

Chapter 10: The Eucharist - Perfect Love Made Present

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

— Matthew 5:17

"When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them [a scholar of the law] tested him by asking, 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' 37 He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. 39 The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'"

— Matthew 22:35-40

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

— Luke 22:19-20

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

— John 6:51

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

— 1 Corinthians 10:16

The Night Everything Changed

The Cross did not begin on Good Friday. It began the night before, in an upper room in Jerusalem, when Jesus gathered His disciples for what would become the most important meal in human history. There, at the Last Supper, Jesus began to reveal the full meaning of everything we have been exploring about perfect love. Through His entire Passion—the Last Supper, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension—He showed His disciples and us exactly how the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant love would bind true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion.

That night, Jesus did something that seemed impossible: He made His future sacrifice on the Cross present to His disciples before it even happened. He took bread and wine and said: *"This is my body, which is given for you... This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"* (Luke 22:19-20). In that moment, Jesus established the Eucharist—the way His perfect love would remain present with us always.

But to understand why Jesus chose this particular night, this particular meal, and these particular words, we need to see how everything in Scripture had been pointing toward this moment.

Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets

When Jesus said, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them"* (Matthew 5:17), He was revealing something profound about love. Everything in the Old Testament—every law, every prophecy, every story—was ultimately about love. As Jesus later explained, *"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"*: love God with all

your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:40).

The perfect love we have been defining throughout this book—the sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds true justice and true mercy into life-giving communion—this is what the entire Old Testament was pointing toward. Every sacrifice, every covenant, every act of justice and mercy was preparing humanity to recognize and receive this perfect love when it appeared.

The Passover Pattern: The most important preparation was the Passover. Every year, the Jewish people remembered how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt through the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb. The lamb's blood marked their doorposts, and death "passed over" their homes. But the sacrifice wasn't complete until the lamb was eaten—the family had to consume the sacrifice to receive its benefits.

This wasn't just a historical memory—it was a pattern pointing toward something greater. The Passover lamb had to be:

- **Male** (symbolizing Christ's masculinity)
- **Unblemished** (perfect and without sin)
- **Sacrificed** (its blood shed for protection)
- **Consumed** (eaten to complete the sacrifice)

Jesus, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), would fulfill this pattern perfectly.

The Last Supper: Establishing the New Covenant

Jesus deliberately chose the Passover meal to reveal the full meaning of His mission. This wasn't coincidence—it was the fulfillment of everything the Passover had been pointing toward for over a thousand years.

The Context of Love

At the Last Supper, Jesus was surrounded by His disciples—the men He had loved, taught, and served for three years. John tells us that Jesus, *"having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (John 13:1). This meal was the ultimate expression of covenant love—Jesus binding Himself permanently to those He loved.

But this wasn't just human affection. This was the perfect love of God being poured out in a way that would make it available to every person for all time. Jesus was establishing a New Covenant—not replacing the old one, but fulfilling it completely.

The Words That Changed Everything

When Jesus took the bread and said, *"This is my body, which is given for you"* (Luke 22:19), He was making present His future sacrifice on the Cross. When He took the cup and said, *"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"* (Luke 22:20), He was establishing the permanent way His love would remain with us.

These weren't just symbolic words—they were the words of God Himself, with the power to make present what they declared. Just as God spoke creation into existence, Jesus spoke His sacrifice into sacramental presence. The bread truly became His Body; the wine truly became His Blood.

Why This Matters: Jesus wasn't just giving us a nice memory or a beautiful symbol. He was giving us the actual reality of His perfect love in a form we could receive. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we

don't just remember what Jesus did—we participate in the eternal reality of His sacrifice.

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"

— 1 Corinthians 10:16

John 6: The Promise Fulfilled

Months before the Last Supper, Jesus had prepared His disciples for this moment. In John 6, after the miracles of feeding the five thousand and walking on water, and as the "Jewish feast of Passover was near" (John 6:4), Jesus made a shocking declaration: *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh"* (John 6:51).

Many people were scandalized by these words. They asked, *"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"* (John 6:52). But Jesus didn't soften His words—He made them even stronger: *"Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day"* (John 6:53-54).

