



THE EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

A RESOURCE FOR PARISH SMALL GROUPS



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INTRODUCTION

Small groups have been a revitalizing spring for parish renewal. In a small group, you have the opportunity to get to know your fellow parishioners in a more intimate setting. You can discover anew what the Scriptures have to say to you through fruitful and sometimes challenging conversations with fellow believers and seekers alike.

This resource is intended to tap into the wisdom of small group formation. And yet, Catholics need not gather only around Sacred Scripture in these small group settings. The Word of God, after all, consists of both Sacred Scripture and Tradition. As the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation states:

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. (*Dei Verbum*, no. 9)

Sacred Scripture and Tradition together function as the echoing of the Word of God, meant to resound in the hearts of every believer. Importantly, the liturgical rites of the Church are part of this Tradition. Therefore, a Catholic can also contemplate the Word of God through discussing the texts of the Sacred Liturgy, especially those of the Mass, in order to encounter the Person of Jesus Christ alive and active.

Indeed, many Catholics attend Mass weekly without fully reflecting on what it means to *pray* the Mass. We go because we love the community, or we want to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord. Both of these are good reasons.

But we are called to a deeper engagement in the Mass, what the fathers of the Second Vatican Council called *active participation*. Active participation is not the same as singing every hymn with gusto or assigning everyone a special role during Mass. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, this is what active participation entails:

The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48)

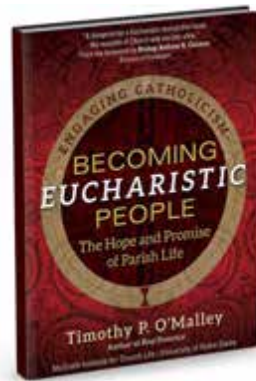
For this reason, every baptized Catholic must participate fully in the Eucharistic liturgy. We prepare ourselves not only to receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist but also to offer our very lives as a sacrifice of love back to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit (see [Romans 12:1](#)).

All baptized Catholics—whether ordained as a ministerial priest or not—will find it fruitful to contemplate what it means to pray the Eucharistic Prayer, that is, to offer the sacrifice of praise that the Mass calls us to carry out.

The Eucharistic Prayer said at every Mass is a highly structured, ancient form of praying that is full of meaning. There are several parts of the Eucharistic Prayer, and each part requires us to take up a different attitude or disposition. Reflecting on the Eucharistic Prayer outside of Mass in a small group context can help prepare us to better celebrate the liturgy. This kind of reflection is akin to tuning an instrument. Yes, you can play an instrument without tuning it, but the music that it produces will not be beautiful. Reflecting on the Eucharistic Prayer in community will enable the whole People of God in the parish to offer the sacrifice of praise celebrated in the Mass not only with their voices, but with their very lives.

SERIES OVERVIEW

The small group sessions that follow are dependent on a structure developed in *Becoming Eucharistic People: The Hope and Promise of Parish Life* by Timothy O'Malley (Ave Maria Press, 2022). The overall series has been developed as an integrated whole: the seven sessions move through the various parts of the Eucharistic Prayer in succession, and each session enriches and complements the others. For this reason, it's best to do all the sessions in the order that they appear below.



Each session begins with an act of *beholding*. We first behold the wondrous mysteries of God revealed in Sacred Scripture. We gaze upon a piece of art or listen to a piece of music that helps us to enter into the mystery of faith. We read the sections of the Eucharistic Prayer that we are contemplating together. Beholding means paying attention. Invite group members to respond to these questions: What strikes you? What do you notice? What draws you in or captures your attention? What challenges you?

The session then moves on to an act of *reflection*. Created by God, we human beings have the capacity to ask questions and therefore seek the truth. Each week will feature a brief video presentation by Timothy O'Malley on a specific facet of the Eucharistic Prayer that participants can view together, then unpack with the help of the facilitator using the questions provided as prompts. **Please note:** these videos are property of the McGrath Institute for Church Life and cannot be recorded, altered, downloaded, repurposed, etc. without written permission.

The last part of each session is a charge to *practice* what has been contemplated. Of course, the best practice is to go to Mass to pray the Eucharistic Prayer in the mystical Body of Christ, but attuning ourselves to the sacrifice of love offered at Mass might involve doing something more, something outside of the Eucharistic celebration. This attunement entails shaping our experiences and therefore developing new habits that will allow us to better celebrate the Mass. Suggested practices are offered at the end

of each session that relate to each week's theme, but you can also use this time to brainstorm other possibilities. Invite group members to consider committing themselves to a particular practice for the coming week. Then, throughout the series, you can use this time at the end of each meeting to check in with your group members, see how their chosen practice went, and offer encouragement and support.

These small group sessions are not intended to serve as a full theological introduction to the theology and spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer, but rather as a starting point for deeper contemplation. If you find yourself captivated by these sessions and want to learn more, you can turn to the brief bibliography at the end of this resource.

FACILITATOR GUIDELINES

All of the content needed for this seven-week series is included in this resource; however, as the facilitator, you will need to consider the precise logistics around each session in order to determine what will work best for your particular community, in your particular context. Below are suggestions for how you might approach planning each section of each session.

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYER

It is highly recommended that each session begin and end with prayer, but the specific form these prayers will take is up to you. The opening and closing prayers can be the same from week to week, lending the series a sense of cohesion and unity; or, these moments for prayer can be varied, either reflecting a session's content or a community's intentions. Regardless of how the opening and closing prayers are structured, it is further recommended that they include texts, practices, and customs familiar to the gathered community so that all can participate authentically and intuitively (examples include: offering personal intentions, invoking the intercession of a patron saint, etc.).

PART I: BEHOLD

As mentioned above, each session will invite participants to spend time beholding an object of beauty that reveals a facet of the divine mystery: a scriptural or liturgical text, a work of art, or a piece of music. Each of these requires a different approach in their presentation, and suggestions are offered below. Your thoughtfulness in this planning will create a space for contemplation where your participants might encounter not just the beauty of the text, art, or music, but the very beauty of God.

Contemplating a Sacred Text

When a text is offered as an object of contemplation, either from Sacred Scripture or from the Eucharistic liturgy, it is essential that participants are also able to see the written text and follow along as they hear it proclaimed if they wish. The written text can either be displayed on a screen using slides, or it can be printed on a handout and distributed to each participant. This will ensure that any participant who might be hearing impaired will be able to engage in the act of contemplating the text. It will also allow participants to repeat the passage mentally during the time of silent reflection, lingering over words and phrases that resonate with them. In addition, the use of handouts will allow participants to take the session's text(s) home with them, creating an opportunity for them to return to the text(s) throughout the week in times of private prayer.

