

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO

CELEBRATING
THE
EUCCHARIST

BY
STEVE MUELLER

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“The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people...have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy the full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.”

—VATICAN COUNCIL II
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1963), #14

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Introduction

Living a Eucharistic Life

This booklet has been written to help you and your household members grow in an understanding and appreciation of our eucharistic ritual or Mass. The eucharist has always been, and still is, the central experience and defining ritual of our Christian lives. In it, we celebrate the presence of Christ within us as individuals and among us as his beloved community. He offers us his body and blood so that we might live anew in communion with God.

As the central worship ritual of our faith, the eucharist expresses the core meaning of our lives. The pattern of the Eucharistic Prayer—take, bless, break and share—is also the pattern of our whole lives. Like Jesus, who gives himself to become our bread, we are called upon to give ourselves so that everyone might live more fully in relation to God and to one another.

This booklet invites you to understand how the eucharistic ritual deepens our awareness of what is already going on in our lives. The goal is not only to understand the structure and meaning of the Mass, but also to encourage attitudes for celebrating it better and to develop skills that achieve the “full, conscious and active participation” of the gathered assembly desired by the bishops at Vatican Council II for the renewal of the liturgy.

Our eucharistic celebration is a ritualized meeting with Christ, who is present at every moment of our journey through life. At Mass, we do the same things we do in our households—gather, listen to God’s Word, praise and thank God, bless bread and share meals, and carry on Christ’s mission—but we do them differently. Both at home and at church, Christ is present inviting us into deeper communion with him and others.

We can never be content, then, just to go to Mass. Rather, by our participation in the mystery of Christ’s life, death and resurrection that the Mass remembers and makes present, we celebrate how we have been gifted and how our lives must also be an expression of thanksgiving. In our eucharist, we are reminded that we not only receive a great gift from God in Jesus, but as we become like him through our communion with him, we also become gifts to one another. We hope that the booklet will help you discover that living in communion with Christ is what our whole life is really all about.

1

Getting the Big Picture Communion with Christ

The celebration of the eucharist or Mass is the central action that defines us as Christians and directs our efforts to realize God’s kingdom community in our world today. In order to understand the Mass, we must remember that this celebration has several characteristics that we must always remember.

First, our celebration is **a sacrament**—a “visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, #774). The words and acts of Jesus bring salvation by creating and establishing communion with God through the Church’s sacramental rituals (*CCC*, #1115). By inviting us into communion with himself, Jesus invites us into a lifetime process of maturing in our relationship. The Church remembers and makes available this communion with God through symbols and rituals called *sacraments*. When the gathered assembly—priest and people—performs these symbolic actions, what they represent actually occurs through God’s effective power.

Second, our celebration is **a ritual action**—a repeated action that helps us bring to consciousness what is always going on but is seldom noticed. The sacred ritual of the eucharist reminds us that we must give thanks because we are constantly receiving God’s gifts for our salvation and sustenance. Christ’s presence in the Christian assembly, in the proclaimed Word, in the consecrated bread and cup, and in the person of the priest and in others invites us to be united with Christ. Our communion grows through the ritual of receiving and giving, gathering to immerse ourselves in God’s Word, sharing a sacred meal and accepting the commission to carry on Christ’s work in our world.

Third, our celebration **uses symbols** to convey its meaning. A symbol is a sign that holds together the hidden mystery of God’s presence and the visible, tangible realities that we can experience. In the sacraments, Christ’s presence establishes, maintains and nurtures our communion with him and with others. So the Christian assembly symbolizes all God’s people living in right relationship and striving for holiness. The water of baptism symbolizes washing from sin and dying to our old life to be born anew in the people of God. The

scriptural Word and the bread and cup of the eucharistic table are symbols of God's abiding presence in our lives.

