

DEFENDING THE EUCHARIST

3 BIBLE PASSAGES EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW



The Catholic Church teaches that when the priest prays the words of consecration at mass, the bread and wine become Jesus’s body, blood, soul, and divinity. Catholics refer to this event as Transubstantiation—what was bread and wine is now the Holy Eucharist. Below are three Bible passages you can use to defend this teaching.

JOHN 6:53-66

I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever. This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at

it, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?”

Explanation:

There are two primary reasons why we must understand Jesus’ words, “eat my flesh, drink my blood,” literally. First, both the Jews and his disciples understood him literally and he does not correct them. In verse 52, the Jews respond, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” In verse 60, his disciples respond, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” You would think that if his audience was mistaken, and given gravity of this teaching, Jesus would have clarified their literal understanding. To the contrary, he affirms them. In response to the Jews, Jesus reiterates the need to eat his flesh and drink his blood no less than six times in six verses (vs.53-58). He affirms his disciples’ literal understanding by letting them walk away (vs. 66).

The second reason to understand Jesus literally is because the Jews already had a metaphorical understanding for the language “eat flesh” and “drink blood”—namely destruction. For example, Revelation 17:16 uses the language of eating flesh to connote the destruction of the harlot, which symbolizes the burning of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. If Jesus meant these words to be taken metaphorically, then the meaning would be, “if you destroy me, you will live forever.” Obviously this is not what Jesus meant.

For these two reasons we must conclude Jesus meant his words literally and not metaphorically.



MATTHEW 26:26-28

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Explanation:

There are three ways in which we can demonstrate Jesus meant his words in this passage, “this is my body, this is my blood,” literally and not metaphorically. As demonstrated above, Jesus’ teaching to “eat his flesh and drink his blood” in John 6 was literal. The command to “eat and drink” at the Last Supper is the fulfillment of this promise. If his command to eat and drink in John 6 was literal, then his command to eat and drink at the Last Supper is literal as well.

Second, there are several other ways Jesus could have more clearly indicated that this was symbolism if he had wished to do so. Aramaic [Jesus’ native language] has around three-dozen words that can mean ‘represents.’

Finally, the typological precursor (see ‘Typology’ below) of this event demands real and substantial blood. Jesus’ usage of the phrase, “blood of the covenant,” reveals that he intends the Last Supper to be for the New Covenant what the sprinkling of blood on Mt. Sinai was for the Old Covenant (see Ex. 24:8)—namely the ratifying ceremony. If real blood was used for the ratifying ceremony of the Old Covenant, then how much more need there be real blood for the ratifying ceremony of the New Covenant?

Jesus did not intend his apostles to interpret his command to “eat his body” and “drink his blood” as a metaphor. He intended for them to literally consume that which he changed into himself, the Holy Eucharist.

What is Typology?

Typology is a method of biblical interpretation whereby an element found in the Old Testament, whether it is a person, place, or event, is seen to prefigure one found in the New Testament. For example, the Passover lamb in the Old Testament was a ‘type’ of Jesus, the New Passover Lamb.



1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-30

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.

Explanation:

The clue that precludes a mere symbolic understanding of the Eucharist is St. Paul's usage of "guilty of blood," which is a figure of speech connoting murder (Nm. 35:27; Ez. 35:6). One incurs the "guilt of blood" only if the victim is present in person. If someone fires a gun at a picture of the President of the United States, that person is not guilty of the President's blood. But if someone actually shoots the President, then that person is guilty of the President's blood.

St. Paul says that we are guilty of Jesus' blood if we partake of the Eucharist unworthily. Therefore, we cannot conclude that St. Paul understood the Eucharist to be a mere symbol. He must mean the Eucharist is Jesus present in person, with his body, blood, soul, and divinity.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karlo Broussard, a native of Crowley, Louisiana, left a promising musical career to devote himself full-time to the work of Catholic apologetics. For more than a decade he has traveled the country teaching apologetics, biblical studies, theology, and philosophy. Broussard has published articles on a variety of subjects in Catholic Answers Magazine and has been a regular guest on Catholic Answers Live.

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