

## ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ — The new manna

In the first installment of “The Eucharist: The Source and Summit” we focused on the doctrine of Jesus’ Real Presence and on prefigurations of the Eucharist in the Old Testament. In this second installment we now turn to the New Testament and will focus on the scriptural scenes and passages that pave the way for the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

Early in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus teaches his disciples to pray the “Our Father.” (Mt 6:9-15) It’s interesting that, in the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus invites us to pray for food: “give us this day our daily bread.” This seems the most “human” or “practical” of all seven petitions in the prayer. Later in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells us to “not be anxious about your life or what you shall eat” (Mt 6:25), yet he invites us to pray for what is necessary each day. Is it possible that Jesus is referring to a “daily bread” that is both physical and spiritual?

The fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer and Jesus’ teaching against anxiety acknowledge our earthly needs but they also call us to turn our cares and worries over to God. We rest in God’s providence and we are called to have faith — an attitude of trust in the presence of God and openness to his will. It is not a blind trust, but an assent to what has been revealed to us.

So, while there is clearly a straightforward, earthly sense to this petition, there are deeper and higher dimensions as well.

The earthly sense is that we need sustenance to survive, and we should trust that God will take care of us. As St. Cyprian (d. 258 AD) observes: anyone who asks for bread each day is poor. In other words, the prayer presupposes the poverty of the disciples — those who have renounced the world, who seek no security other than God and pray for the fulfillment of his kingdom.

The deeper dimension is found in the context of the Exodus, when the People of God, wandering in the desert, were fed by God himself with “manna from heaven.” Jesus referred back to that story when he said, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4; Deut 8:3). In this context, “our daily bread” is the Eucharist, the new manna from heaven.

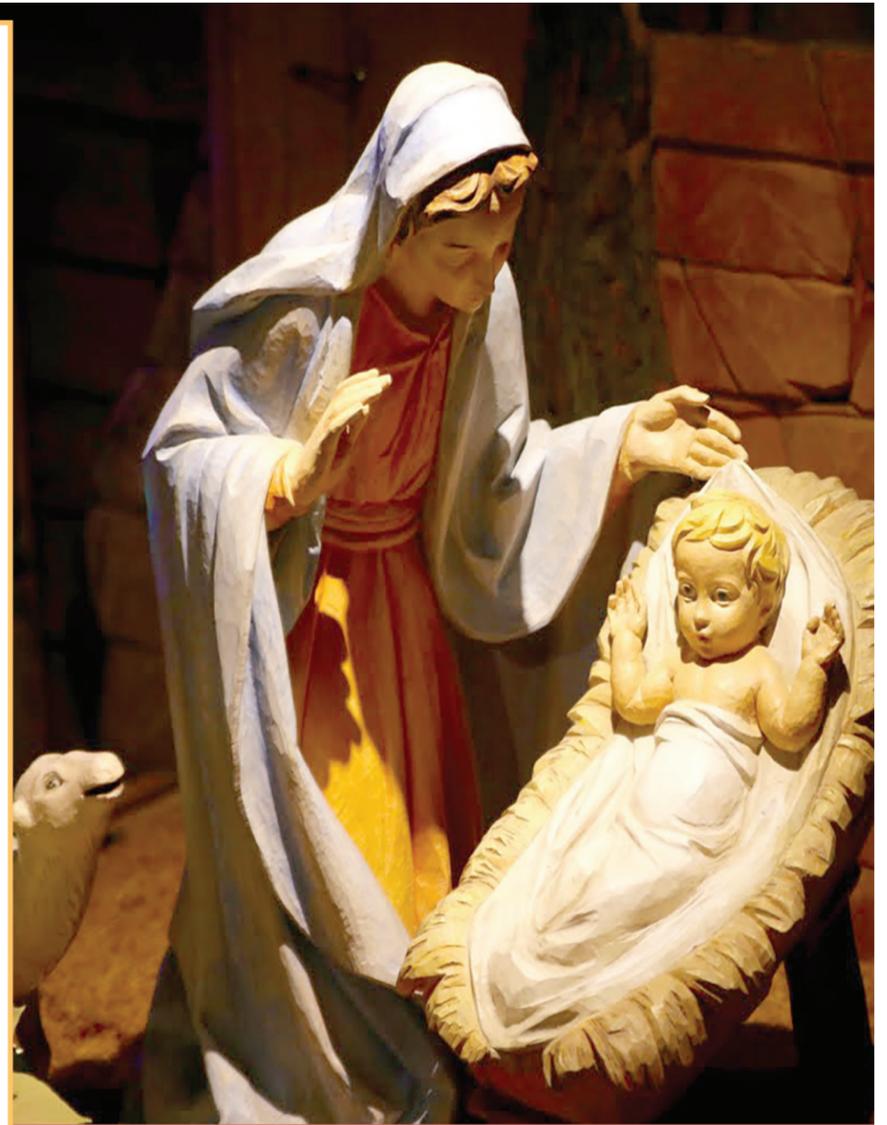
In the fifth chapter of his book, “Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration” (Ignatius Press, 2007), Pope Benedict XVI points out that the Fathers of the Church were practically unanimous in understanding the fourth petition of the Our Father as a Eucharistic petition. “[I]n this sense the Our Father figures into the Mass liturgy as a Eucharistic table-prayer (i.e. ‘grace’).” (“Jesus of Nazareth,” pg. 154) In other words, the Our Father is our prayer before the meal at our Lord’s Table.

