

Introductory Notes on the New Testament's Narratives of the Mystical Supper

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Abstract: This article offers a fresh perspective on key aspects essential for a deeper understanding of the four New Testament accounts of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Rather than providing an in-depth exegetical analysis, which would exceed an article's word limit, it examines the texts in their textual, historical, and theological context. It identifies key textual issues, compares the narratives to highlight their distinct features, and underscores notable insights. Special attention is paid to the theological-liturgical framework of the Mystical Supper and to the ecclesiological and mystagogical context in which these texts emerged. It highlights the necessity of viewing the Mystical Supper not only within the Jewish Passover context but also through the perspective of early Christian Easter theology. This approach better illuminates the chronological details, the insistence of the Evangelists on identifying the event as Πάσχα, and the mystery of the Holy Sacrament shared with the Apostles.

Keywords: Passover, Mystical Supper, Holy Eucharist, Easter, Last Supper

1. Introduction

In the New Testament we have four narratives of the institution of the Holy Eucharist: three in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 26; Mc 14; Lk 22), and one in 1 Cor 11. The Fourth Gospel, though it speaks about the Mystical Supper,² does not explicitly mention the Passover celebration or the institution of the

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² I prefer the Orthodox expression “Mystical Supper” (Μυστικόν Δείπνον) over the common Western “Last Supper,” because it more effectively emphasizes the mysterious and sacramental dimensions of the event. It is likely older than its Western counterpart, as evidenced by its presence in one communion prayer recited or sung during all three main Divine Liturgies of the Orthodox Church, before receiving the Holy Eucharist: “Τοῦ Δείπνου σου τοῦ μυστικοῦ σήμερον, Υἱὲ Θεοῦ, κοινωνόν με παράλαβε.” (“Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a partaker”).

Holy Eucharist, nor does it quote the Eucharistic words of Jesus. However, its theological contribution to understanding the Mystical Supper is undeniable. Saint John offers us the critically important preparatory discourse on “The Bread of Life” (Jn 6:22-59), where the Lord – long ago before the Mystical Supper, in the synagogue of Capernaum (Καπερναούμ)³/Capharnaum (Καφαρναούμ, NA) (Jn 6:59) – spoke about the true Bread (ἄρτος) He will give for the life of the world (Jn 6:51) and the absolute necessity of eating His Body/Flesh (σάρξ) and drinking His Blood (Jn 6:53-58).

The four accounts of the institution of the Holy Eucharist are short and challenging both for the faithful reader and the careful exegete. The aim of this article is to offer a fresh perspective on several introductory issues from an Orthodox perspective. In what follows we will examine their context, textual problems, distinctive narrative and theological features, and their relationships to one another and to the Church’s liturgical tradition.

The Holy Eucharist has been the center of the Church’s liturgical life from its earliest days. Saint Luke notes that the first Christians persevered in Eucharistic communion (Acts 2:42). In doing so, they were fulfilling the Lord’s commandment to celebrate this Holy Sacrament “in remembrance” of Him (1 Cor 11:25). Initially, the Church used Aramaic, but as she expanded into the Hellenistic world, it became necessary to translate her liturgy into Greek. Unfortunately, we lack early witnesses to this process. The four accounts were written much later but, beyond their historical value, they bear our oldest testimonies about the living Eucharistic traditions of the Greek speaking Christian communities. For this reason, it is important to see them not isolated but as integral parts of the same living tradition which is witnessed by the Holy Liturgies of the Church.

This prayer highlights the intimate connection between the Mystical Supper and the Holy Liturgy. The whole prayer can be read here: <https://www.proseyxi.com/akolouthia-thias-metalipsis/>.

³ This article prioritizes the text of the Greek Orthodox Church, distinguished by its profound historical, ecclesiological, and liturgical foundations. It will be abbreviated as PT (from “Patriarchal Text”). Nevertheless, the Nestle-Aland critical edition (*NA*), with its established merits, is not disregarded. See *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini and Bruce M. Metzger, based on the work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle (Münster: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). Additionally, I use the critical edition of the Society for Biblical Literature, *The Greek New Testament. SBL Edition (SBL)*, edited by Michael W. Holmes (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010) and *The New Testament in the Original Greek. Byzantine Textform (RP)*, edited by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, PDF version, 2018. Variances between them will be duly observed and, where relevant, subjected to exegetical scrutiny.

2. The Context of the Synoptic Narratives of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist

While Saint Paul simply states that the Mystical Supper occurred “on the same night in which He was betrayed” (1 Cor 11:23; NKJV), the Synoptic Gospels carefully situate the event within the dramatic context of Holy Week. Each highlights its proximity to the Passover feast, the conspiracy of the leaders to kill Jesus, and Judas’ offer to assist in executing this plot. Curiously, the timing of Judas’ intervention seems almost coincidental. However, Saint Luke attributes Judas’ action to demonic possession, which began after the chief priests and the scribes resolved to kill the Lord (Lk 22:2-3). In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus suggests that the fierce opposition He faces has also a demonic root. When His adversaries claim Abrahamic descent (Jn 8:33.39), He counters by revealing their true spiritual lineage: their deeds show that their father is the devil and this explains why they want to do what their “father,” the devil, wills. He then reminds that the devil “was a murderer (ἀνθρωποκτόνος) from the beginning” (Jn 8:44; RSV).

