



Eucharist

Body of Christ, Broken for the World



The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*], no. 11). In the Eucharistic Liturgy and our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, we encounter God’s presence in personal and profound ways. But the Eucharist is also social, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love*): “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (no. 14). The Eucharist, celebrated as a community, teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves, and others. As the Body of Christ, it sends us on mission to help transform our communities, neighborhoods, and world. Church teaching, rooted in both Scripture and Tradition, emphasizes both the personal and social natures of the Eucharist. This guide highlights Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI’s writings about the social nature of the Eucharist. Their words challenge and move us to encounter Christ in the Eucharist in ways both personal and social.

We experience the Eucharist as a community.

The Eucharist draws each of us closer to Christ as individuals, but also as a community. As Catholics, we never really worship alone. At the Eucharistic Liturgy, we gather with the young and old, the rich and poor, as well as millions around the world and the saints in heaven, to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice. This powerful reality reminds us, in the words of Pope John Paul II: “A truly Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself”, (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [*On the Eucharist*], no. 39); rather the Eucharist challenges us to recognize our place within a community and the human family.

The Eucharist awakens us to our own dignity and to that of others.

The Eucharist is a sign of our incomparable dignity as human persons. This dignity, given to all equally, regardless of our social or economic status or where we come from (Jas 2:1-9), causes us to recognize “what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one. . . . If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person,” Pope John Paul II writes (*Dominicae Cenae* [*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*], no. 6).

The Eucharist unifies and heals divisions.

St. Paul taught that the celebration of the Eucharist is insincere if there are divisions within the community based on class (1 Cor 11), status, or privilege (Rom 12), or if there are factions within the community (1 Cor 1). Partaking in the Sacrament as equals in the Body of Christ challenges us to unity as one family.

The Eucharist sensitizes us to those who suffer.

As we meditate on the Eucharist, we experience Christ’s love for us—and for others. In the depth of prayer, we become so moved and sensitized to his love for those who suffer that the words of St. Augustine become a reality for us: “The pain of one, even the smallest member, is the pain of all” (*Sermo Denis*).

The Eucharist moves us and inspires us to respond.

In the Eucharist, the boundlessness of the Father’s love “springs up within us a lively response” that causes us to “begin to love” (*Dominicae Cenae*, no. 5). Contemplating Christ’s sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn “into the very dynamic of his self-giving” we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 13). St. John Chrysostom’s words in the fourth century become real for us as we reflect on Matthew 25:31-46: Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked.

Eucharist-inspired love allows us to live out our Christian vocation.

Pope John Paul II writes that our ability to go and do likewise in imitation of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is the "criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine [Stay with us, Lord]*, no. 28). "Eucharistic worship," he says, is the expression of "the love that springs up within us from the Eucharist"—that love which is "the authentic and deepest characteristic of the Christian vocation" (*Dominicae Cenaе*, no. 5).

The Eucharist challenges us to recognize and confront structures of sin.

The Risen Christ in the Eucharist acts as "a compelling force for inner renewal, an inspiration to change the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled" (Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini [On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy]*, no. 73). These structures include racism, violence, injustice, poverty,

exploitation, and all other systemic degradation of human life or dignity. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, our "fraternal communion" in the Eucharist leads to "a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis [Sacrament of Charity]*, no. 89).

The Eucharist prepares us for mission.

In the face of the sin and injustice we see present in our communities and in our world, the Eucharist "plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment to the work before us," challenging us to live "Eucharistic" lives. It affirms our role as citizens and as men and women in various professions at different levels of society in "contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20).

The Eucharist propels us forth to transform the world.

The Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today." Christ in the Eucharist calls us to build "a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20). Filled with awe for all we have received in Christ's self-gift, we respond with service and works of charity. We act to transform unjust structures, policies, and laws that degrade human life and dignity.

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QUESTIONS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION BEFORE THE EUCHARIST

1. Spend some time reflecting on the passages from papal writings that are included in this handout.
 - Which do you find inspiring?
 - Which do you find challenging?
 - How might God be speaking to you?
2. What issues affecting your community and the world today weigh deeply on your heart? Spend some time bringing these concerns before the Blessed Sacrament.
3. During your time before Christ in the Eucharist, can you sense his compassion? Love? Desire to transform all that opposes human life and dignity?
4. What gifts has God, the Father, given you? How might he be asking you to use these gifts in the service of others?
5. How does the Eucharistic meal compel you to care for those who are hungry?
6. How might the Holy Spirit be moving you to join with others to respond to problems in your family, neighborhood, or community?