



# Eucharist

## Body of Christ, Broken for the World



The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*], no. 11). In the Eucharistic Liturgy and our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, we encounter God’s presence in personal and profound ways. But the Eucharist is also social, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love*): “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (no. 14). The Eucharist, celebrated as a community, teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves, and others. As the Body of Christ, it sends us on mission to help transform our communities, neighborhoods, and world. Church teaching, rooted in both Scripture and Tradition, emphasizes both the personal and social natures of the Eucharist. This guide highlights Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI’s writings about the social nature of the Eucharist. Their words challenge and move us to encounter Christ in the Eucharist in ways both personal and social.

### **We experience the Eucharist as a community.**

The Eucharist draws each of us closer to Christ as individuals, but also as a community. As Catholics, we never really worship alone. At the Eucharistic Liturgy, we gather with the young and old, the rich and poor, as well as millions around the world and the saints in heaven, to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice. This powerful reality reminds us, in the words of Pope John Paul II: “A truly Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself”, (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [*On the Eucharist*], no. 39); rather the Eucharist challenges us to recognize our place within a community and the human family.

### **The Eucharist awakens us to our own dignity and to that of others.**

The Eucharist is a sign of our incomparable dignity as human persons. This dignity, given to all equally, regardless of our social or economic status or where we come from (Jas 2: 1-9), causes us to recognize “what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one. . . . If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person,” Pope John Paul II writes (*Dominicae Cenae* [*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*], no. 6).

### **The Eucharist unifies and heals divisions.**

St. Paul taught that the celebration of the Eucharist is insincere if there are divisions within the community based on class (1 Cor 11), status, or privilege (Rom 12), or if there are factions within the community (1 Cor 1). Partaking in the Sacrament as equals in the Body of Christ challenges us to unity as one family.

### **The Eucharist sensitizes us to those who suffer.**

As we meditate on the Eucharist, we experience Christ’s love for us—and for others. In the depth of prayer, we become so moved and sensitized to his love for those who suffer that the words of St. Augustine become a reality for us: “The pain of one, even the smallest member, is the pain of all” (*Sermo Denis*).

### **The Eucharist moves us and inspires us to respond.**

In the Eucharist, the boundlessness of the Father’s love “springs up within us a lively response” that causes us to “begin to love” (*Dominicae Cenae*, no. 5). Contemplating Christ’s sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn “into the very dynamic of his self-giving” we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 13). St. John Chrysostom’s words in the fourth century become real for us as we reflect on Matthew 25:31-46: Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked.

### **Eucharist-inspired love allows us to live out our Christian vocation.**

Pope John Paul II writes that our ability to go and do likewise in imitation of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is the "criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine* [Stay with us, Lord], no. 28). "Eucharistic worship," he says, is the expression of "the love that springs up within us from the Eucharist"—that love which is "the authentic and deepest characteristic of the Christian vocation" (*Dominicae Cenaе*, no. 5).

### **The Eucharist challenges us to recognize and confront structures of sin.**

The Risen Christ in the Eucharist acts as "a compelling force for inner renewal, an inspiration to change the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled" (Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini* [On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy], no. 73). These structures include racism, violence, injustice, poverty,

exploitation, and all other systemic degradation of human life or dignity. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, our "fraternal communion" in the Eucharist leads to "a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [Sacrament of Charity], no. 89).

### **The Eucharist prepares us for mission.**

In the face of the sin and injustice we see present in our communities and in our world, the Eucharist "plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us," challenging us to live "Eucharistic" lives. It affirms our role as citizens and as men and women in various professions at different levels of society in "contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20).

### **The Eucharist propels us forth to transform the world.**

The Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today." Christ in the Eucharist calls us to build "a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20). Filled with awe for all we have received in Christ's self-gift, we respond with service and works of charity. We act to transform unjust structures, policies, and laws that degrade human life and dignity.

Copyright © 2013, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to duplicate this work without adaptation for non-commercial use.

## QUESTIONS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION BEFORE THE EUCHARIST

1. Spend some time reflecting on the passages from papal writings that are included in this handout.
  - Which do you find inspiring?
  - Which do you find challenging?
  - How might God be speaking to you?
2. What issues affecting your community and the world today weigh deeply on your heart? Spend some time bringing these concerns before the Blessed Sacrament.
3. During your time before Christ in the Eucharist, can you sense his compassion? Love? Desire to transform all that opposes human life and dignity?
4. What gifts has God, the Father, given you? How might he be asking you to use these gifts in the service of others?
5. How does the Eucharistic meal compel you to care for those who are hungry?
6. How might the Holy Spirit be moving you to join with others to respond to problems in your family, neighborhood, or community?



# The Eucharistic Liturgy

## Formed, Transformed, and Sent



The Eucharist is the “sign” and “cause” of our communion with God and our unity as the People of God. In the Eucharist, we “unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy” and with one another. Together transformed, we are then sent forth to fulfill God’s will in our daily lives (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], nos. 1325-26, 1332). In this way, the Eucharistic Liturgy is social in nature. It is the celebration through which God draws us into communion with himself and with others, forming and transforming us to live as the Body of Christ in the world.

