great mass of my sins when you lay hold of the Sacrifice of the Resurrection. Most Reverend friend, cease not to pray and plead for me when you draw down the Word by your word, when in an unbloody, cutting you cut the Body and Blood of the Lord, using your voice for a sword. (Letter of Gregory to Amphilocheus, Bishop of Iconium)

St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 - 394 A.D.)

This Body, by the indwelling of God the Word, has been made over to divine dignity. Rightly then, do we believe that the bread consecrated by the word of God has been made over into the Body of God the Word. For that Body was, as to its potency, bread; but it has been consecrated by the lodging there of the Word, who pitched His tent in the flesh. From the same cause, therefore, by which the bread

that was made over into that Body is made to change into divine strength, a similar result now takes place. As in the former case, in which the grace of the Word made holy that body the substance of which is from bread, and in a certain manner is itself bread, so in this case too, the bread, as the Apostle says, "is consecrated by God's word and by prayer"; not through its being eaten does it advance to become the Body of the Word, but it is made over immediately into the Body by means of the word, just as was stated by the Word, "This is My Body!" ...In the plan of His grace He spreads Himself to every believer by means of that Flesh, the substance of which is from wine and bread, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, so that by this union with the Immortal, man, too, may become a participant in incorruption. These things He bestows through the power of the blessing which transforms the nature of the visible things to that [of the Immortal]. (The Great Catechism 37)

The bread again is at first common bread; but when the mystery sanctifies it, it is called and actually becomes the Body of Christ. So too the mystical oil, so too the wine; if they are things of little worth before the blessing, after their sanctification by the Spirit each of them has its own superior operation. This same power of the word also makes the priest venerable and honorable, separated from the generality of men by the new blessing bestowed upon him. (Sermon on the Day of Lights or On the Baptism of Christ)

He offered Himself for us, Victim and Sacrifice, and Priest as well, and "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." When did He do this? When He made His own Body food and His own Blood drink for His disciples; for this much is clear enough to anyone, that a sheep cannot be eaten by a man unless its being eaten be preceded by its being slaughtered. This giving of His own Body to His disciples for eating clearly indicates that the sacrifice of the Lamb has now been completed. (Sermon One on the Resurrection of Christ)

St. Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315 - 403 A.D.)

We see that the Savior took in His hands, as it is in the Gospel, when He was reclining at the supper; and He took this, and giving thanks, He said: "This is really Me." And He gave to His disciples and said: "This is really Me." And we see that It is not equal nor similar, not to the incarnate image, not to the invisible divinity, not to the outline of His limbs. For It is round of shape, and devoid of feeling. As to Its power, He means to say even of Its grace, "This is really Me"; and none disbelieves His word. For anyone who does not believe the truth in what He says is deprived of grace and of Savior. (The Man Well-Anchored 57)

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 428 A.D.)

He did not say, "This is the symbol of My Body, and this, of My Blood," but "This is My Body and My Blood," teaching us not to look upon the nature of what is set before us, but that it is transformed by means of the Eucharistic action into Flesh and Blood. (Commentary on Matthew 26:26)

It is proper, therefore, that when [Christ] gave the Bread He did not say, "This is the symbol of My Body," but, "This is My Body." In the same way when He gave the Cup

He did not say, "This is the symbol of My Blood," but, "This is My Blood"; for He wanted us to look upon the [Eucharistic elements] after their reception of grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit not according to their nature, but [that we should] receive them as they are, the Body and Blood of our Lord. We ought...not regard the [Eucharistic elements] merely as bread and cup, but as the Body and Blood of Christ, into which they were transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit.(Catechetical Homilies 5)

[If we have sinned], the Body and Blood of our Lord...will strengthen us...if with diligence we do good works and turn from evil deeds and truly repent of the sins that befall us, undoubtedly we shall obtain the grace of the remission of our sins in our receiving of the holy Sacrament.(Catechetical Homilies 16)

At first [the offering] is laid upon the altar as mere bread, and wine mixed with water; but by the coming of the Holy Spirit it is transformed into the Body and the Blood, and thus it is changed into the power of a spiritual and immortal nourishment. (Catechetical Homilies 16)

St. John Chrysostom (c. 344 - 407 A.D.)

