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EUCCHARIST

— The Heart of the Christian Life —



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The Eucharist: The Heart of the Christian Life © 2023

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CONTENTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EUCHARIST	v
LESSON 1 The Eucharist: Our Great Thanksgiving.....	1
LESSON 2 Creation and Eating: Foundations for Worship	7
LESSON 3 Bread from Heaven: Old Testament Foreshadowing	13
LESSON 4 Do This in Memory of Me: The Sacrament of the Church	19
LESSON 5 The Eucharistic Heart of Life: The Teaching of the Saints	25
LESSON 6 Heaven on Earth: The Mass	31
LESSON 7 Worthily and Well: How to Receive the Eucharist.....	37
LESSON 8 Down in Adoration Falling: Eucharistic Devotions.....	43
LESSON 9 Christ’s Tabernacle in the World: Living the Eucharist.....	49
LESSON 10 Eucharistic Beauty: The Role of Art and Culture.....	55
LESSON 11 Signs to the World: Eucharistic Miracles	61
LESSON 12 Inner Revival: The Eucharist and Civilization.....	67
RECOMMENDED READING	75
ANSWER KEY	75
IMAGE CREDITS	80





AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist distinguishes Catholic life more than anything else, providing the foundation for sacred worship and belief in Christ's living presence within the Church. This course will lay out the teaching of the Catholic Church on the Eucharist and the Mass and how they lead to a robust expression of the Christian life in the world. The Eucharist forms the soul in the holiness of Christ, which inspires believers to work for the transformation of the world through the spiritual power it bestows.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of the Eucharist as “the source and summit of the Christian life” (§1324). Because the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ, made present sacramentally through the Mass, it is not an exaggeration to speak of it as the source of the Christian life. Our Faith flows from Jesus, the Son of God, Who became man and Who continues to offer His body and blood in the Eucharist so that we can receive the saving effects of His death and resurrection. All holiness in the Church comes to us from the presence of Christ in our midst.

The Eucharist also serves as the summit of the Christian life because through it we have communion with Christ and through Him with the Father and Holy Spirit. God made us to enter into an eternally abiding communion with Him. The Eucharist anticipates this perfect communion already in this life. It anticipates heaven, where we will have the fulness of joy and peace in the presence of God. Receiving the Eucharist with a proper disposition and intention enables us to live in communion with God, allowing the divine life to take root within us and transform us.

The Eucharist also gives shape to the Christian life, forming a whole way of life, or culture, that flows from the grace it bestows. The encounter with Jesus at the Mass should make our own lives a continuation of His enfleshed presence in the world. The believer becomes a tabernacle of Christ, being transformed ever more into His image and likeness so that all our actions flow from His presence within us. This enables Christians to spread their faith, serve the needy, transform work and family life into an offering to God, and extend Christ's presence everywhere into society. The Eucharist changes the world from the inside out, becoming an oasis of truth, beauty, and love in a fallen world.

The Church has faithfully preserved Jesus's command to celebrate the Eucharist, expressed in His words “do this in memory of me,” throughout the centuries. Around the altar, God has raised up a great number of saints who manifest the transforming power of the Eucharist to us. We will draw on their teaching and example in each lesson to give concrete shape to the form of a Eucharistic life. We will also draw from the many beautiful images created by Catholic artists throughout history. These images form part of our lesson by conveying a Eucharistic imagination that finds God working through the beauty of material signs to point our minds and hearts to Him.





LESSON 1

THE EUCHARIST

Our Great Thanksgiving

“For my flesh is food indeed,
and my blood is drink indeed.
He who eats my flesh and drinks
my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

— JOHN 6:55-56 —

**OPENING PRAYER**

*Sweetest Jesus,
Body and Blood most Holy,
be the delight and pleasure of my soul,
my strength and salvation in all temptations,
my joy and peace in every trial,
my light and guide in every word and deed,
and my final protection in death. Amen.*

—Saint Thomas Aquinas

LESSON OVERVIEW

The word “Eucharist” means thanksgiving. On the night before He died, Jesus offered His great thanksgiving to the Father during the Last Supper, bestowing His own body and blood on His disciples as the Passover of the New Covenant. By telling His disciples to “do this in memory of me,” Jesus established the Eucharist as the heart of His Church, coming to each one of us during the Mass to enter into communion with us.

