



My Experience of Eucharist

1. Recall the experience of participating in a Eucharist (Mass) that was particularly significant or meaningful for you.

- What made this particular Mass meaningful for you or your family? Name several things that made it meaningful for you.

- What did your experience of this Mass teach you about the importance of the Eucharist for our lives as Catholics and for your own life or your family's life?

2. What does the Eucharist mean to you (and your family)? If you had to summarize your understanding in a brief paragraph would you say?

Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children II (Excerpts)

God, our loving Father, we are glad to give you thanks and praise because you love us.

Because you love us, you gave us this great and beautiful world.

Because you love us, you sent Jesus your Son to bring us to you and to gather around him as the children of one family.

For such great love we thank you with the angels and saints as they praise you and sing: holy, holy, holy Lord God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory: Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed be Jesus, whom you sent to be the friend of children and of the poor.

He came to show us how we can love you, Father, by loving one another.
He came to take away sin, which keeps us from being friends.

God our Father, now we ask you send your Holy Spirit to change these gifts of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The night before he died, Jesus your Son showed us how much you love us.
When he was at supper with his disciples, he took bread and gave you thanks and praise.
Then he broke the bread, gave it to his friends, and said:

Take this, all of you, and eat it:
this is my body which will given up for you.

When supper was ended, Jesus took the cup that was filled with wine.
He thanked you, gave it to his friends, and said:

Take this, all of you, and drink from it:
this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.
It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven.

Then he said to them: do this in memory of me.

And so, loving Father, we remember that Jesus died and rose again to save the world.
He put himself into our hands to be the sacrifice we offer you.

I Believe Eucharist Is...



Read each statement and rate how well it reflects your understanding of Eucharist (Mass). The scale moves from lowest (1) to highest (4) in agreement with your own understanding:

1 = This statement does not reflect my understanding or belief about Eucharist.

4 = This statement reflects how I understand or what I believe about Eucharist.

1. The Eucharist is sacred time in a sacred place – a chance to take time out, pray, and remind myself of God’s presence. 1 2 3 4
2. The Eucharist is a symbolic meal shared by people as a sign of their friendship with one another in Christ. 1 2 3 4
3. The Eucharist is a special way both to remember and celebrate that Jesus saved us from sin through his sacrificial death on the cross and his Resurrection from the dead. 1 2 3 4
4. The Eucharist is a challenge for us to live our Catholic faith everyday, especially by working for justice and peace, and serving those in need just as Jesus did. 1 2 3 4
5. The Eucharist is a prayer offered to God giving thanks for all God’s gifts to people. 1 2 3 4
6. The Eucharist is Jesus truly present under the appearances of bread and wine. 1 2 3 4
7. The Eucharist is a special way that Christ is present in the community. 1 2 3 4
8. The Eucharist is what Jesus told his followers to do in order to remember him. 1 2 3 4
9. The Eucharist is the most important way that Catholics identify themselves as members of the Church. 1 2 3 4

If you had to summarize your understanding of the Eucharist in a brief paragraph what would you say?



The Sacrament of Eucharist

Exploration: Theological Understandings of Eucharist

Your Task: Explain the meaning of the Eucharist in contemporary terms using these three beliefs about Eucharist.

- The Eucharist is a meal.
- The Eucharist is a sacrifice.
- The Eucharist is the real presence of Christ.

Exploration 1. Meal and Nourishment

- Read one of the Synoptic Gospel accounts of the loaves and fishes: Mark 6:34-44 or Matthew 14:13-21 or Luke 9:11-17.
- Read John 6:31-35.

Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- How was the multiplication of the loaves and fishes an anticipation of the Eucharist?
- How do you experience the Eucharist as a meal and nourishment?
- Why do you think it is important that Jesus feeds us at the Eucharist?

Exploration 2. Sacrifice

- Read the account of the Last Supper in the Gospel of Mark (14:22-26) and the Gospel of Luke (22:14-20).
- Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
- Read Eucharistic Prayer II, III, or IV.
- Read excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the *memorial of his sacrifice*. In so doing, *we offer to the Father* what he has himself given us: the gifts of his creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made present. (CCC #1357)

We must therefore consider the Eucharist as:

- thanksgiving and praise to the *Father*;
- the sacrificial memorial of *Christ* and his Body;
- the presence of Christ by the power of his word and of his *Spirit*. (CCC #1358)

In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present." As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." (CC #1364)

Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (CCC #1365)

Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- How do you experience the Eucharist (Mass) as a sacrifice?
- Why do you think it is important that the Mass is a sacrifice?

Exploration 3. Real Presence of Christ

- Read the Emmaus story in the Gospel of Luke 24:13-35.
- Read Eucharistic Prayer II, III, or IV.
- Read excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

"Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us," is present in many ways to his Church: in his word, in his Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name," in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But "he is present . . . most *especially in the Eucharistic species*." (CCC #1373)

The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*." "This presence is called 'real' – by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."
(CCC #1374)

It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament. (CCC #1375)

It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. Since Christ was about to take his departure from his own in his visible form, he wanted to give us his sacramental presence; since he was about to offer himself on the cross to save us, he wanted us to have the memorial of the love with which he loved us "to the end," even to the giving of his life. In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, and he remains under signs that express and communicate this love... (CCC #1380)

■ Read quotes from theologians:

'True, real and substantial' are very abstract terms when applied to presence. In day-to-day life, we do not speak about people whom we love being 'truly, really and substantially' present to us. More often than not, we speak about presence in terms of intimacy. Jesus wants to be intimately close to each of us. Jesus is not simply present by being in the same building as we are or by being physically close to us but not caring about us.

