

Session 12



THE EUCHARIST

SOURCE & SUMMIT OF
CHRISTIAN LIFE



SYMBOLON
THE CATHOLIC FAITH EXPLAINED

THE EUCHARIST

Source & Summit of Christian Life



LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

The sacrament of the Eucharist lies at the very heart of the Catholic faith. When we receive Holy Communion, we are united with Jesus in the most intimate way possible here on earth. For the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ. The almighty God, Creator of the universe, humbles himself so that he can become one with us each time we attend Mass and receive communion.

But the idea that a sliver of bread and a drop of wine can truly be changed into Christ's Body and Blood can be difficult for our limited minds to grasp. After all, they still look like bread and wine! Indeed, when we do stop to consider what is really happening at the Eucharist, the miracle is almost beyond comprehension.

While the Eucharist has the outward appearance of bread and wine, it is the body and blood of Christ that we must consume to have eternal life. This is a central mystery of our faith: Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist, yesterday, today, and until the end of time. In fact, many famous converts have joined the Church because they came to understand that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.

As we explore the Church's teachings on the Eucharist, may our minds be open to a deeper understanding of the mysteries and our hearts be filled with a greater love for our Lord.

THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **The Eucharist as Real Presence—what it means and why it is central to the Catholic faith**
- **Why Jesus couldn't have been speaking metaphorically when he said to eat his body and drink his blood**
- **The Eucharist as Sacrifice—how the sacrifice of the Mass makes present Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and how knowing this makes a crucial difference for our participation in the Mass**
- **The Eucharist as Communion—how Jesus longs for us to receive him in Holy Communion**
- **How Christ's Eucharistic presence remains with us in the tabernacles in our Catholic churches, where the consecrated hosts are kept**

STEP # 1

OPENING PRAYER

SAY: Welcome to our twelfth session of *Symbolon*.

Have participants turn to page 17 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.

This week as we learn more about the Eucharist, let us join together in praying the Anima Christi, which means “the soul of Christ.” St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, was particularly fond of this prayer. This translation is by Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman.

**Soul of Christ, be my sanctification;
Body of Christ, be my salvation;
Blood of Christ, fill all my veins;
Water of Christ’s side, wash out my stains;
Passion of Christ, my comfort be;
O good Jesus, listen to me;
In Thy wounds I fain would hide;
Ne’er to be parted from Thy side;
Guard me, should the foe assail me;
Call me when my life shall fail me;
Bid me come to Thee above,
With Thy saints to sing Thy love,
World without end. Amen.**

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

(Optional)

Suggested Scripture readings for a Celebration of the Word of God

(see Introduction to Symbolon at www.SymbolonCatholic.org)

1 Corinthians 11:24-27

John 6:53-58

Luke 22:19-20



STEP # 2

INTRODUCTION



SAY: When we go to communion, the priest or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist holds up the host and says, “The Body of Christ.” We reply, “Amen,” which means “So be it,” asserting that we do believe that we are going to be taking Christ into our very bodies. When we stop to think about what’s really happening with the host, it’s one of the greatest miracles of all time...and it happens at each and every Catholic Mass.

In this session we are going to explore the Eucharist. Some of the topics we will look at include:

- **How Jesus loves us so much he remains present to us in the Eucharist**
- **How we know Jesus was speaking literally and not figuratively when he said to eat his body and drink his blood**
- **Is the Eucharist really Jesus’ Body and Blood? What the priest holds up at Mass looks, tastes, and feels like bread and wine—how can this be Christ’s Body and Blood?**
- **What Catholics mean when they say the Mass is a holy “sacrifice”**
- **The most important thing we can do when we receive communion**

We will start by watching a short video.

STEP # 3

VIDEO PART I: THE EUCHARIST



Play DVD Part I, which will play for approximately 15 minutes.

STEP #4 PROCLAMATION

After the video has stopped,



SAY: We just heard how Jesus gives himself—body and blood, soul and divinity—in the Eucharist and how the Eucharist is a fundamental mystery of the Catholic faith.

