

# OUR SUNDAY EUCCHARIST



**WHAT ARE WE DOING AS A COMMUNITY  
OF FAITH WHEN WE WORSHIP ON  
SUNDAY?**

**A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE  
STRUCTURE AND PARTS OF THE MASS.**

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*“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.” [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II, 1963]*

THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, FULLY AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN THE WEEKLY (SUNDAY) EUCCHARIST, IS THE HEARTBEAT OF CATHOLIC LIFE AND FAITH.

Through the **Eucharistic Liturgy** all that we are and believe and experience, all that we do and hope for, enter into the once-for-all saving work of Jesus Christ. We connect our lives to and participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ, which we call his “**Paschal Mystery**”—his life, death and resurrection.

As a weekly ritual the **Mass** [the popular name Catholics give to the Eucharistic liturgy] has a defined structure and flow. We come as we are this day; we listen; we offer ourselves and give thanks; we remember; we eat and drink; we go forth to live the paschal mystery in our own daily lives until we come again to the Eucharistic celebration.

We experience Christ as present in the people of God gathered in Christ’s name around the altar, as well as in and through the leadership of the ordained bishop or priest. Christ is actively present in the Word proclaimed. Christ is truly and fully present in his Body and Blood through the consecrated bread and wine we receive at communion.

Our linear, historical time—each changing day, week and year—becomes part of the eternal, once-for-all time of Christ’s salvation, with the whole communion of God’s people, living and deceased joining in. The Sunday Eucharist is the weekly heartbeat of the faith community that sustains us in good times and in bad.

Eucharist is a participatory drama, which forms and transforms us so that we can more deeply embrace the reality of our lives. It is divided into two great “acts” and three “transitional moments”. We hope the following outline will help you better understand and enter into this celebration of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. We use voice in song and response; we lift our hands in prayer, bow our heads and bodies in reverence, walk in procession, listen with open ears and hearts, meditate in silence. Full participation in the Eucharistic liturgy touches all our senses as our whole being is invited to be part of this great act of worship, praise and thanksgiving.

## Setting the Scene—The Introductory Rites: Our Gathering and Preparing

*We gather at Christ's invitation and enter our worship space, united to the assembly of God's people, remembering our own baptism and discipleship in Christ, so as to be ready to hear God's Word and give thanks.*

- **Entrance Chant/Hymn and Greeting.** In the midst of our diversity and differences, *we stand, process, and sing*. United as one worshipping assembly around the altar that represents Christ and his sacrifice for us, which the priest celebrant kisses on behalf of us all. *We make the sign of the cross and respond "And also with you"* to the opening greeting, a reminder that the presence of Christ is to be found in the community assembled.
- **Act of Penitence or Sprinkling Rite.** We recall our common need for God's mercy by praying the *Kyrie eleison* (Lord, have mercy) or remember our common baptism in Christ by being sprinkled with blessed water (*the Asperges*).
- **Gloria.** We sing out this ancient hymn which offers praise to the Father and Christ the Lamb. Used on Sundays except during Advent and Lent, setting the tone for the Eucharist as one of praise to God.
- **Opening Collect (Prayer).** Voiced by the presider on behalf of all the people after a short period of silence to allow for each person to pray from one's heart. It gathers together ("collects") these heartfelt prayer and petitions. It is addressed *to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit. We respond "*Amen.*"

*“The Church is nourished spiritually at the twofold table of God’s Word and the Eucharist.”*

*[Introduction, Lectionary for Mass, par. 10]*

## **Act I—The Liturgy of the Word: We Listen to God’s Word and Respond in Faith and Prayer**

*“Liturgy” means “the work of the people” or “common action”. The first great work or common action we do is to listen as God’s Word is proclaimed. By actively listening, we receive God’s Word as a living Word, which touches us here and now.*

- **First Reading.** Taken from one of the books of the Old Testament or, during Easter season, from the Acts of the Apostles, it is chosen to fit thematically with the Gospel. A lector proclaims it from the ambo, as *we sit and listen with our hearts*. We affirm the reading by praying together *“Thanks be to God,”* followed by a short period of silent reflection.
- **Responsorial Psalm.** Usually sung and led by a cantor, it is taken from one of the Biblical psalms or canticles. The assembly joins in by singing the antiphon.
- **Second Reading.** Except during Lent and Easter, this is a semi-continuous reading week after week, from a New Testament book other than the gospels. In this way, most major passages in the New Testament are heard in the course of a three-year cycle. At the end we respond *“Thanks be to God,”* again followed by a short period of silent reflection.
- **Gospel Acclamation.** *We stand* and sing forth our desire to be open to the Gospel message through an *Alleluia* or, during Lent, another acclamation.
- **Gospel.** The high point of the Liturgy of the Word, a priest or deacon proclaims it. It comes from one of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. We respond: *“Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.”*

- **Homily.** A reflection that connects the Scripture we have heard with the mysteries of our faith, the Eucharist we are celebrating, and our daily life. Afterward we take a short time for personal reflection.
- **Dismissal of Catechumens.** Those preparing for baptism, called *catechumens* (“learners”), are sent forth with a catechist to reflect more deeply on the Word of God. When they are fully initiated (usually at the Easter Vigil), they will then remain and join the community in the rest of the Eucharistic liturgy.
- **Profession of Faith (The Creed).** As a way to assent to the Word of God we have heard, *we stand* and call to mind the rule of faith that guides us. During the Creed we are invited to *bow*, as we remember “by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the virgin Mary and became man.”
- **General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful).** We further respond to God’s Word. We pray for the needs of the universal Church and the world, for the local community, those oppressed by any burdens, and for those in greatest need. At the end of each we respond: “*Lord, hear our prayer.*”

