

Supplemental Information for  
*The Celebration of the Christian Mystery—Sacraments*  
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Session 8: “Eucharist, a Sacrament of Initiation”

### **Suggested Environment**

In addition to the suggested items, it would be most appropriate to have a loaf of bread, a round or unsliced one, together with a large glass of wine or perhaps even an open bottle of wine. Note that the prayer in “Lifting Our Hearts” references the transformation of the simple bread and wine into our Lord’s body and blood. So the visual presence of those two “gifts” we offer adds a sense of presence. For someone who really wants to go over the top with creating a special sense in the gathering, bake a loaf of bread about an hour before your group arrives and see what the reaction is as everyone smells this welcoming gesture.

### **Sharing Our Good News**

As a follow-up to last week’s session on Confirmation, a sacrament that helps us to live even more in God’s grace through an awareness of His Spirit-filled-presence let me suggest an aide to focusing on an individual’s experience of His Spirit. See if you can get individuals to notice that there is a certain joy present when you gather as a group. Certainly, peace and charity as well as a kindness are almost palpable. These are clearly the “fruits” of the Spirit’s presence and follow from our Lord’s promise “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also present.”

### **Exploring the *Catechism***

Just as a note you may want to recall for your group that Pope John Paul II called the Eucharist, “the Source and Summit of our Life as Catholics.” Our belief in this sacrament and the importance we see in it is what separates us, unfortunately, from many fellow Christians in the area of theological belief. The real presence for many non Catholics is merely a representational notion or a symbolic notion, somewhat of a thing symbolized as compared to our belief that the Person of Christ is truly present.

In the second year of his papacy, JP II sent an Apostolic Letter, [\*DOMINICAE CENAE\*](#), in English, “*On the Lord’s Supper*,” in which he made the following observation: “I wish briefly to reaffirm the fact that Eucharistic worship constitutes the soul of all Christian life. In fact, Christian life is expressed in the fulfilling of the greatest commandment, that is to say, in the love of God and neighbor, and this love finds its source in the Blessed Sacrament, which is commonly called the sacrament of love.”

## **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

### **John 6:48-58**

“I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

This passage is really a whole course in theology all wrapped into a short 10 lines. The following is a very brief commentary:

“Jesus again tells the Jews that he is the bread that gives life (48). Their fathers (ancestors) ate manna in the desert. Later they died. That kind of bread ended in death. Now the bread from heaven (Jesus) is here. No one who trusts in him will ever die. Jesus tells them again that he is the bread from \*heaven. His body is the life-giving bread that he gives to the world (49-50). It is the human life of Jesus. Eating that bread means allowing Jesus into your life. You have eternal life (life forever). He will give his human body to save the world from sin (51).

The Jews cannot understand this so they complain to each other. How can he give us his body to eat (52)? Jesus is saying that they should eat his body. That is what they think he means. They should also drink his blood. Clearly, that would be an awful thing to do. His words have a spiritual meaning, but the Jews cannot understand it. So Jesus explains again what he means (verses 53 to 58).

Clearly, Jesus is pointing to the cross. He is ‘the \*Lamb of God’ (1:29). He is the one God will lift up, like the snake in the desert (3:14). There is only one way to understand this. It is through the death of Jesus on the \*cross. There he gave his body. There he poured out his blood. To receive him is like eating his body and drinking his blood. One needs to receive this by faith. You can understand this only by faith. But the people do not have that faith.

The food and drink that we eat become part of our human bodies. The eating and drinking of the body and blood of Jesus is like that. It is about being one with Jesus. He becomes part of our spiritual nature. We become one with him and he becomes one with us. He lives in the believer. The believer then depends on him for his \*spiritual food.”

### **Sharing Question**

It may be an easier to get responses if the question is more general: “What do you expect/we expect when we receive the Eucharist?” Rather than leading directly to being fed, it

might be interesting to hear expectations which may tie into something important for each of us to contemplate....why I do I receive the Eucharist? Is it just habit, because everybody goes up there, etc. Secondly, it may be interesting to try and find out what other “hungers” people have that need to be “fed.”

### **Exploring the Catechism (continued)**

This has some really good information that doesn't need a lot of commentary. Notice how many sections of the Catechism are cited. Here is a general link for the New Advent online offering of the Catholic Encyclopedia that focuses on [Eucharist](#). From that article the following is taken which also mentions the various names by which Eucharist can be known:

“Other titles are used, such as "Lord's Supper" (*Coena Domini*), "Table of the Lord" (*Mensa Domini*), the "Lord's Body" (*Corpus Domini*), and the "Holy of Holies" (*Sanctissimum*), to which may be added the following expressions, and somewhat altered from their primitive meaning: "Agape" (Love-Feast), "[Eulogia](#)" (Blessing), "Breaking of Bread", "[Synaxis](#)" (Assembly), etc.; but the ancient title "Eucharistia" appearing in writers as early as Ignatius, [Justin](#), and Irenæus, has taken precedence in the technical terminology of the [Church](#) and her [theologians](#). The expression "Blessed Sacrament of the Altar", introduced by Augustine, is at the present day almost entirely restricted to [catechetical](#) and popular treatises. “

For deeper insights you may also find the following links taking you to other key thoughts about Eucharist:

[The Sacrifice of the Mass](#)

[The Eucharist as a Sacrament](#)

[The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist](#)

### **Sharing Our Faith**

Those are some worthwhile questions. I would suggest also, if time permits, that a question about “How do we sense that through ‘communion’ we are really brought closer in unity to each other?” After all, it is really through our faith life that we are united with one another, beyond the mere fact of Baptism, through the graces of the Eucharist, into a practicing Christian community—the People of God—the Church—and through that body animated by Christ Himself, He is present, through us, in the world.

### **Living the Good News**

This is a key point to emphasize from this session. We should always be somehow different after an encounter with our God. Whether that encounter comes from reading His word in scripture, meditation, formal prayer, contemplation, or the reception of his very presence in sacrament, we should be a different person after that experience. Liturgists always

have a favorite question they love to pose: “What if the Bread and Wine change and We Don’t....” The true sense of Eucharist for us as Catholics is that it is the most intimate experience of union we can have with our God and it should shape us, even if very slowly and incrementally, on the path and way to the promises we have from Christ himself that this bread is the bread not only of life but of eternal life.

### **Lifting our Hearts**

In this small group setting which was normative for at least 4 to 5 hundred years, you may want to “break bread” among yourselves at the end of your session. Now whether you slice the bread, or truly break it, you will be taking part in a ritual that is hundreds of years old. The typical celebrant would break a loaf into several pieces and then pass those around, allowing the participants to break off their own piece. So you see when liturgists introduced the practice of receiving communion in your hand, as a Church we were returning to our ancient roots. It might be nice to pray a final prayer before breaking bread.

Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to

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