When Jesus feeds 5,000 people by miraculously multiplying bread we are reminded, again, of the miracle of manna in the desert. In the ancient Jewish tradition it was believed that manna was originally from the Garden of Eden but, after the fall of man, was taken away and stored in heaven. Therefore, manna was a perfect food unaffected by sin, and only appeared when God sent a mediator to deliver his people from slavery. It was also believed that the Messiah who was to come would be a new Moses and would bring with him a new manna. In the Bread of Life discourse (Jn 6:35-59), Jesus repeatedly refers to “manna from heaven,” using it to explain to his disciples how they would be able to eat his flesh and drink his blood. It seems just that the new manna provided by the Messiah would be even more miraculous than the ancient manna provided in the wilderness. Jesus said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (Jn 6:51) When Jesus was in danger of losing many disciples because of this hard teaching he said, “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” (Jn 6:55)

New Testament scholars widely agree that Jesus is speaking here about the Eucharistic food and drink that he will give the disciples at the Last Supper. If we consider Jesus’ words in the Bread of Life discourse from an ancient Jewish perspective then the Eucharist could never be just a symbol, it must be supernatural bread from heaven. The Eucharist is a gift of himself that Jesus left behind for all time for the people of the New Testament — us. He left us himself in his sacrifice offered under the appearance of bread and wine. It is a manifestation of his boundless love. It is a uniquely intense fulfillment of the promise: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)

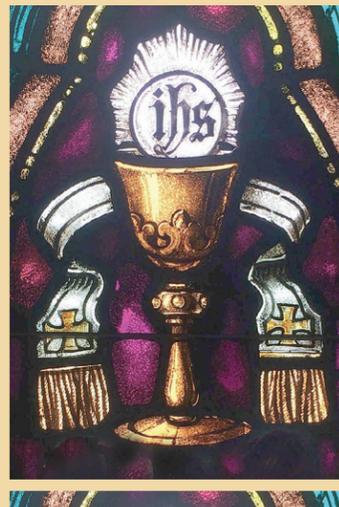
In the Gospels, when Jesus speaks of bread or uses bread to perform a miracle there is always a transcendent message that mankind’s true food is the Logos, the eternal Word. In the Blessed Sacrament the Eternal Word becomes true manna for us, a taste of heaven that we can experience this very day. Being in communion with God, we are sharing in the life of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. The Eucharist, our daily bread, is spiritual food for our soul, giving us graces for our journey back to God.

— David Cooley, Co-director and Office Manager,  
Office of Catechesis and Evangelization



The Nativity of Jesus Christ, portrayed in the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption during the Christmas season every year: Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which translates from Hebrew as “House of Bread.” The city of Bethlehem was the first place to harbor he who was to be the Bread of Life for the whole world.

