

**Bible Study**  
**St. Nicholas Orthodox Church – Monongahela, Pa.**  
***THE HOLY EUCHARIST***  
**Session 3**

**I. THE EARLY CHURCH**

- A. read Luke 24:50-53 (p. 1416)

Where did the apostles and early Christians go to worship? Why is this significant?

We see the apostles continuing what Jesus commanded at His Mystical Supper:

see Acts 2:42-47 (p. 1473)

Acts 20:7 (p. 1505)

- B. There is little additional information on how the followers of Jesus celebrated the Eucharist....until St. Paul briefly mentions it in his letter to the Church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (p. 1562)

- C. St. Paul speaks more about the Eucharist when he wrote to address problems in this Church:

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 (p. 1563)

What was the problem in the worship of the Christians of Corinth?

What from this passage indicates that St. Paul and the Corinthians regarded the Eucharist as something much more than a *symbol* or *reminder* of Jesus?

**II. THE FIRST 200 YEARS**

- A. A number of documents have been preserved from the earliest days of Christianity that shed light on how the earliest Christians worshipped and what they believed about the Eucharist.

- B. The *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Didache means “teaching”) is a brief, anonymous early Christian writing, dated by most scholars to the first century A.D. The Didache includes two primitive and unusual prayers for the celebration of the Eucharist. These are the oldest texts that refer to this rite as “*the Eucharist*”.

#### Chapter 9:

“Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup: We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant, which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever. And concerning the broken bread: We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.

But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but they who 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’.” *Matthew 7:6*

#### Chapter 10:

“But after you are filled, thus give thanks: We thank You, holy Father, for Your holy name which You caused to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality, which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant; to You be the glory forever. You, Master almighty, created all things for Your name's sake; You gave food and drink to men for enjoyment, that they might give thanks to You; but to us You freely gave spiritual food and drink and life eternal through Your Servant. Before all things we thank You that You are mighty; to You be the glory forever. Remember, Lord, Your Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Your love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Your kingdom which You have prepared for it; for Yours is the power and the glory forever. 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.”

#### Chapter 14:

“But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance 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.”

Important points:

**C. St. Ignatius of Antioch (80-110 AD)** A bishop and martyr and a disciple of the Apostle John

“Come together in common, one and all without exception in charity, in one faith and in one Jesus Christ, who is of the race of David according to the flesh, the son of man, and the Son of God, so that with undivided mind you may obey the bishop and the priests, and break one Bread which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote against death, enabling us to live forever in Jesus Christ.”

"Consider how contrary to the mind of God are the heterodox in regard to the grace of God which has come to us. They have no regard for charity, none for the widow, the orphan, the oppressed, none for the man in prison, the hungry or the thirsty. They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, the flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His graciousness, raised from the dead."

“I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible”.

Important points:

**D. St. Justin Martyr (165 AD)**

"This food we call the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true, and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and for rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God's Word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the Word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus."

St. Justin left a description of the typical Christian worship in his day:

On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray. On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give assent by

saying, "Amen". The eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons take it to those who are absent. The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution, and they themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress, whether because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need. We hold our common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week, the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world, and because on that same day our savior Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For he was crucified on Friday and on Sunday he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them the things that we have passed on for your consideration."

How does this description mirror our celebration of the Divine Liturgy today?

**E. St. Irrenaeus of Lyons (177 AD)**

"[Christ] has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own Blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own Body, from which he gives increase to our bodies."

"For just as the bread which comes from the earth, having received the invocation of God, is no longer ordinary bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly, so our bodies, having received the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, because they have the hope of the resurrection."

Important points: