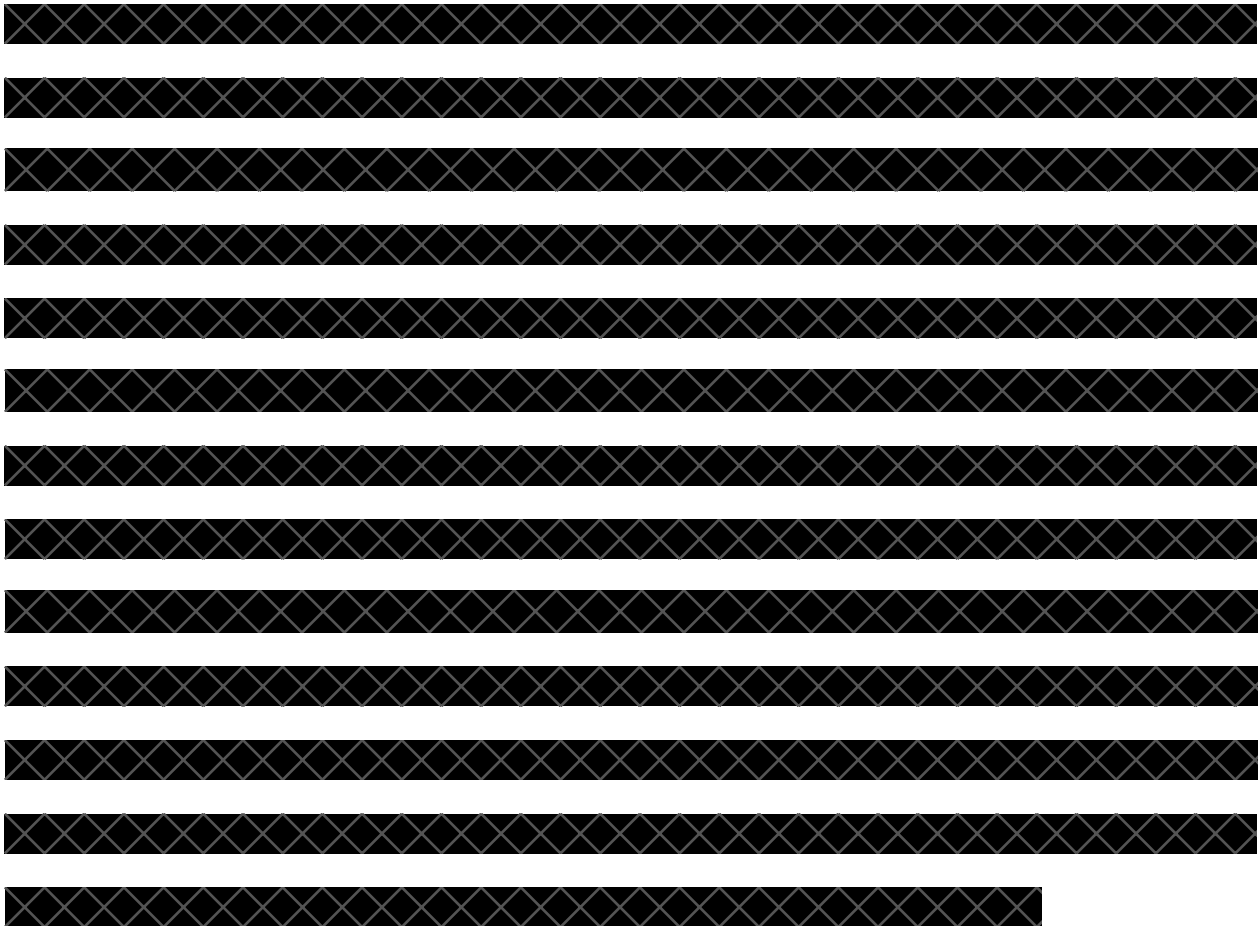


**THE MYSTERY OF THE EUCHARIST
IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



II. OUR RESPONSE

29. In the fourth Common Preface of the *Roman Missal*, the priest prays the following:

For, although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation. . . .

⁴¹ *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 1246-1248; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, c. 881.

⁴² *Didascalia Apostolorum*, no. 13.

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, no. 7.

These words speak of the grace of God, the gift freely given, which inspires us to give thanks and worship him, works our transformation into the likeness of Christ, helps us to seek pardon and to receive it when we fall into sin, and impels us to go forth and bear witness to Christ in the world.

