



### THE EUCHARISTIC BANQUET

#### 27 Why is the Holy Mass a Banquet?

Because, when Christ offers Himself as a sacrifice to the Father in the Holy Mass, and, making himself truly, present, He becomes our food and drink, giving his Body to eat and his Blood to drink. For this reason, it is a, Sacrificial Banquet: the Banquet derives from the Sacrifice that Christ makes of Himself to the Father for us. The Banquet is understood fully only as from the offering that Jesus makes of his own life for us on the Cross.

#### 28 What is the relationship between the Banquet and Holy Communion?

The Holy Communion constitutes the high point of the Eucharistic Banquet: in this the faithful participate in the true Body and true Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and become more completely members of His Body the Church. The nature of the Banquet shows the Eucharist as a mystery that is capable of generating new relationships: the member of the faithful, entering into communion with Christ, creates a new relationship with others. In the Holy Communion, Christ unites us in a marvelous way to him and to each other, in this way making us “into one.”



**In the Holy Mass we too are called to offer our own sufferings and sacrifices, uniting them to the Sacrifice of Christ.**



## 29 Why are bread and wine used during the Eucharistic Banquet?

Bread and wine are used because this is what Jesus did at the Last Supper on Holy Thursday. The Church cannot change what Christ chose to do but for two thousand years has respected it and will continue to respect it until the end of time.



## 30 Do the bread and wine have a particular significance?

Certainly, the bread and wine have a particular meaning. In fact:



Bread and wine are food, they give us nourishment: this helps us to understand that, in the same way as our bodies need to be fed constantly, so too our spiritual lives need to be nourished with the food that Jesus gives us: his Body and his Blood.



Besides, bread and wine, as the priest says during the Offertory of the Holy Mass, are those things that *earth has given and human hands have made*. For this reason the whole of creation is present, synthesized in the bread and wine, and participates in this mystery of *transubstantiation* in the Body and Blood of Christ.