Across the Gospels narratives, opposition to Jesus intensifies gradually, peaking shortly after Lazarus’ resurrection, when the high priests (ἀρχιερεῖς) and the Pharisees decided to kill Him (Jn 11:47-53). As they “sought how they might kill Him,” because they “feared the people,” “Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve” (Lk 22:2-3; NKJV).⁴

Following Judas’ agreement with the leaders to betray Jesus (Lk 22:4), the Synoptics recount events from the early part of the “first” (Mt 26:17; Mc 14:12), “Day of Unleavened Bread” (Lk 22:7). Probably early in the morning, Jesus sends the disciples (in Mt 26:17-18) / two disciples (in Mk 14:13) / Peter and John (in Lk) to “prepare the Passover” (Lk 22:8). In Matthew and Mark, this follows the Apostles’ question: “Where do You want us to prepare the Passover?” (Mt 26:17; Mk 14:12). Following His instructions, they went to the designated place⁵ and prepared everything necessary for the Paschal celebration (Mt 26:17-19; Mk 14:13-16; Lk 22:8-13). Then all the Synoptics narrate the events that took place that evening, beginning with what we usually call the Mystical Supper. Describing the event, Saint Luke mentions again that it is a Passover, quoting Jesus’ words about His strong desire to share it with His disciples. In these words, Jesus links His imminent sacrificial death to this Passover (Lk 22:15).

⁴ Saint John’s account includes Judas’ betrayal, but the satanic action is exposed in two stages: first, the devil put into his heart to betray Jesus (Jn 13:2); second, at the Supper, “after the piece of bread, Satan entered him” (Jn 13:27). The Lord knows that and invites him to do quickly what he has decided (Jn 13:27).

⁵ In Mk 14:14 Jesus names this place τὸ κατάλυμά μου (“My guest room”) suggesting that at least once in the past He was hosted there.

The emphasis of our texts on Passover is not accidental. However, neither the temporal settings,⁶ nor the details of the celebration indicate a traditional Jewish Passover.⁷ Instead, they point to a New Passover (Πάσχα), distinct yet deeply connected to both the ancient Jewish rite and the forthcoming salvific events, culminating in the Cross and Resurrection. The date, explanation, liturgical acts, and sacramental words underscore this New Passover. These texts, written over 30 years later in a Christian context, reflect the Church's understanding of Πάσχα as synonymous with Easter. From the outset, Christians viewed the salvific events of the Holy Week from the perspective of this New Passover,⁸ encompassing the Mystical Supper, the sacrifice of the True Pascal Lamb, His victory on the Cross, and His glorification in the Resurrection.

In the Matthean narrative, Jesus Himself sets the chronological context. Using the messianic title The Son of Man, He links the coming Passover (πάσχα) to the dramatic developments that follow. These events are summarized in two images: *deliverance* and *crucifixion*; He “will be delivered over to be crucified” (Mt 26:2). This marks the beginning of the last section of the First Gospel. While Mark and Luke do not quote this prophetic word of Jesus, their accounts of the Passion similarly connect to the Passover (Mk 14:1; Lk 22:1).

To understand better the events narrated by the Synoptic Gospels from Wednesday, 12 Nisan, to the arrest of Jesus, late in the evening of Thursday, 13 Nisan, after the messianic Passover celebration, a cursory survey of the three accounts is recommended. In the table below we can see how close they are in following the series of events they introduce with a chronological indication related to the approaching Passover festival.

⁶ The data we have may lead quite easily to the conclusion that the events presented as taking place on the “first day of Unleavened Bread” (Mt 26:17; Mk 14:12) actually happened on 13 Nisan, one day before the “day when the Passover *lamb* was being sacrificed” (Mk 14:12; NASB). The apparent problematic timing in the Synoptic Gospels was solved by Saint John Chrysostom simply by understanding the adjective *πρώτος* as meaning “before/prior to,” as it is used in another contexts in the New Testament. See Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, translated by George Prevost, revised by M. Riddle, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, first series, volume 10 (Albany: SAGE, 1996), 1019.

⁷ Armand Puig, *Iisus. Un profil biografic*, translated by Jana Matei (Bucharest: Meronia, 2006), 472. To understand the fact that the Mystical Supper was not a Jewish Passover Seder is essential for any serious study on these texts. Consequently, attempts to align these events with the Jewish Passover, celebrated on 14 Nisan, have gained little traction. Similarly, the double-Passover thesis proposed by French scholar Annie Jaubert in her book *La date de la Cène* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957) has not been widely accepted.

⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, translation by James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 332.

Mt 26	Mk 14	Lk 22
Wednesday, 12 Nisan, AD 30		
1-2: "after two days will be the Passover and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." 3: The conspiracy to kill Jesus 6-13: The Anointing for Jesus' burial 14-16: Judas' betrayal	1a: Two days before the Passover 1b-2: The conspiracy to kill Jesus 3-9: The Anointing at Bethany 10-11 Judas' betrayal	1: The Passover was approaching 2: The conspiracy to kill Jesus [cf. Lk 7:36-50] 3-6: Judas' betrayal
Thursday, 13 Nisan, AD 30		
17a: "On the first day of Unleavened Bread" (NRSV)	12a: "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover <i>lamb</i> was being sacrificed" (NASB)	7: "the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed." (NRSV)
17b-19: Preparations for Passover 20-30: The Mystical Supper	12b-16: Preparations for Passover 17-25: The Mystical Supper	8-13: Preparations for Passover 14-23: The Mystical Supper
[31-35, see below]	[27-31, see below]	24-27: Who is the greatest? 28-30: The reward of the faithful Apostles: (1) they will eat and drink with the Lord in His Kingdom; (2) they will judge the 12 tribes of Israel. 31-34: Jesus predicts Peter's denials 35-38: A time of crisis
30: And having sung (ὑμνήσαντες), they came out to the mount of Olives."	26: "And having sung (ὑμνήσαντες), they came out to the mount of Olives."	39: Jesus and His disciples came out and went to the Mount of Olives.
31-35: The prediction of Peter's denial 36-46: Gethsemane: Jesus' prayer 47-56: Jesus is arrested	27-31: The prediction of the Apostles' stumbling and Peter's denial 32-40: Gethsemane: Jesus' prayer 41-52: Jesus is arrested	40-46: [Gethsemane:] Jesus' prayer 47-53: Jesus is arrested

3. A Synoptic Overview of the Four Narratives of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist

The four accounts of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist share many similarities, yet they also exhibit intriguing differences. At the current stage of the research, is impossible to determine which more faithfully reflects the actual event.

