

### THE REVELATION OF THE EUCHARIST

*The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. . . The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being.*

- CCC, nos. 1322 and 1325, citing Sacred Congregation of Rites,  
*Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery*  
(*Eucharisticum Mysterium*), no. 6

The origins of the Eucharist are found in the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his Apostles. "In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; 'thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament'" (CCC, no. 1337, citing Council of Trent: DS 1740). So rich is this mystery that we have a number of terms to illumine its saving grace: the Breaking of the Bread; the Lord's Supper; the Eucharistic Assembly; the Memorial of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection; the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Holy and Divine Liturgy; the Eucharistic Liturgy; Holy Communion; and Holy Mass (cf. CCC, nos. 1328-1332).

The use of bread and wine in worship is already found in the early history of God's people. In the Old Testament, bread and wine are seen as gifts from God, to whom praise and thanks are given in return for these blessings and for other manifestations of his care and grace. The story of the priest Melchizedek's offering a sacrifice of bread and wine for Abraham's victory is an example of this (cf. Gn 14:18). The harvest of new lambs was also a time for the sacrifice of a lamb to show gratitude to God for the new flock and its contribution to the well-being of the family and tribe.

These ancient rituals were given historical meaning at the Exodus of God's people. They were united into the Passover Meal as a sign of God's delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, a pledge of his fidelity to his promises and eventually a sign of the coming of the Messiah and messianic times. Each family shared the lamb that had been sacrificed and the bread over which a blessing had been proclaimed. They also drank from a cup of wine over which a similar blessing had been proclaimed.

When Jesus instituted the Eucharist he gave a final meaning to the blessing of the bread and the wine and the sacrifice of the lamb. The Gospels narrate events that anticipated the Eucharist. The miracle of the loaves and fish, reported in all four Gospels, prefigured the unique abundance of the Eucharist. The miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana manifested the divine glory of Jesus and the heavenly wedding feast in which we share at every Eucharist.

In his dialogue with the people at Capernaum, Christ used his miracle of multiplying the loaves

of bread as the occasion to describe himself as the Bread of Life: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. . . . Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:51, 53).

### THE LAST SUPPER

The account of the institution of the Eucharist may be found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as well as in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (see Mt 26:17-29; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:7-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Jesus chose the Passover feast as the time in which he would institute the Eucharist and would undergo his dying and rising (d. CCC, nos. 1339-1340). With the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus gave the Passover its new and definitive meaning. He showed himself to be the High Priest of the New Covenant, offering himself as a perfect sacrifice to the Father. Jesus changed the bread and wine into his Body and Blood, given now as an offering for the salvation of all people. For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

By the words "Do this in memory of me," Jesus commanded the Apostles and their successors to repeat his actions and words "until he comes again." From earliest times, the Church has remained faithful to this command. Particularly on Sunday, the day of Christ's Resurrection, the faithful has gathered for the Breaking of the Bread. This practice has continued unbroken for two thousand years right up to the present day.

In the Gospel of John, instead of an account of the institution of the Eucharist, there is the narrative of the foot washing (John 13:1-20) at the beginning of the Last Supper, which sets the tone of humble service, exemplified by Christ and fulfilled in his death on the Cross. The Church has selected this Gospel for the Holy Thursday liturgy, highlighting Christ's teaching: "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do" (John 13:14-15).

Christ's Last Supper Discourse (John 14:1-17:26) reflects Eucharistic themes of divine love, a union with Christ as intimate as a branch is to a vine, and a priestly prayer for the Apostles and those who would believe through them.

### THE MASS FOR THE ROMAN RITE

Since the second century, the Mass (or the Eucharistic Liturgy) has had a structure that is common to all Catholics. While there can be different emphases during the celebration of Mass in Eastern Churches, they maintain the fundamental twofold structure with which members of the Latin Church are familiar. Thus, the Mass unfolds in two major parts that form a single act of worship. First, there is the Liturgy of the Word, with Scripture readings, homily, Profession of

Faith, and General Intercessions. Second, there is the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with the presentation of the bread and wine, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the reception of Holy Communion. The essential elements of Eucharistic celebrations may be summarized in the following four points.

### 1. The Introductory Rites

The Christian community, united by the Holy Spirit, gathers for worship in response to God's call. Jesus, our High Priest, is the principal agent of our celebration. The bishop or priest acts in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church. All the worshipers participate actively with interior devout attention and with external reverence shown by singing the hymns and giving the responses and, when appropriate, observing silence. There are also the deacon, the lectors, those who present the offerings, the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the altar servers, the musicians, and other ministers. This first movement contains the Introductory Rites, which begin the celebration of the Mass. These include the Penitential Rite, the *Gloria*, and the Opening Prayer.