At Mass, the bread is changed into the Body of Christ and the wine is changed into the Blood of Christ.

This is not a chemical change since the outward, sensible appearances of bread and wine remain, but underneath those appearances of bread and wine, Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. This is what we call the Real Presence.

As a liturgical memorial, the Mass makes present Christ's sacrifice on the cross in order to apply the fruit of his sacrifice to our lives. At every Mass, we are called to join our lives in union with Christ's gift of himself to the Father.

When we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving the very body and blood of Jesus into our souls. He loves us so much that he desires to be with us in this intimate way. When we receive Holy Communion, we need to take time for loving thanksgiving and union with Jesus.



DIGGING DEEPER

The Eucharist

The word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving." While Scripture does not directly use this term for communion, it is implied in the Last Supper where it says that "after having given thanks" Jesus broke the bread. By the late first or early second century, the Church fathers Ignatius of Antioch and Justin Martyr were referring to the celebration of the "breaking of the bread" with the word *Eucharist*.

STEP #5

VIDEO PART II: SOURCE & SUMMIT OF CHRISTIAN LIFE



SAY: In our second video segment, we are going to look at how the Eucharist impacts our lives.



Play DVD Part II, which will play for approximately 23 minutes.

STEP #6

BREAK

After stopping the video,



SAY: Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

Break should be about 10 minutes.

STEP #7 DISCUSSION

Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.



SAY: Welcome back to our session on the Eucharist. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the last video segment.

DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

Let's begin with a quick review. First, what does the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist mean? Second, how would you explain to someone how what looks and tastes like bread and wine really is Christ's body and blood?

LEADER'S TIPS:

- **The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:** The Real Presence means that Jesus is present body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine. The Eucharist is not merely a symbol or a figure of speech, but the actual living (real) presence of Jesus.
- **How to Explain:** The miracle of the Eucharist is called transubstantiation, which means "change of substance." In the miracle of the Eucharist, the physical properties of bread and wine (such as shape, size, color, texture, taste) remain the same. However, by the power of the Holy Spirit the substance or essence of what is truly present is changed—what was once bread and wine have now become the Body and Blood of Jesus. While our senses still perceive the outward appearances of "bread" and "wine" that have not changed, faith tells us that it is Jesus Christ—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—that is truly present under the appearances of bread and wine. This is why the great St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Faith will tell us Christ is present when our human senses fail."

DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

What is the relationship between the Eucharist and the Jewish feast of Passover? How might the Passover background shed light on the need to receive Jesus in Holy Communion? How might the Passover background shed light on the Mass as sacrifice?

LEADER'S TIPS:

- **The Relationship of the Eucharist with Passover:** The Eucharist was instituted in the context of the Jewish Passover feast. Jesus gave us the Eucharist as the new Passover meal. At Passover, the people sacrificed a lamb and ate of it to symbolize the covenant union of the people with God. At the Last Supper, Jesus used the same sacrificial language from the Passover, applying it to himself and offering his body and blood for our sins.
- **How the Passover Sheds Light on Holy Communion:** Just as the ancient Jews had to partake of the sacrificial Passover lamb for their covenant union with God to be renewed, so we Christians must partake of the new Passover lamb—Jesus Christ—in Holy Communion to deepen our union with God.
- **How the Passover Sheds Light on the Mass as Sacrifice:** The ancient Jews celebrated their Passover each year as a “memorial”—a liturgical making present of the first Passover in Egypt. At the Last Supper, when Jesus speaks of his body being offered up and his blood being shed and then says “Do this in memory of me,” he is evoking this understanding of memorial not merely as a way of remembering past events, but as a way of making present God’s saving works in history—in this case, the saving work of Christ on the cross.



DISCUSSION QUESTION #3

How can the Eucharist be a true sacrifice when Jesus is no longer dying on the cross, but has been raised from the dead and is seated in heaven?