The Connection to Perfect Love: Jesus was revealing that perfect love isn't just something we admire from a distance—it's something we must receive into ourselves. To truly live the integrated love we've been exploring, we need more than good intentions or noble ideals. We need the actual life of God within us.

When we receive the Eucharist, we receive:

- **Sacred Love:** The very life of God
- **Sacrificial Love:** Christ's perfect offering for our salvation
- **Gift Love:** Freely given, not earned or deserved
- **Covenant Love:** Permanent bond that nothing can break
- **Just and Merciful Love:** Perfect integration of all love's facets
- **Life-giving Love:** Power to transform us and make us capable of authentic love

Good Friday: The Sacrifice Completed

The next day, everything Jesus had made present at the Last Supper was fulfilled on the Cross. There, the unblemished Lamb of God shed His blood for the New Covenant. There, perfect love was revealed in all its fullness—sacred, sacrificial, covenantal, just, merciful, and life-giving.

But the Cross wasn't separate from the Last Supper—it was the completion of what Jesus had begun the night before. The Eucharist made the Cross present before it happened; the Cross made the Eucharist eternally real.

The Ultimate Injustice and Perfect Mercy: The crucifixion was the most heinous crime imaginable—killing God Himself, who in His human nature was completely without sin. This was the ultimate injustice, demanding the full justice of God. Yet even as this ultimate crime was being committed, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34).

Here we see perfect justice and perfect mercy working together as one. Justice was satisfied because the perfect sacrifice was offered. Mercy was extended because forgiveness was given even before it was asked for. This is what perfect love looks like—not justice versus mercy, but justice and mercy perfectly integrated.

Easter Sunday: The Pattern Established

The story doesn't end with the Cross. On Easter Sunday, the risen Jesus appeared to His disciples and did something remarkable—He established the pattern for how His perfect love would remain present in the world.

In Luke 24, we read about Jesus appearing to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Notice the pattern:

First, Jesus explained the Scriptures: *"Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures"* (Luke 24:27). This is the Liturgy of the Word—Jesus showing how all of Scripture points to Him and His perfect love.

Then, Jesus broke bread: *"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him"* (Luke 24:30-31). This is the Liturgy of the Eucharist—Jesus making Himself present through the breaking of bread.

This is the same pattern we follow in every Mass: Word and Eucharist, Scripture and Sacrament, teaching and feeding. Jesus established this pattern so that His perfect love would remain present and accessible to every generation.

The Mass: Perfect Love Made Present

Now we can understand why the Church teaches that the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our faith. Every Mass makes present the perfect love revealed in Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Every Mass is both Calvary and the Upper Room, both Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

How This Actually Works

But how does a historical event from 2,000 years ago become present today? The answer lies in understanding that God exists outside of time. For God, the sacrifice of Jesus isn't a past event—it's an eternal reality. When we celebrate Mass, we don't travel back in time, and Jesus doesn't repeat His sacrifice. Instead, we are brought into the eternal moment of His perfect love.

Think of it this way: imagine a great mountain that can be seen from many different valleys. People in each valley see the same mountain, even though they're in different places. Similarly, every Mass is a different "valley" from which we see the same eternal "mountain" of Christ's sacrifice.

The Complete Gift

In the Eucharist, we receive the complete gift of perfect love:

Sacred: We receive Christ Himself—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity

Sacrificial: We participate in His Sacrifice and also offer our own sacrifice of thanksgiving (Eucharist literally means "Thanksgiving") for His perfect offering to the Father

Gift: It's freely given, not earned by our worthiness

Covenant: We renew our permanent bond with God

Justice: We acknowledge our need for healing and God's perfect righteousness

Mercy: We receive forgiveness and the power to forgive others

Life-giving: We are nourished for eternal life and strengthened for mission

Why We Must "Eat" the Sacrifice

Just as the Passover lamb had to be consumed to complete the sacrifice, we must receive the Eucharist to fully participate in Christ's perfect love. It's not enough to admire the Cross from a distance or to understand it intellectually. We must allow Christ's perfect love to become part of us, to nourish us, to transform us from within.

This is why Jesus was so insistent in John 6: *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you"* (John 6:53). He wasn't being dramatic—He was revealing a spiritual reality. To live the integrated love we've been exploring, we need more than human effort. We need the actual life of God within us.

