

Pastor's Message

In this series on the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the Mass) we now begin a consideration of the second major part of our celebration: the liturgy of the Eucharist (or liturgy of the Sacrament). We have been studying for many weeks the first part of the Mass, the liturgy of the Word, which has equal value with the liturgy of the Eucharist and which presents God to us in God's holy Word. Now God in his son Jesus Christ will be presented to us in the bread and the wine which will really become the sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ, the only son of God.

The liturgy of the Eucharist has three main parts. First, the gifts of bread and wine and our lives are presented to the Lord and prepared at the table (altar). Second, the gifts (bread, wine, our lives) are prayed over in the Eucharistic prayer. There are multiple forms for this extended prayer but each one thanks God for redeeming and saving us and asks God to change the bread, wine, and our lives into the body and blood of his Son. As Catholics we believe that this transition from bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ is real (the real presence) and not simply symbolic. We call this transition from bread into the body of Christ and wine into his blood: transubstantiation. Literally that means that while the "accidents" or visual effects of the bread and wine do not change, the "substance" or essence of the bread and wine really become for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The third part of our liturgy of the Eucharist is communion where we receive the body and blood of the Lord just as the apostles did at the Last Supper, the first celebration of Eucharist.

I will take each of these parts of the liturgy of the Eucharist over the next weeks and discuss and explain each in depth. But I do want to acknowledge a disturbing recent Pew research study that indicates that over 60% of Catholics do not believe that the bread and the wine really become the body and blood of Christ Jesus. They believe that the bread and wine symbolically represent the body and blood but do not really BECOME the body and blood. It is and has always been the belief of the Catholic faith that these elements offered on the altar, as Jesus told us at the last supper, really become his body and blood: *This is my body...this is my blood* (Mt.26: 26-30). This is a central and sacred mystery of our faith. And although mysteries can never be fully explained and completely understood, they always invite us into a deeper and deeper awareness of God's presence among us.

The essence of what we do at Mass is make Christ Jesus really present whenever *two or more gather in (his) name* (Mt.18: 20) and whenever we *do this in remembrance of (him)* (Lk. 22: 18-20).

Fr. Chris