

# The Sacrament of the Altar 1: Its Nature

*What is the Sacrament of the Altar?*

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

*Where is this written?*

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

In different churches across Christendom, the word "Communion" conjures up different images. In Protestant churches, they interpret Jesus' words in the Upper Room to mean that He is saying the bread and wine represent His body and blood. So, they view Communion symbolically as an Ordinance, a confession of faith, a memorial supper. Since it has no real power for them, they may celebrate it monthly, or even only at Christmas and Easter. Or maybe not at all. Many also interpret "the fruit of the vine" as grape juice and use that instead of wine.

The Roman, Orthodox, and Lutheran churches take Jesus' words literally and teach "real presence." However, they differ in the way the body and blood are present. The Roman and Orthodox teach the doctrine of Transubstantiation, which says that at the words of institution, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. This uses Aristotelian logic which says that they have the substance of body and blood, but retain the accidents of bread and wine, that is, the appearance and taste of bread and wine. Following Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 10:16**, *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?* we teach that at the words of institution, God mysteriously unites the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine.

The biggest difference between Roman Communion and Lutheran Communion is the action taking place. For the Romans, it is an upward action. They see themselves as participating in a sacrifice, earning grace by partaking in the body and blood. For Lutherans, it is a means of grace. The action is a downward one as God forgives our sins and strengthens our faith through the body and blood of Christ. This is Holy Communion.