

# All About The EUCCHARIST: Questions & Answers

## All About The EUCCHARIST: Questions & Answers

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This little “catechism” on the Eucharist has five parts:

- 1. Eucharistic Terms**
- 2. What We Believe About the Eucharist**
- 3. Receiving the Eucharist**
- 4. Liturgy and Worship**
- 5. Eucharistic Adoration**

### **1. EUCHARISTIC TERMS**

#### **1.1 What does the word “Eucharist” mean?**

This term comes from the Greek word for “thanksgiving”. At Mass the priest invites us to join in the Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving when he says, “Lift up your hearts . . . Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” These words introduce the great “eucharistic prayer”. “Eucharist”, often accompanied by “holy” or “blessed”, is a reverent way of referring to the Body and Blood of Christ, the Blessed Sacrament. When we offer and celebrate the Eucharist we praise and thank the Father for his gift to us. We are grateful because God has created us, redeemed us and opened to us the way to eternal life in heaven. We are grateful because God gives us his beloved Son as our food for this journey of life.

In Catholic circles we use the simpler word “Mass” to describe the whole ceremony, the action of worship or rite of celebrating the holy Eucharist.

### **1.2 What was the origin of the word “Mass”?**

The word developed in Europe from the Latin words “missio” or “missa”, meaning a dismissal. In the early centuries of the Church, those preparing for Baptism, catechumens, were dismissed after the first half of the Mass. Those fully initiated stayed for the complete rite, and were dismissed by the deacon or priest at the end, as we are today, with the words: “The Mass is ended. Go in peace.”, in Latin, “Ite, missa est.” Hearing this word “missa”, people in Western Europe used it as a popular name for the whole act of eucharistic worship.

This word “Mass” is respected by us today because it came to stand for complete Catholic faith in the Sacrifice of the Lord and his Real Presence, especially in times when these truths were denied. It conveniently sums up the whole action of this central act of Christian worship, without emphasising any one aspect.

### **1.3 What precisely does “Liturgy” mean?**

Here we are using another Greek word, “leitourgia”, meaning to perform a public duty, service or obligation, which came to be used to describe Christian “services” of public worship and prayer. In the Eastern Churches the Mass is usually called the Divine Liturgy. In our own Western European tradition, the term “liturgy” has come to mean the whole complex of ceremonial and ritual, the rites (text or “order of service”), the music and art, that is, the signs, symbols and actions we see and hear at the altar. Today this term “liturgy” has come to include the Sacraments and all forms of public worship, although it mainly refers to the Mass (see Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1066-1075). A “paraliturgy” is a form of public worship or devotion, but not a Mass or a sacrament, probably used for some special occasion or purpose and not found in official liturgical books of the Church.

### **1.4 What were the original names for the Mass?**

In the New Testament we find the “Breaking of the Bread” (Acts 2:42, 46 and 20:7) and the “Supper of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:20). St Paul refers to the eating of the Eucharist as “Communion” (in Greek, “koinonia”). He brings out clearly our union with God, and from this communion, our community with one another through the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 10:16).

The early Christians also used the Greek word “synaxis”, meaning a sacred meeting of people. In the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, in the centuries immediately after the books of the New Testament were written, the Mass is called “the Sacrifice”, “the offering”, “solemnities” and “mysteries”.

### **1.5 Do we use these words today?**

We use some of these original words today. They are useful to describe certain parts of the Mass, or to bring out a specific dimension of the Eucharist.

- At the beginning of Mass the priest invites us to “prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries”. This reminds us that the Eucharistic action is holy, God taking us into his Presence, and we prepare to enter this mystical time and sacred space by repenting of our sins.
- On Holy Thursday night, we celebrate the “Mass of the Lord’s Supper”, to commemorate the Last Supper, when Our Lord first gave us the blessed Eucharist on the night before he was crucified.
- The words “breaking of the Bread” refer to the breaking or “fraction” of the Host, when the priest repeats the action of Jesus at the Last Supper.
- This leads to “Holy Communion”, the usual words to describe the moments when the priest and the people eat the Body and Blood of Christ or receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, entering communion with God and communion in the Church, that is, with one another.
- The terms “holy Sacrifice” provide a general description of the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist.

See also, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1328.

### **1.6 What does the word “Host” mean?**

After the bread has been consecrated, it is called the “Host”, derived from the Latin word “hostia”, meaning a “victim”. Jesus Christ is victim and priest in the Mass because his eternal Sacrifice is made present whenever the Eucharist is celebrated.

### **1.7 Why do we use the word “celebration”?**

We call the Mass a “celebration”, the Eucharistic Celebration, and we refer to the priest as the “celebrant”. But this is not the usual English meaning of “celebration”. It does not mean that the Mass is a party or a social-get-together. The original Latin word “celebratio” referred to a

solemn occasion, the proclaiming of good news, a festival, a great public assembly of people. All these different meanings come together in our celebration of the Liturgy. Therefore our celebration of the Eucharist can have different textures. It does not always have to be joyful. It may also be sorrowful or peaceful and reflective. It may be festive and elaborate, or quite simple, and it may even be celebrated with little emotion.