As one of the Twelve, Saint Matthew is unique in that he directly participated in the event. He has also the advantage of the geographical proximity: He and most of his audience are Judeo-Christians living in the region where the Gospel was proclaimed in the years following Pentecost.⁹ Thus, their connection to the living liturgical tradition of the Church, which began in Jerusalem and spread throughout the Holy Land and Syria, is undeniable.

Close to Saint Matthew's account is that of Saint Mark (14:17-26). The value of Mark's text stems not only from its chronological priority among the Synoptics, but also by the fact that, according to the Tradition, the Last Supper took place in his parents' house.¹⁰ It appears that this family, after the Ascension, became the primary host of the Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). This community was distinguished by its steadfastness in the Apostles' teaching and in the Eucharistic communion (Acts 2:42). Moreover, the Markan text carries the weight of Saint Peter's testimony as well, as both the text itself¹¹ and early Church tradition attest.¹²

Saint Luke, a former Gentile from Antioch and a disciple of Saint Paul, provides a notably lengthy and complex narrative of the Mystical Supper (22:7-23). His account is the most complex, likely due to the in-depth research¹³ he mentions at the beginning of his writing (Lk 1:1-3). It may intrigue the reader but equally, through its insights, it offers material for deeper perspectives to the exegete.

The Pauline text (1 Cor 11:23-26) chronologically precedes the Synoptic Gospels but does not necessarily reflect an earlier tradition. Notably, the Apostle emphasizes that what he delivered to the Corinthians he received from the Lord Jesus. Therefore, his witness is of highest value.

In the synoptic table below, we can see both the distinctive features and the contributions of each author to the understanding of the pivotal historical, liturgical and prophetic event which took place in the same dramatic evening into which the Passion of Jesus began. In order to make it easier to follow the four accounts, we have divided the table into several sections, according to their content.

⁹ Many authors argue for a Palestinian-Syrian setting. For the main arguments, see W. D. Davies, "Matthew, The Gospel According to," in James Hasting, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible*, second edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 633. B. Witherington III (*Matthew*, 21-27) argues for a Galilean origin.

¹⁰ Ioannis Karavidopoulos, *Comentariu la Evanghelia după Marcu* (Bucharest: Bizantină), translated by Sabin Preda after the edition published by P. Pournars, Thessaloniki, 2001, 324.

¹¹ In the Gospel according to Saint Mark Saint Peter is mentioned more than any other Apostle. This points out a special relationship between the author and the Apostle, which is confirmed also by the Tradition (see below).

¹² Papias (ca. 120 AD), cited by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eccl hist*, III, 29, 15; *The Anti-Marcionite prologue* (end of 2nd century); Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposeis* (beginning of 3rd century), VI, cited by Eusebius of Caesarea, *Eccl hist*, II, 15, 1-2.

¹³ U. Luz argues that the Lukan account "probably comes from the pre-Lukan passion narrative." (*Matthew* 21-28, 365).

Mt 26:17-30	Mk 14:12-26	Lk 22:7-23	1 Cor 11:23-26
1. Time Setting. Question About the Preparation of the Passover			
17 Τῇ δὲ πρώτῃ τῶν ἁζύμων προσήλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες αὐτῷ· ποῦ θέλεις ἐτοιμάσωμέν σοι φαγεῖν τὸ πάσχα;	12 Καὶ τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἁζύμων, ὅτε τὸ πάσχα ἔθουν, λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ· ποῦ θέλεις ἀπελθόντες ἐτοιμάσωμεν ἵνα φάγῃς τὸ πάσχα;	7 Ἦλθε ¹⁴ δὲ ἡ ἡμέρα τῶν ἁζύμων, ἐν ᾗ ἔδει θύεσθαι τὸ πάσχα, [9 οἱ δὲ εἶπον αὐτῷ· ποῦ θέλεις ἐτοιμάσωμεν;]	
2. Instructions for the Preparation of the Passover			
18 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν πρὸς τὸν δεῖνα καὶ εἵπατε αὐτῷ· ὁ διδάσκαλος λέγει, ὁ καιρὸς μου ἐγγύς ἐστι· πρὸς σέ ποιῶ τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου.	13 καὶ ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ ἀπαντήσῃ ὑμῖν ἄνθρωπος κεράμιον ὕδατος βαστάζων· ἀκολουθήσατε αὐτῷ, 14 καὶ ὅπου ἂν εἰσέλθῃ, εἵπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότῃ ὅτι ὁ διδάσκαλος λέγει· ποῦ ἐστὶ τὸ κατάλυμά μου ὅπου τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου φάγω; 15 καὶ αὐτὸς ὑμῖν δείξει ἀνώγειον μέγα ἐστρωμένον ἑτοιμον· ἐκεῖ ἐτοιμάσατε ἡμῖν.	8 καὶ ἀπέστειλε Πέτρον καὶ Ἰωάννην εἰπὼν· πορευθέντες ἐτοιμάσατε ἡμῖν τὸ πάσχα ἵνα φάγωμεν. 9 οἱ δὲ εἶπον αὐτῷ· ποῦ θέλεις ἐτοιμάσωμεν; 10 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἰδοὺ εἰσελθόντων ὑμῶν εἰς τὴν πόλιν συναντήσῃ ὑμῖν ἄνθρωπος κεράμιον ὕδατος βαστάζων· ἀκολουθήσατε αὐτῷ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν οὗ εἰσπορεύεται, 11 καὶ ἔρεῖτε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότῃ τῆς οἰκίας· λέγει σοι ὁ διδάσκαλος, ποῦ ἐστὶ τὸ κατάλυμα ὅπου τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου φάγω; 12 κάκεινος ὑμῖν δείξει ἀνώγειον μέγα ἐστρωμένον· ἐκεῖ ἐτοιμάσατε.	