In most cases, these sacred texts are meant to be read aloud. This will require the person proclaiming the text to have spent time with it before the session, becoming familiar with the pronunciations, the rhythm and cadence of the phrases, and the overall tenor of the text. During the session, the text should be proclaimed slowly and thoughtfully, with attentive solemnity, but also with warmth, so as to convey its richness and meaning. The speaker should stand in a central location where s/he may be seen and heard clearly. If a microphone is being used, it should be tested beforehand for ideal sound levels. Depending on timing, you may wish to have the text(s) proclaimed more than once, in keeping with the practice of repeating sacred texts found in *lectio divina*. If such is the case, you might encourage participants to listen to the text first with eyes closed, and then follow along with the written text during the subsequent proclamation(s) so as to encourage different modes of encountering the words.

Contemplating Sacred Visual Art

When participants are invited to behold a work of sacred visual art, a link has been provided to a high-resolution file that can be downloaded and used free of charge. Depending on the size of the group and the technology available in the meeting space, the simplest options for viewing these works are either to project the image on a screen, or to make copies available to each participant.

If a projector and screen are to be used, you should first make sure that each participant can see the screen clearly. In addition, be sure to test the projector before the session to confirm that the technology is working properly, that brightness levels are high enough, that the resolution of the image is clear, and that the color is as true to the original as possible. Experiment with adjusting the lighting in the meeting space to ensure optimal viewing.

If hard copies are to be distributed, the image should be printed in color, using as high-quality a print setting as the technology and budget will allow. If possible, the image should also be printed on heavier paper or cardstock so that participants will have something durable to take with them and display in their home or use during prayer.

During the session, plan to allow 10 minutes for participants to view a particular work of sacred art. While this act of contemplation is perhaps best done in silence, you may opt to play a musical recording during this time. (This is especially recommended if complete silence cannot be achieved in the meeting space due to other activities, gatherings, etc.). A Spotify playlist of instrumental classical music appropriate for times of reflection curated by Carolyn Pirtle, Program Director of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy, is available [here](#).

Contemplating Sacred Music

When participants are invited to listen together to a piece of sacred music, a link has been provided to a YouTube video. If using the YouTube link, you may wish to cue up the recording in advance so as to avoid advertisements if possible. (Nothing disrupts a prayerful atmosphere like an ad!) Alternatively, if you can access the recommended recording through a subscription-based music streaming service (e.g., Apple Music, Spotify, Amazon Music, etc.), this may be a preferable option in order to avoid possible interruption due to unanticipated advertisements.

It is highly recommended to play the piece through good speakers, and to do a soundcheck before the session to ensure that the technology is working properly, that the volume is set to an appropriate overall level (taking into account the fluctuations between loud and soft throughout the piece), and that there is no feedback, distortion, or other sound interference.

PART II: REFLECT

In preparing to share the weekly reflection video with participants during the course of the session, you will want to attend to the same factors named above for sharing audio and visual materials: placement and visibility of the screen, lighting, sound levels, etc.

In the event that a participant is hearing impaired, closed captioning is available and can be accessed when viewing each week's video.

Following the video screening, you'll want to allow time for discussion of what has just been presented. If a large number of participants is present, it may be advisable to divide the group into twos, threes, or fours. Allow 10–15 minutes for small-group conversation (depending on the duration of the session overall), then bring everyone back together for a general discussion.

Prompts have been provided to help guide conversations around the reflection videos. You may choose to display these on the screen after the video, or they can be printed on a half-sheet of paper and distributed to each small group (if utilized).

PART III: PRACTICE

As mentioned above, the practices listed at the end of each week's session are simply suggestions. You can encourage participants to brainstorm other practices that they might take up for the week, but it is recommended that each person limit himself or herself to *one* weekly practice only, so that they might give it their full attention.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Technology

While the use of technology is to some extent woven into each session in this series, it is hoped that its use will not become an end in itself, but rather a means to cultivating fruitful discussions and building community among participants. As much as possible, encourage participants to silence and even set aside their personal mobile devices upon entering the session so that they might focus their full attention on what is being set before them for contemplation and reflection.

Silence

Allowing time for silence is essential to these sessions. Strive to incorporate silence, especially during moments of transition within the session, for example:

- ❖ after any opening/closing announcements and before the opening/closing prayer;
- ❖ after participants have either encountered a sacred text, work of art, or piece of music and before beginning the discussion;
- ❖ after the weekly video has concluded and before breaking into small groups (if utilized).

It is only in silence where the heart is able to hear God speak (see [1 Kings 19:11-13](#)). Creating a balance between silence and sound in these sessions will allow them to become spaces where participants can take a step back from the noise of daily life and enter into contemplation and conversation with God.

Feedback

The staff of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy would love to hear any stories or insights that you discover while praying with these sessions. Please send any questions or comments to ndcl@nd.edu.



WEEK ONE: LEARNING TO GIVE THANKS

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Read [Ephesians 1:3–14](#) aloud.
- ❖ After a few moments of silent reflection, discuss the passage together using these questions:

What words stand out to you from this passage? Why?

Do you find any parts of this passage to be confusing or challenging?

What does this passage evoke in your mind's eye?

- ❖ Now, read aloud Common Preface I from the *Roman Missal*.

It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Christ our Lord.

In him you have been pleased to renew all things,
giving us all a share in his fullness.

For though he was in the form of God, he emptied himself
and by the blood of his Cross brought peace to all creation.

Therefore he has been exalted above all things,
and to all who obey him,
has become the source of eternal salvation.

And so, with Angels and Archangels,
with Thrones and Dominions,
and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven,
we sing the hymn of your glory,
as without end we acclaim:

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts ...

- ❖ After a few moments of silent reflection, unpack this text by considering these questions together:

What words stand out to you in this prayer text? Why?

Does this prayer make you think of anything that you have read above in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians? If so, what?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week One Video – [Learning to Give Thanks: The Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer](#)

Transcript

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a Preface ordered toward giving thanks for some aspect of salvation in Jesus Christ. The world was created by God, given to us for no other reason than because God is love (see [1 John 4:16](#)). Gratitude is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

And yet, human beings have consistently not been thankful for this gift. We call this lack of gratitude sin. The first sin of humankind in the book of Genesis was not just eating from a tree (see [Genesis 3](#)). It was a distrust that God was in fact good in the first place. Call it a fall from gratitude. The serpent tempts Eve by saying in essence, “God doesn't want you to eat from this tree because God doesn't care about you. God is jealous and selfish.” Eve eats because she is no longer thankful. She no longer trusts God.

Her husband Adam's sin is even worse. Adam not only eats from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil alongside Eve. He blames both his wife and God for his transgression. It's Eve's fault. It's God's fault. It's certainly not my fault.

We can read the rest of Sacred Scripture as an invitation from God to Israel—and eventually to all humankind—to learn again to give thanks. God teaches Israel to give thanks in the desert after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. Again and again, God forgives the transgressions of the chosen People if they learn once more to rely on God alone. And in the fullness of time, God took flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus of Nazareth.

