

“Eucharist” means “Giving Thanks”

We also call this gathering “the mass,” which comes from the words at the ending of the mass when it is in Latin, “Ite, missa est” which means, more or less, “Let us go forth.”

In looking at the Eucharist again, we’ll look at three things:

1. We know that Jesus is present in a lot of ways in life, so why is the mass emphasized so much with Catholics (that is, why do we celebrate it every Sunday and many other times.)
2. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is PRESENT at the mass?
3. What do we mean when we say that the mass is a sacrifice?
4. How do we join with those in heaven at mass?
5. We’ll go over some things that we do at mass.

1. Why Is the Eucharist So Central to Our Faith?

First of all, Jesus always wanted his followers, Christians, to be a family that helped each other in the life of faith.

Indeed, his two gifts to the disciples/apostles were gifts to the GROUP/the COMMUNITY — the Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit at Pentecost — which started the Church.

Second of all, gathering for the “Lord’s Supper” or Eucharist is the only request Jesus makes of his followers in terms of *praying together*: When Jesus gave us the Eucharist the night before he died, and he asked us to celebrate this special meal in memory of him. Because of this, it became the most important way that Jesus’ followers would pray and worship God together.

Indeed, we know that the earliest Christians celebrated the Eucharist at least every Sunday. We can see this in the Letters of St. Paul where he writes of people at church (1 Cor 11:23-25, etc.)

We can also see that the mass was important to the early Church in many manuscripts from saints and leaders of the Church in the first generations. For example, St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was a bishop of Antioch, in what is now Turkey, around the year 100 AD, wrote, “Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God’s Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan’s powers are overthrown....”

The Eucharist, at this time, quickly was organized into something we would probably recognize quite easily today. We can see this in a document from 150AD called “The First Apology of St. Justin, Martyr”: ...On the day called Sunday there is a meeting...and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...When the reader has finished, the presider in a discourse urges and invites us to the imitation of these nobler things. Then we all stand up together and offer

prayers. And when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the presider similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; the distribution, and reception of the consecrated elements by each one, takes place and they are sent to the absent by the deacons. Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as much as he chooses to. (NOTICE THAT THEY HAD A COLLECTION!!) What is collected is deposited with the presider, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us, and briefly, he is the protector of all in need. We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead....

2. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is PRESENT in the mass?

Catholics say that Jesus is present in the COMMUNITY OF THE PEOPLE, in the PRIEST, in the SCRIPTURES AS THEY ARE PROCLAIMED and IN THE BREAD AND WINE THAT BECOME HIS BODY AND BLOOD.

The word “presence” comes from the Latin word “to turn towards” – so we say that Jesus TURNS TOWARD US in these four ways at mass.

1. For the presence in the people: All of us are called to be the family of Christ in the Church. So our sincere prayers, our kindness to others, etc. all help people to “turn towards Jesus and Jesus to them.”
2. For the presence in the priest: God works through all of us. At the mass a priest is taking on a role where he represents Christ at the altar, just as Jesus led his friends at the Last Supper.
3. For the presence in the Holy Scriptures; This is God’s word, and we hear a lot of it at the mass (four Scripture readings on Sundays and many special days, three readings on other days). We believe that when the readings are proclaimed to us, that Jesus turns to us through His word in Scripture.
4. For the presence in the Eucharist: The early Church believed in the Real Presence of Jesus.
 - a. Looking at John 6, it’s pretty strong: 6:35 → (Jesus says, “I am the bread of life.”), 6:47: I am the bread of life. 6:51: I am the living bread...Whoever eats of this bread will live forever...” 6:53: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” 6:54: Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life...my flesh is true food and my blood true drink. 6:56: Those who eat my flesh and blood abide in me, and I in them. 6:57: Who ever eats me will live. 6:58: The one who eats this bread will live forever. Also, the verses that follow Jesus’ instruction on the Bread of Life in John 6... say that people abandoned Jesus because his teaching was “too hard.” (But) why would people abandon Jesus if he were only using the image of eating his body and blood as a metaphor? And almost ALL OF THEM DID at this very point: This

- abandoning came right after he preached the message of John 6. And it caused Jesus to say to his disciples, “Will you also leave?”
- b. *We also see that in 1 Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul uses the same language as John 6 does about the Eucharist, (1 Cor. 11: 23-27) “For I received from the Lord and I also handed onto you....that (at the Last Supper), Jesus broke the loaf and said, “This is my body...” and he took the cup and said, “This is the new covenant in my blood.”*
- i. Indeed, the language about the Eucharist (the body and blood of Christ) all through the New Testament is totally similar. In Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11, as well as John 6, we see the exact same wording when the Eucharist is described.
 - ii. Remember that the apostle Paul did not have the Gospels and the Gospel writers did not have Paul. *The Gospel writers may not even have had each other’s words to compare with each other. However, when it comes to the Eucharist, the Apostle Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John use nearly identical language.* How could this be? I would also say it was because they were all celebrating mass around the Mediterranean, and there must have been similarity in what they were saying at mass.
- c. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the people of Smyrna in 100 AD (v. 19-20): “Pay close attention...the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins....”
- d. The First Apology of St. Justin (*ch. 66*): *This food we call Eucharist...we do not receive...as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God’s word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus*

What Are the Implications of Believing in the Real Presence?

