

Basics of Catholicism

This week, we're continuing the discussion about the Eucharist by looking at why we celebrate the Eucharist. We usually say that the Eucharist is about Christ, which it is. Our Lord Instituted the Eucharist at His Last Supper, He gave His life on the Cross so that we might receive Him through it, and He is present to us in it. However, when we look at what is going on when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, we see that all three members of the Holy Trinity are involved.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church does a good job of breaking this down into three different purposes in the celebration of the Eucharist, highlighting each member of the Trinity: "thanksgiving and praise to the *Father*; the sacrificial memorial of *Christ* and His Body; and the presence of Christ by the power of His word and of His *Spirit*." Every time the Church gathers for the celebration of Holy Mass, or even when a priest celebrates Mass without a congregation, each of these roles of the Eucharist come into play.

The first one, thanksgiving and praise to the Father, is probably the most obvious with a basic understanding of the word "Eucharist". This word comes to us from the Greek, and translates into English as "thanksgiving". The Eucharist is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God firstly for all of creation, which is presented to the Father through the death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our attitude of thanksgiving continues in our gratitude for all the works that God has done, especially for all that He accomplished for the creation, redemption, and sanctification of the world. In response, the Church sings God's glory in a sacrifice of praise on behalf of all creation, united through Christ and with Him so that our praise will be accepted in Christ by the Father.

When we talk about the Eucharist as "sacrifice", we usually think of the second purpose of the Eucharist: the sacrificial memorial of Christ and of His Body, the Church. The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. This is not the sense of memorial as recalling and remembering the past, such as a memorial service. Through the liturgy, the sacrifice of Christ becomes present to us, uniting us through space and time to the one sacrifice of Our Lord on the Cross.

This idea of a memorial celebration joining us to an important historical event and making them present to us is the same as how the Passover was viewed by the Israelites. The celebration of the Passover made the events of the Exodus from Egypt present to them. In the same way, our celebration of the Eucharist makes the sacrifice of Our Lord present to us today. Through the words of institution, originally spoken by Our Lord and repeated by the priest acting in persona Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ sacrificed for us are given to us. In the Eucharist, Our Lord re-presents Himself to us.

At the same time that Our Lord's sacrifice is present to us, the Church joins Her own sacrifices to His. We believe that the Church is the Body of Christ here on earth with Our Lord as the head. As members of the Body of Christ, we unite our offerings to His in the Eucharist, and we are called to follow His example by

offering our entire lives in unity with Him and with each member of His Church.

This unity with the universal Church is most clearly seen when the priest prays at every Mass for the Pope, as well as the unity within a diocese through the prayer for the bishop of the diocese. This unity does not end here on earth, however, as we are also united through the Eucharist with those who are enjoying the glory of Heaven. In addition, our union with those who have died allow us to offer the celebration of the Eucharist for those who have died and may still be in Purgatory. The prayers we lift up through the Eucharist assist in their preparation and purification to enter into the Heavenly kingdom.

We see this unity with Our Lord in a special way through the third purpose of the Eucharist: the presence of Christ by the power of His Word and the Holy Spirit. As the Second Vatican Council document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explains, Our Lord is present to His followers in many ways, but is present "most especially in the Eucharistic species". The Eucharist is the most unique presence of Christ, as it is the only way in which Our Lord is present to us completely Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

The great mystery of the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist is that He appears to us not as flesh and blood, but in the appearance of bread and wine. At the moment of Consecration, however, the bread and wine cease to be bread and wine. At that point, they become His Body and Blood completely, which is why we should be cautious about talking about the "consecrated bread and wine". All that remains of the bread and wine is the appearance (commonly referred to using the philosophic term "accidents" of bread and wine).

After consecration, Christ remains present until the Blessed Sacrament and Precious Blood are consumed or destroyed. They do not revert back to bread and wine, but remain the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ. It's also important to realize that we cannot "divide" Christ by breaking the hosts or pouring from one chalice to another. Instead, each piece is Christ present wholly and entirely.

Often, the desire to worship the Eucharist flows from our belief that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. This is a fitting desire, as it is beneficial and laudatory practice to worship and adore Our Lord in the Eucharist. In fact, we are encouraged to spend time in adoration before Our Lord during Mass, in the tabernacle, exposed for adoration in a monstrance, and even during Eucharistic processions.

Our Lord remains present for us the tabernacle for reservation for those unable to attend Mass first of all, but also for silent adoration in His presence. This adoration developed out of a realization of the importance of His presence among us. Our Lord gave us the Eucharist so that He might remain with us even though He no longer is with us visibly. A very beneficial spiritual practice, made famous by Venerable Fulton Sheen, is to enter into a daily Holy Hour before Our Lord either in the tabernacle or placed in exposition within a monstrance. Through this beautiful time of prayer, we come to know Our Lord more deeply.