

Scriptural Basis of the Mass: Session #6: Liturgy of the Eucharist, Part III & Closing Rites

Introduction

So here we are at the end of our series. We have looked at a number of things and hopefully you have gained insight and a greater appreciation of our experiences in the Mass. Therefore, hopefully, this series has made going to Mass more meaningful. In this final session we will look at the part of the Mass that in many ways is the peak of our experience – the Communion Rite wherein we receive Christ in the



bread and the wine. We will also take a brief look at the closing rites of the Mass. While these final moments may seem like nothing more than an afterthought or closing credits of a movie (in which many do not remain for), in some way the Closing Rite is an extremely important moment. If we agree that our experience of Mass, its intent, is to heal us, educate us and inspire us all through uniting us with Christ has a purpose greater than self-indulgence; than our faith or this experience is healing and challenging us so that it can be lived out in the world. We will look at the idea that the Closing Rites have as their purpose a commissioning of sorts to go and spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

Communion Rite

READ: John 3:16. Take a moment and reflect on this one verse. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* What does this passage mean to you? What does this verse mean, and what does it mean to you? In this one simple line we have the sum total of salvation history and in many ways our experience of Mass. While coming to Mass may be nothing more than an obligation to most, its intent is to shower us with God's love and bring us to everlasting life. And how does God do that? By feeding us! God has fed us with His Word and now we prepare to be fed by the substance of His Son. The Communion Rite is divided into four areas: The Lord's Prayer (The Our Father), Sign of Peace, Lamb of God and the Reception of Communion.

The Lord's Prayer: I don't think anyone is surprised to know that this prayer can be found in the bible. These words we recite each weekend come from the lips of Jesus himself. **READ: Matthew 6:5-15.** The Our Father is one most of us learned as small children and say each and every day of our lives. With that much familiarity we can become blind to the profound statement this prayer makes. So let's take a few moments to walk through this prayer and look at it more closely.

The first element is the idea that we should call God, Father. For the ancient Jews their relationship with God was one of honor, adore and obey but such familiarity was unthinkable. In this prayer

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Jesus is asking for everyone to a close personal relationship with God. Just how close? To see our relationship with God as one of parent and child, but not just any parent/child relationship but extremely intimate and close relationship. Scholars believe the word Jesus would have used in teaching this prayer was “Abba” which translated properly means “Daddy” or “Dada”. As we come before the Lord we are meant to see ourselves as children approaching our Daddy whom we love personally and intimately. In my own prayer life I have struggled at times in knowing how to approach God. My cat reminded me just what I am called to do at times with God. Like a child, seeking comfort or simply to be loved, to curl up in the lap of God because He is my Daddy who loves and adores each of us as his children.

Moving further into the prayer, after calling on God; there are seven petitions divided into the first three which are focused on God and the last four which are focused on our need.

- *Hallowed be thy name:* **READ: Exodus 3:14-15;** Isaiah 52:6. In the Old Testament you will notice that when God identifies Himself he does so by saying “I am”. Later in the New Testament Jesus uses those same words to identify himself as the bread of life. In this short prayer we are acknowledging that God is god of all and we are not, and as such His name, who He is should be recognized by all nations and revered as holy.
- *Thy kingdom come:* **READ: Zechariah 14:9.** In this petition, after acknowledging God as god, we pray that it not be the present secular world that reigns in our lives and hearts but God’s world, God’s kingdom. This domain that reigns in heaven should rule throughout the present world. All too often people think that this phrase in the prayer means we are talking about when we die. At that time may we see heaven and there is some truth to this, but this prayer is also reminding us that we have a responsibility to turn our present world into God’s kingdom here on earth.
- *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:* **READ: Psalm 103:19,** Nehemiah 9:6. God reigns supreme in heaven. God’s will is obeyed perfectly in heaven. As we pray this line of the Our Father we are first acknowledging a truth but then challenging ourselves to make obeying God’s will in our lives a perfect response. In this petition we pray for the world beginning with ourselves to respond in perfect obedience as all the angels and saints do in heaven.

As the prayer continues the next four petitions focus on our needs:

- *Give us this day our daily bread:* **READ: Matthew 6:25-34.** As we have spoken about before in these sessions, bread is more than just another piece of our meal. For centuries and throughout the Old Testament bread meant all that was necessary to



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sustain life. In this petition we are asking, seeking from God what we need in this day. Stop and think about that for a moment and realize that it is not what we want but what we NEED. This request for daily bread recalls the Israelites wandering in the desert and each day God showering them with manna from heaven to feed and sustain them for another day. (Exodus 16:1-35) As we prepare to receive God in communion we remind ourselves of what is truly important.



