

Origins of the Eucharist

He took his place at the table and the apostles with him (Lk22:14)



TARGET AUDIENCE

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Overview

This Object is the first in a chronologically ordered set of six covering the evolution of the Eucharist from its origins through to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The multimedia element is comprised of eight images with key texts selected from the Supporting Content.

Teacher Background

Teachers are encouraged to review the 'Exploring the Mass' section of the DVD Rom *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* to deepen their understanding of the scriptural, historical and theological foundations of the Eucharist.

In particular, the following aspects of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* provide entry points and context for this Learning Object:

- Within the pathway 'Scriptural Foundations' click on the tab 'The Last Supper'. It would be pertinent to read the other scripture passages in this pathway under the tabs 'Passion & Death', 'Resurrection', 'Emmaus', and 'Ascension'.
- Read the introduction to the pathway 'Evolution of the Mass'.
- Also within this pathway is the timeline 'Mass Through the Ages'. Click on the button to view the timeline. Scroll along it using the arrows.

Where appropriate, use this material with the students.

Supporting Content

This text supports the focus of the multimedia element.

The ritual we call the Eucharist was being celebrated by Christians before the New Testament scriptures were formed. *The Letters of Paul*, written between the year 40 and the year 60 speak of the tradition of the celebration of the Eucharist originating in the words and actions of Jesus at his Last Supper which were passed on to him and which he in turn passed on to the communities he established.

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Supporting Content

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke recount the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died in which he associated the actions and words of that meal with his death on the cross on the following day. The Eucharist celebrates and represents this same mystery throughout the ages of the Church. John's account of the Last Supper has a different emphasis but Chapter 6 of his gospel contains an extended reflection on the meaning of the Bread of Life which is deeply Eucharistic.

The Acts of the Apostles also shows that the Eucharist (at first called 'the Breaking of Bread') was one of the cornerstones of Christian life and identity from earliest times. While the first context for the Eucharist was an actual meal, Paul's Letters show that, even by the mid-first century, the Eucharistic meal was separating from an ordinary meal.

Christianity grew from Jewish roots, and the development of the Eucharist was influenced by Jewish prayer and practice, especially the offering of praise and thanks to God and the liturgical understanding that when the great events of salvation are celebrated ritually, for example at Passover, their power and reality are extended into the present and are immediately available to each person.

The New Testament texts as well as being based in Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper were influenced by the words and actions of the first Christian communities as they celebrated the ritual that Jesus gave to his own on the night before his death.

The basic *shape* of the Eucharist is established in these early texts: bread and wine are taken, thanks and praise are offered to God over them, the bread is broken and the bread and wine received by all. All experience the presence of Christ with them as they eat and drink the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The basic *meaning* of the Eucharist is also established in the texts of the scripture: the Eucharist proclaims and makes present through the ages the mystery of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

Select one or more of the following activities for students to complete.

- 1 **Use the timeline in the DVD Rom *Become One Body and Spirit in Christ* to familiarise students with an overview of the thirty five key events from the Last Supper (CE 34) to the Mass Today (CE**

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For Reflection and Discussion: Ideas for Use

2010). With that as context, students can find out what other important events happened during a chosen period they are researching: Origins of Eucharist, The Early Church, Religion of the Empire, The Middle Ages, Council of Trent, and the Second Vatican Council.

- 2 Students could be formed into six small groups to each prepare a presentation to the class on one of the six Objects in the Timeline of the Eucharist series. Using the Supporting Content and utilising the multimedia element as the focus of their presentation they should draw on the named further resources, to aid them in preparing their presentation.
- 3 Individually or in pairs/threes, students choose one of the slides in the multimedia element and accompanying Supporting Content and use this as the basis for further research on this aspect of the Object.
- 4 To assist students with answering this question ask them to look at the following references: Mk 14:12-26; Mt 26:17-30; Lk 22:7-23; and Jn 13:1-20.

How would you describe the connection between Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper and his Death on the following day? Why do we say that the Eucharist 'proclaim[s] the death of the Lord until he comes' (1Cor 11:26)?

- 5 Screen the video clip 'Sacred Signs' in the 'Theological Reflections' section of the 'Exploring the Mass' pathway of *Become One Body One Spirit in Christ* to assist students to reflect on this question.
Why might Jesus have chosen bread and wine as the way in which he remains present to his Church throughout history?
- 6 Invite students to write in point form how they imagine a celebration of the 'Breaking of the Bread' was celebrated. Students could write an account of a celebration pretending that they are a participant. They could tell the story in the first person explaining: why 'I, Antonio, participate...'; who is with me; what happens; what I do after the celebration.
After recording their points they should read the following scriptural reference (Last Mk 14:12-26; Mt 26:17-30; Lk 22:7-23; and Jn 13:1-20) and the weblinks in the 'Further Resources' section of this Object.

Imagine and describe a celebration of the 'Breaking of the Bread'

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- 7 **This quote from Lubac is one that students could be asked to reflect on and respond to following their study of the Eucharist drawing on all they have viewed and read, not just in response to this Object.**

'The Eucharist makes the Church; the Church makes the Eucharist' (H. de Lubac). What does this saying tell us about the relationship between the Church and the Eucharist? Could one exist without the other?

Teacher Professional Development Resources

Still, James, ['The Institution Narrative of Luke 22:19-20'](#), 1995

Fr Richstatter, Thomas, OFM, STD, ['A Short History of the Eucharist'](#), 2004