In the Eucharist, Jesus offers His body and blood to us to be consumed under the appearance of bread and wine. It is the greatest of the sacraments, the outward signs instituted by Jesus to give us grace. All the seven sacraments transmit God’s grace to us, but only in the Eucharist do we encounter the true presence of Jesus Who draws us into union with Him. All the sacraments have an outward element, a visible sign, which teaches us about its inward reality. In the case of the Eucharist, we bring the outward signs of bread and wine to the Mass as the matter of the sacrament, while an ordained priest speaks the words of consecration in the person of Christ as its form. During the consecration of the Mass, the bread and wine truly become the body and blood of Christ, a reality known as transubstantiation.

Jesus wants us to receive Him so that He can nourish us and transform us from within. He told His disciples that His body was food indeed (Jn 6:55). The Eucharist is the food that we need to grow in the Christian life. Through it, we become incorporated into Christ to live as His body in the world. The Eucharist helps us to become holy because through it, we receive the life of Jesus within us. He pours out His life into us, for when we consume His body and blood, we receive His entire life, human and divine. The Eucharist, therefore, becomes a means of communion with Jesus and through Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Eucharist is a plan of holiness and renewal for the Church. We speak of the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life. We find the source of all things—the world, our lives, our salvation—within it, providing the most direct means of encountering Jesus Christ. It is the summit, because Jesus gives us communion with Him through it, and this is the very purpose for which we have been created: to have eternal communion with God. It forms the basis of the Christian life, enabling us to do all that we do through our communion with Christ.



The Eucharist incorporates us into the Body of Christ and conforms us to Jesus ever more fully as we learn to cooperate with its graces.

Each lesson presents a Eucharistic saint who embodies its teaching. Our first Eucharistic saint is Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), the great teacher and poet. In addition to his compelling writing on the truth of transubstantiation in his great *Summa Theologiae*, becoming a great teacher of the doctrine of the Eucharist, he also composed the beautiful hymns we sing for Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Aquinas shows us that we can understand the gift of the Eucharist more deeply, explaining how the Mass makes present the one sacrifice of Christ and shedding light on what it means for the substance of bread and wine to become the substance of Jesus’s body and blood. His poetry points us to the great mystery which, at the same time, exceeds our comprehension, calling forth acts of faith and love.

LESSON READINGS

- Scripture: John 6:22–59
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1324–32
- R. Jared Staudt, *How the Eucharist Can Save Civilization*, introduction
- Michael Müller, CSSR, *The Blessed Sacrament: Our Greatest Treasure*, chapter 1

VIDEO LECTURE 1 – THE EUCHARIST: OUR GREAT THANKSGIVING

1. Why do we call the sacrament of Jesus’s body and blood the Eucharist?

2. What are the matter and form of the sacrament of the Eucharist?

3. Why is it the greatest of the sacraments?



4. What does transubstantiation mean?

5. What does Jesus want to give us through Communion?

6. How does Saint Thomas Aquinas model faith and love of the Eucharist?

Wisdom of the Saints

“Now, bodily life needs material nourishment, not only for increase in quantity but to maintain the nature of the body as well, lest it be dissolved by continuous resolutions and lose its power; in the same way it was necessary to have spiritual nourishment for the spiritual life that the reborn may both be conserved in virtues and grow in them. Spiritual effects were fittingly given under the likeness of things visible (as was said); therefore, spiritual nourishment of this kind is given to us under the appearances of the things which men rather commonly use for bodily nourishment. Bread and wine are of this sort. Accordingly, this sacrament is given under the appearances of bread and wine.”

—Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 61





SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think so many Catholics do not understand or believe in Christ's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament? What can we do to strengthen our faith?

2. What graces have you received during communion? Has this been a time of encounter with Jesus for you?

3. Have you sung Saint Thomas's Eucharistic hymns, such as *Pange Lingua*, *O Salutaris Hostia*, or *Tantum Ergo*? How do his words model how we should relate to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament?

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal God, behold I come to the sacrament of Your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . I beg of You, through Your infinite mercy and generosity, heal my weakness, wash my uncleanness, give light to my blindness, enrich my poverty, and clothe my nakedness. May I thus receive the Bread of Angels, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, with such reverence and humility, contrition and devotion, purity and faith, purpose and intention, as shall aid my soul's salvation. Amen.

—Saint Thomas Aquinas, excerpt from his “Prayer before Communion”