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Jesus was fully God and fully human. He revealed to us that to be God is not to seize power or prestige. It is self-emptying love. At the same time, Jesus Christ showed us what it means to be human. We are sons and daughters of God whose very vocation is praise of God. We are creatures made to give thanks.

How hard it is for us to learn this marvelous truth! Like our forebears Adam and Eve, we likely struggle with gratitude. Sometimes, it's because of the hardness of our hearts. We don't want to give thanks to God. We drag ourselves, perhaps begrudgingly, to Mass. We complain about the homily and the music. We become bitter.

This bitterness, of course, is deadly. And it doesn't relate only to life in the Church. When I do not start the day in prayer, in giving thanks to God, I often discover a bitterness that seeps into every part of my life. I'm not grateful for my job. I find myself annoyed at the voices of my children. My spouse's request that we talk about dinner becomes a burden rather than a deeper reason to give thanks. Of course, gratitude is hard because we do live in a fallen world. How do we learn to give thanks in the midst of suffering? Of sickness? Of scandal in the Church and society?

The marvel of Catholicism, if we go to Mass each week, is that we're invited to re-learn this forgotten art of gratitude. Every Sunday, we give thanks to God for the mystery of love revealed in Jesus Christ. But we don't stop there. The Church invites us to come to Mass in a posture of thanksgiving. This does not mean that we must overlook all suffering. Taking up a posture of gratitude in the Christian life gives us the grace to look at every dimension of our lives—our joys *and* our sorrows—as being filled with the presence of God, who loves us unto the end.

I will always remember attending Mass, having just learned that my grandmother was dying. The words of the Preface rang truer to me on this day than any other. Jesus Christ has saved the world! He has rescued us from the power of sin and death. What else could I do but give thanks for the life of this woman, who is a beloved daughter of a loving God? And to have hope that though my grandmother would die, in God's mercy, she will rise again.

Therefore, the task at every Mass is not just to remember what God did once upon a time. It is to recognize that we can give thanks here and now for every dimension of our lives. It is right and just, our duty and salvation, to do so.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 In your life right now, where do you struggle to give thanks? Where do you find it easy? In both instances, why do you think such is the case?
- 2 Have you ever heard sin defined as a fall from gratitude? Does this definition make you think differently about sin? How so? If this is the proper way to understand sin, what would it mean to go to Confession?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 In a journal at the end of each day, keep a list of reasons why you are thankful and of areas where you struggle to be grateful. Read this list over before going to Mass, asking for God's grace to give thanks.
- 2 Once each day, read Ephesians 1:3–14. What stands out to you about Christ's life? Why are you attracted to that dimension of his life? Compose a prayer for yourself, in the style of the Eucharistic Preface, that allows you to give thanks for what God has accomplished in your life.

Concluding Prayer



WEEK TWO: THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Read [Revelation 21:1–8](#) aloud.
- ❖ After a few moments of silent reflection, discuss the passage together using these questions:
 - What do you find attractive in this passage? Why?
 - What in this passage worries or challenges you? Why?
- ❖ Now, listen together to [Pavel Chesnokov's choral piece *Spaseniye*](#).
Before listening to the piece, slowly and prayerfully read the English translation of the Russian text: "Salvation is created, in midst of the earth, O God, Alleluia." Allow a silent pause, then start the recording.
- ❖ After the piece concludes, allow a few moments for silent reflection. Then, unpack the piece together using the questions below. You may wish to reread the translation, or include it on any handouts for the session. If time permits, you could listen to the piece again after discussing it.
 - How did you respond emotionally to this music? Did it make you feel peaceful? Sad? Solemn? Bored?
 - What was going on in your mind as you listened? What was going on in your body? Did you experience any physiological reactions? (e.g., Did your eyes tear up? Did your heart feel like it was expanding? Did your pulse quicken or slow down?)
 - How does this music en flesh the passage from the Book of Revelation?

- ❖ Now, read the words of the Sanctus or Holy, Holy, Holy from the Mass.

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

- ❖ Bearing in mind the Scripture passage and musical piece you have just beheld, consider this liturgical text together using these questions:

Do the passage from Revelation and Chesnokov's choral piece impact your hearing of the Sanctus text? How so?

Do you have new insights about this text after reading the passage from Revelation and listening to *Spaseniyе*? If so, what are they?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Two Video – [Entering the Heavenly Liturgy: The Sanctus](#)

Transcript

The words of the Sanctus are taken from two places in Holy Scripture. The first half of the Sanctus—“Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. / Heaven and earth are full of your glory.”—comes from [Isaiah 6:3](#). In Isaiah, the lips of the prophet are cleansed by the angelic hosts so that he can speak the Word of the Lord. The second half of the Sanctus—“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. / Hosanna in the highest.”—comes from [Matthew 21:9](#), the first line of which is itself a direct quotation from [Psalm 118:26](#). In Matthew's Gospel, this is the moment where Jesus enters Jerusalem immediately before his Passion. This second half of the Sanctus anticipates the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist.

Why do we sing this hymn consisting of two scriptural texts before we pray the Eucharistic Prayer? This image, known as the *Ghent Altarpiece* or *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, provides an answer to this question.

When Catholics celebrate the Eucharist in their parish, we are not the only ones participating in this liturgy. As we read in the Book of Revelation, the entire communion of saints worships the Lamb once slain. The angels worship God because this is their very vocation. The communion of saints sings together in

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perfect harmony. And therefore, when we gather for Mass, we join this communion of praise already in progress. Heaven is worship, and we are meant to be members of this heavenly host.

Now, this does not necessarily mean that we leave the world behind when we go to Mass. Yes, we do leave behind worldliness. If we are stingy, or we hold a grudge against our neighbor, we should leave that behind. But as the Book of Revelation declares, it is heaven that will descend upon earth. Earth will be transfigured.

We sing the Sanctus at Mass because at every Eucharistic liturgy, a bit of this transformation is happening. The light that shines through the stained glass windows is not just pretty. It's a vision of heaven itself. The bread and wine made from human hands will become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. And we, the gathered assembly, will become through Christ's sacrifice of love members of his very Body.

This is what we see in the *Ghent Altarpiece*. Look: men and women are coming from every corner of the world to adore the Lamb once slain. It is Jesus Christ who is the reason for their gathering. Christianity is not a religion that consists of a series of abstract propositions that one must hold. Our worship is a communion that is made possible only by the love of Christ that gathers us together.

At every Mass, we are practicing who we are to become: citizens not of the United States or of Mexico or any other country, but citizens of *heaven*, whose constitution is the Lamb once slain—the One who will wipe away every tear from our eyes, who brings salvation into our lives here and now.

By remembering that we are joining the heavenly liturgy every time we go to Mass, we learn anew what it means to become heavenly—to become singers of a song of peace in a world often plagued by violence. We are invited, therefore, to approach the Eucharistic liturgy not as any ordinary human gathering, but rather as a moment in our daily lives when heaven truly comes down to earth. Hosanna in the highest.

NOTE: If you wish to download a high-resolution file of Jan and Hubert van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* to distribute or display during the session, one is available [here](#) for free use, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (PD-OLD).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Think about the way you pray the Sanctus during Mass, whether sung or spoken. Have you ever thought about the deeper realities of what is taking place during this part of the liturgy? How might the image of joining your song to that of the angels, of heaven descending to earth, impact the way you pray the Sanctus?
- 2 The Book of Revelation shows us the difference between the heavenly liturgy of peace and the earthly liturgy of violence. How do you think worship in your parish might be a source of healing for violence in the world?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 Sit before an image of the *Ghent Altarpiece* each day while reading Revelation 21:1–8. What do you notice from the image each day? How might this image help you to better pray the Mass?
- 2 Before going to Mass, listen to Pavel Chesnokov's *Spaseniye*. Pay attention to the way that this act of listening changes your readiness for participation in the marriage between heaven and earth.
- 3 Take the text of the Sanctus and write a personal prayer linked to each line. When you pray the Sanctus at Mass, do you notice anything different about your participation in this ancient Christian hymn?

Concluding Prayer



WEEK THREE: THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Spend at least 10 minutes looking at *The Mérode Altarpiece* (*The Annunciation Triptych*, ca. 1427–32) by Robert Campin. A high-resolution file is available [here](#) for free use, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's [Open Access](#) program (PD-OLD).
- ❖ After the time of active viewing, discuss the experience of encountering this work of sacred art using these questions:
 - What did you notice? What details stood out to you?
 - Did any questions arise as you looked at the altarpiece?
 - What were they?
- ❖ Now, read [Luke 1:26–38](#) aloud.
- ❖ Conclude this portion of the session by looking again at *The Mérode Altarpiece*. Ask the group:
 - What do you notice in the image now?
 - How did hearing this scene proclaimed in the Scripture passage impact your perception of the altarpiece?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Three Video – [Calling Upon the Holy Spirit: The Epiclesis](#)

Transcript

After praying the Sanctus, the Church prays the following words in Eucharistic Prayer II:

**You are indeed Holy, O Lord,
the fount of all holiness.
Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray,
by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall,
so that they may become for us
the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

As these words are said, the priest extends his hands over the gifts. He then joins his hands in a posture of prayer. Lastly, he makes the Sign of the Cross over the gifts as he says, “the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This part of the Eucharistic Prayer is known as the *epiclesis*, a Greek word meaning “the calling down of.” During the epiclesis, the Church calls upon the Holy Spirit to descend upon the gifts of bread and wine, transforming them into the living presence of Jesus Christ.

Further, in Eucharistic Prayer II, the Church asks that the Spirit may be sent down like the dewfall. As a poetic image, this is beautiful! We likely have all had the experience of waking up on what will be a hot summer morning. And yet, before our eyes, we see the dazzling gift of condensation upon the grass. While the rest of the day will be hot, morning gives us just a bit of water, a coolness upon the grass that is a gift to all who behold and walk upon it.

And yet, there is a scriptural meaning to this dewfall. In the Old Testament, manna is given to Israel as if dew has fallen from the heavens (see [Exodus 16:4–36](#)). Manna is bread from heaven, provided by God as he feeds Israel through their desert sojourn. Yes, they complained about the lack of food. Yes, they wanted to be back in Israel where at least they could eat some stew. But God has something else in mind. He feeds them with the bread of angels.

Manna, therefore, has obvious links to the Eucharist. What will be given at Mass is not ordinary bread. It is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

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This transformation, of course, is not possible through human effort alone. We call down the Holy Spirit at every Mass because only God can enact this wondrous mystery.

Indeed, this is the work of the Spirit throughout the Scriptures. Mary does not give birth to Jesus through her own effort. The conception of the Word in her womb takes place through the gift and the power of the Spirit. In *The Mérode Altarpiece*, the open window behind Mary symbolizes the Spirit at work. Mary's own words are Spirit-filled as she gives space for God to act in her life here and now: "Let it be done to me according to your word" ([Luke 1:38](#)).

At every Mass, we Catholics practice giving space for the work of Spirit. Bread and wine become the new manna from heaven, not through the holiness of the Church's ministers or the baptized faithful. It is purely a gift from God, a marvelous work of love by the same Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters of creation, the Holy Spirit, who will renew the face of the earth (see [Psalm 104:30](#)).

Yes, it is the gifts of bread and wine that will be transformed at every Mass. But Catholics who want to actively pray the epiclesis will recognize the need to create space for the Spirit to act in their lives too. God seeks to transform not just bread and wine, but your own heart as well. Through the Holy Spirit descending from heaven like the dewfall, God wants to soften our stony hearts, so that we in turn might give him a space where he can dwell in our lives.

Sometimes, our hearts are stony because we do not create space for the Spirit to work. We get up in the morning and rather than pray, we get right to work. We are too busy to contemplate the wondrous works of God.

Sometimes, it's even more drastic. We have no space for the Spirit in our hearts because we're worshipping something else. Maybe it's our job. Maybe it's alcohol or drugs. Maybe it's an affair. Maybe it's a grudge against a family member.

Whatever the case may be, we need to learn anew how to give space to the Holy Spirit. Unto ourselves, we cannot soften our hardened hearts. But, we can pray for the Spirit to descend not only at Mass but in every dimension of our lives. We can pray for the grace of the Spirit to create space within our hearts—space where God can be God. We can pray for the grace of the Spirit to teach us how to say with Mary, "Let it be done to me according to your word" ([Luke 1:38](#)).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Where in your life do you need to give space for God to be God?
- 2 What links do you now see between the Annunciation and the Eucharist? How does this change the way that you understand what is happening at Mass?
- 3 The Spirit works at every Mass because of God's promise to dwell among us. How is this good news for the Church today? Especially a Church that sometimes struggles with scandal among her ministers and apathy among her members?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 In Catholicism, there is such a thing as natural contemplation. If we spend time looking at the beauty of creation, we often discover the presence of the Spirit at work. Spend 15 or 20 minutes in silence outside each day for the next week. What do you notice? Where do you see the transforming power of the Spirit at work?
- 2 Before Mass or while spending time before the Blessed Sacrament at your parish church, read through [Luke 1:26–38](#). Ask God to help you become like Mary: attentive to the transforming Spirit of God. Then, reflect on where you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life right now, and where you may need the help of the Spirit.

Concluding Prayer



WEEK FOUR: THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVE

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Spend at least 10 minutes looking at Ford Madox Brown's painting, *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet* (1852–6). A high-resolution file is available [here](#) for free use, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (PD-OLD).
- ❖ After the time of active viewing, discuss the experience of encountering this work of sacred art using these questions:
 - What did you notice? What details stood out to you?
 - Did any questions arise as you looked at the painting?
 - What were they?
- ❖ Now, listen to the *Ubi Caritas* chant, a hymn for Holy Thursday.

