



Third excerpt from
**The Real Presence of
Jesus Christ in the
Sacrament of the Eucharist**
Questions & Answers

#3 This text is the third of six excerpts from *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions & Answers*. Additional excerpts may be found at www.usccb.org/publishing.

4. Does the Bread Cease to Be Bread and the Wine Cease to Be Wine?

Yes. In order for the whole Christ to be present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—the bread and wine cannot remain, but must give way so that his glorified Body and Blood may be present. Thus in the Eucharist the bread ceases to be bread in substance, and becomes the Body of Christ, while the wine ceases to be wine in substance, and becomes the Blood of Christ. As St. Thomas Aquinas observed, Christ is not quoted as saying, “*This bread is my body,*” but “*This is my body*” (*Summa Theologiae*, III q. 78, a. 5).

5. Is It Fitting That Christ’s Body and Blood Become Present in the Eucharist Under the Appearances of Bread and Wine?

Yes, for this way of being present corresponds perfectly to the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus Christ gives himself to us in a form that employs the symbolism inherent in eating bread and drinking wine. Furthermore, being present under the appearances of bread and wine, Christ gives himself to us in a form that is appropriate for human eating and drinking. Also, this kind of presence corresponds to the virtue of faith, for the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ cannot be detected or discerned by any way other than faith. That is why St. Bonaventure affirmed: “There is no difficulty over Christ’s being present in the sacrament as in a sign; the great difficulty is in the fact that He is really in the sacrament, as He is in heaven. And so believing this is especially meritorious” (*In IV Sent.*, dist. X, P. I, art. un., qu. I). On the authority of God who reveals himself to us, by faith we believe that which cannot be grasped by our human faculties (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1381).

6. Are the Consecrated Bread and Wine “Merely Symbols”?

In everyday language, we call a “symbol” something that points beyond itself to something else, often to several other

realities at once. The transformed bread and wine that are the Body and Blood of Christ are not merely symbols because they truly are the Body and Blood of Christ. As St. John Damascene wrote: “The bread and wine are not a foreshadowing of the body and blood of Christ—By no means!—but the actual deified body of the Lord, because the Lord Himself said: ‘This is my body’; not ‘a foreshadowing of my body’ but ‘my body,’ and not ‘a foreshadowing of my blood’ but ‘my blood’” (*The Orthodox Faith*, IV [PG 94, 1148-49]).

At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the Body and Blood of Christ come to us in the Eucharist in a sacramental form. In other words, Christ is present under the appearances of bread and wine, not in his own proper form. We cannot presume to know all the reasons behind God’s actions. God uses, however, the symbolism inherent in the eating of bread and the drinking of wine at the natural level to illuminate the meaning of what is being accomplished in the Eucharist through Jesus Christ.

There are various ways in which the symbolism of eating bread and drinking wine discloses the meaning of the Eucharist. For example, just as natural food gives nourishment to the body, so the eucharistic food gives spiritual nourishment. Furthermore, the sharing of an ordinary meal establishes a certain communion among the people who share it; in the Eucharist, the People of God share a meal that brings them into communion not only with each other but with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Similarly, as St. Paul tells us, the single loaf that is shared among many during the eucharistic meal is an indication of the unity of those who have been called together by the Holy Spirit as one body, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17). To take another example, the individual grains of wheat and individual grapes have to be harvested and to undergo a process of grinding or crushing before they are unified as bread and as wine. Because of this, bread and wine point to both the union of the many that takes place in the Body of Christ and the suffering undergone by Christ, a suffering that must also be embraced by his disciples. Much

more could be said about the many ways in which the eating of bread and drinking of wine symbolize what God does for us through Christ, since symbols carry multiple meanings and connotations.

7. Do the Consecrated Bread and Wine Cease to Be the Body and Blood of Christ When the Mass Is Over?

No. During the celebration of the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, and this they remain. They cannot turn back into bread and wine, for they are no longer bread and wine at all. There is thus no reason for them to change back to their “normal” state after the special circumstances of the Mass are past. Once the substance has really changed, the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ “endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist” (*Catechism*, no. 1377). Against those who maintained that the bread that is consecrated during the Eucharist has no sanctifying power if it is left over until the next day, St. Cyril of Alexandria replied, “Christ is not altered, nor is his holy body changed, but the power of the consecration and his life-giving grace is perpetual in it” (*Letter 83, to Calosyrius, Bishop of Arsinoe* [PG 76, 1076]). The Church teaches that Christ remains present under the appearances of bread and wine as long as the appearances of bread and wine remain (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1377).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1 We read that the symbolism of eating bread and drinking wine discloses the meaning of the Eucharist. What insight do you gain about the Eucharist when you reflect on each of the following meanings?

- The Eucharistic food as spiritual nourishment
- The Eucharist as a sacred meal that brings us into communion with each other and with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- The one bread of the Eucharist as an indication of the one body of Christ
- The union of the many that takes place in the Body of Christ

2 Why is it important to you that the Real Presence of Christ remains after the Mass has ended?

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