

Simion Todoran

The Holy Communion - a unique Sacrifice of the New Testament

Abstract

The most intimate connection between Christians and Jesus Christ the Saviour is achieved through the mystery of the Holy Communion, just like He says it Himself: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them", (John 6, 56), because "the one who eats this bread will live for ever" (John 6, 58).

All four evangelists connect the celebration of Lord's Jesus Christ Supper to the "days of the Unleavened Bread", or the Jewish Easter. The Mosaic Law speaks about the days of the unleavened bread in connection with the feast of the Passover, which was to be celebrated on the evening of 14 to 15 of Nisan.

The Lord did not speak to His disciples about this Bread only at the Supper, but also at the synagogue, when He taught them boldly: "the bread that I will give for the life of the



Rev. Prof. Dr. Simion Todoran is Professor of New Testament at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University "December 1st 1918" of Alba Iulia, Romania

world is my flesh" (John 6, 51), and again: "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" (John 6, 53).

The Holy Communion makes actual again the unique sacrifice of the New Covenant, brought once and for all by Jesus Christ, the Great Bishop, Who did not save his life but offered Himself to ransom us (Hebr. 8, 6; 9, 24-5; Col. 1, 4). That is why "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11, 26).

Keywords

Holy Eucharist, Church, Christ's Flesh, Christ's Blood, Eternal Life

1 Introduction

Through the sacrament of Holy Eucharist¹ is performed the most intimate relationship between Christians and Jesus Christ, Himself as He Himself says: "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him" (John 6. 56); it is the earnest of eternal life and immortality (John 6. 58).

All four evangelists connect the celebration of Jesus Christ's Last Supper to the "days of unleavened bread" or the Jewish Passover. The Mosaic Law speaks of the days of unleavened

¹ As a technical term, the *Eucharist* appears first in the Epistles of St. Ignatius, "take care to gather more often to bring God thanksgiving (Eucharist) and praise" the Ephesians, chapter. 13, 1, translated by D. Fecioru in col. *Părinți și scriitori bisericești*, vol. 1, (IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979), p. 161. He also calls it "the bread that is the cure medicine for immortality and medicine not to die, but forever live in Jesus Christ," Idem, chapter 20. 2.

bread, in connection with the feast of the Passover, which was to be celebrated on the evening of Nisan 14th to 15th. That evening a one year lamb was stabbed, and was eaten "fire roasted" (Exodus 8) with bitter herbs and unleavened bread without breaking any bone of it and without leaving anything for the next day.

The days of Unleavened Bread were held for seven days, i.e. until 21st of Nisan, during which work was forbidden; exception to this rule was the only the preparation of food.

Not only the Last Supper did the Lord speak to his disciples about this Bread, but also in the synagogue boldly teaching, clearly said: "the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6, 51), and again: "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood you will not, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life" (John 6, 53)

St. Mark the Evangelist parents' house apparently was the place where the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist has been set up – as expressed by the vast majority of the exegetes of the Scripture². The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist – central in the life of the Church ever since its inception and whose theology is expressed in the anaphors of ancient liturgies – quickly learned an important place in the writings of the Holy Fathers: Saint Ignatius of Antioch, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Damascene, St. Simon the New Theologian

² The Gospel of Mark, chapter 15, 51-52, is reminiscent of a young man closely seeking what was happening on that terrible night with Christ the Saviour. Most of the biblical commentators see in the young man mentioned in these verses St. Mark who became St. Peter's disciple and later Christ the Saviour's Evangelist. Therefore, when the Saviour and His apostles were in John-Mark's parents' house, it can be easily assumed that they were ben followed with purely infantile curiosity after they had finished the Supper.

(the first of the ascetic writers who puts the Eucharist and the communion in the centre of the path to God)³.

The Eucharist updates the unique sacrifice of the New Covenant, made once and for all by the Grand-Priest, Jesus Christ, who did not spare his life, but was our ransom (Hebrews. 8, 6; 9, 24-25, Col. 1, 4). Therefore, "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come" (I Cor. 11, 26).

2 Establishing the Holy Communion

Four texts in the New Testament tell about the setting up of the Holy Communion: Matthew 26, 26 – 29; Mark 14, 22 – 25; Luke 22, 15 – 20; I Cor. 11, 23 et seq.