As the piece plays, invite participants to silently read the English translation of the *Ubi Caritas* text from the *Roman Missal* (either projected on a screen or distributed in handouts). Ask them to bear in mind that the *Roman Missal* specifically suggests that this hymn be sung on Holy Thursday just after the Washing of Feet, during the Presentation and Preparation of the Offerings at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

- Ant. Where true charity is dwelling, God is present there.
- V. By the love of Christ we have been brought together;
 - V. let us find in him our gladness and our pleasure;
 - V. may we love him and revere him, God the living,
 - V. and in love respect each other with sincere hearts.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK FOUR: THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVE

Ant. Where true charity is dwelling, God is present there.

- V. So when we as one are gathered all together,
- V. let us strive to keep our minds free of division;
- V. may there be an end to malice, strife and quarrels,
- V. and let Christ our God be dwelling here among us.

Ant. Where true charity is dwelling, God is present there.

- V. May your face thus be our vision, bright in glory,
- V. Christ our God, with all the blessed Saints in heaven:
- V. such delight is pure and faultless, joy unbounded,
- V. which endures through countless ages world without end.

Amen.

- ❖ After the hymn concludes, allow a few moments for silent reflection.

Then, ask the group:

How does the unique liturgical context of the Preparation Rite for Holy Thursday inform your hearing of the piece and your understanding of the hymn text?

- ❖ Having listened to the *Ubi Caritas* and contemplated the English translation with Holy Thursday in mind, invite the group now to look again at *Jesus Washing Peter's Feet*, and discuss the following questions:

What do you notice in the expressions of the disciples now? In the eyes of Jesus and Peter?

What do you think the hymn and the painting reveal about the meaning of the Eucharist?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Four Video – [Love Unto the End: The Institution Narrative](#)

Transcript

In the Gospel of John, before Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, the Evangelist comments, “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” ([John 13:1](#)).

There are few passages in Sacred Scripture that better summarize the mission of Jesus. Jesus is the Word made flesh, the beloved Son of the Father. He was sent into the world for one reason alone: to love the disciples unto the end. Jesus’ entire life was an act of love. God did not have to become a Child born in a manger. But God did. God did not have to dine with sinners, inviting them into the Kingdom of God. But God did. God did not have to heal the man born blind or bring Lazarus back to life. But God did.

God did not have to die for us, but God did. The sacrifice that the Son offered to the Father cannot be reduced to the pain or torture of the Cross. Rather, it was his willingness to suffer *out of the depths of love for men and women*. Jesus did not respond to violence with violence, wreaking havoc on those who caused his suffering. Jesus loved unto the end, offering even his Death to the Father as an act of love. And in this self-offering, he transformed death forever. Because God loved us, because Jesus was raised from the dead, death finds a new meaning. Every death, even the most violent and senseless, can become an occasion of self-gift, an occasion of love.

The sheer gratuity of Christ’s love upon the Cross is what we remember at Mass during what the Church calls the Institution Narrative. In the third Eucharistic Prayer, we pray:

**For on the night he was betrayed
he himself took bread,
and, giving you thanks, he said the blessing,
broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying:**

**TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND EAT OF IT,
FOR THIS IS MY BODY
WHICH WILL BE GIVEN UP FOR YOU.**

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK FOUR: THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVE

In a similar way, when supper was ended,
he took the chalice,
and, giving you thanks, he said the blessing,
and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:

**TAKE THIS, ALL OF YOU, AND DRINK FROM IT,
FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD
THE BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL COVENANT,
WHICH WILL BE Poured OUT FOR YOU AND FOR MANY
FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME.

Pay attention to what the Church prays during the Mass. First, we remember the Last Supper, celebrated the night before Jesus died. The Passover, as we remember, is the great memorial meal of Israel. It was instituted on the night before Israel was rescued from slavery in Egypt. The annual celebration of this meal by the Jewish people kept alive the memory of what the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob had accomplished. And even as Israel continued to suffer the slavery of sin and of persecution at the hand of their enemies, the Passover meal also looked forward to God's future activity.

Jesus, in offering himself in this way at the Last Supper, is proclaiming that God's future activity has in fact arrived. His sacrifice upon the Cross is the gift of his Body and Blood for the life of the many, meaning in fact, for all men and women. Every time that the Church offers this bread and wine in the context of the Mass, praying this Eucharistic Prayer, we are remembering anew the sacrificial Death of Jesus Christ for the life of the world.

But there's more to the Institution Narrative than an act of remembering. Thus far, the entire Eucharistic Prayer has been prayed in the first person plural. But as we remember the night before Jesus died, the Church has the priest speak in the very words of Christ. His "we" becomes an "I."

What Jesus gave us on the night before he died, on the night he loved us unto the end, is his very Body and Blood. The bread is now his Body, given for you. The wine is now his Blood, given for the many (which means all). When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we are not receiving ordinary food. Rather, we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. We are receiving his very presence, what the Church has called his Real, or True Presence.

The Church's teaching about Real Presence matters to us precisely because Jesus loved us, and he loved us unto the end. Jesus loved us in such a way that he wanted to be always present with us—and not just present with us or alongside us, but present in such a way that we could receive him into our very selves. The Church teaches that the bread and wine become absolutely and entirely Christ's Body and Blood. Jesus gives his whole self to us—Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—because he wants to be in union with us.

Sometimes, when we look at a small child we exclaim, "You're so cute I could just eat you up!" There's a reason for this. We don't say such things because we're cannibals. We're saying to that child, "I love you so much that I don't want any separation between the two of us. I want to be that close to you."

Jesus wants to be that close to us, and in the Eucharist, he offers this closeness to us in a way that we can receive him, that we can truly be one with him. Remember, we're not cannibals. Jesus comes to us under the form of bread and wine, recalling Israel's Passover, the gift of manna in the desert, and his many meals throughout his lifetime. But what we receive is entirely Jesus. And as St. Augustine always said, it's not we who eat God. God eats us. We are taken up into God's own life.

Jesus loved his own, and he loved them to the end. He loves us even now, at every Mass, becoming present in what seems like bread and wine. And every time we receive our Lord at Mass, we remember and experience this love anew. Whether we're rich or poor, young or old, male or female, whatever country we were born in, Christ comes to us. He gives his whole self to us through the power of the Spirit that transforms ordinary bread and wine into his very Presence.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Jesus loved his own, and he loved them unto the end. When you hear this, what reaction do you have? Do you struggle to believe it? Why?
- 2 Did you hear anything new in the video about the Church's teaching on Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist? How could this teaching matter for how you live as a Catholic in the world?
- 3 Name a time when you recognized the presence of Jesus Christ in your reception of the Blessed Sacrament. What was it like?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 Each morning, spend 30 minutes slowly reading, meditating on, and praying with the English text of the *Ubi Caritas* and the text of the Institution Narrative from Eucharistic Prayer III. Write down any new insights that you have about the love of God in your life over the course of your prayer. Consider sharing them with your small group in the coming weeks.
- 2 If you can, go to Mass on one or two weekdays this week (in addition to Sunday Mass or the Vigil Mass on Saturday evening), or, try to spend an hour praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in your parish church (either before the Eucharist exposed in a monstrance, or reposed in the tabernacle). During this time, reflect on the depth of God's love for you, and Jesus' deep desire to be present with you every hour of every day. What would this mean for the rest of your day? For the rest of your week? For the rest of your life?

