

The Eucharist: The Real & True Presence of Jesus Christ on Earth



The Catholic Mass sets itself apart from other Christian worship services through the sacrament of the Eucharist. Though many Protestant gatherings feature a “Lord’s Supper,” the Mass contrasts all Protestant sects through the Church’s teaching on the Real Presence of Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity present in the Holy Eucharist under the form of bread and wine. Throughout the Church’s 2000-year history this teaching has remained constant. With the 2024 National Eucharistic Congress just around the corner, now is an excellent time to reacquire oneself with the Church Fathers’ writings on the Eucharist and the Real Presence.

Christ explained the nature of the Eucharist while speaking to the Israelites, saying “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.” Catholic theologians throughout history have reinforced Our Lord’s teaching that He is truly present in the Eucharist.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle, St. John the Evangelist, was consecrated a bishop by St. Peter, the first Pope. He was a child at the time of Christ’s crucifixion and grew to the age of maturity as the 12 Apostles were preaching the gospel. In AD 110, he wrote:

“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... and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible... 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

Bishop W. Shawn McKnight elevates our Eucharistic Lord during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
Photo courtesy of The Catholic Missourian.

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 that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.” (Letters to the Romans, Smyrnaeans.)

Another successor of St. John was St. Irenaeus, who wrote extensively about the Real Presence in the Eucharist in a series of letters to confront the errors of the Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism promoted the belief that there were two Gods: a higher God of pure essence and love which was the true God, and a lower God, who was the creator. Gnostics also believed that physical matter (i.e. the human body) was evil. Therefore, Jesus was not incarnated into a human body, but only had the appearance of a human body in order to communicate with humanity. As a result, in Gnosticism, since Jesus did not have a real human body, He could not have been crucified and died on the cross. During his time as the bishop of Lyon in Roman Gaul, Irenaeus wrote that the Real Presence in the Eucharist demonstrates Christ’s Divine Nature.

“He 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 unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body

of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life—flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is in fact a member of him?” Against Heresies, AD 189.)

Moving beyond individual Church theologians, the Church ecumenical councils have time and again affirmed the Real Presence of the Eucharist. In its refutation of the Nestorian heresy which believes that Christ was simply a man inspired by God but not God incarnate. The Council of Ephesus in 431 AD clarified that at every mass, the faithful receive the Eucharist, “not merely common flesh... but as truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself.”

In response to the onset of the Lutheran Heresy, the 1551 Council of Trent affirmed the true nature of Holy Communion, restating that within the sacrament, “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.” The Catholic Church of today has taken that passage from Trent and recorded it within the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Section 1374), thus maintaining the link the Church has held from its outset to the present day.

Despite consistently teaching belief in the Real Presence of the Eucharist for millennia, the

Church has seen a steady decline in belief in the Real Presence among its Catholic faithful. A 2019 Pew Research poll found that among self-identified Catholics, only 31% believe that the Holy Eucharist is transubstantiated – that is, is actually Christ’s body, blood, soul, and divinity under the forms of bread and wine. In addition to asking Catholics what they believe about the Eucharist, the survey also included a question that tested whether Catholics actually had knowledge of what the Church teaches on the subject. Most Catholics who believe that the bread and wine are symbolic do not know that the Church holds that transubstantiation occurs. Overall, 43% of Catholics believe both that the bread and wine are symbolic and that this is the position of the Church. A further one-in-five Catholics (22%) reject the idea of transubstantiation, even though they know the Church’s teaching. Even among Catholics who attended weekly mass, only 67% responded that they believed in the Real Presence.

To help explain and meditate upon the mysteries of the Holy Eucharist, the Church plans to bring the National Eucharistic Congress back to the United States for the first time in 83 years. The first International Eucharistic Congress owed its inspiration to Bishop Gaston de Ségur, and was held at Lille, France on June 21, 1881. From that event and its subsequent International Eucharistic Conferences sprang forth the National Eucharistic Congress, which has met in the United States a total of nine times.



Fr. Dylan Schrader leads a Eucharistic procession on the feast of Corpus Christi at St. Brendan Parish in Mexico, Missouri. Photo courtesy of The Catholic Missourian.

