

All you need to know about...
The Sacrament of the Eucharist



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What is it and what is the purpose of the Eucharist?

- Eucharist is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church.
- It is the final of the three sacraments of initiation into the Church which are necessary for people to become full members of the Church. The other two Sacraments of initiation are the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.
- Under Canon Law, Confirmation can precede the receiving of the Eucharist for the first time but it does not have to. This decision is left to the local Ordinary (the diocesan Bishop). In the Archdiocese of Birmingham Confirmation follows Baptism and Eucharist.
- Eucharist is the only one of the Sacraments of Initiation that we can (and should) receive repeatedly, even daily if possible.
- The Eucharist is also known as the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
- In Holy Communion we consume the Body and Blood of Christ which unites us more closely to Him and helps us to grow in grace by living a more Christian life.

How did Eucharist originate?

- The Sacrament of the Eucharist is rooted in the event of The Last Supper: the day upon which Jesus and the disciples were gathered in the upper room (Maundy Thursday) preparing their final meal together before he died (Matthew 26: 17-30).
- In the course of the Last Supper, Jesus divides up some bread, says a prayer, and hands the pieces of bread to his disciples, saying "this is my body." He then takes a cup of wine, offers another prayer, and hands it around, saying "this is my blood of the everlasting covenant, which is poured for many." Finally, he tells the disciples "do this in remembrance of me." This event has been regarded by Catholics as the institution of the Eucharist.
- The Holy Eucharist refers to Christ's body and blood present in the consecrated host on the altar, and Catholics believe that the consecrated bread and wine are actually the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ. For Catholics, the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist isn't just symbolic, it's real.

When does First Holy Communion take place?

- Candidates can receive the Body and Blood of Christ any time after they have reached the age of reason, seen by the Church as aged seven. The bishop or archbishop of each Diocese makes the decision as to when. In the Archdiocese of Birmingham Communion candidates receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the year in which they are 7 years old (Y3).
- The date and time of First Holy Communion is arranged by the parish priest with the school.
- Communion takes place within the celebration of Mass.

Where does Communion take place?

- Communion can be received at every Mass following the First Holy Communion Mass which takes place in the parish church.

Can anyone receive Communion?

- Anyone who has been baptised may receive Communion.
- When you receive Holy Communion, you're intimately united with Jesus Christ — he literally becomes part of you. You express your union with all Catholics who believe the same doctrines, obey the same laws, and follow the same leaders. This sense of participation in a larger community is why Catholics have a strict law that only people who are *in communion* with the Church can receive Holy Communion. In other words, only those who are united in the same beliefs are allowed to receive Holy Communion.
- The candidate must also have received the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

How many times can you receive Communion?

- A person can receive Communion daily.

Who can give Communion?

- Traditionally the Parish Priest carries out the First Holy Communion Mass.
- A deacon or Eucharistic minister may assist the priest in administering Communion after the bread and wine has been consecrated into the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Transubstantiation is the act of changing the substances of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Who has to be present at a First Holy Communion?

- An ordained priest must be there to administer the Sacrament.
- The candidates for Communion.
- It is expected that the candidate would seek an opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before the day of First Holy Communion.

Are any special clothes worn?

- As the celebration takes place during the celebration of Mass the priest will wear the vestments for Mass.
- There are no specific regulations about what is to be worn by the candidates. Such decisions are usually made at local parish level. Some parishes allow candidates to wear clothes of their own choice whilst others prefer the equality of school uniform.
- Girls should wear a white dress as a symbol of purity.

What happens at the Sacrament of the Eucharist?

The Rite of Communion takes place, as normal, within the celebration of Mass and begins during the Liturgy of the Word following the homily.

- The Candidates stand and renew their Baptismal Promises.

By renewing their Baptismal Promises the candidates are professing their faith. This act is taking place at the point during the Mass where the profession of faith is usually said in the form of the Creed.

In renewing their vows the candidates are professing the beliefs of the Church for themselves whereas at Baptism the parents and Godparents do so on their behalf.

The Rite of Communion in the Mass is where the bread and wine gets consecrated to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Communion is in the form of consecrated unleavened hosts made from wheat flour and water, just like the unleavened bread used by Jesus at the Last Supper. The host is flat and the size of a ten pence coin. Catholics may receive the host on their tongue or in their hand if the local bishop and the national conference of bishops permit.

If you'd like to find out more about the Sacrament of the Eucharist you can ...

- watch a short film clip featuring Bishop Christopher Coyne on the Catholic TV Network from a series of talks 'Everything you wanted to know about Catholic Liturgy' <http://www.catholictv.com/shows/everything-you-wanted-know-about-catholic-liturgy/why-dont-we-invite-everyone-holy-communion>
- watch a short film clip on <http://bustedhalo.com/podcasts/448-how-do-i-help-my-friends-understand-that-celebrating-first-communion-is-a-big-deal>
- read more about it in 'Youcat' ('Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church') available from CTS
- read more about it in the 'Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church' available from CTS
- read more in 'The Catholic Source Book' Harcourt Religion Publishers

Rite of the Sacrament of the Eucharist

The Rite of Communion takes place within the celebration of Mass. It begins during the **Liturgy of the Word** with the renewal of Baptismal promises following the homily.

So now, before you receive the Sacrament, I ask you to renew the profession of faith you made in baptism or your parents and godparents made in union with the whole Church.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

The Candidates all stand and in unison answer the questions asked by the Priest.

Bishop: Do you reject satan and all his works and all his empty promises?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who came upon the apostles at Pentecost and today is given to you sacramentally in confirmation?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: Do you believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

Candidates: I do.

Bishop: This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All: Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist follows where the priest begins the process on consecrating the bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ.

The altar is prepared with the Sacramentary, the book that includes all the prayers for the Mass.

The priest presents the gifts of bread and wine offered saying:

Priest: "Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life."

All: Blessed be God for ever.

Priest: "Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink."

All: Blessed be God for ever.

The priest washes his hands before he prays the Eucharistic Prayer. He says to himself, "Lord, wash away my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins."

The priest says the Eucharistic prayer:

"At the time he was betrayed and entered willingly into his Passion, he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it, 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.

In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it 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."

When the priest says the words, "This is my body," our faith tells us that Jesus truly becomes present in the simple signs of bread and wine. An amazing change has taken place. The priest holds the consecrated host high for all to see. Servers ring bells to bring special attention to this moment.

When we receive communion, we profess our faith that Jesus is really coming to us in this sacrament. The minister says, "The body of Christ," and "The blood of Christ." We respond "Amen," which is our way of saying, "Yes, I believe!"