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*The Eucharist According to the Early Fathers
of the Church*



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

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Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108
www.hebrewcatholic.net • ahc@hebrewcatholic.org

The Eucharist According to the Early Fathers of the Church

The Fathers of the Church give a united testimony regarding the Eucharist, although expressed in differing ways. They emphasize above all the reality of Christ's Body and Blood, the fact that it is the sacrifice of Christ, and a sacrament which brings about interior unity in the Mystical Body of Christ, and which thus must be celebrated in union with the bishop. The substantial conversion of the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ is strongly affirmed hundreds of years before the term "transubstantiation" was developed around 1100. Let us look in this talk at the first two centuries of Church Fathers, who offer a rich defense of the faith of the Church and show the beginnings of a homogeneous development of the doctrine of transubstantiation. This doctrine was in the deposit of faith from Christ and the Apostles, but there is a development of the Church's reflection on that deposit of faith, in the course of which the doctrine has been made clearer, thus generating a more perfect terminology. We shall continue to look at this development in the next talk, which will examine the works of the Church Fathers of the following two centuries.

St. Paul on the Eucharist in I Corinthians 11:23–32

Before looking at the writings of the Fathers, however, let us look at the most important text on the Eucharist outside the Gospels, which is 1 Corinthians 11:23–32:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, 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." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 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 any one 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. But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

This text, dated 53–57, gives the institution of the Eucharist as a crucial part of the Church's Tradition, which can be seen through his use of the verbs, "received" and "delivered." St. Paul delivered to the Church in Corinth what he first received from the other Apostles. Not surprisingly, his account is close to that given by his disciple, St. Luke.

St. Paul adds to the institution narrative a very important warning about unworthy reception of the Eucharist, which relates to his purpose in writing to the Corinthians. This aspect also clearly implies the doctrine of the Real Presence. Unworthy communion is so serious, precisely because we are receiving Christ Himself, crucified for our sins, in a nuptial kind of union. This sacramental union presupposes that one is invisibly united to Him in charity and reverent obedience, as a bride to a bridegroom. To receive in mortal sin would be to "not discern," or to directly contradict, the kind of total union given by sacramental reception. John Paul II addresses this issue of unworthy communions in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 36–38, citing this text of St. Paul:

Keeping these invisible bonds [of faith, hope, and charity] intact is a specific moral duty incumbent upon Christians who wish to participate fully in the Eucharist by receiving the body and blood of Christ. The Apostle Paul appeals to this duty when he warns: "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28). . . . Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The Didache

Perhaps the earliest description of the celebration of the Eucharist outside the New Testament is from the *Didache* 14, which many argue is from the second half of the first century.

And on the Lord's Day, after you have come together, break bread and offer the Eucharist, having first confessed your offences, so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who has a quarrel with his neighbor join you until he is reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled.¹ For it was said by the Lord: "In every place and time let there be offered to me a clean sacrifice, because I am the great king"; and also: "and my name is wonderful among the Gentiles."²

Although brief, the text is important, first of all, for associating the solemn celebration of the Eucharist with the "Lord's Day," which corresponds with Sunday, also referred to as the "first day of the week" by St. Justin (see below). Secondly, the text clearly refers to the Eucharist

¹ See Mt 5:23–24.

² *The Didache* 14, in F. X. Glimm, J. M.-F. Marique, & G. G. Walsh (Trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 182–183.

as a sacrifice. Third, the text connects the ability to offer a clean sacrifice with interior purity, which requires reconciliation with one's neighbors and confession of sins. In support of the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist and its connection with interior purity, the *Didache* quotes the prophecy of Malachi 1:11, which will be quoted extensively by the Fathers. Malachi 1:10–14 says:

I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. /For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. . . . For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations.

St. Ignatius of Antioch

The faith of the age of the Apostolic Fathers with regard to the Eucharist is given in an extraordinarily clear way by St. Ignatius of Antioch in his seven letters written on his way to the wild beasts in the Coliseum around the year 107 AD.

