

The Eucharist: Answering Common Objections – Part 1

By Graham Osborne

As we approach the most holy week of the Christian year, a week that most Christians observe, the question naturally arises: does it really matter that Christians agree on all the various teachings Jesus left us? Isn't it sufficient that we all "love" Jesus, and the rest is just details? That is a loaded question, and it could be answered in multiple ways and on multiple levels. But as the remembrance of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday draws near, let me focus on one aspect in particular. The Eucharist.

In John 6, Jesus says a stunning **THIRTEEN TIMES in nine verses, in one form or another: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"!** He finishes by insisting that, "**my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.**" Here, Jesus has clearly said that eating his flesh and blood is necessary for salvation. If this is true, wouldn't this be one of the greatest reasons to be Catholic? This is not just "details", but an issue that is at the heart of salvation – and a reason why we should want every person in the world to be Catholic!

Now most Protestants will object, claiming that much of John 6 is largely symbolic and that Jesus certainly wasn't speaking literally here. While many of these same Christians are quick to insist on literal interpretations of Genesis 1 and other places in Scripture [something which I'm certainly not intending to dispute here], they're just as quick to insist on a symbolic interpretation John 6.

Ironically, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli would engage in a bitter dispute over exactly this matter, with Luther insisting that Jesus was speaking literally here, and Zwingli adamantly opposing him.

And when some further argued that Jesus was also only speaking symbolically when he said, "this is my body", at the Last Supper, Luther severely criticized them: "Who but the devil, hath granted such a license of wresting the words of the holy Scripture? Who ever read in the Scriptures, that "my body" is the same as "this is a sign of my body"? Or, that "is" is the same as "it signifies"? What language in the world ever spoke so?"

But returning to John 6, closer examination of this passage and context simply does not admit a symbolic interpretation, and on several levels.

First, the context. Jesus has just walked on water, performed a bread miracle and fed over five thousand. Not good enough. The Jews want a bigger and better sign to confirm that he is the Messiah: "what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness ... Jesus then said... my Father gives you the true bread from heaven... They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always"... Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die."

Now if Jesus is just giving them a nice symbolic talk about "eating" his body, that is not much of a "sign" compared to Moses feeding over a million Jews for decades. But this is not a symbolic talk. Jesus is literally saying that if they eat his body and blood, they *will* live forever. And the Jews get that. They all grumble and Jesus knows it. They are taking him literally, and rather than backing off and saying, "hold on, I'm just using figures of speech here", he intensifies his language. He becomes more insistent, and the Greek words he uses become more graphic, more visceral – literally to chew and gnaw.

Earlier in John 6, Jesus used a very generic Greek word for eating: *phago*. But now he changes to *trogo*, which literally means "to chew or gnaw". And for "flesh", instead of using the more general, potentially symbolic word, *soma*, which means body, he uses the more graphic *sarx*, which literally means, "meat or flesh". Not remotely the flowery language of symbolism.

But the key is, many take him literally – and leave. There is no other place like this in all the Gospels. And knowing exactly what they are thinking and why they are leaving, **Jesus lets them go**. Because he means exactly what he has said.

Interestingly, there are other places, like Matthew 16:5-12, where Jesus *does* use symbolic bread language, and his disciples misunderstand. Jesus knows this and immediately sets them straight: "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" ... they discussed it ... saying, "We brought no bread." But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? ... How is it that you fail to perceive that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." *Then* they understood that he did

not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” But Jesus doesn’t do this in John 6 ...

And for the record, St Peter’s take on John 6: “You have the words of eternal life.”

Another objection involves **John 6:63**: “*It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*” Some suggest that this is finally evidence that Jesus was talking “spiritually”, or symbolically, all along, and that “*the flesh is of no avail*” – in other words we don’t really have to eat His flesh after all. But nothing could be further from the truth!

For starters, something that is a spiritual reality is as true as anything gets! This would include God Himself, who “**IS spirit**” [**John 4:24**], Heaven, the angels, and a host of other spiritual realities. Saying that something is a spiritual reality doesn’t in the least suggest it is simply a symbolic representation – on the contrary, nothing could be **MORE** real!

Additionally, when Jesus confirms that, “*the flesh is of no avail*”, He is absolutely not talking about **HIS** flesh. He’s talking about “**THE flesh**”, St Paul-style. He is talking about a “fleshly” or natural, earthly understanding of the spiritual realities He has just revealed. A “fleshly” or earthly understanding cannot possibly comprehend these truths.

St Paul clarifies this perfectly in **1 Corinthians 2:12-15** where he writes: “*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God... interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The unspiritual (i.e. fleshly) man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*”

St Paul is telling us that spiritual realities, like the Real Presence, cannot be understood by the fleshly man, and in fact they would appear as nonsense to him. This would be why many would leave Jesus in John 6.

