



Diocese of Joliet
Religious Education Office
101 W. Airport Rd.
Romeoville, IL 60446

Phone: (815) 838-6475
Fax: (815) 588-6003
www.dioceseofjoliet.org
www.dioceseofjoliet.org/reo

Dear Parents,

Greetings from Joliet! As director of our diocesan Religious Education Office, and on behalf of Bishop R. Daniel Conlon, I wish to congratulate you on the upcoming celebration of your child's First Eucharist. It is an exciting time, a time for focus on family, parish and faith. I hope you and your family are experiencing the joy of coming to know more fully the love of our Lord, Jesus, in this period of preparation and anticipation.

Thank you for having brought your child, in conjunction with your parish religious formation program, to a point of readiness to fully enter into the experience of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Surely, you appreciate how essential is your role in nurturing the gift of faith God has placed in your child. Christian parenting is a holy vocation, a sacred responsibility of bringing your family to know and live the "good news" of Jesus and our Catholic faith. I invite you each day to ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit so that you can be the heart and hands of Jesus for your family. I pray that you may be blessed in seeing your child grow in "wisdom, age and grace", as Mary and Joseph experienced in Jesus (Luke 2:52).



I'd like to offer two strong encouragements to you in this final time of preparation and, perhaps more importantly, in all the days after your child's First Eucharist. First, I hope you will strive to attend to your own faith life, seeking to continue to understand our Catholic faith and how it can be a rich source of hope and meaning for life. In Baptism, each of us were set forth on a journey of a lifetime, on which we are called to faithful Christian discipleship. We must never consider our Confirmation as a graduation from growing in faith, whether spiritually or intellectually. As your child continues to reveal a developing grasp of Catholic faith and a maturing relationship with God and the Church, so too may you see yourself as a work-in-progress, desiring to live out your baptismal identity ever more deeply. In this process, connect with your parish's personnel, ministries and resources, so that the entire faith community can accompany you in your continuing faith formation. This is a part of what parish is all about.

Secondly, I encourage you to value the precious gift of celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist each Sunday with your parish community. For 2000 years this liturgy, our Mass, has been the core Christian act, the centerpiece for life as the Body of Christ, the Church. Liturgy is as much *who we are* as Catholics as *what we do*. It is, since the time of the apostles, where we have come to be fed in Word, Sacrament and Community. It is where we not only give worship to God and obey Christ's command to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19), but also where we nourish ourselves and support one another for the remarkable and ordinary challenges of living the week ahead. In short, if Baptism has set us on a journey, Eucharist is our food for the journey.

Dear friends in Christ, you are precious in the eyes of our God and to our Church! You have been called to bring yet another generation into relationship with Christ. Please see your child's First Eucharist as a beautiful beginning for your entire family. Be present and active in your parish community. The great challenge of the Eucharist is to love as we have been loved, to feed one another as Christ feeds us. May the Eucharist strengthen you and your family in His love, so that you may join in the mission of the entire Catholic Church to transform our world into God's reign, a place where justice and peace and love abound!

Yours in Christ,

Thomas S. Quinlan
Director



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Estimados Padres,

¡Saludos desde Joliet! Como director de nuestra Oficina Diocesana de Educación Religiosa, y en nombre de nuestro Obispo R. Daniel Conlon, los quiero felicitar por la próxima celebración de la Primera Comunión de su hijo (a). Es un tiempo de mucha felicidad, un tiempo para centrarse en la familia, parroquia y fe. Yo espero que usted y su familia, estén experimentando una gran felicidad, al conocer más a fondo el amor de Nuestro Señor en este periodo de preparación y anticipación.

En conjunto con el programa de educación religiosa quiero agradecerle por haber traído a su hijo o hija, al punto de estar preparado para entrar de lleno en la experiencia de la Liturgia de la Eucaristía. Seguramente, ustedes entienden lo importante que es su participación al nutrir el don de la fe que Dios ha puesto en su hijo (a). La vocación de los padres Cristianos es una vocación santa, una responsabilidad sagrada de traer a su familia a conocer y vivir la “buena nueva” de Jesús y de nuestra fe Católica. Yo los invito a que cada día pidan por la gracia del Espíritu Santo para que sean ustedes los corazones y las manos de Jesús para su familia. Yo le ruego a Dios para que ustedes sean bendecidos al ver a su hijo (a) crecer en “sabiduría, edad y gracia”, como María y José observaron a Jesús. (Lucas 2:52)



