

FACTANK

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Just one-third of U.S. Catholics agree with their church that Eucharist is body, blood of Christ

BY GREGORY A. SMITH



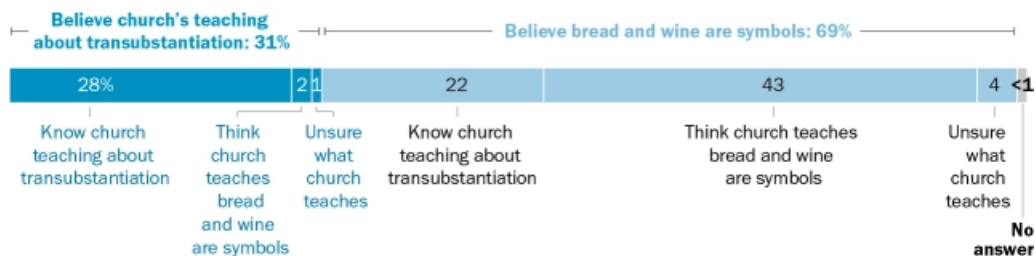
(Avalon_Studio via Getty Images)

Transubstantiation – the idea that during Mass, the bread and wine used for Communion become the body and blood of Jesus Christ – is central to the Catholic faith. Indeed, the Catholic Church teaches that “the [Eucharist is ‘the source and summit’](#) of the Christian life.”

But a new [Pew Research Center survey](#) finds that most self-described Catholics don’t believe this core teaching. In fact, nearly seven-in-ten Catholics (69%) say they personally believe that during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine used in Communion “are *symbols* of the body and blood of Jesus Christ.” Just one-third of U.S. Catholics (31%) say they believe that “during Catholic Mass, the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus.”

Seven-in-ten U.S. Catholics believe bread, wine used in Communion are symbolic

% of U.S. Catholics who ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-19, 2019, among U.S. adults.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In addition to asking Catholics what they believe about the Eucharist, the new survey also included a question that tested whether Catholics *know* what the church teaches on the subject. Most Catholics who believe that the bread and wine are symbolic do not know that the church holds that transubstantiation occurs. Overall, 43% of Catholics believe that the bread and wine are symbolic and also that this reflects the position of the church. Still, one-in-five Catholics (22%) reject the idea of transubstantiation, even though they know about the church's teaching.

The vast majority of those who believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ – 28% of all Catholics – do know that this is what the church teaches. A small share of Catholics (3%) profess to believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist despite *not knowing* the church's teaching on transubstantiation.

About six-in-ten (63%) of the most observant Catholics — those who attend Mass at least once a week — accept the church's teaching about transubstantiation. Still, even among this most observant group of Catholics, roughly one-third (37%) don't believe that the Communion bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ (including 23% who don't know the church's teaching and 14% who know the church's teaching but don't believe it). And among Catholics who do not attend Mass weekly, large majorities say they believe the bread and wine are symbolic and do not actually become the body and blood of Jesus.

Most weekly Mass-goers believe in transubstantiation; most other Catholics do not

% of U.S. Catholics who ...

	NET Believe bread and wine become body, blood of Christ	Know church teaching on transubstantiation	Don't know teaching/ unsure about teaching	NET Believe bread and wine are symbols	Know church teaching on transubstantiation	Don't know teaching/ unsure about teaching
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Attend Mass weekly or more	63	58	5	37	14	23
Monthly/yearly	25	23	1	75	25	50
Seldom/never	13	10	2	87	25	62
Men	32	30	3	67	24	44
Women	29	27	3	70	20	50
White	34	32	2	65	25	40
Hispanic	24	21	4	76	19	57
Under age 40	26	23	3	74	27	47
40-59	27	26	2	72	22	50
60 or older	38	35	3	61	18	43
High school or less	26	22	3	74	15	59
Some college	31	27	4	69	19	50
College graduate	37	36	1	62	33	30

Note: Those who declined to answer not shown. Whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics can be of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-19, 2019, among U.S. adults.

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The survey also finds that belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is most common among older Catholics, though majorities in every age group (including 61% of those age 60 and over) believe that the bread and wine are symbols, not the actual body and blood of Christ.

Note: See [full topline results](#) and [methodology](#).

Topics [Catholics and Catholicism](#), [Christians and Christianity](#), [Religious Affiliation](#), [Religious Beliefs and Practices](#)



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