



What is the **Institution Narrative**? Simply put, the Institution Narrative is the words of Jesus at the Last Supper which we hear in the Mass. These are the words of the Mass that describe what Jesus did and what he said, including the words of Consecration which gave us his Body and Blood for the Holy Eucharist. When we hear the word “Institution” in this context, we are talking about the Institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

One Narrative from Multiple Texts

Fr. Guy Oury teaches, “The Account of the Institution is reported two different ways in the Gospel narrative. According to the Pauline tradition, followed by Saint Luke, the Lord after each consecration commanded his disciples to do what he had done, in memory of him: ‘Do this in memory of me’ (Lk 22:19). ‘Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’ (1 Cor 11:25). Saint Matthew prefaces each consecration with an invitation to partake of the bread and wine: ‘Take and eat’... ‘Drink from it, all of you’ (Mt 26:26ff).” Fr. Oury continues, “St. Paul and St. Luke speak of the ‘cup of the new covenant in my blood.’ St. Matthew’s rendition is more direct and abrupt: ‘This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins’... As reported in St. Matthew, the words of institution contain what amounts to a complete doctrine of the Eucharistic celebration. They say in effect that the death of Jesus has the character of an expiatory sacrifice for the sin of the world. Beyond that, they say that the Eucharist gives us the true Body and the true Blood of the crucified Christ as our food, and by the very fact of sacramental eating of the victim it also gives us participation in Christ’s own sacrifice—this by will of the Lord expressed in person...” Interestingly, “There is not a single Liturgy that adhered strictly to one of the four scriptural formulas to the exclusion of the three others. Every liturgical account of the Institution was made of borrowings from more than one text” (*The Mass*, pp. 91–92).

A Fuller Picture of the Last Supper

At the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples ate a ritual meal. This meal had an order of events and a progression that would have been familiar to the disciples. What we recognize now in the Mass reflects parts of the meal that Jesus changed significantly. Those changes we now see at the heart of the Mass, as the priest stands in the person of Christ. These words and actions at the heart of the Mass are the true words and actions of Jesus, the words and actions by which Jesus changes the bread and wine into the Eucharist, his true Body and Blood.

To summarize from above, if we take the four Gospels together (or, in this case, Gospels plus the writings of St. Paul), we get a fuller picture of Jesus and his life, words, and ministry. The early Church knew we shouldn’t leave anything out and knew the best way to give the “whole picture” was to use all the inspired Gospels and books of the Bible. We certainly benefit from the faith and wisdom of those who have gone before us! We have in the Bible four slightly different accounts of the words and actions of the Last Supper. As we said earlier when reflecting on the Gospels, we have four different Gospels because each writer had a particular audience he was writing for. Some things would have been widely known in certain audiences and so didn’t need to be written down. For example, St. Matthew didn’t need to talk about Jewish meals, sacrifices, and practices because he was writing to a Jewish audience who would have known all that. On the other hand, St. Luke and St. Paul do talk about the customs more, because they were primarily writing to non-Jewish people. When it comes to the Eucharist, what is essential and what is found in each account is that Jesus, by his word, changes the bread and wine into his Body and Blood, gives Communion to the disciples, and asks them to continue this celebration. That is exactly what we do in every Mass!