



# TOGETHER

*Together, an Archdiocese of Cincinnati initiative to catechize the faithful on the importance of Mass, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the value of Sunday, our obligation to worship, and the advantage of being together physically rather than virtually.*



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# Source & Summit

## Are you coming or going?

Do you ever wonder if you are coming or going? Most of us have the sense sometimes that life is too hurried, harried, and unfocused. We pause at the end of a day or a week and are not sure what just happened, or if any of it mattered. We need a source of peace and purpose to lead us to what is most important and give us greater meaning in life. In the Eucharist, we come and go in a different way. We come to Mass with gratitude – the word Eucharist means to be thankful. We experience Christ's presence in the Word of God proclaimed in the readings, in all who have gathered, in the priest who is in the person of Christ among us, and especially in the bread and wine which become Christ's Body and Blood. The Eucharist is the source of our lives as Catholic Christians. In the Eucharist, we are formed as Christ's people and nourished to live as disciples in the world. We come to the source and are sent forth in mission.

## What is the high point of your life?

Have you ever climbed a hill or mountain, and from the top, suddenly found perspective? Or perhaps you recall a particular experience that was a high point for you, a time after which life will never be the same. These summits or high points become a reference point for us. In those moments, our lives come into focus and our future direction is clearer, filled with greater hope and strength. The Eucharist is the summit of the Christian life. It is the high point from which we find direction and perspective. When we orient our lives with the Eucharist as the summit, the rest of our lives take shape. The Eucharist becomes our reference point from which our daily decisions and actions come into focus with Christ at the

center of our lives. Perhaps we do not always think about this, but every Mass is an opportunity to encounter Jesus. We meet the Lord in the celebration of the Eucharist, and surely having done so, our lives will never be the same.

## Are you ready?

We often speak of "going to Mass" like the way we go to a concert, movie, or theater performance. Even though we know that the Eucharist is not a performance, it may be hard to put into words what we do at the Mass. And if we think

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of ourselves as going to Mass, we limit the ways the Eucharist may shape us as disciples of Jesus Christ. Our role in the Eucharist is much more about participation than about watching. It's like the difference between watching a sporting match and playing the game. We are called to full, conscious, and active participation in the Eucharist—we are to open our minds, hearts, and spirit, ready to be changed, to become more like Christ. When we truly participate in the Eucharist, we allow Christ to speak to us, be joined in sacrifice, and be nourished in Holy Communion. We are drawn to communion with Christ and each other. Through this encounter with the Lord, we are renewed. We do not simply

go to Mass. We take part. And our participation changes us for the better.

## Get out!

Have you ever visited family or friends and reached a point when you knew it was time to leave? It is not that you have overstayed your welcome, but simply that the hour has become late, vacation has come to an end, or your visit has reached its natural conclusion. We might imagine our host saying, "Get out! I need to get to bed!" or you might find yourself saying, "I really have to get going." At the end of Mass, we are told to get out. Not that our host, the Lord himself, is tired of us and wants us out of his house, but rather, that the natural conclusion to our participation in the Eucharist is to be sent out in mission. We are to go out, "glorifying the Lord" by our lives. In the Eucharist, we receive the Lord, are formed and nourished and made ready to live as followers of Jesus Christ during our daily lives. When we think about it in this way, being sent out is part of the purpose in our coming to Mass in the first place.

## Things to ponder:

- How does Mass form me to live as a Christian?
- How does the nourishment of the Eucharist give me strength to live as a disciple of Christ?
- What experience comes to mind in which I was "set on fire" by Christ's love during Mass?
- What am I called to do to carry out Christ's mission of love and mercy?





# Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

## You Are What You Eat

Most of us remember from our childhood using this phrase in fun. However, this expression describes well our experience of Holy Communion. When we consume earthly food, it is absorbed into our system, digested, converted into energy or waste; our food becomes part of us. Yet when we receive Holy Communion, we become united with Jesus Christ so much that we truly become what we receive. Jesus became human so that we might become divine, and in the Eucharist, we truly gain a share in God's own life.

## Really and Truly Present

We believe that Jesus Christ – God's own Son – is really and truly present in the consecrated bread and wine. But it also points beyond our earthly experience towards a union with Christ that is impossible to explain this side of heaven. All sacraments are outward signs of an invisible grace, the working of God in our lives. This holy meal is truly a Communion with God.

## Take and Drink

Catholics believe that we encounter God above all in sacramental signs. In Holy Communion, we share in God's own life through the sacrament of Jesus' own Body and Blood. Even though we receive the "whole Christ" – body, blood, soul, and divinity – when we receive Communion under the form of bread alone, receiving Communion also from the chalice is a more complete participation in the Eucharist. In the sign of consecrated wine, we see Jesus' blood outpoured for us and are challenged to drink the common cup with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## How Christ is Present in the Mass

### 1) Christ is Present in the Word of God

"It is truly Christ who speaks when the

holy scriptures are read in the Church," teaches the Church. The relationship between God's Word and the Eucharist have been strengthened by the development of a 3-year cycle of scripture readings to be used for Sunday Mass. The Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass, the books that contains the Mass scripture readings, sums it up in this way: "In the hearing of God's word the Church is built up and grows...past works in the history of salvation are presented anew as mysterious realities."

