

The Holy Eucharist



There seem to be two styles of Worship in the Christian Church—and I can classify them pretty simply like this—the Classroom Model and the Dinner Table Model.

From the very beginning of the Church, the Dinner Table Model was the standard one. It meant at its most basic level, Christians gathering around an Altar Table and sharing a Meal with Jesus, the one He had taught us. It is the chosen Model used today by 80% of Christianity. The other 20% are

Protestants who use the Classroom Model—that is that people gather in rows while a Preacher teaches them from the front. This Model, begun in the 16th century, is descended from the teachers and college professors who were the worship leaders in the beginning of the protestant reformation, when the mass (the Eucharist) was rejected.

In addition, there is the Monastic Model, used in Convents and Monasteries, descended from ancient Jewish worship, where the people sat on opposite sides to each other, and recited the psalms, canticles, and prayers back and forth, and did that from 4 to 7 times per day. Anglican Matins and Evensong are the descendants of that Model, and every priest and deacon is obliged to say these Offices every day of his life.

This morning, I want to talk about the almost universal model—the Dinner Table Model—which is my word to describe the mass, the Eucharist, whatever word you wish to use—the one that is in use today in 80% of Christianity, that is: the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox Catholics, and the Anglicans/Episcopalians.

The night before His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus met with His disciples in the Upper Room. It was called a Chaburah Meal, and was the usual religious meal shared by a Teacher and His disciples. (It was not a Passover Meal, though the meaning of the Passover can be attributed to it; for example, the Passover started the next day, at 6pm, after Jesus was crucified and buried. No Jewish authority would have allowed an execution on the day of the Passover—it would have defiled the Passover for every Jew in Jerusalem. The Gospel of John makes it clear that Jesus was dying on the cross during the preparations for the Passover. see John 19:31) A lot took place that night, including the Washing of the disciples Feet, by Jesus, but the evening ended with Jesus **Taking Bread** from the Table, **Blessing** it with the usual long Jewish Prayer, **Breaking** it, and **Giving** it to His disciples—and then adding: “This is my Body, which is broken for you.” Jesus then reached into the centre of the Table, and **Taking** what was often called the Elijah’s Cup, He **Blessed** it with the usual Jewish Prayer, and then **Gave** it to His disciples saying: “This is my Blood of the new Covenant.” The disciples were stunned. Jewish Law would have definitely forbidden the eating of Flesh and the Drinking of Blood. They received what Jesus gave them in stunned silence.

Jesus was doing something that they didn't understand and wouldn't until well after the Resurrection. He had often shared a Chaburah Meal with them (an agape in our modern terms) but He had never said those words: "This is my Body. This is my Blood." And the next day, He was dead on the Cross and buried.

Key to understanding what Jesus intended is found in the words used by Him. He said "This is my Body—Do This, in Remembrance of Me." At least that is the usual English Translation—but it is not good enough. Jesus and Scripture actually use the word: "anamnesis"—which is poorly translated as remembrance. But that is not meaning of the word.

"Anamnesis" actually means "to do something that brings an event from the past into the present, so that we can participate in it right now." And we do not have a word in English to convey that meaning. You will recognise that that is much more than remembering something in the past, right?

The simplest English translation for "anamnesis" that I can give is: "Do This to make Me Present," though the actual word (for which there is no simple translation into English) is much richer. It basically means to celebrate something that happened in the past in such a way that you bring the effects of that event into the present, so that we may participate in it now, and benefit in the results of the original action. Thus, what Jesus actually meant was: Do This (action) so that the effects of my Sacrifice of the Cross (tomorrow) may be brought into the present in such a way that you can participate in the event as if you were there, and such that the effects of that event may become yours right now. You see what a simplistic translation of "anamnesis" the word "remembrance" actually is. We defraud ourselves when we see only "remembrance" in the Eucharist. It is actually a participation in the Sacrifice of Christ in Heaven right now, such that we offer Christ, and that He offers us to the Father. Well, let's move on.

Not only do we participate in His Sacrifice in Heaven (see the Epistle to the Hebrews) every time that we "Do This," but Christ Jesus is present on the Altar just as much and as genuinely as He was when He was walking on the streets of Palestine. It is He who feeds us with His Holy Body and Blood—that is with Himself, and with His Grace. It is not a "simple memorial" but a real participation in the Sacrifice of Jesus. His Power and His Life is given to us in His Holy Body and Blood.

In the Blessed Sacrament, we are fed with His Grace, so that we are empowered to go out into the world again, as "little Christs" to build His Kingdom on earth. Little by little, we are empowered to Grow into the Saints of God.

All this is happening when we **Do This** as He commanded: We "**Take, Bless, Break, and Give**" each Sunday, as He intended. By this, we participate in His Sacrifice in Heaven, and "show forth His death until He comes again."

Classroom Models are good for teaching and learning—but real communal Worship is done at the Altar, as He commanded. And so, Sunday by Sunday, century by century, we

follow His Command—and when we do, He is Present with us—not as a Memorial, but in reality, person to person, the Living Saviour, and our Blessed Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

[see also Sacrifice of the Eucharist for more on this subject]