What we always celebrate is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the most “celebrated” Person in human history. Therefore his saving work is the only element common to all forms of the celebration of the Eucharist on all occasions. We celebrate the events which save us, as St Paul puts it, “. . . as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

### **1.8 Why do all these eucharistic words go back to Greek and Latin?**

Some can be traced back further, to Hebrew. The words remind us of the great basic truth concerning the Eucharist. As Sacrifice and Sacrament it is great God’s gift to us. The words used to describe this gift go back to the time when the Church began, and are expressed in the languages of those times. The Last Supper was a Jewish Passover meal, during which Jesus Christ gave his new People a new Covenant, or agreement between God and man. The apostles received this gift of a “new covenant in my blood” with the command to “do this”. By that empowering creative word “do this” they were made the first priests of the New Covenant. They carefully handed on the Lord’s command and the way Jesus wanted it to be fulfilled – using his words, bread, wine, action and prayer. This “handing on” of sacred truth and sacred action is what we call “tradition”. It is a vital, living process, linking us with the Apostles.

St Paul shows us this passing on of the Eucharist, this tradition, when he repeats the words used at the Last Supper, first saying, “. . . I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you. . .” (1 Corinthians 11: 23). This living tradition, with the power and authority of Jesus Christ, has been handed on across the ages in the words and actions of the various liturgies of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Western.

“On the Lord’s day assemble and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure. If anyone has a dispute with his brother, let him not come to the assembly till they are reconciled, that your sacrifice be not polluted. For this is the sacrifice

spoken of by the Lord, 'In every place and at every time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great king, said the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations.' (see Malachi 1:11, 14)."

The Eucharist in the early Church, The Didache 14, Second Century A.D.

## **2. WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE EUCHARIST**

### **2.1 What is the best way to sum up the teaching of the Church on the Mass?**

The Mass is Sacrifice and Sacrament. These two aspects bring together and include all the truths of the Eucharist.

A sacrifice is the action of giving something to God, of entering a better relationship with God by the gift offered up. But the word "sacrifice" comes from the Latin "sacrum facere", to make something (or someone) holy. In a sacrifice, the victim offered up is made holy, consecrated, set apart or dedicated. Those who offer the victim are made holy by their offering. Because it involves a real offering, the Mass is a true sacrifice, indeed it is the only true sacrifice.

A sacrament is a visible human action through which God works. Another way of describing a sacrament is that it is an outward and visible sign bringing God's Grace to us. Each of the seven sacraments is moment when we meet God in a special way, a way God has chosen, so that we can share the supernatural life of God here and now. The sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick. But the greatest sacrament is the Holy Eucharist, also known as the "Blessed Sacrament". Putting the definite article before "Eucharist" affirms what the Second Vatican Council taught, that the Eucharistic Liturgy is the summit and source of the life of the whole Church. (cf. Constitution on the Liturgy, 10)

### **2.2 What precisely is the "Sacrifice of the Mass"?**

It is the same Sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered on the Cross. The Council of Trent taught: "It is the one and the same Victim; the same Person now offers it by the ministry of his priests who then offered himself on the cross. Only the way the offering is made is different." On the Cross, Jesus Christ offered himself for us, active Priest and obedient Victim, atoning for our sins by making a perfect act of self-giving love on our behalf. This offering continues in every celebration of the Eucharist.

### **2.3 So is Christ crucified again each time Mass is celebrated?**

No. Fundamentalists accuse Catholics of this, but we believe that Christ died once and for all. His saving death cannot be repeated. He rose from the dead, and in his risen and glorious Body he cannot suffer death again. In this historical event of his death, Jesus Christ gained our salvation. But the way we receive the benefits of this death is through the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This is the channel of the Grace of salvation. This is the way Christ chose to apply to us his saving work, here and now in this time and place.

The Second Vatican Council taught: "As often as the Sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch is sacrificed' (1 Corinthians 5:7) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." The Church 3.

### **2.4 How do we know Christ chose this way to bring us his Sacrifice?**

The New Testament accounts of the Last Supper all use the Jewish words associated with sacrifices. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-28, Luke 22:17-19. Jesus Christ speaks of "my body" and "my blood", the separation of body and blood indicating a sacrificed victim. He says that his body is "given up" (offered up) for us, and that "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many". He says that this is a "new covenant", a new agreement or mutual pact between God and his people. A sacrifice was the way Jews sealed a covenant. This is the new and complete sacrifice for his new covenant. He commands his apostles to re-enact his actions using bread and wine, "do this in remembrance of me", thus instituting the Sacrifice of the Church.

In St John's Gospel we do not find an account of the eucharistic words of the Lord, but he offers himself, and consecrates himself in the beautiful "high priestly prayer" (cf. John 17). He anticipates his self-sacrifice on the following day, Good Friday. In John 6:25-29 he promises his "flesh" and "blood", sacrificial food "which I shall give for the life of the world". In Jewish thought the blood was the life-force, offered to God in sacrifices and used for purification from sins. This reminds us that we need to read the Christian Scriptures with the Hebrew Scriptures.

St Paul regarded the Eucharist as a true sacrifice because he compared the Christian Sacrifice to pagan sacrifices. (1 Corinthians 10:14-22). By offering and eating, the Eucharist, Christians join in the Lord's Sacrifice.