### 2) Christ is Present in the Bread and Wine

We believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayer of the Church, bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the priest, praying with and for the people, makes the sacrifice of the cross real again by taking the bread and wine, asking God to bless it, then breaking the bread and sharing it. Just as the apostles ate and drank at the Last Supper, we all eat and drink to be nourished to continue Christ's saving work in the world. The Eucharistic Prayer is the center and heart of the whole Mass, and in it, the Church gives thanks to God for saving us from sin and death.

### 3) Christ is Present in the priest

Among the many ways Christ is present at Mass is in the ministry of the ordained priest who leads the assembly in the celebration. Praying with and in the name of the community gathered, the priest acts in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church (in persona Christi capitis ecclesiae) in the celebration of the Eucharist. Each Mass is an action of the whole Church: included in every Eucharistic Prayer are prayers for the Church, for the pope, and for the local bishop. And, throughout the Eucharistic Prayer, the

priest prays on behalf and as part of the community, in the plural person: "Let us give thanks...We come to you with praise and thanksgiving..." Through the deacon and other ministers, we encounter Jesus Christ who came to serve.

### 4) Christ is Present in the Church at Prayer

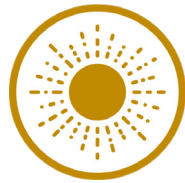
While Christ is truly present at Mass in the Word proclaimed, the Eucharistic bread and wine, and in the ministry of the priest, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II affirmed that Christ is present "when the Church prays and sings, for he promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.'" Mass is not a "spectator sport", in which the priest performs and the people merely watch. The celebration of the Mass – Word and Eucharist – requires the participation of all the faithful because we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Through texts in the language of the people, music accessible to the assembly, and a fuller understanding of what we do, we are all called to engage fully each and every Sunday in this most holy liturgy.

## Things to think about:

- Am I really present to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist?
- What keeps me from being truly and really present to God at Mass?
- Do I experience Jesus' presence in the community, in the Word proclaimed, in the ministry of the priest and others? How can I better encounter Jesus in these ways?
- What are some ways I can be the presence of Christ to others?







# Day of the Lord

## Keep holy the Lord's Day!

### Sunday: The First of Days

From the days of the apostles, the Christian community has set Sunday apart from the other days. At first, it was the day of worship on which the first Christians gathered for the "breaking of the bread". Over time it also became the official day of rest in civic life. This pairing of worship and rest has shaped the rhythm of the week for much of Western civilization to this day.

### Sunday Funday

In a 1998 apostolic letter to the Church, *Dies Domini* ("The Day of the Lord"), Pope St. John Paul II offers a few ways to understand how Christians should approach Sunday. "Sunday is the day of joy and the day of rest precisely because it is 'the Lord's Day', the day of the Risen Lord." (82). The popular cultural expression "Sunday Funday" is only truly possible because our joy and rest (and truly our "fun") derive from our life in Jesus Christ.

Sunday is not only the day  
of faith but is also the day of  
Christian hope.  
— Pope St. John Paul II

### Sunday: Day of the Lord

It was on the 7th day that God rested and so too should we. But this rest isn't simply for its own sake: God rested on the 7th day to reflect upon what had been created and to affirm its goodness. Sunday is our opportunity to reflect upon our past week, our successes and failures at discipleship, and to bring our life to the altar of God at Mass.

### Sunday: Day of Days

Sunday is the first and last day of the week, just as Christ is both alpha and omega, beginning and end. Jesus' resurrection on "the first day of the week" gives us all the reason we need to mark Sunday as holy. As the eighth day, Sunday also reminds us of the goal of eternal life...something to ponder in quiet moments on a restful Sunday



### Sunday: Day of the Eucharist

While the celebration of Mass on Sunday is not different than on other days, because the entire Church comes together and because it is celebrated on the day of the Resurrection, the Sunday Eucharist is the center of life in the Christian community. Our parish gathers each Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, to give thanks for all the gifts God has given to us

### Things to think about:

- How do I treat Sunday differently than the other six days of the week?
- How do I keep holy the Lord's day?
- What could my family and/or I do to observe Sunday in a special way?





# Obligation: Law & Love

## Gratitude

We are obligated to participate in the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. It might seem odd to be obligated to attend a celebration, so what is this all about? It may help to first think about where the obligation comes from. We are blessed with life, salvation, faith, gifts, and resources, and all these many blessings come from God. Out of gratitude, we come to the Eucharist – the word means thanksgiving – and with grateful hearts, we celebrate Christ's presence among us. Our obligation, then, comes from deep within ourselves as we make Christ and the Eucharist the center of our lives. In Christ, we are offered life to the full. In the Eucharist, we are formed and nourished by Christ to live as his people. That is a reason to celebrate!

