



When Catholics affirm that bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ during the Holy Mass, we are not defending a medieval doctrine invented centuries after the Apostles. Nor is it merely a symbolic interpretation or a pious devotion that developed over time. Faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is rooted in the very words of Our Lord, in apostolic teaching, and in the constant witness of the Fathers of the Church.

Among those great witnesses stands an extraordinary figure: **St. John Damascene** (also known as John of Damascus), one of the most important theologians of the East and one of the last great Fathers of the Church. He lived during the seventh and eighth centuries, long before the word “transubstantiation” was officially defined by the Church in the Middle Ages, and yet he taught with remarkable clarity exactly what Catholics continue to believe today.

His teaching constitutes overwhelming historical evidence against the idea that Catholic Eucharistic doctrine is a late innovation. At the same time, it offers profound spiritual guidance for the faithful of our own age, who live in a time marked by the loss of a sense of the sacred and a decline in Eucharistic faith.

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## Who Was St. John Damascene?

St. John Damascene was born around the year 675 in the city of Damascus, then under Muslim rule.

He came from an influential Christian family and received an exceptional education in philosophy, theology, science, and literature. After serving for a time in the civil administration, he left public life and entered the Monastery of Saint Sabbas near Jerusalem.

There he carried out an immense intellectual and spiritual mission.

He is especially known for:

- Defending the veneration of sacred images during the Iconoclastic Controversy.
- Systematizing patristic theology.
- Writing foundational works on the Christian faith.
- Being regarded as one of the greatest Doctors of the Eastern Church.

His most famous work, **The Fountain of Knowledge**, is one of the most important



theological syntheses of Christian antiquity.

What is remarkable is that when he speaks about the Eucharist, he does so with a doctrinal precision that seems to anticipate later dogmatic definitions.

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## The Great Question: What Really Happens at Mass?

This question has accompanied the Church from the very beginning.

When the priest pronounces the words of consecration:

| *“This is My Body”*

| *“This is My Blood”*

Does something real happen?

Or is it merely a symbol?

For St. John Damascene, the answer was unequivocal:

**A true and supernatural transformation takes place.**

We are not dealing with a representation, a figure, or a mere memorial.

We are encountering Jesus Christ Himself.

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# The Words of Christ Are Not a Metaphor

St. John Damascene begins with a simple idea.

God does not lie.

Therefore, when Christ says:

| *“This is My Body,”*

He does not mean:

| *“This represents My Body.”*

When He says:

| *“This is My Blood,”*

He is not saying:

| *“This symbolizes My Blood.”*

The saint writes:

| *“The bread and wine are not a figure of the Body and Blood of Christ; God forbid! They are the very Body of the Lord, deified.”*

This statement is extraordinarily strong.



It leaves no room for purely symbolic interpretations.

For him, the Eucharist is truly Jesus Christ present under the sacramental appearances.

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## The Creative Power of the Word of God

St. John Damascene employs a profoundly biblical argument.

He reminds us that God created the universe through His word.

Genesis tells us:

| *“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)*

If the divine word could create the entire cosmos out of nothing, why could it not transform bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ?

For Damascene, the difficulty does not lie in God’s power but in our limited understanding.

Divine omnipotence infinitely surpasses the capacities of human reason.

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## The Action of the Holy Spirit

An especially important aspect of St. John Damascene’s teaching is the role of the Holy Spirit.

He explains that the Eucharistic transformation takes place through divine action.

He writes:

| *“The Holy Spirit comes down and accomplishes that which*



| *surpasses all word and all thought.”*

Here we find a fundamental element of Eastern theology.

The Eucharistic conversion is not a physical phenomenon that can be observed, nor is it a chemical process.

It is a supernatural action carried out by God.

The senses perceive bread and wine.

Faith recognizes the Savior.

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## A Teaching That Anticipates Transubstantiation

The word “transubstantiation” would appear centuries later as a technical term to explain this reality.

The Church would solemnly define it at the Council of Trent in response to Protestant errors.

Yet the doctrine itself already existed.

St. John Damascene teaches exactly what is essential:

- Bread ceases to be bread.
- Wine ceases to be wine.
- Only the external appearances remain.
- The underlying reality becomes Christ Himself.

This is precisely what later Latin theology would call transubstantiation.

The faith did not change.

