



That They All May Be One

A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Unity
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

1. “That they all may be one” (Jn 17:21). As Jesus prepared for his own death, he offered his priestly prayer to the Father in these words, longing for greater unity among all the children of God. Our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV has called the Church today to greater unity as the Body of Christ. Since the earliest days of the Church, from Jesus Christ himself, echoed by St. Paul and the Church Fathers, and affirmed by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, we have believed that the Eucharist is the Sacrament of Unity¹. In the Eucharistic liturgy (Mass), we both give evidence to and grow in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. In the words of Eucharistic Prayer III, which we often pray together at Mass, we are called to truly become “one body, one spirit in Christ.”

2. As a bishop, among my most important roles is to be a point of unity in our local Church, ever in communion with my brother bishops—the successors to the Apostles—and our Holy Father as our visible head². Thus, as Archbishop of Cincinnati, my task is to bring greater unity to our archdiocese, calling all of us to greater fidelity to Jesus Christ and to our life as Catholic Christians. This letter is an attempt to offer my reflections and hopes for the liturgical life of our archdiocese, so that all may experience greater communion with God and one another, through the grace of the risen Christ truly present when we gather for the Eucharist.

3. Unity in our liturgical celebrations by faithfulness to the Church’s liturgical law and norms is one way in which we share in our common life together. The Church’s ancient maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi* reminds us that as we believe, so shall we pray. While resisting the temptation towards mere *uniformity* where legitimate options exist,



unity is achieved through our faithful *ars celebrandi* (the art of celebrating) in liturgical celebrations. Use of approved liturgical texts and fidelity to the rubrics given to us by the Church is essential to maintain authentic unity in the Body of Christ gathered for worship, while, at the same time, honoring the many cultures, races, and tongues which make up our Church.

4. “Communion” implies that we are brought together to do something in common, not just individuals gathered to do the same thing at the same time. In the midst of our modern world, Christians are continuously called to come together, to value community, to be one; the mystery of the Incarnation demands more than just virtual “presence” on a screen. Gathered at the altar, the Eucharistic celebration is the primary way the Church comes together so that she may be sent forth to manifest God’s love to the world.

5. The celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sundays, is “the source and summit of the Christian life”³; thus, I echo the voices of bishops down through the ages, calling for the Eucharist to be the priority of every parish community, and therefore worth our continuing reflection, effort, and participation.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do I experience Sunday Mass as the “source and summit” of my life? Of my parish’s life?
2. What opportunities are there for greater healing of division in our Church? In our world? What part can I play?

¹ 1 Cor 10:15-17; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 26; Catechism of the Catholic Church 1396

² *Lumen Gentium*, 23

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1324

I. Communion and Salvation

God created humanity for communion, and throughout salvation history has worked to restore that unity first experienced at the dawn of creation. Through Baptism, and other sacraments, especially the Eucharist, believers are drawn into deeper communion with God and one another.

6. What do we mean when we speak of “communion”? Communion is a dynamic state of *unity* or *oneness*, in our case between God and humanity. When we speak of humanity, we do not simply mean all persons as a group, but each individual made uniquely in God’s image. All of us, therefore, both collectively and individually, are invited into a dynamic relationship with God. We experience the fullness of communion when all are brought into that relationship. True communion is experienced when all are made one through a sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ offered for our salvation. “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 Jn 4:20).
7. The story of our salvation is rooted in the fact that we have been created and redeemed for the purpose of living in communion with God. From the beginning, “in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gn 1:27). The story of Adam and Eve reveals a Creator who not only molded us from the dust of the earth but breathed divine life into us. And from humanity’s first fall from grace, God has sought to redeem us and restore our original communion. Throughout salvation history, we see the hand of God reaching out to us, seeking to set us free from the snares of sin and death. With the Incarnation, we see God’s most profound act of communion—God becoming human—so that through the Paschal Mystery (the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus), humanity could share in an eternal communion with our Creator. Now, in our own age, God continues to seek us out and, through the gift of faith and



the work of sacraments, draw us into that eternal embrace won for us by Christ our Savior.

8. Love is the heart of communion. First, God’s love for us, epitomized in the Father’s gift of the Son (Jn 3:16) and the Son’s gift of his life (Jn 15:13). Second, our love for God and neighbor. Beginning at our Baptism, when we die to sin and rise to new life, we commit ourselves to living out the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We strive each day to grow in communion with God and others by living in Christ and loving as Christ loves. Through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we deepen our love of God and neighbor as we grow in the virtues of faith, hope, and love and express those virtues through acts of charity. Gradually, we come to discover that communion with God IS communion with neighbor. Living in communion with our neighbor can be challenging; charity and love seem to struggle sometimes to prevail, whether with our family, at work, at school, on a sports team, or in a club. Our communion with Christ can assist us with our communion with others, as we learn to reflect his self-giving love in our daily life and follow his example of making incarnate (part of our flesh and bone) God’s unconditional love for all.