But perhaps you still think a symbolic interpretation of John 6 is right. What if we could ask someone who knew St John intimately – one of his best friends, and his finest disciple?

In fact we can: St Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch. One of the greatest Christians of the early Church – a Bishop, ordained by St Peter himself, and a martyr for the Christian faith. We have his actual writings, some written as early as 110 AD, and what he says is stunning!

In his letter to the Romans, he exclaims that, “I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ ... and for drink, I desire His Blood.” Writing in his letter to Smyrna, he warns: “Take note of those who hold heterodox [heretical] opinions ... 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 which suffered for our sins.” He then adds: “Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it.”

Similarly, in his Letter to the Philadelphians, he again warns:” Do not err, my brethren: if anyone follow a schismatic, he will not inherit the Kingdom of God ... Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of His Blood; one altar, as there is one bishop.”

And the testimony from the first centuries of Christianity does not end there. In his *First Apology* [150 AD], Saint Justin Martyr, considered the greatest defender of the Christian faith of the second century, writes: “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.”

He then writes that, “We call this food Eucharist; and no one is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true... For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the Flesh and the Blood of that incarnated Jesus.”

St. Irenaeus, – arguably the greatest theologian of the post-Apostolic period, and a student of St Polycarp, also a disciple of St John – would write: “He (Jesus) has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be His own Blood, from which He causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, He has established as His own Body, from which He gives increase to our bodies” (Against Heresies, ≈195 AD).

Saint Athanasius, the great defender of Christian orthodoxy and the doctrine of the Trinity, would write: “when the great and wondrous prayers have been recited, then the bread becomes the Body and the cup the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ ... the Word descends on the bread and the cup, and it becomes his body.”

St. Cyril, Doctor of the Church and Bishop of Jerusalem (≈350 AD) gives a similarly powerful testimony: “He (Jesus) himself, therefore, having declared and said of the Bread, “This is my Body,” who will dare any longer to doubt? And when He Himself has affirmed and said, “This is My Blood,” who can ever hesitate and say it is not His Blood?” Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the Master’s declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ.”

The Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve, dated during or shortly after the Apostles (50-70 AD) states: “On the Lord’s day (i.e. Sunday), when you have been gathered together, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist.”

In fact every Church Father in history who wrote on this subject – every one of them – believed in and confirmed the constant teaching of Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist, a teaching handed down from the Apostles in both written and spoken word.

Stunningly, it would be Martin Luther himself who would give testimony to this unanimous belief in the Real Presence amongst the early Church: “Not one of the Fathers, though so numerous... ever said, “It is only bread and wine”; or,” the body and blood of Christ is not there present ... Certainly in so many Fathers, and in so many writings, the negative might at least be found in one of them had they thought the body and blood of Christ were not really present: but they are all of them unanimous.” If only every Protestant in the world could read – and then believe – these profound words from the father of Protestantism!

The Eucharist: Answering Today’s Objections – PART 2

By Graham Osborne

In my previous column, we looked at indisputable evidence from Scripture and the early Church for the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. In particular, we examined John 6, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you”, showing that a literal interpretation of this chapter leads directly to the Catholic teaching of the Real Presence. Any attempt to force a symbolic interpretation on these verses not only goes against the clear meaning of the text, but also against the early Christian Church’s unanimous understanding of it as well.

And here is yet more fascinating evidence from the Our Father, a prayer many Christians say every day. In Matthew 6:11, Jesus uses a neologism – a new word, previously unknown to the world, and used by Jesus for the very first time in history, right here: “Give us this day our daily [*epiousios*, Greek] bread”. “Epi” means super or above, and “*ousios*” means substance or nature. The translation of the Greek into the English, “daily”, found in many Bible translations today, simply does not capture the profound essence of what Jesus is saying here. St Jerome’s translation of this word in the Latin Vulgate, the official Bible translation of the Catholic Church, reads as follows: “Give us this day our *supersubstantial* bread.” This reference profoundly reflects the Church’s teaching that the Eucharist becomes something “above” the ordinary matter or substance of bread.

But despite all this testimony to the Real Presence, it is still a place where many struggle. How can this be, many ask? “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it” [John 6:60].

And here lies the heart of the matter: could Jesus really do this? Could he change a piece of bread into his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, but still have it remain in *every* aspect of its physicality and appearances, bread – its substance, its essence, absolutely and radically changed, but the physical appearances unchanged? The answer is a resounding, “yes!” Of course **He** could do this! God can do anything!

God assures us of exactly this point in Isaiah 55:11, in case we had *any* doubt: “My word ... goes forth from my mouth ... achieving the end for which I sent it”. So when Jesus, holding bread at the Last Supper said, “this IS my body” (Luke 22:19), that is exactly what it became. It remained, in all its appearances, like bread. But its substance had completely changed. St Augustine, one of Christianity’s greatest saints and theologians, would profoundly observe that, at that moment, “Christ was carried in his own hands.”

