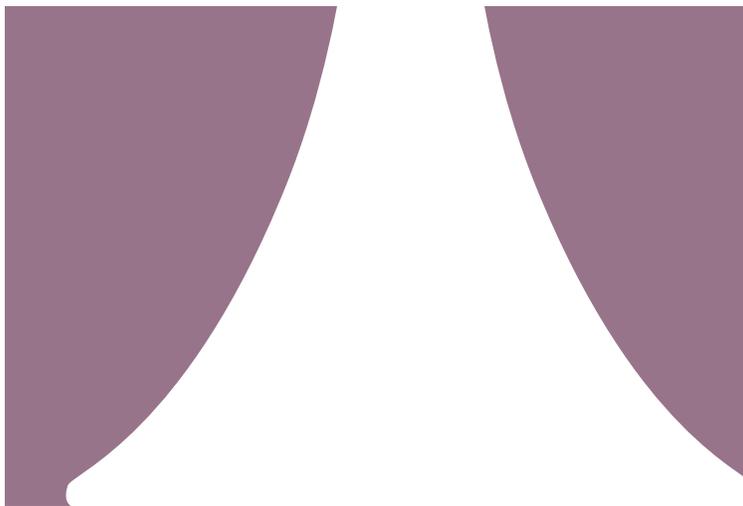
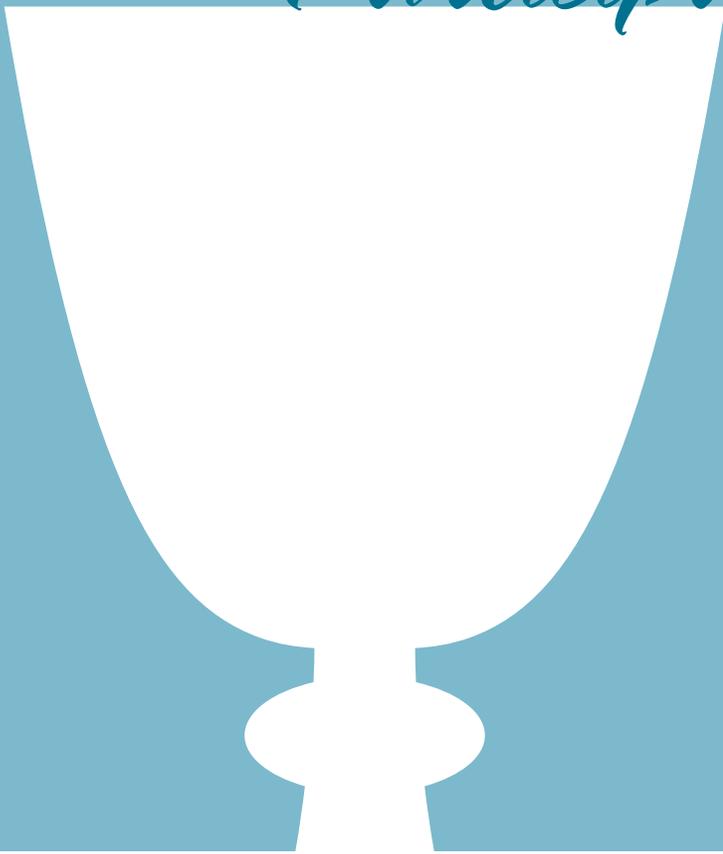




*Small Group
Participant Booklet*



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Welcome to Living the Eucharist

Congratulations! You have decided to join a *Living the Eucharist* small group during Lent. Your participation can enrich your life in ways both subtle and amazing. During the next six weeks you can expect to grow in your understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist, participate more fully in Sunday Mass, and leave Mass with a renewed zeal to let the light of Christ shine.

FORMAT OF THE MEETINGS

Your small group meetings will take around 90 minutes:

- 8 MIN.** Welcome and opening prayer
- 10 MIN.** Response to the Opening Questions for the topic
- 10 MIN.** Presentation of the topic
- 30 MIN.** Discussion of the topic
- 25 MIN.** Praying with the Sunday Mass readings using the *lectio divina* method
- 5 MIN.** Closing prayer
- 2 MIN.** Announcements

Refreshments and social time after the meeting

THE TOPICS FOR EACH WEEK

You will nourish your spiritual life by focusing on six topics during your meetings.

