



THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

FIRST COMMUNION

INTRODUCTION

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

Although we share much in common with other Christians, Catholics also have values, beliefs and ways of expressing them that are distinct. Coming together each Sunday to praise and thank God in the celebration of Mass is one of these. We understand the Mass as being both the source and the summit (the very beginning and the very highest point) of the whole of Christian life¹.

The Mass, the celebration of Eucharist, is integral to the spiritual life of Catholics. We do it again and again because Jesus commanded us to do so at his Last Supper². Over the centuries we have come to know this shared memorial meal as our way of celebrating who we are and remembering what we are called to be.

The Mass is a complex sacramental sign which can express and reveal a variety of Christian values and meanings³. Despite its complexity people of all ages and through all times have found in the Mass a source of spiritual nourishment, strength, comfort and a cause for rejoicing, as well as a way of expressing love and gratitude to God.

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church n.2031.

2 Luke 22:19

3 Doors to the Sacred, Joseph Martos.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we believe that Christ is truly present with us. For many centuries Catholics tended to think of Christ's presence in the Mass as referring only to his 'real presence' in the consecrated bread and wine. But today the Church has recovered its original teaching that Jesus Christ is present with us in four ways in the liturgy:

- a. in the people who gather to worship;
- a. in the person, words and actions of the priest who presides in the liturgy;
- a. in the readings from scripture;
- a. and in the bread and wine consecrated as his body and blood.

The celebration of Mass shares the same basic structure of any human celebration – we gather; we listen; we share; and we leave! Formally or informally, these elements can be found every time we get together with others to celebrate something. As you prepare your child for their First Eucharist (Communion) in coming weeks, we will explore the Mass in these four parts: in the gathering, the proclaiming, the breaking and the sending.





THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

FIRST COMMUNION

A. GATHER - proclaim - break - send

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Mt 18:20

The very first thing we do in celebrating Mass is to gather together from all over our local area. In this assembly Christ is present, as he promised to be when people gathered in his name. Recognising Christ’s presence in the people gathered is essential to a good understanding of the Eucharist. Through Baptism we become members of the Body of Christ (the Church) – when we come together for worship, we make Christ’s body visible. The purpose of the Mass is to draw us more fully into Christ’s body and to nourish and sustain us in the days ahead.

Introductory Rite – Preparing for Word and Communion

Once we have greeted those around us and prepared ourselves for Mass, the formal proceedings start with what we call the Introductory Rite. We usually sing an entrance song setting the mood of celebration and unity. As we sing, the priest (the second presence of Christ in our liturgy), the Word of God (the lectionary in the hands of a reader) and the altar servers process to the altar. The Sign of the Cross reminds us who we are – the People of God gathered in the name of Father, Son and Spirit. A mini-reconciliation service follows, called the Penitential Rite, reminding us of God’s limitless mercy and of the fact that we are forgiven people. The focus is not on our sins but on God’s mercy and love.

An ancient song of praise, The Gloria, lifts our spirits again as we honour our God for the gift of life and creation. And finally, an Opening Prayer led by the Presider (priest) completes the Introductory Rites – the general wording of this prayer is our opportunity to express our personal prayers of the day. At this point we are officially gathered! We are now focussed and united, ready to listen to the Word of God proclaimed.

Come As You Are

Come as you are, that's how I want you.
Come as you are, feel quite at home.
Close to my heart, loved and forgiven;
come as you are, why stand alone?

No need to fear, love sets no limits.
No need to fear, love never ends.
Don't run away, shamed and disheartened.
Rest in my love, trust me again.

I came to call sinners, not just the virtuous.
I came to bring peace, not to condemn.
Each time you fail to live by my promise,
why do you think I'd love you the less?

Come as you are, that's how I love you.
Come as you are, trust me again.
Nothing can change the love that I bear you.
All will be well, just come as you are.

- Deidre Browne





THE SACRAMENT OF EUCCHARIST

FIRST COMMUNION

B. gather - **PROCLAIM** – break - send

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.” Jn 1:1*

Jesus Christ is sometimes called the *Word of God* (‘Logos’) as in the opening passage of John’s Gospel above. But the ‘Word of God’ more commonly refers to the Gospels, the story of Jesus – his Good News for the world. These overlapping names tell us just how important this whole idea of ‘word’ is for Christians. In the *Liturgy of the Word*, this second major part of the Mass, the Word is proclaimed, and we listen for what God’s Spirit is saying to us today.

We believe that the *Word of God* is alive (i.e. it is a living Word) with the power to touch and transform our lives. When the readings from Scripture are proclaimed in this part of the Mass, God speaks to us. Jesus is present now in a third way – in the people, in the priest and now, in the scriptures. He offers us love and forgiveness, guides us by his teaching and example, and challenges us to be his disciples today. This requires us to listen attentively with open ears and open hearts. The *Word of God* can only touch and change us if we come in a spirit of openness and cooperation. Listening carefully enables us to hear what Christ wants to tell each of us.

The *Word of God* is proclaimed in three readings from scripture which are arranged in a three-year cycle that covers much of the Bible. A homily follows continuing the process by which God speaks to us. The preacher helps us to apply the ancient words of scripture to the situation of our own time and place. Each of the readings is followed by a brief silence, a time for each of us to reflect on what we have heard and how it applies to us. This is very much a time of listening; of being receptive; being open to God’s word flowing over us – not necessarily trying to understand every aspect - but rather, listening for the word or idea that is meant for me today and taking it to heart.