## The Eucharist: The Source and Summit



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## Born in Bethlehem — the ‘House of Bread’

Father Nicholas Rottman

Okay, I’ll admit it, “O little town of the House of Bread” does not have quite the same ring to it as “O little town of Bethlehem.” But, although not helpful for singing, it may be very helpful for our faith to know that “Bethlehem” means exactly that. The name is old Hebrew and comes from beth (house) and lehem (bread). As Christians, we recognize immediately the significance. Bethlehem, the “House of Bread,” was the place where Jesus Christ entered the world on that first Christmas morning. How does Jesus describe himself later on in his public ministry? “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger; and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (Jn. 6:35). In this passage, Jesus emphasizes that he is the nourishment, the food that we as believers need to strengthen us as we make our pilgrimage through this land of exile. But what sort of nourishment is this? Is it just a purely spiritual nourishment? No.

By the time of Jesus’ birth, Hebrew was not the spoken language of the Jewish people, but rather Arabic. Interesting, the Arabic equivalent of beth lehem is bet lahm, which means “house of meat.” You just can’t make this stuff up! Jesus promises that he will feed us not just by some spiritual power or grace but also with his own flesh and blood: “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. [...] This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” (Jn 6:55-56, 58) In the holy Eucharist, Jesus provides food for the world — the food of his body, blood, soul and divinity. And God symbolically prefigured all of this through the name of the town where he was born. Christ, born in the House of Bread, has become our food for the journey of life.

This Christmas, we should have a new appreciation of the Nativity Scene thanks to the meaning of “Bethlehem.” There in a manger — a container for holding food and feeding hungry animals — lays the Bread of Life who will sacrifice his flesh to give us new

life. Bethlehem is truly both the House of Bread from Heaven and the House of the meat of Christ’s body. Indeed, this is why it is so important that we celebrate Christmas (Christ-Mass) by attending holy Mass and receiving the Body of Christ in holy Communion.

As we prepare for that celebration through the Advent season, let us remember that Christ can come to us every day — every day can be Christmas — because of the holy Eucharist. St. Bernard of Clairvaux said that there are three comings of Jesus Christ (see *Sermo 5, In Adventu Domini*, 1-3). The first, which we are preparing to celebrate

at Christmas, is his coming as man at the Incarnation. The second, which we look forward to with a mixture of anticipation and fear, is his coming to judge the living and the dead at the end of the world. In between these two comings, said St. Bernard, is a third coming. That is Jesus’ mysterious and sacramental coming to us in the most holy Eucharist. By our worthy reception, may we ourselves become a new Bethlehem — a house of the Bread of Life and a house of the meat of Christ’s body in the most holy Eucharist.

*Father Nicholas Rottman is a priest in the Diocese of Covington, currently on sabbatical.*



## The feeding of the five thousand and the Eucharist

Father Ryan Stenger

The only one of the miracles of Jesus that is included in all four of the Gospel accounts is his feeding of the crowd of five thousand with miraculously multiplied bread and fish. Obviously this event greatly affected the first Christians and was influential in forming their understanding of the Lord’s identity and mission.

In the Gospel according to John, the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is reported at the beginning of the sixth chapter and is followed by the Lord’s famous Bread of Life discourse, in which Christ explains to the crowd his teaching on the Eucharist, thus drawing a strong connection between the miraculous feeding of the crowd and the sacrament of his Body and Blood that he would institute at the Last Supper. The evangelist also emphasizes this connection in his description of the time and place of the miracle. St. John writes, “Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples” (John 6:3). So often throughout the Bible the mountaintop is where God and man come together most profoundly. Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, the prophet Elijah spoke to God in the silent whisper on Mt. Horeb, Christ himself was transfigured in glory on Mt. Tabor, and crucified on Calvary. According to the ancient imagination, the mountain was the place where heaven and earth meet, the symbol of God reaching down to us as we reach up to him.

