

anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 *Cor.* 11:27-28).

Does this sound as though Paul is writing about grape juice and crackers?

As a matter of fact, there is an avalanche of evidence to support the Catholic Church’s understanding of *John* 6: 52-57.

After all this, I can only repeat the well-known words and apply them: “In truth, if we are mistaken, it is you, O Lord, who have led us into error.”

### **The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 652

## ***John 6:52-57***

Victor R. Claveau, MJ

“So Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you;... (v. 53). The word “truly” is defined as “in agreement with fact: truthfully.” “Truly, truly” is a double emphasis expressing the vital importance of the statement. Some translations use the words, “Amen, amen” which are used to express solemn ratification. Either way, Jesus is saying that what follows is of vital importance to his followers. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day”... (v. 54).

Here, Jesus explains that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood, are still mortal, but they receive a pledge of eternal life. In all ages the Church has relied on this promise. The early Fathers taught this in their day, just as it is taught today. In the Eucharist we not only receive the right to rise again on the last day, but even today we receive the beginning of immortality.

“For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”... (vv. 55-56). Other texts, better and more numerous, have “true food... true drink,” which gives a still clearer meaning, as if Jesus would say that his flesh is not merely nourishment, but is indeed real food.

Every word recorded in the Gospels as coming from the mouth of Jesus had import.

Jesus did not waste words and as Scripture states, His words had authority (*Lk. 4:32*). These words of Jesus are tantamount to a command that we must eat his flesh. Certainly, people questioned His words, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52). They obviously understood Jesus correctly and doubted His words. Jesus knew what his listeners were saying and he allowed many to walk away. If it were simply a misunderstanding, Jesus would have had a moral obligation to set them straight. He could have said, “Oh! Come back, I didn’t really mean that you must eat of my body and drink my blood; I only meant this figuratively; that you should do this symbolically.” Instead, He let them go and turned to His Apostles and asked them if they also would leave Him.

In order to properly understand the Holy Scriptures we must go outside of Scripture and compare our understanding to the understanding of those who were taught directly by the Apostles and/or their immediate successors.

Let’s take a look at Ignatius of Antioch. According to tradition, Saint John converted Ignatius to Christianity. Joseph Holzner tells us that when Ignatius was 15 years old he listened to Saint Paul preach in the synagogue of Tarsus, just prior to Saint Paul departing on his first missionary journey to Cyprus (*Paul of Tarsus* [St. Louis: B. Herder Book CO, 1955] 99). According to Saint John Chrysostom, an Apostle ordained Ignatius to the priesthood, and Theodoret, the Bishop of Cyrus (393-457), informs us Saint Peter installed Ignatius as the third bishop of Antioch. Ignatius worked with

Saint John, the “disciple that Jesus loved,” for as many as 30 years. No writer in the history of the early Church has these credentials.

St. Ignatius, also called Theophorus (God Bearer), wrote during the very beginning of the second century. And there was no individual in the early Church with a more comprehensive knowledge of Sacred Tradition.

Ignatius was sentenced during the Emperor Trajan’s reign (98-117) to be devoured by wild beasts in the arena at Rome, because he refused to burn incense before a statue of Trajan as divine emperor. On the way to the Eternal City, he composed seven letters. Of these, five were addressed to the Christian communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. A sixth letter was addressed to his brother bishop, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and the seventh went to the Church in Rome. With the exception of the letter to the Church in Rome, we find Ignatius chastising as well as encouraging the Christian communities.

Ignatius wrote of the “Eucharist”, which is defined as the “Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity” of Jesus Christ under the appearances of bread and wine.

To the Church of the Romans he wrote: “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*” (*Letter to the Romans 7:3* [circa A.D. 110]).

To the Church of the Philadelphians he wrote: “If any man walk about with strange doctrine, he cannot lie down with the passion. Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: *for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of His Blood*; one altar, as there is one bishop with the presbytery and my fellow servants, the deacons.”

To the Church of the Smyrnaeans he wrote: “Take note of those who hold heterodox [heretical] opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God. For love they have no care, nor for the widow, nor for the orphan, nor for the distressed, nor for those in prison or freed from prison, nor for the hungry or thirsty. They abstain from the *Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins which the Father in His goodness raised up again*. They who deny the gift of God are perishing in their disputes.”

These writings of Ignatius are certainly representative of early Christian belief.

Saint Paul wrote, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 *Cor. 10:16*). “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For