

QUESTION 73

The Sacrament of the Eucharist

Next we have to consider sacrament of the Eucharist: first, the sacrament itself (question 73); second, its matter (questions 74-77); third, its form (question 78); fourth, its effect (question 79); fifth, the recipients of this sacrament (questions 80-81); sixth, the minister of this sacrament (question 82); and, seventh, its rite (question 83).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Is the Eucharist a sacrament? (2) Is it one sacrament or many? (3) Is the Eucharist necessary for salvation? (4) Is this sacrament fittingly called by many names? (5) Was there a fitting institution of this sacrament? (6) Was the paschal lamb the principal prefigurement of this sacrament?

Article 1

Is the Eucharist a sacrament?

It seems that the Eucharist is not a sacrament (*Eucharistia non sit sacramentum*):

Objection 1: It should not be the case that two sacraments are ordered toward the same thing, since each sacrament is efficacious with respect to producing its own effect. Therefore, since, as Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 4, confirmation and the Eucharist are ordered toward perfection or completeness (*ad perfectionem*), it seems that the Eucharist is not a sacrament, given that, as has previously been established (q. 65, a. 1 and q. 72, a. 1), confirmation is indeed a sacrament.

Objection 2: In each sacrament of the New Law, that which lies visibly open to the senses (*id quod visibiliter subiiciuntur sensui*) is a cause of the sacrament's invisible effect—in the way that, as was explained above (q. 63, a. 6 and q.66, aa. 1, 3 and 7), the washing with water is a cause both of the baptismal character and of the spiritual washing. But the sensory appearances of bread and wine (*species panis et vini*), which lie open to the senses in this sacrament, are not a cause either (a) of the real body of Christ itself, which is a *reality and sacrament* (*quod est res et sacramentum*) or (b) of Christ's mystical body, which is a *reality only* (*res tantum*) in the case of the Eucharist. Therefore, it seems that the Eucharist is not a sacrament of the New Law.

Objection 3: The sacraments of the New Law that have matter are brought to completion in the use of that matter, e.g., baptism in the washing [with water] and confirmation in the signing with chrism. Therefore, if the Eucharist were a sacrament, then it would be brought to completion in the *use* of the matter and not in the *consecration* of the matter itself. But this is clearly false, since, as will be shown below (q. 78, a. 1), the form of this sacrament consists in the words that are uttered in the *consecration* of the matter. Therefore, the Eucharist is not a sacrament.

But contrary to this is what is said in the collect: "Let this Your sacrament not be for us a liability unto punishment."

I respond: The sacraments of the Church are ordered toward assisting a man in the spiritual life. Now the spiritual life is like the corporeal life, because corporeal things bear a likeness to spiritual things. But it is clear that just as generation, through which a man receives life, is required for the corporeal life, and just as growth, by which a man reaches completeness of life, is required for the corporeal life, so, too, nourishment, by which a man is conserved in life, is required for the corporeal life. And so just as baptism, which is spiritual generation, is needed for the spiritual life, and just as confirmation, which is spiritual growth, is needed for the spiritual life, so the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is spiritual nourishment, is needed for the spiritual life.

Reply to objection 1: There are two kinds of perfection or completeness:

One lies within the man himself and he arrives at it through *growth*. And this sort of perfection or completeness belongs to confirmation.

The other is a perfection or completeness that a man receives by the addition of food or clothing or something of that sort. And this sort of perfection or completeness belongs to the Eucharist, which is spiritual replenishment (*spiritualis refectio*).

Reply to objection 2: The water of baptism causes a spiritual effect not because of the water itself, but because of the power of the Holy Spirit existing in the water. Hence, in commenting on John 5:4 (“An angel of the Lord used to come down at certain times, etc.”), Chrysostom says, “It is not simply the water that is acting on those who are being baptized; instead, the water washes away all sins when it receives the grace of the Holy Spirit.” But the real body of Christ is related to the sensory appearances of bread and wine in the same way that the power of the Holy Spirit is related to the waters of baptism. Hence, the sensory appearances of bread and wine do not cause anything except by the power of Christ’s real body.

