



The Eucharist in Scripture

The Eucharist in Scripture

Clifford M. Yeary

with Little Rock Scripture Study staff



LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.littlerockscripture.org

Nihil obstat for the commentary text by Clifford M. Yeary: Reverend Robert C. Harren, J.C.L., *Censor deputatus*.
Imprimatur for the commentary text by Clifford M. Yeary: † Most Reverend Donald J. Kettler, J.C.L., Bishop
of St. Cloud, Minnesota. June 6, 2014.

Cover design by John Vineyard. Interior art by Ned Bustard. Illustrations on pages 71 and 84 courtesy of
Getty Images.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, revised edition*
© 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission
of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in
any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Where noted, Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition © 1989,
1993 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All
rights reserved worldwide.

Excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in
the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved.



This symbol indicates material that was created by Little Rock Scripture Study to supplement the
biblical text and commentary. Some of these inserts first appeared in the *Little Rock Catholic Study*
Bible; others were created specifically for this book by Michael DiMassa.

Commentary by Clifford M. Yeary © 2014, 2020 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. Inserts
adapted from *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, © 2011 by Little Rock Scripture Study, Little Rock, Arkansas;
additional inserts, prayers, and study questions by Little Rock Scripture Study staff, © 2020 by Order of Saint
Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in
any manner whatsoever, except brief quotations in reviews, without written permission of Liturgical Press,
Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, MN 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Yeary, Clifford M., author. | Little Rock Scripture Study Staff.

Title: The Eucharist in Scripture / Clifford M. Yeary ; with Little Rock Scripture Study staff.

Description: Collegeville : Little Rock Scripture Study, Liturgical Press, [2020] | Series: Little rock scripture
study | Summary: "A Bible study exploring the theme of meals shared in faithful fellowship and in
covenant relationship with God. Old Testament meals and promises provide a foundation for gospel
meals with Jesus, culminating in the Last Supper as it is understood throughout the New Testament"—
Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019055167 (print) | LCCN 2019055168 (ebook) | ISBN 9780814665152 (paperback) |
ISBN 9780814665404 (epub) | ISBN 9780814665404 (mobi) | ISBN 9780814665404 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Lord's Supper—Biblical teaching. | Lord's Supper—Study and teaching. | Lord's
Supper—Catholic Church.

Classification: LCC BV825.3 .Y42 2020 (print) | LCC BV825.3 (ebook) | DDC 234/.163—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019055167>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019055168>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	7
What materials will you use?	8
How will you use these materials?	8
Lesson One (Some Old Testament Feasts with God)	11
Lesson Two (A Wedding Feast in the Kingdom of God)	29
Lesson Three (The Last Supper)	45
Lesson Four (The Eucharist in Paul and Acts)	61
Lesson Five (The Eucharist and John's Gospel)	77
Suggested Reading	93
Praying with Your Group	94
Reflecting on Scripture	96



Wrap-Up Lectures and Discussion Tips for Facilitators are available for each lesson at no charge. Find them online at LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/EucharistinScripture.

Welcome

The Bible is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It is the Spirit-inspired word of God for us. It reveals to us the God who created, redeemed, and guides us still. It speaks to us personally and as a church. It forms the basis of our public liturgical life and our private prayer lives. It urges us to live worthily and justly, to love tenderly and wholeheartedly, and to be a part of building God's kingdom here on earth.

Though it was written a long time ago, in the context of a very different culture, the Bible is no relic of the past. Catholic biblical scholarship is among the best in the world, and in our time and place, we have unprecedented access to it. By making use of solid scholarship, we can discover much about the ancient culture and religious practices that shaped those who wrote the various books of the Bible. With these insights, and by praying with the words of Scripture, we allow the words and images to shape us as disciples. By sharing our journey of faithful listening to God's word with others, we have the opportunity to be stretched in our understanding and to form communities of love and learning. Ultimately, studying and praying with God's word deepens our relationship with Christ.

The Eucharist in Scripture

The resource you hold in your hands is divided into five lessons. Each lesson involves personal prayer and study using this book and the experience of group prayer, discussion, and wrap-up lecture.

