

Gathered, Blessed, Broken, Shared

Diocese of Cleveland, Bishop's Convocation of Catholic School and Parish Catechetical Leaders

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The eucharistic revival underway in the United States comes at the request of our entire conference of Catholic bishops. This three-year project is calling us to a renewed belief in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, as well as a deeper participation in the liturgy of the eucharist at Mass. Eucharistic adoration has already undergone its own revival, inviting a new generation of Catholics to encounter a revered practice.

Your diocesan theme for the revival is “Gathered, Blessed, Broken, Shared.” I’ve adopted it for the title of this talk because it describes what happens at every celebration of the Mass. The words refer both to the eucharist as the Body of Christ and to the People of God as the Body of Christ. After we have gathered, the eucharistic Body of Christ is blessed, broken, and shared. But every day you and I, the Body of Christ, are blessed, broken and shared as well.

Some people are welcoming this revival at the disclosure of disturbing statistics from a study questioning whether or not Catholics really do believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, the results of the survey are not as clear as headlines lead us to believe. Consider what the Pew Study asked: “Which is the Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become actual body and blood of Christ, they are symbols of the body and blood of Christ.”

Well, regarding the first option, the Catholic Church prefers to say Christ is “truly present” or that the eucharist is his “real presence.” If by “actual” this question means the flesh, blood and bones of Jesus of Nazareth, that’s not what we believe. When you bite the host, Jesus doesn’t scream “Ow”. He is not actually present as the disciples beheld him, but he is truly present to us as the risen Christ. At communion time, the minister does not say to you, “The Body of Jesus,” but “The Body of Christ.”

The second option asked if bread and wine in communion are symbols of the Body and Blood of Christ. Well, it depends on what you mean by “symbols”. No, if you mean something apart from the reality. However, the General Instruction of the [Catholic Church’s] Roman Missal calls the eucharist “a symbol of that one body of which [Christ] is the head” (5). The eucharist is a symbol in the greatest sense; it is how Christ becomes present to us, under the forms of bread and wine.

The Pew survey resulted in headlines claiming that two-thirds of Catholics don't believe in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, or that bread and wine are symbolic. But those weren't the questions the survey asked, and neither of its options correctly expressed what Catholics believe. I have been a priest for 43 years, and that dire statistic bears no resemblance to the Catholics I've met in my parishes. In a sense, I conduct my own poll at communion time during every Mass. When I hold up a host and declare, "The Body of Christ," nearly 100% of Catholics answer, "Amen."

Nonetheless, this eucharistic revival gives us an acceptable time to renew our faith and devotion.

The General Instruction speaks of four real presences of Christ in the celebration of the Mass: "Christ is really present in the very assembly gathered in his name, in the person of the minister, in his word, and indeed substantially and uninterruptedly under the Eucharistic species" (27). Christ is really present in many ways. That is our Catholic faith. His real presence in the eucharist is the most sublime.

I'll divide this talk into two sections, one concerning eucharistic adoration, and the other concerning the Mass. I'm starting with adoration because many Catholics presume that our eucharistic revival concerns this form of worship. Then I'll speak about the Mass, without which there is no eucharist in which to revive one's faith.

Part I: Eucharistic Adoration

Here's how the Catholic Church defines the purpose of eucharistic adoration: "Exposition of the holy eucharist... leads us to acknowledge Christ's marvelous presence in the sacrament and invites us to the spiritual union with him that culminates in sacramental communion.... In such exposition care must be taken that everything clearly brings out the meaning of eucharistic worship in its correlation with the Mass. There must be nothing about the appointments used for exposition that could in any way obscure Christ's intention of instituting the eucharist above all to be near us to feed, to heal, and to comfort us" (82). That comes from *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, the liturgical book the Vatican issues for such gatherings as communion services and what we commonly call adoration or Benediction.

Eucharistic adoration is not an end in itself. It is not a substitute for going to communion. It leads toward the next communion. It supplements our belief that Jesus Christ left us his body and blood as food and drink for our spiritual journey. At the Last Supper, he said, "Take and eat," not "Look and adore."

