

THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

Inspiration, information, and encouragement for Parents
and Children who will be making their First Holy Communion

Saint Teresa Parish / Msgr. William Belford

1. On the night before he died on the cross for us, Jesus of Nazareth ate with his apostles. At that Passover meal, which we speak of as the Last Supper, Jesus washed his disciples' feet as an example of service, and gave them his new commandment: to love one another. Then during the meal he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them to eat: **Take this, all of you, and eat it; this is my body which will be given up for you.** At the end of the meal he took a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to them, saying: **Take this, all of you, and drink from it; this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.**

2. Jesus instituted this Eucharistic meal and life-giving sacrifice as the memorial of his imminent death and resurrection, and he commanded that it be celebrated in his memory. The inexhaustible richness of this sacrament is shown by the fact that we have many names for this sacred action. Each name expresses some aspect of the tremendous mystery of God's love and presence. **Eucharist** is a word which means "thanksgiving" and is used for both sacrament and the whole liturgical action we call **Mass** because this sacred action concludes with all of us being sent forth (Latin: *missio*) to love and serve the Lord. This is also known as **the Lord's Supper, the Breaking of Bread, the Eucharistic Assembly, the Holy Sacrifice, and the Blessed Sacrament.** Another title is **Holy Communion** because by sharing this sacrament we are united to Christ, who makes us part of his mystical body the Church.

3. The Second Vatican Council of Bishops who met in Rome (1962-65) called the Eucharist the "source and summit" of the Christian life. A fully Christian life without participating in the Eucharist - that is, someone trying to be a follower of Jesus but without coming to Mass and without receiving Holy Communion - has an uphill climb. The Eucharist is both sign and cause of our union with God and with God's Church.

4. The Eucharist is one of three sacraments of initiation. The other two are Baptism and Confirmation. Through them we become part of the Church. Until we have received all three, we are not fully initiated; we are missing some graces we need and should have. When we do receive the Holy Eucharist, the Catechism of our Church teaches us that we gain many advantages. **Receiving Holy Communion intensifies our union with Christ, strengthens our charity, separates us from sin (both by wiping away venial sins and preserving us from future mortal sins) and makes the Church united.** It commits us to the poor, reminds us to pray for unity among all who believe in Christ, and helps us towards heavenly life and glory.