If you are using this resource in the context of a small group, we suggest that you meet five times, discussing one lesson per meeting. Allow about 90 minutes for the small group gathering. Small groups function best with eight to twelve people to ensure good group dynamics and to allow all to participate as they wish.

Some groups choose to have an initial gathering before their regular sessions begin. This allows an opportunity to meet one another, pass out books, and, if desired, view the optional intro lecture for this study available on the "Resources" page of the Little Rock Scripture Study website (www.littlerockscripture.org).

Every Bible study group is a little bit different. Some of our groups like to break each lesson up into two weeks of study so they are reading less each week and have more time to discuss the questions together at their weekly gath-

erings. If your group wishes to do this, simply agree how much of each lesson will be read each week, and only answer the questions that correspond to the material you read. Wrap-up lectures can then be viewed at the end of every other meeting rather than at the end of every meeting. Of course, this will mean that your study will last longer, and your group will meet more times.

WHAT MATERIALS WILL YOU USE?

The materials in this book include:

- Commentary by Clifford M. Yeary, which has also been published separately as *Welcome to the Feast: The Story of the Eucharist in Scripture* (Liturgical Press).
- Occasional inserts  highlighting relevant biblical information. Some of these appear also in the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible* while others are supplied by staff writers.
- Questions for study, reflection, and discussion at the end of each lesson.
- Opening and closing prayers for each lesson, as well as other prayer forms available in the closing pages of the book.

In addition, there are wrap-up lectures available for each lesson. Your group may choose to purchase a DVD containing these lectures or make use of the audio or video lectures online at no charge. The link to these free lectures is: LittleRockScripture.org/Lectures/EucharistinScripture. Of course, if your group has access to qualified speakers, you may choose to have live presentations.

Each person will need a current translation of the Bible. We recommend the *Little Rock Catholic Study Bible*, which makes use of the New American Bible, Revised Edition. Other translations, such as the New Jerusalem Bible or the New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition, would also work well.

HOW WILL YOU USE THESE MATERIALS?

Prepare in advance

Using Lesson One as an example:

- Begin with a simple prayer like the one found on page 11.

- Read the assigned material in the printed book for Lesson One (pages 12–23) so that you are prepared for the weekly small group session. You may do this assignment by reading a portion over a period of several days (effective and manageable) or by preparing all at once (more challenging).
- Answer the questions, Exploring Lesson One, found at the end of the assigned reading, pages 24–26.
- Use the Closing Prayer on page 27 when you complete your study. This prayer may be used again when you meet with the group.

Meet with your small group

- After introductions and greetings, allow time for prayer (about 5 minutes) as you begin the group session. You may use the prayer found on page 11 (also used by individuals in their preparation) or use a prayer of your choosing.
- Spend about 45–50 minutes discussing the responses to the questions that were prepared in advance. You may also develop your discussion further by responding to questions and interests that arise during the discussion and faith-sharing itself.
- Close the discussion and faith-sharing with prayer, about 5–10 minutes. You may use the Closing Prayer at the end of each lesson or one of your choosing at the end of the book. It is important to allow people to pray for personal and community needs and to give thanks for how God is moving in your lives.
- Listen to or view the wrap-up lecture associated with each lesson (15–20 minutes). You may watch the lecture online, use a DVD, or provide a live lecture by a qualified local speaker. This lecture provides a common focus for the group and reinforces insights from each lesson. You may view the lecture together at the end of the session or, if your group runs out of time, you may invite group members to watch the lecture on their own time after the discussion.

Above all, be aware that the Holy Spirit is moving within and among you.

The Eucharist in Scripture

LESSON ONE

Some Old Testament Feasts with God

Begin your personal study and group discussion with a simple and sincere prayer such as:

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as a sign of your love, you have given us the gift of yourself in the Eucharist. May your presence with us in both word and sacrament be a source of nourishment and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Read the Introduction and pages 13–23, Lesson One.

Respond to the questions on pages 24–26, Exploring Lesson One.