LEADER'S TIPS:

- **The Eucharist is an “unbloody” sacrifice that re-presents, that is, makes present again, the sacrifice of the cross because it is “its memorial and because it applies its fruit.” —CCC 1366**
- **The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice because Jesus is one and the same. Only the manner of offering has changed.**
- **Jesus does not literally die again at each Mass, but his sacrifice is re-presented each time we celebrate the Eucharist.**



DIGGING DEEPER

Receiving Communion

“A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to...receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible” (Code of Canon Law, Can. 916).

“A person who is to receive the Most Holy Eucharist is to abstain for at least one hour before holy communion from any food and drink, except for only water and medicine” (Can. 919 §1).

“After being initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist, each of the faithful is obliged to receive Holy Communion at least once a year. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at another time during the year” (Can. 920 §1§2).

STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.

- The Eucharist is the “the source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324).
- The Real Presence: At Mass, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This is not a chemical change because the outward, sensible appearances of bread and wine remain, but under those appearances of bread and wine, Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist (CCC 1374).
- The Eucharist as Sacrifice: The Mass is a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial (CCC 1366). At every Mass, we are called to join our lives in union with Christ’s gift of himself to the Father (CCC 1368).
- As a biblical memorial, the Mass makes present Christ’s sacrifice on the cross in order to apply the fruit of his sacrifice to our lives (CCC 1366).
- Communion: Jesus loves us so much he desired to come to us in Holy Communion. When we receive the Eucharist, we are receiving the very body and blood of Jesus into our souls (CCC 1391).
- It is important to take time for loving thanksgiving with Jesus after we receive him in Holy Communion, which nourishes and strengthens our life in Christ (CCC 1391-92). Although all are invited, not all are ready to receive the Eucharist, either because of serious sin that has not been brought to the sacrament of reconciliation or for a lack of full communion with the Catholic Church (CCC 1400).



STEP #9 CALL TO CONVERSION

SAY: Spend a few minutes reflecting on the gift of the Eucharist. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. When you consider that the Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of our Lord, how does that change or deepen your appreciation for the Mass? If you have already received your first communion, how can you show your love for Jesus, truly present in the Eucharist, more fully and completely?
2. In the video, we learned some ways to build a closer relationship with Jesus in the Eucharist, including visiting him at a Eucharistic Adoration chapel, spending a few minutes after Mass in thanksgiving, and attending daily Mass. What is one way that you could begin to spend more time with Jesus this week?
3. Reflect on the following quote by St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

“Do you realize that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you—for you alone? He burns with the desire to come into your heart... go without fear to receive the Jesus of peace and love...”

When you read that Jesus is waiting for you alone, what thoughts come to mind? How can you best respond to this invitation of love? What fears or concerns are holding you back? Can you let them go and “receive the Jesus of peace and love”?



STEP # 10

CLOSING PRAYER



SAY: I hope you take time this week to reflect on the great gift we have in the Eucharist. Your Guides will give you prompts if you need some guidance.



Let's close our time together today in prayer.

May the partaking of your Holy Mysteries, O Lord,
be not for my judgment or condemnation,
but for the healing of soul and body.
O Lord, I also believe and profess
that this (which I am about to receive)
is truly your most precious Body
and your life-giving Blood,
which, I pray, make me worthy to receive
for the remission of all my sins
and for life everlasting. Amen.

—From the Byzantine Liturgy



FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading, see the following Catechism passages:

The Names of the Sacrament: CCC 1328-1332

Bread and Wine; Body and Blood: CCC 1333ff

Institution of the Eucharist: CCC 1337-1344

Sacramental Sacrifice: CCC 1357-1368

Transubstantiation: CCC 1376-1377

Fruits of Communion: CCC 1391-1395

Other Resources:

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 17

St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (*On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church*)

The Eucharist: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics by Fr. Mitch Pacwa

Eucharist (Catholic Spirituality for Adults) by Fr. Robert Barron

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper
by Brant Pitre

God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Code of Canon Law, 912-923 (available at www.vatican.va)