The text of I Cor. 11, 23 et seq. where St. Paul "tells us," what he had previously "received from the Lord," recalls the existence of a liturgical tradition which explains how the Early Church performs the Supper of our Lord⁴.

Regarding the time of the setting up of the Holy Eucharist, the Holy evangelist Matthew tells us the following: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26, 26 – 28).

³ Basile Krivocheine, *În lumina lui Hristos. Sfântul Smeon Noul Teolog* (949-1022). *Viața - Spiritualitatea - Învățătura*, translated from French by Vasile Leb and George Jordan, (IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997), p. 104.

⁴ Xavier Léon-Dufour, Pierre Grelot, Jaques Guillet, Marc-Francois Lacan, *Vocabulaire the Théologie Biblique*, (Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1966), p. 326: "The Gospel of Mark is considering a Palestinian tradition, since it uses a wording with many shades of Aramaic, while St. Paul would express the tradition of the Churches of Antioch and Asia Minor."

Therefore, the elements of the Holy Eucharist are bread and wine.

According to Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition, the use of the leavened bread is the only justified and true practice, because the establishment of the Holy Eucharist was done with leavened bread and it was with this type of bread that this Sacrament was committed by the Church during the first centuries, as it is practiced nowadays by the Orthodox Church.

3 Historical Framework

The reason for which leavened bread is used to perform the Holy Eucharist, is the fact that Jesus Christ our Saviour had celebrated Easter with leavened bread. The texts of Exodus 12.5, Numbers 9.1, Deuteronomy 16.1, support this statement: the celebration of Easter, that is, the killing of the paschal lamb, was done on the evening of 14th of Nisan. Evangelist St. Matthew, like the other two synoptic evangelists, count altogether eight days of unleavened bread, taking into consideration the 14th of Nisan, too, in the evening of which Passover was celebrated, because according to the Jewish custom, the day began with the previous evening.

At the time of the evangelists, the 14th of Nisan was called the first day of Unleavened Bread – a fact confirmed by the historian Iosif Flaviu, who tells us that the Jews celebrated eight days of Unleavened Bread, and not seven, and the eighth day was not added at the end but at the beginning, undoubtedly⁵.

Precisely the same is told by St. John the Evangelist when he places the Last Supper "a day before Easter" (John 13.1). So, the evening of 14th of Nisan, when the Last Supper occurred according to the Synoptic authors, was improperly considered to be the beginning of the days of unleavened bread, but it was

⁵ Vasile Gheorghiu, *Sfânta Evanghelie după Matei*, (Cernăuți, 1933), p. 711.

not the Easter day. So, our Saviour did not celebrate the Jewish Passover and did not eat unleavened bread at dinner.

As we know, the first day of Unleavened Bread, which is the 15th of Nisan, did not occur on the day of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, but immediately the next day. In the vernacular "pasha" and "azyme" alternated and were used without distinction, in order to show the cycle of eight days of the feast, from 14th to 21st of Nisan. This was supposed to draw attention upon the correct understanding of the facts. This explanation does not lessen, but rather reinforces the observation made by older and newer exegetes, that the adjective "first" is used to mean "previous". Thus the sacrifice of the paschal lamb happens the day before the day of the unleavened bread, which corresponds to reality. Here's what St. John Chrysostom tells us, on this issue: "The first day of the unleavened bread is called the day before the unleavened bread; for they had always used to consider the day since the previous evening; and this is the day that he brings to observation, after which he was to be sacrificed the night of the Passover, because Saturday's Thursday had come. And he calls the day before the unleavened bread, naming it the time that was about to come. And he says, 'the day of unleavened bread has come' ... and saying this, he was close, he was at the door (behind the doors), showing that he was talking about the evening of that day⁶".