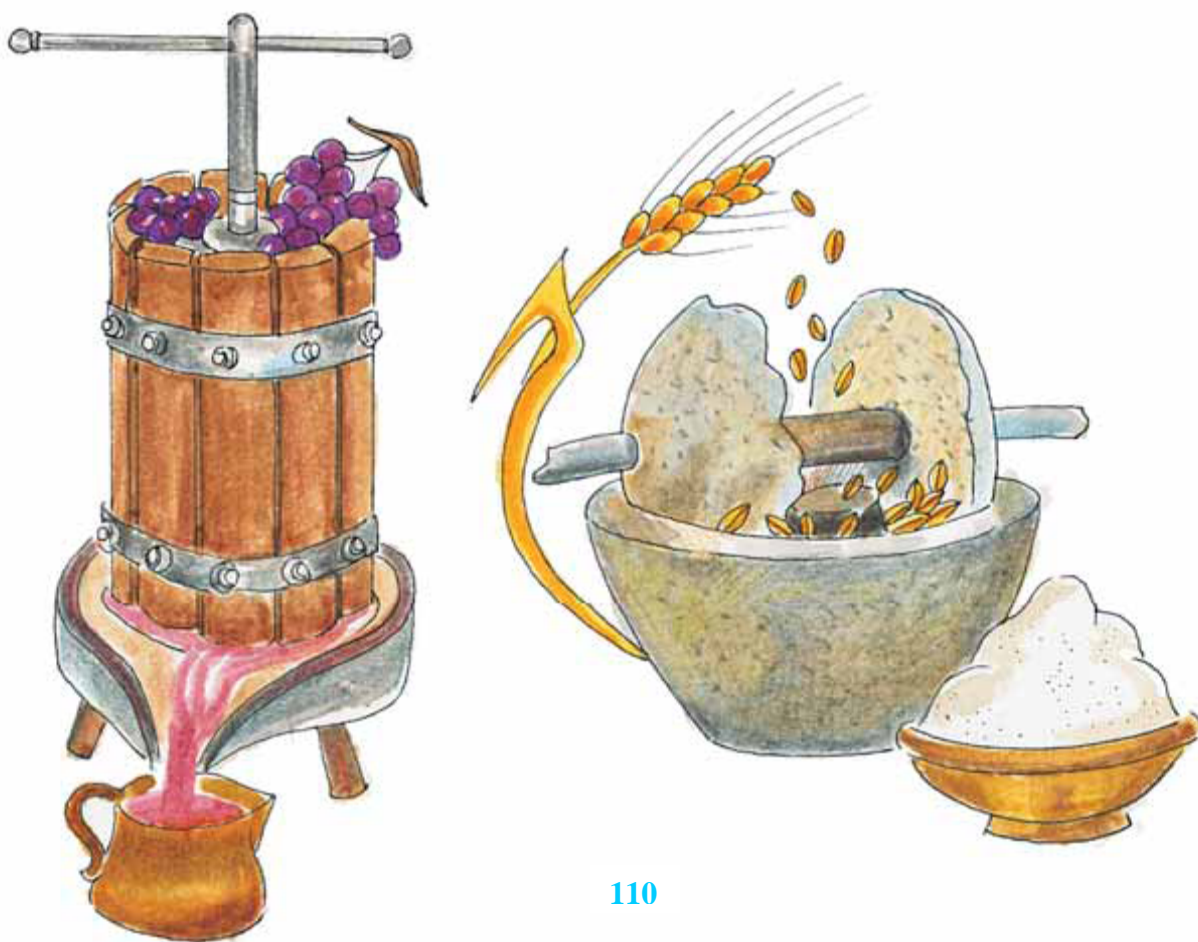


The bread, which is made from many grains of wheat, and the wine, which is made from many grapes, both remind us that this is also a great event of unity: the process of making bread from all the grains of wheat and making wine from all the grapes are the fruit of a union, unification, a communion. All this shows that we too who take part in the Eucharistic Banquet, though many,

we can and must become *one single bread, one single wine*. We must all become united in Christ: one single body, as Saint Paul tells us: **“Since there is one bread, we, though many, are one body: since we all partake in the one loaf”** (*1 Cor 10, 17*). The *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, a book written around the year 100, contains among its prayers the statement: “Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom” (IX, 4).



“The mystery of the Passion of Jesus is hidden in the bread made of ground grain. Flour, the ground wheat, presupposes the death and the resurrection of the grain. Jesus Himself mentioned this deepest mystery when he said: **“Truly, truly I tell all of you with certainty: unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and does not die, it remains alone. But if it does, it produces a lot of grain”** (*Jn 12, 24*). In the process of being ground and baked, it carries in itself once again the same mystery of the Passion. Only through death the resurrection comes, the fruit comes and the new life. But, wine also speaks of the Passion: the vine must be repeatedly pruned to be purified in this way. The grapes must mature with the sun and the rain and must be pressed: only through this passion a fine wine matures” (BENEDICT XVI, *Homily for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Domini)*, 15 June 2006).





Furthermore, the bread and wine are a reminder of the human effort that must be made, the daily work of those who cultivate the land and gather the sheaves of wheat and bunches of grapes, and transform them into bread and wine. As we reflect on these foods we think about all the various good work that men and women do in order to satisfy all their personal, family and social needs. And so in this way we can say that man's work is sanctified. God makes present the Mystery of his communion with us even as he conceals himself under the forms of the consecrated bread and wine. These are the things that *the earth has given and human hands have made* and show us clearly the harmonious collaboration that exists between man and the created world. It also foretells the *new Heavens* and the *new Earth* that God will accomplish through Christ at the end of time. In this way, the Creation shows it aspire beyond itself to something even greater.

### 31 Taken individually, what do the bread and wine mean?



**Bread** recalls us too the food a traveler usually takes with him when he is on a journey. We too are pilgrims on the earth, as we make our way towards our true homeland: Heaven. The Lord wanted to give us food for our pilgrimage, but not just any kind of food, rather he wanted to give us a food that was extraordinary, something exceptional: nothing less than himself, His Body and His Blood. Just as the people of Israel received the manna from heaven as they made their way through the desert for forty years, so also do we receive *our manna* as we make our way towards Heaven, that is, the Host which the Lord feeds us with. This is the *True Bread from Heaven*, his Body and Blood.



**Wine** reminds us of the Blood that Christ poured out for our salvation, and of all the suffering there is in the world. Not only is all of our *human work* brought to the altar, namely the bread and wine, but also all of our human sufferings and pain. Christ is with us in all our sufferings until the end of time and he supports and helps us along our way. For this reason Jesus says: **“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (*Mt* 11, 28-30). The pain and suffering of every human person and of the whole world are brought to the altar so that they can be sanctified and to get meaning and hope of redemption thanks to the Blood of Christ, the Lamb without spot or stain.

### 32 What is the difference between a normal meal and the Eucharistic banquet?

When we are speaking about regular meals, the food we eat every day, men (and women) are given greater importance on these occasions since they are the ones eating the food and assimilating it into their own bodies. In the Eucharist, the opposite takes place: Christ is at the center and he draws us into himself, he draws us out of ourselves so that we may form one body with Him and with others.