Concluding Prayer



WEEK FIVE: ANAMNESIS AND OBLATION

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Spend at least 10 minutes looking at the mosaic from the apse of the Basilica of San Clemente in Rome (ca. 1130s). A high-resolution file is available [here](#) via Wikimedia Commons for free use, courtesy of Dnalor_01 (CC-BY-SA-3.0).
- ❖ After the time of active viewing, discuss the experience of encountering this work of sacred art using these questions:
 - What do you see? What is interesting about the image as you look closer? What details stood out to you?
 - Did any questions arise as you looked at the mosaic? What were they?
- ❖ Now, read [John 15:1–17](#) aloud.
- ❖ After hearing the Word of God in Sacred Scripture, look again at the mosaic from San Clemente, bearing in mind Jesus' language of "abiding with." Ask the group:
 - Does the Scripture passage bring any new details to your attention, or cause you to see other details you had noticed previously in a different way? How does bringing art into conversation with Scripture and vice versa impact your experience of both?
 - Does the mosaic bring to your mind anything that happens during the Mass? How does bringing art into conversation with the liturgy and vice versa impact your experience of both?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Five Video – [Our Return Gift of Love: Anamnesis and Oblation](#)

Transcript

Because of the importance of the Institution Narrative in the Eucharistic Prayer, many Catholics likely lose focus as the rest of the Eucharistic Prayer continues. After all, Jesus Christ is now present among us in an especially intimate manner. Is there anything else for us to do?

The Church answers, “Yes!” The Eucharistic Prayer continues with two additional sections, called the anamnesis and the oblation.

Anamnesis is a Greek word for memory. But it’s not just any kind of memory. Anamnesis makes present what is remembered. Let’s look together at the third Eucharistic Prayer:

**Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial
of the saving Passion of your Son,
his wondrous Resurrection
and Ascension into heaven,
and as we look forward to his second coming,
we offer you in thanksgiving
this holy and living sacrifice.**

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice upon the Cross. But the purpose of the Eucharist is not merely to make Christ present among us once again. Christ’s presence is linked to what he does for us. He died for us so that we might know how much God loves us. He was raised up by the Father, because he wanted us to know that our vocation—our calling as men and women—is eternal life with the Father. And he will come again, transforming every crack and crevice of this world into a space where God’s love will dwell. Real Presence, as it turns out, is a foretaste of what God is still going to do. God is inviting us to a face-to-face communion with God here and now.

Until then, the Church offers this holy and living sacrifice. It is the way that we keep this memory alive, while also anticipating what God is still going to do. In the meantime, God is in fact doing something rather remarkable.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK FIVE: ANAMNESIS AND OBLATION

The word *oblation* is a word that means sacrifice or offering. The God who acted in history through Jesus Christ is still active among us today. Let us listen again to the words of the third Eucharistic Prayer:

**Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church
and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death
you willed to reconcile us to yourself,
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.**

The whole Church, in offering the Eucharist, has a role to play. We offer Christ, through the hands of the priest, back to the Father—the priest, who acts in the person of Christ and the Church.

This language should remind us a bit of the way that parents sometimes give their kids a bit of money so that their children can buy them a Christmas or birthday gift. It's a strange gift, right? It's my money, and surely, I could buy my own things. But because we want our children to experience what it's like to give, we want to give them a part to play in the whole exchange. Even if we don't need a candle that smells like tuna or a tie that involves seven shades of brown, our real delight is seeing how happy the act of giving makes our children. And through their delight, we become closer to our kids.

At Mass, Jesus Christ becomes present among us in what seems like bread and wine. And this is what we offer back to the Father, who recognizes in our offering the very saving love and presence of his Son. In lifting up these gifts to the Father, we remember that Jesus alone is the one who brings us into communion with the Father. It's nothing that we did. Nothing that we earned. It's all a gift.

But there is something for us to do in return. We are to offer that same return gift of ourselves. Eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ is not just about a private encounter with the Lord. It's a commitment to become like the One we have received. We must become like Christ.

And that's where we need the Church. After all, to become like Christ means that we are to live the very same communion he does with the Father. It means that his communion is lived out with our fellow members of Christ's Body, our fellow believers.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK FIVE: ANAMNESIS AND OBLATION

Look around you the next time you're at Mass, and recognize the true scandal of the Eucharist. It's not just that bread and wine become Christ's Body and Blood, of course, in a way that we can receive it. It's that every member of Christ's Body who receives him in the Eucharist is to be united more closely with his and her neighbor.

Neighbor, in this case, does not mean only those that I happen to like or agree with. It means the whole Body of Christ, every man and woman called to the Supper of the Lamb. This task, if it was up to us alone, would be impossible. Community is not something that we create on our own. Rather, community is the result of communion with the Beloved, a recognition that it is Christ alone who calls all of us to the Supper of the Lamb.

The offering that the Church makes, therefore, is herself. We are to offer everything back to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. That starts with our concrete lives. When I go to Mass, I'm surrounded by people with needs, desires, hopes, aspirations, worries, and joys. Each of us—as individuals—offer all of this on the altar. And it is through the presence of Jesus Christ who loves us unto the end, and the power of the Holy Spirit, that we are brought into closer union with one another.

Dear friends, of course, like all of what God has done for us, this should change the way that we live. If we remember the whole life of Christ and await his second coming, our task is to become what we have received in the Eucharistic mystery: a sacrifice of love offered back to the Father, lived in the communion of the entire Church.

Think about this scandal. Your parish, with all of its characters (and I bet you could probably name a few), is to become the space where Jesus Christ acts here and now. This action is intended to unite every member of your parish—in all their stunning and sometimes obnoxious particularities—into closer union with Jesus and one another.

We can't do this alone. And therefore, we pray that the God who makes ordinary bread and wine into his wondrous, divine presence can do the same in every parish throughout the world.