Rather, Jesus, in the Eucharist, wants to be and is deeply present to us in love and in compassion. Only when we begin to understand the Eucharist as a time when Jesus is not distant, but close; not aloof, but very intimate; not above us, but profoundly near us; not judging us, but compassionate toward us, will we be truly able to relate this teaching of the Church to our faith and devotion.

(Kenan Osborn, *Sacramental Guidelines: A Companion to the New Catechism for Religious Educators*.)

...we need a body and blood relationship with God in Christ. We can only begin to understand the body and blood of Jesus when we understand true love in relationships involving friends, family and marriage.

Truly the Eucharist is a real, interpersonal encounter between God and the worshipping community precisely because Christ is body-and-blood present. Our human experiences of love and relationships tell us that any lover seeks concrete union with the beloved. Although there may be new formulas to describe the real presence, the love expressed in the Eucharist is as old as Christmas. It is like the love between a mother and her infant in the womb.

(Jeffrey D. VonLehmen, *Real Presence in the Eucharist*. Catholic Update.)

Reflection

Take a moment to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- How do you experience the real presence of Christ at the Eucharist (Mass)? Which of the four "presences" of Christ at the Eucharist are most significant for you: Jesus present in (a) the presiding priest; (b) the word of God; (c) the people gathered to celebrate by praying and singing; (d) the bread and wine that are consecrated as Jesus' body and blood?

- Why do you think it is important that the Jesus is really present at the Mass (rather than just symbolically present in bread and wine)?

Integration

- What did you learn about the Eucharist that you didn't know before? What difference might this new understanding make in your celebration of the Eucharist?
- What new questions about Eucharist do you have after this session?
- How does what you learned in this session compare to your present understanding of Eucharist that you developed at this beginning of this session? How were you affirmed? What would you change? What would you add?

Changes or Additions:

Application

Insight #1 (St. Augustine)

Referring to the Eucharist, St. Augustine said: "If then you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your sacrament that reposes on the altar of the Lord... Be what you see and receive what you are." "There you are on the table, and there you are in the chalice."

Insight #2 (Nathan Mitchell)

In short, the church's celebration of a ritual meal launches a process of *becoming* eucharist, a process that is completed only when Christians recognize their own new identity as *Christ's body in the world*. That is why the epiclesis of the eucharistic prayer prays not only for a transformation of the gifts but also of the people: "Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit." (Eucharistic Prayer II) Or as Augustine expressed it in Book VII of his *Confession*:

I am the food of grown men and women. Grow, and you shall feed upon me.

You will not change me into yourself, as you change food into flesh, but you will be changed into me.

(Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence*, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998. pages 118-119)

The Eucharistic Prayer

Committee on the Liturgy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
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The Eucharistic Prayer or Canon of the Mass is the central prayer of the entire celebration. Most Catholics have been made aware from their earliest days that during the Eucharistic Prayer the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. What many Catholics are not aware of, however, is that the Eucharistic Prayer is about more than adoring Christ who becomes present in our midst.

The Church tells us that liturgy (and the Mass is the highpoint and heart of liturgy) is the **action** of Christ the priest and His Body, the Church. In the celebration of Mass, during the Eucharistic Prayer, not only does Christ become present, body and blood, soul and divinity, under the forms of bread and wine, but Christ's saving action, His passion, death and resurrection are once again enacted and offered to the Father by Christ Himself in the person of the priest, and by all present.

This is a truth of enormous significance! This action of Christ which brought about our redemption from sin and eternal death, offered once for all on Calvary, becomes present again for us, here and now, in this time and place, so that we can join in Christ's perfect offering and can ourselves participate in His perfect worship.

Read carefully any of the Eucharistic Prayers. You will see that prayer is offered, not to Christ, but to the Father: "Father, you are holy indeed..."; "Father, we bring you these gifts..."; "Father, we ask you...". It is worship offered to the Father by Christ as it was at the moment of His passion, death and resurrection, but now it is offered through the priest acting in the person of Christ, and it is offered as well by all of us who are part of Christ's Body, the Church. **This** is the **action** of Christ's Body, the Church at Mass.

When the priest prays this prayer he prays "**we** bring you these gifts"; "**we** ask you..."; "**we** offer". That "**we**" signifies that all the baptized present at this Eucharistic celebration make this offering in union with Christ, pray this prayer in union with Him. And what is most important, we do not offer Christ alone; we are called to **offer ourselves**, our lives, our individual efforts to grow more like Christ and our efforts as a community of believers to spread God's Word and to serve God's people, to the Father in union with Christ through the hands of the priest. Most wonderful of all, although our offering is in itself imperfect, joined with the offering of Christ it becomes **perfect** praise and thanksgiving to the Father.

And so, during the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, we have more to do than to look forward to the moment of consecration and remain there while the prayer of the priest continues. Before the consecration we join in the prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Father known as the Preface and affirm that praise and thanksgiving in our singing of the Holy, Holy, Holy. Following the Consecration we join together in the Memorial Acclamation which proclaims our common faith in Christ's real presence and is an acclamation expressing our gratitude to Christ for His

wonderful gift of salvation. But then our prayer moves on and we are called to offer Christ, and ourselves with Christ to the Father: "We offer to you, Father, this holy and living sacrifice..." and to pray with the priest that "we who are nourished by His Body and Blood may be filled with the Holy Spirit and become one body, one spirit in Christ..."; we then join our prayers with the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints for our Holy Father the Pope, our bishops and clergy and all God's people, living and dead. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer the priest sums up all that has gone before: "Through Him (Christ), with Him (Christ), in Him (Christ) in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, forever and ever." And we who are privileged to make our own offering through, with and in Christ, respond with the most important acclamation of the Mass, the great AMEN by which we profess the action of Christ to be our action as well.