Reply to objection 3: A sacrament (*sacramentum*) is so-called by the fact that it contains something sacred (*aliquid sacrum*). But there are two senses in which something can be sacred, viz., (a) *absolutely speaking* (*absolute*) and (b) *in relation to something else* (*in ordine ad aliud*).

Now the difference between the Eucharist and the other sacraments is that the Eucharist contains something sacred absolutely speaking, viz., Christ Himself, whereas the waters of baptism contain something sacred in relation to something else, viz., the power to sanctify—and the same line of reasoning applies to chrism and similar things. And that is why the sacrament of the Eucharist is brought to completion in the very consecration of the matter, whereas the other sacraments are brought to completion in an application of the matter to the sanctification of a man.

And another difference also follows from this. For in the sacrament of the Eucharist that which is a *reality and sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*) exists in the matter itself, whereas that which is a *reality only* (*res tantum*) exists in the recipient, viz., the grace that is conferred. By contrast, in baptism both of these exist in the recipient—i.e., both the character, which is a *reality and sacrament* and the grace of the remission of sins, which is a *reality only*. And the same line of reasoning applies to the other sacraments.

Article 2

Is the Eucharist one sacrament or many?

It seems that the Eucharist is not one sacrament but many (*Eucharistia non sit unum sacramentum, sed plura*):

Objection 1: For in the collect it says, “Let the sacraments that we have received, O Lord, purify us”—something that is being said because of our reception of the Eucharist. Therefore, the Eucharist is not just one sacrament, but many.

Objection 2: It is impossible for the genus to be multiplied without the species being multiplied, as would happen if one were to say, “One *man* is many *animals*.” But as was explained above (q. 60, a. 1), the genus of a sacrament is *sign*. Therefore, since there are many signs in the Eucharist, viz., bread and wine, the result seems to be that there are many sacraments.

Objection 3: As has been said (a. 1, ad 3), this sacrament is brought to completion in the consecration of the matter. But in this sacrament there is a twofold consecration of the matter. Therefore, there are two sacraments.

But contrary to this: In 1 Corinthians 10:17 the Apostle says, “We though many are one bread and one body, all of us who partake of the one bread and the one cup.” From this it is clear that the

Eucharist is the sacrament of ecclesiastical unity. But a sacrament bears a likeness to the reality of which it is the sacrament. Therefore, the Eucharist is one sacrament.

I respond: As *Metaphysics 5* explains, *one* is said not only of what is indivisible and of what is continuous, but also of what is complete, in the way that we say, “one house” and “one man.” Now a thing that is one by completeness (*unum perfectione*) is such that all the things that are required for its end-state come together for its wholeness, in the way that a man is made a whole from all the members that are necessary for its soul to operate, and in the way that a house is made a whole from all the parts that are necessary for its being a place to live in.

And it is in this sense that this sacrament is said to be one sacrament. For it is ordered toward spiritual replenishment, which conforms to corporeal replenishment. But there are two things required for corporeal replenishment, viz., food, which is solid nourishment, and drink, which is liquid nourishment. And so these two likewise come together for the wholeness of this sacrament, viz., spiritual food and spiritual drink—this according to John 6:56 (“My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”). Therefore, this sacrament is, to be sure, many materially speaking, but it is one formally speaking and with respect to completeness.

Reply to objection 1: Within the same collect, it says, first of all, in the plural, “May these sacraments purify us who receive them,” and afterwards in the singular, “Let this Your sacrament not be for us a liability unto punishment”—and all of this in order to show that this sacrament is in a certain sense many, but is one absolutely speaking.

Reply to objection 2: The bread and wine are, to be sure, many signs materially speaking, but they are one formally and with respect to completeness, insofar as one complete instance of replenishment is effected by them.

