

The Eucharist In Scripture: Part II

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In our first essay we reviewed Eucharistic typology in the Old Testament. There we saw how Eucharistic events served as the context for key moments in redemptive history. Such typology begins to explain why the Church places the Eucharist front and center in our faith. But a larger reason looms for Eucharistic devotion. It is the Real Presence of Christ - body, blood, soul and divinity. It is that aspect we'll explore here.

Setting The Stage

The Real Presence of Christ is proclaimed in John's gospel, the 6th chapter. In this chapter Christ gives a two-day discourse on the Eucharist. As a result, his ministry almost completely implodes. The chapter covers events that take place over a two-day period **during the Passover**. As the Passover involves the sacrifice and eating of a lamb, Christ will demonstrate that in the Age of the Gospel he is the real Passover.

On the first day Christ performs a miracle by feeding 5,000. In this preamble Christ demonstrated four things. First, he proved he could take a loaf of bread and miraculously multiply it over a wide area. Second, Christ commanded the apostles (bishops) to distribute the bread; "**you** feed them". Thirdly, the remains were not treated as rubbish but instead carefully collected. Finally, this is the only miracle of Christ recorded in all four gospels, giving it a place of honor and centrality. Collectively these are lessons that prepare us for Christ's teaching on the Eucharist, the focus of the second day's discourse.

"This Is A Hard Saying"

On the second day Christ begins by claiming he is the bread from heaven. This causes the people to grumble. While the crowd seems to brush off the reference to bread, they do get their ire up over his claim of **coming from heaven**.

"Therefore the Jews were **grumbling** about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.' They were saying, '*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven?'*'¹"

But grumbling escalates to outright arguing when Christ tells them to eat his flesh.

"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' Then the Jews began **to argue** with one another, saying, 'how can this man give us flesh to eat ?'²"

¹ John 6:41,42

² John 6:51,52

The Jews wanted to understand Christ but it was proving difficult. After all, what could eating flesh possibly refer to? Christ thus far in the discussion was using the word “esthio” [to eat]. It is *possible* to take this word metaphorically. No doubt those still hanging in there with Christ were clinging to such a possibility. Thayers New Testament Greek-English Lexicon (Protestant) lists the various senses of the word esthio:

- To eat
- To consume (to take food, eat a meal)
- Metaphor to devour or consume

At this point the crowd has asked, “How can this man give us flesh to eat?” In answering the question Christ escalates the crisis by switching the word for eating, from “esthio” to the word “trogo”, leaving no room for metaphors. Thayers New Testament Greek-English Lexicon³ (Protestant) lists the various senses of the word trogo:

- To gnaw, crunch, chew raw vegetables or fruits
- To eat

John 6:54 “He who [trogo: gnaws] my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

John 6:56 “He who [trogo: gnaws] my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

John 6:57 “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who [trogo: gnaws] me, he also shall live because of me.”

John 6:58 “This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate, and died, he who [trogo: gnaws] this bread shall live forever.”

By escalating the language, Christ made his point. The debate ended and a consensus formed; leave. Either Christ gave the worst sermon in the history of Christendom, nearly insisting the people misunderstand him (couldn’t he read the crowd?) or Christ gave a sermon that demanded a radically altered paradigm of how God would commune with Man in the Gospel Age. Protestants claim the crowds missed the symbolism. Catholics claim the people rejected the radicalness⁴ of Christ, wanting him only on their terms.

Protestant Objections

Protestants believe Christ was speaking symbolically, not literally about the Eucharist in John chapter 6. What do they base this on? It is Christ’s concluding words of his discourse they focus on. Specifically, verse 63 of the sermon says the following:

³ Other Lexicons concur on the word trogo. A crunching sound; to gnaw or chew (Dictionary of the Greek Testament) Originally I munch, I eat audibly (A Pocket Lexicon To The Greek New Testament)

⁴ The Jews were forbidden to *even utter* God’s name (Yahweh) and here this man claimed to be divine (God) AND they must (sacramentally) eat his flesh and drink his blood. This was a *radical* paradigm shift.

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh⁵ profits nothing.”

The Protestant Reformation Study Bible (Calvinist) says the following about verse 63.

“This makes it plain that a merely physical understanding of Jesus’ words was utterly mistaken.”

