

# 5 Ways to Spiritually Prepare Your Child for Their First Communion

POSTED ON MARCH 20, 2017

First Communion is an important milestone in a Catholic child's life as they enter into the wholeness of their Catholic faith by partaking in the Eucharist. But there's so much to do to get ready, including sending invitations to loved ones, buying the perfect apparel, and selecting the most faith-filled gifts to commemorate it. While, of course, we want to celebrate this blessed event, we must remember that the most important preparation is spiritual.

Here are some simple ways you can help your child appreciate the excitement of their First Communion, while cultivating a deep, abiding love for Jesus and their Catholic faith.

**1. Talk to them about why Jesus is important to you.** Explain why you go to mass and take the Holy Sacrament, and how it brings you closer to Him. If you fast before Mass, explain to your child why you do so, advises Kathleen Wellman on [CatholicMom.com](http://CatholicMom.com).

**2. Say a prayer with them,** continues Kathleen. Arrive to mass a few minutes early to pray the **Anima Christi**, a simple Eucharistic prayer. As you leave when mass ends, instead of genuflecting in the aisle, take your child to the tabernacle and genuflect there. This will help bring them closer to the presence of Jesus.

**3. Take your child to Holy Thursday mass and Eucharistic Adoration,** advises the book **Catholic Parent Know How: Preparing Your Child for the First Communion**. It will be an opportunity for children to learn about the Last Supper, and is yet another place where children can draw closer to Jesus.

**4. Read the book, First Communion, by Mother Mary Loyola, with your child.** Even though this book was first published in 1890, its powerful, easy-to-understand message has been making the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist even more meaningful to children for generations.

**5. Explain the Eucharist in terms that are easy for a child to understand,** advises [Beliefnet](http://Beliefnet). Relate the Holy Sacrament to their lives. For instance, discuss:

- The "spiritual food" they will receive through the ritual meal of bread and wine. Just as food nourishes the body, Jesus nourishes our soul through the Eucharist.
- The friendship of Jesus - just as we love our friends, Jesus loves us. Through the Eucharist, He made it possible for us to be with Him (**John 15:15**).
- The gift of Jesus's sacrifice. Jesus's crucifixion was the ultimate sacrifice of His body and blood for our salvation. In the Eucharist, we partake in bread and wine which represents this sacrifice. It unites us with Him and His profound love for us.
- What it means to honor Jesus. Just as we celebrate special events, the Eucharist celebrates the most important event ever by allowing us to gather, remember and honor His death and resurrection. Your child looks up to you. While they will certainly get excellent education through your church and Sunday school, your example and guidance will set a solid, unwavering foundation for their faith.

We hope this blog post gives you a good starting point for preparing your children spiritually for the First Communion. Feel free to check out all of our resources that can help you grow their faith, and yours, including, **books, DVDs, and more.**



# FIRST COMMUNION DAY



**Bill  
Dodds**

**T**here's nothing quite as wonderful and terrifying for a young Catholic child as first Communion day.

If I'm that boy or girl, it's wonderful because now I get to step forward and receive Jesus in the consecrated host and wine just like the big kids and grown-ups. And it's terrifying because all eyes are on me. What if I trip? What if I forget my line? ("Amen." "Amen." "The Body of Christ. Amen.")

First Communion day isn't easy on a family, either. There's all the chaos that accompanies any major family event. A mother and father take turns singing out, like two choirs of monks facing each other chanting a psalm.

— Mom: Where's the camera? There's no film in it! We'll have to stop at the drugstore on the way to church. That means we have to leave here sooner. Hurry up!

— Dad: No, your good shoes. Today you have to wear your good shoes.

— Mom: Quit fiddling with your collar. Daddy is wearing a tie. You'll get used to it. Daddy! You **are** planning on wearing a tie, **right?**

— Dad: STOP! Drop the toast. One hour before Communion, remember? No food and nothing to drink but water.

— Mom: Here's your dress, all freshly ironed. Now try not to wrinkle it.

— Dad: Did you gas up the car last night? No? That means we have to leave here sooner. Hurry up!