Reply to objection 3: As has been pointed out, from the fact that the consecration belonging to this sacrament is twofold it can be inferred only that this sacrament is many materially speaking.

Article 3

Is this sacrament necessary for salvation?

It seems that this sacrament is necessary for salvation (*hoc sacramentum sit de necessitate salutis*):

Objection 1: In John 6:54 our Lord says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life within you.” But in this sacrament the flesh of Christ is eaten and His blood is drunk. Therefore, without this sacrament a man cannot have health in his spiritual life (*non potest habere salutem spiritualis vitae*).

Objection 2: This sacrament is a sort of spiritual nourishment. But corporeal nourishment is necessary for corporeal health. Therefore, this sacrament is likewise necessary for spiritual health.

Objection 3: Just as baptism is the sacrament of our Lord’s passion, without which there is no salvation, so, too, with the Eucharist; for in 1 Corinthians 11:26 the Apostle says, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.” Therefore, just as baptism is necessary for salvation, so, too, is this sacrament.

But contrary to this: In *Ad Bonifacium Contra Pelagianos* Augustine writes, “Nor should you think that young children cannot possess life if they do not share in the body and blood of Christ.”

I respond: In this sacrament there are two things to consider, viz., (a) the *sacrament* itself (*ipsum sacramentum*) and (b) the *reality* that belongs to the sacrament (*res sacramenti*).

Now it has been explained (a. 1) that the *reality* that belongs to the sacrament is one’s union with the mystical body (*unitas corporis mystici*), without which salvation cannot exist. For the path to

salvation is not open to anyone outside the Church, just as it was not open during the flood without Noah's ark—which, as 1 Peter 3:20-21 points out, signifies the Church.

Now it was explained above (q. 68, a. 2) that the *reality (res)* of any sacrament can be had without the sacrament by means of the very desire to receive the sacrament. Hence, before the reception of this sacrament a man can have salvation by the desire to receive this sacrament—in the same way that, as was explained above (q. 68, a. 2), salvation can be had before baptism by means of the desire for baptism. Yet there are two respects in which there is a difference:

First of all, because baptism is the beginning of the spiritual life and the gateway to the sacraments, whereas the Eucharist is, as has been explained (q. 63, a. 6 and q. 65, a. 3), the consummation, as it were, of the spiritual life and the end or goal of all the sacraments. For what is effected by the instances of sanctification belonging to all the sacraments is a preparation for receiving or consecrating the Eucharist. And so the reception of baptism is necessary for embarking upon the spiritual life, whereas the reception of the Eucharist is necessary for *consummating* the spiritual life and not for simply *having* the spiritual life—though it is sufficient to have [the Eucharist] in one's desire, in the way that the end is likewise had in one's desire and intention.

The second difference is that through baptism an individual is ordered toward the Eucharist. And so by the very fact that young children are baptized, they are ordered by the Church toward the Eucharist. And so, just as they believe by the faith of the Church, so by the Church's intention they desire the Eucharist and, as a result, they receive the *reality* of the Eucharist. By contrast, they are not ordered toward baptism through any another previous sacrament. And so before the reception of baptism, young children do not in any way have baptism in their desire—only adults do. Hence, they cannot receive the *reality* of the sacrament [of baptism] without actually receiving the sacrament. And that is why the present sacrament, [viz., the Eucharist,] is not necessary for salvation in the same way that baptism is.

Reply to objection 1: In explaining the words of John 6:55 (“This food and drink”), i.e., the food and drink of His flesh and blood, Augustine says, “He wants us to be thinking of the fellowship of His body and members, i.e., the Church, in those who have been predestined and called and justified and glorified, in His holy and faithful ones.” Hence, as Augustine himself says in *Epistola ad Bonfacium*, “No one should doubt to any degree that (a) each of the faithful is made a partaker of our Lord's body and blood when he is made a member of Christ's body in baptism, and that (b) for as long as he is established in the unity of Christ's body, he is not deprived of his share in that body and that cup, even if he departs from this world without having eaten that bread or drunk of that cup.”