It surprises many Catholics to learn how the same liturgical book describes the purpose of tabernacles. Many of us presume that tabernacles are there to provide hosts for communion at Mass and a place for private prayer. But the Church teaches something else: "The primary and original reason for reservation of the eucharist outside Mass is the administration of viaticum [that is, communion to the dying]. The secondary ends are the giving of communion and

the adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ present in the sacrament. The reservation of the sacrament for the sick led to the praiseworthy practice of adoring this heavenly food that is reserved in churches. This cult of adoration has a sound and firm foundation, especially since faith in the real presence of the Lord has as its natural consequence the outward, public manifestation of that belief” (5).

Ironically, the first reason for tabernacles is something of which many Catholics are unaware and take little action to fulfill. When you hear the words “last rites,” you probably think of prayers a priest says over someone on the day that they are dying. But there are various kinds of last rites, and the most important one to receive is holy communion, which a minister obtains from a tabernacle. To receive viaticum a Catholic needs to be able to renew baptismal promises and to swallow communion. But many families do not contact a priest until that time is long gone. The primary purpose of tabernacles therefore frequently goes unfulfilled. The secondary purposes draw all the attention. This eucharistic revival may inform Catholics of the importance of viaticum, and remind them that it can be administered by a priest, a deacon, or any extraordinary minister of holy communion. The church so desires to share this particular last rite, that it does not require the presence of a priest.

Eucharistic adoration may take place at any time as an independent celebration. However, “In the case of more solemn and lengthy exposition, the host should be consecrated in the Mass which immediately precedes the exposition and after communion should be placed in the monstrance upon the altar. The Mass ends with the prayer after communion, and the concluding rites are omitted. Before the priest leaves, he may place the blessed sacrament on the throne and incense it” (94).

That instruction reveals several values: The host to be adored is one that was just consecrated at the Mass. It therefore extends the fruit of communion allowing people to meditate before a host from the very celebration of the eucharist in which they have just participated. This is probably why the ceremony is called “Eucharistic Adoration.”

The ceremony has four parts: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, in which the host is set inside a monstrance for the viewing of the faithful; adoration, the period of time when the faithful as one or individually adore the real presence of Christ; benediction, when the priest or deacon blesses the gathered assembly with the host inside the monstrance; and reposition, placing the consecrated host back inside the tabernacle and closing the door.

The period of adoration may be limited or it may extend over many hours. Adorers plan their time accordingly. Traditionally, people aim to spend an hour in prayer before the blessed sacrament. They remember what Jesus told Peter sleeping in the Garden of Gethsemane after the Last Supper, “So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?” (Matt 26:40 || Mark 14:37). The faithful, then, “keep watch” with Christ for an hour at his command. At times that hour of adoration concludes with benediction; at other times the community’s adoration extends beyond the time an individual worshiper may give.

How can you best pass the time in adoration? The Church presents several ideas. For example, “When the faithful adore Christ present in the sacrament, they should remember that this presence derives from the sacrifice and has as its purpose both sacramental and spiritual communion” (80). The consecrated host comes from the sacrifice of the Mass. At any celebration of the Mass we each offer the sacrifice of our lives and hearts. One way to pass time during adoration, then, is to reflect on the sacrifices you are offering to God: the love you give your family, your faithfulness to school, your service at work, the time you devote to those in need. You may review your sacrifices in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, reminding God what you have been doing, in hopes that he will find your sacrifice acceptable.

The purpose is both sacramental and spiritual. Your adoration has a spiritual purpose lengthening the time you spend in the presence of Christ, but it also has a sacramental purpose, driving you forward toward the next communion.

The introduction to *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* continues, “Therefore the devotion prompting the faithful to visit the blessed sacrament draws them into an ever deeper share in the paschal mystery and leads them to respond gratefully to the gift of him who through his humanity constantly pours divine life into the members of his Body. Abiding with Christ the Lord, they enjoy his intimate friendship and pour out their hearts before him for themselves and for those dear to them and they pray for the peace and salvation of the world.... Thus they foster those right dispositions that enable them with due devotion to celebrate the memorial of the Lord and receive frequently the bread given us by the Father” (80).

