



Faith Formation Session on the Eucharist: LEADER'S GUIDE

1 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!

Faith formation leaders should review all materials and select the material most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.

Introduction:

The Eucharist is our Number ONE reason for being Catholic! No surprise here as we believe the Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our faith. "Eucharist" was the overwhelming response, whether described as "Real Presence," "the Body and Blood of Jesus," "Communion," or "the Mass." Catholics are Eucharistic people; we believe the Eucharist feeds, forms, strengthens, and sends us as the one Body of Christ.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.
Guide us to a deeper conversion.
Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty and truth of our Catholic faith.
Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.
May your Church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.
Be with us now as we explore the Eucharist.
Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture:

Matthew 26:26-29

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father."

The Gospel of the Lord:

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Song: *(or select your favorite hymn on the Eucharist:*

We Come to You: Josh Blakesley

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ51_UDpVIs

Section I: The Eucharist as Self-Gift

Video # 1: Archbishop Michael O. Jackels

<http://youtu.be/Oug63HiFwlg>

Archbishop Jackels speaks passionately about the power of the Eucharist as self-gift. Jesus' gift of self, the pouring out of his life—totally and completely—on the cross, fulfilled the covenant and became the source of our salvation. His self-gift, his sacrificial love, is made present to us in the Eucharist. This abundant gift is the reason for our great thanksgiving!

According to theologian Michael Downey, the Trinity is a relationship—a self-giving—of love: God the Father as the Giver of Love; Jesus the Son as the Gift of Love; the Holy Spirit as the ongoing Gift/ing of Love. God's gift/ing continues in the Eucharist—until the end of the ages. "It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. ... In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us ... (CCC, #1380).

God's self-gift relinquished all power (power that rightfully belongs to God) to come to earth, in complete vulnerability, and dwell among us. God's self-gift loves so completely that Jesus willingly laid down his life, from crib to cross. This given-ness is perpetuated in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We are invited to receive of this self-gift—this visible, physical, and tangible love of God—and in turn become gift to one another.

Opportunities to become a self-gift grace our day, often unnoticed. Doing the dishes, folding laundry, reading to children, or taking out the garbage become a generous self-gift when done without complaint—even when tired or stressed. Giving our time to an elderly friend, making soup for a neighbor, serving in a homeless shelter, or spending time helping a new mother extends the gift of love—especially when inconvenient. Children and teens experience self-gift when they give their time to help a younger sibling or sacrifice popularity to befriend an isolated or bullied classmate.

Some self-gifts are truly of generous proportions—even lifelong. A young woman, already a mother to an eighteen month old, gave birth prematurely to twins. One of her babies was released from the hospital after ten days while the other remained in the hospital for over two months. This mother participated in Christ's self-gift by caring for her toddler, nursing her baby at home, and then pumping breast milk to feed her baby in the hospital. She gave of herself—body and soul—for the good of her loved ones. This mother became "Eucharist" by pouring God's abundant love into her family—into the world.

Please break into small groups after watching Archbishop Jackels' witness to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What does self-gift mean to you? What virtues do you need to give more generously of self?
- b. When have you witnessed an incredible act of self-gift?
- c. How does the Eucharist challenge us to participate in Christ's self-gift in the home/neighborhood/workplace?

Section II: The Eucharist as Real Presence

Video #2: The Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

http://youtu.be/Ah_K16Ukcb0

Perhaps we learn more about "real presence" by witnessing what isn't "real" presence:

- Two "friends" sitting across from each other in a booth, eyes cast down, texting.
- Family members sharing the same room, staring ahead at the television, rarely speaking.
- Two people refusing to listen to each other's viewpoints because of their own ideologies.

Real presence implies the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—is fully, completely, and truly present to the other. A person may show up physically but may be too distracted or disinterested to offer a real presence to another. A person may be listening on the phone or praying for another, but lacks the fullness of presence because of the physical absence. In either case there is a kind of presence, but something is missing. In the Eucharist, Jesus is present spiritually and physically—totally—Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity!

“When we speak of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist we call it the ‘fullness’ of presence or the presence that is of ‘par excellence’” (*Sacred Congregation of Rites, Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Ministry*, # 9). Scripture affirms Jesus’ Real Presence in the Eucharist in John 6: 48-51, when Jesus said: “‘Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.’ The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us [his] flesh to eat?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.’”

The Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is the deepest knowing and most perfect union humans can experience—the reason for our existence. This intimacy and fullness with God in Jesus is also the foundation for all other relationships: a deep and abiding friendship, an intimate marriage, parent/child love—love that lasts for eternity.