Thus, the stories of the synoptic writers attune with that of John, which tells us that the next day after he was caught, Jesus

⁶ Ioannis Karavidopoulos, *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Marcu*, translated by Sabin Preda, (Byzantine Publishing, Bucharest, 2005), p. 325 "Understanding this can also rely on: a) the observation that elsewhere in the New Testament the adjective "first" is used to mean "the first, the anterior, the previous (Matthew 12, 43, John 1, 15; 15, 18; Acts 1, 1; I Timothy 4, 16; 5, 12; Hebrew 8, 7; Revelation 2, 4; 21, 1); b) the fact that it places the text in accordance with those achieved at the Jewish Passover, and c) the fact that the commenting parents, who were also closer to the text and to the conditions of the New Testament era, understood the expression likewise", p. 326.

was taken to Pilate in the morning, "and the Jews went not into the judgement hall - which was a pagan institution - lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18, 28). So catching Jesus was not done at the feast of the Passover, because the Jews wanted to avoid any disturbance to the people (Mt. 26, 4-5).

The arrest of Jesus Christ was done in one night, which separates two working days. The apostles carried weapons with them. So did the same crowds that came to the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26, 47-55, Mark 14, 43-48, Luke 22, 50-52). Jesus Christ was not aware that he took upon himself the work of the servant of God, too, who does not suffer only after his arrest, but even since the beginning of His activity (see the account of the Baptism when God the Father recognized Him as the "beloved Son"). Throughout His life, Jesus prepared himself for Passion. He obeys God's will, and is not constrained by historical conditions⁷.

The trial of Jesus Christ our Saviour before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate and before Herod Agrippa, takes place on the eve of the feast of the Passover, that is during the working day, as they convene and gather for the working session the Sanhedrin members, witnesses are brought in and heard, the servants of the high priest lit a fire in the yard, crowds of Jews, headed by the chief priests lead Jesus before Pilate and Herod, and a series of acts forbidden by the law of the Sabbath and by the custom of the Passover are committed (Matthew 27, 1; Mark 15, 1; Luke 23, 1)⁸.

On the way to Golgotha, the soldiers charged with execution of the sentence, forced Simon of Cyrene, who was coming back from the field, to carry the Cross of the Saviour, despite the fact

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

⁸ I. Fruma, Grigorie T. Marcu, *Procesul Mântuitorului*, (Sibiu, 1945), p. 193.

that, according to the Mosaic Law, all activity and travel must end a few hours before sunset, on 14th of Nisan⁹.

After the crucifixion of the Saviour, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus and the myrrh-bearing women find open stores where to buy the shroud, the veil, the spices and other things necessary for the taking down from the Cross and the burial (Matthew 27, 57; Mark 15, 46; Luke 23, 56). And because no Jew would have committed such deeds on the first day of Easter, and even more on a Saturday, we must admit that by the words "the first day of Unleavened Bread" and the day when the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed (Matthew 26, 17; Mark 14, 12; Luke 22, 7), the Synoptic writers understand Easter eve, or 14th of Nisan, the day described by St. Mark the Evangelist (15, 42) "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is the day before the Sabbath¹⁰."

If the Synoptic writers say that Jesus sent Peter and John "to prepare the Passover", this does not mean that the paschal lamb was killed that evening, that is they would have celebrated the Jewish Passover, a fact that the evangelists would have made a note of, obviously. After the Mishnah, the evening of 13th of Nisan, the heads of families sought with a burning candle in the house, so that nothing was left leavened for Easter¹¹.

If Jesus Christ had celebrated the Jewish Passover at the Supper, that meal should have been called Easter (πάσχα), but it was called dinner (δείπνον) and the bread was leavened (άρτος), not unleavened (ἄζυμον)¹².

Other details show the same thing: that the Jewish Passover has not celebrated at the Last Supper. Washing the feet of the

⁹ N. Nicolaescu, *Cele patru Evanghelii, dovadă pentru folosirea pâinii dospite la Sfânta Euharistie*, in "Studii Teologice", no. 9-10 (1951), p. 554.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Simion Todoran, *Sfânta Euharistie (Mt 26, 26-28). Studiu exegetic*, in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română", no. 9-10, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 835-837.

¹² Nicolae Chițescu, Isidor Todoran and I. Petreuță, *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică*, vol. 1, (Bucharest, 1958), p. 868.

disciples would not have been done at that time, had it been united with the celebration of Easter, when everyone had to keep their shoes on their feet, their loins girded and their staff in their hands, ready to travel (Exodus 12, 11).

Judas Iscariot shared the same plate, from which it results the fact that, in addition to roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs, there was also liquid food for dinner, something forbidden at Easter (Exodus 2, 8).