## **2.5 But didn't Christ only say "do this in remembrance of me"?**

The correct translation is "do this in memory of me", or "as a memorial of me". The Greek word used, "anamnesis", is much stronger than our words "remembrance", "memorial", "memory". It is closer to our word "re-play". It means therefore that when bread and wine are consecrated according to Christ's command, the saving events of his death and resurrection are "re-played", or made present here and now. We are taken into those great events, and through them we put all our needs before our Father in heaven, "re-presenting" the Sacrifice of his beloved Son. We do not merely "remember Jesus" when we celebrate the Eucharist.

## **2.6 What is the purpose of the Eucharistic Sacrifice?**

There are four main purposes or "ends" in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Jesus Christ offers himself:

1. in an act of perfect adoration for us.
2. in thanksgiving for us and for all creation.
3. in prayer for us in all our daily needs.
4. in atonement, to obtain divine mercy for us, in this life and the next.

Through his one Sacrifice, applied to us through the Eucharistic Celebration, we are able to adore God, to praise and thank God, to pray for all our needs, and to gain mercy and peace for the living and the dead. This is why the Mass is sometimes called the great prayer or the perfect prayer. We join Christ when we celebrate the Eucharist and make his saving work our own. "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen." (Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer).

## **2.7 Is the Mass only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving?**

No. It is much more than a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is the all-powerful pleading of the Passion of Christ on the Cross, therefore the Church describes it as the Sacrifice of propitiation, that is, the gaining of the Father's loving favour and mercy for us. As the Third Eucharistic Prayer puts it: "Look with favour on your Church's offering, and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself." This prayer also speaks of "this sacrifice which has made our peace with you. . ." Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we apply the saving death and resurrection of our Lord to help the living and the dead, to gain mercy, pardon and peace.

## **2.8 Why are the words "we offer" used in the Mass?**

The Eucharist is the Sacrifice of the Church, our sacrifice, for this corporate action involves all members of the Church. The words "Body of Christ" apply to the Eucharist and, at the same time, to the community offering the Sacrifice. By celebrating and receiving the Eucharist we become more truly the Body of Christ in the world. The worshipping and serving Church is a priestly People, so there are different ways of offering one Eucharistic Sacrifice within this one community.

The priest offers Mass by using the gift of his priesthood to offer and consecrate. He has been raised into a special share in Christ's eternal Priesthood by the sacrament of Orders. The Second Vatican Council teaches: "Through the ministry of priests the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is completed in union with the sacrifice of Christ the only mediator, which in the Eucharist is offered through the priest's hands in the name of the whole Church in an unbloody and sacramental manner until the Lord himself come." Life of Priests 2.

The people offer the Lord's Sacrifice through and with the priest, uniting themselves to him. At the altar he is both the representative of Jesus Christ, acting "in the Person of Christ", and their representative, acting on behalf of God's People as they assemble in prayer before the Lord. They share a communal priesthood through Baptism, and in faith and love they offer themselves with Christ to the Father in union with the Holy Spirit.

### **2.9 How is the Mass the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ?**

There have been various theories in theology, each attempting to deepen our understanding of this mystery. Pope Paul VI presented the developed doctrine which centres the offering of Sacrifice on the consecration of the bread and wine. "The Lord's immolation in the sacrifice of the Mass without bloodshed, his symbolic presentation of the sacrifice of the cross and his application of its saving virtue, all these take place at the moment when, by the words of consecration, he begins to be present sacramentally, as the spiritual food of the faithful under the appearances of bread and wine." *Mysterium Fidei* 34.

We may say that the Sacrifice of the Lord is made present through the consecration of bread and wine, his Body and his Blood, offered for us.

### **2.10 How is the Mass the Sacrament of Jesus Christ?**



After the consecration, Jesus Christ is really present under the visible appearances, or “signs”, of bread and wine. The bread is changed into his Body, the wine into his Blood. This is the Blessed Sacrament, our Sacrifice and our Food, a sacred offering and a sacred meal.

### **2.11 How does Christ become really present?**

When the priest says the words of consecration, there is a real change of bread and wine. The Church calls this change “transubstantiation”, meaning a change of the very reality of bread and wine (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1373-1377, 1413). Pope Paul VI taught that “on the conversion of the bread and wine’s substance, or nature, into the Body and Blood of Christ, nothing is left of the bread and wine but the appearances alone. Beneath these appearances Christ is present whole and entire, bodily present too, in his physical ‘reality’, although not in the manner in which bodies are present in place.” *Mysterium Fidei*, 46.

After the consecration there is no bread and wine on the altar, only Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. What is on the paten and in the chalice looks, feels and tastes like bread and wine, but it is really our Lord Jesus Christ. He holds nothing back of himself. He is present really, truly and substantially, present in his body, blood, soul and divinity, truly God and truly Man. We accept and honour his “Real Presence” by prayerful adoration, because this is the personal Presence of the Son of God, who invites us to respond in a relationship of faith, hope and love.

### **2.12 Is Christ present among us in other ways?**

Yes. Jesus is present among us in other ways, for example when the Church performs works of mercy (see Matthew 25:40), or as the pilgrim Church moves forward towards heaven in faith, hope and love, or when the Church preaches his Good News, or in the apostolic ministry of caring for and governing God’s People, granted to the Pope and Bishops. He is especially present and active in the Liturgy and the Sacraments.

In the Instruction, introducing the Roman Missal, we read that “. . .the promise of Christ: ‘Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ (Matthew 18:20) applies in a special way to this gathering of the local church. For in the celebration of the Mass whereby the sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated, Christ is really present in the very community which has gathered in his name, in the person of his minister, in his word and also substantially and continuously under the eucharistic species.” (7.)