All those worries fade later that morning as those young children reach out to accept Jesus; reach out to accept the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Redeemer of the World, Christ the King.

Reach out to hold in tiny, cupped hands the God who created their souls. Reach out to love, with tiny hearts and eager minds, the One born in a stable and laid in a manger, found in a temple; this God who became a human being — a little kid — just like them.

As the years go by, it's hard to avoid becoming, not jaded, but casual about receiving Holy Communion. It's just what one does at Mass. Stand for the Gospel. Kneel for the eucharistic prayer. Step for-

ward for Communion.

That's why first Communion day is important not just for a second-grader, but for a family. For a parish. For a Church.

As a family — a parish, a Church — we are saying to that child: This is what we believe. Jesus took bread. . . Jesus took the cup. . . And through the words He said on that night, through the words the priest says today, those ordinary items become **Christ**. They become His Body and His Blood.

Not in a symbolic way. Not in a "tooth fairy, Santa Claus" way. But **really** Him.

But how is that possible? How can that happen? We don't know. It's not magical, but it is mysterious. It's beyond our understanding.

And it's a hard truth. There are people who turn away from Jesus as they turn away from this. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" some of Christ's disciples asked. Not long after that, they "returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him" (Jn 6:47-66).

When that happened, Jesus looked at His Twelve Apostles and asked them point blank: "Do you also want to leave?"

They had free will. They could decide.

So can we.

And on some spring Sunday mornings we can let 7- and 8-year-olds lead us in our answer. We can follow them — with their anxious eyes and fluttering hearts — as their actions echo the words of Peter's response to Christ's question in John 6:68-69: "You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." ■





# | How to Spiritually Prepare Your Child for First Communion

BY GUEST ON MARCH 18, 2012

ARTICLES FROM OUR CONTRIBUTORS



It has finally arrived on the horizon . . . the day of your child's First Holy Communion. You've probably been waiting and preparing for this moment for quite some time. You've labored to raise your little one in the Catholic faith, and now they're taking their next big step! It's pretty exciting to know that your child is soon to receive the body, blood, soul, and divinity of

Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Just think . . . soon your child will not only share your DNA, they will also share with you in the Body of Christ! This will be a new kind of communion with your child that you have never experienced before.

Unfortunately, though, with all the logistics (finding the right First Communion apparel, sending out First Communion invitations, cleaning your house for the relatives, baking up a storm, etc.) it's more than easy to get lost in the hustle and completely neglect the most important thing of all—spiritually preparing your child for their special day.

It's tempting to rely on your child's religious educators to teach them the importance of receiving the Eucharist, especially when you have so much to do. However, the truth of the matter is that your child's preparation for this Sacrament begins and ends with you, the parent. You are the most influential person in your child's life, and the reverence you model for the Eucharist is the reverence they will learn to imitate. Here are a few easy tips on how to keep yourself and your child focused on the real meaning of this amazing Sacrament.

## **First: Find Those Mini Catechesis Moments**

- An easy way to reverence the Eucharist is simply to talk to your child about why you go to Mass. For example, on a day that you attend Mass, tell your child that you are going to be with Jesus in a special way and to receive Him into your body. If you attend weekday masses, tell your child that you go to Mass more often so that you can receive Jesus more often. Get them excited about it!
- When you begin your hour-long fast before Mass, announce to your child what you are doing and invite them to fast for this hour with you. Explain to them why you are fasting, that you are preparing yourself spiritually and physically to receive Jesus into your body.
- Draw your child more deeply into Eucharistic reverence by praying with them before and after you receive Holy Communion. The Anima Christi is a beautiful and simple Eucharistic prayer that you and your child can practice memorizing together, and it's usually found in the Missal. Just arrive to Mass a few minutes early and pray this prayer together. Saying a special prayer in this way will teach your child to reverence the holy moment of receiving Communion.
- As you leave the pews when Mass ends, instead of genuflecting in the aisle, walk with your child up to the tabernacle and genuflect with them there. This will teach to your child that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, and His resting place until the next Mass is in the tabernacle.