That night was not Easter and because Jesus Christ takes His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane after Supper, temple workers come to arrest him, including many armed people (Exodus 12, 22; Matthew 26, 47).

The very purpose of the Holy Eucharist demands the use of leavened bread. The Holy Eucharist is destined for everyone, both Jews and Gentiles. It is eternal, so that people receive the Eucharist at any time, not just at Easter.

In the practice of the early church the Holy Eucharist was performed with leavened bread. The Acts of the Apostles (2, 42-46; 20, 7) and St. Paul (I Cor. 10, 16; 11, 21), speaking of the Holy Eucharist, call the leavened bread *ἄτρος* = Eucharistic bread, not the unleavened bread = *ἄζυμον*. The early Christians, who devoted themselves to "breaking of bread" in Jerusalem, that is they received the Eucharist, used leavened bread¹³.

Bread is the most complete element – it contains the amino acids and calories necessary for life, being part of our food, our metabolism and, therefore, Jesus Christ our Saviour could not use anything else. The wafer is unleavened, thus, being toxic food¹⁴.

The book *Didache* at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, clearly expressed the idea that in the

¹³ Hristu Andrușos *Simbolica*, translated by Iustin Moiescu, (Craiova, 1955), p. 295.

¹⁴ P. I. David, *Călăuză creștină. Pentru cunoașterea și apărarea dreptei credințe în fața prozelitismului sectant*, (Publishing Bishopric of Arad, Arad, 1987), p. 283.

Eucharist the Church experiences what is promised for the Revelation, that is the eschatological unity of all in Christ: "As this broken bread was scattered over mountains and being gathered together became one, so should Your Church gather from the ends of the world inside your kingdom"¹⁵.

St. Cyprian says: "The Lord called His Flesh bread, which is made of many grains of wheat united"¹⁶. St. Augustine, in his catechism, mentions the bread "which is not made from a single grain, but from more"¹⁷.

Greek theologian Ioannis Zizioulas, in his *The Ecclesial Being*, a book translated into Romanian, asserts the following, inter alia, "naming the local community by the expression *Catholic Church*, was not without any connection. It was the equivalent of clearly indicating that, although the catholicity of the Church is ultimately an eschatological reality, its nature is actually revealed and perceived *hic et nunc* in the Eucharist: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion (koinonia) with the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion with the flesh of Christ? Since there is only one bread we who are many, are one body, because all of us share it." The idea of incorporating "the many" into "One" was from the beginning connected to the "Eucharistic conscience of the Church"¹⁸.

Wine. Fresh grapes wine is the second Eucharistic element, in which little water is poured on Anaphora. The significance of this moment is that in the liturgical perspective of the wine's turning, the saving blood of Christ is not that after death, which is decomposed, but the one that has been shed on the Cross,

¹⁵ *Învățătura celor 12 Apostoli*, chapter 9, 4, translated by D. Fecioru in col. "Părinți și scriitori bisericești", vol. 1, (IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979), p. 29.

¹⁶ St. Cyprian, *Epistle 76*, in PL, III, 1142.

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *Sermons*, 272, 274.

¹⁸ Ioannis Zizioulas, *Ființa eclesială*, translated by Aurel Nae, (Editura Bizantină, Bucharest, 1996), pp. 161-162.

living and life-giving¹⁹. Also, the wine contains tonicity and the more ancient the more eliminates toxicity. The chemical analyses of fresh grapes wine - especially red wine - prove that it has vital virtues, strengthens circulation, regulates blood pressure and helps red cell regeneration.

The practice of mixing wine with water, reminiscent of the blood and water flowing from the pierced side of Christ the Redeemer (John 19, 34) is of apostolic origin. The ancient church fathers and the councils of Carthage (397) - in the 23rd Canon - and then the 5th and 6th ecumenical councils - in the 32nd canon²⁰ testify about this. "The warmth of the Holy Spirit" of the saints, the hot water is a constituent of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher called mixture the second element, mixed drink (χράμα) because the wine is mixed with water²¹. And St. Irenaeus says, "When the mixed glass and the broken bread receive the word of God, the Eucharist - the Flesh and Blood of Christ - is accomplished²²." St. Ambrose says, in relation to mixing water with wine, that "Before the blessing the cup is filled with wine and water, but after the words of Christ work, the blood of Christ, who redeemed the world, is achieved"²³.