- *Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us:* (Emphasis my own.) This phrase in the prayer actually has two parts. First is our request for God's mercy. **READ: 1 John 1:9.** **READ: Matthew 18:23-35. Matthew 6:14-15.** In truth the entire bible as seen as a whole is a story of God's willingness and desire to show mercy. This mercy of God culminates and climaxes in the sacrifice of His own son for the forgiveness of our sins. So, as we prepare to receive Jesus into ourselves we once more beg forgiveness for those things we have done wrong. But in our own words we condition the mercy that we ask God to show us. In the second part of this phrase we ask God to condition His mercy based on the mercy and forgiveness we have shown others. Think about this the next time you are unwilling to forgive someone. Why do you think Jesus set up this prayer that way? Let's look at the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Now—and this is daunting—this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace

Catechism of the Catholic Church #2840

- *Lead us not into temptations:* **READ: 1 Corinthians 10:13.** This petition bothered me for years because I was not one who liked the idea of a God who set out road-blocks for me to stumble over. This did not fit my understanding of a loving and merciful God. Much to my relief I eventually found out that this request is not about God's leading but a request for the strength and/or faith to withstand the sin and temptation that enters into life. Pope Benedict XVI wrote about temptation in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* and spoke of viewing temptations as the trials and tribulations that afflict our lives. In praying the Lord's Prayer we are acknowledging that bad stuff happens and when it does... *please remember that my strength only goes so far. Don't overestimate my capacity... and be close to me with your protecting hand when it becomes too much for me.* (page 163)

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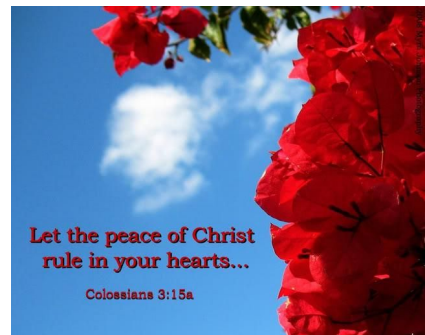
- *Deliver us from evil*: **READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:3**, 2 Samuel 22:3-4. In some translations we read in scripture to be delivered from *the evil one*. In truth this would be a better translation. In this petition we are not so much asking to be saved from circumstances but to be saved from the person of Satan who is out there warring with God for our soul. In this final line of the prayer we are begging God to win this battle for us to not be fooled by the lies, works and entrapments of the devil.

As you can see this small prayer packs a great deal in it. It comes from the lips of God in the form of Jesus and is meant to take root and sprout into fullness in our hearts and lives. It is right that just as we are about to receive Jesus in communion that we pray and later throughout the week live this prayer that He gave us.

Sign of Peace: In the structure of the Mass I find it interesting that as we end the Our Father, a prayer that if we truly embraced and lived in attitude and action outside the doors of the Church we would live in a much different world. But conversion both outside and within the Church needs to happen, with praying the Our Father, the hope is, once we open ourselves up to God's mercy and direction we now open ourselves up to our neighbor in this action prayer. When we turn to our neighbor to offer them the "Peace of Christ" we are praying not for the absence of bad but we are saying: *"I hope you have all the highest good come into your life."* We can see this moment as another opportunity to practice during Mass how we should live the rest of our week.

The peace we offer our neighbor is a biblical peace. The concept of peace in the bible is more than just the absence of war or conflict. Biblical concept of Peace or *shalom* is that everything about living is in right relationships—right relationship with the people around us, right relationship with our possessions, right relationship with things such as power and authority and most importantly right relationship with God.

READ: John 14:24 and Ephesians 6:14-17. (Also James 1:2) In the gospel of John Jesus is extending His peace to the disciples. A peace that is *not as the world gives...* The peace of the world is one where there may not be conflict but there also isn't love, charity and harmony. Think in terms of a cold war – one were while neither side is striking out at each other in words or action, in other words there is no conflict; the anger and resentment are just below the surface. Now think in terms of the Ephesians reading. As Christians we should live armored by God. This means we live in truth, possessing right relationships especially with God, confident in our faith which is grounded in knowledge of the gospel and joy filled with the gift of salvation. Once clothed with these virtues we can yield the *sword of the spirit* or the power of God. This is the peace we are searching for in Mass and this is the peace we offer to our neighbor. But

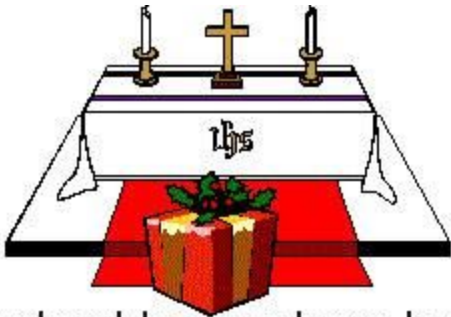


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this peace will only happen when we are freed from sin. Listen to the words of the priest as we transition from the Our Father to the Sign of Peace:

