

5 – The Eucharist

Aim: To unpack the Mass, focusing particularly on the liturgy of the Eucharist.



The Disciples on the Road to Emmaus (15 minutes) Fr Alan

Luke 24:13-35 – The story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus gives us an image of Mass. The disciples were walking on the road running away from the horror they had witnessed in Jerusalem - Jesus' death. A man appeared and started walking with them. The man opened up the scriptures for them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets; he interpreted to them the things about Jesus in all the scriptures. As they came near the village, the man made to go on, but the disciples urged him to stay. When they sat down to eat together the man took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. It was at that point the disciples' eyes were opened and they realised that the man had been Jesus all along. The disciples said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'

The Mass is made up of two parts: the Liturgy of the Word (the opening up of scripture) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the taking, the blessing, the breaking and the giving of the bread).

The sacraments are described as 'the signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the **grace** of Christ, the head, throughout the Church which is his Body.' We believe that Christ himself is at work in the sacraments. Sacraments are not magic. *In the Eucharist, God gives us the greatest gift in the world. He gives himself—to you and to me.*

So Why do we need sacraments in the first place? To become like Jesus through Jesus: children of God in freedom and glory. We can and should come to God with all our senses, not just with the intellect. That is why God gives himself to us in earthly signs—especially in bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ.



John 6 - It divided people then and it divides them now (5 minutes)

Watch Robert Barron clip on John 6 and the disciples' reaction.

John 6:60 - *When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?'* This is the question we have to ask ourselves and that we hope to answer throughout this session.

Jesus' words at the Temple in Capernaum are put into context for the 12 disciples at the Last Supper. In our small groups, let us remind ourselves of what happened at the Last Supper.



What happened at the Last Supper? (15 minutes)

Leaders read to your group a quick history of the Passover and what the Passover was like for 1st Century Jews:

All Jewish families who could afford to do so would travel up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast in order to commemorate in a special festival the famous night of the EXODUS, in which Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery.

That night the Israelites had been commanded to slaughter an unblemished one-year-old lamb and to smear its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their houses. When the angel of death saw the blood, he would “pass over” the house.

In the Old Covenant, bread and wine were offered in sacrifice among the first fruits of the earth as a sign of grateful acknowledgment to the Creator. But they also received a new significance in the context of the Exodus.

By the time of Jesus, precise instructions had been passed down about the way in which this solemn Passover meal was to be held. The father of the household, or the head of the clan, played an important role in it. It was also common for groups of disciples to share the Passover meal with their Rabbi. Let us imagine Jesus in this role:

- The leader had to proclaim a “eucharist”—a prayer of thanksgiving to the “King of the world, who has brought forth bread from the earth” (manna in the desert).
- Then he had to bless a special chalice filled with wine, while thanking the Lord “who has created the fruit of the vine”.
- He had to offer an unblemished, one-year-old lamb in sacrifice.
- This lamb had to be slaughtered at a precise time... and it had to be in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Ask someone to read Luke 22: 14-20. This discuss the following questions

Q: What did Jesus change in his last Passover celebration?

Q: What are the similarities between what happened at the Last Supper and what we see/hear/experience at Mass?

Q: Who is the “sacrificial Lamb” at Mass?



The signs of bread and wine: signifying the goodness of creation (5 minutes)

In the Offertory, we give thanks to the Creator with bread and wine, fruit of the "work of human hands," but above all as "fruit of the earth" and "of the vine" – which are gifts of the Creator.

But why does it begin with bread? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life”. Jesus wished to be the new manna in the desert (the “food which endures to eternal life”) by means of which man can survive death.

Priest: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.

And why with wine? “I am the vine, you are the branches”, Jesus had said before. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5). When we drink of the chalice, his blood courses through our veins like enlivening wine.

Priest: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink.

Eucharist – as thanksgiving

“Eucharist” (Greek = thanksgiving). When we celebrate “Eucharist”, this is creation’s great thanksgiving to God. Each time Holy Mass is celebrated, we hear the words, *“It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you **thanks**, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord...”*

The catechism says, *“In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made **good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity.**”* CCC 1359

Do you remember the Rob Bell video we watched a few weeks ago, about Resurrection? He said that “Resurrection announces that God has not given up on the world because this world matters. This world we call home: dirt, blood, sweat, light and water and our senses. This world that God is redeeming and restoring and renewing. Jesus invites us to believe Resurrection; that every glimmer of good, every hint of hope, every impulse that elevates the soul is a sign, a taste, a glimpse, of how things actually are and how things ultimately will be.” This is what we are thanking God for at Mass.

Let us thank God for everything, since all good comes from him.
SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

So, the Eucharist is the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation.



A sacrifice perpetuated throughout time (5 minutes)

Jesus changed the entire meaning of the Passover meal when he said, *“Do this in memory of me.”* Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus’ passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection is the new Passover. The Last Supper anticipates this new Passover and the Eucharist celebrates it.

Now Jesus was either: placing himself in God’s place (and thereby committing, in Jewish eyes, a crime punishable by death) or he was indeed the Son of God who was preparing to die so that all might have life.

It says in the Catechism, *“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. **This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again...**”* CCC 1323

Ever since the beginning of the Church, Christians have carried out this Sacramental offering of the Eucharist in obedience to Christ’s command on the night of the Last Supper.