The Real Presence

Drawing on John 6, and alluding to the Tree of Life in the Garden, St. Ignatius in his *Letter to the Ephesians* refers to the Eucharist as the “medicine of immortality”:

At these meetings you should heed the bishop and presbytery attentively, and break one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ.³

In the *Letter to the Romans* 7, Ignatius speaks of the realism of the presence of Christ's Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine:

My passionate love has been crucified. . . . I take no pleasure in corruptible food or the pleasures of this life. I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love.⁴

In his letters, St. Ignatius was seeking to combat the Docetist heresy, which denies the true humanity of Jesus Christ, holding that Jesus was a man only in appearance, and not in reality. In order to show their error, Ignatius brings in the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist as evidence against them. For if Christ did not have a true humanity, then the realism of the Eucharistic conversion would make no sense! If Christ were not true man, then the consecrated host could not be His true human Body. St. Ignatius is relying for proof of Christ's humanity on what he puts forth as a very solid and popular belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Since we truly receive Christ's flesh in the Eucharist, Christ is true

man and not a mere apparition of the divinity. The Docetists were thus the first heretics to deny the real Presence of Christ's humanity in the Eucharist. St. Ignatius speaks against this Eucharistic consequence of Docetism in the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*:

They abstain from the Eucharist and prayer because they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up.”⁵

This is a very strong witness. The Docetists are condemned by Ignatius for refusing to believe that the Eucharist is the very “flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ,” that same flesh which suffered and died on Calvary and was raised from the dead on Easter, and that same blood which was poured out for our sins.

Sacrament of Ecclesial Unity

Another aspect of Ignatius's Eucharistic teaching is his emphasis on the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist. The Eucharist unites us with Christ's physical Body and Blood precisely to unite us more closely with His Mystical Body, the Church. Every Eucharistic celebration pertains to the entire Church, and is part of her public worship. The liturgy, and the Eucharist in particular, is therefore the act of worship of the *whole Christ*: Head and members, *hierarchically ordered*. The liturgy is a prolongation or continuation of the priestly worship of Christ.

Because it is the sacrament of Christian unity, St. Ignatius stresses the role of the bishop in the Eucharistic celebration. Both the Eucharist and the episcopacy work to maintain and deepen the unity of the Church, but in two complementary ways. The source of the unity of the Church is Christ, with whom we are united in the Eucharist. The same Christ is represented by the Bishop, to whose oversight the sacramental life of the Church is entrusted. As there is one Eucharist, so there is one bishop in each diocese.

In the *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4, his reference to the Eucharist emphasizes the obligation of celebrating it in union with the bishop. The Eucharist is presented as the source of Christian unity by giving the faithful communion with the one flesh and blood of Christ. This unity must be liturgically represented and preserved through communion with the bishop:

Take care, therefore, to participate in one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.⁶

³ *Letter to the Ephesians* 20, trans. Michael Holmes in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 199.

⁴ *Letter to the Romans* 7, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 233.

⁵ *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 255.

⁶ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 239.

The connection between the Eucharist and the bishop is stressed again in the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8:

Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) is to be considered valid. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.⁷

In his *Letter to the Ephesians* 5, he writes: “Let no one be misled: if anyone is not within the sanctuary, he lacks the bread of God. For if the prayer of one or two has such power, how much more that of the bishop together with the whole church!”⁸

St. Justin Martyr on the Eucharist

St. Justin Martyr, writing about 150 AD, gives a brief account of the liturgy of the Eucharist in the *First Apology*.⁹ After the rite of Baptism, which he speaks of as “illumination,” the neophytes are brought to the celebration of the Eucharist, in which prayers are made for the neophytes and for all men everywhere, “that we may be accounted worthy, having learned the truth, by our deeds also to be found good citizens and guardians of what is commanded, so that we may be saved with eternal salvation. Having ended the prayers we greet one another with a kiss.”¹⁰

Justin then describes the Offertory, the Eucharistic prayer, and the distribution of Communion through the deacons:

Then there is brought to the Ruler¹¹ of the Brethren bread and a cup of water and of wine mixed with water,¹² and he taking them sends up praise and glory to the Father of the Universe through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and offers thanksgiving at some length for our being accounted worthy to receive these things from Him. When he has concluded the prayers and the thanksgiving, all the people present assent by saying, Amen. Amen in the Hebrew language signifies “so be it.” And when the Ruler has given thanks and all the people have assented, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present a portion of the eucharistized bread and wine and water, and they carry it

7 *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 255. This is perhaps the first use that has come down to us of the expression “Catholic Church.” Catholic means universal. Here it signifies the one Church that is present throughout the world.