*Deliver us, Lord, we pray from every evil,
graciously grant peace in our days, that, by
the help of your mercy we may be always
free from sin and safe from all distress...*

READ: Romans 6:23. (Romans 6:13, Genesis 2:17, Romans 5:12) As long as sin is a part of our lives and therefore a part of the world we will not know the peace of Christ. But by coming to Mass and entering into the experience as fully as we can we work on ourselves and pray for our neighbor.



I don't know where he is.
He said something
about his brother

Let me offer some final words about the Sign of Peace. In that first century Church, both Sts. Peter and Paul challenged the faithful to “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” SEE Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26. In one sense this moment is about recognizing and nurturing the unity we have (or we should have) as a faith community. The Sign of Peace is also giving us one final moment to, in recognize that we are sinful creatures in need of reconciliation in our lives, to settle matters with those we have wronged. **READ: Matthew 5:23-24.** If

we had all the time in the world we would in this moment leave the church, go to those in our lives that we have hurt and seek their forgiveness. But that is not practical. So, as we turn to those sitting near us and offer them the Peace of Christ, we should see in them all those we need to be reconciled with. Our attendance at Mass is about changing the world, but that will only happen if we become peacemakers. And what is true peace? True peace (see discussion above) can only happen when God’s will and the human heart become one. Peace happens when we are able to put everything we have and everything that happens to us into perspective and respond to life in a way that brings out the very best in others. The sign of peace both represents the mission we are about to take on, the mission we should be committed to once we leave the Church as well. **READ: Matthew 5:9.**

Lamb of God: Within Lamb of God or more appropriately called the “Fraction Rites” by most clergy, there are three moments within the one: the breaking of the bread, the commingling of the Body and Blood of Christ, and the reciting of the Lamb of God:

- *Breaking of the Bread:* There is four times Jesus broke bread in a communal setting. Two are in the accounts of the multiplication of loaves. **READ: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark**

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6:39-44; Luke 9:14-17. Of course we all know that Jesus broke the bread at the Last Supper. READ: Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; Matthew 26:26. And finally, in the Emmaus Story we hear at the end of Luke's Gospel. **READ: Luke 24:13-35.** It should be noted that in this trip the two took to Emmaus Jesus was with them the whole time but it was only with the breaking of the bread that their personal blindness was healed and they recognized Jesus. This is the hope of the Eucharist. Each time we come to Mass we should have confidence and faith that our personal blindness will be healed and in ever growing revelation Jesus will be revealed to us. As Mass the bread is broken just as Jesus broke the bread centuries ago. The priest takes an oversized host and first breaks it in half and then into smaller pieces. St. Paul saw the symbolism of the one loaf shared by all just as there is one body of Christ with its many parts. READ: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

- *Commingling:* After the priest breaks the larger host into many pieces he takes one small piece and places it in his chalice. This is done for two reasons. Historically it represents the unity of a worldwide Church. It comes from the fact that in the early Church in Rome, the Pope had a small particle of the consecrated host (called the *fermentum* or leaven) sent out to all the parishes in the city. The priests then place that *fermentum* into the chalice as a sign of their unity with the Pope and the Church. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Philippians 2:2) Later scholarship saw in this act a reenactment of the Resurrection. They saw in the separate consecrations of bread and wine in Mass the symbol of the separation of Christ's body and blood in his death. When the bread is placed in the wine it symbolizes the reunion of Christ's body and blood at His resurrection.
- *Recitation of the Lamb of God:* this is another moment that unites heaven and earth – the gathered community in prayer and the angels and saints in praise and worship. As we have discussed before, ultimately in this moment we are recognizing Jesus as the new Passover Lamb being sacrificed for our sins. (1 Corinthians 5:6-7; Revelations 5:1-14) It was John the Baptist who was first to recognize Jesus as the "Lamb of God". **READ: John 1:29.** And the Messiah as the sacrificial lamb was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 53:7) Just like in the Confiteor (Through my fault...), the Kyrie (Christ have mercy) and the Sanctus (Holy Holy) – three times we offer our prayer and with the third recitation we once again ask for the peace of Christ. Three times for emphasis as showing our sincerity, and to understand that it is only through the power of God's mercy to forgive our sins will we know true peace.



