

Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/040121.cfm>

This evening, Lent ends and the Sacred Triduum begins, the summit of our Liturgical Year.

Beginning tonight until the evening of Easter Sunday, we celebrate three liturgical services:

1. This Mass of the Lord's Supper
2. Good Friday of the Lord's Passion
3. And the Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord

These liturgies combine to make up the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery.

If you are observant, you noticed when you came into church tonight that the tabernacle is empty. Why? For two reasons, really:

- First, to ensure that everyone receiving Holy Communion this evening does so from altar breads consecrated at this particular liturgical service, placing us, in a timeless way, at the Last Supper with Jesus and His chosen followers.
- And second, and in some sense, even more importantly, to make us reflect on what life in the Church would be like without the Eucharistic Christ. How barren, how cold, how lifeless would our churches be if the Lord of the Eucharist were permanently absent, rather than truly present.

Perhaps this insight explains the centrality of the tabernacle in our churches. Perhaps this realization helps us understand what makes us genuflect when we enter a Catholic church, not in mockery like the soldiers during Our Lord's Passion, but in adoration and thanksgiving and love.

For Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, comes into our midst in a unique and marvelous manner as the Church gathers to renew the Sacrament and Sacrifice which He gave us on this holy night.

Imagine, the God in whom and through whom the universe was created, comes among us and within us. Too many of us take this simple fact of Catholic life for granted; we need to be shaken out of our routine, in order to appreciate — as if for the first time — the true significance of it all.

Because of the pandemic and the fear of this COVID-19 virus, many Catholics have not returned to the Holy Mass. Many have not received the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist for over a year. Yes, I understand the concerns and the fears of gathering with others and the potential risks - I do.

I have a suggestion. Pick up one of these prayer cards when you leave Mass this evening. It's a Prayer Against Coronavirus. Pray this every day. Let me read for you what I think is the most important and powerful line in this prayer: "May we always fear the contagion of sin more than any illness."

In St. John's Gospel chapter 6, the powerful "Bread of Life" discourse, Jesus utters these stunning words, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day."

Brothers and sisters, without the frequent reception of Holy Communion, we will starve to death! We will have no life within us! All Catholics must return to the Holy Mass and the Eucharist. It is time.

I will never forget the words I heard from a young boy several years ago. A boy stricken with brain cancer and lying in his bed at Children's Hospital.

During my first visit with him, his mom told me that he had received his First Holy Communion just before coming to the hospital for surgery. I asked him what it was like to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. He looked at me intently and said, “it was like I had Jesus in my heart”.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave us his body and blood for our spiritual nourishment; our food for this journey toward eternal life with him.

I still remember when my 2nd grade teach, Sister Aloysius, was preparing my class for our First Communion. We all knelt along the altar rail and then each of us received a small piece of hard candy on our tongue - sweet like Jesus, yes, but it was not the bread of eternal life that I would soon experience. Through the Eucharist, Jesus and I would become one.

St. Paul, in his Letter to the Corinthians, recalls the Last Supper event when the Lord Jesus institutes the Eucharist.

Jesus took bread, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And in the same way he took the cup of wine saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

The Greek term for remembrance is “anamnesis”. Anamnesis means making present an event or person from the past.

It is like the past and the present coalesce into a single moment.

God isn’t limited by space and time.

Time stops as “then” and “now” become the same.

Meaning that we are really there. And that it is still happening in the present moment. A perpetual memorial!

When the bread and wine are consecrated at Mass, we are actually present at Christ's death on the cross. Even though he died once for all.

And then each time we receive the Eucharist, we are really present with Christ at his resurrection; at the very moment when he conquered death and opened the gates of heaven for us. When we understand this great mystery, the Mass and the Eucharist become all the more powerful.

To most fully participate in this mystery, bring your gifts to Jesus at every Mass. Bring your struggles to him. Bring your joys, your sorrows and your wounds. Present to him what needs healing.

Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist to strengthen us in our weakness, to accompany us in our loneliness, and as a foretaste of heaven itself.

We all need to recapture that enthusiasm, that innocence, that faith which brings us to appreciate precisely what the mystery of the Eucharist is in itself and for us — what St. John Paul II referred to as “Eucharistic amazement.”

We all need to ask Our Lord on this holy night to grant us the grace to have a second honeymoon with Him who, on the day of our First Holy Communion, became the Bridegroom of our souls.

Deacon Kevin Heckman

Holy Thursday 2021