

In a letter written 110 A.D., St. Ignatius of Antioch warned the Smyrnaeans about the Docetes - Gnostic heretics:

They (the Docetes) have no care for love, no thought for the widow and orphan, none at all for the afflicted, the captive, the hungry, or the thirsty. They even absent themselves from the Eucharist and public prayers, because they will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same Body of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins... [Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 6-7; Ibid., p. 102].

St. John Chrysostom in the 4th century during a sermon said this about the Eucharist: How many of you say: "I should like to see His face, His garments, His sandals." You do see Him, you touch Him, you eat Him. He gives Himself to you, not only that you may see Him, but also to be your food and nourishment. [Quote from: John Laux, Mass and the Sacraments, (TAN, 1990) p. 43].

St. Justin Martyr in the 2nd century, while St. Ambrose and St. Augustine in the 4th century among many others bore witness to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist, also known as the Blessed Sacrament, is the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. When we receive or adore the Eucharist during Mass or during Holy Hour, we are actually receiving and adoring Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus promised to be with us to the end of time (Matt 28:20), and His promise is especially fulfilled in the Eucharist. May the Lord help us to better realize His truly awesome gift to us.

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Censor Librorum

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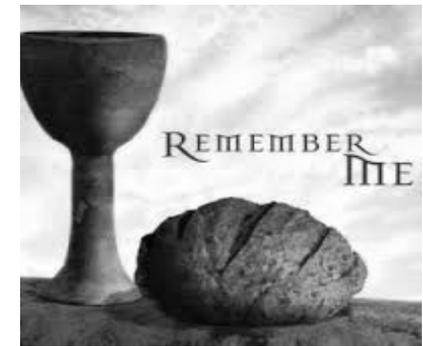
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The Secret of the Mass

As far back as the fourth century, historians called Christian life "the discipline of the secret." Of the 249 years from the first persecution under Nero (64) to the year 313, when Constantine established lasting peace, it is calculated that the Christians suffered persecution about 129 years and enjoyed a certain degree of toleration about 120 years. There is no way to know for certain, but it has been estimated that as many as one million Christian men, women and children perished in martyrdom during this period.

It took a long time for people to believe that the persecutions were really over. There was a latent fear of renewal for many years. Secrecy survived in the east until the fifth century, in the west until the sixth. When partially trusted strangers or new converts attended Christian rites, they were allowed to remain for the first part of the prayers and ceremonies. They were required to leave before the Eucharistic celebration. The first part of the Mass was designated for "the catechumens" and the rest designated for "the faithful." The Eucharistic celebration was the most carefully guarded secret in all history. It was referred to as "the secret" until 1964 when Vatican Council II removed the label of secrecy and openly substituted "Liturgy of the Eucharist" for "Secret of the Mass".

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The Blessed Sacrament: Jesus Christ

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The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ?

— 1 Corinthians 10:16

As Christians, we are saved (i.e., prepared for heaven) through faith by grace - the free gift of God's life earned by Jesus Christ on the wood of the Cross (Eph 2:8-10; Acts 15:11). In faith, we receive this saving grace through the Sacraments - outward, sensible signs instituted by Christ through which inward grace is given to our souls. For example, during Baptism (Matt 28:19), we are outwardly washed with water but inwardly receive sanctifying grace which reconciles us with God (1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 3:21; Acts 2:38). According to the Catholic Church, there are seven Sacraments: Baptism (Mark 16:16), Reconciliation (John 20:21-23), Confirmation (Acts 8:14-17), the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:16), Holy Matrimony (Eph 5:22-32), Holy Orders (Acts 6:5-6; 20:28; 1 Tim 4:14-16) and the Anointing of the Sick (Mark 6:13; James 5:14-15). In this tract, we will focus on only

one Sacrament - the Eucharist - with special attention placed on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a Sacrament since it was instituted by Christ in the Gospels (Matt 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 6). Its outward signs are the wheat bread and grape wine over which the words of consecration - "*This is My Body, this is My Blood*" - are said by the priest as the representative of Christ. The inward grace is Christ Himself, the Author of all grace - "*He who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him.*" [John 6:56] The Catholic Church teaches that the Eucharist, even though it still appears as bread and wine after consecration, is truly the Real Presence of Christ - His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. (Council of Trent, 13th Session)

Before going into the Gospels, let us consider a few Old Testament prefigurates or types of the Eucharist. The first foreshadowing is the bread and wine offered by the priest, Melchizedek, in Genesis 14:18ff. Melchizedek brought bread and wine, not to have lunch with Abram, but to sacrifice them up to God for Abram. Afterward Abram gave him a tithe (Gn 14:20). In Hebrews 5:10, St. Paul wrote that God designated Christ as high priest after the order of Melchizedek. A second type is the Manna - bread from heaven - which fed the Israelites during their Exodus (Ex 16:14-15). Jesus in John 6:31-33 compares Himself to this Manna. A third type is the paschal lamb. The paschal lamb was to be sacrificed to God; its flesh had to be eaten whole (Ex 12:8-10) and this custom was to be practiced for all generations. In the New Testament, Christ is called "*Our Paschal Lamb*" [1 Cor 5:7]. In Rev. 5:6, Jesus is referred to as "a Lamb standing, as

though it had been slain." For Catholics, these types are fulfilled in the Eucharist.

A powerful Gospel text for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is John 6:31-71. In this passage, Jesus said "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven*" [John 6:51]. Jesus further said: "*Truly, truly, I say to you ... he who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*" [John 6:53-54] In verses 52-59, Jesus repeated this teaching four different ways, while His audience became angry. Many of His disciples complained: "*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*" [John 6:60] and left Him (John 6:66). Even with the angry crowd and His disciples leaving Him, Jesus did not change His teaching nor say that He was merely speaking figuratively or in parables. His response to the Apostles was: "*Will you also go away?*" [John 6:67] St. Peter answered: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.*" [John 6:68-69]

Some Christians claim that Jesus in chapter 6 of John's Gospel was speaking figuratively since He commonly spoke in parables while preaching to the crowds. However, this does not appear to be the case here; His audience took Him literally and became angry. Nowhere in the Gospels do the crowds become angry when Christ taught in parables. After John 6:60, Jesus was no longer speaking to the crowds but speaking privately with His disciples (Mark 4:34). Still, they understood Him as before and many left Him. This reaction would have been quite inappropriate if Christ were merely speaking in parables.

Christ instituted the Eucharist during the Last Supper (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke

22:14-20). St Paul in his letter to the Corinthians also wrote about the Last Supper: ... that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "*This is My Body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.*" [1 Cor 11:23-24; also see 1 Cor 10:16 on front panel].

Notice that in all four versions of the Last Supper, Jesus said: "*This is My Body*" and not "This represents (or symbolizes) My Body." A few verses later, St. Paul also added: Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [1 Cor 11:27-30]

These words would be too strong, if the Eucharist were merely a symbol of Christ or merely a meal of ordinary bread and wine. People do not profane the Body of Christ by eating ordinary bread or wine.

The early Christians also had a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. In the Didache - a 1st century catechism - the apostles wrote: Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. [The Didache 14:1; Early Christian Writings, (Penguin Classics, 1987) p. 197].

This is the same advice as given by St. Paul. Confessing one's sins in preparation would not be necessary, if the Eucharist were not a sacrifice or merely a symbol of Christ.