And St. John also writes, “The Jewish feast of Passover was near” (John 6:4). It was on Passover that the sacrificial lambs were put to death in remembrance of God’s liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. Of course, Christ would die on the Cross at Passover time, as the true Lamb of God whose sacrifice saves us from death and lib-

erates us from slavery to sin. And so, with these details, St. John is showing that the miracle that Christ performed in feeding this massive crowd was not simply a matter of providing ordinary food, but that it was symbolic of something much more, that the bread he gave them prefigured

the Bread of Life about which he would go on to teach them, the Eucharist — the place where heaven and earth meet, the unbloody re-presentation of the sacrifice of the Cross, the Lord’s sacred Body offered up and his precious Blood poured out.

It’s easy to imagine that enormous crowd of five thousand  
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Parishioners at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, Burlington, participate in Mass.

# The Bread of Life discourse — have you come to believe?

Father Michael Comer

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you will not have life within you.” Jesus spoke these words to a group of his disciples — those who had already begun to follow him, and who had at least the beginnings of faith in him. But these words shocked them to the core. The very idea of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus was totally repulsive to them. In fact, they were, as Jews, forbidden to have any contact with blood at all. It made them ritually unclean. And so, they turned away from him. We are told that they returned to their former ways of life. They abandoned him, and refused to have any more to do with him. This was just too much.

We read this account in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John — what is called the Bread of Life discourse. It is a dialogue between Jesus and his followers, who have experienced the miracle of the multiplication of the bread and fishes, and want him to continue to provide for their physical sustenance. Jesus explains that they have missed the point. God wishes to feed them with bread from heaven that will give them eternal life. “Give us this bread

always,” they respond.

Jesus then begins to explain to them that he himself is the Bread from Heaven. He is the only one who can satisfy the deepest hungers of the human heart. Only he can give them eternal life. If they eat this bread they will never be hungry again. They will never thirst again. They are shocked, because they have never heard this kind of talk from a rabbi before. Each of them taught about God and how God would satisfy their deepest longings. But Jesus is saying that he himself will fulfill their deepest longings. This is scandalous at best, and blatant heresy at worst. Who does he think he is? Who, indeed!

only this teaching but also him. He loved them. He had come in order to redeem them, and to be

the food that would satisfy them, and make them into the children of God. It must have broken his heart. Couldn't he have tried a little harder to hold on to them, and not let them leave? Couldn't he have softened his teaching just a little bit, so that it would have been less shocking and upsetting to them? But he didn't. He let them walk away. If they could not accept this teaching, they could not be his disciples. This was that important.

We then see Jesus look with sadness to the Twelve. His words are filled with hurt and disappointment and fear: “Are you going to leave me, too?” My guess is that the

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sand following the Lord across the Sea of Galilee and up the mountain. They surely must have been hungry and weary and maybe even lost and confused. How many times throughout their lives had they sought for a way to satisfy their hunger, for a place to find rest, for a source of guidance and direction, but been left unfulfilled in the end? But now they have come to Christ. And after they have been fed by him, St. John tells us that they “had their fill” and still there were twelve baskets of bread left over (John 6:12). That crowd stands for all of mankind, because we all have a profound spiritual hunger; a longing for more than what the world can give. Our hearts reach out towards the infinite, the transcendent, the divine, because God has made us for himself. Only in him are we able to have our fill, so to speak.

And it is in the Eucharist that he gives himself to us as food to sustain us on our journey towards him, as the only food that is able to satisfy that most fundamental longing of our hearts. If it were merely a symbol, it would not be enough, but the Lord gives himself to us truly in the Eucharist — his Body and Blood, his soul and divinity. And he gives himself to us not simply in a momentary way during the liturgy, but he remains with us always in the Tabernacle. His presence abides in our midst; he lives within his Church, so that we always have access to him, so that we're always able to find our sustenance in communion with him.

