

CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST
IN AN ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
(80 - 215 CE)

The following are excerpts from Early Christian texts describing various Eucharistic liturgical forms celebrated in the first two centuries of Christianity.

Didache, c. 80-140 CE

Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant {the royal, Davidic bloodline}, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever...

And concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church {the body of Christ according to Paul} be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever.

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."

But after you are filled, give thanks this way: We thank Thee, holy Father, for Thy holy name which You didst cause to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You modest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Thou, Master almighty, didst create all things for Thy name's sake; You gavest food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to Thee; but to us You didst freely give spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Thy Servant. Before all things we thank Thee that You are mighty; to Thee be the glory for ever. Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou have prepared for it; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God (Son) of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen. But permit the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire. (9-10)

But every Lord's day [or, "according to the Lord's {instruction?}] gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who is at odds with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations." (14)

Justin Martyr, c. 160 CE

"But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized [illuminated] person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. 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 *genoito* [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." (First Apology LXV)

Irenaeus of Smyrna/Lyons, 180 CE

For we make an oblation to God of the bread and the cup of blessing, giving Him thanks in that He has commanded the earth to bring forth these fruits for our nourishment. And then, when we have perfected the oblation, we invoke the Holy Spirit, that He may exhibit this sacrifice, both the bread the body of Christ, and the cup the blood of Christ, in order that the receivers of these antitypes may obtain remission of sins and life eternal. (Fragments from the Lost Writings)

Hippolytus of Rome, 215 CE

“When he has been made bishop, everyone shall give him the kiss of peace, and salute him respectfully, for he has been made worthy of this. Then the deacons shall present the oblation to him, and he shall lay his hand upon it, and give thanks, with the entire council of elders, saying:

The Lord be with you.

And all reply: And with your spirit.

The bishop says: Raise your hearts.

The people respond: We have them with the Lord.

The bishop says: Let us give thanks to the Lord.

The people respond: It is proper and just.

The bishop then continues: We give thanks to you God, through your beloved son Jesus Christ, whom you sent to us in former times as Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your Will, who is your inseparable Word, through whom you made all, and in whom you were well-pleased, whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a virgin, who, being conceived within her, was made flesh, and appeared as your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin. It is he who, fulfilling your will and acquiring for you a holy people, extended his hands in suffering, in order to liberate from sufferings those who believe in you. Who, when he was delivered to voluntary suffering, in order to dissolve death, and break the chains of the devil, and tread down hell, and bring the just to the light, and set the limit, and manifest the resurrection, taking the bread, and giving thanks to you, said, “Take, eat, for this is my body which is broken for you.” Likewise the chalice, saying, “This is my blood which is shed for you. Whenever you do this, do this (in) memory of me.”

Therefore, remembering his death and resurrection, we offer to you the bread and the chalice, giving thanks to you, who has made us worthy to stand before you and to serve as your priests. And we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit to the oblation of your Holy Church. In their gathering together, give to all those who partake of your holy mysteries the fullness of the Holy Spirit, toward the strengthening of the faith in truth, that we may praise you and glorify you, through your son Jesus Christ, through whom to you be glory and honor, Father and Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your Holy Church, now and throughout the ages of the ages. Amen.” (The Apostolic Tradition, 3-4)