The New Covenant of Love

The New Covenant established at the Last Supper and sealed on the Cross is fundamentally a covenant of love. It's God saying to humanity: "I will love you with perfect love, and I will give you the power to love Me and others with that same perfect love."

This covenant is:

Permanent: Nothing can break it—not our failures, not our sins, not even death

Personal: It's offered to each individual person by name, calling us into intimate relationship with God

Communal: Yet it's never merely private—it incorporates us into the Body of Christ, where our personal relationship serves the good of the whole Church

Powerful: It actually transforms us, giving us the capacity for authentic love

Present: It's available to us right now, every time we celebrate Mass

The Relationship God Wants

Through the Eucharist, we see exactly what kind of relationship God wants with us. Not a distant, formal relationship based on arbitrary rules and meaningless obligations, but an intimate, personal relationship based on the law of love—that sacred, sacrificial gift of covenant which binds truth, justice, and mercy into life-giving communion. God wants to be so close to us that He becomes our food, our life, our very being.

This is the ultimate expression of the covenant love we explored earlier. In marriage, two people become "one flesh." In the Eucharist, we become one with Christ Himself. This is the deepest possible union—not just emotional or spiritual, but substantial. We literally become what we receive.

We do this because this is exactly what Jesus told us to do. At the Last Supper, He didn't suggest or recommend—He commanded: *"Do this in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19). The Church doesn't create this sacrament; the priest doesn't make it happen through his own power. This is Christ's own sacrifice, made present through His own words and His own promise. Just as He desired the profound union of marriage where "two become one flesh," He desires the same intimate union with each of us in this New Covenant.

At every Mass, the priest acknowledges this divine command in the Eucharistic Prayer: *"Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the saving Passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice... at whose command we celebrate these mysteries."* The priest is not acting on his own authority—he is obeying Christ's direct command.

What looks like bread and wine to our eyes is actually the Body and Blood of Christ, for in the sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ's words of institution possess the power to effect what they signify, bringing about the real presence of His Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine. When He declared *"This is my body... this is my blood"* (Matthew 26:26-28), He wasn't speaking symbolically—He was

speaking with the same creative power that said "Let there be light" at the beginning of creation. The appearance remains the same, but the reality has changed completely through His word and His sacrifice.

As St. Paul explains, "*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*" (1 Corinthians 10:16). This isn't symbolic participation—it's real participation in Christ Himself. When we receive Communion, we're not just remembering Jesus or honoring Him—we're actually receiving His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity into our own bodies, becoming one with Him just as He desired. We are recommitting ourselves to His life-giving communion.

Living the Eucharistic Life

Understanding the Eucharist as the presence of perfect love changes everything about how we live. We're not just trying to be good people—we're learning to live as people who have received perfect love and are called to share it with others. We participate in, submit to, and offer our own sacrifice of thanksgiving (Eucharist literally means "Thanksgiving") for His perfect offering to the Father, not for our own "boasting," but for the sake of others, the sake of the entire Body of Christ, the sake of the world.

Daily Transformation

Every time we receive the Eucharist, we're being transformed more deeply into the image of Christ. We're receiving not just forgiveness for our failures but the actual power to love as He loved. This is why the saints found in daily Mass the secret to heroic love—they were being nourished daily by perfect love itself.

The Pattern for All Love

The Eucharist also gives us the pattern for all authentic love in our relationships:

Sacred: Every person is sacred, worthy of reverence and respect

Sacrificial: Love requires giving of ourselves for others' good

Gift: Love must be freely given, not demanded or manipulated

Covenant: Love creates permanent bonds and commitments

Just and Merciful: Love upholds truth while extending forgiveness

Life-giving: Love creates new possibilities and hope

Mission and Service

Finally, the Eucharist sends us out on mission. We don't receive Christ's perfect love just for our own benefit but to become instruments of that love in the world. Every Mass ends with "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord"—we're sent to bring the perfect love we've received to everyone we encounter.

This is actually where the word "Mass" comes from—the Latin *missa*, meaning "sent." The Mass doesn't end when we receive Communion; it ends when we are sent forth to live what we have received. We are dismissed not to go home and forget, but to go out and become living extensions of Christ's perfect love in the world.