Quisiera ofrecer dos estímulos fuertes a ustedes en estos días de preparación final y, tal vez más importante, en todos los días después de la Primera Comunión de su hijo (a). Primero, espero que ustedes traten de atender su propia vida espiritual, continuamente tratando de entender nuestra fe Católica y cómo puede ser la fe un recurso rico en esperanza y sentido de vida. En el Bautismo, cada uno de nosotros fuimos enviados al camino de la vida, en donde somos llamados a ser fieles discípulos Cristianos. Nunca deberíamos de considerar nuestra Confirmación como una graduación de crecimiento en la fe, ya sea espiritual o intelectualmente. Mientras su hijo (a) continua desarrollando un entendimiento de la fe Católica y una relación madura con Dios y la Iglesia, así también, que usted se vea como un “trabajo en proceso”, deseando vivir su identidad bautismal más hondamente. En este proceso, conéctese con el personal de su parroquia,

ministerios y recursos, para que toda la comunidad parroquial pueda acompañarle en su formación de fe. Esto es solo una parte del propósito de su parroquia.

Segundo, yo le animo a que valore el precioso don de celebrar la Liturgia de la Eucaristía cada Domingo con su comunidad parroquial. Por 2000 años esta liturgia, nuestra Misa, ha sido el acto Cristiano básico, el centro de la vida en el Cuerpo de Cristo, la Iglesia. La Liturgia es tanto “lo que somos” como Católicos como “lo que hacemos”. Desde el tiempo de los apóstoles ha sido, el lugar a donde venimos a alimentarnos con la Palabra, Sacramento y Comunidad. Es, en donde no sólo ofrecemos culto a Dios y obedecemos el mandato de Cristo de “Haced esto en conmemoración mía” (Lucas 22:19), pero también en donde nos nutrimos y apoyamos mutuamente para enfrentar los pequeños y grandes desafíos que nos esperan durante la próxima semana. En pocas palabras, si el Bautismo nos envía al camino, la Eucaristía es el alimento para el camino.

¡Estimados amigos en Cristo, ustedes son preciosos ante los ojos de nuestro Dios y de nuestra Iglesia! Ustedes han sido llamados a llevar a una nueva generación en relación con Cristo. Por favor vean la Primera Comunión de su hijo (a) como un bello comienzo para toda su familia. Estén presentes y activos en su comunidad parroquial. El gran desafío de la Eucaristía es de amar como hemos sido amados, de alimentarnos mutuamente como Cristo nos alimenta. ¡Que la Eucaristía los fortalezca a usted y a su familia en Su amor, para que así puedan unirse a la misión de toda la Iglesia Católica, de transformar nuestro mundo en el reino de Dios, un lugar donde la paz, la justicia, y el amor abundan!

Suyo en Cristo,

Thomas S. Quinlan
Director

Eucharist: Food for the Journey of Discipleship (by Tom Quinlan)

Have you ever taken a long, maybe really long, car trip? Most of us probably have. Can you remember what it was like? The sights, the fun, the fatigue, the stops. Long travels, whether in a car or on a bike or walking a trail out in nature can, upon reflection, be a metaphor for the journey of life.

Sometimes our lives are headed uphill, sometimes downhill. Sometimes we're traveling in sunny, pleasant conditions, sometimes we're immersed in clouds, fog, and even the dark of night. But no matter, onward we go because we have a destination that we need to reach.

For the Catholic Christian person, the road of life is traveled in faith. Baptism is so important because it is our starting point and our compass. It orients us for the journey of discipleship, the close following of our Lord, Jesus. Baptism gives us a special grace-filled relationship to Christ, and through him, to all the baptized who become our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Now, if Baptism sends us forth on a path of Christian discipleship, the Eucharist is our food for the journey! Whether we refer to it as the Bread of Life, the Blessed Sacrament, or Body of Christ, the Eucharist is the most intimate gift Christ leaves to us. It actually is, in a way no one can fully grasp, the presence of Christ with us and in us!

The Eucharist is real food and real drink, ordinary foods made from wheat and grapes that we lift up to God, returned to us as the extraordinary sacrament of Christ for us. It is made possible by Jesus' act of complete surrender to the will of the Father, whereby he offers up his life, his love, and finally his body and blood on the Cross.

The Eucharist embodies the transformative power of the Cross. It represents the Paschal Mystery, from which we know that, in Christ, death no longer has power to destroy... that God's grace is greater than sin and darkness. The Eucharist, first shared with his disciples on the night before he died, contains Jesus' everything, given so that we might live more fully here in this world and ultimately be granted a share in life eternal.

And so, as at the Last Supper, Christ wishes today to feed us. He longs to be our refreshment, our food for the difficult, beautiful journey of life to which God calls us. When we partake in the Eucharist we are tapping into the very life of God, made fully available to us now and forever through the death and Resurrection of Christ. It is right that the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, frames the Eucharist (both as sacrament and as the liturgical celebration) as "the source and the summit of Christian life"!