### 33 Who may receive Holy Communion?

Every Catholic person who is in the state of grace, that is, having examined his or her conscience carefully, is aware of not being in mortal sin can receive Holy Communion. If a person were in the state of mortal sin and nevertheless approached Holy Communion, this would be a sacrilege: **“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord (...) For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself”** (*1Cor* 11, 27-29).

## In what way and with what gestures should a person receive Holy Communion?

There should be both interior (these are more important) and exterior gestures, signs of respect that are required by this Sacrament.





### Interior:



**To be in the state of grace**, that is to have an awareness that one has no mortal sin on one's soul. If a person is aware that he or she has committed a mortal sin, he or she must first receive absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion. Our love for the Eucharist leads us to a deeper appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is important and right to celebrate this sacrament, even when a person has committed venial sins from time to time (on average it is usual to go once a month and certainly at least once a year) in order to eliminate even that light veil of mist, or dust, or shadow that that venial sin causes since this dulls the splendid beauty and marvelous richness of our filial relationship with God.



### Exterior:



**a spirit of reflection and prayer** to help us with our interior participation during the Holy Mass, particularly in certain moments (periods of silence, personal prayer after Holy Communion);



**the dignified way we pray** the acclamations or the parts of the Holy Mass that are said by the people together;



**bodily gestures** (gestures, and clothing that are dignified and suitable, an appropriate tone of voice, our overall way of behaving), are signs of respect and faith towards Christ whom we receive in Holy Communion;



**observing the Eucharistic fast** of at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion.

## 35 When should we receive Holy Communion?

The Church recommends strongly that a person receive Holy Communion each time he or she participates at the Holy Mass, but not more than twice on any one day.

## 36 What are the fruits of receiving Holy Communion?



If Holy Communion is received with a proper disposition:



it deepens our intimate union with Christ, so that we can exclaim with Saint Paul: **“It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me”** (*Gal 2,20*);



it preserves, increases and renews the life of grace that I received at my Baptism and at Confirmation;



consolidates our bond of unity within the Church and with the Church;



urges the person to live each day, always conscious of the need for conversion and transfiguration, that is to say, to become more and more like Christ;



helps us to grow in love for our neighbor;



wipers out venial sins;



helps to avoid falling into sin and makes us more willing to repent of our sins;



reinforces the unity of the Church (the Eucharist makes the Church);



makes us long for eternal life;



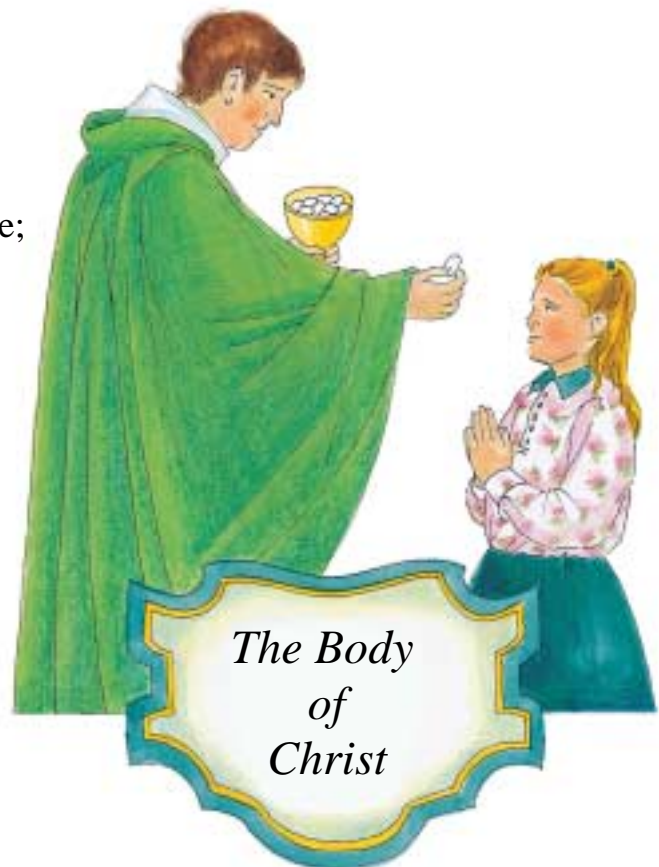
provides us with a foretaste of the future glory of paradise as we make our way along this earthly pilgrimage;



unites us to the Church in Heaven;



is the source of the final resurrection:  
**“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day”** (*Jn 6,54*).





## 37 What is spiritual Communion?

*Spiritual Communion* consists in expressing one's desire to receive the Body and Blood of Christ with faith and devotion when it is not actually possible to receive it.

