

SESSION 4

BIBLICAL
FOUNDATIONS OF
THE EUCHARIST

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OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, on the night of the Last Supper,
you begged your Heavenly Father for the gift of unity.
Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
may we who seek to be more united with God and one another be satisfied in our longing.
And may we satisfy Your longing, O Lord,
by helping others to know and love you in the Sacrament of Love,
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.
Amen.

—based on John 17:20–22



INTRODUCTION

“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” These words uttered 2,000 years ago are echoed today. The doctrine of the Real Presence presents a difficulty for many people. When we take the time to understand the difficulties, we become better equipped to help address them. This can be done especially by showing how the Scriptures really do mean what the Church says they do. This session examines objections to the Church’s Eucharistic teaching and provides scriptural answers for them. This apologetic helps us to give a reason for our faith and to gain a deeper insight into our faith.



CONNECT

1. Have you ever watched or engaged in wrestling or other martial arts? Sometimes smaller competitors win over heavier ones. What are ways this can happen?

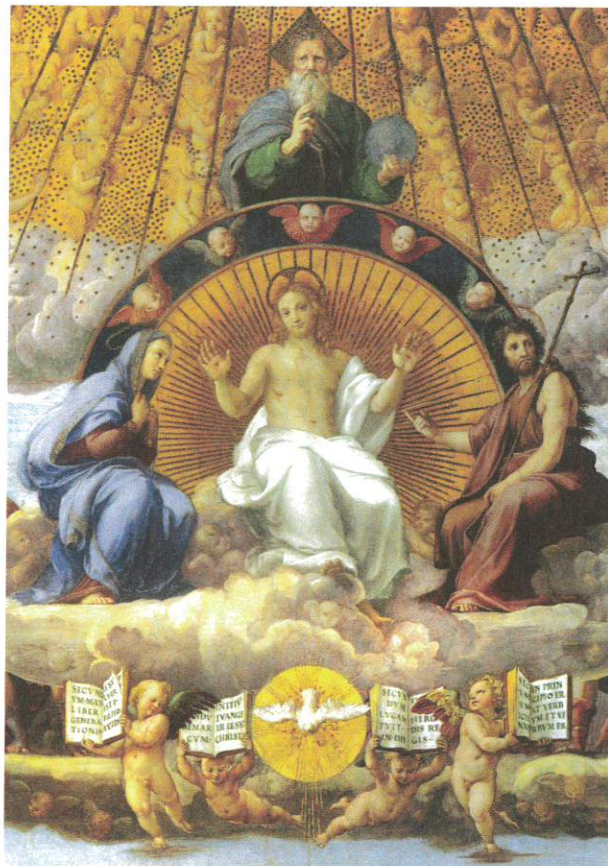
2. Describe a time in your life when you learned something by listening carefully to a person who disagreed with you?



DIGGING DEEPER

In the Vatican is a magnificent painting by Raphael called “The Disputation of the Sacrament.” Despite the title, the picture is not of an argument, but rather it depicts the Blessed Sacrament, with Christ in glory above, and below a great crowd of adorers. They are clearly engrossed, some with books or engaged in writing. It is an active but peaceful scene.

The Eucharist is central to our faith, and we should be eager to understand it more. All our disputes and arguments should take their cue from Raphael’s painting: they should flow peacefully from faith and love and aim at producing more of the same.





VIDEO PART 1 (INTRODUCTION; JEWISH AND PAGAN OBJECTIONS)

I. Introduction

- A.** Objections to the doctrine of the Real Presence
- B.** Value of considering objections

II. Four groups of objectors

- A.** Jewish
- B.** Pagan
- C.** Protestant Reformation
- D.** Secularist

III. Jewish and Pagan Objections

A. Jewish difficulties, looking at John 6

1. In calling himself the Bread from Heaven, Jesus is making a claim to be divine
2. Jesus's insistence on eating his Flesh shows he is the new Passover Lamb, essential to participation in the New Covenant
3. Jesus's insistence on drinking his Blood is contrary to the Old Law
4. Reason for difference: It is Jesus's Life that is in the blood

B. Pagan difficulties

1. Evidence that the early Church really believed in the True Presence
2. Problem: Cannibalism
3. Response: not cannibalism, but communion with the living flesh of Christ





DIGGING DEEPER

REAL PRESENCE

Jesus is present with us in many ways—in Scripture, in prayer, in the poor and suffering. . . but he is present in a unique way in the Eucharist. The *Catechism* says that in the Blessed Sacrament “the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained” (CCC 1374). Although all appearances (also called accidents) of bread and wine remain, the substance of both the bread and the wine are truly changed into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus. This is what the Church means by the term transubstantiation.