¹⁹ Bartolomeu Anania, *Cartea deschisă a împărăției. O însoțire pentru preoți și mireni*, (IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005), p. 45.

²⁰ Simion Todoran, *Sfânta Euharistie (Mt 26, 26-28) ...*, note 13, p. 837.

²¹ St. Justin Martyr and Philosopher, *Apologia întâi*, ch. 65, in "Apologeți de limbă greacă", the collection "Părinți și scriitori bisericești", volume II, (IBMBOR Publishing, Bucharest, 1980), p. 70.

²² Nicolae Chițescu, Isidor Todoran and I. Petreună, *Teologia dogmatică și simbolică...*, p. 873.

²³ *Ibidem*.

4 The Moment of the Transformation of Elements (the Epiclesis)

Jesus Christ took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to His disciples, telling them that "it was His Flesh" what He gave them. From the words of Christ the Redeemer results the fact that, the moment he gave his disciples the bread and wine, those had already been transformed into His Flesh and Blood.

The question is: when and how did Christ our Saviour do the transformation?

Before answering this question, we have to clarify another issue, namely whether the words *ευλογεῖν* and *ευχαρίστειν*, by which both bread and wine characterized Lord's second act, express the same thing. Are they synonymous or not? If yes, then which one has lost its original meaning and received the meaning of the other?

St. Matthew the Evangelist uses the terms above for the description of the miraculous multiplication of the five loaves and two fish, then for the description of the multiplication of the seven loaves and a few little fishes, and finally for the Last Supper: taking the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed (*εὐλογήσῃ*), and brake, and gave to the multitude ... "(Matthew 14, 19). Or: "Taking the bread he blessed it (*εὐλόγησας*) ... And he took the cup and gave thanks (*εὐχαρίστησας*) ... (Matthew 26, 26-28).

Comparing the texts we see that the terms are used to define the same thing: the multiplication of loaves and *ευχαρίστειν* is used both for bread and for the cup.

Christ the Saviour tells his disciples, "τοῦτο ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα μου". If the bread were not transformed, our Saviour would have said οὗτος (ὁ ἄρτος) ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα μου; τοῦτο refers to σῶμα and not ἄρτος, which is masculine; if He referred to ἄρτος, He would have used the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος.

St. Matthew the Evangelist says that when the Saviour gave the cup to his disciples saying: "Drink ye all, for it is (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν) my blood." The conjunction "for" introduces the

motivation "that what is in this cup is my blood", which makes the whole sentence to have the characteristic of an argumentation.

From the structure of the two sentences linked by the conjunction "for" (γάρ), it undoubtedly results that when Christ spoke the words: "Drink ye all", the blood was already present inside the cup. Naturally, the transformation could not have happened than through the act of blessing, which preceded it"²⁴.

The teaching of the Holy Fathers is another means by which we show that the transformation of bread and wine into the Flesh and Blood of Christ took place through the blessings that the Lord has given them. Thus St. Ephrem says: "Lord Jesus gave the bread that his right hand blesses... Take, eat in faith, doubt nothing, for this is my flesh. He took the cup of wine, blessed it, and commanded them to drink, explaining that the cup they drank was His blood"²⁵.

St. Cyril of Alexandria explains that the Saviour said, "This is My Blood", in order to show us that the seen are turned into the Flesh and Blood of the Saviour through an unspeakable act of God, the one who can do anything²⁶." St. Gregory of Nyssa assigns the consecration of bread and wine to the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

St. Athanasius states that "these are mere bread and cup is simple as long as prayers and invocations are not held. But as soon as they (i.e. prayers) were raised, the Word descends on the bread and cup, and transforms them into the Flesh and Blood"²⁷.

²⁴ Nicolae Popoviciu, *Epicleza euharistică*, Sibiu, 1933, pp. 41-42.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, notes 1, 2, pp. 46-47.

²⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comentariu la Evanghelia de la Matei*, in PG 72, col. 452.

²⁷ St. Athanasius the Great, P.G., 26, col. 1325 and 86, col. 2401; Origen's *Contra Cels*, P. G., 11, col. 1565: "We thank the Creator of all, eat the brought bread being thankful and praying, and who became holy, sanctifying those who use it with healthy conscience".