9. Love, therefore, becomes our mandate. The mission given to every Christian in Baptism is to bring faith and love to the world, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Washed clean in the waters of Baptism, clothed in Christ, walking in Christ’s light, and anointed for mission, we go into the world to share the gift we have been given

with others. This is not simply the work of some random missionaries; every baptized person is called to missionary discipleship. Whether at home or away, in our family, parish, or neighborhood, we take up the mission and ministry of Christ, who comes to save and not condemn (Jn 3:17). The command of love and the mission to manifest God's saving presence are the foundation of our conscience. In living out the commandments in the spirit of love, we grow in communion with God and one another.

“Gradually, we come to discover that communion with God IS communion with neighbor.”

10. The way we know we truly are in communion is when we obey God's commandments (1 Jn 5:3). St. Paul offers us sound advice concerning how we might grow in obedience to those commandments: “Have ... the same attitude that is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). If we can develop the attitude of Jesus washing the disciple's feet, seeking to serve and not be served, the Golden Rule becomes less of a burden and more of a gift. That gift of love, required for communion with God and neighbor, when given freely returns to us with grace in abundance. Jesus makes clear that the gift of love is not reserved to those with whom we have an affinity (e.g. family, friends, fellow citizens, and those who may think like us, act like us, and agree with us), but also with the stranger in our midst, our enemies, and anyone in need (1 Cor 12:12-13).

11. The Church—the Body of Christ—is the community in which we live out our communion with Christ and with each other, with Christ as the Head. This unity is not of a passive nature, that is, measured by a feeling of fellowship or by the lack of division, but by active concern for the spiritual and physical well-being of all in our human family. St. Paul never simply tells Christians, “Don't fight; don't live in disunity,” but encourages them to actively “preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit” (Eph 4:3). In a world so severely divided and broken, we recognize the challenge this presents. For that reason, we offer our thanksgiving in the Eucharist for God who nourishes us and strengthens us through the Body and Blood of Christ that we may never grow weary in the active pursuit of a world where all may be one.

Reflection Questions

3. Do I realize that salvation is God's gift to me (to which I must respond) or do I see it more as me earning my salvation (and waiting for God's response)?
4. How do we fulfill the mission to bring salvation to the world (near and far)?

II. An Encounter with the Living Christ

At Mass, Christ is actively present in the Word proclaimed, the assembly gathered, the priest presiding, and the sacrament of his Body and Blood. The Mass is not merely a means of distributing the Host and sharing the chalice, but a communal act in which Christ assembles the Church in worship, unites believers to his sacrifice, and fosters oneness with God and neighbor through a shared encounter with Christ, present in Word and Sacrament.

12. From the earliest days of the Church to now, Christians have gathered on Sunday, Resurrection Day, to fulfill Christ's command to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of him. So integral to our life of faith is the celebration of Christ's Paschal Mystery that Christians have paid the price of martyrdom to participate.



13. I fondly recall visiting a holy site in Ireland with my sister some years ago. This site was connected to a time when the law prevented Catholics from worship and priests were exiled or killed for celebrating Mass. The Church's members sought out hidden places in the glens, forests, and hillsides of rural Ireland where they could celebrate the Eucharist, often on a rock. These places are now commonly referred to as Mass rocks and are often pilgrimage sites. Our visit to that Mass rock reminded my sister and me that throughout her history and in various parts of the world, the Church has experienced moments of persecution.

14. Yet, because the Mass is central to our life in Christ, the faithful have always found ways to gather, whether in sacred spaces, in homes, or outdoors in nature. Our hunger for sacred communion reveals a core Catholic teaching: the Mass we celebrate is the *source* and *summit* of our Christian life. The communion that we share is a source of ongoing grace here on earth, especially in moments of trial or hardship. It also points us to what we hope to become and our full participation in the eternal banquet of the Lamb, where all hungers will be fed and where there will be no more trial or hardship.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

15. Born into Christ's life in Baptism, we are continually nourished by Christ through our sharing in his Word and his Body and Blood. While the Eucharist has forever remained central to our faith, many of us grew up with mistaken assumptions or incomplete understandings of it. Two major errors are: 1) that the

purpose of the Mass is simply to provide Holy Communion, and 2) that in the celebration of the Eucharist, people offer the Eucharist to the Father, then the Father feeds us with what we have offered (as if Christ is passively the Victim and the Food). To truly understand the Mass, we must realize that Christ is *actively* present throughout the liturgy, leading his Mystical Body, the Church, in every aspect of the celebration.