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1 Pt 2:9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism. (SC, no. 14)

### 2. Liturgy of the Word

Over the course of the liturgical year, readings from Scripture, especially the Gospels, provide the heart of this part of the celebration. The proclamation of God's Word and its explanation are meant to arouse our faith and prepare us for an ever deeper participation in the mystery of the Eucharist. The readings are followed by a homily from a bishop, priest, or deacon; the Profession of Faith in the recitation of the Creed; and intercessory prayers.

## THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church. In a variety of ways, she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her

pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope. (Pope John Paul II, *On the Eucharist [Ecclesia de Eucharistia]* ; EEJ, no. 1)

### 3. Liturgy of the Eucharist

a. *The Preparation of the Gifts* (Jesus took bread and wine). The offerings of bread and wine are received by the priest, who may be assisted by a deacon. "They will be offered by the priest in the name of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrifice in which they will become his Body and Blood" (CCC, no. 1350). From the earliest days of the Church, there was also an offering of gifts for the poor and needy. This has become the customary place and time for the parish collection.

b. *The Eucharistic Prayer* (Jesus blessed and gave thanks). This is the heart of the Eucharistic Liturgy, which unfolds in the following manner.

- *Thanksgiving* (expressed especially in the Preface): In this prayer, we thank God the Father, through Christ in the Spirit, for the gifts of creation, salvation, and sanctification.
- *Acclamation*: The whole congregation joins with the angels and saints in singing or saying the *Sanctus* (Holy, Holy).
- *Epiclesis* (Invocation): The Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine offered by human hands into Christ's Body and Blood.
- *Institution Narrative and Consecration*: The priest proclaims Jesus' words at the Last Supper over the bread and wine. "The power of the words and the action of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit, make sacramentally present, under the species of bread and wine, Christ's Body and Blood, his sacrifice offered on the cross for all" (CCC, no. 1353).
- *Anamnesis* (The Remembrance): We recall the death and Resurrection of Christ and look forward to his glorious return. *Second Epiclesis*: The Holy Spirit is invoked upon the gathered community, to bring unity to the worshippers who will receive Holy Communion.
- *Intercessions*: With the whole Communion of Saints and all God's people on earth, we pray for the needs of all the members of the Church, living and dead.
- *Doxology and Great Amen*: We conclude the Eucharistic Prayer with praise of God the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. This glorification is confirmed and concluded by the people's acclamation "Amen."

c. *Communion Rite* (Jesus broke the bread and gave his Body and Blood). After the Lord's Prayer, the Lamb of God is sung or said during the breaking of the Body of Christ, or fraction, then we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. The Communion Rite concludes with a closing prayer.

### 4. Concluding Rite

Following the prayer after Holy Communion, the priest blesses the people and dismisses the assembly.

Centuries of reflection on the Eucharist have left us a spiritual heritage that continues to deepen and grow. Three key truths about the Eucharist draw our attention: it is a Sacrifice, a Holy Meal, and the Real Presence of Christ.

### **THE MASS IS A SACRIFICE**

The Mass is a sacrifice in the sense that when it takes place, Jesus Christ, through the bishop or priest celebrating the Mass, makes present sacramentally his saving, sacrificial death on the Cross by which he redeemed us from our sins. This Eucharistic sacrifice is the memorial of Christ's redeeming death. The term *memorial* in this context is not simply a remembrance of past events; it is a making present in a sacramental manner the sacrifice of the Cross of Christ and his victory. "When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and 'the work of our redemption is carried out'" (EE, no. 11). The Eucharistic sacrifice is offered to adore and thank God, to pray for all our needs, and to gain pardon for our sins.

In this divine sacrifice which is made present in the Mass, especially in the Eucharistic Prayer, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross offers himself in an unbloody manner. Present and effective, Christ's sacrifice is applied to our lives. "If the blood of goats. . . can sanctify those who are defiled. . . how much more will the blood of Christ. . . cleanse our consciences from dead' works to worship the living God" (Heb 9:14).

The Mass is also the sacrifice of the Church. The ordained priest in the Mass links the Eucharistic consecration to the sacrifice of the Cross and to the Last Supper (d. EE, no. 29), thus making it possible that the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of all the members of the Church. "The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value" (CCC, no. 1368). This also reminds us of the importance of sacrifice in each individual's life. In a self-centered culture where people are taught to extend themselves only for something in return, the sacrifices each of us make, following the example of Jesus, who freely sacrificed his life in love for all, point to the reality and power of God's love for us.

The offering of Christ unites the members here on earth and those in heaven. The Pope, as chief shepherd of the People of God, is named at every Mass for the sake of the unity of the whole Church. The bishop of a diocese is named because he is the shepherd of the local Church and the instrument of its unity. The text of the Eucharistic Prayer also recalls the

presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints as they join us in this act of worship. Drawing from the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, the Mass is also offered for the faithful departed—who have died in Christ but may not yet be totally purified—so they may enter the glory of heaven.

