



First Communion Preparation

St. William Catholic Church

General Guidelines – Preparation for Eucharist

The following guidelines have been established by the Diocese of Birmingham, Office of Religious Education, and apply to all preparation programs for children preparing for their initial reception and celebration of the Sacrament of Eucharist.

Parents have the Primary Role in Passing on the Faith

All programs preparing children for the initial reception of the sacraments should involve parents, consistent with their primary role in the religious education of their children. (*Declaration on Christian Education #3*).

Therefore, priests and teachers are to arrange programs to help parents to fulfill their role in preparing children for the sacraments. Participation in such programs should be mandatory for all parents who have children preparing for the sacraments. Children whose parents do not participate in the preparation program should not be admitted to the reception of the sacraments without serious pastoral consideration.

The pastor, in close consultation with parents, teachers, and those involved in the sacramental preparation of children has the right to decide the time and manner of the celebration of the Sacrament according to proper liturgical norms. This decision should be based on the child's understanding of, and desire for the Sacrament.

Age for First Communion

Generally speaking the formal preparation for the first reception of the Eucharist is between ages 6 - 8. However, the age of reception is left to the discretion of the parents, after consulting with priest and teachers.

Fasting Before Communion

To honor Jesus, we do not eat or drink anything, unless it is water or medicine, for one hour before we receive Holy Communion. This fast reminds us that we "hunger" for Christ, and we honor Jesus with this fasting preparation for Mass.

Celebration of First Eucharist

Unless there are serious pastoral reasons that indicate the contrary, a child's celebration of First Eucharist should reflect the communal nature of church through both family and parish celebrations.

Requirements

In order to receive First Eucharist, the child should have sufficient knowledge and desire as prescribed by St. Pope Pius X in Quam Singulari. What a child needs to know for the reception of First Eucharist is simple and reasonable, i.e. **a child's faith and a child's desire**. Therefore, the Diocese stipulates that:

The child should know who Jesus is:

- Jesus is the Son of God; Mary is His mother.
- Jesus taught people how to follow God's rules of love.
- Jesus gave us the Eucharist at His Last Supper with His friends.
- He died on the cross out of love for us.
- He rose from the dead.
- Jesus is with God, His Father. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to always help God's Family.

The child should be able to distinguish between the Eucharist bread and ordinary bread.

- When Mass begins, the bread and wine are not Jesus.
- At Mass, the bread and wine become Jesus at the consecration when the priest says the words of Jesus: "This is My body" and "This is My blood."
- The bread and wine do not seem different in any way after they become Jesus. They still seem to be bread and wine; they look and taste and feel the same, but they are really Jesus.
- When you receive just the Host in Communion, you are really receiving Jesus. Jesus is fully present in the Host. Jesus is also fully present when you receive Communion from the chalice.

The child should desire to receive the Eucharist.

- Jesus gave us the Eucharist because He loves us. People want to receive Jesus. They love Jesus. They want Jesus to help them show love. They want to share in the Meal of God's Family.

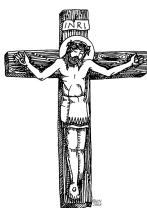


Why Do We Receive Communion?

by Most Reverend Daniel E. Pilarczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati; Why Be a Catholic Series

What Happens at Mass?

The usual occasion to receive Holy Communion is during Mass, so if we want to understand why we receive Communion, we have to remember what the Mass is all about.



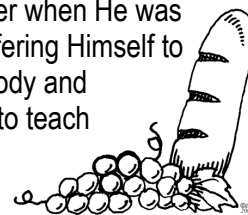
When the Christian community gathers to celebrate Mass, it finds itself at the foot of the cross. Jesus' faithfulness to the will of His Father was the central feature of His life, and it brought Him to the final act of dedication when He accepted even death at the hand of His enemies in order to remain faithful to the Father. The Mass is a new presentation of that sacrifice that Jesus offered at the end of His earthly life. Jesus is there, still offering Himself to His heavenly Father in obedience and love. But Jesus does not offer His sacrifice alone. The members of His community, the Church, offer themselves in union with His sacrifice. They unite their own limited and flawed faithfulness with His perfect faithfulness. They offer their joys and sorrows, their achievements and their failures, their hopes and their fears.