Until he comes again in glory.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Return once more to the mosaic from San Clemente and [John 15:1–17](#), recalling what you have learned about anamnesis and oblation through the video. How did meditating on these facets of the Eucharistic Prayer impact your experience of the sacred imagery in the mosaic and the Sacred Scripture from John’s Gospel? What new insights do you have?
- 2 Do you experience parish life as membership in one body, one spirit in Christ? Why or why not? Where do you think you yourself could do better to become what you receive? Where do you think the whole parish could better live this mystery?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 Each day this week, read [John 15:1–17](#) slowly and prayerfully. Ask yourself: where do I need God’s assistance to abide in Christ? Where do I need God’s assistance to love my neighbor? Then, the next time you go to Mass, spend some quiet time in prayer beforehand, and ask God for that assistance.
- 2 Pray the Rosary each day this week, carefully attending to the various mysteries. Write down any thoughts, questions, or insights you might have on how remembering and meditating on the various mysteries of Christ’s life better prepares you to offer the sacrifice of the Mass.
- 3 Think about someone in your life—perhaps someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your parish—that you struggle to love as Christ first loved us. Reach out to this person, perhaps asking forgiveness, or simply inviting them to a short conversation.

Concluding Prayer



WEEK SIX: INTERCESSION

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Spend at least 10 minutes looking closely at the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece* (1445–50) by Rogier van der Weyden. A high-resolution file is available [here](#) for free use, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (PD-OLD).
- ❖ After the time of active viewing, discuss the experience of encountering this work of sacred art using these questions:
 - What strikes you about the image?
 - Where do you see the sacrament of the Eucharist being celebrated?
 - Where do you see the other six sacraments represented?
- ❖ Now, read aloud this selection on Eucharistic living, from Pope Benedict XVI's *Sacramentum Caritatis (Sacrament of Charity)*:

Christianity's new worship includes and transfigures every aspect of life: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Christians, in all their actions, are called to offer true worship to God. Here the intrinsically eucharistic nature of Christian life begins to take shape. The Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. [Romans 8:29ff](#)). There is nothing authentically human—our thoughts and affections, our words and deeds—that does not find in the sacrament of the Eucharist the form it needs to be lived to the full. Here we can see the full human import of the radical newness brought by Christ in the Eucharist: the worship of God in our lives cannot be relegated to something private and individual, but tends by its nature to permeate every aspect of our existence. Worship pleasing to God thus

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becomes a new way of living our whole life, each particular moment of which is lifted up, since it is lived as part of a relationship with Christ and as an offering to God. The glory of God is the living man (cf. [1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). And the life of man is the vision of God. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 71)

- ❖ Discuss the selection briefly together using these questions:
 - What do you find attractive in this excerpt? Why?
 - What in this excerpt worries or confuses or challenges you? Why?
- ❖ Return to the *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*, and bring it into conversation with words of *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Ask the group:
 - How do the insights of Benedict XVI shape the way you see the liturgical life depicted in van der Weyden's altarpiece?
 - On the other hand, how does this altarpiece, in your assessment, depict or affirm Benedict XVI's insights? In other words, how does this work of art show that worship is a new way of living our whole life, from birth to death? Having heard the passage from *Sacramentum Caritatis*, is there anything in the altarpiece that captures your attention in a new way?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Six Video – [Lifting Up Our Lives to God: Intercession](#)

Transcript

In a certain diocese in the United States, a parish opened up a chapel dedicated to perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. It was a beautiful space, and members of the parish were excited about the opportunity to adore the Lord twenty-four hours per day, seven days a week. To walk into that chapel, where there was always the smell of incense, was almost to enter heaven for a time.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK SIX: INTERCESSION

Yet, this parish had not fully appropriated what it meant to adore the Eucharistic Lord. In one Sunday bulletin, in that same parish, an announcement indicated that certificates to local grocery stores were being sold to raise money for the parish building fund. In bold and in italics at the bottom of this notice was an addendum: if a parishioner was concerned that someone might confuse this certificate for a food stamp at the grocery store, said parishioner could trade it in for a gift card.

Likely, the parish did not recognize the damage done by this announcement, but just imagine. If a parishioner on food stamps had read it, they would likely have come to conclude the following: at least some of my fellow parishioners are afraid of being confused with someone who is poor. Yes, they celebrate a reverent liturgy. Yes, they adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. But they also don't want to be mistaken for me, a poor person on food stamps. I am not welcome here.

This parish, for the most part, fell into a trap that many of us have also fallen into. Simply put, we erect a barrier between our worship of Christ and the rest of our lives. On Sundays, I go to Mass and worship the Eucharistic Lord. The rest of the week, I do other things.

But this is not what it means to be a Catholic who lives a Eucharistic life. The Eucharistic Prayer includes a section dedicated to intercession. Likely, you have at least some experience of intercessory prayer. We pray for others in need of prayer, lifting them up to God.

What are we doing when we offer such prayers? To answer this, we have to return to what we are doing in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Recall for yourself that every baptized person in the Catholic Church is technically a priest, a prophet, and a royal person, meant to sanctify the cosmos. This is what the Church means by the baptismal priesthood. The Eucharistic liturgy of the Catholic Church is in fact the proper exercise of the baptismal priesthood where we, alongside the ordained priest who acts in the person of Christ and the Church, offer everything back to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

Intercessory prayer in the Eucharistic Prayer, therefore, is a concrete way of exercising our baptismal priesthood. Mass is not about escaping from the world, creating a sacred space in which we leave everything else behind. Rather, to celebrate the Mass means that we are to stand in the midst of the world and intercede for the living and the dead alike.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK SIX: INTERCESSION

In Eucharistic Prayer IV, we pray:

Therefore, Lord, remember now
all for whom we offer this sacrifice:
especially your servant N. our Pope,
N. our Bishop, and the whole Order of Bishops,
all the clergy,
those who take part in this offering,
those gathered here before you,
your entire people,
and all who seek you with a sincere heart.

Remember also
those who have died in the peace of your Christ
and all the dead,
whose faith you alone have known.

To all of us, your children,
grant, O merciful Father,
that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance
with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
with blessed Joseph, her spouse,
and with your Apostles and Saints in your kingdom.
There, with the whole of creation,
freed from the corruption of sin and death,
may we glorify you through Christ our Lord,
through whom you bestow on the world all that is good.

Look closely at what we pray for in the Eucharistic Prayer. We pray for the Pope, a particular man in Rome, who serves as a sign of our unity. We pray for our bishop, who is also a sign of the unity of the Church. We pray for the entire People of God, those who are present and those who are not, and we even pray for all human beings who seek God with a sincere heart, whether they're Catholic or not. We pray for the dead, those who have died in Christ and those who may not have died in Christ, because we are aware that death has not severed our communion with those who have gone before us. We pray for all of us present at this Mass, that we will enter into communion with Mary, St. Joseph, the Apostles, and all the saints in the beatific vision. And we pray for all of creation, because through union with Christ, everything that exists will be redeemed.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK SIX: INTERCESSION

Because we so often pray this part of the Eucharistic Prayer, we likely forget how remarkable the expansiveness of this prayer is. Nothing that is created is left outside of God's loving concern. Even the dead are remembered by God through the prayer of the Church.