All these different ways Christ is present lead to his Presence “under the eucharistic species”, his unique and supreme physical Presence, achieved by transubstantiation. This is why we speak of his supreme Presence in the blessed Eucharist as “the Real Presence”.

### **2.13 What is the ultimate purpose of his “Real Presence”?**

Christ is in the Eucharist as our Food. He gave the command, “take, eat. . .”, “drink of it, all of you.” He gave us the Eucharist at the Last Supper, a sacred Passover meal. In plain words he tells us that “my flesh is real food, my blood is real drink” (John 6:55) Therefore, every Host consecrated at Mass ultimately has but one destiny, to be eaten in Holy Communion.

### **2.14 What is the purpose of receiving the Eucharist or Holy Communion?**

The first purpose of receiving the Eucharist is to unite each of us to God. Christ comes to us and we come to Christ. We receive Christ but at the same time Christ receives us. “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him.” (John 6:56) This gift of himself nourishes us spiritually, so that we depend on Jesus for the life of our souls, “. . . whoever eats me will live because of me.” (John 6:57) This supreme gift nourishes Christians for eternal life in heaven, “. . . whoever who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:54) Our frequent faithful Holy Communion, received worthily, helps us to grow in grace, to reflect Christ in the world, to bring him to those we meet day by day, to make us more Christ-like. We are called to become Who we receive.

The second purpose of receiving the Eucharist is to create Christian community. St Paul teaches that our receiving of the Body and Blood of Christ unites us to one another. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:17) This is echoed in the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer: “Lord, look upon this sacrifice which you have given to your Church; and by your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise.” Therefore the Second Vatican Council describes the Eucharist as a supper of family fellowship and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Cf. The Church Today 38. The unity of the Church is celebrated and deepened in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is our Food as individuals and as community, for the journey of life in this world and in anticipation of the glorious life of eternity with God.

### **2.15 Can we just say that the Mass is a meal?**

This is misleading. It runs the danger of reducing the eucharistic mystery to something ordinary or even trivial. A “meal” in our culture has a wide range of meanings. Accurate language should lead us to say that the Mass is the Sacrifice of the Lord in the form of a holy meal, or, that the Liturgy is completed by the “spiritual banquet”, receiving the Eucharist. A feast or banquet is closer to the festive and rich meaning of sharing the Eucharist. But it is difficult in English to find a word for this sacred eating and drinking that both preserves its essential religious meaning and its rich meanings of sharing a sacred Food together.

### **2.16 How then is receiving the Eucharist related to the Sacrifice?**

The Jewish background is helpful in holding together sacrifice and meal, that is, the offering of the Sacrifice and receiving the Sacrament as spiritual Food. One form of Jewish sacrifice in the Old Testament involved the eating of portions of the victims, and by this eating those making the offering were joined to God and to one another. This was the “communion sacrifice”. The last Supper reflects this kind of sacrifice when Our Lord commands his Church to eat and drink his body and blood. Through the sacred meal we are most perfectly and completely united to the Sacrifice of Christ. We offer ourselves in communion with him to the loving Father, “our Father”.

### **2.17 Is it right to refer to the Host as “holy bread”?**

No, because this is not true. After the consecration, in the context of certain liturgical prayers, we find references to “bread” and “cup”. But the words only make sense in the context of the prayers and the words of St Paul used for the third acclamation. Outside of this context, it is wrong and very misleading to refer to the Blessed Sacrament as “holy bread” or “bread and wine”. This would merely describe the outward appearances, ignoring the true reality, Jesus Christ himself. A Catholic should never call the consecrated Host “bread” or the Blood of Christ “wine”.

Children must never be allowed to speak of the Eucharist in such false ways. Sound educational practice tells us that children must never be taught something they will have to “un-learn” later. Eucharistic catechetics always should focus on the great essentials, which may be taught at an early age without any need to “dumb down”. It is remarkable the way young children easily accept, wonder at and appreciate the real change of bread and wine and the real Presence of

Jesus among us. Older children can comprehend basic teaching on the offering of the Holy Sacrifice (Cf. To Know, Worship and Love, 4b, unit 11 / Yr 6, unit 12).

For all of us, adults and children, Jesus Christ must remain the personal centre of our eucharistic faith. The General Directory for Catechesis places Jesus Christ at the centre of all catechetics. Christ, true God and true man, and his saving work carried out in his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, is the centre of the message. Eucharistic catechesis should remain true to this principle.

(See. To Know, Worship and Love, Year 7, Vic/ NSW edition, unit 11).

### **3. RECEIVING THE EUCHARIST**

#### **3.1 How should I prepare to receive the Eucharist?**

The best preparation is to be reconciled with God our Father and with the community of the Church through the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. Good confession is the best way towards a good Communion. Our Lord's own advice is found in Matthew 5:23, 24, that we are to be at peace with one another before coming to the altar. This is why we exchange the "sign of peace" just before Communion in the Roman Rite of Mass. St Paul warns of unworthy Holy Communion, and its effects, in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34. Before Communion we should pray, seek God's help and make a sincere act of contrition.

#### **3.2 Do I have to go to confession every time I come to Communion?**

No. But the Catholic who comes frequently to the Lord's table is also meant to be regular and frequent at the sacrament of Reconciliation. What "frequent confession" means will vary from person to person.

