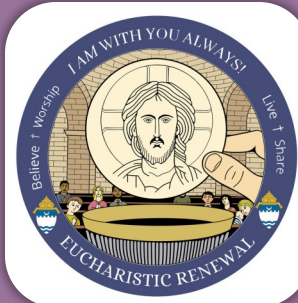


# Encountering the Eucharist

Believe ✦ Worship ✦ Live ✦ Share



If you've been to the liturgical service called "Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament" you might have noticed that the priest or deacon puts a cloth over his shoulders and then covers his hands while blessing the people. This vestment is called a "Humeral Veil." The Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is different from a normal blessing. The priest or deacon in Benediction does not bless the people. Rather, the minister holds the Blessed Sacrament Who is the Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ *Himself* directly blesses the people. In order to signify that he is not blessing the people, the priest or deacon covers his hands with a humeral veil which drapes over his shoulders and covers his hands (*humurus* means "shoulder" so a humeral veil is a "shoulder veil").

## What We Believe... The MOST Blessed Sacrament

Have you ever wondered why the Church calls the Eucharist the *Most Blessed Sacrament*? Are not the other six Sacraments also just as "blessed?" Are they not *as* important? What is a Sacrament in the first place? The sacraments are "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us" (CCC 1131). In other words, a sacrament is a sacred and visible sign that is instituted by Jesus to give us grace, an undeserved gift from God. (See also



CCC 1084). Christ was present at the inception of all of the sacraments, which He instituted 2,000 years ago. Christ is also present every time each sacrament is celebrated. The Catholic Church has all of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ, which include Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that "the seven sacraments touch

all the stages and all important moments of the Christian life" (CCC 1210). Nevertheless, this still doesn't answer the question as to why the Eucharist is considered to be the "*Most Blessed*" of all the *Sacraments*. To begin, each sacrament is a sign demonstrative of the present invisible sacred realities. Another way of saying this is that each sacrament is an efficacious sign; the visible sign actually *effects* in us the invisible reality that it signifies. For example, the visible sign of water in baptism indicates cleansing. When someone is baptized, there is a cleansing of the flesh when the water is poured. But that indicates the cleansing of the person of sin by the invisible reality of Christ's sanctifying grace being poured into our very being. However, with the Eucharist, not only do the sacred species of bread and wine effect the invisible reality that they signify, they *really are, truly* what they signify! That is the real substantial presence of the body and blood with the soul and divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ! St. Ignatius says that "the Eucharist is the flesh of Our Savior Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins and which the Father in His loving kindness raised again." Theodore of Mopsuestia adds, "The Lord did not say: This is symbol of my body, and this is a symbol of my blood, but rather: This *is* my body and my blood. He teaches us not to look to the nature of what lies before us and is perceived by the senses, because the giving of thanks and the words spoken over it have changed it into flesh and blood." The Eucharist is "*Most Blessed*" because it is the Lord Himself!

## Sharing Our Very Life: A Worthy Reception of Communion

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul says something a bit shocking: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (1 Cor. 11: 27-30). What does this Scripture mean for us today? It seems clear that, for St. Paul, receiving the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion was not just a casual affair. Apparently even he believed that the bread and the cup were much more than just symbols! How can a person eat and drink a symbol unworthily so as to bring judgment or condemnation upon himself? Invited to the Lord’s Supper, we need to realize the great gift given us. The Eucharist expresses who we are as a Church. The Eucharist makes the Church. Already in the second century, Justin Martyr wrote, “no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined” (First Apology 66:1-20). Thus, to receive Holy Communion, someone must be baptized and living in the state of sanctifying grace. The Eucharist expresses our communion with the Lord. Mortal sin, however, breaks that communion. It destroys the bond of life between us and the Risen Lord. If we sin gravely, willfully and knowingly, we commit mortal sin. In such cases, we need to repent and avail ourselves of the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance before approaching the Lord in Holy Communion. Being one in mind and heart with the truth of the gospel, as handed down in the teaching of the Church, is a condition for a worthy reception of Communion.



“Surely the word of Christ, who could make something that did not exist out of nothing, can change things that do exist into something they were not before. For it is no less extraordinary to give new natures to things than it is to change nature.”

-St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan

### Life in the Eucharist: Pope St. John Paul, II

Born Karol Józef Wojtyła in Wadowice, Poland, in 1920, John Paul served as pope from 1978 until his death in 2005. During his nearly-27-year pontificate, his teachings transformed the Catholic Church. The first pope to extensively travel the globe, St. John Paul II’s total devotion to the Eucharist was witnessed by people everywhere. Stories are told of how he often went off script or off schedule during official visits to stop before a tabernacle he

chanced to pass to spend time praying. Part of his day was devoted to extended contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament. In an address to young people of Bologna, Italy, Sept. 27, 1997 St. John Paul said this: “The Eucharist is the secret of my day. It gives strength and meaning to all my activities of service to the Church and to the whole world... Let Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament speak to your hearts. It is he who is

the true answer of life that you seek. He stays here with us: He is God with us. Seek him without tiring; welcome him without reserve; love him without interruption: today, tomorrow, forever!



### Adoro te Devote: The Fraction Rite

The name “Fraction Rite” comes from the focus of this rite: the breaking of the sacred Host. This action symbolizes Christ’s body broken for us, so that when we receive holy Communion we may be one, united in Christ. St. Paul writes, “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Cor. 10:17). In the early church, the gesture of breaking the Eucharistic bread gave the entire celebration of the Eucharist its name: “the breaking of the bread.” During the Fraction Rite the priest also breaks a small piece of the sacred Host and drops it into the chalice. This action is called the commingling. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, No. 83, says that this action is to “signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious.”