Notice the request to pray for yourself, for those dear to you, and for the peace and salvation of the world. Part of your time in adoration can be devoted to prayer for members of your family, mentors who guided you, your friends, and the people who rely on you to form their lives. But notice also the importance of praying for peace in the world. A few national and international trouble-spots typically attract a lot of news, but keep in mind those that get less attention. When you hear of areas in search of peace, bring that intention to adoration.

The rubrics for adoration also say this: “the blessing with the eucharist is preceded by a reasonable time for readings of the word of God, songs, prayers, and a period of silent prayer” (89). Thus, it would be appropriate for those who organize the time of adoration to provide the proclamation of scripture, the singing of songs, and the recitation of prayers. There may also be periods of silence—and in our culture those are particularly appealing because noise surrounds us all the day.

A list of appropriate scripture readings is available from a variety of resources. Close at hand is the lectionary for Mass, which you can find in the sacristy of every Catholic church and chapel. Near the back of Volume IV is a collection of readings recommended for votive Masses. These are Masses that foster devotion to different aspects of our faith—the Holy Trinity, the Holy Cross, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, for example. One of these is for a Mass

with the theme of the Most Holy Eucharist. Another is for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Some people flip through the bible hoping to land on appropriate readings, but the lectionary has done the work for you, searching them out and organizing them by category. There you can easily find readings to inspire your time at adoration: the falling of manna in the desert, the angel providing food for Elijah, the institution of the eucharist at the Last Supper, the apostles gathering for the breaking of bread, the wedding banquet of the Lamb from the Book of Revelation. These and many more are at your fingertips in the fourth volume of the lectionary.

The introduction also advises, “In structuring these devotional exercises account should be taken of the liturgical seasons so that they accord with the liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead people back to it” (79). The first three volumes of the lectionary provide passages for all the seasons of the liturgical year. The Liturgy of the Hours offers readings from the bible and from sources such as the writings of the saints. It also provides sets of intercessions and hymns appropriate for the seasons of the year. The time of adoration is flexible enough to accept a variety of elements in a variety of sequences, blending times when people pray aloud together and when they pray in silence together.

The introduction says of those who adore, “Abiding with Christ the Lord, they enjoy his intimate friendship” (80). You may imagine yourself among Jesus’ disciples enjoying his friendship in passages from Matthew’s gospel such as the Sermon on the Mount from chapters 5 through 7, or Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve in chapter 10.

The liturgical book describing adoration does not say what not to do, but one’s activities during this time should be for the purpose of adoration. This is not the time to do homework, to message friends, surf the web, or plan dinner. Exposing the blessed sacrament is not like turning on background music or switching on a lamp so you may continue doing your own things uninterrupted by the dark. Adoration is like entering the room of an intimate friend or mentor to whom you give your complete attention.

When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, upon entering or leaving your pew, it used to be customary to make a double genuflection; that is, to go down on both knees for a moment. That rule changed in 1973: “Genuflection in the presence of the blessed sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed for public adoration, is on one knee” (84). The same Christ is present in the same way both inside and outside the tabernacle, and the sign of reverence therefore remains the same.

With regard to candles and incense, “For exposition of the blessed sacrament in the monstrance, four to six candles are lighted, as at Mass, and incense is used” (85). The blessed sacrament then should not be exposed without the use of candles and incense.

Many Catholics find that by setting aside time for eucharistic adoration they organize their entire week better. Sitting in the presence of Christ allows him to speak to their heart. As with any deep conversation, it fuels the soul.

Part II: Participating at Mass

Communion is the reason Jesus left us his Body and Blood. Eucharistic adoration helps us appreciate the communion we share.

Some Catholics miss the integration of their holy communion with their sacrifice in the Mass. At the Mass, each one offers the sacrifice of their lives to God. Each one offers the bread and wine. Each one receives the same bread back, consecrated as the Body of Christ.