The Liturgy provides us with a penitential rite at the beginning of the Mass, which prepares us to take part in hearing the Word, offering the Sacrifice and sharing in the banquet of Christ's Body and Blood. This rite is meant to move us to a spirit of personal contrition, and certainly takes away venial sins. But it is not a substitute for the sacrament of reconciliation, that is, personal confession to a priest, especially in times of grave sin.

#### **3.3 How should I receive the Eucharist?**

Above all else we should show welcome to Our Lord by (a) the body language of outward reverence and respect, (b) private personal prayers of thanksgiving. After we return to our

places, we usually kneel in prayer, for it shows a lack of respect and gratitude for the Gift merely to return to one's seat and sit there gazing around. There is also meant to be a time for silence after everyone has received the Eucharist. During this time we may sense that tremendous unity of the whole community, caused by sharing the One Bread and One Cup of the Eucharist, our intimacy with God, our solidarity with one another. A hymn, psalm, prayerful reflection, meditative music may be provided after Holy Communion. If there is singing, we should take this opportunity to praise and thank the Lord as one people, with one voice of faith and love.

### **3.4 Is there a "right way" of receiving the Eucharist?**

In Australia, everyone is free to choose. The Host may be either received directly into the mouth, or received in the palm of the left hand and placed in the mouth by the right hand. No-one may be compelled to go either way, nor should children ever be required to go only in one way.

If you receive in the hand, keep your cupped left hand up high, the right hand beneath it, supporting it, then step to one side and put the Host into your mouth before you turn to go back to your seat. If you receive directly into the mouth, assist the priest or minister of Communion by opening your mouth and extending the tongue, with the head up.

Whether people kneel or stand to receive the Eucharist is a matter of local custom, but in most Australian churches we stand for Communion. It is only good manners to conform to the local custom of the church where you worship, but no-one may be compelled to stand or kneel. The act of kneeling to receive Our Lord in itself is an action of reverence to the Blessed Sacrament. Many people bow before they receive standing and bishops in some countries require this act of reverence.

Communion-in-the-hand is a return to a practice widely followed in the early centuries of the Church. In the writings of several of the Fathers of the Church we read of the reverence with which people cupped the left hand to make a "throne" for the Lord, and the care they took to prevent any crumbs falling to the ground or remaining on the palm of the hand. Those who choose to receive in the hand today should show the same reverence and care as Christians in the distant past.

In Western Europe, by at least the Ninth Century, the Host was placed directly on the tongue. The people also only received Holy Communion under “one kind”, that is, only under the appearances of bread. In various Eastern Churches, the Host was mingled with the precious Blood in the chalice and given on a spoon directly into the mouth, as remains the Byzantine Rite practice today.

By the Middle Ages the custom of kneeling for Holy Communion was universal in Western Europe, and after the Reformation altar rails or Communion benches were used in most churches. In the Eastern Churches the old practice of standing for Communion continued to be the rule.

### **3.5 Why can we drink from the chalice?**

The Second Vatican Council restored the possibility of being able to receive “under both kinds”, at least on certain occasions. At a concelebrated Mass, for example, the people may receive from the chalice. At group Masses, when the numbers are small and it can be arranged easily, Communion under both kinds is normal. Obviously it is difficult to arrange if there are large numbers of people.

There are two ways of receiving “under both kinds”: 1. when the priest or minister gives the chalice to each communicant. 2. By intinction, when the Host is dipped into the chalice and placed directly into the mouth.

### **3.6 Is “self-service” Communion allowed?**

No. Jesus Christ “gave himself by his own hands” to the Apostles at the Last Supper. Those ordained or authorised to give Holy Communion serve the people by this ministry. The very act of giving the Eucharist is a sign of service. People should never take the chalice from the altar or a Host from a sacred vessel, even if held by someone else, and give themselves Communion. The chalice is not meant to be passed around. Nor is it right to take the Host and dip it in the chalice and then give yourself Communion. The Eucharist is always “administered” or given to each communicant personally and individually. The priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion says, “The Body of Christ ... The Blood of Christ.”, and each communicant makes a personal act of faith by replying “Amen”, before receiving this holy Sacrament.

### **3.7 If Communion under both kinds is provided, do I have to take it?**

For personal reasons you may choose not to receive from the chalice, or you may not wish to receive a Host that has been dipped in the chalice. If intinction is used, you will have to tell the priest or minister that you only wish to receive the Host. No-one may be compelled in such a matter.

Christ cannot be divided. He is really present “whole and entire” under either the appearances of bread or of wine. To receive the Host alone or some of the precious Blood alone is to receive the Lord himself. On the other hand, the Second Vatican Council commended the restoration of “both kinds”, to enrich the full symbolism of the Liturgy on various occasions. The Council Fathers recognised that Catholics today would not be influenced by a Protestant error that Communion was incomplete without the chalice, a problem of the Sixteenth Century, when the Council of Trent decided against restoring Communion under both kinds.

