

Real Presence

From earliest times, believers gathered together to share a meal of the poor: just bread and wine. It was instituted by Jesus just before his death at a Passover meal typically called *The Last Supper*.

After Jesus miraculously feeds thousands of people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes in the Gospel of John, Jesus says that he is the *Bread of Life*. By eating His flesh and blood, one becomes unified to Him (and therefore God). Unlike of the bread of this world that temporarily sustains life, Jesus – the Bread of Life – provides sustenance that will never end.

Corpus Christi means “Body of Christ.” Not only is Christ present in the mass, but we are the body of Christ in the world. Our presence and participation in the mass strengthens our union with God, so that we can be Christ in the world. (Our word mass comes from the word *missio* in Latin which means “sending forth.”)

Opening Prayer

Source of all life, you have gifted us with your Son, Jesus Christ. Send your Spirit to be with us as we reflect on this mystery of love. Guide our time of prayer, reflection, and discussion that we might have a greater appreciation of this great gift of love. Amen.

The Lord's Supper

We were told to do this by Jesus during a Passover meal. (e.g., Luke 22:7-20, Mathew 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-25)

The Breaking of Bread:

- This was name used by the earliest Christians for their Eucharistic gatherings.
- During the last supper, Jesus – acting as the master of the table – broke the bread into pieces and distributed them to the disciples (sharing the one body of bread amongst all).
- The disciples first recognized the resurrected Jesus only when he broke the bread at a meal.

Mass has two major parts:

Liturgy of the Word *and* Liturgy of the Eucharist

At the end of the liturgy of the Eucharist, we receive Jesus in communion (partake of the bread and wine); we take part in an action which unites ourselves with God.

Discussion

*What gifts in your life do you feel that you have been given?
How do you demonstrate thankfulness for the gifts that you have been given?
How do you use the gifts that you have been given?*

What is Passover?

It is always important to remember that Jesus was a Jew (e.g., blessing a cup of wine during a communal meal and sharing it), and this is reflected in his teachings and what we do as Christians.

Fast for at least 1 hour before communion. This is special food, separated from ordinary consumption. This practice reminds us of our spiritual hunger and thirst for God.

Eucharist:

“Thanksgiving”
“eu-” means “good”
“charism” is a “gift”

Presence

Not incarnation, but still God coming into the world.

Jesus is most “fully” present in the bread and wine, *but Jesus’ presence is everywhere, especially in the gathered people*. The Word is His Word. It is not only in the “head” that takes part in the mass; *the whole body takes part in the mass*.

The bread is sometimes referred to as *hosts*. Both the bread and wine contain the full presence of Christ and a “home” for it. The bread and wine are called the two *species* (two different kinds or categories things). For the first 600 years, everyone was offered the bread and cup, but by the Middle Ages, only bread was given to lay folk. Vatican II restored the older practice.

The assembly is to be present to what is happening in both body and mind.
We don’t go to mass to watch – we go to act.

Catholic & Orthodox
vs. Protestant views

In coming to mass, *we are making a choice, to continue to answer God’s invitation to grow closer to God*. (We also can and do make choices that turn us towards God during our daily lives during the rest of the week.) Of course, it is God’s grace that helps us make such choices: “Indeed, we also work, but we are only collaborating with God, who works, for his mercy has gone before us.” (St. Augustine)

Communion

Ekklesia, the Greek root for our word *church*, refers to a group of citizens summoned to gather together.

Through the Eucharist we are united with God, united in our baptisms into one body, united with the Church everywhere, and united with all children of God (all people), including those who have died.
The Church (people) is (are) also the Body of Christ.

Taking pieces of bread from one loaf and the practice of drinking from the same cup symbolizes our union with one another (with other people) through the same Spirit embodied in the bread and wine. (There are other practices than sharing the same cup.)

We cannot be saved alone; we are saved together: “We are saved.” vs. “I am saved.”

Transformation and Sustenance

Can you receive communion if you don’t come to mass?

Eucharist strengthens and deepens this unity, helps us along the process by which we are being transformed into a new person through the Holy Spirit, the kind of person who loves God and their neighbor as themselves: extending mercy and support to those in need.

It is food for the journey of life.

Eucharistic ministers are laypeople who are trained and commissioned to distribute communion. They are also called special or extraordinary ministers. (Priests and deacons are ordinary ministers.)

Discussion

Think of an occasion when you failed to be fully present and wished that you were.

Why did you want to be more “present” at the time? Why was it important to you to do so?

What keeps you from being “present” during moments when you feel you should be present?

In other words, what distracts you?

How do you restore your focus? How do you help yourself become more present?

Concluding Prayer

Gracious God, you invite us to come to your table so that you can fill our hunger. Direct our hearts to you, the one who gives true nourishment. Shape our thoughts and actions, that we may be the Body of Christ in the world. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.