Reply to objection 2: The difference between corporeal nourishment and spiritual nourishment is that corporeal nourishment is converted into *the substance of the individual who is nourished*, and so corporeal nourishment cannot do a human being any good in conserving his life unless it is actually consumed. By contrast, spiritual nourishment converts a human being into *itself*—this according to what Augustine says in *Confessiones* 7, viz., that it was as if he heard the voice of Christ saying, “You will not change me into you, as with food for your flesh; instead, you will be changed into me.” But an individual can be changed into Christ and incorporated into Him by his mind's desire, even without receiving this sacrament. And on this score there is no likeness [between corporeal nourishment and spiritual nourishment].

Reply to objection 3: Baptism is a sacrament of Christ's passion and death insofar as a man is regenerated in Christ by the power of His suffering (*virtute passionis eius*). By contrast, the Eucharist is a sacrament of Christ's passion insofar as a man is perfected in his union with Christ as having suffered. Hence, just as baptism is called the sacrament of faith, which is the foundation of the spiritual life, so the Eucharist is called the sacrament of charity, which is “the bond of perfection,” as Colossians 3:14 puts it.

Article 4

Is it fitting for this sacrament to be called by many names?

It seems that it is not fitting for this sacrament to be called by many names (*inconvenienter hoc sacramentum pluribus nominibus nominetur*):

Objection 1: Names should correspond to realities. But as has been explained (a. 2), this sacrament is one [and not many]. Therefore, it should not be called by many names.

Objection 2: Species are not appropriately made known by means of that which is common to the whole genus. But the Eucharist is a sacrament of the New Law. Now it is common to all the sacraments that grace is conferred through them—and this is signified by the name ‘Eucharist’, which is the same as ‘good grace’. Again, each sacrament provides us with a [spiritual] remedy on the path of the present life (*in via praesentis vitae*)—and this belongs to the name ‘viaticum’. Again, in each sacrament there is something sacred—and this is part of the meaning of ‘sacrifice’. Again, each sacrament is such that through it the faithful share something in common with one another (*sibi invicem fideles communicant*)—and this is signified by the name ‘*synaxis*’ in Greek and by the name ‘communion’ (*communio*) in Latin. Therefore, these names are not appropriately adapted to this sacrament.

Objection 3: A host (*hostia*) seems to be the same as a sacrifice. Therefore, just as it is not properly called a sacrifice, so neither is it properly called a host.

But contrary to this is the use of these expressions by the faithful.

I respond: This sacrament has a threefold signification:

One *with respect to the past*, since it is commemorative of our Lord’s passion (*commemorative dominicae passionis*), which, as was explained above (q. 48, a. 3), was a true *sacrifice*. Accordingly, it is called a sacrifice.

It has a second signification *with respect to a present reality*, viz., the unity of the Church, in which men are brought together through this sacrament. Accordingly, it is called *communion* or *synaxis*; for in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4 Damascene says, “It is called communion since we communicate with Christ through it, both (a) because we partake of His flesh and divinity and (b) because we communicate with and are united to one another through it.

It has a third signification *with respect to the future*, viz., insofar as this sacrament prefigures the enjoyment of God that will exist in heaven. Accordingly, it is called *viaticum*, since it presents us with the way to arrive there. And on this score it is likewise called *the Eucharist*, i.e., good grace, either because (a) “God’s grace is eternal life,” as Romans 6:23 says, or (b) because it really contains Christ, who is full of grace.

In addition, in Greek it is called *metalepsis*, i.e., the *assuming*, because, as Damascene says, “Through it we assume the divinity of the Son.”

Reply to objection 1: Nothing prevents the same thing from being called by different names in accord with its different properties or effects.

Reply to objection 2: That which is common to all the sacraments is attributed to the Eucharist antonomastically because of its excellence.