Jesus responds to their faithfulness by uniting them still more deeply with Him. He gives them Himself in Holy Communion so that His dedication to the will of the Father can root itself more and more in their lives. As a result of receiving Jesus, body and blood, soul and divinity, in the Eucharist, His faithful followers leave the Eucharistic celebration better able to reflect the love and obedience and faithfulness of Jesus in their actions and relationships of each day. The Eucharist is one of the three sacraments of initiation because our participation in the sacrifice of Christ and our constant growth in His life and faithfulness and generosity are fundamental elements of our membership in His people. No one is fully united with Christ unless one is united with Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the cross, unless one's life is constantly nourished by the self-giving life of Christ.

Why Bread and Wine?

The central point of the Eucharist occurs when the priest pronounces the words of Jesus ("This is my Body, This is my Blood.") over the bread and wine during the Mass. There are many reasons why Jesus chose to use these elements for the sacrament of self-giving and growth.

First of all, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper when He was celebrating His last meal with His disciples. Even before He died He was offering Himself to His heavenly Father, using bread and wine to signify the separation of His body and blood that would take place at His death. The Church uses bread and wine to teach about Christ's death because Christ used them for that purpose.



The bread and wine of the Passover supper had a special significance to Jesus' people. They used it to recall their liberation from slavery and their continued dedication to God. By using bread and wine as signs of His won sacrifice, Jesus wanted to indicate that His death was a sign of His dedication to His Father and a source of new life and liberation that would lead to the joyful and eternal banquet of heaven. In addition to that, of course, bread and wine were the ordinary food of people of that time and place. By changing bread and wine into His body and blood, Jesus wanted to signify that, just as we need ordinary food for our bodies, so we need regular nourishment from His life for our souls. Just as we grow weak without physical food, so we grow weak without the strength that comes from Him.



What Does It Mean to Receive?

When we receive Holy Communion we are expressing our union with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and we are opening ourselves up to a still deeper relationship with Jesus. If we have ended our relationship with Jesus by serious sinfulness, we cannot participate fruitfully in the Eucharist because our souls are out of touch with Jesus. We need to have our sins forgiven first before our lives can grow again in Him.

But there is more to Holy Communion than our individual relationship with the Lord. The Eucharist is also the bond of unity for the Church. When we grow in our closeness to Jesus, we also grow in our closeness to everyone else who shares the life of Jesus. It is the whole Body of Christ, the Church, that is nourished and that grows when its members share in the Eucharist. Every celebration of the Eucharist is an affair of the whole Church. That's why the sacrament of the Eucharist can only be celebrated by a priest, an official representative of Christ's leadership of the Church. That's why those who are not members of the Church or who have separated themselves from the Church may not take part in the Church's Eucharist.



Is Christ really Present?

Some Christian groups are willing to look on the Eucharist as a remembrance of Jesus, but they do not believe that Jesus is really and truly present in Holy Communion. Catholics believe that Jesus is really there, as really and truly and fully as He was when He ate the Last Supper with His disciples and when He died on the cross. That's why we keep some of the hosts consecrated at Mass in our churches: so that the presence and energy of Christ will be available for the dying and so that we can be in touch with the presence of Christ in the tabernacle when we visit to pray at times when Mass is not being celebrated.

All the sacraments are signs of Christ's desire to be in touch with us. They all speak of His love for us. But the Eucharist is the high point of our life in Christ because in the Eucharist, Christ speaks to us of His love most eloquently and offers Himself to us most intimate-

A Walk through the Mass ~ Four Movements of the Mass



Liturgy of the Word, Part One: the Gathering Rites



An important part of Sunday worship is our coming together as an assembly. **The Gathering Rites** bring us together into one body, ready to listen and to break bread together. One of the first things Catholics do when they come to church is sign themselves with Holy Water. This ritual is a reminder of our baptism. **Posture and song:** In medieval Europe, it was a custom to genuflect; go down on one knee before a king. We genuflect to honor the presence of Christ in the tabernacle before entering a pew. Some show their reverence with an even older custom and bow to the altar. When the Mass begins, everyone stands up. **Standing** is a traditional posture for Christian prayer, expressing our attentiveness to the Word of God and our readiness to carry it out. **Song** unites our thoughts and voices in common word, rhythm and melody. **Penitential Rite:** we call out for God's merciful forgiveness as we acknowledge the times we have failed. Like a loving parent, God's love is unconditional.