Note: If you need help finding the right words for these little moments, try using a Children's Catechism until you get the hang of it. The idea is to continually reinforce to your child, in

**Note:** If you need help finding the right words for these little moments, try using a Children's Catechism until you get the hang of it. The idea is to continually reinforce to your child, in your own words, that it is Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist that draws your family to Mass.

### **Second: Take Your Child to Eucharistic Adoration**

Pope John Paul II and the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI have recommended children's Eucharistic adoration as a great way to prepare your children spiritually for their First Communion. Don't be concerned that your child won't understand what Eucharistic adoration is (you don't even have to use those words), or that they won't be able to sit quietly. Just tell your child that you are going to spend a few minutes sitting and talking with Jesus, and invite them to talk to Jesus too.

**Note:** Remember that children are easy believers, and spiritual realities are not often difficult for them to grasp when plainly explained. You may find that your child not only grasps the concept of Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist, but that they actually respond positively to the adoration experience.

### **Third: Reinforce with Literature**

Your child may not understand the Mass very well, but that doesn't mean that they can't participate in their own way and on their own level with what is happening. There are great children's Mass books and other Catholic children's books that explain Holy Communion. These books will help to reinforce your teaching about the specialness of Jesus in the Eucharist. If you bring books for your child to look at during Mass, make sure it's a children's missal or other Catholic children's catechesis books. Let Mass be a holy hour for your child just as it is for you.

With these simple tips you can begin preparing your child now for their special day with Jesus, when they receive Him for the first time in the sacrament of Holy Communion. If you have found any other helpful ways to prepare your child spiritually for First Holy Communion, please share your comments with our readers below.

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## **Tips for Parents of First Communion children**

*"Do you believe in God?" the catechist asked.*

*The child replied, "Yes!"*

*"Why do you believe in God?"*

*The child thought a moment, "I don't know why. I think it runs in the family."*

Mums and Dads, if you're asking the question, "How can we - in our home church - prepare our child for first Communion?" then, your child is already growing up in the atmosphere where believing, knowing and experiencing God just runs in the family. It is part of the fabric of our everyday life. And in reality, that is the first and foremost "thing to do" to prepare your child for first Communion:

- 1. Realize that you already have been preparing your child for first Communion** since the day he or she was born. Eucharist is about the absolute love of God for us. The ways you have loved, cared for and modelled forgiveness speak of the unconditional love of our God. Our most intimate experiences of God's presence with us often occur within the everyday moments, interactions and relationships of family life. The challenge is that sometimes we are so busy that we miss them. Family life is holy, is sacred. That is where God is.
- 2. Talk together.** Tell stories about your God times. Use scripture stories, the wonderful children's literature. Answer their questions, even the ones they're not asking!
- 3. Stress the connection of baptism and Eucharist.** Get out your photo albums and recall your child's baptism. Unpack the baptismal garment and tell its history: when and where you bought it or who made it, who else wore it. Attend the Easter Vigil as a family.
- 4. Celebrate the liturgical seasons at home:** Advent wreaths, putting up the crib, Epiphany house blessing, reading scripture stories,



celebrating baptismal anniversaries, talking about family members' baptism and first Communion photos, etc.

**5. Put a little extra into family meals** (they have a big connection to Eucharist!) Let your child decorate the table for an evening meal. Talk about special meals your family has shared.

**6. Pray as a family** – often and as a natural part of family life: mealtimes, bedtimes, happy times, worrisome times, after an argument, when someone is in trouble, always on special occasions (Thanksgiving, birthdays, baptismal days.)

**7. Make Mass a family event.** Sit near the front. Point out one or two things each week for your child to watch for. Talk about the homily on the way home. Before liturgy talk with your family about who you want to pray for during the General Intercessions; and what you want to thank God for during the Eucharistic Prayer.

**8. Grow together in appreciation of God's Word.** On Saturday evenings, read the scriptures you will hear at Mass. What is God saying to your family this weekend?

**9. Take a tour of your church.** Point out to your child where he or she was baptized, show him or her the altar up close, the tabernacle, the oils, etc.