St. Ambrose, one of the greatest Doctors of the Church and the key evangelizer of St Augustine, explains: “Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over

that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed... Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature."

And St. John Chrysostom, perhaps the greatest preacher of the early Church, echoes this same teaching: "It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered."

Similarly, St. Cyril of Jerusalem also writes: "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."

But some still object, insisting there is no physical evidence of such a change. One can get "inebriated" from the Precious Blood. Celiacs can react to the Precious Body. If the bread and wine cease to exist, and all that is left is Jesus' Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, the physical response to bread and wine should no longer occur either, right?

But again, such an objection misses the profound truth of what *actually happens* at the moment of consecration: the substance of bread and wine is completely changed, but all the physical properties or "accidents" – taste, smell, outward appearance, physical qualities and effects – remain.

Transubstantiation is the word the Church uses to describe this miraculous change: "by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation" (CCC 1376).

What part of the physical traits of bread and wine do we expect Jesus to leave *unchanged*? Should it look like bread but not taste like it? Should the wine still be claret in colour, but not have the physical effect of wine? Should the bread have turned immediately to flesh, as it actually has in multiple documented miracles documented in the Church over the centuries (the Miracle of Lanciano is a great place to start)?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses this point in section 1333: "The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ". Similarly, in his commentary on Luke 22:19, "this is my body", St Cyril of Alexandria further emphasizes this point: "Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Savior in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie."

St Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest Christian theologian of history, puts things this way: "That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that cannot be apprehended by the senses, but *only by faith*, which relies on divine authority". In other words, we believe in the Real Presence because we trust Jesus at his word: "this *is* my Body."

We don't primarily rely on an emotional, intellectual or physical response: I don't feel any different, I don't feel holier, I don't feel Jesus Real Presence inside me as I receive the Eucharist. Perhaps not (though some certainly do at times, as a special grace from God). Jesus, his Church, and the Saints have *never* said that such feelings would accompany the reception of Communion. And maybe you don't feel you're a particularly great saint today, even after receiving Jesus' Body and Blood often – maybe for years. But ask yourself this: what do you think you would be like if you hadn't received Jesus in the Eucharist as often as you have? Or what might you be like if you *did* receive him?

To some degree, the Eucharist is a test of faith. Do you believe in God, and in all he has revealed to us? Or not? "For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" (John 6:40). How would someone actually "see" Jesus today? The Eucharist. But how many Christians today – including Catholics – believe this to be true ...

St Cyril of Jerusalem summarizes things beautifully for us: "He... having declared and said of the Bread, "This is my Body," who will dare any longer to doubt? And when He... has affirmed... "This is My Blood," who can ever hesitate and say it is not His Blood?" Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ."

What *is* crystal clear here is that Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist has been the constant, unanimous belief of the Christian Church, right from the time of the Apostles to Martin Luther himself. And in past centuries, this was a unifying doctrine amongst *all* Christians – a belief that formed *the heart of Christian worship*. During times of persecution or danger, people risked their lives to attend Mass, hide priests, or secretly distribute the Eucharist to other believers. But as doubts flood in, and faith in the Real Presence plummets to stunning lows – today, only 20 to 30% of Catholics believe in the Sacrament the Church calls “the source and summit of the Christian life” – perhaps the answer lies in the prayer of the dad in Mark 9:29: “I believe! Help my unbelief!”

To some degree, the Eucharist is a test of faith. Belief in the Real Presence is not a matter of science, or verifiable observations. Ultimately, it is about trusting that Jesus will do exactly what he has said: “This is my body” ... “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day ... For my flesh is *true food*, and my blood is *true drink*.” “Amen, Amen” (John 6:53-55).

The Eucharist in Scripture and The Early Church

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): See Sections 1322 to 1419 (and also Sections 1066 to 1211)

St. Thomas Aquinas: "That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that 'cannot be apprehended by the senses,' ... 'but *only by faith*, which relies on divine authority" – on Jesus' pronouncement, “this is my Body.”

CCC 1376 by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."

St. John Chrysostom (380 AD): It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered.²⁰⁴

St. Ambrose: Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed. . . . Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature.²⁰⁵

1 Corinthians 2:11-15 Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms.^[a]

¹⁴Now the natural person^[b] does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God, for to him it is foolishness, and he cannot understand it, because it is judged spiritually. ¹⁵The spiritual person, however, can judge everything

St. Ignatius of Antioch Letter to the Smyrnaeans (≈110 AD)

(a disciple and co-worker of the Apostle, St. John),

“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 which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans (≈110 AD)

“I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink, I desire His Blood, which is love incorruptible.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Philadelphians (≈110 AD)

“Do not err, my brethren: if anyone follow a schismatic, he will not inherit the Kingdom of God... Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of His Blood ; one altar, as there is one bishop with the presbytery and my fellow servants and deacons.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans (≈110 AD) *See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father... Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it... It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid.*

St. Ignatius of Antioch Letter to the Smyrnaeans (≈110 AD)

(a disciple and co-worker of the Apostle, St. John),

“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 which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans (≈110 AD)

“I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink, I desire His Blood, which is love incorruptible.”