¹⁴ Ἦλθεν, in NA and SBL. In PT, the final ν is absent in the third person singular of certain indicative aorists. This peculiarity contrasts with its consistent presence in early manuscripts, suggesting the omission emerged during the Byzantine period, likely due to phonetic changes in the evolving Greek language or under the influence of liturgical Eucharistic texts. The same occurs in Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24 (ἐκλασε - ἐκλασεν). Similarly, in Mt 26:28 and its parallels (Mk 14:24; 1 Cor 11:25), the verb εἰμί in the third person singular present indicative is rendered as ἐστὶ instead of ἐστιν..

3. The Apostles (Mt) / Peter and John (Mk and Lk) Prepare the Passover			
19 καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ ὡς συνέταξεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ἡτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα.	16 καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ εὗρον καθὼς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἡτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα.	13 ἀπελθόντες δὲ εὗρον καθὼς εἶρηκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἡτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα.	
4. The Passover of the New Covenant			
20 Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης ἀνέκειτο μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.	17 Καὶ ὁψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.	14 Καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ἡ ὥρα, ἀνέπεσε, καὶ οἱ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι σὺν αὐτῷ.	
4. 1. The Betrayer Revealed (In Luke, the revelation of the betrayer occurs after the institution of the Holy Eucharist.)			
21 καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με. 22 καὶ λυπούμενοι σφόδρα ἤρξαντο λέγειν αὐτῷ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν· μήτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, Κύριε; 23 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ὁ ἐμβάψας μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ τρυβλίῳ τὴν χειρα, οὗτός με παραδώσει. 24 ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ· οὐαὶ δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκεῖνῳ δι' οὗ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται· καλὸν ἦν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος. 25 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτὸν εἶπε· μήτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, ραββί; λέγει αὐτῷ, σὺ εἶπας.	18 καὶ ἀνακειμένων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσθιόντων εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με, ὁ ἐσθίων μετ' ἐμοῦ. 19 οἱ δὲ ἤρξαντο λυπεῖσθαι καὶ λέγειν αὐτῷ εἷς καθ' ἑνός· μήτι ἐγώ; καὶ ἄλλος· μήτι ἐγώ; 20 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· εἷς ἐκ τῶν δώδεκα, ὁ ἐμβαπτόμενος μετ' ἐμοῦ εἰς τὸ τρυβλίον. 21 ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ· οὐαὶ δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκεῖνῳ, δι' οὗ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται· καλὸν ἦν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος.	<i>[21 πλὴν ἰδοὺ ἡ χεὶρ τοῦ παραδιδόντος με μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης.]</i> <i>[23 καὶ αὐτοὶ ἤρξαντο συζητεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς τὸ τίς ἄρα εἴη ἐξ αὐτῶν ὁ τοῦτο μέλλων πράσσειν.]</i> <i>[22 καὶ ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πορεύεται κατὰ τὸ ὀρισμένον· πλὴν οὐαὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκεῖνῳ δι' οὗ παραδίδοται.]</i>	

4.2. Introduction			
		<p>15 καὶ εἶπε πρὸς αὐτοὺς· ἐπιθυμία ἐπεθύμησα τοῦτο τὸ πάσχα φαγεῖν μεθ' ὑμῶν πρὸ τοῦ με παθεῖν·</p> <p>16 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι <u>οὐκέτι</u> οὐ μὴ φάγω ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἕως ὅτου πληρωθῇ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ¹⁵</p>	
4.3. The First Chalice/Cup			
[see 26:29]	[see 14:25]	<p>17 καὶ δεξάμενος τὸ ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας εἶπε· λάβετε τοῦτο καὶ διαμερίσατε ἑαυτοῖς·</p> <p>18 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ πίω ἀπὸ τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου, ἕως ὅτου ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔλθῃ.</p>	
4.4. The Institution of the Holy Eucharist			
4.4.1. The Bread – The Body of the Lord			
<p>26 Ἐσθιόντων δὲ αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασε καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς καὶ εἶπε· Λάβετε φάγετε· τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου·</p>	<p>22 Καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἄρτον εὐλόγησας ἔκλασε καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπε· λάβετε <u>φάγετε</u>· τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου.</p>	<p>19 καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασε καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων·</p> <p>τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν <u>διδόμενον</u>· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.</p>	<p>23 [...] ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδото ἔλαβεν ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασε καὶ εἶπε· 24 <u>λάβετε φάγετε</u>· τοῦτό μου ἐστι τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν <u>κλόμενον</u>· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.</p>

¹⁵ The words underlined do not appear in NA and in SBL.