Reception of Holy Communion: Now comes the moment we have all been waiting for – the

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reception of Holy Communion. As a child I waited for this moment only because it signaled two things: I got a little entertainment because I could watch all the people parade by as they went to communion, and it meant that Mass was almost over. Hopefully by now we know that this moment is much more than these simple pleasures of a child. It is here and now that we are given an opportunity to receive the greatest of graces -- the taking of Jesus Christ into our very being.

The rite begins with the priest holding both the chalice of precious blood and the body of Christ and inviting all to this moment by saying: *Behold the Lamb of God... Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.* This last line is taken from the Book of Revelations. **READ Revelations 19:9.** In this passage the heavenly angels are singing praises to God who has conquered death and inviting all to participate in the Lord's Supper... the Eucharistic celebration. Once again heaven and earth unite and in humility, as we recognize what we are about to receive we say: *Lord, I am not worthy....* This prayer made by the congregation makes two profound statements in one line. First, we once again acknowledge our complete unworthiness which is an appropriate statement of humility in the face of what is about to happen. Second we acknowledge the power of God. These words are words we share with a Roman Centurion or soldier who was seeking Jesus to come and heal his servant. **READ: Matthew 8:5-13.** Like him we stand before the Lord knowing that if it is God's will all our sins can be healed but realizing how little we are worthy of that kindness.



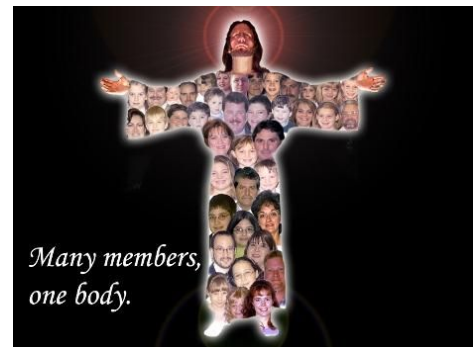
After last minute preparations at the altar we take our turn coming forward to receive communion. The next time we go to Mass we should take a few moments really reflecting on what is happening here. This is Jesus before us in the form of bread and wine and this is Jesus who we are taking into ourselves. Jesus wants so much to be one with us we come forward to consume Him. Shouldn't we want God within us, and not just a little, not just a taste but as much as we can get? I

know there are many who refuse to receive Jesus in the wine because of the fear of drinking from a shared cup. My challenge is this (if you are one of those people): If it was Jesus standing offering the cup would you take it? How much more does our faith have to grow to recognize Him in the chalice? Some will say that it is enough to receive just the host and there is some truth in that. But why is it we can't get enough ice cream... chocolate... time with our children or grandchildren... but we can get enough of Jesus? This is God Himself offering Himself to us. Who are we to say what enough is. (Besides, in the decades the Church has been offering communion under both species I have yet to hear of this great epidemic illness that everyone is afraid of that was traced back to a shared communion cup.) Each of us in our own way has a hungry heart, we yearn to be fulfilled and complete. Here is God waiting to feed our hungry heart. Step up and receive!

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With that said working I think many people wish there was a more overt experience when receiving communion. Over the course of my work with children who are preparing to receive their First Communion I can at times see disappointment in their eyes as they walk away from receiving for the first time. What they were expecting I don't know but I suspect they thought the effect to this moment would be one similar to Popeye and his eating spinach, that there would be an immediate and sudden transformation. The Eucharist is not a commodity. It is better thought of as an embrace. As a mother of an adult daughter who no longer lives with me, there are much I miss about not having her around but mostly I miss the physical contact -- sitting together on the couch, hugs, holding hands...you get the idea. Each one comforts me, communicates her love for me and over time heals me. Coming forward and receiving communion many miraculous and mysterious things are happening but the image I want you to reflect on is the idea that we are being embraced by God. It is an expression of His love and His desire to comfort us, to heal us but mostly it is an opportunity to receive His life giving grace which will change us.

Once we have received communion we return to our places as we wait for the rest of the community to receive. Rather than watch the parade of people pass by we should be in prayer through singing the communion song. It is about the community experience. Everything that is done is done together throughout the entire context of the Mass-- we say the same things at the same time. We stand, we sit, we kneel -- everyone together. The only time this is not true is during the Eucharistic prayers due to the significance of the moment -- Christ is becoming physically present, and quite simply it is impractical for the priest to kneel at the Altar throughout the Eucharistic Prayer. **READ: Colossians 1:24.** (1 Corinthians 12:12-30) The idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is one St. Paul used a lot. We are a visible presence to the world that God is near and interested in their lives. We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.* (1180) So sing and as St. Clare says, and pray twice.



