

5th Sunday of ordinary.

Lesson 3 part 1

Theme: Understanding the Eucharist

Purpose of the lesson: To help the candidate and the catechumens to understand and appreciate the beauty and the sacredness of the Eucharist, so that they may approach it in complete and sincere reverence, full of faith, hope and love and lifelong devotion.

Formation level: confirmation and RCIA.

Display: white table cloth, crucifix, candle, bread and chalice (grape juice)

Duration: 1h30min



Introduction

The Bishop of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg has dedicated the year 2021 the year of the Eucharist. He has set aside time for the Church within the Archdiocese of Johannesburg to reflect more deeply on the Eucharist **(the true body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.)** Just as the Holy Father has dedicated the year 2021 as the year of st Joseph to the Universal Church. Without the Eucharist there is no Catholic Church, for the Eucharist is the source and the pinnacle of our Catholic faith.

1. The Lord Jesus, on the night before he suffered on the cross, shared one last meal with his disciples. During this meal our Savior instituted the sacrament of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate (continue) the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages and to entrust to the Church his Spouse a memorial of his death and resurrection. As the Gospel of Matthew tells us:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:26-28; cf. Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22:17-20, 1 Cor 11:23-25)



Recalling these words of Jesus, the Catholic Church professes that, in the celebration of the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the priest. Jesus said: **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. . . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink" (Jn 6:51-55).** The whole Christ is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine—the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins. This is what the Church means when she speaks of the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. This presence of Christ in the Eucharist is called **"real"** not to exclude other types of his presence as if they could not be understood as real (cf. Catechism, no. 1374). The risen Christ is present to his Church in many ways, but most especially through the sacrament of his Body and Blood.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine? How does this happen? The presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist is an inexhaustible (everlasting) mystery that the Church can never fully explain in words. We must remember that the triune God is the creator of all that exists and has the power to do more than we can possibly imagine. As St. Ambrose said: **"If the word of the Lord Jesus is so powerful as to bring into existence things which were not, then a fortiori those things which already exist can be changed into something else"**. God created the world in order to share his life with persons who are not God.

This great plan of salvation reveals a wisdom that exceeds our understanding. But we are not left in ignorance: for out of his love for us, God reveals his truth to us in ways that we can understand through the gift of faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We

are thus enabled to understand at least in some measure what would otherwise remain unknown to us, though we can never completely understand the mystery of God.

As successors of the Apostles and teachers of the Church, the bishops have the duty to hand on what God has revealed to us and to encourage all members of the Church to deepen their understanding of the mystery and gift of the Eucharist. In order to nurture such a deepening of our faith.



2. Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because he loves us. God's whole plan for our salvation is directed to our participation in the life of the Trinity, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our sharing in this life begins with our Baptism, when by the power of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ, thus becoming adopted sons and daughters of the Father. It is strengthened and increased in Confirmation. It is nourished and deepened through our participation in the Eucharist.

By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist we become united to the person of Christ through his humanity. **"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56)**. In being united to the humanity of Christ we are at the same time united to his divinity. Our mortal and corruptible natures are transformed by being joined to the source of life. **"Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" (Jn 6:57)**.

Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (Chrismation), we are temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and by his indwelling we are made holy by the gift of **sanctifying grace**. The ultimate promise of the Gospel is that we will share in the life of the Holy Trinity. In this we see that God does not merely send us good things from on high; instead, we are brought up into the inner life of God, the communion among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of the Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving") we give praise and glory to God for this beautiful gift.

3. While our sins would have made it impossible for us to share in the life of God, Jesus Christ was sent to remove this stumbling block. His death was a sacrifice for our sins. Christ is **"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29)**. Through his death and resurrection, he conquered sin and death and reconciled us to God. The

Eucharist is the memorial of this sacrifice. The Church gathers to remember and to re-present the sacrifice of Christ in which we share through the action of the priest and the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, we are joined to Christ's sacrifice and receive its endless benefits.

4. As the Letter to the Hebrews explains, Jesus is the one eternal high priest who always lives to make intercession for the people before the Father. In this way, he surpasses (outshines) the many high priests who over centuries used to offer sacrifices for sin in the Jerusalem temple. The eternal high priest Jesus offers the perfect sacrifice which is his very self, not something else. **"He entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12)**. Jesus' act belongs to human history, for he is truly human and has entered into history. At the same time, however, Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; he is the eternal Son, who is not limited within time or history. His actions go beyond time,



which is part of creation. **"Passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation" (Heb 9:11)**, Jesus the eternal Son of God made his act of sacrifice in the presence of his Father, who lives in eternity. Jesus' one perfect sacrifice is thus eternally present before the Father, who eternally accepts it. This means that in the Eucharist, Jesus does not sacrifice himself again and again. Rather, by the

power of the Holy Spirit his one eternal sacrifice is made present once again, re-presented, so that we may share in it. Christ does not have to leave where he is in heaven to be with us. Rather, we partake of the heavenly liturgy where Christ eternally intercedes for us and presents his sacrifice to the Father and where the angels and saints constantly glorify God and give thanks for all his gifts: **"To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever" (Rev 5:13)**.

5. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, **"By the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all" (no. 1326)**. The Sanctus proclamation, **"Holy, Holy, Holy Lord . . . ,"** is the song of the angels who are in the presence of God (Is 6:3). When in the Eucharist we proclaim the Sanctus we echo on earth the song of angels as they worship God in heaven. In the Eucharistic celebration we do not simply remember an event in history. Rather, through the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharistic celebration the Lord's Paschal Mystery is made present and immediate to his Spouse the Church. Furthermore, in the Eucharistic re-presentation of Christ's eternal sacrifice before the Father, we are not simply spectators. The priest and the worshiping community are in different ways active in the Eucharistic sacrifice. The ordained priest standing at the altar represents Christ as head of the Church. All the baptized, as members of Christ's Body, share in his priesthood, as both priest and victim. The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. **The Church, which is the Body and Bride of Christ, participates in the sacrificial offering of her Head and Spouse.** In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of the members of his Body who united to Christ form one sacrificial offering (cf. Catechism, no. 1368)

6. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the glorified Christ becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine in a way that is unique, a way that is uniquely suited to the Eucharist. In the act of consecration during the Eucharist the "substance" of the bread and wine is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the "substance" of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the appearances of bread and wine remain. This change at the level of substance from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is called "transubstantiation." According to Catholic faith, we can speak of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist because this transubstantiation has occurred (cf. Catechism, no. 1376). This is a great mystery of our faith—we can only know it from Christ's teaching given us in the Scriptures and in the Tradition of the Church.

7. In order for the whole Christ to be present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—the bread and wine cannot remain, but must give way so that his glorified Body and Blood may be present. Thus in the Eucharist the bread ceases to be bread in substance, and becomes the Body of Christ, while the wine ceases to be wine in substance, and becomes the Blood of Christ. As St. Thomas Aquinas observed, Christ is not quoted as saying, "This bread is my body," but "This is my body

8. For this way of being present corresponds perfectly to the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus Christ gives himself to us in a form that employs the symbolism inherent in eating bread and drinking wine. Furthermore, being present under the appearances of bread and wine, Christ gives himself to us in a form that is appropriate for human eating and drinking. Also, this kind of presence corresponds to the virtue of faith, for the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ cannot be detected or discerned by any way other than faith. That is why St. Bonaventure affirmed: **"There is no difficulty over Christ's being present in the sacrament as in a sign; the great difficulty is in the fact that He is really in the sacrament, as He is in heaven.** And so believing this is especially worthy" On the authority of God who reveals himself to us, by faith we believe that which cannot be grasped by our human abilities (cf. Catechism, no. 1381).

9. In everyday language, we call a "symbol" something that points beyond itself to something else, often to several other realities at once. The transformed bread and wine that are the Body and Blood of Christ are not just symbols because they truly are the Body and Blood of Christ. **As St. John Damascene wrote: "The bread and wine are not a foreshadowing of the body and blood of Christ—By no means!—but the actual sacred body of the Lord, because the Lord Himself said: 'This is my body'; not 'a foreshadowing of my body' but 'my body,' and not 'a foreshadowing of my blood' but 'my blood'"** At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the Body and Blood of Christ come to us in the Eucharist in a sacramental form. In other words, Christ is present under the appearances of bread and wine, not in his own proper form. We cannot assume to know all the reasons behind God's actions. God uses, however, the symbolism natural in the eating of bread and the drinking of wine at the natural level to lighten the meaning of what is being accomplished in the Eucharist through Jesus Christ.



10. There are various ways in which the symbolism of eating bread and drinking wine reveals the meaning of the Eucharist. **For example, just as natural food gives nourishment to the body, so the Eucharistic food gives spiritual nourishment.** Furthermore, the sharing of an ordinary meal establishes a certain communion among the people who share it; in the Eucharist, the People of God share a meal that brings them into communion not only with each other but with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Similarly, as **St. Paul tells us, the single loaf that is shared among many during the Eucharistic meal is an indication of the unity of those who have been called together by the Holy Spirit as one body, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17).**



Prayer

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.
Permit me not to be separated from you.
From the wicked foe, defend me.
At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you
That with your saints I may praise you
For ever and ever. Amen.

Activity (this activity can be done in groups.)

- I. Why does Jesus give himself to us as food and drink? [par1]
- II. Why is the Eucharist not only a meal but also a sacrifice? [par3]
- III. When the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, why do they still look and taste like bread and wine? [par6]
- IV. Does the bread cease to be bread and the wine cease to be wine?[par7]
- V. Is it fitting that Christ's Body and Blood become present in the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine?[par8]
- VI. Are the consecrated bread and wine "merely symbols"? [par9]

Bible reflections;

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| ➤ Gen14:18 | ➤ Lev 24:1-8 |
| ➤ Ex16:4 | ➤ 1cor 10:3 |
| ➤ Heb 7:17 | |