## Love

Think about the things you do out of love for another. Parents get up in the middle of the night to feed or console their children. Adults care for their aging parents. Siblings and good friends stop everything to support their loved one through a difficult moment. We might say that we are obligated to do these things, not because someone tells us we must, but because we cannot imagine doing anything else. The obligation is our loving response which shows the importance of the person in our lives and our gratitude for him or her. This is a helpful way to think about our obligation to participate in Sunday Mass. We come to the Eucharistic feast, not only because the Church tells us we must, but as a response to the astounding love of God which is shown and shared through Jesus Christ.

## House Rules

Let's be honest. There are moments when we may be inclined to stay home, lingering in leisure or distracted by the swirl of weekend activities rather than participating in Sunday Eucharist. We may rationalize our desire for creature comforts as we ignore our conscience's call to get ourselves to Mass. This is why the Church has established the Sunday obligation to attend Mass. Like parents who establish house rules to form a child into a responsible adult, the Church establishes rules that lead us to spiritual maturity, which is expressed in willing participation in the Eucharist. The Sunday obligation may feel like an imposition from the outside, rather than what it is—a call for us to do what is best for us.

**"We need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day 'empty of God.'"**  
– Pope Benedict XVI

## Participate and Celebrate

We often say we are "going" to Mass. When we truly celebrate the Eucharist, we do more than simply come to Mass. We are not to be passive spectators, but active participants. We listen, speak, sing, stand, sit, kneel, and eat. Through our participation, we are changed. Pope Francis recently said, "The prayer of the Christian makes the sacramental presence of Jesus his or her own. What is external to us becomes part of us. The Mass is always celebrated, and not only by the priest who presides over it, but by

all Christians who experience it. And the center is Christ! All of us, in the diversity of gifts and ministries, join in His action, because He, Christ, is the Protagonist of the liturgy." (February 2, 2021) Through our active participation in the Eucharist, particularly in receiving Christ's Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we become more like Christ and are strengthened to live as Christ's people in the world.

## Things to think about:

- What obligations do I have in my life? What things do I undertake purely out of love?
- What helps me to be mindful of my blessings and to grow in gratitude?
- How is my relationship with Christ and the celebration of Sunday Mass central in my life?
- How do I know that I am obligated to participate in Sunday Mass and holy day Mass? How is this obligation different from other obligations I have?





# Presence: Physical vs. Virtual

## Face Time

Anyone who has spent significant time away from loved ones knows that connecting through a video call just isn't the same. We want to touch them, hear the nuances in their voice, linger in their physical presence. Similarly, and more importantly, viewing Mass on television or via social media just isn't the same as participating in person. While at times watching Mass is the only option available to us due to illness or other serious circumstances, it is good for us to remember that Jesus came to us in human form - in flesh and blood - so that we could more fully grasp the great love that God has for humanity. When we gather at the celebration of the Eucharist, we hear God's word, feel the presence of Christ with one another, touch and taste the very Body and Blood of the Lord.



## Where 2 or 3 Are Gathered

Jesus said, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt 18:20) This is especially true when we come together at Mass. In the celebration of the Eucharist, we experience Christ's presence together, are formed in word and sacrament, receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, and are sent forth in Christ's mission of mercy, forgiveness, and compassion. In the Eucharist, we realize the true identity of the Church as the Body of Christ. In the Eucharist, we grow in communion with our Lord and one another, assured that Christ is with us.

"Just as the term 'Church' refers to the living temple, God's People, the term 'church' also has been used to describe "the building in which the Christian community gathers to hear the word of God, to pray together, to receive the sacraments, and celebrate the eucharist."

## The Word Became Flesh

We often only think about the Incarnation - God coming to us in human form in Jesus - at Christmas time. Yet, the Incarnation is significant all the time. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." God understands our human experience and communicates to us through physical realities. In the sacraments, Christ's presence is made known to us through the stuff of the earth - water, bread, wine, oil - and these are experi-

enced through our senses - touch, taste, sight, smell. We must be physically present at Mass and in other sacramental celebrations to fully encounter Christ's presence.

## Become What You Are

In speaking about the Eucharist, St. Augustine said, "Believe what you see, see what you believe and become what you are: the Body of Christ." In sacramental Communion, we receive Christ's real presence, Christ's Body and Blood. While the graces received by participating at Mass are not solely received through sacramental Communion, the more perfect means of participating in the Eucharist include receiving Holy Communion when properly disposed. Our reception of sacramental Communion nourishes and strengthens us so that we may become more fully who we are as baptized Christians: members of Christ's Body.

## Things to think about:

- What do I appreciate most about my parish's church building?
- What are the benefits I receive from physically going to Mass rather than only participating online?
- How do I encounter God in my virtual participation in Mass? How is God missing if I live only online?
- What keeps me from truly appreciating Christ's real presence in the community of believers who gather in the church each Sunday?