The transformation of bread and wine into the Flesh and Blood of Christ is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, when the prayer of invocation is uttered by the achiever as we have explained it above.

Epiclesis is the central moment of the Eucharistic Sacrifice; when it is utterance the "Eucharistic miracle" occurs, i.e. the Holy Spirit comes down on the offered gifts and turns them into the Flesh and Blood of Christ²⁸.

5 Holy Eucharist in the Gospel of St. John

Unlike the Synoptic writers, although he refers broadly to what happened the night of the Last Supper, St. John the Evangelist does not offer us an account of the establishment of the Holy Eucharist. Some put this "absence", this omission on the care that St. John had for the establishing words lest they should be desecrated. According to others, writing his gospel at the end of the 1st century, when the Gentiles, hearing about the communion with the Flesh and Blood of Christ, accused the Christians of anthropophagy (cannibalism), St. John avoids writing in the gospel the words of the Saviour regarding the bread and the Eucharistic cup²⁹. In *The Teaching of the 12 Apostles* (Didache) we find a very important testimony regarding Eucharistic discipline during the period when St. John was writing his gospel "... on the cup (so to do, so to speak n.n): Thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus, Your Son ... Let no one eat or drink from our Eucharist, but (only) those who were baptized in the name of God. Because the Lord said

²⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *L' Orthodoxie*, (Neuchâtel, Suisse et Paris, 1965), pp. 249-250.

²⁹ Vasile Mihoc, *Sfânta Evanghelie de la Ioan. Introducere și comentariu*, vol. 1, (Teofania Publishing, Sibiu, 2003), p. 156.

about this: "Do not give dogs what is holy"³⁰. The author of the fourth gospel reproduces instead wonderful sermon on the bread of life, thus offering us the most beautiful and rich text in the entire New Testament that speaks of the Holy Eucharist.

"Labour not for the meat which perished, but for that meat which which endured unto everlasting life which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed ..." And Jesus said unto them: I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst "(John 6, 27; 6, 35).

Of course the food is helpful, especially nowadays when, as in the days of the Saviour, there are many hungry people. Only Christ the Saviour wants to draw attention to a very special fact, namely that a man who seeks God must seize another meaning of the concept of food: that of an everlasting food, given by Him, which gives you the strength to obtain "eternal life" from God the Father. Working for the imperishable food, means to get closer to Christ, who can provide this food.

"This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (John 6, 50). But although it is given for eternal life, yet it is offered visibly. Christians who will receive the Eucharist, the flesh of the Son of God made Man, will experience eternal life. Receiving the Eucharist is of vital importance for the salvation of the believer. "The one that receives the Eucharist, benefits from Father's kingdom. The one who does not, remains outside the Incarnate Son. The Eucharist is a spiritual work that you desire to caress your heart and fortify your will for Christ, so that you desire Him with all the powers of your being"³¹.

³⁰ *Scrierile Părinților Apostolici*, translated, notes and indices by Dumitru Fecioru, (IBMBOR Publishing, Bucharest), p. 29.

³¹ Leon Arion, *50 de Omilii la Sfânta Evanghelie după Ioan*, ASA Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p.222.

6 The Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ, a Condition of Salvation (John 6: 51-59)

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum."

"The living bread" is synonym for "bread of life". St. John the Theologian uses such metaphors as "living water" (John 4, 10, 11) and "water of life" (Rev. 21, 6; 22, 1, 17). If anyone eats of this bread shall live. The next verse reaches climax of the revelation of Christ the Bread: This is My Flesh. St. John the Theologian uses the future form of the verb: "I will give". The sentence thus announces the work of Christ the glorified by the faithful to share the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Having only once sacrificed Himself for the life of the world, Christ will continually give himself to the people as the real bread, through the Holy Eucharist.

St. John uses the noun σάρξ = meat, not σῶμα = flesh as used by the Synoptic writers and by St. Paul. St. John's preference for this term could also be explained by an apologetic intent: against dochet heretics who claimed that Jesus had only one apparent body. In the prologue to the Fourth Gospel (1, 14) is used the same σάρξ in the statement about the incarnation of the Logos to refer to the material composition of the human body of Christ. As fully human, with flesh and blood, Christ

sacrifices himself "for the life of the world"; but with the sacrifice of His flesh, He eternally feeds the faithful³².