The Church concurs that a *merely* physical understanding of the Eucharist does not suffice (as the Spirit transforms the elements into a sacrament), but Protestants miss Christ’s point. In some ways this section in John parallels Matthew chapter 16. In Matthew the crowds hadn’t figured out who Jesus was. Christ asked the apostles their opinions and Peter responds. While Peter’s response was accurate, Christ told him flesh and blood played no role in his insight. Jesus said, “flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my Father in heaven”⁶.

In our passage, the crowds see Christ as only a man (the same as in Matthew). Christ ends his discourse by asking the apostles a question (as he did in Matthew). It is Peter that responds (as he did in Matthew). Peter professes Christ as divine (as he did in Matthew). But before Peter’s confession Christ states that the flesh profits nothing and only God (the Spirit) can bring us to faith (as he stated in Matthew).

[After everybody left, Christ turns to the apostles and asks] “Do you wish to go away?” And **Peter answered** him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that **you are the Holy One of God.**” [John 6:68-69]

In essence Christ is re-stating that only by the grace of the Spirit can we see Christ is divine (as stated in Matthew) and is present in the Eucharist (as stated in John). That’s the point Christ is making in John 6:63. Christ then adds the following to verse 63:

“The words that I have spoken to you are **spirit [Greek: pneuma]** and are life”

Some Protestants understand the word “spirit” to mean “figurative”; “the words I have spoken to you are [figurative]”. The problem with such an understanding is this; Christ uses the word *pneuma* (spirit), not the word *paraomia* (figure) or *tupos*⁷ (figure).

At times the word *paraomia* (figure) is used to describe Christ’s teaching method. **In the same gospel**, John clarifies when Christ is speaking metaphorically.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not **enter by the door** into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep... **This figure [Greek: paraomia]** of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were

⁵ Previously Christ spoke of “my flesh” but now of “the flesh”. It is of no profit but his flesh profits much!

⁶ Matthew 16:13-19

⁷ Romans 5:14 states Adam is a *tupos* (type or figure) of Christ. It’s the word we get typology from.

which He had been saying to them. So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am the door** of the sheep."⁸

Here Christ uses a metaphor of a door. John is careful to indicate the figurative meaning by employing the Greek word *paraomia* (figure). But John makes no claim in chapter 6.

The Sacrifice of the Mass

The Eucharist is the sacrifice of the Cross of Calvary and is sometimes referred to as the Sacrifice of the Mass. Scripture includes the concept of sacrifice with the Eucharist.

“And the bread also **which I will give** for the life of the world is my flesh.”⁹

“And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body **which is given** for you; do this in remembrance of me’. And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup **which is poured out** for you is the new covenant in my blood’¹⁰.”

“For Christ our Passover also **has been sacrificed**. Therefore let us celebrate the feast.”¹¹

“I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing, which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread, which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; **are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar**? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. [Note: *But we share God through the sacrifice on our altar*] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”¹²

While the Mass is not a repeated sacrifice of Christ (as Protestants claim), it is perpetual.

“And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, **as if slain**, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”¹³

Christ is not re-sacrificed nor does he suffer pain. But Christ’s sacrifice is perpetual and **today** the Passover Lamb stands in heaven as if slain. This is the Sacrifice of the Mass.

⁸ John 10:1-7 - NASB

⁹ John 6:51

¹⁰ Luke 22:19, 20

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:15-21

¹³ Revelation 5:6

Tradition

Saint Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35-110) 3rd bishop of Antioch - student John the apostle
“Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God . . . They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because **they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh** of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh that suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.” — *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6:2–7:1

Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430)
“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 he first adores it. . . We do sin by not adoring it.” (Explanations of the Psalms 98, 9 William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* volume 3, p. 20)

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 313-386)
“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* 19:7 [A.D. 350]).

Saint John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407)
“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 [A.D. 391])

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Paragraph 1367: The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are **one single sacrifice**: “The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different. “And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner . . . this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.”

Summary

Most Protestants believe Christ’s words of institution *mean*, “This **represents** my body”. Lutherans believe the words of institution *mean*, “This **contains** my body”. Catholics (and Eastern Orthodox) believe the words of institution *mean* (as they say), “This **is** my body”. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium have concurred for 2,000 years that the Eucharist is Christ’s body, blood, soul and divinity. **It is Christ**. While Protestants lack the Eucharist (owning only a symbol), Catholics possess it. It is the summit of our faith.