The Second Vatican Council taught that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (Lumen Gentium, n. 11). It is in the Eucharist that God lives among us — from him do our lives come and to him are our lives directed. He must indeed be the source and summit of our lives, as a Church, as a diocese, as parishes, as families, as individuals. But sometimes we lose sight of that. It seems so common to hear the Church spoken of as a sort of social service agency, which exists to run hospitals, and schools, and soup kitchens, but then for it to be forgotten that her primary purpose, the reason for all of her activity, is the worship of God. A parish, for example, can do all sorts of great things, but if it doesn't draw its people closer to Christ in the Eucharist, then it has completely failed in its mission. And it is the same way in our individual lives. We can become so consumed with activity and busy-ness, even good and important and necessary things, that we lose sight of God living in our midst, that we sometimes even tell ourselves that we don't have time to spend with him and worship him. Sometimes we look for our sustenance and satisfaction in other places; sometimes we direct our lives to other ends.

But the Lord's miraculous feeding of the five thousand reminds us that only he can truly feed us, only he can satisfy the restlessness of our hearts. May we never look for our happiness apart from him who lives with us always in the Eucharist, so that we might live at all times with him as the source and summit of all that we do.

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In this Messenger file photo, priests from the Diocese of Covington pray before the Blessed Sacrament during the August Holy Hour for Victims of Abuse and Sanctification of Priests.

At this point in the discourse, Jesus changes the metaphors. He no longer speaks of bread from heaven, but of his own flesh and blood. “The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” This is even more shocking. “How can he give us his flesh to eat? What can this possibly mean?” And now Jesus becomes even more shocking in his statements.

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you will have no life in you.” Now he is not only talking about eating his flesh, but drinking his blood. How repulsive! How disgusting! How offensive! Jesus keeps pushing the issue, not softening his words in any way. In fact, he doubles down, beginning to use a new word for “eat”, which is typically used to refer to a dog gnawing on a bone. “My flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh (whoever gnaws on my flesh like a dog gnawing on a bone) and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”

It is at this moment that the line had been crossed. Jesus had gone too far. It is one thing to say that God will provide for his children. It is something else for Jesus to identify himself with God and tell them that he would provide for them. If Jesus had said that God had sent him to provide for his people that would have been somewhat acceptable. But when Jesus essentially made himself equal to God that was too much. And when he said that we must eat his body and drink his blood, that was really too much. But now, he has become even more graphic, even more literal, telling us that we must actually gnaw or chew on his flesh and drink his blood — this is a bridge too far.

I am certain that Jesus must have felt a great sadness as he watched these followers of his turn away, and reject not

Apostles were just as shocked and confused by this teaching as were those in the crowd. They too were repulsed and repelled by the idea of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood. They were shaken to the core. And yet Peter responds, for all of them, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe that you are the Holy One of God.” In other words, “We don't get this either. It makes no sense to us. But we know and believe in you, and so we are staying. We trust you.”

Some studies state that on any given Sunday, only about 20 percent of those who identify as Catholic attend Mass. And only about half attend with any regularity at all. There are many reasons for this, but I believe that one of the main reasons is that in their heart, many Catholics do not believe what Jesus tells us in this Bread of Life discourse. “I am the Bread that has come down from heaven. ... I am the Bread of Life. ... Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. If you eat this bread, you will live forever. ... This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ... Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you will not have life within you. ... My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.”

If we truly believe the words of Jesus and what he is promising to those who eat his flesh and drink his blood, how could we possibly absent ourselves from the Mass?

Let us pray for a rediscovery, by the Catholic people, of the remarkable gift of the Eucharist, the Bread from Heaven, and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ himself.

Father Michael Comer is the pastor of Mother of God Parish, Covington.

# In the sacrament of the Eucharist, why bread and wine?

**Father Daniel Schomaker**

The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.” (CCC 1324) The Church’s teaching in memoriam tells us that contained in the “sacred species” and veiled in the objects of bread and wine, is in fact Jesus Christ! His very body, blood, soul and divinity!

But why when we celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist do we use bread and wine? The simplest explanation is that we are adhering to the command of the Lord when at the Last Supper “He took bread and gave it to his disciples...” and “He took the cup filled with wine ... ‘Do this in memory of me.’” Ultimately as believers this should be enough, but since God has given us a mind let’s delve a little deeper.