Verse 55 explains why the one who receives the Holy Eucharist has eternal life. Because: "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." Through the Holy Eucharist is performed the most intimate and complete union between Christ and the believer who receives it: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

Just as the Father is the source of life of the Son, so whoever receives the Eucharist actually participates in the divine life, common for Father and Son. Therefore, the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is presented closely connected to the mystery of the person and life of Jesus Himself.

7 The main Meanings of the Holy Eucharist

7.1 Unique Sacrifice for the entire mankind

7.1.1 The Holy Eucharist is not only a sacrament, but it is also the atoning sacrifice for the living and for the dead that is the very re-enactment of Calvary.

The sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist results from Jesus Christ's hierarchical dignity. St. Paul presents Christ our Saviour as High Priest, after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrew 7, 17, 21, 24, 25), who did not spare his life, but gave himself to ransom us (Hebrew 8, 6; 9, 24-25, Colossians 1, 4). "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. 11, 26).

Jesus Christ's priesthood replaces the temporary priesthood of the Old Testament. His sacrifice is an act of love and intercession, passing from death to life (Hebrew 10, 10). Christ, "the Great and Holy Easter" gave himself willingly, He was sent to death: "He has brought himself like an innocent lamb to the slaughter and like a dumb sheep without in front of those who

³² Vasile Mihoc, *Sfânta Evanghelie de la Ioan...*, p. 172.

shear it, so did He not to open His mouth." His sacrifice is not only a repairing, ransoming aspect, but it represents the passing from death to life³³.

St. Paul tells us that God "brings a one-time sacrifice for sins", meaning that Lord Jesus Christ sacrifices himself in the Eucharist for God the Father and the communion with him represents the communion with his sacrifice: "Are not they which eat of the sacrifices, he says, partakers of the altar? Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons; we have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle "(I Cor. 10, 18-21, Hebrews 13, 10).

7.1.2 The Holy Tradition testifies to the sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist. Holy Eucharist is "our Sacrifice", "the new Sacrifice of the New Testament" in which "Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to the Father first and commanded that this be done to His remembrance" and "to be sacrificed himself instead of the animals that were sacrificed in the Old Testament," because "He who sacrifices, is sacrifice himself, and wanted the Sacrament that is celebrated daily to be the sacrifice of the Church"³⁴.

Canon 18 of the First Ecumenical Council states: "On the Holy Mass is sitting the Lamb of God, the one who takes away the sins of the world and is sacrificed by Lord's servants as bloodless sacrifice." Canon 28 of the 5th/6th ecumenical council states the following: "In church we perform the holy and life-giving bloodless sacrifice, and we believe that the precious flesh and blood is the very Flesh and Blood of the Word, who gives life to all"³⁵.

³³ Ion Bria, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, (Bucharest, IBMBOR, Publishing, 1981), p. 160.

³⁴ Nicolae Chițescu, Isidor Todoran and I. Petreună, *Teologia dogmatică specială și simbolică*, p. 180.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

Also, ever since early Christian centuries, the sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist is confirmed by the existence of shrines (the altars) in churches, as shown by the scenes painted in the catacombs³⁶. "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that it is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8, 34).

7.2 Christ's real presence in the Eucharistic bread and wine

Jesus Christ is really present in the very Flesh and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Our Saviour tells us about his real presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, when he says that unless "we eat His Flesh and Blood, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven." In regard of this St. Paul says: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ? (I Cor. 10, 16). Commenting upon this verse, Saint John Chrysostom says the following: "what is in the glass is the very blood that flowed from His side and from that blood we receive the Eucharist³⁷." The Eucharist is "our most Bread for being" the substance to maintain the being, food for eternal life (John 6.54). Christ receives the Eucharist also with the power of the Holy Spirit, in its entire personal reality, as "food of the faithful", as Christians become "part of his body and blood"³⁸.

St. John Chrysostom, in his comments to the New Testament, speaking of the "new wine" that Lord Jesus will drink in the kingdom of His Father, says that "the Saviour spoke of His body after the Resurrection, the one that will also be in the Holy Eucharist, as being without sufferance and incorruptible³⁹."

³⁶ Simion Todoran, *Sfânta Euharistie (Mt 26, 26-28)*, pp. 840-841.

