

The Eucharist

The Eucharist is one of the two Dominical Sacraments of Christianity. This means it is based on the life of Jesus, particularly his Last Supper. The Eucharist has several different names, including Holy Communion.

At the Last Supper, Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples. Luke's Gospel describes Jesus' actions like this:

**And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him...
And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."**

(Luke 22: 13-20)

Following Jesus' instruction, Christians have celebrated the Eucharist ceremony ever since. The ceremony closely mirrors the Last Supper as described above and the person leading the ceremony will normally speak very similar words to those said by Jesus. After this, each person participating in the ceremony then eats a piece of the bread and drinks from the cup of wine (though in some churches alcohol is substituted for another drink).

In some denominations, the first time someone takes part in the Eucharist is a major event. In Catholicism, for example, this is known as a person's 'First Holy Communion'. It normally occurs during a special service when a child is in primary school. Before the service, the child will receive special lessons to help them prepare for the event. On the day of the service, they will wear special clothes and celebrate the event with their family.

The vast majority of Christians see Holy Communion as a sacrament through which they can receive God's grace. They also see it as a time to remember the sacrifice of Jesus and how this brings salvation for all. This can give people strength and hope.

However, there is disagreement on the Eucharist's meaning. Catholics believe that when the priest prays over the bread and wine during the ceremony these become the actual body and blood of Jesus. This is known as 'transubstantiation'. Protestants, however, believe that bread only represents the body and blood of Jesus. This was a major issue in the religious disputes (and wars) between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century.