

Class 7: The Eucharist

Class Goals

To be able to address the following questions:

What is the Paschal Mystery?

Why do we say that the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the Christian life?

What does it mean to say that in the Eucharist there are “Two Tables: The Table of the Word, and the Table of the Eucharist”?

Why are all called to “full, active, conscious, participation?”

How do we experience the Real Presence of Christ at Mass?

What is the “whole Christ?”

How are the vertical and horizontal dimensions symbolized in the cross? What do they mean with respect to the Eucharist?

Explain the Sunday obligation and the original notion of the obligation in the first centuries.

To what are we sent at the end of Mass?

Overview:

The Eucharist is the gathering, the assembly of God’s people, to worship God in thanksgiving and praise. In the Eucharist God’s people are nourished at the Tables of the Word and of the Sacrament. In our Eucharist we celebrate and deepen our union with God and one another. We are formed and transformed into the Body of Christ in order to carry out the transformative mission of Jesus Christ in the world. We become “change-agents.”

In the Eucharist we are extended backwards in time and forwards to the future; we embrace those near to us and those far away. We especially are mindful of those who suffer and struggle. We gather to remember, the past becomes present and our hope of future glory.

Christians are called *to become Eucharist*, food for the hungry and thirsty.

“Receive what you are, be what you received,” says St. Augustine (d. 430).

Resources

Cardinal Mahony on the Sunday Eucharist “Gather Faithfully Together”:

(<http://goo.gl/RW6aI>)

“Eucharist” in NDCS, 357-361.

CCC, #1322-1419,

Martos, Joseph. *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. Expanded ed. Liguori, MO: Triumph Books, 1981.

Documents of Vatican II, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy”

Prayer

*Oh Sacrament of love,
Sign of our unity and
bond of our fraternity,
all who long for life*

have here its very source!

let them come here and believe;

unite with You and live. (St. Augustine, Commentary on John 26.13; d. 430 CE)

Core Content

A note on method: Pose the questions given below that come from a “ theology of the Eucharist from above.”

These questions do not get answered right away, but only as the participants are “walked through the Mass.” This method connects the theology from above with the participants lived experience of celebrating the Eucharist.

Questions for discussion

What is the Paschal Mystery?

Why do we say that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life?

What does it mean to say that in the Eucharist there are Two Tables: The Table of the Word, and the Table of the Eucharist?

Why are all called to “Full active, conscious, participation?”

How do we experience the Real Presence of Christ at Mass?

What is the “Whole Christ?”

How are the Vertical and Horizontal dimensions symbolized in the cross, what do the mean with respect to the Eucharist?

Explain the Sunday obligation and the original notion of the obligation in the first centuries

To what are we sent at the end of Mass?

A Walk Through The Mass

1. Imagine, you are entering the church building along with others. This is the Assembly of God’s people.

There are four ways that Christ is present when we are assembled:

In one another,

In God’s word proclaimed

In the Eucharist with the bread and wine

In the priest presiding

2. As we enter we see the Ambo, which is for the proclamation of God’s word and the altar/table, for the bread and wine, the sacrament of the Eucharist.

To our right and left are the pews for the people of God, and by the altar and the ambo, the presiding priest's chair.

The Mass is communal prayer. The positioning of the Ambo (podium) and the table show that the celebration of the Eucharist is continual prayer with two major parts: the liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

3. The entrance rite begins with everyone's "full, conscious, active, participation" as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1Peter 2: 9). "This is everyone's right and duty by reason of our baptism" (Vat. II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14).

4. At the Ambo the Liturgy of the Word is proclaimed. The story of the Paschal Mystery begins to unfold in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and tells of God's covenant from creation through the faith journey of Israel. The Liturgy of the Word continues with the proclamation of the Christian scriptures (New Testament) and tells of the momentous event in which God enters history as a human, in the person of Jesus. These scriptures continue with the faith journey of the early Church unfolding the Paschal Mystery and its meaning for our daily lives.

The high point of the Liturgy of the Word is the proclamation of the Gospel, the new covenant of love revealed in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus that reveal the Paschal Mystery.

5. The prayer of the Mass now moves to the Liturgy of the Eucharist at the Altar. In the Offertory rite we join ourselves and our gifts with the supreme offering of Christ to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

6. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. As "summit," the Eucharist is the most important thing the Christian does; it is the center of the Church's life. All activities lead to it and from it.

As "source," it is the real presence of Christ loving, forgiving, healing, empowering and transforming us to be Christ for one another and for the world. This transformation is symbolized in the beams of the cross with its horizontal and vertical arms. Reflect on the prayer "Oh Sacrament of Love."

By the power of the Word and Holy Spirit, the whole Christ (read the "Final Judgment: "Whatever you do to the least . . . (Mt. 25)) is truly and fully present, body and soul, humanity and divinity, under the appearance of the consecrated bread and wine (CCC #1374).

7. In this Holy Communion with God and one another we are sent to the world as the Body of Christ to love, forgive, heal, and transform the world.

We are sent to bring about God's kingdom, which is a civilization of love.

8. The Eucharist is a cosmic poem. We look to the cosmos, the universe in the night sky, and see an array of life-giving activity. The Eucharist reminds us that to give life, even to the point of death, is written into the cosmos.

9. As the sun rises over the horizon each day, it reminds us of the elevated host over the altar of the world. We are mindful of all that goes on in the world: the creation of culture and the violence and blood shed in senseless ways. We are not just concerned with our salvation, this is too narrow a goal. Instead we are also deeply mindful of all life, including non-human life of the planet.

10. On this "altar of the world", we look to a new humanity, a new future, for our lives and the life of the world, and that includes the air, water, soil, plants, and animals. Our new future will be a "Eucharistic future" of peace and justice or it will cease to be the garden of plenty God left in our hands to design and to steward. Be virtue of baptism, we all "preside" over this altar, we all "offer up" the contents of our existence, and we "transfigure" despair into a new song of hope. "Ita missa est."