16. The presence of Christ in us, the People of God, is not a passive presence. To receive Christ is to also receive the Spirit, who calls us to action. As we receive and become Christ's Body, the Church finds herself compelled through the Spirit to not sit and wait for others to draw near. God's blessing sends us forth from Eucharist with Christ as our head and the Spirit as our heart, that we might enter into our daily lives and reveal God to the world, so that the Light of Christ might "shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16).

17. God's presence is always active and self-giving; such as when we say, "That person was really present to me; they listened to me, spoke with me, and stood by me." Self-giving presence is part of the give and take of everyday life. The daily attentiveness of one spouse to the other, or of a parent to a child, is what builds loving unity between them. Being actively present to one another becomes important in strengthening our relationship with others; so, too, does the active presence of God in our lives.
18. In the celebration of the Mass, Christ is truly present to us in several ways. The Second Vatican Council's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) #7 teaches that Christ is present in his Church when they pray and sing, for "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst" (Mt 18:20). Christ is present in the Word, since he is the Living Word, who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are proclaimed in the Church. Christ is present in the person of the minister who acts in the person of Christ, bringing order to our worship. And, Christ is present in the Eucharistic species, the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Christ. The many ways we encounter Christ in the Mass serve to lead us to communion. They are not in competition with each other and they are not measurable. We cannot say Christ is 50% present in the Word, or 25% present in the priest, or only 100% present in the Host and the chalice. From the first sign of the cross to the final blessing, Christ comes to us in our celebration of Mass, seeking to awaken our senses to his presence and send us forth from the altar changed by that encounter so that we may reveal Christ's presence out in the world.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

19. We celebrate Mass as a community. Just as there is no "I" in "team", there is no "me" in Catholic. Our faith is not individualistic, nor is it centered in one congregation or group of friends. We each do not have our own personal priest to celebrate Mass privately. We find the essence of our identity as Catholics in a communion that not only unites us to God but to one another. We are members of the Son's Mystical Body, and, as stones are joined together to form a temple, we are to be assembled together as living stones with Christ as our foundation. It is in the *gathered* People of God that Christ is made manifest to the believers and to the world. One Christian alone does not make the Church.
20. Yet, it is not simply that we are gathered that conveys the ecclesial presence of Christ; it is also the interaction of those gathered that makes Christ's presence effective. The

self-giving of individuals, one for the other and as a gift to the Father, brings about unity and builds up the Church. To be at Mass, participating fully, consciously, and actively, not only gives praise to God, but serves as a beacon to the broader community, a sign of welcome and invitation. In a world that promotes self-reliance, independence, and isolation, our gathering for Eucharist invites others into an experience of life-changing communion, introducing them to a relationship with God and neighbor that reveals the potential for peace and reconciliation. As the bells toll for the start of Mass, people of various moods and dispositions gather. No tickets are required at the door. All join in the opening hymn, including the crying babies and that one man who sings off key. Yet the terrible voice of the person behind us, the hymns that may not be to our liking, and the imperfections of the priest and the ministers, do not matter. The powerful presence of Christ can transform a disparate gathering of believers, using the mundane to reveal the sacred.

“God’s blessing sends us forth from Eucharist with Christ as our head and the Spirit as our heart, that we might enter into our daily lives and reveal God to the world, so that the Light of Christ might ‘shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father’ (Mt 5:16).”

21. One of the beautiful realities of our Eucharistic liturgies is that there are stylistic differences from one parish to the next. For instance, at some, the music may generally be more classically-inspired. At others, it may be more contemporary. The boundaries of our Archdiocese are blessed to include a richness of cultures- European, African, African-American, Hispanic, Korean, and Vietnamese, among others, celebrating Masses in a variety of languages. As we profess in the Creed, we believe in a Church that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Catholic signifies universal and creates space within our Church for a diversity of expressions and styles of worship. Whether we travel the world or simply visit different churches within our own archdiocese, we can experience a variety of expressions of the beauty that is our Catholic faith. Rather than look down our noses at anyone or suggest that anyone might be less “Catholic” than another, I encourage us to seek encounter, dialogue, and understanding. When the liturgy is faithful to the Roman Missal and embraced by the full community of worshippers of that parish, that community will surely be blessed in their worship.

22. The many diverse celebrations of the Eucharist find unity in a common truth of all liturgies: where two or three are gathered in the Lord’s name, there is Christ in their midst. Even if a priest finds himself alone at the altar, he celebrates with a heart united to the People of God throughout the world. Beyond the priest and the deacon, the laity also are invited to assist through their prayer and service at the altar to bring about an authentic encounter with Christ through reverent and well-prepared liturgies. Some ministries require special training and ability; all require humble service. Men and women, old and young, are invited into that service, not to receive but to give. The Church is not simply a gathering of people to receive a gift from God from the hands of a priest. Rather, it is the work of Christ in and through the many members of his Body. The various ministries of the Eucharist reflect the ways in which all Christians are called to act in the world: welcoming people into the life of Christ (greeters and ushers), proclaiming the Good News (lectors), lifting hearts to God (musicians), and assisting in bringing Christ to others (altar servers, sacristans, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion). The varied ministers at Mass should reflect the diversity of the community by gender, race, culture, and age. There should be no distinction between male and female ministers within any lay ministry.