Jesus is as close to us as he was to his disciples, even more so until the Last Supper “when they too were privileged to eat His body and drink His blood and get Him inside themselves instead of just outside” (Peter Kreeft, *Jesus Shock*, 103). He comes not as a symbol or as the remembrance of a historical person; the risen Jesus comes to us, fully alive—in the now. While we will never fully understand this great mystery, we can open our hearts to this most intimate and transformative gift of Jesus’ Real Presence.

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- a. When have you experienced the real presence of someone at a needed time in your life?
- b. How is the Eucharist compelling you to take Jesus’ presence to someone in your home, neighborhood, workplace, or parish?
- c. In what ways does the Real Presence of Christ challenge you?

Section III: The Eucharist as the Source and Summit of our Lives

Video #3: The Faithful of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/ZpoFyZNgYNE>

Source and Summit: “The Eucharist is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’ The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch” (CCC, #1324).

Everything we do, everything we are, leads to and comes from the Eucharist, the “source and summit” of our lives. In the Eucharist, we offer ourselves—our joys, sorrows, struggles, works, failures, and sacrifices—to God, finding them acceptable through the sacrifice of Jesus: “Through him, with him, and in him” (the conclusion of each Eucharistic Prayer). In the Eucharist, our gift and Jesus’ gift become one—blessed, broken and given. The summit—the Eucharist—becomes the source, as we are commissioned to take his loving, healing, caring presence into the world—our homes, neighborhoods, cities, nations.

New and Eternal Covenant: Each time we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we participate in the new and eternal covenant between God and God’s people. A covenant, rather than a contract, is a love relationship between two people. Throughout history, the people of God continuously broke the old covenant—turning away through sin and idolatry—until Jesus came into the world and perfectly fulfilled the new and eternal (never to be broken) covenant on our behalf. Each time we partake in the Eucharist, we continue to participate in this covenantal love with God. Through Holy Communion, we also drink in the joys, sorrows, and struggles of our brothers and sisters and commit ourselves to them.

As Christians, participating in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration is critical for renewing our covenant with God and community. The Jewish community ceased work and spent Saturday, the Sabbath, worshipping God and loving family. We too are called to “keep holy the Sabbath” (Exodus 20), on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, through worship at Mass and revitalization of our most important relationships.

Do you remember Sunday dinner at grandma’s house? Do you remember taking hikes on Sunday with friends? Do you remember “game night” with your siblings and parents on Sunday evening? Do you remember the community refusing to partake in commerce on Sunday? Sunday, the Lord’s Day, calls us to step back from the busyness of life, to remember God’s love, and to renew our covenants.

Inexhaustible Richness: The Eucharist is THE sacrament of faith. “It is most appropriate that the Eucharist, the ‘perfect sacrament,’ goes by various names, for no one name says it all. The richness of this sacrament is inexhaustible—no one name totally captures its meaning—and so many names are needed. Each name tells us a part of the mystery we celebrate and are called to enter into fully.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers nine names for the Eucharist, each of which refers to a part of the hidden treasure this sacrament offer us (see #1328-1332) (*Sacramental Theology*: Stasiak, 940)

Expressions of the Eucharist include: *Thanksgiving; Lord’s Supper; the Breaking of the Bread; the Memorial of the Lord’s Passion and Resurrection; the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy; Most Blessed Sacrament; Holy Communion; Holy Mass*. Each expression is rooted in God’s love for us, given on the cross, and made present to us in the Eucharist. “In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: ‘Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking’” (CCC, #1327).

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- In what ways have you grown in your appreciation and understanding of the Eucharist through your life experiences?
- Why is the Eucharist described as “the sacrament of faith” or the “source and summit” of our lives?
- How do you renew your covenants each week/day?
- How can we keep the Lord’s Day in our busy world?

Conclusion:

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion: What did you learn about the Eucharist? What did you like best about the session? What is one thing you will share with someone at home or in your sphere of influence? What difference does it make in one’s life to believe in the real presence of the Eucharist?

Finish the session by playing an appropriate song followed by the concluding prayer:

Closing Song: Miracle of Grace: Curtis Stephan
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0ZYOnwH-2w>

Prayer in Thanksgiving for the Gift of the Eucharist:

Loving God, you have called each of us to be formed in your image.
Thank you for the gift of your living presence in the Eucharist.
Grant us a deep desire to receive you and to take your presence into the world.
Help us to be men and women who pour out our lives for others.
Give us the strength and courage to live as the Body of Christ.
Make us into people of thanksgiving.
Mary, Blessed Mother of the Word Incarnate, intercede for us.
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Additional Resources:

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on the Eucharist, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580 X214 or dbqcm1@dbqarch.org.