We come to the final moment of the Liturgy of the Eucharist -- after all have received communion the rubrics of the Mass charge that there should be a moment of silence. **READ Psalm 139:1-4.** This Psalm is one of my most favorite and it is worth meditating on regularly. We have all heard that "Silence is golden" and in this moment it is a golden opportunity to bask in the glory of God. It is a moment to offer a final prayer or praise, or just sit and listen for God's voice. In the same way that within the Entrance Rites there is a unique prayer that begins the Mass, the Liturgy of the

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Eucharist is brought to a close with a formal prayer of the Church called the Prayer after Communion. It is specific to the season or feast and has as its intent collecting all our prayers and offering them to God.

Closing Rites



We come now to the last moments for Mass which in many ways mirror how our Mass begins. The short process begins with the words from the Priest: “The Lord be with you”; and our response: “And with your Spirit.” As we did in the beginning we do in the end; and in the same way the beginning exchange is not our way of saying hello or good-morning, this end dialogue is not our efforts to say good-by. Once again we are acknowledging the Spirit of God that resides within the priest by way of his ordination and the priest is offering a prayer that the Christ we have received would remain with us always. This exchange is followed by a blessing and the congregation once again making the Sign of the Cross. (To read more about the significance of this short prayer – Sign of the Cross, see notes from session #1).

The final blessing is founded in blessings offered and received throughout the Old Testament. Two more noted ones are the blessing God gave Noah and his sons (Genesis 9:1) and Isaac blessing his son Jacob (Genesis 27:1-40. Both were imparted at a transitional moment in their lives, so as we are transitioning from this holy moment back into our worlds it is only fit and proper that we should receive a blessing. Once the blessing is given it is now that we are ready to be dismissed.

There are six different statements the priest (or deacon if one is present) offers at this moment. Two are given during the Easter Season (Go forth, the Mass is ended, alleluia, alleluia or Go in peace, alleluia, alleluia), and four that can be said throughout the rest of the year. Two are similar to the proclamations given at Easter. The only difference is that throughout the rest of the year the alleluia’s are omitted. It is the other two that can be offered throughout the remainder of the year that I believe speak more profoundly to what this moment is about. As stated in an earlier session our reason for being at Mass has as much to do with the work we are meant to be about throughout the rest of the week as it does coming to honor and receive Jesus. In this final statement we the faithful are being commissioned to *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*, or to *Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life*. The first of the two comes from the lips of Jesus as he sends His disciples out to make converts throughout the lands. (Mark 16:15) The second regarding glorifying God with our lives is an adaptation of the words of St. Paul. (1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:12). We come to the table of the Lord to be healed and transformed. It makes sense that we would want to tell the world of this wonderful, loving God. That is our relationship with God through Baptism and our commitment to God

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in Confirmation.

This brings an end to our study. I hope you enjoyed the journey as much as I have. I pray that you have gotten a greater appreciation for what we do and say at Mass and its basis in faith throughout the scriptures. See you at Mass!

Reflection Questions:

1. How would you explain the Sign of Peace to someone who was not familiar with the Catholic Mass?
2. Besides receiving Jesus in Communion, what part of the Eucharistic prayers would you say is the most important? Why?
3. Is there something else that you learned in this session that you would like to share or discuss?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Our Father

2765 The traditional expression “the Lord’s Prayer” — *oratio Dominica*—means that the prayer to our Father is taught and given to us by the Lord Jesus. The prayer that comes to us from Jesus is truly unique: it is “of the Lord.” On the one hand, in the words of this prayer the only Son gives us the words the Father gave him: he is the master of our prayer. On the other, as Word incarnate, he knows in his human heart the needs of his human brothers and sisters and reveals them to us: he is the model of our prayer.

2766 But Jesus does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically. As in every vocal prayer, it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father. Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us “spirit and life.” Even more, the proof and possibility of our filial prayer is that the Father “sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘*Abba!* Father!’” Since our prayer sets forth our desires before God, it is again the Father, “he who searches the hearts of men,” who “knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” The prayer to Our Father is inserted into the mysterious mission of the Son and of the Spirit.

Church as the Body of Christ here on earth

1186 Finally, the church has an eschatological significance. To enter into the house of God, we must cross a *threshold*, which symbolizes passing from the world wounded by sin to the world of the new Life to which all men are called. The visible church is a symbol of the Father’s house toward which the People of God is journeying and where the Father “will wipe every tear from their eyes.” Also for this reason, the Church is the house of *all* God’s children, open and welcoming.

1180 When the exercise of religious liberty is not thwarted, Christians construct buildings for divine worship. These visible churches are not simply gathering places but signify and make visible the Church living in this place, the dwelling of God with men reconciled and united in Christ.

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1377 The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.

Reception of Holy Communion

1415 Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance.