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Introduction

Our synodal exercise here identified the Sunday assembly for Holy Mass – every Sunday in every parish – as the most important marker for a vital parish community.

For that to take place every Sunday in every parish will require prayer, personal invitations and a joyful witness from our priests to inspire an increase of vocations to priesthood.

The survey respondents also identified what will enhance that worship experience: a sense of belonging, or hospitality; appropriate hymns; and a good (and short) homily.

There was concern expressed about whether worshippers ever received an explanation of why we do what we do at Mass, and of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

All of that is nothing peculiar to our time and place. It illustrates the need for on-going formation in our holy Catholic Faith, especially on how to pray and to worship at Mass.

One of the archdiocesan ministry priorities is to enhance the experience of the Sunday assembly for Holy Mass.

Towards that end, special emphasis is placed on what are called the 4 H's – hospitality, hymns, homily, and how to (worship at Mass).

On the [archdiocesan website](#), there is an icon entitled The Fourth H, which attempts to explain why we do what we do at Mass.

The reflections that follow are offered for the benefit of a Eucharistic revival or renewal, needed in every time and place, but maybe more so now after the COVID pandemic.

Our Holy Father Francis (May the Lord preserve him) often organizes his comments around “tres palabras,” or 3 points.

That schema serves well for comments on the Eucharist, as there can be said to be 3 Eucharistic moments: Worship at Holy Mass, the Consecration, and Holy Communion.

Worship at Holy Mass

The Third Commandment tells us to keep one day a week holy. The Jews do that on Saturday. Catholics do it on Sunday, to honor the day Jesus rose from the dead.

We keep Sunday holy by not working (unless we *really* have to), by doing good deeds, and by worship at Mass, either after 4 pm on Saturday, or any time on Sunday.

The heart of our worship at Mass involves gift-giving between God and ourselves; in fact, “the holy exchange of gifts” is a traditional way of referring to the Mass.

In the first part of Mass called the Liturgy of the Word, in the readings and the homily, we listen to a proclamation and an explanation of God’s unconditional, unbounded love for us.

In exchange, in the second part of Mass called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we give the gift of like minded love to God. And after that, a series of changes take place:

We reach into the collection basket to change our gift of love to God into an offering of money, time in prayer, or service to the poor; put your money where your mouth is.

Those offerings are then changed into, and collectively symbolized by the bread and wine that are brought to the altar.

And at the altar, God works through a priest to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus, making mystically present his sacrifice on the cross for our benefit.

The Eucharist is given as spiritual food at Holy Communion to change us to be like Jesus, imitating his mind and heart, his humility and charity, his forgiveness and service.

And if we live that way after Mass, outside of church, on weekdays, towards any and all people, even an enemy, especially an enemy, with God’s help we will change the world.

All of the above makes up the worship we offer God at Holy Mass. It is right and just, our duty and our salvation to give God thanks and praise at Mass.

The Consecration

Impress your family and friends by using the word *transubstantiation* in conversation. But just in case someone knows what it means, you should try to understand it too.

The word transubstantiation is rooted in Latin. The "tion" ending indicates an action, "trans" or change is the action, and "substantia" (a thing's essential nature) is what is changed.

So, the word means the act of changing the essential nature of a thing into a different nature. This is the word used to describe what happens to bread and wine at Holy Mass.

During Mass, at the Consecration, a priest invokes the Holy Spirit and repeats Jesus' words at the Last Supper, and the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

The essential nature is changed, but it still looks and tastes like bread and wine; those are called accidentals, in the sense that they aren't essential to the nature of a thing.

This is a miracle, something the laws of nature can't explain. It's also a mystery, not like a who-done-it story, but a truth about God that we believe even if we can't fully understand.

But with our intellect, we are able to make conclusions about what is unseen from what is seen; faith will tell us Christ is present, even when our human senses fail.

That's why, at the Consecration, we kneel in silence broken only by the ringing of a bell, which calls our attention to worship and adore the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Sometimes, at that same moment, people in the pews call out, "my Lord and my God." It's okay to do that, when it's inspired by faith in and devotion to the Real Presence.

That's also why candles and flowers are placed around the altar, the altar ministers bow and genuflect, and incense is burned (Trinity, Powder Blend, hypo-allergenic... the blue stuff).

Finally, with the change at Consecration, it's no longer correct to refer to the Eucharist as bread and wine, because it's really, truly and most completely the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Holy Communion

The decision on whether to go to Holy Communion belongs to each Catholic, and no one else. And in that regard, we should give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, and receive...

After, of course, examining ourselves: Am I Catholic? Can I distinguish between bread and the Host? Have I fasted for 1 hour before Communion time? Am I guilty of mortal sin?

We are obliged by Church law to go to Communion at least once a year, but we should want to go more often on account of the many benefits, for example:

It strengthens our union with God, the Church, and the saints in heaven. It's like a line in a poem: My God and I shall interknit, like rain and ocean, breath and air.

A consequence of our union with God from Holy Communion is that our venial (minor) sins are forgiven, and it makes us stronger to say "no" to doing a mortal (major) sin.

Holy Communion also lifts up our hope in the promise of heaven, and our desire to go there (that's why the Eucharist is given to people when they're sick or dying).

Heaven is the goal for which God created us. We say the saints in heaven, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, experienced as sublime bliss.

The cause of our sadness is the persistent, painful nagging of our desiring to be satisfied; it's never enough, or long-lasting, and so we start all over again, and again. Ugh.

So, the cause of our joy is the *quieting* our desires, when all the good things we want are satisfied at once, completely, and forever by our perfect union with God = heaven. Aah.

And that's because any good thing we desire has its origin and fullness in God; if you hanker for a Hostess Ho-Ho, it's really God you desire, the essence of Ho-Ho-ness.

Receiving the Eucharist slowly works a change in us: to desire power, possessions and pleasure less, and to desire God more, as well as the things of God, like helping the poor.

Conclusion

Going to Sunday Mass isn't our only religious practice; in fact, the readings and homily, giving a gift, and receiving Communion help us practice religion outside of church too.

At the end of Mass, the deacon or priest says words translated from the Latin, *Ite missa est*. It means: Go! The Church is sent! This isn't permission to leave, but a command to go.

We are transformed by the Eucharist, and sent out to transform the world. There should be signs over the exit doors of church: You are now entering mission territory.

And our mission includes to make peace, to be caretakers of earth, our common home, and to help the poor. This last mission, the Bible says, is *the* practice of true religion.

The Bible also says that the love that inspires helping the poor can cover a mountain of sins, as well as keep us holy until the Day of Judgment.

And about that day, Jesus says he will judge us on whether or not we helped the poor: those who do will enjoy heaven; those who don't, won't.

And so, the way to a joyful and fulfilled life here and in the hereafter is to live for, give to, help out, share with, serve, even sacrifice for the benefit of others, such as the poor.

In addition to continuing the mission of Jesus, there are practices we can do after Mass that flow from our faith in the Eucharist, and which also strengthen it. For example:

When we pass by a Catholic church, with a tabernacle, where the Eucharist is kept, we can bow our heads, make the Sign of the Cross, or say the name of Jesus.

Or we can stop in the church for a quick genuflection before the tabernacle, or stay longer to kneel in prayer, or to adore the Eucharist exposed in a monstrance.

The Eucharist is called our source and summit: all the practices mentioned above flow from it, and then lead us back to worship at Holy Mass, the Consecration, and Holy Communion.

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