Only the technical language used to describe it changed.



## The Support of Sacred Scripture

The teaching of St. John Damascene does not arise from isolated reflection.

It is firmly rooted in Scripture.

### The Bread of Life Discourse

In chapter 6 of the Gospel of John, Christ declares:

*“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world.” (Jn 6:51)*

His listeners react with scandal.

Yet Jesus does not correct what would supposedly be a misunderstanding.

On the contrary.

He insists even more strongly.

*“For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” (Jn 6:55)*

These words constitute one of the foundations of Eucharistic doctrine.

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## The Last Supper

During the Jewish Passover, Christ takes bread and wine and declares:

“Take, eat; this is My Body.” (Mt 26:26)

“Drink ye all of it; for this is My Blood.” (Mt 26:27-28)

St. John Damascene considers these words decisive.

The Church simply believes what Christ said.

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## St. Paul

The Apostle teaches:

“Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord.” (1 Cor 11:27)

If the Eucharist were merely a symbol, this warning would make little sense.

No one can become guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ through a mere symbol.

The gravity of the sin demonstrates the reality of the Presence.

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## A Response for Our Time

We live in an age marked by a profound crisis of Eucharistic faith.

Many baptized Christians:

- No longer believe in the Real Presence.
- View Mass merely as a community gathering.
- Receive Holy Communion without spiritual preparation.
- Have lost their sense of mystery.

In this situation, the voice of St. John Damascene resonates with astonishing relevance.

He reminds us that the altar is not just any table.

The consecrated Host is not an ordinary religious object.

The Mass is not a theatrical reenactment of the Last Supper.

It is the sacrifice of Christ made present sacramentally.

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## Practical Consequences for Spiritual Life

### 1. Recovering a Sense of Wonder

If we truly believe in the Real Presence, every Mass should be an extraordinary event.

We are not merely attending a talk.

We are going to encounter the King of the Universe.

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## 2. Receiving Communion in a State of Grace

The traditional teaching of the Church remains unchanged.

Anyone conscious of mortal sin should first approach the Sacrament of Confession.

St. Paul warns:

*“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself.” (1 Cor 11:29)*

The Eucharist requires spiritual preparation.

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## 3. Caring for Eucharistic Particles

If Christ is truly present, even the smallest fragments of the Host deserve reverence.

This conviction was a constant element of both Eastern and Western liturgical tradition.

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## 4. Practicing Eucharistic Adoration

The logic of faith in the Real Presence naturally leads to adoration.

If Christ is truly present, then worshiping Him outside of Mass is perfectly coherent.

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## 5. Living Eucharistically

Communion does not end when we leave the church.



Christ enters our soul in order to transform it.

The Eucharist should be reflected in:

- Charity.
- Purity of life.
- Prayer.
- The struggle against sin.
- Fidelity to God.

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## The Astonishing Continuity of Catholic Faith

One of the most fascinating aspects of St. John Damascene is seeing how perfectly his teaching corresponds with contemporary Catholic doctrine.

We do not find a different faith.

We do not see a radical doctrinal evolution.

We see the same faith expressed throughout the centuries.

The Church of the eighth century believed exactly what the Church of the twenty-first century believes:

that Jesus Christ is truly, really, and substantially present in the Eucharist.

The theological formulation became more refined over time.

The truth being believed remained unchanged.

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## Conclusion: St. John Damascene Invites Us to Kneel

The great lesson of St. John Damascene is not merely intellectual.

It is profoundly spiritual.

His theology inevitably leads to adoration.

Before the Eucharistic mystery, the proper response is not only to study.

It is to believe.

To love.

To adore.

In a culture that has lost its sense of the sacred, the saint of Damascus reminds us that every time we attend Holy Mass, the greatest miracle on earth takes place: Christ Himself becomes present upon the altar.

Therefore, when we gaze upon a consecrated Host, we should remember the implicit testimony of the entire Catholic tradition, from the Apostles to St. John Damascene:

**We are not before a symbol. We are not before a memory. We are not before a representation. We are before Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, hidden beneath the humble appearances of bread and wine in order to remain with us until the end of time.**

And if this is true—and the Church has professed this truth for twenty centuries—then our entire life should revolve around the tabernacle, because there awaits the One who said:

*“And behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.” (Mt 28:20).*