**10.** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us the Eucharist commits us to the poor (#1397.) Together **fix a meal for a neighbour in need**, sort through toys and clothing for gifts to the poor, visit a nursing home, add pennies to a charitable donation.

**11. Keep first Communion first.** It should be just what we call it: first. Don't put so much emphasis on this one. It's important because it is the first of many, the first of a lifetime of coming to the Table. In reality, most of these suggestions are not just about preparation for first Communion, they are about living the wonder of our Catholic family all the time.





# A Quick Guide to Praying the Mass

By Sr. Brittany Harrison, FMA

*Notes on what is happening at different moments of the Mass*





**I** became a convert to Catholicism at age 14, so I never learned how to pray the Mass as a child. My later learning and eventual studying the prayers of the Mass and its spiritual movements greatly enriched my liturgical experience and worship. I offer the following guide to the Mass as a helpful and simple start to begin praying the liturgy with increased fervor and devotion.

*Liturgy* means “work of the people,” which implies that we have to *do something* instead of just passively sitting in the pews at Mass. Let’s dive into some tips for being more prepared for Mass so we can actively participate.

**BEFORE MASS:** Try to arrive a few minutes early to recollect yourself and calm your body and mind. Our

culture seems always in a rush. If you are blessed to have a parish that allows a time of silence and recollection before Mass, try to give yourself at least five minutes to take a deep breath, settle into your seat, and thank God for this time of worship. In these moments before Mass, call to mind where you are. What intentions do you wish to offer God during this Mass? Why have you come to the altar this morning? Set your purpose.

Try to release the tension you’re carrying in your body, because in the Mass we worship God with our soul *and* our body (that is why we stand, sit, and kneel at certain points). Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer during the Mass.

**SILENCE:** Silence might make us uncomfortable because it alerts us to the chaotic noise within ourselves. There should be periods of silence during the Mass. (Catechists can learn more about this by reading the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Find it at [USCCB.org](http://USCCB.org).) These moments call us to still our minds and hearts to hear the Holy Spirit. As anxieties and distractions pop up, visualize offering them to Jesus, and gradually the internal storm will still.

**SIGN OF THE CROSS:** This moment reminds us of our Baptism and our relationship with the Holy Trinity. We are all called to bear the cross as Christians, and we mark it upon our bodies physically while renewing our desire to witness to Christ day by day.

In this moment I like to recall all of the Christians who cannot attend Mass for whatever reason, whether they are sick or homebound, suffering persecution, or imprisoned. I bring them to God at the beginning of the Mass, for the sacrifice of Jesus unites us with one another.

**KYRIE ELEISON/CONFITEOR:** Call to mind whatever comes between you and God as well as you and others. Offer forgiveness to the people who have hurt you. Ask God to bless them in place of the pain you’ve experienced. Ask for forgiveness and healing for the ways in which you’ve failed to live up to your Christian calling to holiness and love. Remember that God’s love does not depend upon how “good” you are, but constantly invites you to strive to be better. The Kyrie and Confiteor (“I confess ...”) are as much a time of repentance as a time of rejoicing in the greatness of God’s mercy and love.

**READINGS AND HOMILY:** As you sit down, ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to hear the message he has for you today. Whether it be a word



## Resources

■ **The Mass** by Bishop Robert Barron (DVD, Ignatius Press) — Bishop Barron walks us through the entire Mass with the history and deeper meaning of each part. It's a great way to visually refresh and enrich our understanding of it.

■ **The Mass and the Saints** by Fr. Thomas Crean, OP (Ignatius Press) — Combining the writings of the saints and Church Fathers with more contemporary reflections, this text guides the reader to have an understanding of the development of the Sacred Liturgy and appreciation for its role in our spiritual lives.

■ **If Your Mind Wanders at Mass** by Thomas Howards (Ignatius Press) — A perfect text for those who battle distractions and boredom at Mass!

■ **The Power of Daily Mass: How Frequent Participation in the Eucharist Can Transform Your Life** by Bert Ghezzi (Ave Maria Press) — Contemporary testimonies, the witness of the saints, and the author's own experience combine to offer a credible and convincing argument for the value of daily Mass attendance. Even if you cannot go to Mass every day because of work or other responsibilities, it will help you to have a deeper appreciation for the gift of the Mass.