### Gathering

The gathering for worship and the Introductory Rites emphasize our coming together as a community. From our individual lives and situations, we gather as one family. At the entrance song, we raise our voices in a united chorus. The ordained minister leads us in the Sign of the Cross, which recalls the Trinity’s divine communion of persons and to which we respond with one communal voice. As we make the Sign of the Cross, we turn to God, opening ourselves to his transforming presence.

### Penitential Act

During the Penitential Act, we acknowledge the sin that affects our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world around us. We seek Christ’s healing love and forgiveness in order that we might be transformed—both as individuals and as a community, into a people of love. During the *Confiteor*, we ask the members of our heavenly community, “blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints,” and our brothers and sisters around us to pray for us, and we for them.

### Liturgy of the Word

At this time, we hear a “proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation” (Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*], no. 35). Through the Scriptures, we also receive teaching, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tm 3:16). We are guided and instructed in faith and in how to live in right relationship with God, others, ourselves, and creation.

### Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful

As Pope John Paul II writes, “The Prayer of the Faithful responds not only to the needs of the particular Christian community but also to those of all humanity,” and the Church “makes her own ‘the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of the poor and all those who suffer’” (*Dies Domini* [*On Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy*], no. 38).

### Preparation of the Gifts

Bringing forth donations to share with the poor along with the bread and the wine was part of the tradition of even the first Christian communities. The writings of SS. Paul, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Cyprian describe these donations for use to help orphans and widows, the sick, the imprisoned, and sojourning strangers. Pope John Paul II reminds us that we bring more than our money or donations, bread, and wine to the altar; we also bring our hearts. Through the presentation of the gifts, we contribute to “a demanding *culture of sharing*, to be lived not only among the members of the community itself but also in society as a whole” (*Dies Domini*, no. 70).

### The Eucharistic Prayer

During the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest prays that we might share in the fellowship of the apostles, saints, and martyrs—recalling real and inspiring examples of the “very many saints who are living examples for us of Eucharistic worship” (Pope John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae* [*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*], no. 5). As the

Eucharistic Prayer continues, the reality of Christ's sacrifice is proclaimed for us in order to make us "a holy people" and to allow us to "enjoy for ever the fullness of [God's] glory." The fourth prayer reminds us of the Father's desire "that we might live no longer for ourselves" and that his Spirit would bring "to perfection his work in the world."

During the *consecration*, the Holy Spirit transforms the gifts on the altar into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Christ's sacrifice does not remain at the altar but also enters into our hearts as we participate in it, that we might come to know and model the love that is present in the sacrifice. This *memorial* (which he said to do "in memory of me") recalls Christ's words at the Last Supper. His sacrificial act strengthens our faith and also draws us to "enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* [God Is Love], no. 13).

### The Communion Rite

During the Lord's Prayer, we praise the Father, pray for the coming of his Kingdom on earth, and recall again our need for reconciliation to God and others. At the Rite of Peace, we extend our hands and our hearts to one another in a sign of communion and charity. We then ask the Lamb of God for mercy and peace.

Before the priest raises the host, he proclaims how Christ, through "the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit" brought "life to the world." On behalf of the congregation, he prays, "Keep me always faithful to your commandments, and never let me be parted from you." In praying to be faithful to the Church's teachings, God's help is sought in our daily lives to follow the mandates of Scripture and the

tradition of our Church, which lead us to right and loving relationship with God, ourselves, and others.

Before receiving Communion, we acknowledge our unworthiness and pray for God's healing for ourselves and our community. We prepare for communion with Christ and the Spirit, but also with one another. Pope John Paul II writes in *Dominicae Cena*, "We approach as a community the table." We receive Christ as "a gift and grace for each individual" but also "in the unity of His body which is the Church" (no. 4). The Eucharist is a "sacrament of [the Church's] unity" (no. 12).

### Final Blessing and Dismissal

The Concluding Rites with the Dismissal prepare us for mission: empowered by the Holy Spirit, we live out our baptismal consecration in the world. Renewed by the Eucharist, we are sent back into our daily lives to transform our communities and world.

Pope John Paul II writes that the Prayer after Communion, Final Blessing, and Dismissal should lead "all who have shared in the Eucharist" to "a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them." Returning to their daily lives, Christ's disciples are called to "make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because of what they have received in the celebration" (*Dies Domini*, no. 45).

The Good News we have received should overflow into our lives and move us to mission in the world. Thus, the Concluding Rites are not an end but a beginning, calling us to make our entire lives "Eucharistic," so that "the Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns

to become a *promoter of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation" (Pope John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* [Stay with Us, Lord], no. 27). Pope John Paul II issues this challenge:

Why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table. (*Dies Domini*, no. 72)

Likewise, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that our "fraternal communion" in the Eucharist, must lead to "a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [Sacrament of Charity], no. 89). Transformation by Christ in the Eucharist should compel us to address injustices that degrade the life or dignity of others—the poor, the unborn, immigrants, the elderly—all brothers and sisters in need.

Learn about the *Roman Missal* at [www.usccb.org/romanmissal](http://www.usccb.org/romanmissal).

Copyright © 2013, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC. All rights reserved. Permission is hereby granted to duplicate this work without adaptation for non-commercial use.