8 *Letter to the Ephesians* 5, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 187.

9 See St. Justin, *First Apology*, chs. 65-67, in Cyril Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Collier, 1970), 282-88.

10 St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65, trans. Leslie William Barnard, in *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 70.

11 See *ibid.*, 178n398 for a discussion of the translation of this term, which is often translated as “he who presides” or “president.” Justin is most probably referring here to the bishop, and uses a generic title rather than the technical term, *episkopos*.

12 This rather puzzling expression is translated more simply as “a cup of wine mixed with water” by Dennis Minns and Paul Parvis, in *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 253.

away to those who are absent.¹³

Justin goes on to say that Catholic faith, Baptism, and life according to the commandments are three conditions for receiving Communion, and then testifies to Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist, which requires this preparation:

And this food is called among us the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things which we teach are true, and has received the washing that is for the remission of sins and for rebirth, and who so lives as Christ has handed down. For we do not receive these things as common bread nor common drink; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior having been incarnate by God’s logos took both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food eucharistized through the word of prayer that is from Him, from which our blood and flesh are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became incarnate. For the Apostles in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, thus handed down what was commanded them: that Jesus took bread and having given thanks, said: “Do this for my memorial, this is my body”; and likewise He took the chalice and having given thanks said: “This is my blood;” and gave it to them alone. Which also the wicked demons have imitated in the mysteries of Mithra, and handed down to be done.¹⁴

The realism with which St. Justin speaks of the Eucharistic conversion is absolutely clear. Just as Christ took on true flesh and blood for our salvation—in contrast to the Docetism taught by the Gnostic sects—so the Eucharist contains “the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became incarnate.” St. Justin establishes an interesting parallelism here, using the words “flesh and blood” three times in one sentence. First it refers to the flesh and blood assumed by Christ in the Incarnation; in the second case it refers to our flesh and blood which will be nourished by the Eucharist; and in the third case it refers to the flesh and blood of Christ present in the Eucharist, through which our flesh will be nourished. Christ took on true flesh and blood, of the same nature as ours, so that our flesh and blood may be spiritually nourished with His through the Eucharist, which contains Christ’s very flesh and blood.

There is also a parallelism in the same sentence between the Word of God by which Christ took on flesh and blood in the Incarnation, and the “prayer of His word” by which the food (i.e., the bread and the wine) is converted into the flesh and blood of Christ. St. Justin’s point is that the same divine power that realized the Incarnation after Mary’s *fiat* in the Annunciation is at work in the “prayer of His word” uttered in the consecration. That is, just as the Incarnation was a work of divine power through the divine Word, the conversion of bread and wine into Christ’s flesh and blood is a work of divine power through the words of Christ.¹⁵

13 *First Apology* 65, trans. Barnard, p. 70.

14 *First Apology* 66, trans. Barnard, pp. 70-71.

15 See Roch Kereszty, *Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 96. Although it is the work of the Blessed Trinity, we normally appropriate to the

Justin then concludes his account of Christian worship with a brief description of the liturgy of the Mass celebrated every Sunday with all the faithful:

And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader has finished, the Ruler in a discourse instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers; and, as we said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought and wine and water, and the Ruler likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability,¹⁶ and the people assent, saying the Amen; and the distribution and the partaking of the eucharistized elements is to each, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And those who prosper, and so wish, contribute what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the Ruler, who takes care of the orphans and widows, and those who, on account of sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us, and in a word [he] is the guardian of all those in need. But we all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the Universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For they crucified Him on the day before Saturday, and on the day after Saturday, He appeared to His Apostles.¹⁷

St. Justin asserts the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 41, citing Malachi 1:11, as the *Didache* had done.¹⁸ He thus sees the Eucharist as the fulfillment of that prophecy:

“I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord; and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands: for from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same my name has been

Holy Spirit the work of the Incarnation, since it maximally reveals the divine love. St. Justin here appropriates this to the Logos. His purpose seems to be to create a parallelism between the consecration of the Eucharistic species through the words of Jesus, and the Incarnation of the Son through the divine power of the Word.