<p><b>Intermission and Scene Changing: The Preparation of the Gifts</b></p>
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- **Preparation of Altar and Presentation of Gifts.** A time to collect offerings for the Church and those in need. The bread and wine are brought forward *in procession* by representatives of the community and placed on the altar. The priest prays quietly and washes his hands as a sign of his desire for inward purification.
- **Prayer over the Gifts.** *We stand* and pray. We place ourselves and our prayers among the gifts on the altar. The presider “collects” them in a prayer prayed aloud. We respond: “*Amen.*”

## Act II—The Liturgy of the Eucharist: Remembering and Giving Thanks for What God Has Done, Being Fed by the Body and Blood of Christ

*“Eucharist” means “to give thanks.” The sacramental gift of Christ’s Body and Blood, given through our participation in the Eucharist, is not something we can ever earn. It is sheer gift of God’s love, rooted in Jesus’ obedience as Son.*

• **Eucharistic Prayer.** The central prayer of the entire celebration. We remember what God has done for us, especially in Jesus, and we give thanks. We unite ourselves to the offering that Jesus makes of his life to God the Father. We actively participate through listening, responses, and acclamations. There are several versions of this prayer (also called the *canon* or *anaphora* of the Mass). They ordinarily have the following parts.

\* **Preface.** Following an introductory dialogue between priest and assembly (our responses: *“And also with you, We lift them up to the Lord, It is right to give him thanks and praise”*), the priest celebrant leads us in praising the Father for the work of salvation, often connecting the prayer to a special feast or season.

\* **Sanctus (Holy, Holy Acclamation).** The first of three major acclamations. We join in with the entire communion of saints and angels, here and in heaven, all united in prayer. Afterward *we kneel or remain standing*, according to the custom of the community.

\* **Epiclesis.** As hands are extended over the gifts we offer on the altar, we call upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate them, so as to become the body and blood of Christ for us.

\* **Narrative of the Institution and Consecration.** We recall the Last Supper and Jesus’ words and actions, which give us this Eucharistic memorial. We do as Jesus asks: in memory of Him. If standing, the assembly *bows in reverence* after the consecrated bread and wine are placed back on the altar.

\* **Memorial Acclamation.** The second major acclamation,

wherein the entire assembly proclaims the great paschal mystery of faith: “*Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again;*” through this or some other wording.

\* **Anamnesis.** We further remember (that is the definition of *anamnesis*) the meaning of Jesus’ saving death, resurrection, ascension, and gift of the Spirit.

\* **Offering.** We explicitly offer the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, sacred Victim, to the Father. We ask that we too can be an offering in union with Him and that the Holy Spirit transform us, parallel to how we earlier asked the Holy Spirit to transform the gifts of bread and wine.

\* **Intercessions.** We make it clear that this offering is in communion with the whole Church, heaven and earth, living and deceased, and for all members, not just the ones present.

\* **Final Doxology or Great Amen.** The third great acclamation sums up in praise and thanksgiving all that we have just celebrated. The consecrated bread and wine are held up to God as we sing out our great “*Amen!*”

• **Communion Rite.** As we “take and eat” and “take and drink,” our communion unites us as the body of Christ and nourishes us for our going forth to be that body of Christ in the world. The communion rite consists of:

\* **Lord’s Prayer.** We begin our immediate preparation for this great gift of communion by praying as Jesus taught us to pray. After a short prayer (*embolism*), we pray the doxology “*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.*”

\* **Rite of Peace.** We offer each other Christ’s peace. *Not our* hello or our peace, but *Christ’s* peace, a greeting that can and should be given even to those we struggle to love [cf. Matthew 5:23-24].

\* **Breaking of the Bread with Lamb of God.** From early apostolic times the Eucharist was called by this action of “breaking bread,” because we who are many will be made one in the one Bread of Life who is Christ. Accompanying this action we sing the Lamb of

God (*Agnus Dei*).

\* **Lord, I Am Not Worthy.** Before approaching the table of the Lord we admit our unworthiness. We are gratefully amazed that the Lord is offering us this gift.

\* **Communion Procession and Hymn.** All *stand* and those who are able to partake of communion process forward, while a hymn accompanies us, uniting us in this common action of receiving the priceless gift of this sacrament. The standing and the hymn remind us that this is not a time of private prayer but of common recognition of our communion in Christ Jesus. Before receiving communion (bread or cup) we make a slight bow. We respond “*Amen*” to the faith statement: The body/blood of Christ.

\* **Prayer after Communion.** After taking time for personal prayer in an extended period of silence, the priest who is presiding again “collects” all the unspoken prayers of the assembly and lifts them up to God. All respond “*Amen.*”

*“It is your own mystery which is placed on the Lord’s table; it is your own mystery which you receive.”*

[St. Augustine, Sermon 272]

### **The Closing Rites: We Are Blessed and Sent Forth to Live our Faith**

*In many ways, the Mass ends quite abruptly. We do not linger over the good feelings that receiving communion brings, but are sent forth to live as the Body of Christ in our world.*

- **Blessing.** This can be done simply, or more solemnly on special feasts. As the priest proclaims the blessing, we *make the sign of the cross and respond “Amen.”*
- **Dismissal.** We cannot keep our Christian discipleship inside the church building. We respond “*Thanks be to God*” and go forth to live lives that give God honor and glory.

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REV. DAVID A. BUERSMEYER

7777 W. 28 MILE RD, WASHINGTON MI 48094 PHONE: 586.781.9010

WEBSITE: WWW.SSJOHNANDPAUL.ORG