23. Ministries are acts of self-giving for the sake of the community. Therefore, it is important that all ministers are properly formed for their task and have the competence to carry it out. While ministries often lead those who minister to a deeper experience of discipleship, they do not exist for that purpose; each ministry

exists to support the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the Mass. All ministers should undertake their ministry with humility and selflessness, which can assist them to live out the same outside of Mass in their daily life.

BEFORE MASS BEGINS

24. If we hope to encounter a welcoming Christ, with arms outstretched to receive us, we must create a space of hospitality and welcome for all who gather. I have entered too many cold and unwelcoming churches, where nary a “hello” or “good morning” was offered to me. Care should be given from the parking lot to the doors of church that all should feel welcome. Once gathered, we must pause to silently set aside the busyness of our day and prepare ourselves for Mass. While the Holy Spirit leads and guides our celebrations, it is up to us to prepare ourselves to be receptive to the Spirit’s work. We should arrive early enough to enter into a time of prayer and quiet before Mass. However, this quiet should be experienced as graced and sacred preparation and not punishment from those who might wish to shush us or scowl at us when our children struggle to settle down.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

25. Full, active, conscious participation begins with the opening hymn. Singing together reveals the harmony we hope to experience in Christ. Most of us are familiar with the ancient saying, “Those who sing pray twice”. Music raises the heart and mind to the higher realities of life. How often in the Scriptures do we hear of God’s people lifting their voices in song to God? Like the poetry found in the psalms, music expresses our deepest emotions—joy, sorrow, repentance, hope, gratitude—feelings that words cannot easily articulate. Singing also unites hearts and minds in a common identity, a common purpose, and a common action. Singing should not be understood simply as “icing on the cake”, but as “part of the cake”, a leaven lifting us to God, expressing the reality in which we are engaged.

26. Once we have gathered in song, we take a moment to acknowledge our dependence on God. We come to Mass with an awareness of our unworthiness. The Penitential Act foreshadows the words spoken prior to receiving Communion, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” We beseech the Lord’s mercy, and with the absolution that is given, freed from our sins, we offer our

praise to God in the Gloria. Our introduction to the Mass concludes with the Collect (the opening prayer), when we bring our individual needs into the silence following “Let us pray” and unite ourselves in readiness to encounter Christ in Word and Sacrament.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

27. When the Scriptures are proclaimed at Mass, it is not simply the lector, the psalmist, the deacon or the priest who read to us. It is the Living Word of God speaking through the voice of the proclaimer. The purpose of the readings becomes more than a moment to share historical stories and impart some bit of ancient wisdom. God speaks to us today, imparting contemporary wisdom that pertains to our present-day reality. Sacred Scripture communicates eternal truths that can assist us to know and experience God in our daily life. As we proclaim the Word of the Lord, we come to understand God not simply as a character of fiction that stirs our imagination, but as a companion on our life’s journey, stirring our hearts with divine love that is eternal and true.

28. Because it is Christ who speaks, it is important that the proclaimer both clearly communicates the meaning of the text and makes the text come to life through eye contact and body language. The homily, also, must be engaging. With a desire to break open the scriptures and pour forth their grace upon the congregation, the homilist must prepare well and preach not only with a mastery of intellectual knowledge, but with a heart on fire with the joy of the Gospel. On Sundays and other more solemn days, the readings and the homily lead us to the Profession of Faith (the Creed); made one in Christ through his Word, we express the unity of our Christian faith that spans millennia.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

29. We believe that in the person of the bishop or priest, Christ is acting as Head of his Body—the Church—leading us through the sacrifice of the Mass to the Father. From the president’s first greeting at the beginning of Mass to the final blessing, we are led deeper into communion with Christ and with each other, becoming one body, one Spirit in Christ. The sacrament of Holy Orders is witnessed in the Eucharist as the ordained minister surrenders himself in service to all gathered, bringing order to our celebration, lending his hands to the work of the sacrifice and his voice to unite us in our common prayer. As the congregation brings forth its gifts of bread and wine, the priest

receives them and places them upon the altar in the service of all gathered, that a fitting sacrifice may be offered for the praise and glory of God’s name and for the good of all God’s holy Church.