Reply to objection 3: This sacrament is called a *sacrifice* insofar as it re-presents Christ’s passion itself. On the other hand, it is called a *host* insofar as it contains Christ, who is “a fragrant victim,” as Ephesians 5:2 says.

Article 5

Was there a fitting institution of this sacrament?

It seems that there was not a fitting institution of this sacrament (*non fuerit conveniens institutio istius sacramenti*):

Objection 1: As the Philosopher says in *De Generatione* 2, “We are nourished by the same things from which we come.” But through baptism, which is a spiritual regeneration, we receive spiritual being (*spirituale esse*), as Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 2. Therefore, it is through baptism that we are likewise nourished. Therefore, it was unnecessary to institute this sacrament as spiritual nourishment.

Objection 2: Through this sacrament men are united to Christ as members to the head. But Christ is the head of all men—even, as was explained above (q. 8, aa. 3-6), those who have existed since the beginning of the world. Therefore, the institution of this sacrament should not have been deferred until the supper of the Lord.

Objection 3: This sacrament is said to be a memorial of our Lord’s passion—this according to Matthew 26 and Luke 22:19 (“Do this in remembrance of me”). But remembrance is of things past. Therefore, this sacrament should not have been instituted prior to Christ’s passion.

Objection 4: Through baptism an individual is ordered toward the Eucharist, which should be given only to those who have been baptized. But as is clear from Matthew 29:19, baptism was instituted after Christ’s passion and resurrection. Therefore, it was unfitting for the sacrament under discussion to have been instituted before Christ’s passion.

But contrary to this: This sacrament was instituted by Christ, of whom it is said in Mark 7:17, “He has done all things well.”

I respond: This sacrament was fittingly instituted during the supper at which Christ kept company with His disciples for the last time.

First of all, because of what this sacrament contains. For Christ Himself is contained in the Eucharist as in a sacrament. And so when Christ Himself was about to depart from His disciples under His proper appearance, He left Himself behind for them under His sacramental appearance—in the way that, in the absence of the emperor, his image is set up to be venerated. Hence, Eusebius says, “Since He was going to remove His assumed body from their eyes and bear it away to the stars, it was necessary that on the day of the supper He should consecrate the sacrament of His body and blood for our sake, in order that what was once and for all offered in payment for us might be venerated perpetually through the mystery.”

Second, because without faith in Christ’s passion there could never have been any salvation—this according to Romans 3:25 (“... whom God has set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood”). And so it was necessary for there to exist among men at every time something to represent our Lord’s passion. The principal sacrament of the passion in the Old Testament was the paschal lamb, and that is why in 1 Corinthians 5:7 the Apostle says, “Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed.” Now what succeeded the paschal lamb in the New Testament was the sacrament of the Eucharist, which commemorates the passion as past, just as the paschal lamb had prefigured it as future. And so, as Pope Leo explains [in *Sermones* 58], it was fitting that when His passion was imminent, and after the old sacrament had been celebrated, Christ instituted the new sacrament.

Third, because those things that are said at the end, especially by departing friends, are more strongly committed to memory—especially because at such times affection for one’s friends is more ardent, and those things toward which we are more disposed are more deeply imprinted on our minds. Therefore, since, as Pope Alexander says, “there can be nothing greater among sacrifices than the body

and blood of Christ, nor any oblation more powerful than this one,” our Lord instituted this sacrament at His final parting from His disciples, in order that it might be held in the greater veneration. And this is the same point that Augustine makes in *Responsiones ad Ianuarium*: “Our Savior, in order to commend more forcefully the depth of this mystery, wanted to fix this last act in the hearts and memories of the disciples whom He was about to leave to go to His passion.”

Reply to objection 1: We are indeed nourished by the same things from which we come, but not by their coming to us in the same way. For those things from which we come make their way to us through generation, whereas those same things, insofar as we are nourished by them, come to us through eating. Hence, just as we are regenerated in Christ through baptism, so we eat Christ through the Eucharist.