For Deeper Study: The Lamb's Supper

To explore these connections more deeply, we highly recommend Scott Hahn's masterful book *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*. Dr. Hahn, a biblical scholar and theologian, and a former Protestant who converted to the Catholic faith, provides a detailed exploration of how the Mass connects to the Book

of Revelation and the eternal worship of heaven. His work shows how every element of the Mass has deep biblical roots and how the Eucharist truly makes present the eternal reality of God's perfect love. His book also connects the New Covenant to all of the Old Testament covenants and explains in detail how Jesus fulfills each of these covenants, showing the magnificent unity of God's plan of salvation throughout all of Scripture.

The Heart of Everything

Without understanding the Eucharist as the presence of perfect love, we miss the entire point of why Jesus was sacrificed on the Cross. The Cross wasn't just a historical event or a moral example—it was the establishment of a New Covenant that makes God's perfect love present and available to us always.

Every time we celebrate Mass, we encounter the same perfect love that was revealed on Calvary. We receive the same Jesus who died and rose for us. We participate in the same sacrifice that conquered sin and death. We are nourished by the same love that created the universe and redeemed humanity.

This is why the Church has always taught that the Eucharist is the center of Christian life. It's not just one devotion among many—it's the source from which all authentic love flows and the summit toward which all authentic love points.

When we truly understand this, everything changes. We see that we're not just trying to be good people—we're learning to live as people who have been loved with perfect love and called to share that love with the world. We're not just following moral rules—we're participating in the very life of God. We're not just members of an organization—we're part of the Body of Christ, nourished by His perfect love and sent to bring that love to everyone we meet.

Lord Jesus, thank You for establishing the New Covenant in Your Blood and making Your perfect love present to us in the Eucharist. Help us to understand more deeply the gift You have given us. Transform us through this sacred meal so that we may become what we receive—Your Body in the world, instruments of Your perfect love. Give us the grace to live Eucharistic lives, offering ourselves as You offered Yourself, loving others as You have loved us. Through Your perfect love, make us saints who draw others to encounter You in the Blessed Sacrament. Amen.

Examen: Perfect Love Made Present

Evening Reflection:

1. **Gratitude:** How did I encounter Christ's perfect love in the Eucharist today? What graces did I receive?
2. **Examination:** How well did I live as someone who has received perfect love? Where did I fail to share this love with others?
3. **Sorrow:** How did my actions or attitudes contradict the love I received in the Eucharist?
4. **Resolution:** How will I better prepare to receive Christ's perfect love tomorrow? How will I share it more generously?
5. **Prayer:** Ask for the grace to live a truly Eucharistic life, centered on Christ's perfect love.

Daily Practice: Before receiving Communion, remind yourself: "I am about to receive perfect love itself. How will this transform me today?" After Communion, pray: "Perfect Love, live in me and love through me."

Further Study

Scripture:

- **Exodus 12:1-28** - The first Passover and the pattern of sacrifice
- **Matthew 26:26-29** - The institution of the Eucharist
- **Luke 22:14-20** - The Last Supper and the New Covenant
- **Luke 24:13-35** - The road to Emmaus and the pattern of Mass
- **John 6:25-71** - The Bread of Life discourse
- **1 Corinthians 11:23-29** - Paul's account of the Eucharist
- **Hebrews 9:11-28** - Christ as the perfect sacrifice

Catechism:

- **CCC 1322-1419** - The Sacrament of the Eucharist
- **CCC 610-618** - Jesus' sacrifice and the Eucharist
- **CCC 1362-1372** - The Eucharist as sacrifice
- **CCC 1373-1381** - The real presence of Christ

Recommended Reading:

- **Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth*** - Essential reading for understanding the biblical foundations of the Mass
- **Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*** - Deep theological reflection on the Passion and Eucharist
- **St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*** - Papal encyclical on the Eucharist and the Church

Saints for This Chapter:

- **St. Tarcisius** - Young martyr who died protecting the Eucharist, showing the sacred nature of this gift
- **St. Juliana of Liège** - Promoted devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the feast of Corpus Christi
- **St. Peter Julian Eymard** - "Apostle of the Eucharist" who dedicated his life to Eucharistic devotion
- **St. Thérèse of Lisieux** - Found in daily Communion the source of her "little way" of perfect love