In the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, we read, “The meaning of Communion is signified as clearly as possible when it is given under both kinds. In this form the meal-aspect of the Eucharist is more fully manifested and Christ’s intention that a new and eternal Covenant should be ratified in his Blood is better expressed. Also the connection between the eucharistic meal and the heavenly banquet in the Father’s kingdom becomes easier to see.” (281, revised edition)

### **3.8 May I receive Communion twice in the same day?**

Guided by the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, we should remember that it is devotion not frequency which makes the blessed Eucharist effective in our lives as Christians. However, if you received Holy Communion at a morning Mass and later in the day went to a Mass for a special occasion, for example a marriage or funeral, you could receive a second time. Your second Communion would identify you with that occasion and the community sharing in it. When the first Sunday Mass is celebrated on the Saturday night, you could receive Communion at that evening Mass even ‘though you had already received at a Saturday morning Mass.

### **3.9 What is the fast before Holy Communion?**

There is an ancient tradition in the Church that we show our reverence and respect for the most sacred Food by fasting for some time before receiving the Eucharist. The modern rule is easy to follow, that we do not eat or drink for at least one hour before Holy Communion. The time is calculated from the approximate time of receiving Communion, i.e., not from the time

Mass begins. Those who receive Communion of the sick are only bound to a quarter-of-an-hour fast. This provision includes elderly folk at home or in an institution and those working for the sick and elderly in such places. Medicine never breaks the fast. Water may be taken at any time.

This fast for one hour is a minimum time. Out of devotion or with a sense of self-sacrifice, we are free to choose a longer fast. Obviously a much longer fast is appropriate if alcohol has been consumed.

### **3.10 When should children receive first Eucharist?**

In his decree *Quam Singulari* (August 8th, 1919), St Pius X restored the right of children who have attained the age of reason or discretion (about 7 years) to make their First Confession and First Communion. In those days the first Sacraments were often deferred until much later. Pope St Pius X did much to promote frequent Communion and to strengthen eucharistic faith and practice among children, with Penance as the right preparation for the Eucharist. In Australian schools First Eucharist is usually received in Grade 3 or 4, that is, at about the age of 8 or 9 years.

### **3.11 Should children receive first Eucharist before their first Reconciliation?**

No. After the Second Vatican Council, experiments began to happen which contradicted the teaching of St Pius X. Some argued that children could not understand the Eucharist at an early age, that Communion should be deferred until they were nine or ten or even older. Some claimed that children were terrified by first Confession, or that they cannot commit serious sin and therefore that first Confession should be delayed until some time, even some years, after first Communion. These experiments created problems, such as a failure to see the link between Penance and the Eucharist, that the sacrament of Penance is the normal preparation for the Eucharist. In some cases, children missed out on Reconciliation altogether, yet they continued to receive the Eucharist.

A note added to the General Catechetical Directory (April 11, 1971) re-affirmed the practice of First Confession coming before First Communion, as envisaged by St Pius X. All experiments deviating from the normal practice were ruled out by the declaration *Sanctus Pontifex* (May 24th, 1973). Subsequent letters from Rome made it clear that First Reconciliation comes before First Eucharist, and that all children of the "age of discretion" have the right to both sacraments in the customary order. Canon 914 of The Code of Canon Law (1983) is clear in this regard and



the normal practice was recently endorsed in the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004) no. 87.

However, there should be proper catechetical formation for both sacraments, with ample time between First Reconciliation and First Eucharist so that children may appreciate the distinctive meaning and grace of each sacrament. Children can readily understand that Reconciliation is the way to the Eucharist. The parish priest is to judge whether a child has reached the age of discretion and whether that child is ready to receive the Eucharist.

### **3.12 Why are non-Catholics who come to Mass not allowed to receive the Eucharist with us?**

The second meaning of receiving the Eucharist applies here, that the Eucharist celebrates our unity, that this sacrament makes us one and is a sign of our communion as members of the Church. The Eucharist is for those who are already “in communion with” one another in the community of the Church. Those who celebrate the Eucharist in Catholic dioceses, parishes and communities are “in communion with” the Pope and the bishops of the Catholic Church. Separated Christians are not part of that visible communion of people. Moreover, there is another problem. Some separated Christians do not believe in the reality of the Eucharist as this has been handed on within the Church.

There are some exceptions to the normal rule, specific cases when the local bishop may permit a non-Catholic who has faith in the sacrament and the right dispositions to receive the Eucharist. But, while the sad divisions continue it would be pretending were separated Christians generally to receive the Eucharist with us. We hope and pray for the day when all Christians will truly be one, in one faith, under one shepherd, able to share together in the sacrament of unity.

O sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with Grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. St Thomas Aquinas

## **4. LITURGY AND WORSHIP**

### **4.1 Why does the Church have public worship, with ritual and display?**

In Jesus Christ, God became visible: “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). His religion is visible – seen in actions and deeds, in a visible community of people, the Church. Jesus continues his saving work in this world through a visible Church. The worship of this Church will therefore be

clearly seen in public, where possible, and so designed to draw all people into its action, because this Church is for everyone – “Catholic”.

We are not only individuals when we worship. We are members of God’s People, the Church. While it is good to pray alone, privately, we need to gather in a public assembly of worship, as a community. Here we are led by an ordained priest, who is the “president” of this assembly of worship. As God’s family we come together at one altar.

In Christian worship we bring to God the best we have to offer, our gifts and talents, our skills and our interests. Musicians and artists have always endowed Catholic worship with beauty. God who is The Beautiful One is adored and loved by human efforts to create beautiful worship. We see this in reverent ceremonial that has come to mean so much to millions of people across the ages. It is expressed in Christian art and architecture, the rich variety of liturgical music, traditional and modern. Depending on the occasion, we offer to God the beauty of simple worship or the colourful splendour of glorious ritual. The various forms of liturgy in Eastern and Western traditions bring us closer to God as we worship in the beauty of holiness.