At any Mass, the priest must receive communion from the bread and wine consecrated at that Mass; he may not consume a host in the tabernacle from a previous Mass. This applies even to concelebrants.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says this about your communion: "It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass... so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated" (85). Many parishes pay scant attention to this, fostering the notion that the communion of the faithful does not relate to the sacrifice of the Mass. The people come to Mass, and the people get communion, but they don't always see how their communion is the fruit of their own sacrifice in the same celebration.

This has led to strange practices that divorce receiving communion from participating at Mass: People watching the Mass on livestream do not receive communion. Some participants at a communion service prefer its brevity to the length of a Mass. Some Catholics leave Mass right after receiving communion. Some receive communion and then genuflect to the tabernacle or make a visit to the tabernacle, as if the reserved hosts are more important than the communion they have in their mouth. A proper eucharistic revival will help people understand better the point of the Mass.

The second half of the Mass, the liturgy of the eucharist, presumes that everyone there is eligible for communion and will be receiving communion. When incense is used, the people are all incensed together with the priest and the gifts: All without discrimination are offering their lives in sacrifice in preparation for communion. The eucharistic prayer offers intentions such as this: "grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ." All share the peace, an anticipatory sign of the unity to be achieved more perfectly in communion.

The prayer after communion presumes that all who hear it and answer "Amen" have all shared communion together. Take, for example, the prayer you heard last Sunday: "May the communion in your Sacrament that we have consumed, save us, O Lord, and confirm us in the light of your truth. Through Christ our Lord." Or the one you'll hear this coming weekend, which begins,

“Made partakers of Christ through these Sacraments, we humbly implore your mercy, Lord.” These prayers make no distinctions among those who have come to worship. They presume that you came ready to receive communion and that you did receive it.

Some people are ineligible for communion because of some continuing condition: They are married outside the Church, for example, or they are not members of our Church. The eucharistic revival may stimulate them to see if something can be done so that they may come to the table of the Lord. Others consider themselves ineligible for communion because of some temporary condition. For example, they accuse themselves of some grave sin, which, if unconfessed, leads to eternal damnation. Obviously, they want to confess their sin as soon as possible not just to receive communion but to avoid perdition.

Celebrations of the eucharist in Spanish are often the best attended Masses in a diocese in the US, but they may also be the ones when the least percentage of people receives communion. Some hispanic Catholics have still not heeded the teaching of Pope Pius X from 1905, who condemned “the poison of Jansenism” and decreed, “Frequent and daily Communion, as a practice most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful, of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the Holy Table with a right and devout intention can be prohibited therefrom” (*Sacra Tridentina* 1). The eucharistic revival may animate members of the hispanic community to receive communion frequently.

Finally, here are some tips pertaining to Mass that would enliven your participation in the eucharistic revival:

Prepare for Mass. During the week, pay attention to the sacrifices you offer to others. Pray over the readings and prayers of the upcoming Sunday. Come to Mass ready.

Come to Mass early. Arrive in time to visit with other worshipers and to prepare yourself for the eucharist. If you arrive late, your mind may be preoccupied with other matters and make it harder to concentrate.

Make the proper reverences. When you approach a tabernacle, you genuflect. If you approach the altar, you bow. Upon entering a church, many Catholics genuflect before taking their pew. That genuflection is to be aimed at the tabernacle, which houses the blessed sacrament. If the tabernacle is to the side, then genuflect in that direction. If it is in a separate chapel, then you may go there to genuflect, but make a bow to the altar before taking your place. Attention to this detail will help you derive meaning from these reverences.

Sit up front. The single most visible change Catholics in the US could make during the eucharistic revival is to fill the pews from front to back. You all make extraordinary efforts in secular venues such as school entertainments featuring your children and grandchildren. You get there early for a front seat. Why not do the same at church? You are a priestly people, and you are participating at the altar.

