

The Eucharist in the Early Church

1. A description of how to consecrate the Eucharist from *The Didache*

(a handbook intended for missionaries to show them how to do the basics of Christian practice) Late 1st - Early 2nd Century AD.

CHAPTER 9 : Eucharistic Consecration

9:1 Now regarding the Eucharist, give thanks in this way :

9:2 First concerning the cup : “We thank You, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant, which You made known to us through Jesus Your servant. To You belongs the glory for ever”.

9:3 And concerning the broken bread : “We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your servant. To You belongs the glory for ever”.

9:4 As this broken bread was scattered over the mountains, and was brought together to become one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your Kingdom, for the glory and the power are Yours through Jesus Christ forever.

9:5 But let none eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Name of the Lord. For concerning this did the Lord say: “Give not what is holy to dogs.”

CHAPTER 14

14:1 On the Lord’s day, come together, break bread, and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.

14:2 But let none who has a quarrel with his companion join with you until they have been reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be defiled.

2. A description of the Eucharist in the *First Apology* by Justin Martyr

(Justin was born in Syria but went to Rome after converting to Christianity. The *Apology* was written to show that the Christians did nothing evil - they had been accused of cannibalism) About 150 AD.

CHAPTER 65: the Eucharist following a Baptism

Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them, gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying *Amen*. This word *Amen* answers in the Hebrew language to “so be it”. And when the president has given thanks, and all the people have expressed their

assent, those who are called by us deacons give to each of those present to partake of the bread and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced, and to those who are absent they carry away a portion.

CHAPTER 66: How the Eucharist is to be understood

And this food is called among us the *Eucharist*, of which no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing that is for the remission of sins, and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;" and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood;" and gave it to them alone.

CHAPTER 67: The Sunday Eucharist

And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

3. The earliest surviving example of a Eucharistic Prayer

(from Chapter 4 of the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, describing the Eucharist following the consecration of a bishop) About 215 AD.

And when he is made bishop, all shall offer him the kiss of peace, for he has been made worthy. To him then the deacons shall bring the offering, and he, laying his hand upon it, with all the presbytery, shall say as the thanksgiving: The Lord be with you.

And all shall say

And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is meet and right.

And then he shall proceed immediately:

We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Servant Jesus Christ, whom at the end of time you sent to us as a Savior and Redeemer and the Messenger of your counsel. Who is your inseparable Word; through whom you made all things and in whom you are well pleased. Whom you sent from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, and who, dwelling within her, was made flesh, and was manifested as your Son, being born of [the] Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Who, fulfilling your will, and winning for himself a holy people, spread out his hands when he came to suffer, that by his death he might set free them who believed in you.

Who, when he was betrayed to his willing death, that he might bring to nought death, and break the bonds of the devil, and tread hell under foot, and give light to the righteous, and set up a boundary post, and manifest his resurrection, taking bread and giving thanks to you said: Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you. And likewise also the cup, saying: This is my blood, which is shed for you. As often as you perform this, perform my memorial.

Having in memory, therefore, his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the cup, yielding you thanks, because you have counted us worthy to stand before you and to minister to you. And we pray you would send your Holy Spirit upon the offerings of your holy church; that you, gathering them into one, would grant to all your saints who partake to be filled with [the] Holy Spirit, that their faith may be confirmed in truth, that we may praise and glorify thee.

Through your Servant Jesus Christ, through whom be to you be glory and honor, with [the] Holy Spirit in the holy church, both now and always and world without end. Amen.

4. The earliest surviving example of a complete Eucharistic liturgy (taken from Book 8 of *The Apostolic Constitutions*) About 375 AD.

READINGS (Old Testament, letters and Gospel)

HOMILY

DISMISSAL OF THE CATECHUMENS, POSSESSED AND PENITENTS

PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

SIGN OF PEACE

OFFERTORY

The EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Bishop says: The grace of almighty God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

All: And with your spirit.

Bishop: Up with your mind.

All: We have it with the Lord.

Bishop: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

All: It is fitting and right.

The Bishop continues with a long thanksgiving for creation. Then all say:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of his glory; blessed is he for ever. Amen

The Bishop continues: Truly are you holy and all-holy, most high and exalted above all for ever. Holy also is your only-begotten Son, our Lord and God Jesus the Christ, who ministered to you, his God and Father in all things.

There follows a very lengthy description of the work of Jesus, including:

He lived a holy life and taught according to the law; he drove away every disease and every sickness from men; he did signs and wonders among the people; he who feeds those who need food and fills all things living with plenteousness partook of food and drink and sleep; he made know your name to those who did not know it; he put ignorance to flight; he re-kindled piety; he fulfilled your will; he accomplished the work which you gave him. And when he had achieved all these things, he was seized by the hands of lawless so-called priests and high priests and a lawless people, by betrayal through one who was diseased in wickedness. He suffered many things at their hands, endured all kinds of indignity by your permission, and was handed over to Pilate the governor. The Judge was judged and the Savior was condemned; he who cannot suffer was nailed to the cross, he who is immortal by nature died, and the giver of life was buried, that he might free from suffering and rescue from death those for whose sake he came, and break the bonds of the devil and deliver men from his deceit.

And on the third day he rose from the dead, and after spending forty days with his disciples, he was taken up into heaven and sits at your right hand, his God and Father.

Remembering therefore what he endured for us, we give you thanks, almighty God, not as we ought but as we are able, and we fulfill his command.

For in the night he was betrayed, he took bread in his holy and blameless hands and, looking up to you, his God and Father, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying ‘This is the mystery of the new covenant: take of it, eat; this is my body which is broken for many for forgiveness of sins’.

Likewise also he mixed the cup of wine and water and sanctified it and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood which is shed for many for forgiveness of sins. Do this for my remembrance; for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim my death, until I come.

Remembering then his passion and death and resurrection from the dead, his return to heaven and his future second coming, in which he comes in glory and power to judge the living and the dead, and to reward each according to his works, we offer you, King and God, according to his commandment, this bread and this cup, giving you thanks through him that you have deemed us worthy to stand before you and be your priests.

The prayer continues with petitions for the Church, the Emperor, those who have died (including the saints), for those in trouble, for good weather and for those who are absent, and ends with a doxology as it does now.

The Bishop holds up the host and says: The holy things for the holy people. The bishop gives the host (called “the offering”) with the words “The Body of Christ” and the recipient replies “Amen”.

The deacon gives the cup with the words: “The blood of Christ, the cup of life” and the response is “Amen”.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING DISMISSAL

It is significant that this last and longest example of a Eucharist from the age of the early Church comes from after the time when Christianity was tolerated (Edict of Milan 313 AD). For a time Christianity and paganism existed side by side, and persecution still occasionally broke out, but finally Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Theodosius in 380 AD.