

## SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 2

### Sacraments of Initiation: Eucharist

**Eucharist** (ccc, 1322-1344; 1356-1397; 1409-1412; 1414-1418) The Eucharist completes a person's Christian initiation. It unites the new Catholic to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to the Father. Through this wondrous gift, Christ continues to pour out his saving graces on the members of his Body, the Church. The Eucharist has its roots in Scripture. The Old Testament foreshadowed the Eucharist when the priest Melchizedek offered God bread and wine (Gn 14:18), when the Jews celebrated Passover to commemorate the Exodus from slavery (Ex 12:1-20), and when God gave manna to the Chosen People in the desert (Ex 16:4-35).

In the Gospels, Jesus' multiplication of the loaves and his changing of water into wine at Cana prefigured the institution of the Eucharist. Moreover, Jesus made direct reference to the Eucharist in John's Gospel (6:53-59) when he declared the importance of eating his body and drinking his blood, a hard teaching that caused some disciples to leave him. The Lord established the Eucharist at the Last Supper in the context of the Jewish feast of Passover. He took unleavened bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles, saying: "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." (Lk 22:19-20)

**Various Names for the Eucharist:** We can never fully understand the Eucharist, since it is such a rich mystery of God's love for us. But by reflecting on some of its various names, we can begin to appreciate it more.

- **Eucharist:** The term Eucharist in Greek means "thanksgiving." In this sacrament, we thank God for his gifts of creation, Redemption through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and sanctification in the Holy Spirit.
- **Lord's Supper:** The term Lord's Supper brings to mind the Last Supper. Jesus chose a Passover meal to launch the events of our Salvation. A meal is a universal symbol of friendship and life. The Eucharist is Christ coming to us as our greatest friend and Savior and giving us a share in his own divine Life.

- **Breaking the Bread** (cf. Acts 2:42): The Apostles recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:35), a symbol for sacrificing and sharing. We are to be broken like the Lord as we serve others. We receive the bread of life to become the bread of life for others.
- **Eucharistic Assembly:** Eucharistic assembly emphasizes how we celebrate the Eucharist in the midst of the assembled Church. Validly ordained priests are the only ones who can preside at this Eucharistic assembly to consecrate the bread and wine so that these ordinary species can become the Body and Blood of the Lord (CCC, 1411).
- **Holy and Divine Liturgy:** The Eucharist is the very heart of the Church's liturgical life. The term liturgy means "people's work." The holy and divine liturgy of the Eucharist is the supreme worship we can give God, "the source and summit of the Christian life" {Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 11). This is why Church law requires Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days. The Sunday obligation comes from Jesus himself, who told us to break bread in his name. Weekly Mass attendance joins us to our brother and Savior Jesus Christ and to one another in worship of the Father.
- **Most Blessed Sacrament:** The Eucharist is the Most Blessed Sacrament. The consecrated Eucharistic species reserved in the tabernacle also go by this name. The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrifice are wheat bread and grape wine. In the Eucharistic liturgy, the priest consecrates bread and wine by invoking the blessing of the Holy Spirit. He does so with the words of Jesus himself: "This is my body, which has been given up for you ... This is the cup of my blood ..."
- **Holy Sacrifice:** The word sacrifice means "to make holy." The Eucharist is a memorial of our Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. It makes present Christ's sacrifice and includes the offering of the Church. The shedding of his blood on Calvary was Christ's supreme act of love. It makes us holy and pleasing to God because:

1. Jesus is the High Priest and the victim who offers himself through the celebrant and the assembly in praise, thanksgiving, petition, and atonement to Almighty God.

2. It makes present Christ's sacrifice on the cross by memorializing it and by applying its fruits to the members of Christ's Body. Because the Church is the Body of Christ, the Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Christian faithful, the whole Church, including the Pope, bishop of the local diocese, minister of the Eucharist, and the Communion of Saints. It involves their adoration, prayers, sufferings, and works.

3. It celebrates the presence of Christ by the power of his word and spirit. The Lord is uniquely present in the Eucharistic species, the consecrated bread and wine, which are the Body and Blood of Christ.

- **Holy Communion:** The Eucharist unites us with Christ and forms us into his Body, the Church. In the Eucharist "the Body and Blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained" (CCC, 1374, quoting the teaching of the Council of Trent). This presence of Christ in the consecrated species of bread and wine is called the "real presence." Exactly how Jesus is present in the consecrated bread and wine is a mystery. The term transubstantiation expresses that at the consecration of the Mass the reality (the substance) of the bread and wine change into the reality of Jesus - his risen, glorified Body and Blood, even though the appearances of bread and wine remain. The Lord is present whole and entire in each species from the moment of consecration for as long as the Eucharistic species subsist (see CCC, 1377).

