

# Basics of Catholicism

*This week, we begin a series of bulletin articles in which I hope to discuss and explain the teachings of the Catholic Church that every Catholic should know. Much of what we believe would be hard to explain in depth during the 5-10 minute Sunday Mass homilies, so these articles will be an opportunity to explore these teachings in greater detail.—Fr. Cory*



As I mentioned briefly in my homily, the Gospel passages for last week's, this week's, and the next couple weeks' Masses come to us from the Gospel of John chapter 6, commonly known as the Bread of Life Discourse. The title comes from a number of passages within John 6 where Our Lord proclaims that He is the Bread of Life. This chapter is arguably one of the more important passages for us as Catholics, as it is one of the Scriptures that support the Church's teaching on the Eucharist.

I've begun these bulletin articles with an explanation on the Eucharist due to the importance that it plays in the life of each individual Catholic and of the Church as a whole. The Second Vatican Council made this importance clear when it described the Eucharist as "the font and apex (also commonly translated as 'source and summit') of Christian life" in its document on the Church titled *Lumen Gentium*. This importance is reinforced in *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, a document on the Ministry and Life of Priests, where the Council states, "The other sacraments, as well as with every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it." This tells us that regardless of what we do in the life of the Church, from the smallest act of generosity to the largest organized work of the Church, flow from the graces we receive in the Eucharist and lead us back to the Eucharist.

The Eucharist holds this importance because of who it contains. Again quoting from *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, "The Most Blessed Eucharist contains the entire spiritual boon of the Church, that is, Christ himself, our Pasch (Passover) and living bread". Through the celebration of the Eucharist, we are united with Our Lord Jesus Christ in a way beyond any other union we can experience here on Earth. As part of this union with Our Lord, we "unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1326)

Every time we attend Mass, we participate in this heavenly liturgy and enter into the Sacrifice of Our Lord upon the Cross. Regardless of the terms we use -- Divine Liturgy, Holy Mass, Sacrifice of the Mass, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper -- they all point back to the sacred mysteries we gather to celebrate while emphasizing various aspects of those mysteries. They put our focus on the ritual sacrificial meal in which we all are more clearly seen as the Body of Christ through our receiving Jesus in the appearance of bread and wine. It is through our participation at Mass and reception of Our Lord that we see and live our unity as members of the Body of Christ.

It cannot be overstated how important it is to attend Mass and receive Our Lord while in the state of grace! To say that Mass attendance has become lax in recent decades is an understatement. For whatever reasons or excuses they might give, the percentage of Catholics who do not attend Mass weekly or even monthly is high and growing. And yet, if we truly desire unity with Our Lord for eternity in Heaven, why do we not seek that unity with Him now here in this life? As praiseworthy as it is for individuals to pray on a regular basis, no individual prayer, nor gathering as a group to pray or even joining our Protestant brothers and sisters for their Sunday services, can match the graces and unity we receive from Our Lord through the Eucharist.

This is not to say there aren't circumstances which might prevent someone from attending Mass, but we must work to make those situations as rare as possible. If there is a foreseen reason, such as inaccessibility of transportation or seasonal labor (harvest, branding, etc.), which make Mass attendance impossible, please do not assume a license to skip Mass on the obligatory Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. In cases where attendance would be impossible, then there would be no obligation to attend. Otherwise, a dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass can be granted by the priest, but on a case-by-case basis. In either scenario, please do not assume this dispensation! All you have to do is ask for it, and it will likely be granted if you have a good reason.

Outside of these rare circumstances, Catholics are under obligation to attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. When we attend, we should always seek to be in the state of grace and prepared to receive Our Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. This means that we should start by ensuring that any mortal sins have been confessed and absolved, and that we have received the Sacrament of Confession at least once a year. To have mortal sins on our soul (including missing Mass willingly and failing to receive the Sacrament of Confession) is to cut ourselves off from God's grace. By receiving the Sacrament of Confession, all sins are forgiven and any barriers between us and God are removed.



Once we are sure that we are in the state of grace, meaning that we are in right relationship with God and no longer cut off from His grace, it's important that we prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist every time we attend Mass. To enter fully into the Sacrifice of the Mass, we need to take time to focus our attention on the spiritual realities we're about to celebrate, and try to set aside the cares and concerns of the world. This is not always easy to do, especially during particularly troubling or exciting times in our lives, but it is still important to take time before Mass to enter into prayer. Of course, it goes without saying (but I will anyways) that this means being early for Mass instead of showing up right at the last minute or even late.

*Next week, we will continue this explanation on the Eucharist. Please let me know if there are any topics you'd like to see explored in these articles!*