Liturgy of the Word, Part Two: The Story Telling

On Sundays we hear three readings from the Bible. The first reading is from the Hebrew Scriptures; our covenant with God. Then we recite or sing a psalm. The second reading is usually from an apostles' writings. The third reading is from the Gospels. Because of the unique presence of Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel, it is the custom to stand in attentive reverence to hear these words. The readings are followed by the **Homily, Creed and General Intercessions.** The homily takes the Word and brings it to our life situation today. The creed is a statement of our faith in the Word. Finally we present our needs; we pray for the Church, nation, people in special need and the needs of our parish.



Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part Three: Meal Sharing

Now we move to the altar table. Like a meal in the home of a friend, we offer gifts; the table is set (**Preparation of the Gifts**), we say grace (**Eucharistic Prayer**) before sharing the food (**Communion**). **Communion Rite:** because communion is the sign and source of our reconciliation, union and forgiveness with God and with one another, we pray the Our Father together and make a gesture of peace with those around us. In coming forward to receive, we bow our heads before we approach the Eucharistic minister, the minister announces "The Body (or Blood) of Christ" we respond "**Amen**".

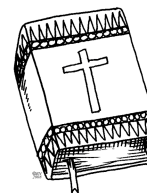


Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part Four: Commissioning

Announcements, Blessing and Dismissal. We leave the church building - but we carry something with us. We are strengthened and sustained by the celebration and meal, and we are commissioned to build the Kingdom of God in our world.



What Scripture Teaches Us About Eucharist



An angel brings bread to Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-7)

An angel met Elijah on his journey through the wilderness at a time when Elijah felt he could go no further. The angel told Elijah to get up and eat so he would be strong for his journey. From Elijah's story we can learn that we need food for our own journeys. Even when we feel we cannot go on, Christ provides us with the gift of Himself to strengthen us for our work in the world.

Manna from heaven (Exodus 16)

Scripture tells how God provided bread from heaven, called manna, to the Israelites as they wandered through the desert after leaving Egypt. This account can teach us that God provides His people with what we need.

Melchizedek's Offering (Genesis 14:18-20)

Melchizedek offered bread and wine to God in thanksgiving. This offering foreshadowed Jesus' establishment of the Eucharist. Hebrews 5:6 calls Jesus "a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." Scripture speaks of Melchizedek's offering to prepare us to recognize the Eucharist as a feast of thanksgiving.

Jesus changes water into wine (John 2:1-12)

Jesus' first miracle was at a special celebration—a wedding in Cana. At the request of His Mother, He turned water into wine. The Eucharist we celebrate in Mass is described in the Book of Revelation as the wedding feast between Christ, the bridegroom, and the Church, His bride. In the midst of this celebration, Jesus takes His first miracle in one important step further by changing wine into His blood; through the Eucharist He also transforms all of us, so that we become more like Christ as we live as the "Body of Christ" in the world.

Jesus feeds the five thousand (John 6:1-15)

Jesus takes one small boy's lunch and feeds a multitude of people. The account of this miracle can teach us that Jesus can feed everyone who "hungers" for closeness with Him.

Jesus teaches that His flesh & blood are real food & drink

(John 6:22-59)

Jesus frequently spoke in metaphors, but He seemed to go out of His way with repetition to emphasize the fact that He intended the Eucharist to be understood literally: *He was giving Himself to us as food and drink*. This was difficult even for His followers to understand, and some left Him, but Jesus did not try to stop them by offering an alternative explanation, an indication that they understood what He meant but could not accept it.



Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples

(Matt 26:17-30)



On the night He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples. This meal commemorated the freedom of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. As part of the first Passover meal the Israelites were commanded to eat the flesh of the Passover lamb that was sacrificed to save them. Passover was intended to prepare God's people for Jesus, the "Lamb of God" who would be sacrificed to save us from the bondage of sin. In fact, St. Paul calls Jesus "our paschal lamb" (1 Cor. 5:7). When Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples, He offered the bread and the cup with the words, "This is my body," and "This is my blood." Jesus spoke clearly about the Eucharist so we would know that He *is truly present* in this great meal.

Jesus and His disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)



After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were walking. They later stopped and shared a meal. At first, the disciples didn't know it was Jesus who was with them, but they recognized Him when He broke the bread. This passage of Scripture can teach us that the Eucharist reunites us with Jesus *and* we can recognize and know Him in this meal.

The Squiggly Thing We Do

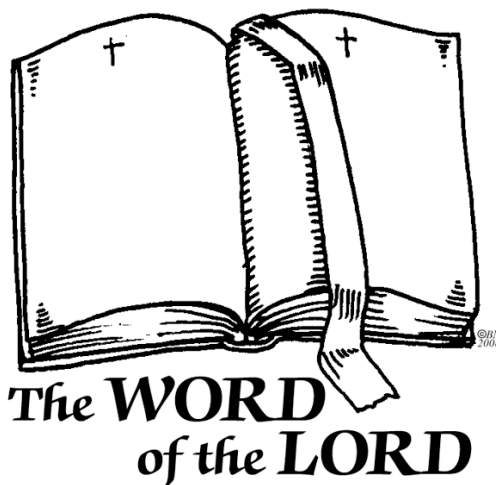
By Mary Lou Rosien

I remember reading a question once about the, "Squiggly thing we do before the Gospel reading." The writer posing the question didn't know why Catholics made the sign of the Cross on their foreheads, lips and over their hearts. As I began to question my students, I realized that many of them didn't understand what we were doing either.

When we make the sign of the cross over these three places, we ask the Lord to let His Word live in our minds, lips and hearts.

The two parts of the Mass are undeniably united; The Liturgy of the Word is connected to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In both, we are brought to God and He to us. Our mandate in this life is simple, to love God with all our hearts, minds, strength and soul. (Deut. 6:5) How can we do this and what does it have to do with the 'squiggly thing?'

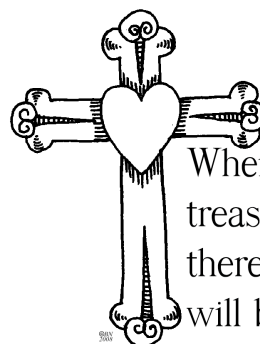
To love God, His Word must live in our minds. We read the Word. We study His Word to understand it. Through the Catechism of the Catholic Church we are able to effectively do this. We do not need to really solely on our own interpretation in fact, if we do this we could be in error. I have had this experience myself. I once used a Bible verse that I believed illustrated a point I was trying to make. A priest friend of mine gently corrected me by explaining the preceding part of the reading and showing me that I had misunderstood the verse.



I enjoy listening to Bible studies from other faiths, but without the guidance of Mother Church, you find inconsistencies between different pastors' understandings of the verses. We are blessed to have the full deposit of faith in the Catholic Church and a true interpretation of the Bible guided by the Holy Spirit. Does this mean the Holy Spirit cannot use a certain verse to expand your own understanding of a personal situation? Of course not. God reveals, what God reveals in the way He wants to, but, as I always tell my own children, "If you are not sure about something, throw it up against the Catechism and see if it sticks!"

Once we understand the Word of God, it should live on our lips. We cannot provide guidance, love and instruction to others in the faith if we are afraid to speak it ourselves. Memorizing small verses, reading a few lines from the Bible in the morning and repeating it to ourselves during the day, these things bring God's words to our lips frequently.