When you see the Lord IMMOLATED and lying upon the ALTAR, and the priest bent over that SACRIFICE praying, and all the people empurpled by that PRECIOUS BLOOD, can you think that you are still among men and on earth? Or are you not lifted up to heaven? (Priesthood 3:4:177)

Reverence, therefore, reverence this table, of which we are all communicants! Christ, slain for us, the SACRIFICIAL VICTIM WHO IS PLACED THEREON! (Homilies on Romans 8:8)

Christ is present. The One [Christ] who prepared that [Holy Thursday] table is the very One who now prepares this [altar] table. For it is not a man who makes the SACRIFICIAL GIFTS BECOME the Body and Blood of Christ, but He that was crucified for us, Christ Himself. The priest stands there carrying out the action, but the power and the grace is of God, "THIS IS MY BODY," he says. This statement TRANSFORMS the gifts. (Homilies on Treachery of Judas 1:6)

Let us therefore in all respects put our faith in God and contradict Him in nothing, even if what is said seems to be contrary to our reasoning and to what we see. Let His WORD be of superior authority to reason and sight. This too be our practice in respect to the [Eucharistic] Mysteries, not looking only upon what is laid out before us, but taking heed also of His WORDS. For His WORD cannot deceive; but our senses are easily cheated. His WORD never failed; our senses err most of the time. When the WORD says, "THIS IS MY BODY," be convinced of it and believe it, and look at it with the eyes of the mind. For Christ did not give us something tangible, but even in His tangible things all is intellectual. So too with Baptism: the gift is bestowed through what is a tangible thing, water; but what is accomplished is intellectually perceived: the REBIRTH and the RENEWAL....How many now say, "I wish I could see his shape, His appearance, His garments, His sandals." ONLY LOOK! YOU SEE HIM! YOU TOUCH HIM! YOU EAT HIM! (Homilies on Matthew 82:4)

Take care, then, lest you too become guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ [1 Cor 11:27]. They slaughtered His most holy body; but you, after such great

benefits, receive HIM into a filthy soul. For it was not enough for Him to be made Man, to be struck and to be slaughtered, but He even mingles Himself with us; and this NOT BY FAITH ONLY, but even in every DEED He makes us His BODY. How very pure, then, ought he not be, who enjoys the benefit of this SACRIFICE? (82:5)

...if everywhere grace required worthiness, there could neither then be Baptism nor Body of Christ nor the sacrifice priests offer.....now He has transferred the priestly action [of ancient times] to what is most awesome and magnificent. He has changed the sacrifice itself, and instead of the butchering of dumb beasts, He commands the offering up of Himself....What is that Bread? The Body of Christ! What do they become who are partakers therein? The Body of Christ! Not many bodies, but one Body....For you are not nourished by one Body while someone else is nourished by another Body; rather, all are nourished by the same Body....When you see [the Body of Christ] lying on the altar, say to yourself, "Because of this Body I am no longer earth and ash, no longer a prisoner, but free. Because of this Body I hope for heaven, and I hope to receive the good things that are in heaven, immortal life, the lot of the angels, familiar conversation with Christ. This Body, scourged and crucified, has not been fetched by death...This is that Body which was blood-stained, which was pierced by a lance, and from which gushed forth those saving fountains, one of blood and the other of water, for all the world" ...This is the Body which He gave us, both to hold in reserve and to eat, which was appropriate to intense love; for those whom we kiss with abandon we often even bite with our teeth. (Homilies on Corinthians 8, 1[2]; 24, 2[3]; 24, 2[4]; 24, 4[7])

"So also was Christ offered once." [Hebrews 7-10] By whom was He offered? Quite evidently, by Himself. Here [Paul] shows that Christ was not Priest only, but also Victim and Sacrifice. Therein do we find the reason for the words "was offered." "He was offered once," [Paul] says, "to take away the sins of many." Why does he say of many and not of all? Because not all have believed. He did indeed die for all, for the salvation of all, which was His part....But He did not take away the sins of all men, because they did not will it....What then? Do we not offer daily? Yes, we offer, but making remembrance of His death; and this remembrance is one and not many. How is it one and not many? Because this Sacrifice is offered once, like that in the Holy of Holies. This Sacrifice is a type of that, and this remembrance a type of that. We offer always the same, not one sheep now and another tomorrow, but the same thing always. Thus there is one Sacrifice. By this reasoning, since the Sacrifice is offered everywhere, are there, then, a multiplicity of Christs? By no means! Christ is one everywhere. He is complete here, complete there, one Body. And just as He is one Body and not many though offered everywhere, so too is there one Sacrifice. (Homilies on Hebrews 17, 2[4]; 17, 3[6])