#### **4.2 Surely God does not expect all this fuss?**

God expects the very best we can offer. Faith is shown and lived out in actions. Faith is not ideas in the head or sentiments in the heart, even as these should be elements of Faith. Careful and reverent worship not only shows our Faith but it strengthens our Faith. Those who complain about the money or effort spent on Catholic worship link themselves to Judas, whose scoffing at sacrificial devotion is recorded in John 12:1-9.

There is perpetual worship in the inner Life of the One God, the Trinity. God the Son offers himself in loving adoration to his Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We are caught up and brought into this eternal worship by being “in Christ”, members of his priestly people. Through the Sacrifice of the Mass, we join Christ in his loving adoration and are given the power to offer to God acceptable worship. The Second Vatican Council lays this down as the basis of true worship in the opening chapter of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.

#### **4.3 Why does the Mass have two parts?**

The Liturgy of the Word is the first part of the Mass, once known as the “Liturgy of Catechumens”, because those preparing for Baptism were allowed to remain only for this

phase of the celebration. It consists of prayers, psalms and readings from the Scriptures, and appears to be based on the worship of the synagogues, adapted by the early Christians and perfected with readings from the New Testament, the Christian Scriptures. The main theme of the Liturgy of the Word is God speaking to us here and now, through the inspired Word of Scripture. The supreme moments of this part of Mass come at the Gospel, when we all stand to hear the very words of Jesus Christ, who is present in this communication of his saving message today. On Sundays we always hear the Gospel explained in the homily or sermon, then we express our Faith together in the Creed, the faith words of the Church, and we pray for all people in the Prayer of the Faithful or General Intercessions.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is the main part of the Mass, once known as the "Liturgy of the Faithful", because only the baptised were allowed to remain for it. We re-enact the actions of Christ at the Last supper in four steps.

1. Jesus Christ took the bread and wine – the Preparation of the Gifts or Offertory, when the raw materials of the Eucharist are brought to the altar and these offerings are set aside for their sacred purpose.
2. He consecrated the bread and wine – the Eucharistic Prayer or Canon of the Mass, when, through the hands of the priest and words of Christ, bread and wine are changed into his Body and Blood, offered up in Sacrifice for us, taking us into the renewal of his life, death and resurrection.
3. He broke the bread – the "fraction" or breaking of the Host, so it may be eaten and shared in Holy Communion, also a sign of his broken Body on the Cross.
4. He gave this sacred Food to his disciples – the eating and drinking of his Body and Blood, Holy Communion, when Christ comes to us, we come to him, and are made one in him.

The main part of the Mass usually concludes with prayer in thanksgiving for Communion, the blessing and the dismissal – which sends us out into the world to live the life of Christ, to become the One we have received.

#### **4.4 Why should we join in the responses and prayers?**

The Church expects all of us take part in the Liturgy actively "... by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper time a reverent silence should be observed." (Vatican II, Constitution on the

Sacred Liturgy, 30). Joining in responses and prayers is part of our active participation which is why the Council authorised the use of the “vernacular”, the language of the people, in Catholic worship. But true participation is personal. It involves sincere devotion, reverence, mature behaviour, listening to readings and showing respect for God and one another by modest dress, being punctual and remaining for the whole of the Mass.

#### **4.5 Is Latin “out” now?**

No. The standard edition of the Roman Missal is in Latin, and Mass may be celebrated at any time or place in the ancient language of the Church. For some years after 1969, the use of the old Roman Missal (the “Tridentine Rite”) was not permitted, with some exceptions. That gave the impression that Latin is “out”. Today, with the permission of the bishop, a priest may celebrate Mass according to the 1962 missal. In recent years there has been renewed interest in the Latin “Gregorian” chant and many CDs are available. Singing in Latin is meant to be continued, at least for various occasions.

#### **4.6 Why does the priest face the people, standing behind the altar?**

This is partly a return to a practice of at least some places in the early Church, partly an appropriate way of helping communication, dialogue and developing a sense of community when celebrating the Eucharist. In most public Masses today the priest faces the people, although he is free to face the altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist. This remains the normal practice in the liturgies of the Eastern Churches. According to this tradition, facing the altar is understood as turning towards the East, leading the worshipping people towards the dawning light of Christ. Good reasons can be brought forward to justify the symbolism and benefits of both ways, which are recognised in the Roman Missal and its revised General Instruction.

#### **4.7 Why is the priest sometimes called a “president”?**

The priest as celebrant “presides” over the eucharistic assembly, which is why he occupies the “presidential chair”. This is a return to liturgical practice in the early centuries. When we call the priest a “president” we use the language of liturgy, emphasising how he is the leader of a worshipping community. However, when we use doctrinal language we call the celebrant a sacrificing priest, a mediator or bridge between God and people, but depending on the One Mediator he represents, Jesus Christ. The priest’s function in liturgy is not merely a special role to be played, but the exercise of supernatural gifts he has received permanently in his

ordination. He serves the people as he leads. The laity do not have the specific gift of ordination, and a lay person may never preside at the Mass. When the Eucharist is celebrated, the laity worship through and with the priest, but all worship together as one community.