4.2. The (second) Cup/Chalice – The Blood of the Lord			
<p>27 καὶ λαβὼν τὸ ποτήριον καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, λέγων, Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες•</p> <p>28 τοῦτο γάρ ἐστι τὸ αἷμά μου, τὸ τῆς <u>καινῆς</u> διαθήκης, τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.</p> <p>29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐ μὴ πῖω ἅπ' ἄρτι ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γεννήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου, ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω μεθ' ὑμῶν καὶνὸν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου.</p>	<p>23 καὶ λαβὼν τὸ ποτήριον εὐχαριστήσας ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες.</p> <p>24 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· τοῦτό ἐστι[ν] τὸ αἷμά μου τὸ τῆς <u>καινῆς</u> διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον.</p> <p>25 ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι <u>οὐκέτι</u> οὐ μὴ πῖω ἐκ τοῦ γεννήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου ἕως τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ὅταν αὐτὸ πίνω καὶνὸν ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ.</p>	<p>20 ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων·</p> <p>τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυνόμενον.</p> <p>[see 22:18, above]</p>	<p>25 ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων·</p> <p>τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὅσάκις ἂν πίνετε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.</p>
		24-38 [discussions and teachings]	
<p>30 Καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν.</p>	<p>26 Καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν.</p>	<p>39 Καὶ ἐξελθὼν ἐπορεύθη κατὰ τὸ ἔθος εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν· ἠκολούθησαν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ.</p>	

The above synoptic table helps us easily identify what our texts have in common and the peculiarities of each. First, we observe their core shared elements: All contain liturgical gestures and words of Jesus. All describe Him taking bread, breaking it, and identifying it as being His Body. All mention the cup/chalice and directly (Mt and Mk) or indirectly (Lk and 1 Cor) identify its content as His Holy Blood and associate it with the New Covenant (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη, in Mt and Mk / τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, in Lk and 1 Cor).

Beside these commonalities, we notice the peculiarities of each one. Before listing them, I would like to make an important preliminary observation. As in the case of the synoptic problem, the available data make it impossible to determine who influenced whom and which text more accurately reflects the actual Eucharistic acts and words of Jesus. However, we can be confident that

each author provides us what he considers the most accurate description of the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

4. Textual Problems and Narrative Peculiarities

4.1. Saint Matthew's Account (Mt 26:17-30)

4.1.1. Textual Problems

Mt 26:20: Certain manuscripts insert the genitive plural substantive μαθητῶν after τῶν δώδεκα. The SBL includes this reading, whereas the NA and RP editions omit it. B. Metzger deems this inclusion “doubtful.”¹⁶

Mt 26:27: NA and SBL do not include the definite article τό. B. Metzger considers it an addition of copyists.¹⁷ I do not share this view. The article occurs in all the four accounts. There is a good theological reason for it: this is not a common cup but the cup/chalice through which the Holy Blood of Jesus is given to His Apostles.

Mt 26:28. The adjective καινῆς does not occur in most manuscripts. That's why NA does not include it. RP includes it. B. Metzger thinks that it “has apparently come from the parallel passage in Luke (22:20).”¹⁸

4.1.2. Matthean Peculiarities

Saint Matthew's text is the only one who included surely the verb “eat” (φάγετε), which emphasizes the act of consumption by the Apostles, which is not described explicitly in any of our texts. It is also the only one which contains the express command Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες (“Drink of it, all of you”). Of utmost importance is the Matthean emphasis that the Blood of Christ is shed εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (“for forgiveness of sins”), which is not found in the parallel texts. Thus, Saint Matthew emphasizes the link between the Holy Eucharist and the atonement work of Jesus. In this context we should remember that he is the only evangelist who includes the prophecy made to Joseph about the meaning of the name of the Child: he will name Him Jesus “for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). Worth noticing is the fact that this Matthean explanation is found also in the Holy Liturgies of the Church: Λάβετε, φάγετε· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ

¹⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 53.

¹⁷ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 53.

¹⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 54.

τὸ σῶμα, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλῶμενον, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (“Take, eat; this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins”).¹⁹

The soteriological affirmation regarding the purpose of the shedding is followed by an eschatological prophecy, which is found also in Mark and Luke, about drinking the “fruit of the vine” “new,” with His disciples, in His “Father’s Kingdom” (Mt 26:29). This identification of the Kingdom is unique to Matthew. In Mk and Lk, we have the phrase “the Kingdom of God.” The Lukan parallel is placed before the institution of the Holy Eucharist, being related to the first cup (Lk 22:16-18).

4.2. Saint Mark’s account (Mk 14:12-26)

4.2.1. Textual Problems

14:14. PT: ποῦ ἐστι[ν] τὸ κατάλυμά μου ὅπου τὸ πάσχα μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν μου φάγω; The presence of the possessive pronoun μου is well attested, but not by all. RP does not include it. It is present in NA and in SBL.

14:15. PT: ἀνώγειον. NA and SBL: ἀνάγειον; RP: ἀνώγειον.

14:22. Λάβετε φάγετε. The second verb, φάγετε, does not occur in a number of manuscripts. NA and SBL omit it.

14:24. τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης. The original text likely omitted the adjective καινῆς, which is absent from several key manuscripts. B. Metzger argues it is “a scribal addition, derived from the parallel accounts in Lk 22:20 and 1 Cor 11:25.”²⁰ Neither the NA nor the SBL include it.

14:25. The adverb οὐκέτι in the phrase οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ πῖω is absent in some manuscripts. The SBL omits it, while the NA retains it within brackets. Notably, the same expression, οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ φάγω, appears in Lk 22:16, where it accompanies the verb φάγω (to eat). In Mark, the phrase relates to the cup/chalice, whereas in Luke, it pertains to the entire messianic Passover.

