

Tim Sullivan Family Life Director

Eucharist should be way of life for Catholics

It's that time of year when we have a lot of First Communions and Confirmations. On top of that, we just had many people enter the Church at Easter. So maybe it's a good time to address some basic principles on the Eucharist, which I have found over the years that many of us Catholics really don't understand as well as we should.



One important point about the Eucharist that has gotten lost in the shuffle is that the Eucharist is a sacrifice. The death of Jesus on the cross is re-presented every time we celebrate the Eucharist. It's not that Jesus dies again every time we have Mass. It's that the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus hasn't ended. The death of Jesus, who is timeless, is ongoing and remains ever present.

So, every time the priest recites the words of Jesus at the Last Supper: "This is my body which shall be given up for you; this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant of my blood," it's as if the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary is taking place in our midst. We should consciously place ourselves at the foot of the Cross during every consecration,

and imagine what it was like to be there as Jesus suffered and died for us.

The body of Jesus that we receive is the broken, bruised, mocked and spat upon Body of Christ. It is also the body, blood, soul and divinity of the One who existed before time, the "first born of all creation, in whom all things were created," the One who is the Center of the universe.

Now, here's a principle that I have found very few Catholics understand. The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. It's the sacrifice of you and me. The way the Eucharist is supposed to work is that you and I, by the grace we receive from Jesus, respond to His gift of Himself by committing to offer our own lives for Him and for others. So when we come forward to "receive" Jesus in Holy Communion, we are also pledging to give up our lives for Jesus and for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we participate in the Eucharist, our knees should be trembling, because we are receiving the Master of the universe, Jesus Himself, and committing to give up ourselves just like He did. The most serious thing you can do as a human being is expressed in the Eucharist.

Here's how the Catechism expresses it: "In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members

of His Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with His total offering, and so acquire a new value."

The reference to "new value" means that if we consciously offer ourselves with Jesus in the Eucharist, the ordinary trials and challenges of our lives will take on a new, supernatural character. Jesus will take our trials and challenges and magnify them through His grace into a blessing for the Body of Christ. In the process, our own lives will be transformed. Every aspect of our life can have new power and meaning. This gift is sitting there, just waiting for us, but the power of it is neutralized by our own lack of understanding, appreciation and full participation.

The Eucharist is not something we do on Sunday. The Eucharist is a way of life, something that affects everything we do. If we truly understood the beauty and depth of the Eucharist, there would be so much more reverence in Mass. When Mass ended, there would be reverent, awe-filled silence and a spirit of thanksgiving that is too big, too deep for words.

Our closing verse is from 1 Corinthians: "Is not this cup we bless a participation in Christ's blood? Is not the bread we break a participation in Christ's body?"

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