#### **4.8 Can the priest change the words of the liturgy?**

There are several points in the Mass where the priest can adapt the words provided, or use words of his own. However, he is not allowed to change the official prayers of the Church in the missal. The Second Vatican Council teaches: "... no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority." Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 22. This reminds us that liturgical worship always has a set structure and some fixed forms of words. It has a predictable quality about it, but within that structure there is flexibility and variety, with special prayers and readings provided for the Sundays and feast days of the liturgical year and for different occasions in our lives.

#### **4.9 Why are lay people doing so many things at Mass?**

One principle of liturgy today is to share around various "roles" in celebrating the Eucharist. We are used to lay people acting as servers, usually older children or young people. To these lay helpers are now added lectors or readers, commentators, people bringing up the gifts and, in places where they are needed, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Involving lay people in these liturgical roles is a return to the best traditions of our past.

"... the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper." Vatican II, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 10.

## **5. EUCHARISTIC ADORATION**

### **5.1 Why is the Blessed Sacrament locked in the tabernacle after Mass?**

The Eucharist is reserved in a church so it might be taken to the sick. This practice goes back to the earliest centuries of Christianity. Various methods of keeping the Eucharist after the time of Mass developed: in a eucharistic “tower”; in a vessel suspended over the altar, the hanging pyx; in a small wall safe or aumbry; finally in a safe set on or behind the altar, known today as the tabernacle, the tent or dwelling place of the Lord. What began as a practical way of bringing the Eucharist to people unable to get to Mass, soon became a focus of devotion. In Europe, in the Middle Ages, popular devotion to Jesus present in Eucharist outside the time of Mass developed rapidly. Public and private prayer before the reserved Sacrament took various forms.

### **5.2 What is a monstrance and what is Benediction?**

A desire to see the Eucharist led to the showing or elevation of the Host and Chalice during Mass. Then a vessel was invented, taking the place of the priest’s hands so as to prolong the elevation. This is called a monstrance, from the Latin *monstrare*, to show. A blessing with the Sacrament exposed in a monstrance or contained in a ciborium, was introduced, known as benediction. Gradually prayers and hymns were recognised for public eucharistic adoration. Some of the best hymns were composed by St Thomas Aquinas. Benediction, holy hours, perpetual exposition, eucharistic processions and, more recently, eucharistic congresses, became features of the public worship of Jesus Christ among us (Cf. To Know, Worship and Love, Year 10, Vic/ NSW edition, chapter 8).

### **5.3 Is eucharistic adoration encouraged today?**

Yes, and strongly so. After the Second Vatican Council, instructions were published to promote a renewal of public adoration (eg. *Eucharistiae Sacramentum*, June 21st, 1973). But in harmony with the Council’s emphasis on celebrating liturgy, adoration of the Eucharist is presented as an extension of the liturgy, not as some “devotion” cut off from the liturgy (cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1378-1381).

Public adoration, with prayers and readings, is strongly commended for various occasions, usually concluded with benediction. We come to Christ in the Eucharist, not only to adore the Lord and receive his blessing, but to deepen our unity with him in offering the Sacrifice and receiving his Body and Blood. The public celebration of adoration comes from the liturgy and leads us back into the liturgy.

### **5.4 What personal forms does adoration of the Eucharist take?**

Personal “visits to the Blessed Sacrament” are strongly commended by the Church. As individuals or in groups we come before the tabernacle, where Christ is enshrined to be available for the Communion of the sick and the adoration of believers. In the Credo of the People of God, Pope Paul VI described the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle as “the living heart of each of our churches”. With words which invite us to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, Pope Paul added, “and it is our very sweet duty to honour and adore in the Blessed Host which our eyes see, the Incarnate Word which they cannot see, and Who, without leaving heaven, is made present before us”.

Pope John Paul II has strongly promoted eucharistic adoration by word and example. Each year since 1979 he has led the splendid Corpus Christi procession through the streets of Rome, praying before the Blessed Sacrament and giving the final benediction from the steps of the basilica of St Mary Major. In response to his call, in recent years there has been a widespread revival of eucharistic adoration. Lay people play a major role in associations and new groups devoted to this form of prayer, which attracts many people because it emphasises restful silence and quiet meditation.

### **5.5 How can we develop eucharistic adoration in our schools?**

Eucharistic adoration can easily be developed in a school located near a church, or where the Eucharist is reserved in the school chapel. Prayer before the Eucharist deepens the spirituality of young people, particularly by cultivating silence, reflection and creative forms of meditation.

The Host exposed in the monstrance is the focus for the best form of “centering prayer”. Here we are not confronted by just a symbol or sign, but by the Person of Jesus in the Eucharist, the supernatural reality of the Lord dwelling among us in his Real Presence. Training children and young people to respond to the Presence with reverent body language and prayerful silence helps them learn to relate personally to Jesus.

Exploring appropriate music and singing for adoration is very important. Some popular modern hymns are appropriate for adoration such as Be still, for the Presence of the Lord. Repetitive prayers such as litanies and the Taize chants are also helpful during adoration. But cultivating silent prayer is the most creative and fruitful strategy for eucharistic adoration among young people. In the silence, in the stillness, they encounter the Lord.

The Master is here! Let us go to Him!

St Peter Julian Eymard