

Eucharist: Body of Christ, Broken for the World

Introduction

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* #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 entrance rite 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 Rite

During the Penitential Rite, 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* prayer, 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” (Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, # 35). Through the Scriptures, we also receive teaching, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). We are guided and instructed in faith and in how to live in right relationship with God, others, ourselves, and creation.

Prayer of the Faithful

As 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* #38).

Presentation of Gifts/Offertory

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 Saints 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. 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* #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” (John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae* #5). As the Eucharistic prayer continues, we are reminded of Christ’s sacrifice in order to make us “a holy people” and to allow us to “enjoy forever the vision of [God’s] glory.” The fourth prayer reminds us of the Father’s desire “that we might live no longer for ourselves” and “complete his work on earth.” During the *consecration*, the Holy Spirit transforms the gifts at



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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. The *memorial* ("Do this in remembrance of me") recalls Christ's words at the Last Supper. His sacrificial act strengthens our faith and it also draws us to "enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* #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 Sign of Peace, we extend our hands and our hearts to one another in a sign of fellowship, forgiveness, and unity. 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 God and the work of the Holy Spirit" brought "life to the world." On behalf of the congregation, he prays, "Keep me faithful to your teaching, 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 Cenae*, "[W]e 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" (4). The Eucharist is "a sacrament of [the Church's] unity" (12).

Final Blessing and Dismissal

The Concluding Rite and 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* #45).

The good news we have received should overflow into our lives and move us to mission in the world. Thus, the Concluding Rite is 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" (John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 27). John Paul 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*, 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" (*Sacramentum Caritatis* #89). Transformation by Christ in the Eucharist should compel us to address injustices which degrade the life or dignity of others—the poor, the unborn, immigrants, the elderly—all brothers and sisters in need.

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