

# The Eucharist in the New Testament

Mass Plus

Series on History of the Mass 1

St. Mary Magdalene Parish Family

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## 1. Studying the History of the Mass

- “Mass” = “Eucharist.” “Eucharist” may also refer specifically to communion. Action + object.
- Sources (for later developments in future sessions, today looks at New Testament)
  - Documents: homilies, catechesis, apologies, church manuals, letters, travel diaries, etc.
  - Architecture: meeting places, shape of churches, etc.
- Our agenda: ONLY the Latin Rite, Roman, dominant in West. (Not Celtic, Gallican, Mozarabic)
  - NOT Eastern: Armenian, Byzantine, Alexandrian/Coptic, Syrian, Jerusalem, etc.
- Our agenda: Only the Eucharist/Mass. Not “liturgy:” sacraments, hours, other rites, music, etc.

## 2. 1 Corinthians – Earliest Reference in New Testament

- Written by St Paul, from Ephesus, around 56 C.E. (Gospels not till 70+.)
- Paul is responding to news he received about problems in Corinth.
  - All we have is his reply, not what he had heard or been told.
  - We have to infer what the situation was from his answer.
- In general, New Testament does not give much detail about what was done, who led, etc.



## 3. The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11

*Text on another handout*

- 1 Cor—whole letter concerns problem of factions, divisions. Ch 11—Lord's Supper.
  - Their gatherings are *not* the Lord's Supper, because of division between wealthy and poor.
  - Real evening meal, in a home, like a pot-luck. Early diners are drunk before poor arrive.
- 1 Cor 11:23-26. Last Supper, “This is my body.”
  - Earliest written account of institution of Lord's Supper in New Testament, before gospels.
  - Memorial of Jesus's self-giving death.
  - Crucial importance of ethical implications of meal. 1 Cor 11:28-29.
- 1 Cor 10 and 12: unity of church, Body of Christ.
  - 1 Cor 10:17. Essential connection between Supper and identity as church.  
“Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body,  
for we all partake of the one loaf.”
  - Meal demonstrates and effects unity of church as Body of Christ. Meal defines who they are.
  - Importance of communion. Also, Supper is act of all those gathered.
- Body of Christ: BOTH bread and church.

## 4. Other Pauline Epistles

- Greetings to “church” that meets at someone's home. Perhaps met for Eucharist?
  - “Church” = ecclesia (Gk) = gathering, assembly. Identity of the church lies in their gathering.
  - Worship not tied to building (as in Gk/Roman temples), but to the community assembled.

## 5. Gospels, 70-100 C.E.

*See texts on another handout*

- Last Supper, considered to be when Christ instituted Eucharist.
  - Slight differences may reflect different liturgical practices.
  - No liturgy, past or present, quotes gospels exactly.
  - Jesus giving himself, body & blood, as a sacrifice.
  - Participate in meal = partic in passion & death, also resurrection.
- Jesus also eats many other meals, often with marginalized.
  - In some resurrection appearances, Christ eats w disciples.
- Recurring verbs: took, said blessing/gave thanks, broke, gave.
- No mention of what exactly Jesus said in blessing.
  - Likely used model of Jewish *berakah*, blessing at the end of a meal.
  - Thank/Bless God in present, by recalling past, petition for future.
- John's Gospel: No Institution Narrative. John 6 – Bread of Life discourse.
  - Foot-Washing at Last Supper – same meaning of sharing in Christ by service.
  - Copy Jesus: be bread broken, be a cup poured out, in serving others.



## 6. Acts of Apostles, 80-90 C.E.

- Breaking of bread in homes, in depictions of Jerusalem community: 2:42-47, 4:32-35, 5:12-16.
- But no description of what was said or done.
- “Breaking of Bread” – many members share one loaf?

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” Acts 2:42

## 7. Didache, c. 100 C.E.

*A church manual, discovered in 1873*

- “Teaching” of the Twelve Apostles, around 100 C.E., roughly same period as John's Gospel.

“On the Lord's Day of the Lord, come together to break bread and give thanks, after having, in addition, confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let anyone who is at odds with his fellow not join with you until he has first been reconciled, lest your sacrifice be profaned.” ch 14

- Section titled “Eucharist.” Prayers over a cup, bread. Thanks after a meal. [ch 9-10]
- Only those baptized permitted “to eat and drink of your eucharist.”

## 8. Ordained Ministers?

- Not clear in NT. Apostles? Prophets? Teachers?
- But see role of bishop in Eucharist in Ignatius of Antioch, c. 110 CE. Bishop of Antioch, Syria.
  - “Bishop” = *episcopos*, “overseer,” one who “watches over” Christian community in a city or town.

“The only Eucharist to be considered legitimate is the one celebrated under the presidency of the bishop or of someone he has appointed.”

*Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8*

“Be careful to take part in only one Eucharist; for there is but one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, one cup that unites us to his blood, and one altar, just as there is but one bishop with his presbytery and deacons.”

*Letter to the Philadelphians 4 [Both these cities in present-day Turkey]*

## 9. First Non-Christian Source about Christianity, 112 C.E.

- Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia and Pontus, modern Turkey.
  - Letter to Emperor Trajan, asking how to handle those accused of being Christians.

“On a stated day, they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god.... When this ceremony was concluded, it had been their custom to depart and meet again to take food....”

*R. Cabie, History of the Mass, 10*