4.2.2. Markan Narrative Peculiarities

Saint Mark’s concise account reinforces the prevailing scholarly consensus on its relationship to the other Gospels. Mark is simple, focusing on the acts and words of institution. As in Mt, the first word uttered by Jesus at the table begins with the characteristic ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν (Mk 14:18; Mt 26:21). Notable is the presence of εὐλογήσας (Mk 14:22) instead of the εὐχαριστήσας (Mt, Lk, 1 Cor), before the breaking of the bread. The liturgical tradition of the Church keeps both words (εὐχαριστήσας and εὐλογήσας): λαβὼν ἄρτον [...], εὐχαριστήσας καὶ

¹⁹ See *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, available online, in Greek and English, on the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.goarch.org.

²⁰ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 95.

εὐλογήσας, ἀγιάσας, κλάσας, ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ μαθηταῖς καὶ ἀποστόλοις, εἰπών.

Where Matthew quotes Jesus' command Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες, Mark simply records its fulfillment, saying καὶ ἔπιον ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες (Mk 14:24). In Mark there is no further explanation, as in Matthew, where the salvific meaning of the Blood is emphasized. Equally, there is not the command to "do this in remembrance" of Jesus, as in Lk and 1 Cor.

The Markan account closes exactly with the same words as the Matthean: Καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν ("And having sung, they came out to the Mount of Olives"; Mk 14:26; Mt 26:30). Excepting these two occurrences, the verb ὑμνέω (to sing a hymn/hymns; to praise) occurs in only two other places, Acts 16:25 and Heb 2:12. In both cases the object of the verb is God. Some commentators think that probably the two evangelists have in mind the second part of the Hallel (Psalms 114/115-118), which was sung at the end of the Passover celebration, accompanied by the fourth cup of wine. This final part of the Jewish Paschal ritual had a prophetic meaning, indicating the fulfillment of God's redemptive work.²¹

4.3. Saint Luke's Account (Lk 22:7-39)

4.3.1. Two Main Versions

The existing manuscripts of the Lukan narrative present several interesting and challenging peculiarities. In order to have a clear image of the situation, we can summarize it by grouping the witnesses according to their characteristics, taking first into account the main traditions and then minor variants.

(1) The Lukan narrative came to us in two main manuscript traditions,²² one longer and one shorter. This is the most theologically important textual issue of the entire Lukan oeuvre.

(1.1) The longer version is known also as the Eastern, because it is present in almost all Greek manuscripts and is witnessed by Eastern Fathers.²³ It is the one we have in the text currently used in all the Greek speaking Orthodox Churches, as well as in the critical editions Nestle-Alland and SBL.²⁴

²¹ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35 - 24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 211.

²² Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148.

²³ As Jonathan Knight points out, "it would be foolish to ignore this substantial evidence." To this conclusion he adds an important theological argument: "The longer text adds a more explicit covenantal overtone to the death of Jesus than would otherwise be found in Luke." See Jonathan Knight, *A Reading of Luke* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 140.

²⁴ For solid external and internal arguments in favor of the long version see the thorough study of Bradley S. Billings, *Do this in Remembrance of Me. The Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution*

(1.2) The shorter one is known also as the Western one since it is witnessed by several Latin manuscripts and Latin Fathers, and only by one Greek codex (D). These texts do not include the words we have in vv. 19b and 20. They end in v. 19a with “Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου / Hoc est corpus meum / This is my body”²⁵ and omit entirely the words:

[19b] τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν
/quod pro vobis datur hoc facite in meam commemorationem.

[20] καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων·

τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον.

/similiter et calicem postquam cenavit dicens

hic est calix novum testamentum in sanguine meo quod pro vobis funditur.²⁶

Few scholars expressed their preference for this short version. The first notable were Westcott and Hort. They were followed by other scholars, but gradually this view lost support²⁷ J. Jeremias was convinced that “we have before us in 19a the abbreviation of a liturgical text,”²⁸ but as John Nolland argues, “Jeremias’ idea ... remains unconvincing.”²⁹

(2) Beside the two main traditions, there are some other variants which can be regarded either as attempts of harmonizing these traditions or as consequences of copyists’ negligence. Notable among these variants are the following three:³⁰

(2.1) In some Latin, Coptic and Syriac manuscripts, the verses 17-18 (Καὶ δεξάμενος ποτήριον ... ἕως οὗ τοῦ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔλθῃ) are omitted.

(Luke 22:19b-20). *An Historic-Exegetical, Theological and Sociological Analysis* (Library of New Testament Studies 314), London – New York, T. & T. Clark, 2006. Long before, Metzger summarized the situation as follows: “The majority (...) impressed by the overwhelming preponderance of external evidence supporting the longer form, explained the origin of the shorter form as due to some scribal accident or misunderstanding” (Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 150).

²⁵ So do the Codex Bezae (D) and some Latin manuscripts (a, d, ff2, i, l).

²⁶ Vulgate, The Holy Bible in Latin Language with Douay-Rheims English Translation, https://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_22.htm, accessed August 22, 2024.

²⁷ Among the few scholars that consider the shorter version as the original one worth noticing is Erich Franklin, who dismiss the longer version with the argument that it “bears all the marks of a hybrid resulting from the contributions of many hands to bring Luke into some sort of conformity with the general Eucharistic traditions of the early church.” For him, the short version “is the more distinctive and, indeed, more difficult reading” and exactly these characteristics drive him to the conclusion that “if Luke himself is not responsible for it, it is hard to see why anyone should have shortened what he wrote to arrive at this unusual and not easily explained interpretation of Jesus’ actions.” See “Luke,” in J. Barton and J. Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 955.

²⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 158.

²⁹ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35 - 24:53*, 203.

³⁰ For an exhaustive presentation of all variants see Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148-149.