To facilitate ease of travel, most of America’s National Eucharistic Conferences have been hosted by cities in the Midwest, including the 1901 conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The last Eucharistic Congress held in the United States was the International Eucharistic Congress in 1976 which took place in Philadelphia. The upcoming 2024 conference is scheduled to take place in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Despite the frequency of these conferences near the beginning of its history, the 2024 National Eucharistic Conference will be America’s first Eucharistic Conference in 83 years, and will

culminate in a five-day event at Lucas Oil Stadium where organizers expect tens of thousands of pilgrims to be in attendance. After the commencement ceremony on the evening of the first day, each subsequent day of the conference will begin with morning mass and catechetical sessions, leading into afternoon breakout sessions, followed by dinner and general session speakers in the evening.

Event organizers have stated they want Catholics from all walks of life present at the conference in order to demonstrate the true universality of our Church community. Though the Lucas

Oil venue is large, tickets are selling fast, so the Eucharistic Congress recommends purchasing individual or group tickets at their website, eucharisticcongress.org, well in advance. Looking beyond the Eucharistic Congress, if you want to be involved in promulgating belief in the Real Presence, you can discuss both the sacrament and the Church’s history among your friends, family, or religious peers. Even simple conversations can cause others to understand the sacraments in a way they never have before,



NATIONAL
Eucharistic Congress

THE FIRST NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN 83 YEARS

This is a pivotal moment in both American history and the legacy of the Catholic Church. We are expecting tens of thousands of pilgrims—but space is limited. Jesus Christ will be there. Will you?



*Fr. Jeremy Secrist distributes the Holy Eucharist to parishioner, Joe Jones during Mass at St. Peter Cemetery on All Souls Day.
Photo courtesy of Kathleen Lavery.*



“This Is My Body”

THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Jesus said, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” This teaching was so shocking that many of his followers left at that moment! Jesus did not call them back to clarify, because he knew they understood correctly. He was actually telling them to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

As Catholics, we believe Jesus’ words literally, not symbolically. The substance of the bread and wine transform into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ at every Mass. We call this miracle the Eucharist.

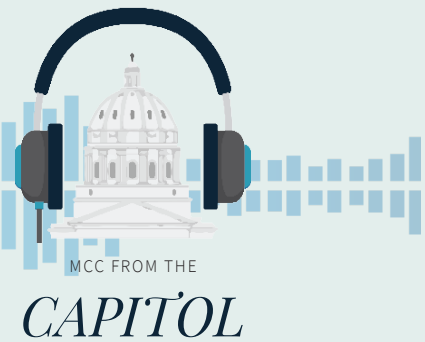


Scan to explore Church teaching on the Eucharist!

eucharisticrevival.org

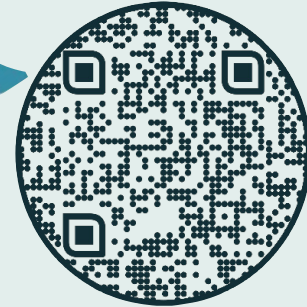
MCC 2023 Virtual Annual Assembly

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The Missouri Catholic Conference is once again preparing to release a collection of podcasts this fall as part of its Virtual Annual Assembly. MCC hosts will sit down with speakers from across our state and nation to produce a collection of episodes focused on issues of interest and concern to Catholics. We hope you find these podcasts enlightening, challenging, and informative, and we encourage you to share your favorite episodes with family, friends, and fellow parish members. We are pleased to begin with a video message from Archbishop Rozanski of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, who reflects on these ideas and the call for us to engage in them.

*SCAN TO
LISTEN!*



MCC Welcomes (Back!) New Communications Director



Kathleen Lavery returns to the Missouri Catholic Conference as the Communications Director beginning October 2, 2023. She previously was the MCC's Communications Director from 2004 - 2009. Since that time, she served as the Publications Manager at the Missouri Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association and was the Communications/Outreach Coordinator at the Proto-Cathedral of St. Peter in Jefferson City, Missouri. She has more than 25 years of experience in Communications and Marketing. She holds an M.F.A. from Yale University School of Drama in Stage Management. Any questions, collaborative opportunities or ideas for MCC's publications can be sent to communications@mocatholic.org.



Join the Missouri Catholic Advocacy Network! (MOCAN)

Join the 10,000 + Catholic Missourians who make up the team of advocates who help the Catholic voice ring through the halls of the Missouri State Capitol. If you want to stay updated on pro-life legislation — or any of the many other legislative priorities the MCC advocates for — you will not want to miss the opportunity to join MOCAN.

If you're already a member, encourage your family, friends, and fellow parishioners to join! As MOCAN grows, so does the Catholic voice in Missouri's Capitol. Again: Visit mocatholic.org, send us an email at mocatholic@mocatholic.org, or text MOCAN to 50457 to join.