30. The Eucharistic Prayer is not simply the prayer of the priest. Nor is it a recipe for making Christ present in the bread and the wine. The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the people, given voice through the priest who stands at the altar. It is not a recipe, but a ritual that includes the participation of all present, all who gather with humble spirit and contrite heart so that an acceptable sacrifice may be offered and found pleasing to the God we have come to worship. The variety of Eucharistic Prayers in the Roman Missal (most of them from ancient texts) allow the priest to appropriately attend to the people and pray in a way that expresses the state of their heart and mind that day.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

31. The prayer begins by calling us to praise and thanksgiving, “Lift up your heart . . . Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” Then some aspect of the story of salvation is gratefully proclaimed to the Father, leading us to proclaim “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The reason for our gratitude continues, always culminating in the remembrance of Christ’s Paschal Mystery: his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Set in the context of the Last Supper, at which Jesus gave us his Body and Blood, we pray in response to his command, “Do this in memory of me.” The whole of the Eucharistic Prayer holds power, as it unites us in the sacrifice of Christ. There is no magic moment, no “hocus pocus” as the ancient critics of our faith would propose. Through the oneness of our prayer and the intentionality of our actions, we unite ourselves with God, changing the bread and wine into the fullness of Christ’s Body and Blood.

32. With wonder and awe at the power and presence of Christ encountered through our prayer at the altar, we can only respond with a great “Amen!” Yes, Lord, we believe that you are truly present with us! Yes, Lord, we are humbled by your power to lead us from cross to resurrection. While from the Last Supper the apostles were led to Calvary, our experience of bread and wine becoming Body and Blood leads us to Christ’s victory over the cross. Our praying of the Eucharistic Prayer does not simply recall historical events—Christ has died, Christ is risen—but declares transhistorical events, truths that go beyond history and become eternal—Christ will come again. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, Christ comes once again into our humanity and through the sharing of his Body and Blood sustains us on our journey to heaven and our hope for life with the saints.

33. This great prayer concludes with praise to God, “Through him, and with him, and in him . . . all glory and honor is yours for ever and ever,” to which the people respond “Amen.” This is arguably the most profound response of the Mass, because by it the people are claiming as their own all that has been prayed to this point. Sometimes we think of the Eucharistic Prayer as being prayed by the priest which we overhear. When we look at the text, however, we find that—with few exceptions⁴—it is the prayer of *all*, in which the priest is the spokesperson. “I” and “me” are not found in the Eucharistic Prayer. “We” and “us” are.

THE COMMUNION RITE

34. As we now stand clearly before Christ our Savior, made present in Word and Sacrament, we are truly humbled. We recognize that we are but God’s creation and are reminded of our dependence upon God. If we desire to become one with God through the Body and Blood of Christ that we soon will share, we must first pray in the words our Savior gave us. We pray to Our Father, giving glory to God and not ourselves, and we pledge that God’s will be done and not our own. We express our hunger for our daily bread and acknowledge our awareness that our hunger is more than something physical. It speaks of our desire to be freed of sin and temptation, and our hope that we may extend forgiveness and mercy to others.

35. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus instructs us to leave our gift at the altar and first go and make peace with our brother or sister (Mt 5:23-24). So that our reception of Communion may not be experienced in vain, after praying the Our Father we offer the sign of peace. Too often we might think of this gesture as a nicety, usually given to family or friends gathered around us. In fact, this action extends beyond the church in which we stand and becomes a moral act. While we may only extend a gesture of peace to particular people, they represent all people. The words “Peace be with you” are spoken to all humanity—to those we easily love, those we are indifferent to, and those we are at odds with or even hate. The simple gesture of a handshake, a wave, or a nod of the head serves as a prophetic act, calling us to be reconciled with everyone before we dare approach the Sacrament of Unity. If this ritual is taken seriously and executed with intentionality, it not only prepares us for the next moment of Mass, the reception of Holy Communion, but also assists in transforming us into instruments of Christ’s peace.

36. Christ gives himself to us in his Body and Blood. This is not a mere symbol, pointing to something outside of our reach and beyond our reality. This is Christ truly present, offered to us in the fullness of his divinity, his humanity, his crucified and risen life. Like the Hebrews who ate the Passover Lamb and were sprinkled with the blood of the Sinai Covenant, we eat the Lamb of God and drink the Blood of the new and eternal Covenant so that we might be brought into unity with God. And, while one can receive the fullness of Christ under either form, in the Host or from the cup, receiving both the Body and Blood of Christ manifests the fullness of the meaning of Communion and obedience to Christ’s command, “Take and eat . . . Drink of it, all of you” (Mt 26:26-27).

“It is in the gathered People of God that Christ is made manifest to believers and to the world. One Christian alone does not make the Church.”