The Closing Prayer on page 27 is for your personal use and may be used at the end of group discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Among the more liturgically oriented Christian faith traditions, the Eucharist is central to faith and worship. As a Catholic, I am deeply appreciative of how Catholic teaching concerning the Eucharist continues to enrich my faith in untold ways. This commentary, however, was not undertaken in order to “prove” that Catholic doctrines on the Eucharist are to be explicitly found in the Bible. Rather, I hope to assist those without theological degrees to gain insight and appreciation for the deep biblical roots of the Eucharist. Those biblical roots are richly nourishing, and those who know what their faith teaches will recognize the vital relationship between their traditions and the scriptural accounts.

I have been engaged in serious study of Scripture for many years and have always called myself a student of Scripture while disclaiming the title of scholar. In this commentary my goal is to open up the Scriptures to the best of my ability while providing you, the reader, with the rich gleanings from many respected scholars. In discussions specifically dealing with the Eucharist in the New Testament, I have relied solely on Catholic Scripture scholars. I am grateful to all for helping me engage with the biblical accounts about encounters with God and the Son of God during the very human experience of eating a meal. As this commentary is directed toward general readers, I have avoided the use of footnotes, but in fairness to the scholars with whose ideas

I engage, I have tried to consistently inform you of the sources I used. At the back of the book you will find a list of the most pertinent names in a recommended reading list.

It may come as a surprise that in the opening chapter I begin with Abraham and Sarah and the hospitality they showed when three strangers who were imbued with a divine aura appeared at their tent. But that is how the story that builds up to the Eucharist in the New Testament begins, with the desire of both God and people to be in intimate fellowship with each other in the context of a meal. God gives us food for the nurturing of our lives, but the greatest nurture of all is God’s presence at a meal. Later, in the Old Testament, we learn that the blessings God promises the children of Israel are an invitation to a feast, a wedding feast, in which their God will be united with them as a loving, devoted spouse. When Jesus began to minister to the people of Israel, he consistently invited them to feast with him as their bridegroom. His ministry culminated in a meal in which he offered bread and wine as his own body and blood soon to be taken and shed in a violent execution on a cross.

He asked that his followers continue to offer this meal “in memory of me,” and this they remembered to do after he had risen from the dead, making that memory of him one of deep sorrow and yet of unsurpassable joy. And so we too are invited to eat with the Savior, to remember his passion and resurrection in the breaking of bread. Therefore let us faithfully respond to his call as we are bidden, *Welcome to the feast!*



SOME OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS WITH GOD

The Hospitality of Abraham

Genesis 18:1-15

Abraham's Visitors. ¹The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oak of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. ²Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, ³he said: "Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. ⁴Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. ⁵Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way." "Very well," they replied, "do as you have said."

⁶Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread." ⁷He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. ⁸Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.

⁹"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There in the tent," he replied. ¹⁰One of them said, "I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son." Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, just behind him. ¹¹Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her menstrual periods. ¹²So Sarah laughed to herself and said, "Now that I am worn out and my husband is old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?" ¹³But the LORD said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really bear a child, old as I am?' ¹⁴Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son." ¹⁵Sarah lied, saying, "I did not laugh," because she was afraid. But he said, "Yes, you did."

At the time the three strangers approach Abraham at the oak of Mamre, this aging couple have left their original homeland in order to faithfully respond to a call from God (Gen 12:1). God has promised that the entire region of Canaan would be the inheritance of Abraham's offspring through Sarah (at least by implication), and yet they have grown old and have had no children together. There is no hint, however, that their hospitality toward these strangers is provided in expectation of any sort of gift or repayment.

In the New Testament, Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to these three strangers is most probably responsible for the exhortation in the Letter to the Hebrews urging Christians to be hospitable people, for through hospitality "some have unknowingly entertained angels" (13:2).

While nothing is explicitly said about whether Abraham recognized the angelic or divine nature of his visitors, Abraham is someone who has been visited by God more than once (see Gen 12:7-9; 15:1-20; 17:1-22). We also have to consider that the appearance of God to Abraham by "the oak of Mamre" would not have happened coincidentally. In ancient times special trees of the region, some called oaks and others terebinths, were considered likely