Reply to objection 2: The Eucharist is the complete and perfect sacrament of our Lord’s passion in the sense that it contains Christ Himself as having suffered. And so it could not have been instituted before the incarnation; instead, the sacraments that were in place at that time were only prefigurements of our Lord’s passion.

Reply to objection 3: This sacrament was instituted at the supper so that in the future it would be a memorial of our Lord’s passion, once that passion had been completed. Hence, He explicitly says, “... as often as you shall do these things ... ,” speaking of the future.

Reply to objection 4: An institution corresponds to the order of intention, and the sacrament of the Eucharist, even though it is later than baptism in being received, is nonetheless prior in intention. And that is why it was fitting for it to have been instituted first.

An alternative reply is that baptism had already been instituted in the baptism of Christ itself. Hence, as we read in John 3:22, some individuals had already been baptized with Christ’s baptism itself.

Article 6

Was the paschal lamb the principal prefigurement of this sacrament?

It seems that the paschal lamb was not the principal prefigurement of this sacrament (*agnus paschalis non fuerit praecipua figura huius sacramenti*):

Objection 1: Christ is called “a priest according to the order of Melchisedech” (Psalm 109:4) because Melchisedech performed a figure of Christ’s sacrifice “by offering bread and wine” (Genesis 14:18). But an emphasis on likeness brings it about that the one thing is named after the other. Therefore, it seems that Melchisedech’s offering was the most important prefigurement of this sacrament.

Objection 2: The crossing of the Red Sea is a prefigurement of baptism—this according to 1 Corinthians 10:2 (“All were baptized in the cloud and in the sea”). But the immolation of the paschal lamb preceded the crossing of the Red Sea, and it was the manna that came afterwards, in the way that the Eucharist comes after baptism. Therefore, the manna is a clearer prefigurement of this sacrament than the paschal lamb is.

Objection 3: The most important power of this sacrament is that it leads us into the heavenly kingdom, like a sort of viaticum. But this was prefigured especially in the sacrament of the Atonement, in which, as the Apostle shows in Hebrews 9, “the high priest entered once a year with the blood into the Holy of Holies.” Therefore, that sacrifice seems to have been a more explicit prefigurement of this sacrament than the paschal lamb was.

But contrary to this: In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 the Apostle says, “Christ our passover has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

I respond: There are three things we can consider in this sacrament: (a) that which is a *sacrament*

only (sacramentum tantum), viz., the bread and wine; (b) that which is a *reality and sacrament (res et sacramentum)*, viz., the real body of Christ; and (c) that which is a *reality only (res tantum)*, viz., the effect of this sacrament.

Thus, as regards that which is the *sacrament only*, the most important prefiguration of this sacrament was the offering of Melchisedech, who offered bread and wine.

On the other hand, as regards Christ Himself as having suffered, who is contained in this sacrament, the prefigurations of this were all the sacrifices of the Old Testament, and especially the sacrifice of the Atonement, which was the most solemn.

And as regards the effect, the principal prefiguration of it was the manna, “having within it the sweetness of every taste,” as Wisdom 16:20 says, just as the grace of this sacrament replenishes the soul in all respects.

However, the paschal lamb prefigured this sacrament with respect to these three things: (a) with respect to the first, because it was eaten with unleavened bread—this according to Exodus 12:8 (“They shall eat the flesh and unleavened bread”); (b) with respect to the second, because it was immolated by the whole multitude of the children of Israel on the fourteenth day of the moon, and this was a prefiguration of the passion of Christ, who is called a lamb because of His innocence; and (c) with respect to the effect, because by the blood of the paschal lamb the children of Israel were protected from the destroying angel and were led out of Egyptian captivity.

And the paschal lamb is posited as the principal prefiguration of this sacrament because it represents it in every respect.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The reply to the objections is clear from what has been said.