The Church encourages us to receive Holy Communion every time we participate in a Eucharistic liturgy. (The bare minimum, though, is at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season.) However, we must receive Holy Communion worthily, that is, we must be in the state of sanctifying grace.

The Eucharist communicates God's very life to us by giving us the Risen Lord himself, who, by power of the Holy Spirit, binds us together and makes us the Church. Among the many graces of Holy Communion are:

- spiritual life and nourishment
- cleansing from past sins by wiping away venial sin and preservation from future mortal sins (The Sacrament of Penance is the proper sacrament to

gain forgiveness of mortal sin. The Eucharist is the sacrament for those who are in the state of sanctifying grace, in full communion with the Church.)

- a greater commitment to the poor, because when we receive Christ in Holy Communion, we must recognize him in the poorest people in our midst
- an increase in the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love and strengthening of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit
- spiritual energy for our earthly pilgrimage, a foretaste of Heaven, and union with the Blessed Mother and the saints in Heaven

In sum, the Eucharist puts us in touch with the saving effects of the Paschal Mystery, the eternal life that Jesus' sacrifice has won for us.

- **Holy Mass:** The term Holy Mass derives from the sending forth in the dismissal rite (in Latin, *Ita missa est*). We are to become for others the Christ we receive in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.

**The Celebration of Mass** (ccc 1345-1355: 1408): The Mass consists of two major parts - the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the Liturgy of the Word we hear God's Word and are called to respond to it. The Liturgy of the Eucharist celebrates the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ's love for us. The order of the Mass is as listed in the following subsections.

- **Introductory Rites:** Entrance and Greeting. The Mass begins with the congregation standing and singing an appropriate song. The celebrant and people make the Sign of the Cross. The priest greets the people.
- **Penitential Rite.** To worship with a pure heart, we acknowledge our sinfulness and ask for God's forgiveness.
- **Gloria.** A prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Triune God is shared.
- **Opening Prayer.** The priest offers a prayer of supplication, which recalls the Mystery of Salvation proper to the day or feast.

### **Liturgy of the Word**

- **The First Reading and Responsorial Psalm.** Typically, the first reading comes from the Old Testament. Its theme is similar to the message of the Gospel. The psalm response, either sung or recited, shows that we plan to take God's Word to heart.

- **Second Reading and Alleluia or Acclamation.** The second reading usually comes from one of St. Paul's letters and often deals with a problem facing followers of Jesus. It is not explicitly connected to the other readings. The Alleluia verse is our resounding yes to God's Word.
- **Gospel.** The most important reading is from a Gospel, thus linking us to the Word of God, Jesus the Lord. Standing is a sign of reverence. Signing ourselves with a small cross on the forehead, lips, and heart symbolizes our commitment to make God's Word come alive in what we think, say, and do.
- **Homily.** The celebrant or another priest or deacon preaches the homily to apply Scripture to our lives.
- **The Creed.** Our profession of faith in the Nicene Creed expresses our common belief. It binds us more closely as a community.
- **General Intercessions.** Here we pray with confidence that the Lord will take care of our needs and those of our world.

### **Liturgy of the Eucharist**

- **Offertory.** The bread and wine are brought to the altar in procession. The prayer said over these gifts tells of God's goodness that we now offer back to God. The congregation offers a Sunday collection to support the Church's ministries and those who are in need.
- **The Eucharistic Prayer.** This prayer is the heart of the Eucharistic liturgy. The preface (an introductory prayer) reminds us of our duty to thank the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. The entire congregation assents to the preface by singing or reciting a hymn of praise called the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy").

The Church has four standard Eucharistic prayers, used on different occasions. Each of these prayers:

- invokes the power of the Holy Spirit (the epiclesis);
- recounts the words of institution spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, remembers and acknowledges Christ's saving deeds (anamnesis), and offers the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father;

- contains intercessions that petition God for peace and various intentions of the whole community; concludes with the Great Amen in which we respond with a resounding yes, affirming we agree with what was prayed.
- **Communion Rite.** The communion rite includes the Lord's Prayer, the prayer for deliverance, the prayer for peace, the sharing of a sign of peace, and the breaking of the bread while the Lamb of God is sung or recited. The congregation approaches the altar to receive the food of Salvation, God's heavenly gift to us—the Risen Lord. The communion rite closes with a prayer of petition on behalf of the community.
- **Concluding Rite:** After any announcements, the Mass concludes when the celebrant blesses and dismisses the people. We are to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord" as the priest and others process out to the singing of an appropriate song.