Not in vain was it decreed BY THE APOSTLES that in the awesome Mysteries remembrance should be made of the DEPARTED. They knew that here there was much gain for them, much benefit. For when the entire people stands with hands uplifted, a priestly assembly, and that awesome SACRIFICIAL VICTIM is laid out, how, when we are calling upon God, should we not succeed in their defense? But this is done for those who have DEPARTED in the faith, while even the catechumens are not reckoned as worthy of this consolation, but are deprived of

every means of assistance except one. And what is that? We may give alms to the poor on their behalf. (Homilies on Philippians 3:4)

St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 333 - 397 A.D.)

We saw the Prince of Priests coming to us, we saw and heard Him offering His blood for us. We follow, inasmuch as we are able, being priests; and we offer the sacrifice on behalf of the people. And even if we are of but little merit, still, in the sacrifice, we are honorable. For even if Christ is not now seen as the one who offers the sacrifice, nevertheless it is He Himself that is offered in sacrifice here on earth when the body of Christ is offered. Indeed, to offer Himself He is made visible in us, he whose word makes holy the sacrifice that is offered. (Commentaries on Psalms 38:25)

A priest must offer something in sacrifice and according to the Law he must enter the holy place through blood. Therefore, because God had repudiated the blood of bulls and of rams, it was necessary for this Priest, as you have read, to enter into the Holy of Holies, penetrating the heights of heaven, by means of His own blood, so that He might become an eternal oblation for our sins. Priest and Victim, therefore, are one and the same. But the priesthood and the sacrifice are a duty of the human condition; for like a lamb He was led to the slaughter, and He is a priest according to the order of Melchisedech. (The Faith 3:11:87)

"My flesh is truly food and My blood is truly drink." You hear Him speak of His flesh, you hear Him speak of His blood, you know the sacred signs of the Lord's death; and do you worry about His divinity? Hear His words when he says: "A spirit has not flesh and bones." As often as we receive the sacramental elements which through the mystery of the sacred prayer are transformed into the flesh and blood of the Lord, we proclaim the death of the Lord. (The Faith 4:10:124)

Perhaps you may be saying: I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the Body of Christ? It but remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use! Let us prove that this is not what nature has shaped it to be, but what the blessing has consecrated; for the power of the blessing is greater than that of nature, because by the blessing even nature itself is changed...Christ is in that Sacrament, because it is the Body of Christ; yet, it is not on that account corporeal food, but spiritual. Whence also His Apostle says of the type: "For our fathers ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink" (1 Cor 10:2-4; 15:44). For the body of God is a spiritual body. (The Mysteries 9:50; 9:58)

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. And let us add this: How can what is bread be the Body of Christ? By the consecration. The consecration takes place by certain words; but whose words? Those of the Lord Jesus. Like all the rest of the things said beforehand, they are said by the priest; praises are referred to God, prayer of petition is offered for the people, for kings, for other persons; but when the time comes for the confection of the venerable Sacrament, then the priest uses not his own words but the words of Christ. Therefore it is the word of Christ that confects this Sacrament....Before it be consecrated it is bread; but where the words of Christ come in, it is the Body of Christ. Finally, hear Him saying: "All of you take and eat of this; for this is My Body." And before the words of Christ the chalice is full of wine and water; but where the

words of Christ have been operative it is made the Blood of Christ, which redeems the people. (The Sacraments 4:4:14; 4:5:23)

St. Jerome (c. 347 - 420 A.D.)