A) Thanksgiving and Worship

30. Having been sanctified by the gift of the Eucharist and filled with faith, hope, and charity, the faithful are called to respond to this gift. Indeed, it is only natural that we give thanks to the Lord for all that he has given to us. *How can I repay the Lord for all the great good done for me? I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord* (Ps 116:12). The word “Eucharist” literally means “thanksgiving.” Even our manner of giving thanks comes from God, for we do so by following the command of the Lord: *do this in memory of me* (Lk 22:19).

31. The Second Vatican Council taught that, in order to give thanks properly in the celebration of the Mass, we should “take a full, conscious, and active part in the liturgical celebration.”⁴⁴ We need to be conscious of the gift we have received, a gift that is none other than the Lord himself in his act of self-giving. We become conscious of this gift when we actively engage our minds, hearts, and bodies to every part of the liturgy, allowing God through the words, actions, gestures, and even the moments of silence to speak to us. We actively and consciously participate by giving our full attention to the words being spoken in the prayers and the Scriptures, even if we have heard them hundreds of times before. We do so also by listening to the homily and reflecting upon how the Lord may be speaking to us through his ordained minister. We are actively giving thanks when we join in singing and in the responses; when we kneel, stand, and sit; and when we pay attention

⁴⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14; see also *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 835 §4 and 837 §2, and *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, c. 673.

to the liturgical seasons where the entire history of what God has done for us, in and through his Son, is revealed to us.

32. The gratitude that inspires us to give thanks and worship God in the celebration of the Eucharist should be nurtured and enriched by the beauty of the liturgical action itself. Bishops and priests have a particular duty to ensure that the Mass is celebrated in a manner befitting the sacredness of what takes place. As Pope Francis recently wrote to the bishops of the world, “I ask you to be vigilant in ensuring that every liturgy be celebrated with decorum and fidelity to the liturgical books promulgated after Vatican Council II, without the eccentricities that can easily degenerate into abuses.”⁴⁵ Priest celebrants of the Mass should have a prayerful understanding of the liturgical books, as well as of the feasts and seasons, and be faithful to the texts and rubrics established by the Church.⁴⁶ In doing so, they will lead the people more deeply and reverently into the exchange that is the dialogue of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

33. Our gratitude is also expressed in our worship of the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. These forms of worship are all intrinsically related to the Eucharistic celebration.

In the Eucharist, the Son of God comes to meet us and desires to become one with us; eucharistic adoration is simply the natural consequence of the eucharistic celebration. Receiving the Eucharist means adoring him whom we receive. Only in this way do we become one with him, and are given, as it were, a foretaste of the beauty of the heavenly liturgy.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, Letter to the Bishops of the Whole World, That Accompanies the Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Data* “*Traditionis Custodes*,” July 16, 2021.

⁴⁶ *Code of Canon Law*, c. 846 §1; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, c. 668 §2.

⁴⁷ See <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/frequently-asked-questions/ars-celebrandi>.

⁴⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 66.

We rejoice in the growing numbers of the faithful who pray in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, a testament of faith in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. We encourage this devotion, which helps all of us to be formed by the self-giving love we behold in the Lord's gift of himself in the Eucharist. St. (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta reportedly once said: "When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now."

B) Transformation in Christ

34. The person who shares worthily in the Eucharist is enabled more and more to live the new law of love given by Christ precisely because Christ communicates himself in the sacrament of the altar. The foundation of our personal and moral transformation is the communion with himself that Christ establishes in Baptism and deepens in the Eucharist. In the celebration of the Mass, we are shown what love truly is, and we receive grace that enables us to imitate the love that Christ shows us. St. John Paul II noted that the moral life of the Christian flows from and is nourished by "that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God" that is found in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist: "by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ's self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds."⁴⁹

35. The personal and moral transformation that is sustained by the Eucharist reaches out to every sphere of human life. The love of Christ can permeate all of our relationships: with our families, our friends, and our neighbors. It can also reshape the life of our society as a whole. Our relationship with Christ is not restricted to the private sphere; it is not for ourselves alone. The

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 107.

very solidarity or communion in Christ's self-giving love that makes the Church and makes us members of the Church orders us beyond the visible community of faith to all human beings, whom we are to love with that very same love that forms our communion with the Lord. Otherwise, if we do not love all human beings in this way, our communion with the Lord is impaired or even contradicted. This love extends particularly and "preferentially" to the poor and the most vulnerable. We all need to be consistent in bringing the love of Christ not only to our personal lives, but also to every dimension of our public lives.