After being cast out of the Garden of Eden because of disobedience, God tells man that it is “bread you shall eat, by the sweat of your brow.” (cf. Gen. 3:19) Humanity also offers back to God the “first-fruits” of the field — as seen in the offering of Abel and later in the offering of bread and wine by the priest-king Melchizedek. Prior to their journey into the desert as they fled Egypt, the Israelites ate “unleavened bread”; and when wandering in the desert, it was the manna or “bread from heaven” that God gave to sustain them.

The gift of bread to eat (which we pray for every time we offer the Lord’s Prayer) is a sign of “the pledge of God’s faithfulness to his promises.” (CCC 1334) Or another way to say this is that in the midst of the trials of life and on our pilgrimage towards the “promised land” (Heaven) and in our thanksgiving to God for any and all blessings, it is bread that always sustains us physically and reminds us of God’s closeness.

The gift of wine or “the fruit of the vine” also finds its way into the revelation of salvation history. Just as there was an offering of bread in the Old Testament, so too was there

an offering of wine — often referred to as the “cup of blessing.” At the conclusion of the Jewish Passover meal, this “cup” “adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.” (CCC 1334) We also see, in Jesus’ very first public miracle — the Wedding Feast at Cana — the centrality of wine, where he transforms water into wine, but not just any wine, the very best wine. And this miracle takes place at a joyful celebration.

So, why do we use bread and wine for the celebration of

the Eucharist? 1. Jesus said to; 2. Bread points us to the continual sustenance we receive from the Lord when we cooperate with his grace; 3. Wine points us to the joy of the Gospel and of our eschatological end, heaven; 4. Human beings are a compilation of body and soul; both need to be fed — bread sustains the body; wine sustains the soul.

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In this *Messenger* file photo, students bring the bread and wine forward which will become the Body and Blood of the Lord during Ash Wednesday Mass 2019 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption.

## What does the Eucharist mean to you? What people are saying around the Diocese.



**Mother Margaret Mary Fields, Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ**

*“Our life is surrounded by Eucharistic sacrifice and Eucharistic adoration. Our life is built around the Eucharist ... (at the monastery) we have Eucharistic adoration every day, we expose the Blessed Sacrament every day at 4-5:30 p.m. in the public chapel. We should all be looking*

*forward to going back to Mass because seeing Mass on television is good, but at the same time, you’re not getting the full benefit of the Mass. The Eucharist is so important in all our lives.”*

## Prayer for after receiving Holy Communion:

*Soul of Christ, sanctify me.*

*Body of Christ, save me.*

*Blood of Christ, inebriate me.*

*Water from the side of Christ, wash me.*

*Passion of Christ, strengthen me.*

*O Good Jesus, hear me.*

*Within Thy wounds, hide me.*

*Separated from Thee let me never be.*

*From the malignant enemy, defend me.*

*At the hour of death, call me.*

*To come to Thee, bid me,*

*That I may praise Thee in the company*

*Of Thy Saints, for all eternity*

*Amen.*

*Anima Christi, sanctifica me.*

*Corpus Christi, salva me.*

*Sanguis Christi, inebria me.*

*Aqua lateris Christi, lava me.*

*Passio Christi, conforta me.*

*O bone Iesu, exaudi me.*

*Intra tua vulnera absconde me.*

*Ne permittas me separari a te.*

*Ab hoste maligno defende me.*

*In hora mortis meae voca me.*

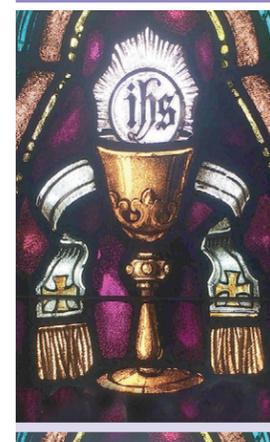
*Et iube me venire ad te,*

*Ut cum Sanctis tuis laudem te*

*in saecula saeculorum.*

*Amen.*

## Study Questions



How can we relate the Christmas story to the Eucharist?

Name two miracles, besides the Eucharist, that Jesus performed with bread or wine.

Where in the Bible do we find the Bread of Life discourse? Why are these passages so unique?

Throughout the entire Bible, what do bread and wine symbolize?