In Scripture, a memorial is not just a retelling of past events but also the mystical proclamation of those events, where they become in a certain way **present and real**.

This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated even today, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may conform their lives to them.

When the Church celebrates the Passion of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ is remembered and made present. It is a true sacrifice because it re-presents the sacrifice of Christ and applies its fruits.

Christ was sacrificed once in time upon the cross in Jerusalem. But the Eucharist is the means by which that one sacrifice and its fruits are perpetuated (made to continue indefinitely) throughout time.¹ And what is so amazing is that we take part in it every time we go to Mass.



A sacrifice perpetuated (10 minutes)

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to **perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again...**” CCC 1323

[Have a chat about this](#)



Real Presence (5 minutes)

Let's think about it this way:

- What was Jesus like when he was incarnate on this earth?
- He lived a physical life, he used his hands (as a carpenter)
- He entered into our reality physically
- And people flocked to him and wanted to see him and touch him
- Remember in the gospel of Mark (5:25-34) the woman that had a disease that caused her to haemorrhage for 12 years? She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, *'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.'* What is interesting is that it goes on to say that she was immediately healed. But it doesn't just stop there, it says *"Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?'"* "And his disciples said to him, *'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"'* He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, *"Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*
- As the woman touched Jesus, she received physical healing. Jesus, as soon as he was touched, turned to her. This transformed her into something more beautiful without pain and peace in her heart. She left transfigured.
- Jesus spoke to her, he had eye contact with her, he saw her body language and she saw his. It was real.
- Jesus wanted to perpetuate that same physical, healing and transforming encounter with him throughout time for you and me.
- Today, 1.2 Billion Catholics flock to Jesus today. They do not just go to adore a thing, an object. We receive Jesus physically, we are able to meet him and we leave transfigured too.
- I read somewhere that Catholics take the incarnation seriously.

¹ http://www.unamsanctamcatholicam.com/images/eucharist_.pdf

- When Jesus gives us the Eucharist, he does it with a purpose: “that we may become one with him.” (Pope Francis)
- When Christ is present in the sacrament, He is present in such a way that he who handles the consecrated host is handling God.

Jesus’ Presence in the Eucharist is the reason why we genuflect towards the tabernacle when entering or leaving the Church. So important is Christ’s presence in this sacrament that almost all of what the Catholic Church does and believes is incomprehensible without it.

When the priest says “This is my Body” and “This is my blood”. The words of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, change reality. In the Eucharist, Christ Himself becomes present among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. This presence is called as the *Real Presence*.

Let us find out more about this from Bishop Barron, who starts talking about what Thomas Aquinas called *Transubstantiation*.



Real Presence (6 minutes)

ROBERT BARRON clip about Real Presence.



Real Presence (10 minutes)

Have a chat about what you have just heard.

Q: Bishop Robert Barron said, “appearance and reality do not always coincide”. What do you think about this?

Q: The Church says, in the case of the Eucharist, what appears to be ordinary bread and wine, in fact is “changed” at the deepest level of its reality. What do you think about this?

Q: Words not only describe reality, but under right circumstances can change reality. What did you think of the examples Bishop Barron gave when he talked about this?

Q: Flannery O'Connor said, “If it [the Eucharist] is only a symbol, I say to hell with it”. What do you think she meant by this?



What does the Eucharist mean to me? (10 minutes)

Testimony

Fr Alan talks about KISS (Keep it Simple Stupid). Jesus kept it simple. Jesus used everyday things: water, bread, oil, wine, words, hands, spit, mud and transforms them into instruments of grace.

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1. ***Our sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other end than that we should be transformed into what we receive. - Pope Leo the Great***

 2. ***The Eucharist is about complete and utter transformation, transformation of the entire creation and also my transformation from a sinful, mortal being into a being who will no longer die.***

 3. ***“Whoever receives the sacred Eucharist loses himself in God like a drop of water in the ocean. No one can separate them from each other again. If someone were to surprise us, after our Holy Communion, with the question: “What are you taking back home with you?” then we could answer: “We are taking heaven back with us.” - Saint John Vianney***

 4. ***“The Eucharist is Jesus who gives himself entirely to us. To nourish ourselves with him and abide in him through Holy Communion, if we do it with faith, transforms our life into a gift to God and to our brothers.” - Pope Francis***

 5. ***Communion “is assimilation: eating him, we become like him. But this requires our ‘yes,’ our sticking with faith.” - Pope Francis***

 6. ***What’s the point of attending Mass? I can go when I feel like it but I pray better alone. The Eucharist “is not a private prayer or a beautiful spiritual experience, it’s not simply a commemoration of what Jesus did in the Last Supper.”***

 7. ***It is a “memorial, namely, a gesture that actualizes and makes present the event of the death and resurrection of Jesus: the bread is truly his Body given, the wine is truly is Blood poured out.***

 8. ***To live in concrete communion with Jesus through the Eucharist while on earth is already the beginning of our passing from death to life, [resurrection].” - Pope Francis***

 9. ***Mass is an encounter with Christ. Imagine inviting someone round for dinner. You start by chatting, having a conversation and then we sit down and eat together. Mass is a formalized and ritualised staying with God.***

 10. ***“The actual effect of the Eucharist is the transformation of man into God.” St. Thomas Aquinas***
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