37. It is important to note that Jesus gave the Church both his Body and his Blood to receive. While the Church teaches that one receives Christ wholly and entirely under either form, the reception of the Precious Blood makes more evident the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist as well as the sacrifice we are called to embrace in our daily living. Jesus asks us, “Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?” (Mt 20:22). Receiving from the cup also points to the Covenant sealed in the Blood of the Lamb, reminding us that receiving Christ draws us more fully into the New and Eternal Covenant. The norm of my two immediate predecessors, which I reaffirm, is that at all Masses, especially on Sunday, the faithful be offered Holy Communion under both species unless there is a truly cogent reason for not doing so.

⁴ For example, in the Institution Narrative and Consecration, the priest celebrant speaks in the person of Christ.

38. The words “Behold the Lamb of God” cause us to fall to our knees in adoration and awe, aware of our not being worthy for so great an encounter. The words “only say the word and my soul shall be healed” then impel us to rise, for the Word has truly come to us and now invites us to come forward to receive. What we receive in Holy Communion is a result of our prayer together and our participation in the sacrifice that has just taken place on the altar. For this reason, the Church teaches that, whenever possible, the assembly should receive Hosts that have been consecrated at the Mass they are celebrating in order to make evident the connection between the Eucharistic Prayer they have just prayed and the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ.
39. As far back as 1742, Pope Benedict XIV exhorted the priests of Italy to offer Holy Communion from Hosts consecrated at Mass rather than from the tabernacle, uniting the importance of the Sacrifice at Mass with the impact of reception of Communion⁵. Thus, in Communion we do not receive Christ without entering fully into his Paschal Mystery. We take the words and intentions of the Eucharistic Prayer and express them through our action of receiving Christ’s Body and Blood, committing ourselves to live what we receive and making our prayer our reality.
40. The norm by which we receive Holy Communion—that is, processing forward and standing to receive—is rooted in ancient practice and filled with theological significance. This procession is a reminder that we are a Church on pilgrimage to the heavenly kingdom and the promise of eternal life. Before entering the procession to share in Holy Communion, we declare, “only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” That Word is not only proclaimed but is a Living Word, alive and present before us, declaring our dignity as God’s chosen sons and daughters, redeemed through the victory Christ won for us by his cross and resurrection. It is the Living Word that lifts us to our feet to joyfully come forward and receive Holy Communion. While the norm promulgated by the U.S. Bishops for several decades now has been to receive Holy Communion standing, the Church does permit individuals to kneel⁶. Our collective posture is a witness to our belief in Christ’s resurrection. It should not be the case that an individual elects a different posture solely for the sake of demonstrating personal piety. In any case, the faithful are asked to receive with reverence, bowing before receiving and responding “Amen” aloud before extending their tongue or their hands. Through the reverent reception of Holy Communion, we are drawn—body, mind, and soul—into a dynamic relationship with Christ, revealed to us in the Body and Blood we receive and encountered in union with our brothers and sisters.
41. I imagine that many of us have been blessed with moments at Mass that brought us to tears, where the Lord was clearly revealed to us, truly present in Word and Sacrament. In these moments, there is no doubt that Christ stands in our midst. It has happened with me on more than one occasion, as I have distributed Holy Communion and the faithful have processed forward to receive. There have been moments where Jesus was revealed more clearly than ever, not simply in the Host that I held before each communicant, and not only in the words I spoke, “The Body of Christ.” In those unanticipated moments and with unexpected people, Christ was revealed in the man, woman, or child standing before me to receive the Host. My words in those moments became more than a statement of fact—“This Host in my hand is the Body of Christ”—they became a declaration of our identity as a people transformed through Eucharist—“You are the Body of Christ!”
42. In an instant, I am challenged by Christ, “Do you recognize me truly present in the people surrounding you?” Like St. Peter, I find myself asked by Jesus, “Do you love me?” and discover that my service as a minister of the Eucharist is a call to accept the mandate to feed his sheep. The word “Amen” spoken in that moment, becomes a deep and abiding “yes” to the Lord’s invitation to communion, where we become one with both God and neighbor.
43. In these moments, the prayer traditionally attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila becomes a lived experience. “Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours!”
44. In order to strengthen the grace of Holy Communion and the oneness we experience with Christ and the Church, a hymn is sung during the Communion procession. The unitive action of singing gives voice to our praise and thanksgiving for the gift we are receiving and draws us more deeply into the heart of God, where both neighbor and stranger find refuge. The reception of Holy Communion, while a profoundly *personal* act that touches each soul uniquely, is fundamentally *communal*, for it binds us together as Christ’s Mystical Body. The sacrament pushes us beyond a private encounter between ourselves and Jesus and challenges us to humbly surrender before the Lord who has come that all may have life. Aware of our place as simply one of many brought into deeper unity, we spend a moment in humble prayer with our brothers and sisters, grateful for the sustenance we have received, and await the Prayer after Communion.