This change happens at the moment of consecration and continues as long as the Eucharistic species survive as such—in other words, until they are digested. Christ is completely present under both species, in the tiniest piece of a host and the smallest drop from the chalice. So even if you only receive under one species—only receiving the Host, or only receiving from the chalice—you are still receiving all of Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.



DISCUSS PART 1

1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

2. In the video, Tim Gray focuses on two groups that have objections to the Church’s doctrine of the Real Presence. Which of these groups do you sympathize with the most?

3. Have you ever heard the Jewish objections before? How about the Pagan difficulty? What things might we say or do to help remove those objections?



I. Historical background for Protestant objections

- A.** Luther did not deny, although his teaching was different from the Catholic understanding of transubstantiation
- B.** Others like Zwingli and Calvin did deny the Real Presence
 - 1. Eucharist explained metaphorically

II. Scriptural background: John 6

- A.** “What if you were to see the son of man ascending . . .” a defense of his divinity
 - 1. “It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh is of no avail.”
 - 2. In verse 66, many disciples leave

III. Protestant Interpretation and Catholic Responses

- A.** “Flesh is of no avail” = no Real Presence, just a metaphor
 - 1. Disregards Christ’s repeated statements
 - 2. Christ’s words related to the soul and eternal life, distinct from earthly bread
 - 3. Christ’s actions show he is speaking literally
 - 4. He does not call disciples back (after verse 66)
 - 5. Belief in Eucharist rests on belief in Christ’s divinity
 - a. Three Passovers, a progression of faith
 - 6. Actual metaphorical statements are different from Bread of Life statements.
- B.** Saint Paul evidence (1 Corinthians 11)
 - 1. A tradition handed on by the Lord himself
 - a. New Covenant in blood
 - b. Real covenant has real blood; if it were simply metaphorical blood, then it would just be a metaphorical covenant
 - 2. Paul’s warning against eating and drinking unworthily
 - a. A profanation deserving judgment
 - b. Evidence of divine wrath
 - c. Paul takes the Real Presence seriously, so does the Church
- C.** Additional Pauline evidence
 - 1. “Cup of blessing is a participation in the blood . . .”
 - 2. Those who eat the sacrifice are partners in the altar
 - 3. Participation and partners related to word *koinonia*
 - 4. Church being the Body of Christ depends on the Real Presence



DIGGING DEEPER

GUIDELINES FOR RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION

The Church gives us some guidelines for the reception of Holy Communion to help us approach the sacrament reverently.

The Eucharist is a communion with Christ and with his Body, the Church. It is a statement of faith in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and of unity with the entire Catholic Church. Outside of the unbroken succession of authority from the Apostles to today's bishops (apostolic succession), there is no priesthood; and without the priesthood, there is no valid Eucharist. Therefore, the bread and wine received in Protestant ecclesial communities is not the Body and Blood of Jesus.

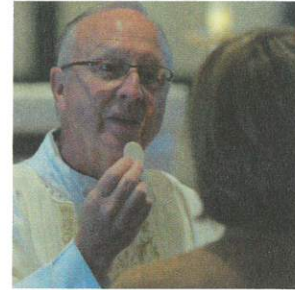
Because of these differences, only a baptized member of the Catholic Church who believes in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist may receive Holy Communion; and a Catholic must not receive communion in a Protestant service.

The Eucharist as a sign of the real unity of the Church—including all Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church—reminds us to pray earnestly that God would heal the divisions among believers.

We should not receive the Eucharist if we are conscious of having committed a mortal sin. All mortal sins must be confessed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving the Eucharist.

We must fast for at least one hour from food and drink (with the exceptions of water and medicine) before receiving the Eucharist.

The faithful may receive Holy Communion a maximum of two times in one day, but only if the second reception takes place during a Mass. (The exception to this is in the case of the Eucharist given as Viaticum to a person in danger of death, which may be received at any time.)



