



Sunday Eucharist

The day-to-day life of a parish varies greatly from one community to another, but the one thing that all Catholic parishes hold in common is the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, the Lord's Day. This is the gathering point for all parishioners, the time when everyone comes together. The table of God's Word and the table of the Eucharist feed and nourish the community, refreshing the people and sending them on into yet another week of work and struggles, joys and successes, and many opportunities to spread the Kingdom of God. In speech and song, symbol and gesture, we unite our praise and thanksgiving to Christ's perfect self-offering on the cross.

Sunday: The Day of the Lord

From earliest times, Christians have kept Sunday, the Lord's Day, by celebrating the Eucharist, which the Lord gave us as an everlasting memorial of his saving death and resurrection. The Eucharist makes present sacramentally the living mystery of the Lord's Passover from death to life, and our participation in the Mass gives us a unique share in the Passover of Christ. It is no wonder that the Church teaches us that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life, and that the Holy Father invites us to renew our amazement in the face of this great gift.

So important is the liturgy for our lives as Christians that the Church has always taken great care with how the liturgy is celebrated. The essential parts of the liturgy have remained unchanged over the centuries, although the ritual words and form of the liturgy have varied from time to time. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) instituted a number of revisions to the *Roman Missal*, calling for changes to help Catholics celebrate the liturgy more deeply. After the Council,

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there was a major effort to catechize the faithful on the meaning of the liturgy and these revisions. Since then, a whole new generation of Catholics has grown up with the liturgy that we celebrate Sunday after Sunday, week after week, season after season.

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If we were to stop and reflect on what has happened in the years since the Council, we might have to admit that some well-intentioned people may have overlooked some parts of the deep meaning and order of the liturgy. We might become aware that in some places, certain idiosyncrasies might have crept into a particular parish's celebration of the Eucharist. And we might realize that now is a good time for the Church to reflect on and review how we celebrate the liturgy, the most important element of Catholic life.

The Revised General Instruction

Recently, the Holy See issued a revision of the *Roman Missal* and its introduction, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. This revision has grown out of the years of pastoral experience with

the *Roman Missal* that was published immediately after the Second Vatican Council. Respecting the diversity of cultures in the universal Church, the Holy See invited the national conferences of bishops to propose revisions appropriate to their own particular regions. The changes called for in this revision, relatively minor though they are, give witness to the fact that the liturgy is the prayer of the living Church and so understandably must undergo some changes from time to time.

The publication of this revision provides the occasion for renewed catechesis on the understanding and practice of the liturgy, especially the Mass. The hope is that, with this catechesis and reflection, Catholics everywhere can more deeply pray the liturgy with all their hearts and can find in the liturgy the wellspring of their spirituality.

In the weeks to come, we will have the opportunity to reflect again upon the meaning and the value of the liturgy in our Catholic Tradition. We will be introduced to the changes in the liturgy called for in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. As we revisit our celebration of the Mass, all of us may also rediscover some things that perhaps we've taken for granted or haven't paid too much attention to in the past. This catechesis is not based in a concern about law or rubrics, but about the quality and integrity of our prayer together, which must truly be the primary and indispensable source from which we draw the true Christian spirit.

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In some parishes, the implementation of this revision will mark a change in various aspects of the parish's weekly celebration of the Eucharist. In other parishes there may be very little that is noticeably different. One of the most notable changes, for all, concerns the way we receive Holy Communion in this country. The *General Instruction* calls for communicants to make a gesture of reverence before receiving the Eucharist, and the bishops of the United States have determined that for Catholics in this country, that gesture shall be a bow of the head to the Body and Blood of Christ in the minister's hands.

As we reflect on these changes in the celebration of Mass, it is important to appreciate the opportunity they offer for all the Church. This is a chance for each parish to consider a most important question: "Is it clear, in the celebration of the Eucharist in our parish, that this is the *most important thing we do all week?*"

In the coming weeks, bulletin inserts will address these topics:

- Ministries and Roles in the Liturgy
- Postures and Gestures at Mass
- Hearing the Word of God
- The Eucharistic Prayer
- The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass
- Music in the Liturgy

These inserts are to help in the preparation for the implementation of the revised norms and guidelines, which will take place in the Diocese of Worcester beginning on the first Sunday of Lent, February 29, 2004.