⁵ *Certiores Effecti*, 2-3.

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Thirty Questions on the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*” 12

Our gestures, words, and actions affirm and strengthen our belief about what occurs in the celebration of Eucharist. Our hearts are stirred with gratitude for the amazing grace made present when we gather together for Mass.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

45. Following the Prayer after Communion, the priest says, “The Lord be with you.” At this point, the greeting carries new significance; through the celebration of Eucharist, we are more attuned to our communion with the Lord. What follows in the blessing of the Trinity is not a generic blessing, but one that is given in light of our having been renewed in our identity as a people created for communion in the image of Father, Son, and Spirit. The people are then dismissed, not with a simple goodbye, but with a commissioning to go forth, proclaiming the Good News and giving glory to God.
46. The Latin dismissal from Mass is “*Ite, missa est.*” For centuries, a common translation of this phrase has been “Go, the Mass is ended.” However, this translation lacks nuance. A more literal translation is “Go, being sent.” The end of Mass is actually a beginning. We are sent forth from the Eucharist renewed in our discipleship and ready to begin again the work of glorifying God by our life.

Reflection Questions

5. What challenges do I find in being able to prayerfully and attentively participate in Mass? What is something I can do to help overcome these challenges?
6. How does praying the Eucharistic Prayer and receiving Holy Communion impact my life? How should it?

III. Putting Our Love into Action

The Eucharist is not an end unto itself, but a commissioning to live Christ's self-giving love in the world. Having heard God's Word and received Christ's Body and Blood, believers are sent forth to serve others, to forgive as they have been forgiven, to care for the poor and vulnerable, to promote justice and peace, and to witness to the Gospel through concrete acts of charity and sacrifice.

47. Once the Mass has ended and we have been sent forth, the real work of living as a Eucharistic people begins. Having been privileged to share in the fellowship of worship and the saving sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, we are challenged to share the grace we have received with those less privileged. We go forth from the Eucharist with our eyes open, ears attentive, and hearts ready to encounter those who hunger and thirst for the grace of Communion and long to experience the blessing of God's salvific love.



48. I recently experienced this myself. While leaving the barbershop, the bells of the church across the street began to ring. This was not a coincidence. God had been seeking me out all week, but I was reluctant in my response. My attention was given to the great amount of work waiting to be done, and to the amount of struggle and strife I witnessed in the world around me. I should have known that God would not stop at simply ringing bells to get my attention. Steps from my office building, a man approached and asked for a minute of my time. I wrongly assumed he wanted more than a minute—he would want money, or food, or gas for his car. Instead, he asked for my prayers. He and his family were in the midst of crisis. Seeing me walking down the street, he felt God throwing him a lifeline in the midst of the stormy seas that were consuming him. My fifty-year experience of Eucharist suddenly stirred my heart. Standing before me was the Body of Christ, weak and wounded under the weight of the cross. My response was “Amen! Yes, Lord, I see you

and I serve you.” The man and I prayed together on the sidewalk. The grace of Communion could be felt in the air around us. I breathed deep, and surrendered myself anew to the Lord, moving from reluctance to conviction, and the man and I became an answer to Christ's prayer that all may be one.

49. Jesus brilliantly teaches us the importance of our embrace of missionary discipleship, a discipleship that puts love into action, through the parable of the servant who was forgiven his enormous debt yet chose not to forgive his own servant of a smaller debt (Mt 18:23-35). We must follow our Master's example by repaying in love to others the very love with which we were graced in the Eucharistic celebration. Having been granted mercy, blessed by prayer, and nourished in Communion, how can we not offer those same gifts to others? Pope Benedict XVI said it plainly, “‘Worship’ itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.”⁷

50. Following Christ's perfect sacrifice of having been broken for us, we are called to sacrifice in turn for others—to be a people blessed, broken, and shared. The selfless love of Christ paves the way of our discipleship. Along the Way, God provides the strength we need through the grace of the Eucharist that soaks deep into our roots and allows us to grow out of good soil, so that the Sower can count on us to produce fruit a hundredfold (Lk 8:4-8). Through our selfless

⁷ *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

service to others, particularly the poor, the vulnerable, and those most in need of our love and care, we demonstrate fidelity to the God we claim to be in communion with.

“Having been granted mercy, blessed by prayers, and nourished in Communion, how can we not offer those same gifts to others?”

