

The Sacrament of the Eucharist



from the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

271. What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is the very sacrifice of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus which he instituted to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until his return in glory. Thus he entrusted to his Church this memorial of his death and Resurrection. It is a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet, in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

272. When did Jesus Christ institute the Eucharist?

Jesus instituted the Eucharist on Holy Thursday “the night on which he was betrayed” (1 Corinthians 11:23), as he celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles.

273. How did he institute the Eucharist?

After he had gathered with his apostles in the Cenacle, Jesus took bread in his hands. He broke it and gave it to them saying, “Take this and eat it, all of you; this is my Body which will be given up for you”. Then, he took the cup of wine in his hands and said, “Take this and drink of this, all of you. This is the cup of my Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me”.

274. What does the Eucharist represent in the life of the Church?

It is the source and summit of all Christian life. In the Eucharist, the sanctifying action of God in our regard and our worship of him reach their high point. It contains the whole spiritual good of the Church, Christ himself, our Pasch. Communion with divine life and the unity of the People of God are both expressed and effected by the Eucharist. Through the eucharistic celebration we are united already with the liturgy of heaven and we have a foretaste of eternal life.

275. What are the names for this sacrament?

The unfathomable richness of this sacrament is expressed in different names which evoke its various aspects. The most common names are: the Eucharist, Holy Mass, the Lord’s Supper, the Breaking of the Bread, the Eucharistic Celebration, the Memorial of the passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord, the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, the Sacred Mysteries, the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and Holy Communion.

276. Where does the Eucharist fit in the divine plan of salvation?

The Eucharist was foreshadowed in the Old Covenant above all in the annual Passover meal celebrated every year by the Jews with unleavened bread to commemorate their hasty, liberating departure from Egypt. Jesus foretold it in his teaching and he instituted it when he



celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles in a Passover meal. The Church, faithful to the command of her Lord, “Do this in memory of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24), has always celebrated the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection of Jesus.

277. How is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist carried out?

The Eucharist unfolds in two great parts which together form one, single act of worship. The Liturgy of the Word involves proclaiming and listening to the Word of God. The Liturgy of the Eucharist includes the presentation of the bread and wine, the prayer or the anaphora containing the words of consecration, and communion.

278. Who is the minister for the celebration of the Eucharist?

The celebrant of the Eucharist is a validly ordained priest (bishop or priest) who acts in the Person of Christ the Head and in the name of the Church.

279. What are the essential and necessary elements for celebrating the Eucharist?

The essential elements are wheat bread and grape wine.

280. In what way is the Eucharist a memorial of the sacrifice of Christ?

The Eucharist is a memorial in the sense that it makes present and actual the sacrifice which Christ offered to the Father on the cross, once and for all on behalf of mankind. The sacrificial character of the Holy Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution, “This is my Body which is given for you” and “This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood that will be shed for you” (Luke 22:19-20). The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one and the same sacrifice. The priest and the victim are the same; only the manner of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist.

281. In what way does the Church participate in the eucharistic sacrifice?

In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, their suffering, their prayers, their work, are united to those of Christ. In as much as it is a sacrifice, the Eucharist is likewise offered for all the faithful, living and dead, in reparation for the sins of all and to obtain spiritual and temporal benefits from God. The Church in heaven is also united to the offering of Christ.

282. How is Christ present in the Eucharist?

Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in a unique and incomparable way. He is present in a true, real and substantial way, with his Body and his Blood, with his Soul and his Divinity. In the Eucharist, therefore, there is present in a sacramental way, that is, under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ whole and entire, God and Man.

283. What is the meaning of transubstantiation?

Transubstantiation means the change of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the Body of Christ and of the whole substance of wine into the substance of his Blood. This change is brought about in the eucharistic prayer through the efficacy of the word of



Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit. However, the outward characteristics of bread and wine, that is the “eucharistic species”, remain unaltered.

284. Does the breaking of the bread divide Christ?

The breaking of the bread does not divide Christ. He is present whole and entire in each of the eucharistic species and in each of their parts.

285. How long does the presence of Christ last in the Eucharist?

The presence of Christ continues in the Eucharist as long as the eucharistic species subsist.

286. What kind of worship is due to the sacrament of the Eucharist?

The worship due to the sacrament of the Eucharist, whether during the celebration of the Mass or outside it, is the worship of latria, that is, the adoration given to God alone. The Church guards with the greatest care Hosts that have been consecrated. She brings them to the sick and to other persons who find it impossible to participate at Mass. She also presents them for the solemn adoration of the faithful and she bears them in processions. The Church encourages the faithful to make frequent visits to adore the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle.

287. Why is the Holy Eucharist the paschal banquet?

The Holy Eucharist is the paschal banquet in as much as Christ sacramentally makes present his Passover and gives us his Body and Blood, offered as food and drink, uniting us to himself and to one another in his sacrifice.

288. What is the meaning of the altar?

The altar is the symbol of Christ himself who is present both as sacrificial victim (the altar of the sacrifice) and as food from heaven which is given to us (the table of the Lord).

289. When does the Church oblige her members to participate at Holy Mass?

The Church obliges the faithful to participate at Holy Mass every Sunday and on holy days of obligation. She recommends participation at Holy Mass on other days as well.

290. When must one receive Holy Communion?

The Church recommends that the faithful, if they have the required dispositions, receive Holy Communion whenever they participate at Holy Mass. However, the Church obliges them to receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season.

291. What is required to receive Holy Communion?

To receive Holy Communion one must be fully incorporated into the Catholic Church and be in the state of grace, that is, not conscious of being in mortal sin. Anyone who is conscious of having committed a grave sin must first receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before going to Communion. Also important for those receiving Holy Communion are a spirit of



recollection and prayer, observance of the fast prescribed by the Church, and an appropriate disposition of the body (gestures and dress) as a sign of respect for Christ.

292. What are the fruits of Holy Communion?

Holy Communion increases our union with Christ and with his Church. It preserves and renews the life of grace received at Baptism and Confirmation and makes us grow in love for our neighbour. It strengthens us in charity, wipes away venial sins and preserves us from mortal sin in the future.

293. When is it possible to give Holy Communion to other Christians?

Catholic ministers may give Holy Communion licitly to members of the Oriental Churches which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church whenever they ask for it of their own will and possess the required dispositions. Catholic ministers may licitly give Holy Communion to members of other ecclesial communities only if, in grave necessity, they ask for it of their own will, possess the required dispositions, and give evidence of holding the Catholic faith regarding the sacrament.

294. Why is the Eucharist a “pledge of future glory”?

The Eucharist is a pledge of future glory because it fills us with every grace and heavenly blessing. It fortifies us for our pilgrimage in this life and makes us long for eternal life. It unites us already to Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, to the Church in heaven and to the Blessed Virgin and all the saints.

In the Eucharist, we “break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death and the food that makes us live forever in Jesus Christ.” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch)

Information

The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is published by Catholic Truth Society. It is available online on the website of the Holy See with cross references to the Catechism. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html]