DISCUSS PART 2

4. What is at the heart of accepting the doctrine of the Eucharist?

5. Why do some Protestants say that Jesus's words are a metaphorical statement? How do his words about being the Bread of Life compare to other statements like "I am the vine"?

6. What are the three Passovers? How do these three events help to dispel the idea that Jesus is speaking metaphorically?

7. What is the evidence from Saint Paul that Jesus is not speaking metaphorically but metaphysically?



VIDEO PART 3 (SECULAR OBJECTIONS AND CONCLUSION)

I. Secular Objections

A. You really believe that God is present?

1. Seems insane
2. Post-enlightenment: everything must be explained by reason or it's not true
3. Excludes all faith

II. Response: faith is not contrary to reason, but goes above and beyond reason

- A.** Key Christian belief of the Eucharist stands with the Incarnation and Resurrection
- B.** It's rational and reasonable to say God changes bread and wine into his Body and Blood, but it does take faith
- C.** Some truths do go beyond the comprehension of our reason; faith is necessary to have life

III. "Unless you eat the flesh ... you have no life in you."

A. Jesus is the lamb of the New Passover

1. Must eat the lamb
2. Must drink his blood to share divine life

B. The Bible is framed with the theme of eating and drinking for eternal life

1. Genesis: Tree of Life
2. Revelation, promises to those who conquer
 - a. 2:7 - promise to eat of the Tree of Life
 - b. 2:17 - promise of the hidden manna

- c. 3:20 – promise to come in and eat
- d. Climax in Revelation 19 – Wedding Feast of the Lamb
- e. Also climax of John’s writings

C. Conclusion: Faith in the Eucharist is reasonable

- 1. Consistency of Scripture evidence of its divine origin
- 2. Evidence of Scripture points to centrality of the Real Presence in the Eucharist



DIGGING DEEPER

WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST

As a sign of our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, we offer this sacrament our adoration and worship both during the Mass and outside of it. We can rightly say that we worship the Eucharist because the Eucharist is Jesus.

We show our reverence by kneeling during the Consecration and bowing or making some other sign of devotion when receiving the Eucharist. Outside of Mass the consecrated Hosts are kept with care in the Tabernacle, with a candle burning near it to signify the presence of the Lord, and we genuflect to the Tabernacle. In addition, we have the unique opportunity to spend time in the presence of God, gazing upon him and worshipping him in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

We also show reverence for our Lord in the Eucharist by preparing ourselves carefully before receiving Holy Communion. God himself calls us to draw near to him in this sacrament, but it is not something to be taken lightly.



DISCUSS PART 3

8. What does “reasonable” mean for the secular objectors? How does the scientific interpretation limit not only belief in the Eucharist, but all belief in Jesus? Why do we say that faith is beyond reason but not contrary to reason?

9. What is the significance of the literary arguments about the Tree of Life, Feast of the Lamb, etc.?

10. How does Mary's life show us how to approach the Eucharist in a biblical way?



DIGGING DEEPER

"He once in Cana of Galilee, turned the water into wine, akin to blood, and is it incredible that He should have turned wine into blood? When called to a bodily marriage, He miraculously wrought that wonderful work; and on the children of the bride-chamber, shall He not much rather be acknowledged to have bestowed the fruition of His Body and Blood?"

—St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture*, 22, 2



COMMIT—THE WORD MADE FLESH

Inspired by this week's teaching on the biblical apologetics for the Real Presence, consider writing down a specific way in which you will make these arguments your own. Perhaps it will be a short summary of how Holy Communion, by uniting us to the living Christ, is not a cannibalistic act, but a sanctifying deed. Perhaps it will be meditating on the two-part argument: 1) if Christ is God, then he can change bread into his Body; 2) the Gospels make it clear that he does want just that.

The best way, of course, to make this lesson ours, is to embrace the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and to receive that Presence in Holy Communion at Mass. Make a commitment to spend some time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament this week and ask him how he wants you specifically to grow from this time of study. With God's grace, we will grow in our capacity to live his life in us and to share that life with others.



WRAP-UP and CLOSING PRAYER

Beloved Lord, in the Book of Revelation it is written:

“I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches.

I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

We, the members of your Body, the Church, say

“Come.” Come to us in the Eucharist,

come to us in the Scriptures, come to us with the fullness of life.