(2.2) In certain Latin, Syriac and Coptic texts, verses 17-18 are inserted after verse 19a, presenting Jesus' actions and words in a different sequence, likely to resolve the apparent conflict of the cup-bread-cup order.

(2.3) In the Curetonian³¹ Syriac manuscript (5th century), after verse 19a, the text includes wording from 1 Cor 11:24,³² followed by verse 17.³³

As pointed above, the longer form enjoys not only the best external evidence, but also overwhelming acceptance from the scholarly world. These rich textual variants highlight the challenges faced by readers, copyists, scribes, and commentators, stemming from the distinct features of the Lukan text compared to the other three accounts of this pivotal redemptive event.

4.3.2. Other Textual Peculiarities of the Lukan Narrative

Lk 22:16 ὅτι οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ φάγω. The adverb οὐκέτι (no longer, no more, any more) is not witnessed by many manuscripts. NA and SBL do not include it.

Lk 22:17 δεξιόμενος τὸ ποτήριον. As in the parallel Matthean account, the definite article τό is not present in NA and SBL. See our comment on Mt 26:27, above.

Lk 22:20 τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη. We have to notice here the absence of the verb εἰμί. It is not an accident or a preference of the Byzantine tradition since it does not appear in any manuscript. Despite that, all translations I have consulted do include it, sometimes in italics or in square brackets.

4.3.3. Lukan Narrative Peculiarities

Saint Luke's narrative is the most distinct and the richest among all four. If in general Luke follows Mark³⁴ and Q or/and (Aramaic?) Matthew,³⁵ here he goes far away from them. His account contains several peculiarities that amaze the serious reader and challenge the exegete, bringing a new perspective on the whole liturgical celebration. Among these: (1) the strong desire of Jesus to celebrate "this Passover" with His Apostles (22:15a); (2) the relationship between "this Passover" and His Passions (22:15b); (3) the first cup (22:16); (4) the link

³¹ Named after the British scholar William Cureton (1808-1864), who edited the so called *Curetonian Gospels* under the title *Remains of a very Ancient Recension of the Four Gospels in Syriac, hitherto unknown in Europe* (London, 1858).

³² Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148.

³³ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 148.

³⁴ Constantin Preda, "Evangelhia după Luca," in Stelian Tofană, ed., *Studiul Noului Testament. II: Evangheliile după Luca și Ioan. Problema sinoptică. Faptele Apostolilor* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2023), 113.

³⁵ Tofană, "Problema sinoptică și actualitatea ei," in Tofană, *Studiul Noului Testament*, II, 411-24.

between “this Passover” and the impending coming of the Kingdom of God (22:16.18). The details included in the first four verses (22:15-18), corroborated with the information that the second cup sequence occurred “after supper (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι)” (22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), can be brought as arguments for a twofold celebration, one dedicated to the Old Passover which is fulfilled in the second part in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. As for the Eucharistic words of Jesus, we can see easily how close they are to those we have in the Pauline text (1 Cor 11:23-25). Given the chronological priority of 1 Corinthians, these commonalities will be discussed in the next chapter.

In Matthew and Mark, the prediction of Judas’ betrayal precedes the scene of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. In Luke, perhaps to avoid darkening the celebration, the Lord reveals Judas’ treachery after the Eucharist, with the traitor still “at the table” (Lk 22:21), indicating his participation in the entire celebration. However, he is not identified at this point; instead, the author focuses on the Apostles’ reasoning (Lk 22:23). Unlike Mark 14:20, Saint Luke does not mention the bowl (τὸ τρύβλιον), nor does he refer to the piece of bread (ψωμίον) that is given to Judas, as in the John 13:26.³⁶

4.4. Saint Paul’s Account (1 Cor 11:24-25)

4.4.1. Textual Problems

11:24. The words Λάβετε, φάγετε are missing in several important manuscripts and in some Fathers, but they are present in the Textus Receptus, in PT and in RP. It is impossible to explain this absence if Saint Paul did include them. That’s why the editors of NA and SBL do not include it. J. Fitzmyer, following B. Metzger, considers that they “are derived secondarily from Matt 26:26.”³⁷

11:24. τοῦτό. As Jesus was sharing the bread, which in Greek is masculine (ἄρτος), the reader/hearer “would have expected to see/hear the demonstrative pronoun in the masculine form (οὗτος).³⁸ The neutral τοῦτό corresponds to the substantive σῶμα.³⁹

11:24. The participle κλῶμενον does not occur in some manuscripts, but it is present in many important ones. B. Metzger considers that the concise form

³⁶ B. Witherington III argues that “the meal portrayed in John 13 involving the Beloved Disciple himself was taken earlier in the week.” See Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006), 483.

³⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, coll. The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 437.

³⁸ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 437.

³⁹ Fitzmyer argues that “*touto* actually refers to Jesus’ action of giving the bread as his body” (*First Corinthians*, 437).

(without participle) “is characteristic of Paul’s style” and that the participles κλώμενον, θρυπτόμενον, and διδόμενον – that occur in some manuscripts – are just “attempts to explicate the meaning of the words” τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν.⁴⁰ Probably mainly on this ground, it is not present in NA and in SBL. However, it occurs in the two main Holy Liturgies of the Church, that of Saint John Chrysostom and that of Saint Basil the Great: Λάβετε, φάγετε· τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν. The wording of this phrase may suggest either a different tradition, either a composite structure, resulting from the combination of the Matthean Λάβετε, φάγετε (“Take, eat”), the Pauline τοῦτό μου ἐστὶ τὸ σῶμα, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον (“this is My Body, which is broken for you), and the Matthean εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (“for the remission of sins”).