16 This expression can be interpreted in two different ways. The more common interpretation is that the Eucharistic prayer was not yet fixed, and the celebrant had a certain liberty to elaborate the prayer, presumably within certain fixed forms. Another possibility, however, is that this text means that the celebrant prayed according to his ability to “put his heart and soul into it.” See O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna*, 20; and Eques de Otto, *Iustini Philosophi et Martyris Opera quae feruntur omnia* (Wiesbaden: Sändig, 1969), 1:187.

17 *First Apology* 67, trans. Barnard, p. 71. It is interesting to note that St. Justin connects the celebration of Sunday as the Lord’s Day not only with the Resurrection, but also with the creation. There is a beautiful typology here. The Jewish Law sanctified the seventh day of the week on which God rested. The Christian dispensation celebrates the eighth day, which is also the first day of the week, to symbolize that the Passion and Resurrection of Christ effects a “new creation,” opening the way to the supernatural order. The change of holy day from the seventh to the eighth day also shows symbolically that Judaism was instituted to prepare for the Christian dispensation, and thus its feasts give way to the Lord’s Day.

18 *Didache* 14.3 (*Apostolic Fathers*, p. 365).

glorified among the gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the gentiles says the Lord, but you profane it.” He then speaks of those gentiles, namely us, who in every place offer sacrifices to him, that is, the bread of the Eucharist and also the cup of the Eucharist.¹⁹

In the middle of the second century, therefore, the Eucharist is understood by St. Justin to be the offering of a true and pure sacrifice “in every place,” through the offering of the “eucharistized” elements: the consecrated host and chalice which make present “the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became incarnate.”²⁰

St. Irenaeus on the Eucharist

St. Irenaeus, writing some eighty years after St. Ignatius, and forty years after St. Justin, develops the same themes with regard to the Eucharist. This should not be surprising, for St. Irenaeus was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who was an associate of St. Ignatius, a fellow bishop with him, and a fellow disciple of St. John the Apostle.

In his work *Against the Heresies*, St. Irenaeus develops the theme of the Eucharist as the medicine of immortality. As in St. Ignatius, the Eucharistic conversion is clearly understood in a completely realist sense, and thus the doctrine of transubstantiation is implied.

The Gnostics whom St. Irenaeus is combating, like those alluded to by St. Ignatius, reject the goodness of the body, for they see matter as the source of all evil. Thus they deny the resurrection of the body, and the true humanity of Christ, which forces them to also deny the true presence of His human nature in the Eucharist. St. Irenaeus combats all these errors through the doctrine of the Real Presence:

But vain in every respect are they who despise the entire dispensation of God, and disallow the salvation of the flesh, and treat with contempt its regeneration, maintaining that it is not capable of immortality. If the body be not saved, then, in fact, neither did the Lord redeem us with His Blood; and neither is the cup of the Eucharist the partaking [communion] of His Blood nor is the Bread which we break the partaking of His Body. For blood can only come from veins and flesh, and whatsoever else makes up the substance of man, such as the Word of God was actually made.²¹

Interestingly, St. Irenaeus argues *from* the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist *to* the truth of His humanity. This argumentation shows that the faith of the early Christians in the true Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist was no less vigorous than their faith in the true humanity of Christ. The fact that St. Irenaeus could argue in this way also shows that for the ordinary Christian the faith of the Church is most palpable in the liturgy, for the principal

19 *Dialogue with Trypho* 41, in ANF 1:215.

20 St. Irenaeus, *First Apology* 66, trans. Barnard, 71.

21 St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.2.2, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF) 1:528.

contact of the faithful with the Church is through the liturgy. Thus there is the Patristic axiom: *the rule of prayer is the rule of faith*.