■ **The Wonders of the Mass** by Fr. Paul O'Sullivan, OP (TAN Books) — A small booklet, but packed with inspirational stories about how the Mass can transform our lives; it can be read in less than an hour.

■ **A Devotional Journey into the Mass: How Mass Can Become a Time of Grace, Nourishment, and Devotion** by Christopher Carstens (Sophia Institute Press) — A very approachable text empowering readers to pray the Mass.

■ **Eucharist (Threshold Bible Study)** by Stephen J. Binz (Twenty-Third Publications) — Explore the biblical background of the Eucharist through the Old and New Testaments. Discover that the Eucharist unites the prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of our lives as an offering in union with Christ.

or phrase or a particular idea, pray for the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit to help you truly hear the Word of God and faithfully carry it out. A phrase from Scripture may jump out at you, or a lyric from one of the songs, or a line from the homily; if it stays with you, ruminate on it, ponder it, and take it with you from the Mass into your everyday life.

**CREED:** The Creed is a summary of the most important things we believe as Catholic Christians. So

many Christians have died as martyrs for the sake of what the Creed professes. Do I, too, truly believe what the Creed states? Pray for the gift of faith and the courage to witness to it. If anything is confusing, resolve to better understand it through personal study. Ask God to give you insight into what confuses or troubles you so you can better understand what you are saying when you pray it.

**PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL:** These are the prayers of the universal Church, of people all over the world. They embrace leaders, the sufferings of others, the needs of our country, and the community at prayer. What specific intentions or petitions do you want to join to the Church's prayer during this time?

**OFFERTORY:** This is the preparation of the gifts of the bread and wine that will be brought to the altar on behalf of us all. Yet we should never come to Mass empty-handed. This is more than bringing our financial stewardship gifts, though support of the parish is important. Ask yourself: "What sacrifices, acts of love, gratitude, and trust can I offer to God in this moment?" Maybe a difficult situation is bringing you stress; offer it to God with trust. Perhaps your heart is singing because your children did something wonderful; offer them to God in gratitude. We all have something to bring, and it's important to spiritually place it on the altar to be offered to God as our "sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15).

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (Sanctus):** This prayer joins our voices with the prayer of the angels (see Revelation 4:8) as the Eucharistic Prayer gets underway.

**EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER:** This is the priestly prayer that leads to the high point of the Mass when the bread and wine are consecrated and become the true Body and Blood of Jesus. It is a long prayer that requires reverence on our part. Some people find reading along with the prayer helps them enter it more deeply.

**CONSECRATION:** This is the moment when Jesus, our Lord and King, becomes truly present in the Eucharist. Although we cannot see him with bodily eyes, we can perceive him through the eyes of faith. Adore and thank him for coming. Some people like to prayerfully repeat the words of St. Thomas at the elevation: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

**THE GREAT AMEN:** This is connected to the ultimate moment Jesus offered his life to the Father to atone for our sins. The sacrifice is accomplished. Try to really mean your "amen," which is the same



as saying "I believe" or "It is true."

**SIGN OF PEACE:** In wishing peace to those around us, let us spiritually offer peace to those who have hurt or offended us, asking God to heal them and our memories of the pain they caused.

**LAMB OF GOD:** The Lamb of God not only recalls the biblical event of the Passover in which the lamb was slain and sacrificed for God's chosen people before they were delivered from their bondage in Egypt (see Exodus 12:1-14), but it also notes the exclamation of John the Baptist that Jesus is the new Lamb of God who will deliver us from our sins: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

**"LORD, I AM NOT WORTHY ...":** The prayer "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof ..." is based on the words of the centurion who recognized how unworthy he was to have Jesus enter his home (see Matthew 8:8). His faith in Jesus and his humility moved Jesus to perform a great miracle and heal his servant. This is a good time to reflect on our unworthiness, but to also rejoice in God's gratuitous and generous love and mercy.