4.4.2. Peculiarities of the Pauline Text

If we ignore the possible early materials included in the Synoptic Gospels, this text is our earliest New Testament account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. It was written around AD 55 in the context of some incredible theological misunderstandings that severely affected the Corinthian Church. In order to correct the abusive practices of some and the ignorant tolerance of others, Saint Paul reminds the addressees of what he had given them long time ago, during his work of establishing the Corinthian Church (AD 50-52). His narrative is introduced by a strong statement about the divine origin of the sacrament he is speaking about: he has received it from the Lord Himself⁴¹ (11:23a). Saint Paul is not interested in situating the event into the Passover context, but he wants to point out the connection between the Holy Eucharist and the salvific Passion of the Lord. For this reason he mentions that it took place “in the night in which He was betrayed” (11:23b). The details which follow are very close to those we have in the Third Gospel. Like Saint Luke, the Apostle places the cup with the Holy Blood “after the supper” (μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι) (1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20). Like in Luke, the readers/hearers are indirectly invited to see themselves in relationship with the sacrifice of Christ; His Body is “broken” (1 Cor; PT) / “given” (Lk; PT) “for you” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). Equally, His Blood is not being shed abstractly “for many” (περὶ πολλῶν), as in Matthew and in Mark, but “for you” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), as in the Third Gospel.⁴² Of course, in the historical context of the Supper, “you” are the Apostles, but the preference for the tradition that preserved this form may be

⁴⁰ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 496.

⁴¹ What does he mean by this affirmation is subject of debate. Some think that the Apostle has in mind the Holy Tradition; others argue that he refers here to a real divine revelation, as in Gal 1:12.

⁴² The liturgical tradition of the Church has received both expressions. They are included in the same phrase: Ὁμοίως καὶ τὸ Ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, λέγων· Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες· τοῦτό ἐστὶ τὸ αἶμά μου, τὸ τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν

seen as deliberate given its capacity to include all those who continue to fulfill faithfully the command of the Lord to do this Holy Sacrament in remembrance of Him (εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν). Worth noticing is the fact that this command occurs only in Lk and in 1 Cor. In Luke it is uttered only in connection with the Holy Body of Christ (Lk 22:19b); in the Pauline account it is repeated twice, first accompanying the word about His Body and, second, in relationship with His Holy Blood. Of great interest is the Pauline and Lukan chronological information about the moment at which the Lord offered the cup with His Holy Blood to the disciples. Both authors affirm that “after supper (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι)”⁴³ He took the cup and explained its mystery (1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:20).⁴⁴

How could these similarities be explained? The fact that 1 Corinthians is older than the Third Gospel does not mean that Saint Luke necessarily used the Pauline text. Actually, it is hard to demonstrate that the First Epistle to the Corinthians enjoyed a rapid wide reception throughout the Christian world and that it arrived in the hand of Saint Luke before the writing of the gospel. However, we know that both authors, beside their close friendship, had a strong connection with the Church of Antioch, which some years after Pentecost became the second center of the Church. Therefore, it is quite possible that in these two texts we have two precious witnesses of the Eucharistic tradition of the Antiochian Church.⁴⁵

5. Conclusions

The four accounts discussed in this article provide the most ancient and valuable information available about the institution of the Holy Eucharist. They reflect two main traditions: one is attested by the first two Gospels (Matthew and Mark), and the other by the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the Third Gospel. These traditions share commonalities but also exhibit distinct features. Textual variants in some manuscripts reveal how these accounts influenced each other throughout history. But this is not all. We know that the teaching and practice of the Holy Eucharist are much older than the New Testament texts. From the beginning, the Church ministered what the Lord taught in Galilee during the first part of His ministry (Jn 6:34-59) and instituted during the Mystical Supper.

ἁμαρτιῶν (*The Holy Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, online on the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, <https://www.goarch.org/>).

⁴³ This detail has been received in the liturgical tradition of the Church. See the liturgical fragment quoted in the previous footnote.

⁴⁴ Based on this information, some commentators speak about a two-parts celebration, the first being dedicated to the Passover and the second to the institution of the Holy Eucharist.

⁴⁵ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 150: Metzger argues that these similarities come “from the familiarity of the evangelist with the liturgical practice among Pauline churches, a circumstance that accounts also for the presence of non-Lukan expressions in verses 19b-20.”

Thus, the origins of the two traditions witnessed by these texts should be sought within the history of ecclesial developments which began at Jerusalem, in the spring of AD 30, with the small messianic community upon which the Holy Spirit descended.

The Church was established through a complex foundational work, culminating in the Cross and Resurrection. It emerged as the expression of the new and definitive Covenant, centered on the True Passover Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this context, the old term Passover quickly acquired a new meaning, equivalent to Easter. After the Resurrection the Apostles began to reconsider the whole life of Jesus from the perspective of Easter, which encompasses the salvific events of the Holy Week into an indissoluble unity. When examining the Synoptic accounts of the Mystical Supper, which frame the context through paschal imagery, we should consider how much the new Christian perspective shaped their texts. Seeing them through the Easter's theological perspective, the exegete is free from the necessity to fit these narratives into the framework of the Passover of the Law. Also, the apparent contradiction between the Synoptics regarding the date of the Supper can be resolved more easily. The Easter framework also clarifies why the Synoptics refer to Passover while their details do not suggest a traditional Jewish paschal celebration. The Mystical Supper is for them so deeply linked to the Cross and to the Resurrection that it cannot be separated from them. They speak about the institution of the Holy Eucharist not only as responsible historians but equally as believers for whom communion with the crucified and resurrected Lord is the center of their lives. Therefore, any attempt to reconstruct in detail the Eucharistic acts and words of Jesus or to determine how much and by whom our authors, and subsequently the manuscript variants were influenced, must also consider the liturgical tradition of the Church.