36. It is the role of the laity in particular to transform social relations in accord with the love of Christ, which is carried out concretely in actions that work for the objective common good. Lay people, "conscious of their call to holiness by virtue of their baptismal vocation, have to act as leaven in the dough to build up a temporal city in keeping with God's project. [Consistency] between faith and life in the political, economic, and social realm[s] requires formation of conscience, which translates into knowing the Church's social doctrine."⁵⁰ Lay people who exercise some form of public authority have a special responsibility to form their consciences in accord with the Church's faith and the moral law, and to serve the human family by upholding human life and dignity.

37. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that the "Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren."⁵¹ Preaching on Matthew 25, St. John Chrysostom observed: "Do you

⁵⁰ V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *The Aparecida Document*, no. 505; see also *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 225 §2 and 227, and *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, cc. 401-402 and 406.

⁵¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1397.

wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk only then to neglect him outside where he suffers cold and nakedness. He who said: ‘This is my body’ is the same One who said: ‘You saw me hungry and you gave me no food.’”⁵² St. Teresa of Calcutta is an outstanding example in more recent times of someone who learned to recognize Christ in the poor. It was her deep faith in the Eucharist and her reception of Holy Communion that motivated her loving care of the poorest of the poor and commitment to the sanctity of all human life. In beholding the face of Christ in the Eucharist, she learned to recognize his face in the poor and suffering. Mother Teresa is said to have asserted: “We must pray to Jesus to give us that tenderness of the Eucharist. Unless we believe and see Jesus in the appearance of bread on the altar, we will not be able to see him in the distressing disguise of the poor.”

38. Pope Francis has warned us that in our “throwaway culture” we need to fight the tendency to view people as “disposable”:

Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, “persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’—like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’—like the elderly.”⁵³

⁵² St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50, 3-4: PG 58, 508-509, as cited by Pope John Paul II in *Dies Domini*, no. 71.

⁵³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 18, citing his Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See (January 11, 2016).

As Christians, we bear the responsibility to promote the life and dignity of the human person, and to love and to protect the most vulnerable in our midst: the unborn, migrants and refugees, victims of racial injustice, the sick and the elderly.

39. The Second Vatican Council stresses the importance of reverence toward the human person. “Everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus.”⁵⁴ The Council goes on to say that

whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury.⁵⁵

40. Just as we are impelled by the Eucharist to hear the cry of the poor, and respond in love, we are also called to hear the cry of the earth and, likewise, respond with loving care.⁵⁶ Pope Francis, like Pope Benedict XVI before him, has eloquently drawn the connection between the celebration of the Eucharist and care for the environment.⁵⁷ All creation gives glory to God, and journeys toward divinization, toward union with the Creator.

⁵⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27

⁵⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 49.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 236; Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 92.

41. We look forward to the day when all such evils will be eliminated, when the Kingdom of God is established in its fullness. Then, there will be *a new heaven* and *a new earth*, and the human community will dwell in *a new Jerusalem*, in which God himself will dwell with his people (Rev 21:1-3). No one will suffer from poverty or injustice or violence. We will be able to see each other as God sees us, without any of the distortions caused by sin or by structures of sin such as racism or the various manifestations of the throwaway culture. No one will be seen as “disposable.” We will be able to love each other in a way that reflects the way God loves us.

42. While it is all too obvious that in our current world the Kingdom has not been fully established, our communion with the Lord shows that the Kingdom of God is not simply something we await at the end of time. The Kingdom is already present, if not in its fullness: “The kingdom has come in the person of Christ and grows mysteriously in the hearts of those incorporated into Him,”⁵⁸ until its fulfillment when he comes again in glory. The mystery of the Kingdom remains present in the Church because she is joined to Christ as the members of a Body are to their Head. In the communion which is the Church, “the Kingdom of heaven, the Reign of God, already exists and will be fulfilled at the end of time.”⁵⁹

43. God has not only called us out of sinful indifference to do whatever we can to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom; through Christ he has given us the grace we need to do this. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* explains:

Men and women who are made “new” by the love of God are able to change the rules and the quality of relationships, transforming even social structures. They are people capable of bringing peace where there is conflict, of building and nurturing

⁵⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 865.

⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 865.

fraternal relationships where there is hatred, of seeking justice where there prevails the exploitation of man by man. Only love is capable of radically transforming the relationships that men maintain among themselves.⁶⁰

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

⁶⁰ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 4.

⁶¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1863.