It is based on the privileges that have been granted to us at our Baptism, and it is the only form of Communion that many persons may in fact make because they are unable to fulfill an objective or subjective condition of receiving Sacramental Holy Communion. For example, *Spiritual Communion* is something that elderly persons or persons suffering from an illness who show their love for the Eucharist may do so. They participate in the communion of saints and this brings great spiritual blessings both for themselves and for the Church, which is enriched through their sufferings that they offer up to God. In this way they make up for what is lacking in the Body of Christ, the Church (see also *Col 1,24*) and they also proclaim the “**Gospel of suffering**”, that the Master bequeathed to his disciples with his own sacrifice, for which the Eucharist is the memorial.



### 38 What is Viaticum?

It is Holy Communion that is given to those who are about to leave this earthly life. For the faithful who receives Viaticum, the medicine of immortality, a certain contemporaneous experience of death and the fullness of Life takes place, and that person is given the pledge of the resurrection of the body, at the end of time.



### 39 Why is the Eucharist a pledge of future glory?

“Because the Eucharist fills us with every grace and Heavenly blessing. It fortifies us for our pilgrimage in this life and makes us long for eternal life. It unites us already to Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, to the Church in Heaven and to the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints” (*Compendium*, 294). It acts as an antidote against sin and frees us from venial sins, infuses the soul with the strength of grace that sanctifies the person and prepares him for eternal life, with an invocation addressed to the Lord that he might come: **“Maranà tha: come, Lord Jesus!”** (*1 Cor* 16,22; see also *AP* 22,20). In the Eucharist we break **“The one bread, the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, to live forever in Jesus Christ”** (Saint Ignatius of Antioch) with God the Father.

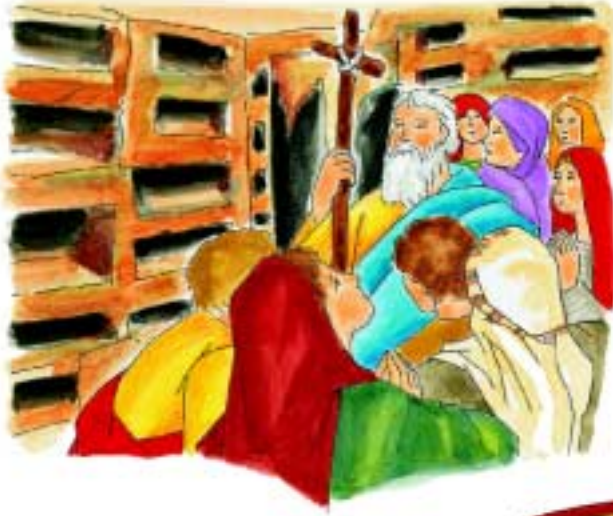


#### 40 Is it obligatory to participate at the Holy Mass?

Christians have the obligation to participate at Mass every Sunday and on Feast Days established by the Church, unless there is a grave reason (such as sickness...). If these grave conditions are not present, then the Christian who does not fulfill this obligation commits a mortal sin. There is a triple duty on the Christian: towards God, towards oneself and towards the community. The Sunday Eucharist is a *question of identity*, in fact it is a requirement, a life-giving necessity from which we cannot turn. **“We cannot live without Sunday”** show the Christians of the 4<sup>th</sup> century who were martyred at Abitene in North Africa.



*“We cannot live without Sunday”*  
(Abitene Martyrs, IV Century)



 The first Christian Martyrs



 The first Christian Community



*The participation in the daily celebration of the Holy Mass is also important and fruitful, and in this way it becomes an efficacious development of our own Christian identity and witness, lived among our family, at work and in our social life.*



## 41 Why is it an obligation to participate at Mass on Sunday?

Because Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Sunday. The Resurrection of Christ is the central event of Christ's whole life and of our Christian Faith. **“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith”** St. Paul tells us (*1Cor* 15,14). Sunday is the *Dies Domini* (*the Day of the Lord*), a holy day in the life of the Church, for the community of the faithful and for every believer. The *Day* of the Lord is also a day of solidarity and of sharing with the poor because the Eucharist is a bond of fraternity and a source of communion. By dedicating time to the Lord every Sunday and on the holy days established by the Church, everybody, as individuals and members of a family can rediscover the hierarchy of values on which he should model his life, and therefore learn to make use of his free time, in union with God, his Creator and Redeemer, to dedicate his Christian and human talents for the good of all in society. This is why it is important to safeguard Sunday as a day that is free of work, especially in countries that have Christian roots.



Bunch of grapes



Wine



Sheaf of wheat



Bread



Deer



Fish



Lamb



Pelican



Dolphin



Griffin

Symbols which are often used to represent Jesus Christ and the Eucharist