### THE MASS IS A HOLY MEAL

"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (Jn 6:53). Jesus Christ shares with us his Body and Blood under the form of bread and wine. Thus the Mass is a sacred banquet that culminates in the reception of Holy Communion. The Church urges us to prepare conscientiously for this moment. We should be in the state of grace, and if we are conscious of a grave or serious sin, we must receive the Sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion. We are also expected to fast from food or drink for at least one hour prior to the reception of Holy Communion. "Like every Catholic generation before us, we must be guided by the words of St. Paul, 'Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord' (1 Cor 11:27). That means that all must examine their consciences as to their worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord. This examination includes fidelity to the moral teaching of the Church in personal and public life" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Catholics in Political Life*, 2004). The Church gives us the humble words of a Roman centurion to say as we prepare to receive Communion: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed" (cf. Mt 8:8).

Although the Church urges us to receive Communion at each Mass, there is an obligation for everyone to receive Communion at least once a year some time during the interval between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday. Since Christ is fully present under each form of the Eucharist (that is, both the consecrated Bread and Wine), it is sufficient to receive him under the species (form) of bread or wine alone. However, the "sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more clearly" (CCC, no. 1390).

Holy Communion increases our union with Christ. Just as bodily food sustains our physical life, so Holy Communion nourishes our spiritual life. This Communion moves us away from sin, strengthening our moral resolve to avoid evil and turn ever more powerfully toward God. "The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin" (CCC, no. 1395).

### THE REAL PRESENCE OF CHRIST

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present in the proclamation of God's Word, in the Eucharistic assembly, in the person of the priest, but above all and in a wholly unique manner in the Eucharist. "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, no. 1374, citing Pope Paul VI, *Mystery of Faith*, no. 39).

Since the Middle Ages, the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ has been called "transubstantiation." This means that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. The appearances of bread and wine remain (color, shape, weight, chemical composition), but the underlying reality—that is, the substance—is now the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Real Presence of Jesus Christ endures in the consecrated elements even after the Mass is ended. Once Communion has been distributed, any remaining hosts are placed in the tabernacle. If any of the Precious Blood remains, it is reverently consumed. The hosts are reserved to provide Communion for the sick, *Viaticum* (Communion for the dying), and to allow the faithful to worship Christ in the reserved Sacrament and to pray in his presence. As a sign of adoration, Latin Catholics genuflect to the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle or genuflect or kneel when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for prayer. Eastern Catholics show their reverence by a profound bow rather than a genuflection: "It is for this reason the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the Church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament" (CCC, no. 1379).

With the passage of time, reverent reflection led the Church to enrich its Eucharistic devotion. Faith that Jesus is truly present in the Sacrament led believers to worship Christ dwelling with us permanently in the Sacrament. Wherever the Sacrament is, there is Christ, who is our Lord and our God. Such worship is expressed in many ways: in genuflection, in adoration of the Eucharist, and in the many forms of Eucharistic devotion that faith has nourished.

The Eucharistic Liturgy contains the entire treasure of the Church since it makes present the Paschal Mystery, the central event of salvation. Eucharistic adoration and devotion flow from and lead to the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Mass.

### **WAYS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PASCHAL MYSTERY**

Through participation in the Eucharist, we also participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, that is, in his dying and rising, which is made present for us in the Eucharistic sacrifice. This participation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ reaches its consummation when we receive his Body and Blood in Holy Communion; Christ's victory and triumph over death is then made

present in the lives of those who participate in the Eucharist.

Holy Communion increases our union with Christ. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (John 6:56). Communion with the Body of Christ preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism.

Holy Communion separates us from sin. We receive the Body of Christ "given up for us" to save us from sin. We receive the Blood of Christ "shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." Our love of God is intensified and therefore our disordered attachments are weakened and even broken. Divine love wipes away venial sins.

Holy Communion offers us strength, called grace, to preserve us from mortal sin. By deepening our friendship with Christ, this Sacrament makes it more difficult for us to break our union with him by mortal sin.

Holy Communion expands the life of the Church. The Church as a communion is bound ever more closely together through the celebration of the Eucharist. As an ancient axiom states, the Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church. In receiving Communion, we are more fully united to the Church.

Holy Communion commits us to care for the poor. St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that in sharing the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, they were also called to care for the poorer members of the community (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34).

Participation in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice is a source and means of grace even apart from the actual reception of Holy Communion. It has also been long understood that when circumstances prevent one from receiving Holy Communion during Mass, it is possible to make a spiritual communion that is also a source of grace. Spiritual communion means uniting one's self in prayer with Christ's sacrifice and worshipping him present in his Body and Blood.