Fourth, our celebration is **eucharist**, from the Greek word for “thanksgiving,” to remind us that our basic human relationship to God is a response to God's gifts. Everything that we have is God's gift (1 Cor 4:7). In our ritual, we celebrate the gift of God's own presence in the assembly that gathers, in God's Word that we hear, in the consecrated bread and wine that are Christ's body and blood, and in the person of the priest who presides during the celebration.

Finally, our celebration is also **Mass**, from the final Latin words of sending, “*Ite missa est*,” meaning “Go, you are sent.” As we finish our prayer we are reminded that we are sent to discover and proclaim God's presence in all the situations of our daily lives.

As Christians, we not only pray the eucharist but we are called upon to live eucharistic lives. Just as Jesus took the bread (his body), blessed and broke it to share with others, so we ask God to take us, bless us, break us and share us with others so that so that “through him, with him and in him” we may also become sources of God's new life for the world.



Communion and Mission

“The Sacraments express and realize an effective and profound communion among us, for in them we encounter Christ the Savior and, through him, our brothers and sisters in faith. The Sacraments are not mere appearances, not just rituals, but the power of Jesus Christ who is present in the Sacraments. When we celebrate the Eucharist it is the living Jesus who brings us together, forms us into a community, allows us to adore the Father. Each one of us, in fact, through Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, is incorporated into Christ and united to the entire community of believers. Therefore, if on the one hand it is the Church that “makes” the Sacraments, on the other, it is the Sacraments that “make” the Church, that build her up, by generating new children, by gathering them into the holy people of God, by strengthening their membership.

Every encounter with Christ, who in the Sacraments gives us salvation, invites us to “go” and communicate to others the salvation that we have been able to see, to touch, to encounter and to receive, and which is truly credible because it is love. In this way, the Sacraments spur us to be missionaries, and the apostolic commitment to carry the Gospel into every setting, including those most hostile, is the most authentic fruit of an assiduous sacramental life, since it is a participation in the saving initiative of God, who desires salvation for all people.”

—Pope Francis

FOCUS ON 4 THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EUCHARIST

Sacrament

A sacrament is a “visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation” (CCC, #774). The words and acts of Jesus bring salvation by creating and establishing communion with God through the Church’s sacramental rituals (CCC, #1115). By inviting us into communion with himself, Jesus invites us into a lifetime process of maturing in our relationship. The Church remembers and makes available communion with God through symbols and rituals called sacraments. When the gathered assembly—priest and people—performs these symbolic actions, what they represent actually occurs.

Symbol

A symbol is a sign that holds together the hidden mystery of God’s presence and the visible, tangible realities that we can experience. In the sacraments, Christ’s presence establishes, maintains and nurtures our communion with him and with others. So the Christian assembly symbolizes all God’s people living in right relationship and striving for holiness. The water of baptism symbolizes washing from sin and dying to our old life to be born anew in the people of God. The dialogue of reconciliation between the priest and penitent in the sacrament of reconciliation is the sign of our desire to be forgiven and live in restored communion with God and with others. The scriptural Word and the bread and cup of the eucharistic table are symbols of God’s abiding presence and effective influence in our lives.

Ritual

A ritual is a repeated action that helps us bring to consciousness what is always going on but is seldom noticed. The sacred ritual of the eucharist reminds us that we must give thanks because we are constantly receiving the gifts of God for salvation and sustenance. Christ’s presence in the Christian assembly, in the proclaimed Word, in the consecrated bread and cup, and in the person of the priest and others invites us to be united with him. Our communion grows through the ritual of receiving and giving, gathering to immerse ourselves in God’s Word, sharing a sacred meal, and eagerly accepting the commission to carry on Christ’s work for the world.

Salvation

Salvation is the action of God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit to put us into communion (the right relationship, covenant friendship) with God and with others. The mystery of our salvation, as demonstrated in Jesus’ death and resurrection, is that God desires to continue this communion beyond death and uses the divine power to do it. The Christian “Good News” that we proclaim is that death ends only our physical life but not our relationship with God and others. Our lifelong task is to make sure that we begin, continue and increase our communion with Christ.