³⁷ John Chrysostom, *Comentariile sau explicarea epistolei I către Corinteni*, translated by The Archimandrite T. Athanasiu, Bucharest, 1908, p. 321.

³⁸ Ion Bria, *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă*, pp. 160-161.

³⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Euharistiei*, in "Ortodoxia", 21st year (1969), no. 3, p. 98.

Also, Nicholas Cabasila says that "what is sacrificed is not bread, but the very Body of Christ⁴⁰." And this presence is not only the body and blood, but Christ is present with his soul and divinity, that is his whole being⁴¹.

7.3 Between the Eucharist and the Church - the Body of Christ, is an organic link

The Christian community is a Eucharistic community. It brings sacrifice of praise and without blood both for the invisible Church (Virgin Mary, the righteous of the Old Testament, the New Testament apostles and saints), as an act of thanksgiving, and for the visible church as an act of request. It brings all and for all, Christ himself being "the one who brings himself, who is offered and he who receives the Eucharist". The existence and mission of the Church as the Body of Christ are inseparably linked to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

The priest or the bishop pronounces the epiclesis in the name of the Church. This is the prayer of consecration of the whole community: "Let your Spirit come upon us and upon these gifts that are put forward." The Eucharist is for the community, the fruit of the Eucharistic life is for the world. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is celebrated in the name of all creation, but only the members of the body of Christ, incorporated in Christ through Baptism and Chrismation and living their life in Christ, can take part in the Holy Sacraments⁴².

7.4 The Eucharist – earnest of future life

In St. John of Damascus' opinion the Eucharist is the earnest of the future life as the Body of Christ is full of life-giving Spirit. "The bread and wine are also called antitypes of the future

⁴⁰ Nicolae Cabasila, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieștii Liturghii*, trans. by Ene Braniște, Bucharest, 1946, p. 82.

⁴¹ Simion Todoran, *Sfânta Euharistie (Mt 26, 26-28) ...*, p. 840.

⁴² Ion Bria, *Destinul Ortodoxiei*, (Bucharest, IBMBOR Publishing, 1989), p. 75.

ones, not because they are not Christ's real body and blood, but because all these will be fully revealed the eschatological day, which is now covered and hidden in the form of bread and wine. Therefore, the liturgical assembly, after receiving the sacraments, prays: "Allow us to receive You, most of all on the undying day of thy kingdom⁴³." Then the saints will be discovered "the food" that Christ the Saviour speaks about: "I have meat to eat that ye not know of" (John 4, 32).

8 Conclusions

1. Our Saviour Jesus Christ established the Sacrament of the Eucharist on Thursday evening, the 13th of Nisan, at the Last Supper he takes with His apostles before His Passion.

2. The elements of the Holy Eucharist are: leavened bread and not unleavened bread, and fresh grapes wine⁴⁴. It was like this that it was established by Christ the Saviour and that is how it was performed by the apostles and their successors up to our days.

3. The unseen performer of the Sacrament is Jesus Christ himself, who sacrifices himself for us. But it was Christ the Saviour who commanded and gave power to the Apostles and their successors – priests and bishops – to perform the Holy Eucharist (Luke 22, 19; I Cor. 11, 24).

4. The transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Saviour was achieved through the act of blessing them done by Christ the Saviour. Therefore, the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, when the prayer of invocation is uttered by the performer.

⁴³ St. John of Damascus, *Dogmatica*, IIIrd edition, trans. by D. Fecioru, (Bucharest, Scripta Publishing, 1993), pp. 164-170.

⁴⁴ Nicolae Cabasila, *Tâlcuirea Dumnezeieştii Liturghii*, p. 94.

5. Jesus Christ is really present with His very Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

6. Holy Eucharist is not only a sacrament but also an atoning sacrifice for the living and the dead that is the reenactment of the sacrifice on Golgotha, itself.

7. One of the many results that the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist has is the remission of sins. Corpus Christi heals the wounds of our body and soul.

8. Through the Sacrament of the Eucharist that ecclesial unity of all the members of Christ is accomplished. By receiving the Eucharist, Christ abides in us and us in Him⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ Simion Todoran, *Sfânta Euharistie (Mt 26, 26-28) ...*, p. 843.