As St. Irenaeus develops this argument against the Gnostics, he also briefly mentions what later came to be called “transubstantiation,” the miraculous conversion of the bread and wine into the true Body and Blood of Christ, through the omnipotent power of the words of consecration, spoken by the priest *in the person of Christ*. St. Irenaeus writes: “When, therefore, the mingled cup and the manufactured bread receives the Word of God, . . . [it] becomes the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ.”²² The Word of God referred to here by St. Irenaeus most probably refers to the words of institution that form the center of the Eucharistic liturgy in all her rites.²³

St. Irenaeus then goes on to speak of how the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist is our spiritual nourishment, which prepares us for the future gift of our participation in the glory of Christ’s risen Body:

How can they affirm that the flesh is incapable of receiving the gift of God, which is life eternal, which [flesh] is nourished from the body and blood of the Lord, and is a member of Him?—even as the blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that “we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.” He does not speak these words of some spiritual and invisible man, for a spirit has not bones nor flesh; but [he refers to] that dispensation [by which the Lord became] an actual man, consisting of flesh, and nerves, and bones,—that [flesh] which is nourished by the cup which is His blood, and receives increase from the bread which is His body. And just as a cutting from the vine planted in the ground fructifies in its season, or as a corn of wheat falling into the earth and becoming decomposed, rises with manifold increase by the Spirit of God, who contains all things, and then, through the wisdom of God, serves for the use of men, and having received the Word of God, becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ; so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption, because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness, in order that we may never become puffed up, as if we had life from ourselves.²⁴

St. Irenaeus thus makes a parallelism between the Eucharist and our bodies. As the bread and wine are transformed by the Word of God in the consecration to become the Body and Blood of Christ, so the bodies of the faithful who

have been nourished by the Eucharist will be transformed to share in the glory of the Body of Christ.²⁵

This parallel is given also in *Against Heresies* 4.18.5:

Then, again, how can they say that the flesh, which is nourished with the body of the Lord and with His blood, goes to corruption, and does not partake of life? Let them, therefore, either alter their opinion, or cease from offering the things just mentioned. But our opinion is in accordance with the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn establishes our opinion. For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity.²⁶

Like the *Didache* and St. Justin, St. Irenaeus also affirms that the correct interpretation of the prophecy of Malachi is that the Eucharist is the acceptable sacrifice among the Gentiles: “The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him.”²⁷ Indeed, he speaks of the Eucharist as the “new oblation of the New Covenant”:

He took that created thing, bread, and gave thanks, and said, “This is my Body.” And the cup likewise, which is part of that creation to which we belong, He confessed to be His blood, and taught the new oblation of the New Covenant; which the Church receiving from the Apostles, offers to God throughout all the world . . . concerning which Malachi, among the twelve prophets, thus spoke beforehand: “. . . From the rising of the sun, unto the going down, My name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a pure sacrifice . . .”—indicating in the plainest manner, by these words, that the former people shall indeed cease to make offerings to God, but that in every place sacrifice shall be offered to Him, and that a pure one; and His name is glorified among the Gentiles.²⁸

As the Old Covenant was sealed by sacrifice, which it commanded to be offered continuously, so the New Covenant has a new sacrifice, a new oblation, that is proper to it, which is the Eucharist. The bloody animal sacrifices of the Old Testament ceased with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. In their place the Eucharist sacrifice is now offered in every part of the world. As the mystical (sacramental) offering of the true Blood of Christ, poured out on Calvary, it is infinitely more noble than the blood of slain animals.

²⁵ St. Irenaeus stresses the resurrection of the body because the Gnostics denied it, since they viewed the material world as the source of evil.

²⁶ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.18.5, in ANF 1:486.

²⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.18.1, in ANF 1:484.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 4.17.5, in ANF 1:484.

²² St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.2.3, ANF 1:528.

²³ See James T. O’Connor, *The Hidden Manna* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 25, who interprets these words as applying to the epiclesis.

²⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.2.3, ANF 1:528.

Origen

Origen gives witness to the faith of the Church in the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the beginning of the third century, seeing it as the fulfillment of the Old Testament types: "If you go up with Jesus to celebrate the Passover, he gives you the cup of the New Covenant, he gives you the bread of blessing and hands over his flesh and blood."²⁹

Conclusion

The first two Christian centuries, although sparsely documented, give us a rich insight into the centrality of the Eucharist in the Apostolic and post-Apostolic age, both in the aspect of the Real Presence and the aspect of sacrifice that is offered throughout the catholic world.

²⁹ Origen, Homily on Jeremiah 19.13, quoted in Roch Kereszty, *Wedding Feast of the Lamb*, 105.