51. Two saints of our time have spoken clearly of selfless love for others. Pope St. John Paul II asserted, “We cannot delude ourselves. By our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.”⁸ St. Teresa of Calcutta’s life and wisdom also exemplified this dynamic for us. “We cannot say that we love Jesus only in the Eucharist—naturally, we want to put that love into action. We cannot separate the Eucharist and the poor.”⁹

52. Each time we gather for Mass, we must consider how the Eucharist will impact us and our community. The transition from Eucharistic reception into Eucharistic expression, as the Body of Christ offered up for the life of the world, will continually be different. It may be very personal, as we attempt to build a new bridge of communication with an estranged family member or seek healing and reconciliation after suffering an abusive relationship. It may be more communal, as we care for the homeless and those who hunger in our community or advocate for the lost and forgotten among us. It may even be prophetic, as we defend the dignity of life and

accompany brothers and sisters in our human family who are threatened by the scapegoating or apathy of our society, such as the unborn, immigrants, and the victims of unjust violence and war. Whether the charity we exercise is close to home or not, we put love into action like Simon of Cyrene, who helped carry the cross of Jesus. We unite ourselves with Christ crucified and allow ourselves to be stretched beyond our limits in love for the salvation of all. Like Christ, who on the cross stretched out his arms in an embrace of all humanity, we must strive to extend the gift of God’s love and salvation to all, particularly those who have been made to believe they are not worthy of it. As Pope Leo XIV recognized, “The Eucharist opens us to justice and sharing, with a preferential concern for those who are burdened by poverty or marginalization.”¹⁰

53. At every Mass, we are given the grace to be renewed, to be reminded of our purpose, and to be loved once more through the sacrifice that Christ made for us. That grace must compel us to action and assist us to renew, remind and love the world. Especially when we encounter in the world fear, sin, and sadness, we must become messengers of faith, grace, and joy. We must allow our reception of Holy Communion to transform us into a people of joy sent on mission to share God’s love wherever it is most needed.

54. Joy fuels our discipleship. Joy is not determined by our current state, whether we find ourselves burdened by the weight of the cross or raised up in a moment of resurrection. Joy is found when we unite ourselves to Christ. Those who choose to follow Jesus Christ, build up his Church, and carry out her mission of charity in the world do so not out of a sense of arduous obligation, but through an experience of God’s love and an abiding awareness of the joy that is ours in Christ our Savior. Why do more and more people find their way to the Eucharist each year? Because the love and joy revealed through our works of charity are infectious. “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows,” Pope Francis recognized, “but by attraction.”¹¹ Jesus models this for us in the Gospel of John, when he gets down on his hands and knees and washes his disciples’ feet as an example of servant leadership, saying, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15).

8 *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 28.

9 <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/franciscan-spirit-blog/holy-quotes-from-mother-teresa/>

10 *Magnifica Humanitas*, 235.

11 *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14.

55. Our world confronts suffering, violence, division, and existential anxiety every day; this has been true since before the time of Jesus and his first followers. The particular challenges the world faces may be different for each generation, but the path of discipleship remains the same. Every generation must respond with charity and love to the present day's challenges. The Eucharist serves as the starting point for that response. The *mandatum*, Jesus Christ's command to his disciples during the Last Supper to love one another, compels us to love and serve with the same humility and selfless love Jesus has offered to every generation. May we, through our personal lives, our parish outreach and social justice ministries, our Catholic charities and other initiatives that celebrate life and promote dignity of all, fulfill our Eucharistic obligation by going forth from the altar to do what Jesus commands of those who sit with him at table.

“We must allow our reception of Holy Communion to transform us into a people of joy sent on mission to share God’s love wherever it is most needed.”

Reflection Questions

- 7. How does the Eucharist make me feel whole again as a person? How does it expand my understanding of how I am connected to the entire human family and to all of God’s creation?**
- 8. How does my reception of the Eucharist at Mass motivate me to spread love to others in a way that is challenging? Is there a parish ministry, Catholic charity, or community initiative that may help me to do this?**

Closing

56. With mind and heart centered in Christ, whose gift of communion defines and directs us, I pray that we may prepare ourselves well for our archdiocesan synod next year. May our understanding of the Eucharist—the Sacrament of Unity—assist us to embrace more fully Christ’s missionary mandate in our local Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may our Eucharistic identity determine our priorities, form our values, and guide our decisions so that

in the coming years we may best fulfill Christ’s plan to bring all things together in him. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for us and assist us to draw closer to her Son, so that an even greater outpouring of grace may be shared by our archdiocese, parishes, schools, homes and hearts, and more people may be welcomed into the gift of communion with God and neighbor.

This pastoral letter was published on September 17, 2026,
the memorial of St. Robert Bellarmine.

St. Robert Bellarmine, the secondary patron of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, stressed the importance of the unity of believers with Christ as our head, even making unity one of his 15 “marks” of the Church. May we all, like St. Robert Bellarmine, have the grace to see ourselves as members of the Body of Christ, called to be one in communion through our service to one another.

St. Robert Bellarmine, pray for us!

In Christ,



Most Reverend Robert G. Casey
Archbishop of Cincinnati