### **FROM THE CATECHISM**

#### **1. What happens at the consecration in the Mass?**

By the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of



Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine, Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true real and substantial manner: His Body and Blood with his Soul and divinity. (CCC no. 1413; Council of Trent: DS 1640, 1651)

### **2. What are the effects of Holy Communion?**

Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicant's union with the Lord, forgives his venial sins and preserves him from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. (CCC, no. 1416)

### **3. Why is it Valuable to visit the Blessed Sacrament?**

Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honored with the worship of adoration. "To visit the Blessed Sacrament is. . . a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ Our Lord." (CCC, no. 1418; Pope Paul VI, *Myster y of Faith*, no. 66)

## **THE EUCHARIST TRANSFORMS THE RECIPIENT**

To participate actively in the Mass, we need to resist a tendency to passivity when gathered in an audience-like setting. At Mass, we are an assembly of believers called to be a community joined in the praise and worship of God. We do this in the singing of hymns, psalms, recitation of prayers and responses, especially in our "Yes" to God in the Great Amen. Active participation also requires an interior attention and a profound inner offering, as St. Paul urges in Romans 12:1: "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship."

When the assembly of the faithful, from the hands of the priest, offers the sacrifice of Christ to the Father, the members of the assembly are called to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. In using the word body, St. Paul does not mean simply our flesh and bones, but rather our very selves. This, then, is a spiritual sacrifice. How can we do this?

In the Eucharistic Prayer, we hear that Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, made it his Body, and gave it for our salvation. One way of identifying with this is to pray, "Lord, take me. Bless me. Break me. Make me a part of your saving, sacrificial gift for the world's bodily and spiritual needs." Having offered ourselves to the Father in union with Christ, we practice active

participation in the Mass in its highest form.

This inner drama at each Mass contributes to the process of our spiritual transformation into Christ. It all takes time. When we receive Communion, we need to remember that we are not changing Christ into ourselves. Jesus is transforming us into himself. This requires a proper understanding of the Real Presence of Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine. It is not simply a symbol that merely points to Jesus. Nor is Christ's presence just a projection on our part in the sense that we make him present when we receive him. As Pope Benedict XVI told the young people gathered for the Twentieth World Youth Day:

The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood.

We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world. (Benedict XVI, Homily at Marienfeld, Twentieth World Youth Day [August 21, 2005])

The consecrated bread has become Christ's Body. The consecrated wine has become Christ's Blood. Jesus Christ is substantially present in a way that is entirely unique. This happens by the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the priest's or bishop's acting in the person of Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer. At Mass, when we are offered the Host and hear the statement "The Body of Christ," we answer, "Amen," that is, "Yes, I believe."

Only Jesus can transform us into himself. Our inner receptivity is critical. To receive love, we need to be open to it. The sacrificial gift of self at every Mass is the best way to be continuously transformed into Christ. Then in Christ we become bread for the world's bodily and spiritual hungers.

### **DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS**

- Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice, the banquet of divine life, at the Last Supper.
- We need to remember that the Eucharist is the summit and source of our Christian life. Why? Because in the Eucharist is found the entire treasure of the Church-Jesus Christ.
- The Eucharistic celebration begins with the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist the preparation of the gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer (the

prayer of thanksgiving and praise, including the consecration of the bread and wine), and the reception of Holy Communion. The celebration concludes with the sending forth to serve the Lord.

- The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's saving life, death, and Resurrection, made present for our salvation by the action of the liturgy.
- Christ, acting through the ministry of his priests, is both the priest offering the sacrifice and the victim being sacrificed.
- "Only validly ordained priests can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of the Lord" (CCC, no. 1411).
- The essential signs of the Eucharist for the Latin Church are unleavened wheat bread and grape wine.
- At Mass, the consecrated bread is Christ's Body. The consecrated wine is Christ's Blood. Jesus Christ, whole and entire, is fully present under each form of the Eucharist. He is substantially present in a way that is entirely unique. This happens by the power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the priest's acting in the person of Christ during the Eucharistic Prayer.
- "As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead and to obtain spiritual and temporal benefits from God" (CCC, no. 1414).
- To receive Communion, one should be in the state of grace. A person conscious of mortal sin may not receive Communion until absolved from the sin in the Sacrament of Penance (see 1 Cor 11:27-29).
- A person who is conscious of grave sin but has no opportunity for sacramental confession may receive Communion for a serious reason; in such a case, the person must first make an act of perfect contrition and have the intention of confessing as soon as possible (cf. CCC, can. 916).
- The fruits of Holy Communion include a deeper union with Christ, a closer identity with all the faithful, a commitment to the poor, and a pledge of future glory.
- The faithful are urged to receive Communion at Mass. The Church obliges them to do so at least once a year during the Easter season. .
- Once Communion has been distributed, the remaining hosts are placed in the tabernacle to provide Communion for the sick and Viaticum for the dying and also to provide opportunity for prayer and worship before Christ in his Real Presence.