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Philadelphians (≈110 AD)

“Do not err, my brethren: if anyone follow a schismatic, he will not inherit the Kingdom of God... Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of His Blood; one altar, as there is one bishop with the presbytery and my fellow servants and deacons.”

St. Justin Martyr Apology, (≈150 AD)

(born about the time that the last Apostle, St. John, died in Ephesus, around 130 AD. St. Justin Martyr was also converted in Ephesus where disciples of St. John undoubtedly instructed him. He is considered the greatest Christian apologist of the second century).

“We call this food Eucharist; and no one is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true... For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the Flesh and the Blood of that incarnated Jesus.”

St. Irenaeus Against Heresies, (≈195 AD)

(studied under St. Polycarp, who was a disciple of St. John the Apostle. St Irenaeus is considered the greatest theologian of the immediate post-apostolic period.)

“He (Jesus) has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be His own Blood, from which He causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, He has established as His own Body, from which He gives increase to our bodies.”

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, (≈350 AD)

“He (Jesus) himself, therefore, having declared and said of the Bread, “This is my Body,” who will dare any longer to doubt? And when He Himself has affirmed and said, “This is My Blood,” who can ever hesitate and say it is not His Blood?” Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the Master’s declaration, the Body and Blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ.”

*“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.” – St. Cyril of Jerusalem, **Catechetical Lectures, A.D. 348-350***

Martin Luther, (Luther’s Collected Works, no. 7, p 391):

“Who but the devil, hath granted such a license of wresting the words of the holy Scripture? Who ever read in the Scriptures, that “my body” is the same as “this is a sign of my body”? Or, that “is” is the same as “it signifies”? What language in the world ever spoke so? It is only then the devil, that imposeth upon us by these fanatical men.... Not one of the Fathers, though so numerous, ever spoke as the Sacramentarians: not one of them ever said, “It is only bread and wine”; or, “the body and blood of Christ is not there present”. Surely it is not credible, nor possible, since they often speak, and repeat their sentiments, that they should never (if they thought so) not so much as once, say, or let slip these words: “It is bread only” or “the body of Christ is not there”, especially it being of great importance, that men should not be deceived. Certainly in so many Fathers, and in so many writings, the negative might at least be found in one of them had they thought the body and blood of Christ were not really present: but they are all of them unanimous.”

Saint Augustine: *“For Christ was carried in his own hands, when, referring to his own Body, he said, ‘This is my Body.’ For he carried that Body in his hands.”*

Saint Justin Martyr, First Apology 66 *“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.*

Saint Augustine, Sermons 227 *“You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That Bread which you see on the altar, consecrated by the word of God, is the Body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what the chalice holds, consecrated by the word of God, is the Blood of Christ. Through those accidents the Lord wished to entrust to us His Body and the Blood which he poured out for the remission of sins.”*

St Augustine, Sermons , It isn't every loaf of bread, you see, but the one receiving Christ's blessing, that becomes the body of Christ."^[23]

St [Ambrose](#) of Milan (died 397) wrote:

Perhaps you will say, "I see something else, how is it that you assert that I receive the Body of Christ?" ... Let us prove that this is not what nature made, but what the blessing consecrated, and the power of blessing is greater than that of nature, because by blessing nature itself is changed. ... For that sacrament which you receive is made what it is by the word of Christ. But if the word of Elijah had such power as to bring down fire from heaven, shall not the word of Christ have power to change the nature of the elements? ... Why do you seek the order of nature in the Body of Christ, seeing that the Lord Jesus Himself was born of a Virgin, not according to nature? It is the true Flesh of Christ which was crucified and buried, this is then truly the Sacrament of His Body. The Lord Jesus Himself proclaims: "This Is My Body." Before the blessing of the heavenly words another nature is spoken of, after the consecration the Body *is signified*. He Himself speaks of His Blood. Before the consecration it has another name, after it is called Blood. And you say, Amen, that is, It is true. Let the heart within confess what the mouth utters, let the soul feel what the voice speaks.^[12]

John Chrysostom, Against the Judaizers: *“It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God’s. “This is my body”, he says. This word transforms the things offered.”*

Saint Athanasius, Sermon to the Newly Baptized [373 AD]: *“So long as the prayers and invocations have not yet been made, it is mere bread and a mere cup. But when the great and wondrous prayers have been recited, then the bread becomes the Body and the cup the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . When the great prayers and holy supplications are sent up, the Word descends on the bread and the cup, and it becomes his body.”*