**COMMUNION:** Receiving Communion is your special time with Jesus. Don't pretend to be anything other than who you are in that moment. (Even if you do not receive Communion, it is an opportunity to speak to him heart-to-heart and make a spiritual Communion, simply expressing a desire to be with him). During this time his Sacred Heart is entirely open to us. What troubles, joys, and requests do you bring to Jesus? Do not forget to spend some time thanking him for all he does. If you're going to Mass in

another language, speak to him in your native dialect, in your own way, naturally.

**FINAL BLESSING:** This blessing is meant to give us the strength to go out, witness to Jesus by our lives, and grow in holiness. Do you receive it with awareness? Try to really listen to the closing prayer and the words of the blessing the next time you're at Mass. You may find it really touches you in a new way.

This guide only scratches the surface of the spiritual riches found in the Mass. As you begin to enter into the different movements of the liturgy — from the opening call to prayer and repentance, to receptivity to the Word of God, to offering God our gifts and receiving him in return — you'll

find that the Mass takes on a new depth of meaning and beauty.

Spiritual reading is an important part of forming our spiritual lives and can help us deepen our appreciation of the truths of our faith. St. Jerome once said, "When we pray, we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us."

Please see the recommended resources on the opposite page. Any one of them will enrich your ability to pray the Mass with greater awareness and love.



**SR. BRITTANY HARRISON, FMA**, is a Salesian Sister of St. John Bosco, youth minister, and social media maven. A high school theology teacher for almost 10 years and a catechist for 20, she makes the faith accessible without stripping it of its depth and beauty. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @SisterB24.





# May They Be One

By Sr. Mary Michael Fox, OP

## *The Eucharist as a sign of unity and a bond of charity*

**O**n the night before he died, our Savior instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist and prayed for unity among his apostles and all those who would come to know him through their preaching (see John 17:21). This was no coincidence. The Eucharist is “a sign of unity and a bond of

charity” because it effects in the faithful participant a real unity with God and unity with fellow members of the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1329). In this article, I will explore this vertical and horizontal unity that the Eucharist effects by examining three gestures at Mass: the Epiclesis, the Offering, and the Sign of Peace.



## The Epiclesis

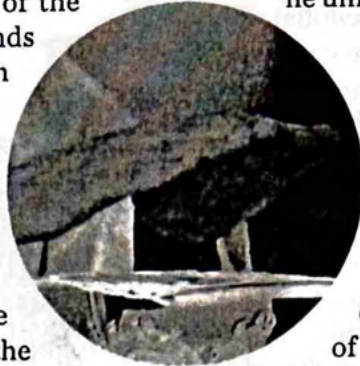
The first gesture is the *Epiclesis*, which is Greek for “invocation.” At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest extends his hands over the chalice and paten and asks the Father to send down the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine so “they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ” (see Eucharistic Prayer II).

The Holy Spirit is the bond of love and unity between the Father and the Son, and it is this same Holy Spirit that makes Jesus truly present in the Eucharist. That is, the power of the Holy Spirit works through and with “the power of the words and the action of Christ” to make sacramentally present the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (see CCC, 1353). Hence, to receive Jesus in the Eucharist is to receive this Holy Spirit — this bond of love. Just as the Holy Spirit is the source of unity in the Trinity, the Spirit is the source of unity in the Church. We hear this described when the priest prays Eucharistic Prayer III: “Grant that we, who are nourished by his Body and Blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one Spirit in Christ.”

Entering into this sublime gesture of the Epiclesis, we beseech the Holy Spirit to transform not only the bread and wine on the altar but to transform all of us gathered in worship so that we become more united as the Mystical Body of Christ. Again, in Eucharistic Prayer II, the priest prays: “Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.”

The Epiclesis is one of those moments in the Mass that point to the reality of how, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist brings about our unity with God and with each other. The more

conscious we are of the Holy Spirit’s action in the liturgy, the more intentional will be our prayer that he unite us with God and with one another.



## The Offering and Final Doxology

At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, we see another gesture of the priest called the Offering. The priest lifts the paten and chalice that now contain the precious Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and proclaims: “Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever.” We respond: “Amen.”

