



Opening Question:

How do you gain perspective?

Have you ever climbed a mountain peak? When you look down, you can see where you came from and where you might be going. The view can give you perspective.

For us Christians, an encounter with the Lord can be a mountain top experience. We see where we've come from and where we could go. And we believe. But there is a difference with the analogy. Jesus is the beginning and end points of faith. He is our source and summit. This is especially true when we encounter him in the Eucharist.

Different Names for the Eucharist

The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word for thanksgiving. It speaks to our attitude when we meet the Lord. We should feel gratitude for his presence in our lives. It also goes by other names that point to different aspects of the encounter. It is called the "Lord's Supper" which points to its origin two thousand years ago. It's called the Breaking of Bread to indicate what happens during the ceremony. But most of us refer to it as either Communion or the Mass. Communion points to the moment when the faithful eat the consecrated bread together. The word "Mass" comes from the Latin phrase "ite missa est" which means "go, you are sent." In other words, we are the Lord's apostles or "sent ones." The term refers to our Christian mission in the world.

Bread and Wine

Eucharist revolves around the common food and drink in the time of Jesus, bread and wine. These elements were served at almost every meal. But, since meals were one of the few ways people gathered for social events, bread and wine took on the signs of celebration. As the psalmist wrote:



*God lets the earth produce...
plants for our food,
wine to cheer us up...
and bread to make us strong.*

Psalms 104:14bc, 15a,c

The sharing of bread and wine took on a major role in Passover, the most important celebration in Judaism. The Passover meal celebrated the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. It evolved into a ritual with symbolic foods. The ceremony began with the breaking of bread and included multiple wine toasts.

During the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated Passover but gave the bread and wine not only a new significance but a new reality.

While they celebrated the Passover meal, Jesus took bread and blessed God for it. Then, he broke the bread into pieces, gave it to his followers, and said, "Take it. This is my body."

After he took the cup in his hands and blessed God for the wine, Jesus passed the cup to everyone and they all took a drink. He told them, "This is my blood of the covenant God makes with us. It will be poured out for many people."

Mark 14:22-24

Notice the phrase "for many people." It indicates the universal aspect of the Eucharist. On the one

hand, it is meant to feed everyone. The multiplication of the loaves and fish in all four gospels point to the abundance Eucharist provides. Indeed, Jesus himself stated:

I am the living bread God sent down from heaven.

If someone eats this bread, he will live forever.

The bread I will give is my flesh.

I give it so the world might really live!

John 6:51

But not everyone accepts the abundant life Jesus offers in the Eucharist.

After they heard what Jesus said, many of his followers complained,

"The words of Jesus are hard to accept. Who can stand to listen to what he says?"

From then on, many of his followers left Jesus.

John 6:60, 66

Real Presence of Christ

Jesus scandalized some in his audience because his words were so graphic. He was present in the bread he offered for the life of the world. The Church teaches us this is the case.

...in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, (Christ is) contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ...

Council of Trent: Thirteenth Session

The Risen Christ is truly and completely present in the Eucharist. Theologians call this belief "the real presence." That means that not only his Spirit is present to us, so is his body which still has the wounds that caused his death. The painting, the *Incredulity of St. Thomas* by Caravaggio, illustrated that belief. Jesus carried the proof of his demise, yet he lived. Like Thomas, we are confronted with the Paschal Mystery, the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ in the Eucharist. So, the sacrifice he made on the cross is present to us.

Christ offered himself as a sacrifice that is good forever...By his one sacrifice he has forever set free from sin the people he brings to God.

Hebrews 10:12, 14

Through our worship,, we, the Church, join our sacrifice to the Father along with the Risen Christ in the Eucharist. In fact, in the Eucharist, our worship is one with his and with those with him in the Communion of Saints.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Our worship in the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with our meager offerings. Bread and wine are presented to the altar along with prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father. Then, we transition to the Eucharistic Prayer.

This great prayer begins with a call and response, a preface prayer, then the "Holy, holy, holy" hymn. We kneel for the prayer itself. Its body contains the Words of Institution, the memorial command, then petitions for the Church and the world. The Words of Institution contain both the words Christ spoke at the Last Supper and a call for the Spirit to change the ordinary bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Both refer to the activity of God in the community. At this point, the bishop or priest stands in the place of Christ as his instrument when he repeats the words "This is my body" and "This is my blood." He stands in the place of Christ when he prays for the Spirit over the gifts. In other words, it is not the ordained minister who says the words and prays. It is Christ himself. At this moment, the bread and wine are consecrated. In them, the Lord is truly present.

At this juncture, we might ask, why do we celebrate Eucharist over and over? It's because Jesus commanded us. "Do this in memory of me." The notion of memory he spoke of is not a psychological exercise of the individual but an activity of the community. It's not a call to a mental image but a communal celebration that evokes the spirit of a past event. For example, a war memorial in a sense recalls the sacrifice of the fallen at a particular moment in the past. But their efforts helped build the world we live in today. By the same token, when we, as Christians, celebrate the

Eucharist, we invoke the spirit of the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ. That reality comes alive for us in the Eucharist.

Now, the Risen Christ is present on the altar. The prayer continues with intercessions for the Church and the world. When the prayer ends, the theme of the Eucharist shifts to the unity of the Church. Together, we pray the Our Father, wish each other peace, and then receive Communion.

When we receive the consecrated bread and wine, we are one with Christ and our fellow believers. This is the moment when the notion of Church is fully realized. Because we are united and at peace with others, disagreements and failings are set aside. Minor sins are forgiven. And we can renew our calling as Christians. We recommit ourselves to the work the Lord sent us to do.

In a sense, Sunday Eucharist is a mountain top experience. Since Christ is the source and summit of our faith life, he communicates both through his body and blood. In the Eucharist, we can receive strength from the gift of Christ's very self. In our encounter with him in the Eucharist, we can gain perspective. We can reflect on what the Lord did for us over the past week and look ahead to what he will do, not only in the next few days, but, indeed, at the end of time.

Whenever you eat this bread and drink from this cup together, you tell everyone about the death of the Lord, until he returns .

1 Corinthians 11:26

Closing Question:

What do you experience in the Eucharist?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1322-1419.

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