Far be it from me to speak adversely of any of these clergy who, in succession from the Apostles, confect by their sacred word the Body of Christ, and through whose efforts also it is that we are Christians... (Letter of Jerome to Heliodorus)

The flesh and blood of Christ is understood in two ways; there is either the spiritual and divine way, by which He Himself said: "My flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink"; and "Unless you shall have eaten my flesh and drunk my blood you shall not have eternal life." Or else there is the flesh and blood which was crucified and which was poured out by the soldier's lance. (Commentaries on Ephesians 1:1:7)

After the type had been fulfilled by the Passover celebration and He had eaten the flesh of the lamb with His Apostles, He takes bread which strengthens the heart of man, and goes on to the true Sacrament of the Passover, so that just as Melchisedech, the priest of the Most High God, in prefiguring Him, made bread and wine an offering, He too makes Himself manifest in the reality of His own Body and Blood. (Commentaries on Matthew 4:26:26)

St. Augustine (c. 354 - 430 A.D.)

"That Bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God IS THE BODY OF CHRIST. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, IS THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. Through that bread and wine the Lord Christ willed to commend HIS BODY AND BLOOD, WHICH HE Poured out for us unto the forgiveness of sins." (Sermons 227)

"The Lord Jesus wanted those whose eyes were held lest they should recognize him, to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread [Luke 24:16,30-35]. The faithful know what I am saying. They know Christ in the breaking of the bread. For not all bread, but only that which receives the blessing of Christ, BECOMES CHRIST'S BODY." (Sermons 234:2)

"What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that THE BREAD IS THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE CHALICE [WINE] THE BLOOD OF CHRIST." (Sermons 272)

"How this ['And he was carried in his own hands'] should be understood literally of David, we cannot discover; but we can discover how it is meant of Christ. FOR CHRIST WAS CARRIED IN HIS OWN HANDS, WHEN, REFERRING TO HIS OWN BODY, HE SAID: 'THIS IS MY BODY.' FOR HE CARRIED THAT BODY IN HIS HANDS." (Psalms 33:1:10)

"Was not Christ IMMOLATED only once in His very Person? In the Sacrament, nevertheless, He is IMMOLATED for the people not only on every Easter Solemnity but on every day; and a man would not be lying if, when asked, he were to reply that Christ is being IMMOLATED." (Letters 98:9)

"Christ is both the Priest, OFFERING Himself, and Himself the Victim. He willed that the SACRAMENTAL SIGN of this should be the daily Sacrifice of the Church, who,

since the Church is His body and He the Head, learns to OFFER herself through Him."
(City of God 10:20)

"By those sacrifices of the Old Law, this one Sacrifice is signified, in which there is a true remission of sins; but not only is no one forbidden to take as food the Blood of this Sacrifice, rather, all who wish to possess life are exhorted to drink thereof."
(Questions on the Heptateuch 3:57)

"Nor can it be denied that the souls of the dead find relief through the piety of their friends and relatives who are still alive, when the Sacrifice of the Mediator is OFFERED for them, or when alms are given in the church." (Letter: Faith, Hope, Love 29:110)

"But by the prayers of the Holy Church, and by the SALVIFIC SACRIFICE, and by the alms which are given for their spirits, there is no doubt that the dead are aided that the Lord might deal more mercifully with them than their sins would deserve. FOR THE WHOLE CHURCH OBSERVES THIS PRACTICE WHICH WAS HANDED DOWN BY THE FATHERS that it prays for those who have died in the communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, when they are commemorated in their own place in the Sacrifice itself; and the Sacrifice is OFFERED also in memory of them, on their behalf. If, the works of mercy are celebrated for the sake of those who are being remembered, who would hesitate to recommend them, on whose behalf prayers to God are not offered in vain? It is not at all to be doubted that such prayers are of profit to the dead; but for such of them as lived before their death in a way that makes it possible for these things to be useful to them after death." (Sermons 172:2)

"...I turn to Christ, because it is He whom I seek here; and I discover how the earth is adored without impiety, how without impiety the footstool of His feet is adored. For He received earth from earth; because flesh is from the earth, and He took flesh from the flesh of Mary. He walked here in the same flesh, AND GAVE US THE SAME FLESH TO BE EATEN UNTO SALVATION. BUT NO ONE EATS THAT FLESH UNLESS FIRST HE ADORES IT; and thus it is discovered how such a footstool of the Lord's feet is adored; AND NOT ONLY DO WE NOT SIN BY ADORING, WE DO SIN BY NOT ADORING." (Psalms 98:9)