

Sacrament of the Eucharist

A Sacrament is an external sign (something that can be seen) instituted by Christ to give grace (the gift of intimate relationship with God). There are 7 Sacraments in our Catholic faith:

- Sacraments of Initiation
Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist
- Sacraments of Healing
Anointing of the Sick, Reconciliation
- Sacraments of Vocation
Holy Orders, Marriage



The Sacrament of the Eucharist provides food for the journey of spiritual growth into which a person has been initiated through Baptism and Confirmation. It was instituted by Jesus at the “Last Supper” when He said, “Take and eat, this is my Body”, “Take and drink, this is my Blood”. He then instructed His apostles to “do this in memory of me.” Jesus further emphasizes the importance of Eucharist when He says, “...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life within you.” (John 6:53) He goes on to say, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:54)



What is the significance of such a strong teaching? When Jesus instituted the Eucharist He was celebrating a Passover meal with His apostles. In the Passover meal, a lamb is slaughtered and its blood drained out. This was done because the Israelites believed they could not consume the blood of the sacrificed animal—the blood represented its “life force” and could therefore not be consumed. The lamb was then roasted and eaten. Because it has been slaughtered for the purpose of the sacred meal, it had “passed over” into the realm of God. Thus the Israelites were in their own way entering into communion with God in the Passover Meal.

Jesus changes all that. He is now the Lamb of God. He wants us to participate in the divine life of God by receiving BOTH His body and His blood. We are invited through the Eucharist into a deeply personal and intimate relationship with our God.

Both the testimony of Sacred Scripture, and the writings of early Church fathers, establish a belief handed on to us today, that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. He offers Himself to us to remind us of His love and the love of the Father for us, and he invites us into a deeper and more personal relationship with Him. As food for the spiritual journey, the Eucharist nourishes our faith and opens up for us the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation.



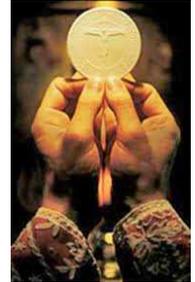
Should the Eucharist be received under both species? Jesus seems to think so! At the Council of Trent in 1551 the Church taught that a person receives the complete Jesus: Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity under either the species of the consecrated host or in the species of the consecrated blood. Afterwards most pastors offered only the consecrated host for Communion. This was not, however, the practice of the early Church or the practice we are seeking to revive after Vatican II, which called for us to restore the older practices of the Church. The earliest instruction that we seen on how to receive the Eucharist comes from St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the 4th century. He urges people to make a throne for the King with their hands, step to the side after Jesus is placed onto the throne and receive Him, and then proceed to the cup. There was, as far as we can tell, no provision for receiving on the tongue or for receiving only the consecrated Body. Those are later developments in our history. What is most important is the respect, care and reverence shown for the Body and Blood of our Lord.

Can anyone receive the Eucharist? Only those who are baptized and in good standing with the Church are invited to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. All are invited to the Mass, and those who for one reason or another cannot receive the Eucharist are invited to make a “spiritual communion”. People not in “good standing” include those who are conscious of mortal sin, until they go to Confession, and those married outside the Church. We can help resolve both of these issues.

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Holy Sacrament. I love You above all things, and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

May baptized non-Catholics receive the Eucharist? The Early Church faced many heresies, ranging from Jesus was not truly God and truly Man, to Jesus was not truly present in the Eucharist. Because the early Church saw the Eucharist as a sign of unity and communion with the Holy Father, the Bishops, and the faithful, they did not permit people with different belief systems to participate in the Eucharist. That is the guiding principle today as well. If you do not accept the Pope, the Bishops, and the belief system of Catholicism you are not invited to the Eucharist, since it is a sign of our union and communion with each other.

What is Eucharistic Adoration? At Mass when the bread is consecrated into the Body of Christ, and the wine is consecrated into the Blood of Christ, the priest holds the Body and then the Cup up for the people to adore. Adoration means that we pay special respect to the Eucharist. Outside Mass, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament can be done anytime the Eucharist is “exposed”, or placed upon an altar, usually in a Monstrance, which is an implement whose name means “to show forth”. Eucharistic Adoration is done in silence. It is a moment for the individual to be in communion with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament—a moment of intimate prayer with God.



Why is our worship called the “Mass”? The word “Mass” comes from the dismissal at the end of the celebration. The original Latin dismissal was “*ita, missae est*” which literally translates to GO, THE MASS IS ENDED. In other words, the emphasis on our worship is not simply being there, but being nourished to go out into our world and make a difference. We are nourished to go forth and continue Jesus’ mission in our world today. We are nourished for service to others and for the mission of evangelization.

Why is the Eucharist so Important to us as Catholics?

1. Jesus calls us to the Eucharist.
2. Jesus calls us to place the Eucharist at the center of our lives.
3. We encounter Jesus in a personal and intimate way and are invited to let Him deepen our relationship with Him.
4. The word “Eucharist” means to “give thanks”. The sacrifice of our time to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist is the way Jesus asks us to give God thanks for our blessings—spiritual and material.
5. We are called to pray with and for the community of believers.
6. We are nourished for our lives as Catholics.
7. The Eucharist is the summit to which all of our efforts as followers of Jesus are directed.
8. The Eucharist is the source of graces needed to live our lives as Catholics and it is important that we stay connected to the Christian community.

What is the significance of the Tabernacle? The Tabernacle is a major focus in our Catholic churches. It is where Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament, is housed for several purposes:

- to be a focus of private prayer,
- to have the Eucharist available to take to the sick and homebound,
- to be a constant reminder that Christ is in our midst.

The word comes from the Jewish word for TENT. As the Israelites came across the desert, each night they erected a tent in the middle of their camp and the tablets of the Ten Commandments were placed within. For them it symbolized God’s presence in their midst, “tenting” with them on their journey. Today it symbolizes the same: God’s presence in our midst, “tenting” with us on our journey of faith.

Note: *Upon entry into the Church, one should face the tabernacle and genuflect towards it as a sign of reverence for the presence of Jesus, and afterwards take their seat.*

May God bless you as you grow in your appreciation of the Eucharist. Let’s make a commitment to be proud to be Catholics.