What’s happening here?

Jesus promised his apostles: “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32). Though there are still many people who have not yet experienced the fullness of Our Lord’s redemptive sacrifice in their lives, nevertheless his promise stands. Jesus is drawing all people to himself, fulfilling the desire of God the Father that we would be one with him and with each other (see Ephesians 1:3-13).

At every Mass, the actions of Jesus that took place in Jerusalem at a particular place and at a particular time “become in a certain way present and real” (CCC, 1363). We are *there*. This is the mystery of time and timelessness that we experience in the Divine Liturgy. In the gesture of the Offering, the priest lifts up the chalice and paten that now hold the Precious Body and Blood of Jesus.

Here is Jesus who “offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross ... contained and offered in an un-bloody manner” (CCC, 1367).

Here is Jesus, whose Precious Blood is poured out for the salvation of the world.



COLLAGED IMAGES (TOP IMAGES) WIDEORBIT/ISTOCK (HANDSHAKE) LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Here is Jesus, whose Precious Blood  
is poured out for the salvation of the world.



Here is Jesus, through whom we are reconciled and united to God the Father. "Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all praise and glory be yours, Almighty Father" (see CCC, 1361).

Here we have an affirmation of the reality that Jesus is being lifted up to reconcile us to the Father. Yet here, too, is an invitation to us to enter into the mystery that is before us on the altar — the mystery of the sacrifice of Jesus that brings us into the inner life of the Trinity.

The reality is before us to be recognized and affirmed. Do we want this union? Do we want to be drawn up into the heavenly realities — the mystery of being saved by Jesus who is being lifted up on the altar? Let us with full heart, mind, soul, and strength say "Amen!"

## The Our Father and the Sign of Peace

Following the two gestures of the Epiclesis and the Offering that signify the vertical unity between God and his Church, the liturgical prayers and gestures begin to introduce the horizontal unity that the Eucharist effects among the members of the Church.

After the great "Amen," the congregation stands and prays, with one heart and one voice, the Our Father. It is a prayer of unity and a prayer for unity. We address God with the pronoun "our," recognizing that through the sacrament of Baptism, we have become children of the same heavenly Father. At Mass, we pray the Our Father because we are not isolated persons saved by Jesus. No, we are his Mystical Body — his holy people. The union among us is real: *We are the Church*. We affirm this with our prayers and our actions at Mass.

**"Our Father"** If we pray the Our Father sincerely, we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it. The "our" at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, like the "us" of the last four petitions, excludes no one. If we are to say it truthfully, our divisions and oppositions have to be overcome.

— *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2792.



Immediately following the Our Father is the simple yet deeply significant gesture of unity called the Sign of Peace. We turn to those near us and offer our hand in fellowship, an embrace of love, or a nod of recognition that says "Thank you for being here. I need you to be here as a fellow member of Christ's body.

Without your prayers, your sacrifice, and your witness, I wouldn't be able to persevere on this journey of faith. For this reason, I may not hold any grievance against you, and so I extend to you Christ's peace." Imagine

how dynamic this sacred gesture would be if everyone had a similar understanding of how much we need each other as members of Christ's Body (see 1 Corinthians 12:15-26).

Again, the gesture signifies the reality. United in Christ's peace, we are called in one body (see Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:14).

## May they be one...

Jesus gave his whole life that we might be one with him and with each other. In these three gestures of the Mass — the Epiclesis, the Offering, and the

Sign of Peace — we see the cross that brought about the reconciliation between God and us and among God and one another. Our Church is not immune to the divisive ideologies that plague our culture, but we must resist the temptation to allow differences to separate us from Christ or from one another. Our only hope to preserve the unity that Christ established is to enter deeply into the Eucharist, our source of unity and charity.

We know that the more intentional one's participation is in the Mass, the more disposed he or she is to receive the graces contained therein. How important it is, therefore, that catechists draw attention to the gestures of unity found in the Mass so as to help those they catechize enter more fully into that vertical unity with God and that horizontal unity with fellow members of the Church.



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