Together we recite what is known as a *Profession of Faith* – our Creed. This is our response to God’s word. What we believe, our faith, is always a response to what God has done and who God is. We have listened to God and now we respond by expressing our faith and trust in God. Having stated our belief we then bring to God our own communal *Prayers of Intercession* - praying for the needs of the Church and of the world.

Your Word

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path.
When I feel afraid and I think I have lost my way,
still you are there right beside me.
I will fear nothing if you are near.
Please be near me to the end.

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path.
I will not forget your love for me and yet,
my heart is forever wandering.
Jesus, be my guide and hold me to your side,
I will love you to the end.

Slightly adapted lyrics of the song ‘Thy Word’ by Amy Grant & Michael W. Smith





THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

FIRST COMMUNION

C. gather – proclaim - **BREAK** - send

*“And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying,
“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” Lk 22:19*

Eating with others is one of the most common and enjoyable things we do as human beings. Shared meals have much to teach us about our lives and about the meaning of the Eucharistic meal. Just as eating together is a sign of care for those at the table with us – sharing food naturally leads to sharing ourselves.

Jesus frequently ate meals with others – ordinary meals as well as festive ones. He was often criticised for the dinner companions he chose because people instinctively knew the significance of his sharing meals with ‘sinners’ – those deemed unacceptable in society.

At Mass, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Jesus invites us to join him at his table. By doing so, he offers us the same love, reconciliation, and acceptance that he showed the outcasts of his own time. The Mass is our family meal so sharing the Eucharistic meal together is a sign that we belong.

We bring gifts of bread and wine to the altar and these represent our lives and what is basic to them – food and drink. In the Eucharistic Prayer, we praise and thank God as we remember what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper – just before he died for us. But it is more than just remembering – we call it ‘anamnesis’ – our prayer and action in effect bring the loving presence of God into our midst. As we recall Christ’s gift of himself, he is again present with us, offering himself to us and for us. Catholics believe that the bread and wine are transformed for us into his body and blood and Jesus becomes present in a unique way. In this sacramental presence, we see, taste and touch bread and wine, but the inner reality is Christ himself with us anew.

But we aren't just observers! Jesus told us to break the bread and pour the wine – to take it, to eat and drink it and so we do. In the Communion Rite we share a meal united in peace. The breaking signifies that Jesus' body was broken for us and through it we are asked to be willing to be 'broken' for others. Jesus' blood was poured out for all of us and, so too, our lives are to be poured out for others. As we eat and drink together in communion we commit to a life for others just as Jesus did.

Sharing in Eucharist unites us with Christ so that we ourselves are transformed so completely that he shares his life and love with us, and through us with others. The real purpose of Eucharist, its deepest goal, is the unity of the Church and the world. You could say that Eucharist is less about transforming bread and wine into Christ's body and blood than about transforming us into his body! That is the goal of the Eucharist and the true meaning of Communion.

And so we say 'Amen!' – 'we agree' or 'so be it!' Our 'amen' is our acknowledgement that this bread and wine are truly the body and blood of Jesus Christ. But our 'amen' is also our acceptance of the Body of Christ – the Church – all who share in this meal everywhere. And our 'amen' signifies our willingness to be the Body of Christ, to accept the mission to be Christ in the world today.



“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” John 13:13-15



THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

FIRST COMMUNION

D. gather – proclaim - break - **SEND**

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Mt 28:19-20

It is often said that Eucharist (the Mass) never ends – instead, it continues in our lives if we allow it. That is why this part of the Mass is more of a sending than an ending... The above passage from Matthew’s gospel is known as the ‘Great Commissioning’ and it sums up what we are asked to do – get out there and live what we believe!

Before we go, we often share what is happening in our community since these are some of the ways the community will seek to live the Gospel after Mass and in the days ahead. Led by our Priest, we pray God’s blessing on everyone present and on those in the community who cannot be with us. Everything, including this blessing, now points to the door as we ask God’s care and guidance as we go out to live our faith every day.

Did you ever wonder where the name ‘the Mass’ came from? This is the moment - the dismissal – ‘Go, you are sent’ we are told. Strengthened by God’s word and nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, we are sent out to proclaim that word and to be the Body of Christ in the world. That is how important this ‘going out’ is – it became the name for the whole celebration! It is to that sending forth that we respond, ‘Thanks be to God!’ and it is these words that are the actual meaning of the word ‘Eucharist’ = ‘thanksgiving’.

We sing, we process out, we talk and perhaps share a cup of tea. The meaning and effects of our celebration of Eucharist continue through our daily lives until the next time we gather around the table.

'Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life!'

As we leave the celebration of Mass, it is not 'business as usual'.

Something more is expected of us.

Strengthened to carry the light of Christ to all the dark corners of our world and to reach out to all those who need to feel the tenderness of his love for them.

Children who are preparing for their first Holy Communion are not too young to understand our responsibility to share the love that has been given in the Eucharist. Let's lead our children to see that every Eucharistic celebration sends us back into our homes, communities and schools with a mission...

... to let others know how much Jesus loves them by what we say and do.

It is through our love for others that we will be recognized as true followers of Christ.