Through the intercession of your Mother, Mary,

may we always treasure the Word within us

and make that Word known and loved in time and in eternity.

Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1333–1344 (“The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation”), 1384–1390 (““Take this and eat it, all of you”: communion”), 1400 (Ecclesial communities)

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*: 22, On the Body and Blood of Christ and 23, *On the Sacred Liturgy and Communion*

Pope Saint John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Rome, 2003)

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SESSION 2

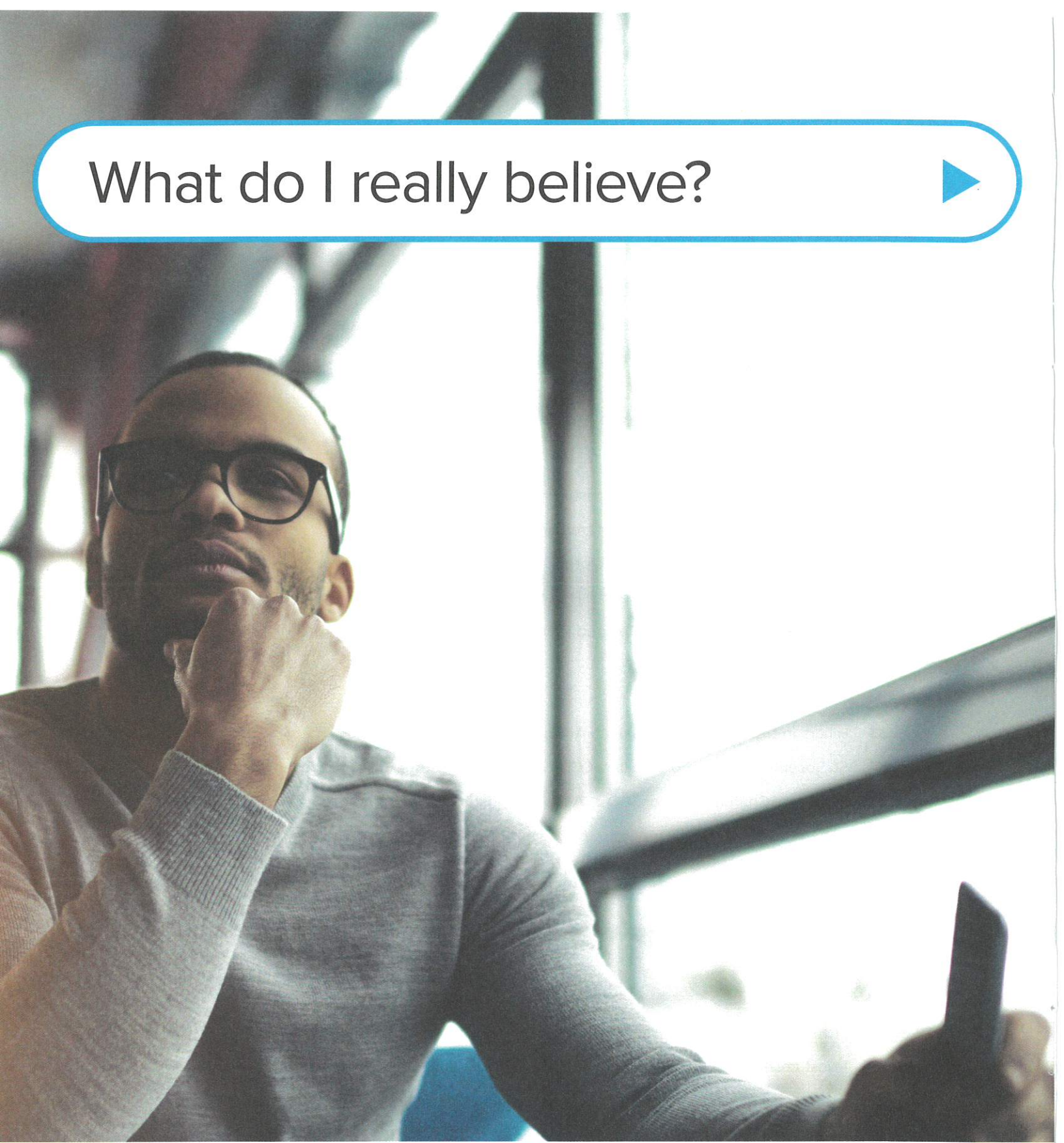
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