Certainly this is something to keep in mind on those days we might feel resistant to attending Mass. Or when we find ourselves a bit bored and wondering what we are getting out of Mass. Mass is, of course, more about participation than simply receiving. It is more about *us* than *me*. The Eucharist, as liturgy, is a communal act of divine worship, where everyone's full presence and active prayer is vital in this greatest prayer of the Church.

After all God has done for us in Christ, why would we ever try to travel through life without help? Jesus knew how difficult it would be for us to follow in his path. That is precisely why he gave us his Body and Blood, mystically present in the Eucharist...so that he could be intimately present to us, nourishing us for the journey of Christ-like discipleship. Let us always stay connected to the love of Christ offered to us in this Bread of Life. Christ shares it with us that we might remain true to the dignity of our baptismal identity and stay on the course our Baptism set.

Our *National Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that "we are called to realize that we become what we receive... which has great implications for how we live and act." (p 126) Saying "Amen" when we take the Eucharist should not only be a "yes, I believe", but also a "yes, I become". In this life journey of discipleship, may the Eucharist not only *be* the Body of Christ for us. May it also be our food to help us together to *become* more fully the voice, the heart, the Body of Christ for our families, for our neighborhood and for our world today!

Eucharist: Food that Satisfies Our Deepest Hunger

Tom Quinlan (tquinlan@dioceseofjoliet.org)

Two of them that same day were making their way to a village named Emmaus, seven miles distant from Jerusalem. ...Then the two recounted to them what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

Luke 24:13-35

Through this bread there comes about what we see in the gospel: a fellowship of pilgrims, a fellowship gathered around the apostles, a fellowship of a meal that includes everyone, a fellowship of one single pilgrim path to God.

Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ

Sacraments are means through which God share Himself with us.

The basic structure of Mass (Liturgy of Word and of Eucharist) dates back to the First Century, when Christians combined their Eucharistic liturgy with the Jewish traditional synagogue “Word” service.

We may not have people hungry for a plate of rice or for a piece of bread in New York City, but there is a tremendous hunger and a tremendous feeling of unwantedness everywhere. And that is really a very great poverty. We don't expect hunger here today, in Western countries. We don't expect, maybe, that terrible loneliness. But everywhere today hunger is not only for a piece of bread, but hunger for God, hunger for love.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

We partake in the Eucharist because we are hungry. Ours is an elemental hungering. We want sustenance. We crave nourishment beyond food and drink that sustain our physical lives. We hunger for life to be spiritually meaningful and for it to be redeemed from the evil and viciousness that all too often mar it. Our hunger is the human appetite to be in communion with one another. Like the thirst of which the psalmist spoke so long ago, it is also our inescapable longing for God.”

J. Robert Baker, Barbara Budde

The “Paschal Mystery” (the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus) is available to us in the Eucharist.

The wheat and the grapes represent our lives...the ordinary sacrifice of our lives ground and crushed, offered to God who returns the gifts as extraordinary, life-giving Eucharistic food.

The great mystery of the Eucharist is that God's love is offered to us not in the abstract, but in a very concrete way; not as a theory, but as food for our daily life. The Eucharist opens the way for us to make God's love our own... Whenever you receive the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, his love is given to you, the same love that he showed on the cross.

Fr. Henri Nouwen

The mystery of God continues to unfold in our world. The dying and rising of Christ in our own lives...and in the world connects us to the “Liturgy of the World.”

Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ

In celebrating the Eucharist, we are called to *be* the Body of Christ for the world.

How the bread and wine at Mass is “transubstantiated” into the Body and Blood of Christ is mystery...and that is as it should be with a God infinitely greater than us.

When you look at the Crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host, you understand how much Jesus loves you now.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the Body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

1 Corinthians 10: 16-17

The Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, calls the Eucharist "the source and summit of Christian life".

Jesus speaks in the silence of the mystery of the Eucharist and reminds us each time that following him means going out of ourselves and making our lives not something we 'possess,' but a gift to him and to others.

Pope Francis

When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and "the work of our redemption is carried out." This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there.

Pope John Paul II

For us, the eucharistic banquet is a real foretaste of the final banquet foretold by the prophets...to be celebrated in the joy of the communion of saints. The more ardent the love for the Eucharist in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: to bring Christ to others.

Pope Benedict XVI

Eucharist is *both* sacrifice and meal.

From the first generation after Christ, the Church understood the Eucharist to be the *real presence* of Jesus.

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life, going to Beer-sheba of Judah...and went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death... He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. He looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched him, and ordered: "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!" He got up, ate and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.

1 Kings 19: 3-8

God made us; invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other.

C. S. Lewis

The table awaits us at which our baptismal life is fed over and over again. We have every reason to cry out in gratitude: alleluia, alleluia!

Balthasar Fischer