We see this expansiveness in Rogier van der Weyden's *Seven Sacraments Altarpiece*. You can see in this work of art how every dimension of life is taken up into the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. Birth and death, the mystery of marriage and the vocation to the priesthood, all of it makes sense because of the Cross of Christ. The priest, offering the Mass, is interceding for every man and woman, no matter where they are relative to their journey with Christ.

Through the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer, we learn that every part of our lives is to become an offering to Christ. If we create a sacred space (linked to religious things) and a private space (linked to everything else), we have not yet learned what it means to live Eucharistically. Our task is to pay careful, prayerful attention to the intercessions in the Eucharistic Prayer, because these intercessions are our prayer for the entirety of creation. And then, we are to let every dimension of our personal, individual lives become an offering to Christ.

After all, this is what it means to be a priest, a prophet, and a royal figure: to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice of our lives—conformed to Christ—back in love to the Father.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 At this moment in your life, who or what do you need to urgently lift up in prayer?
- 2 What do you find challenging about the passage from Benedict XVI relative to the union of worship and life? Why do you think many Catholics in the United States struggle to make this connection? Why do you struggle to make this connection?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 Spend 15 minutes each morning making a list of intentions or people that you want to pray for throughout the day. At 9:00 a.m., noon, and 6:00 p.m., take out that list and pray for those things or people. Notice the way that this practice changes you over the course of the week.
- 2 Visit a cemetery this week and say a Hail Mary or Our Father at the tomb of each person (for as long as you're at the cemetery). Bring their names to mind the next time you're at Mass. Meditate on how this practice impacts the way you pray for the living and the dead during the Eucharistic Prayer.
- 3 Read through the intercessions from Eucharistic Prayer IV on your own. Pause for a moment after each and think about the particular people or intentions that you are praying for. Lift them up to God.

Concluding Prayer



WEEK SEVEN: DOXOLOGY AND SILENCE

Opening Prayer

PART I: BEHOLD

- ❖ Begin the session by listening to James MacMillan's "[Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit](#)" from his large-scale work *Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

Before listening to the piece, slowly and prayerfully read the text: "Father, into Thy hands, I commend my spirit." Allow a silent pause, then start the recording.

- ❖ After the piece concludes, allow a few moments for silent reflection. Then, unpack the piece together using the questions below. You may wish to reread the translation, or include it on any handouts for the session. If time permits, you could listen to the piece again after discussing it.

How did you respond to this music? What emotions did it bring up within your heart?

What was going on in your mind as you listened? What was going on in your body? Did you experience any physiological reactions? (e.g., Did your eyes tear up? Did your heart feel like it was expanding? Did your pulse quicken or slow down?)

What did you notice about the use of silence in the piece? What about the interplay between silence, instruments, and voices?

PART II: REFLECT

Watch Week Seven Video – [Longing for the Lord: Doxology and Silence](#)

Transcript

The Eucharistic Prayer offers a gift of great richness for a Christian life. The Mass is not just a Christian service or a private act of worship. Rather, through the Mass, our entire lives, in an encounter with Jesus, become an offering back to the Father.

And yet, it may be a surprise to discover that there is something even better than the Mass. Every Eucharistic Prayer concludes with the doxology. In the doxology, the Church prays:

**Through him, and with him, and in him,
O God, almighty Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honor is yours,
for ever and ever.**

In some ways, it's a strange ending. The Eucharistic Prayer is so ordered and, in fact, verbose. But after we have interceded for the world, we conclude (ideally with the priest chanting this section) with a doxology. *Doxology* in Catholicism simply means an act of praise. In this case, our praise is the recognition that everything we've prayed for is impossible except through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All glory and honor is to God, and not to ourselves.

The abruptness of the doxology functions as a kind of 'break' in the fabric of the prayer that returns us as Christians to our ultimate vocation or calling. We are not meant to celebrate the sacrament of the Eucharist forever. Rather, we are made to adore God face-to-face in what St. Thomas Aquinas called the *beatific vision*. To see, adore, and praise God is what human beings were created for.

Thus, even though Jesus Christ is made present—Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity—in the Eucharistic Prayer of the Church, there is something more for all of us. There will come a day when all signs will pass away, when there will be no more need for mediation. God will be all in all.

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER ♦ WEEK SEVEN: DOXOLOGY AND SILENCE

It's good, therefore, at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, even at the end of receiving Jesus Christ in Communion, to long for more. The Mass, despite its beauty, is not enough. There is more. It's something like that first moment when parents behold their children. Such a moment is pregnant with beauty, a recognition that before me is a wondrous creature worth beholding. But if I'm really attentive, if I'm silent before the newborn babe, I recognize that 'something more.' Who is the one who made this creature to begin with? Who made possible such beauty, such wonder?

Silence before the Blessed Sacrament is a little different from encountering the 'more' of divine love in the gift of a child. After all, it is the true presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine in the Eucharistic species. It is the communion of saints worshiping before the throne of God. But each of these moments is still an encounter mediated through signs.

None of this is intended to say that the Mass is insufficient, or not good enough. Not in the least! Rather, as St. Thomas Aquinas noted in all his Eucharistic hymns, if our celebration of the Mass and reception of the Blessed Sacrament does not lead to an increase of silent desire before the living God, we have not yet grasped the wondrous mystery of what is given in the sacrament.

Silence is therefore a way of respecting the mystery of the One who comes to us in the Eucharist. It is the Lord. And this silence is also a way of desiring an even deeper union with the Beloved and with the whole communion of saints.

Until then, we wait for the final consummation and transformation of the world in Christ, going to Mass, and remembering with each celebration our joyful hope: that every man and woman will together adore the living God as a member of the communion of saints.

All glory and honor is indeed God's, for ever and ever. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- 1 Why do you think so many people struggle to be silent today? How might the silence of the Eucharist be a medicine for us?
- 2 At the end of this series, what have you discovered about the Eucharistic Prayer that has changed the way that you pray at Mass?

PART III: PRACTICE

- 1 Take 15 minutes each day this week to sit in silence before the Eucharist (or, if you can't make it to a church, pray before a crucifix). What did you learn about silence in the process? How has this started to change your prayer life, or even your life outside of prayer?
- 2 Write a letter to God, expressing your desire to see God face-to-face, drawing upon what you have discovered about the Eucharistic Prayer and learned about yourself during this series.

Concluding Prayer

FOR FURTHER STUDY: SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Goffredo Boselli, *The Spiritual Meaning of the Liturgy: School of Prayer, Source of Life*, tr. Barry Hudock (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014).

Romano Guardini, *Meditations Before Mass*, tr. Elinor Castendyk Briefs (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2014).

Timothy P. O'Malley, *Bored Again Catholic: How the Mass Could Save Your Life* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2017).

Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystery of Sacrifice: A Meditation on the Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 1991).

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