

## The Eucharist: Catholic Beliefs and Practices

### *The first in a series of teachings on the Eucharist*

A Pew Research survey on religious views last year found that only 37% of regular Mass going Catholics accepted the teaching of the Church that Christ is truly and actually present in the



Eucharist. The teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that Christ is present body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist species. While it is good news that 37% do accept this teaching of the Church, it is sad news that 63% of active Catholics do not fully accept it. A number of commentators quickly noted that the methodology used for the Pew survey actually measured catechetical knowledge more so than actual belief, but the results still are troubling. Even more troubling was that for self-identified Catholics under forty, who only marginally practiced their faith, belief in the real presence was at 26%. In light of these findings and after

discussing the survey with members of the Priests' Council, I decided to begin a series of monthly teachings on the Eucharist, brief in nature, that pastors could provide to parishioners by a medium that works best for each parish. This is the first of the series. Each will be posted on the diocesan website: [www.diocesegfb.org](http://www.diocesegfb.org).

Eucharist, a word derived from the Greek *eucharistia*, means thanksgiving. The early Christian community began to use the word to refer to the Last Supper meal of Jesus with his disciples. There are four accounts of the institution of the Eucharist in the New Testament, the earliest account being by St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:23-26). These early Christians gathered on Sunday in order to recall Christ's passion, death and resurrection from death because it was on Sunday that he rose from death. Their coming together offered them time and opportunity to thank God for their redemption from sin and lasting death in and through Christ. At the Last Supper, referring to Christ's last gathering before his arrest, Jesus instructed his disciples to "do this in memory" of all that he would do for them in the following days through his death and resurrection. He connected everything he would experience through his passion, death and resurrection with the sacred meal they were sharing and which he instructed them to continue. It was more than a sacred farewell meal. It was participation in a saving action. Through their continuing to gather and share this meal, they were able to join in his saving sacrifice by which he brought about the possibility of salvation for people once and for all.