Sing and make the responses in a full voice. When the song is announced, pick up the participation aid. Even if you do not feel like singing, try it. Focus on the words. Give an example to those around you. If you look disinterested during the music, you make it harder for others to participate. Are you inspiring them? Or are you communicating your view that this part of Mass isn't very important? You are a priestly people; you have responsibilities at Mass. One of them is singing.

Pray. When the priest says, "Let us pray," he means just that. We priests are supposed to give you a period of silence after those words. The General Instruction says, "Next the Priest calls upon the people to pray and everybody, together with the Priest, observes a brief silence so that they may become aware of being in God's presence and may call to mind their intentions. Then the Priest pronounces the prayer usually called the 'Collect'" (54). Come ready to put your intentions before God at the beginning of Mass, and listen to the words of the collect to raise those intentions on high.

Listen to the readings. Do not read along with the readings. Put your books and phones down. Lift your head. Open your ears. The General Instruction says this: "When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel" (29). The reading is not a common exercise of checking out something God said in the past. It is a sacramental moment in which God speaks to you today. As you would with anyone who walked into the room to say something prepared just for you, drop everything else and listen.

Join the universal prayer. The General Instruction says, "In the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal Priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all" (69). Offering these petitions is your responsibility by your baptism. You have privileges, but you also have duties. One of these is to pray for the salvation of all.

Contribute to the collection. Support your parish generously. Don't make the collection a place to skimp on giving or to carry out grievances against your priest. Make it a place of charity. Your gift is not just about helping pay bills, though it will do that. It is an expression of your sacrifice to God. It indicates how much of your life every day you are willing to sacrifice to God.

Offer yourself. As the gifts are brought forward, imagine yourself going up with them. All that you have sacrificed this week is being placed on that altar. The priest says, "Pray... that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father." Have you made an acceptable sacrifice?

Give thanks. The word "eucharist" means "thanksgiving." During the preface at every Mass, the priest gives thanks to God for something. For what are you thankful today? Be conscious of that when you lift up your heart to the Lord.

Adore. During the consecration, when the priest shows you the host and chalice, look up and adore the Lord your God. To be precise, the priest is not elevating the Body and Blood of Christ to the Father. He is showing them to you

so that you may adore. You cannot see if you look down. Many times after the resurrection, Jesus showed himself to his disciples. In your parish church, at this very moment, he shows himself to you. You then address him in the memorial acclamation, such as “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.”

Receive communion. This is why Jesus died and rose, so that we might have life and enjoy his enduring presence in the sacrament of the holy eucharist. A eucharistic revival begins and ends in receiving communion at Mass. You may not have much control over this, but receive communion from the bread consecrated at the Mass in which you are participating, not from the hosts of a different Mass in the tabernacle. Switch communion lines if you need to.

Stay for the end of Mass. Holy communion is not an isolated moment. It derives meaning from what comes before and what comes after. What comes before is sacrifice, and what comes after is mission. After receiving communion, you return to your place singing. Your heart is so full of joy that the only way to express your love and gratitude to God is in song. Observe silence as it is provided. Thank God for the gift of unity with Christ and with your brothers and sisters who have shared this communion. Listen to every word of the priest's prayer after communion: They are few but rich in meaning. Listen for the announcements. Seek ways to get involved in your parish and community this week, so you may put this communion into action. Receive the blessing from the priest. Let God's good favor come upon you one last time. Then, most importantly, hear the command from the deacon or the priest to go forth to announce the gospel, glorifying the Lord by your life. At Mass we gather together, we sing together, we stand together, we sit together, we observe silence together, we sacrifice together, we receive communion together, and we go forth together, not individually, but as the Body of Christ, a community of people telling the good news to the world.

Although this talk and your diocesan theme for this revival is “Gathered, Blessed, Broken, Shared,” you could easily add one more word: “Sent”. This is the eucharistic revival that the Catholic Church is called to embrace: one that reaffirms our belief in the real presence of Christ and that begins and ends with communion at Mass. Then, having gathered as one, having been blessed by this communion, we are ready to be broken for others, shared with the world, and sent.