



**GIVEN THAT WE MAY HAVE LIFE:
THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRAMENT OF
FAITH, LIFE, UNITY, WORSHIP, AND LOVE**
St. Peter Catholic Church † Faith Fact † June 2019



The Eucharist is a sacrament of faith, life, unity, worship, and love.

The Eucharist Is a Sacrament of Faith.

The consecrated Host looks no different after the consecration than before. It looks, smells, feels, and tastes like bread. Only one of the five senses gets to the truth. As St. Thomas Aquinas' *Adoro Te Devote* expresses, "Seeing, touching, tasting are in Thee deceived. What says trusty hearing that shall be believed?" The ears hear His words, "This is My Body; this is My Blood," and faith takes us beyond the veil of appearances.

Christians are used to looking beyond appearances. The baby in the manger does not look like God; nor, for that matter, does the man on the cross. Yet by faith we know He is no mere man. The Bible does not have a particular glow setting it off from other books, nor does it levitate above the shelf. Yet by faith we know it is uniquely the Word of God. The Eucharist seems to be bread and wine, and yet by faith we say, "My Lord and My God!" as we kneel in adoration.

The same dynamic of faith that enables us to see beyond appearances in these mysteries enables us to see beyond appearances in our neighbor. We can look at the persons around us, at the annoying person, or the ugly person, or the person who is unconscious in a hospital bed, or the person on death row, or the unborn child in the womb, and we can say, "Christ is there as well. There is my brother, my sister, made in the very image of God!" We can look at all these people and declare, "There is my brother, my sister, equal in dignity and just as worthy of respect and protection as anyone else!" The slightest particle of the Host is fully Christ. Eucharistic faith is a powerful antidote to the dangerous notion that value depends on size or appearance.

The Eucharist Is the Sacrament of Life.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. The Gospel passage of today places the Eucharist in the context of giving and receiving life. "Just as the Father who has life sent me and I have life because of the Father, so the man who feeds on me will have life because of me." The Eucharistic sacrifice is the very action of Christ by which He destroyed our death and restored our life. Whenever we gather for this sacrifice, we are celebrating the victory of life over death, and when we receive this Sacrament, we receive the life that never ends.

The Eucharist Is Also a Sacrament of Unity.

St. Paul declares in today's second reading, "We, many though we are, are one body, since we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17).

Imagine all the people, in every part of the world, who are receiving Communion today. Are they all receiving their own personalized, customized Christ? Are they not rather each receiving the one and only Christ? Through this sacrament, Christ the Lord, gloriously enthroned in heaven, is drawing all people to Himself. If He is drawing us to Himself, then He is drawing us to one another. When we call each other "brothers and sisters," we are not merely using a metaphor that dimly reflects the unity between children of the same parents. The unity we have in Christ is even stronger than the unity of blood brothers and sisters, because we do have common blood: the blood of Christ! The result of the Eucharist is that we become one, and this obliges us to be as concerned for each other as we are for our own bodies.

Imagine a person who receives Communion, accepts the Host when the priest says, "The Body of Christ," says "Amen," and then breaks off a piece, hands it back, and says, "Except this piece, Father!" This is

what is done, spiritually, by the person who rejects other people—whether by hatred, unforgiveness, or a failure to recognize the dignity of one or more others. In receiving Christ, we are to receive the whole Christ, in all His members; in welcoming Him, we are to welcome all those whom He made, whom He loves, whom He died to save—all our brothers and sisters, whether convenient or inconvenient, wanted or unwanted.

The Eucharist Is the Supreme Act of Worship of God.

Two lessons each person needs to learn are, “1. There is a God. 2. It isn’t me.” The Eucharist, as the perfect sacrifice, acknowledges that God is God, and that “it is [His] right to receive the obedience of all creation” (Sacramentary, Preface for Weekdays III). In our culture, many consider “freedom of choice” enough to justify even the dismemberment of a baby by abortion. Choice divorced from truth is idolatry. It is the opposite of true worship. It pretends the creature is God. Real freedom is found only in submission to the truth and will of God. Real freedom is not the ability to do whatever one pleases, but the power to do what is right.

The Eucharist Is, Finally, the Sacrament of Love.

St. John explains, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us” (1 Jn. 3:16). Christ teaches, “Greater love than this no one has, than to lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). The best symbol of love is not the heart, but rather the crucifix.

Love says, “I sacrifice myself for the good of the other person.” The culture of death says, “I sacrifice the other person for the good of myself.” In the Eucharist we see the meaning of love and receive the power to live it. The very same words, furthermore, that the Lord uses to teach us the meaning of love are also used by those who promote the culture of death: “This is my body.” These four little words are spoken from opposite ends of the universe, with totally opposite results. Christ gives His body away so others might live; some are tempted to cling to their own bodies so others might die. Christ says, “This is my body given up for you; this is my blood shed for you.” These are the words of sacrifice; these are the words of love.

Gustave Thibon has said that the true God transforms violence into suffering, while the false god transforms suffering into violence. The suffering caused by an unexpected pregnancy may bring the temptation to abortion; the suffering caused by severe illness may bring the temptation to euthanasia; the suffering caused by social injustice may bring the temptation to unjust war. The Eucharist gives both the lesson and the power to transform violence, and the temptation to violence, into love. “This is my body, my blood, my life, given up for you.”

Everyone who wants to follow Christ needs to say the same. Spouse says it to spouse, parents to children, priests to their congregations. We need to imitate the mysteries we celebrate. “Do this in memory of me” applies to all of us in the sense that we are to lovingly suffer with Christ so others may live. We are to be like lightning rods in the midst of this terrible storm of violence and destruction, and say, “Yes, Lord, I am willing to absorb some of this violence and transform it by love into personal suffering, so that others may live.”

Indeed, the Eucharist gives us our marching orders. It also provides the source of our energy, which is love.

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Catholics United for the Faith, Sunday Homilies; <http://www.cuf.org/2008/05/given-that-we-may-have-life/>