If we really think about it then, what is going on at Eucharist is astounding! The God of the Universe is becoming a little piece of bread in our hands...or a sip of wine.

What an amazing gift to us, and such a simple one.

In a tribute to the late international religious educator Christiane Brusselmans, published in "Commonweal" (Jan. 31, 1992), James Parker concluded with this vignette: The story came from Christiane’s children’s catechumenate in Spanish Harlem. Christiane was about to leave the parish. Once girl, whom years of family abuse had hardened in sullen resistance to everything Christiane said and did, called her aside. She held out a small piece of notebook paper. "Here, write your name." Christiane carefully formed each letter of her name. The girl snatched the paper and crumpled it quickly into a small ball. Before the horrified Christiane could intervene, the girl put it in her mouth and swallowed. "Now," she announced, "even if you go

away, you'll never leave me. You'll always be inside me."

SO: The Eucharist is a way that we are assured that God is always with us. It is not the ONLY way that God is with us — for we can pray or serve the poor, or try to love those around us -- and God promises to be with us in those times, but the Eucharist is a something Jesus gave us to help us to see that God really is with us.

3. What do we mean when we say that the Mass is a Sacrifice?

For Catholics, we say that Jesus dying on a cross is the ONE sacrifice that takes away our sins. AND we say that, years later, that ONE EVENT STILL takes away our sins TODAY: So that it is PRESENT TENSE: It still is taking away our sins today.

We also say that, at the mass, we offer our OWN SACRIFICES to Jesus at mass: *Even those of us that don't PHYSICALLY DIE for our faith.* So we offer the struggles to be a good mom or dad or son or daughter or friend or Christian. That's why this is said during the mass:

Priest: "Pray, my brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." All: May the Lord accept the sacrifices of your hands, for our God and for the good of all His Holy Church.

SO, we say, ALSO, that OUR sacrifices that we make for our faith — to try to love our family, to reach out to the poor or those in trouble, etc. become UNITED with Christ's one sacrifice. In the Catechism we read:

1368 The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. 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. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.

And as St. Paul wrote in Collosians 1:24:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,

While we are talking about sacrifices, some interesting information to add: Every "official" altar in a Catholic church has a relic of a martyr put placed in it. The martyrs sacrificed their lives for Christ and His Church. *So when the priest and the deacon kiss the altar at the beginning and the end of mass, that is to emphasize our own commitment to **offer our hearts and lives and wounds to the building of the Kingdom.***

4. How do we join with this in heaven at the mass? In looking at the mass, let's remember that we gather:

1. As a family to praise and worship God, like in heaven (see Book of Revelation, etc.)
2. And we gather as a community with no distinctions (a homeless person can sit with a millionaire in the same pew: No skyboxes.
3. And we sing the songs of the angels (the Gloria is from the song of the angels at the birth of Jesus, Luke 2:13-14 and the Holy Holy is from the song of the angels in Isaiah 6:3).
4. In heaven they seem to gather together to pray and praise God (see Revelation, other), so this must be why Jesus wanted US to GATHER to praise God.
5. The Catechism, from 1369-72, says:

1370: To the offering of Christ are united not only the members still here on earth, but also those already in the glory of heaven. So the mass is where we join together as one body — and all our efforts and love and faith united with Christ's — for we are a family gathered at a meal, and we aren't strangers any more but brothers and sisters, and all children of the one God.

5. A bit about the parts of the mass:

Here are the main parts of the mass:

1. People and Clergy greet each other
2. We all ask God to prepare us for the mass by having our sins forgiven
3. Gloria – all year except for Advent and Lent – the song the angels sang when Jesus was born. The mass is part of the eternal song of the angels. The Liturgy of the Word, with readings from both the Old and New Testaments
4. The homily is a sermon on the readings
5. We recite the “Nicene Creed” on Sundays and important feast days. The Creed dates from the Church Council of Nicea, 325 AD.
6. We lift up prayers for the world, the Church and other needs in the Prayer of the Faithful
7. The Preparation of the Gifts of bread and wine
 - a. The Eucharistic Prayer culminated by “The Great Amen.” The Great AMEN is the high point of the mass, when we say “I believe it” to the whole mystery of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection
8. We say the “Our Father”
9. We offer one another a “Sign of Peace”
10. The Distribution of Communion
11. Dismissal