Live in our hearts, Lord. When we understand God's Word more fully, speak it with reverence, we will feel our love for Him grow in our hearts. How often have I heard my conscience whisper a verse to me, when I am about to make a mistake, or even better, when I need to do something?! It is not enough to have a conscience, it must be an informed conscience. Informed by God's Word, the understanding of His Word, a willingness to speak the Word and finally, to act with your heart, accordingly.



Wherever your
treasure lies,
there your heart
will be.

Luke 12:34

Mary Lou Rosien writes from her home in N. Chili, NY. She is the author of [Managing Stress with the Help of Your Catholic Faith](#) (OSV Publishing). Email her with questions or ideas at mrosien@rochester.rr.com.

Some Suggestions for Family Activities

- After Mass each week, talk to your child about the readings – what do they remember; what does it mean to them and to their lives?
- Have your child help with meal preparation, especially if it is a special meal. Talk about how the preparation for a special meal is important; like preparation for Mass
- Help your children prepare for Mass and praise them for doing so. Can they set out their clothes the night before, make sure that they finish eating in time for fasting before mass? Is there a younger sibling they can help? Can they get out the offertory envelope for you?
- Help your children learn the rhythm of the liturgical year by participating in church activities centered on the seasons and Holy Days. Mark Lent by coming to Stations, Holy Thursday and Good Friday Services; help your child find ways to contribute to the church.



Some frequently asked questions about First Communion:

What to wear? Boys—white suit is traditional but typically boys wear dark pants, white shirt (long or short sleeved) and tie (long or bow); some wear a jacket; some do not. Girls—White dress is traditional. Gloves and veils are optional. Shoulders must be covered. If the dress has spaghetti straps or strapless then a wrap or shawl is required.

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A Family Prayer

Loving God,
we ask you to bless our family
and the life we share together.
Help us to work with one another,
sharing our gifts and talents
to make our family grow in faith, love and service.
Help us to play together joyfully,
giving of our time and of ourselves
to make our family happy.
Help us to love one another
and always to be eager to show that love,
in joys and in sorrow, in good times and in bad.
May we give strength to one another
as we strive to follow the example of
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
May we respect everyone's human dignity
in all our daily relationships.
Finally, may we all one day share together
in the everlasting happiness of your heavenly family. Amen



debbie@stwilliamchurch.com
256-200-0814

BASIC PRAYERS

Our Father

Our Father
Who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil
Amen

Hail Mary

Hail Mary
Full of grace
The Lord is with thee
Blessed are you among women
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus
Holy Mary, Mother of God
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death,
Amen

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father
And to the Son
And to the Holy Spirit
As it was in the beginning
Is now and ever shall be
World without end
Amen



Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins
With all my heart, and I detest them.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you,
Whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
To do penance, to sin no more,
And to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

Guardian Angel Prayer

Angel of God
My guardian dear
To whom God's love
Commits me here
Ever this day
Be at my side
To light, to guard,
To rule, and guide
Amen

Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son. Our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.
Amen.

Resources that your family may find helpful

Web sites:

www.stwilliamchurch.com

www.loyolapress.com/christ-our-life-religion-program -our textbooks' web site offers chapter reviews, games and family resources

www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm-Vatican Documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church, etc.

www.usccb.org/dioceses.htm -United States Conference of Catholic Bishops - letters and documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church etc.

www.Creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html – short meditations on the daily readings, seasonal resources

www.homefaith.com – site for Catholic families run by the Claretians

www.bustedhalo.com- short video clips on all things Catholic

www.americancatholic.org -sponsored by the Franciscans

www.Pflaum.com -family resources connected to the readings

www.catholicmom.com-variety of resources, stories, articles, prayer, color/activity sheets

Some Children's Books

Leo Lionni *Swimmy* and others

Tomi DePaola *The Legend of Bluebonnet* and others

Marlys Boddy -*The Glassmakers of Gurven*

Marcus Pfister -*Rainbow Fish*

Munsch -*I Love You Forever*

Favorite authors:

Max Lucado

Patricia Polacco

Sandy Eisenberg Sass

Kushner

Maria Shriver's (children's books)