



What are the symbols of the Eucharist and what is their meaning?

The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, paragraph 11), and [as] we contemplate Jesus as the Bread of Life (Jn 6:35,48,51), this is an excellent time to examine the symbols for the Eucharist.

Wheat. Wheat is a cereal grain, its seeds are ground into flour and used as the main ingredient for bread, and Jesus is the Bread of Life. Sometimes wheat is represented by a single head of grain, other times by a shock or sheaf of wheat, a bunch of cut stalks bound together in a bundle.

A Loaf of Bread. Bread is the staple food of physical life, and Eucharistic bread is the staple food of the spiritual life. At the Last Supper, Jesus took a loaf of unleavened bread and said, “Take and eat, this is my body” (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19). The consecrated bread is Jesus himself, the Real Presence of Christ.

A basket of loaves. When Jesus fed the five thousand, he began with a basket of five loaves (Mt 14:17; Mk 6:38; Lk 9:13; Jn 6:9), and when he fed the four thousand he began with a basket of seven (Mt 15:34; Mk 8:6). Loaves and fishes were both part of Jesus’ Eucharistic miracles (Mt 14:17; 15:34; Mk 6:38; 8:6,7; Lk 9:13; Jn 6:9), and they were part of Jesus’ Eucharistic meal with his disciples after the Resurrection (Jn 21:9).

A Host. A host is a Communion wafer, a round piece of unleavened bread used for consecration and distribution at Mass. The term comes from the Latin word *hostia*, a sacrificial lamb. Jesus is “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29,36), and his body, offered on the altar of the Cross, is given to us from the altar of the Mass.

Grapes and Wine. Grapes are crushed into juice, the liquid fermented into wine, and wine was used by Jesus at the Last Supper to represent his Blood, the blood of the covenant, shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20).

A Chalice. Jesus used a cup or a chalice as the vessel for his Blood at the Last Supper.

The Pelican and her chicks. If a mother pelican's chicks are dying for lack of food, it pierces its own breast to feed its young with its own blood. Likewise, the heart of Jesus was pierced on the Cross (Jn 19:34), and the Blood that flowed out was true drink, and whoever drinks his Blood gains eternal life (Jn 6:54,55).

The Altar is where the Eucharistic sacrifice is celebrated and a symbol for the Eucharist itself.



ALPHA
& OMEGA



PELICAN



IXTHUS
Fish



I.H.S.



CHI-RHO



LATIN CROSS



CRUCIFIX



I.N.R.I



LAMB