- MEETING 1: Why We Gather for Sunday Eucharist**
PREPARING FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
- MEETING 2: Who's at the Table?**
PREPARING FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT
- MEETING 3: What Happens at Sunday Mass?**
PREPARING FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
- MEETING 4: The Dynamic Role of the Holy Spirit**
PREPARING FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT
- MEETING 5: How Do I Respond?**
PREPARING FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT
- MEETING 6: What Changes?**
PREPARING FOR PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

THE EUCHARIST, AS A MYSTERY TO BE "LIVED," MEETS EACH OF US AS WE ARE, AND MAKES OUR CONCRETE EXISTENCE THE PLACE WHERE WE EXPERIENCE DAILY THE RADICAL NEWNESS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE NOURISHES AND INCREASES WITHIN US ALL THAT WE HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED AT BAPTISM, WITH ITS CALL TO HOLINESS, AND THIS MUST BE CLEARLY EVIDENT FROM THE WAY INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS LIVE THEIR LIVES. DAY BY DAY WE BECOME "A WORSHIP PLEASING TO GOD" BY LIVING OUR LIVES AS A VOCATION. BEGINNING WITH THE LITURGICAL ASSEMBLY, THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST ITSELF COMMITS US, IN OUR DAILY LIVES, TO DOING EVERYTHING FOR GOD'S GLORY.

POPE BENEDICT XVI
THE SACRAMENT OF CHARITY, NO. 79



GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SMALL GROUP EXPERIENCE

As you enter into the holy season of Lent, consider the following suggestions as ways to participate fully in your small group meetings.

Before the Meeting

Schedule some personal prayer time in order to read and reflect on the materials *before* you go to the meeting. Try the four-step sequence below and see if you find it helpful. Or find a sequence that works best for you.

First, read the Collect prayer for next Sunday's Mass, found on the first page of each session. Use this prayer to place your mind and heart in the presence of God.

Second, read the opening introductory paragraph for the session and the Opening Questions. What is your response to these questions? Next, read the presentation and reflect on the questions at the end of the presentation. What is your response to these questions?

Third, prepare for *lectio divina*. Read the Scripture passage on the last page of each session, titled *For Lectio Divina*. This passage is taken from one of the readings for next Sunday's Mass. Next, read the section titled "*Lectio Divina: A Way to Pray with the Scriptures*," found on pages 29–33 of this booklet. Fr. Thomas Ryan, CSP, an insightful and knowledgeable teacher, will be your guide as you discover the treasure of the *lectio divina* method. Return to this section whenever you need to until you become comfortable with this method of prayer.

Finally, grow in your knowledge and appreciation of the Mass by reading all or part of the section titled "Guide to the Eucharist: A Companion to Sunday

INTRODUCTION

Mass,” on pages 34–44 of this booklet. Rita Ferrone, an award-winning writer with expertise in liturgy and catechesis, will open your mind to new insights about the Mass, a luminous mystery of our Catholic faith. Go back to this section when needed, as you participate in the discussions week by week.

During the Meeting

Enter fully into the conversation. Contribute to the extent that you are comfortable and have something to say. You can enrich the experience of other group members by your participation; you also can benefit from listening attentively when others speak. Be yourself, participate in a way that is right for you, and enjoy the experience.

Keep the focus on faith sharing. Think of your group as a community of disciples growing in the love of Christ. Faith sharing is not an academic discussion or a test of how much each person knows about the topic. Rather, it invites each participant to consider the question: “What does this mean to me as a follower of Jesus Christ?” Each person will express his or her faith differently, and all will be enlightened through the sharing.

After the Meeting

Be attentive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Lent is a period of illumination and enlightenment during which the Spirit leads us to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. The insights from the group meetings on the Eucharist can be a pathway to conversion, an invitation to new life in Jesus Christ. What the Spirit teaches you through the meetings will enable you to celebrate Easter with a renewed mind and heart.

Look for ways to live the Eucharist. During the dismissal rite at Mass, the priest or deacon says one of four things: “Go forth, the Mass is ended,” or “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life,” or “Go in peace.” As you participate in your small group and learn more about the Mass, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in bringing Christ to your family, your work place...wherever the light of Christ needs to shine. You can count on Christ’s presence in the Eucharist to give you the power, strength, and wisdom you need to live and share your faith with joy and confidence during the week.

Why We Gather for Sunday Eucharist

Contrary to the myth of rugged individualism, most people in our society like to belong. We enjoy participating in groups of many kinds. Some are useful, others enjoyable, still others strengthen us in our vocation or reinforce our values. When we make the decision to come to Sunday Eucharist we are opting into something wonderful. What are we doing when we come to Sunday Mass?

COLLECT FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Grant, almighty God,
through the yearly observances
of holy Lent,
that we may grow in understanding
of the riches hidden in Christ
and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

OPENING QUESTIONS

1. Brainstorm a list of groups you have belonged to at one time or another, outside of church gatherings.
2. What kinds of things bring people together? (Think of things such as crisis, common purpose, shared ideals or interests, work to be done, need for support, desire for enrichment or pleasure, exercise of duty, moral obligation, etc.)
3. In your own experience, have you ever gotten together with a group of people for one reason, and found that a different—unexpected—outcome emerged? Take a few moments to reflect, then tell the story.

PRESENTATION

The Good News of Jesus

In the Gospel according to John, the coming of Jesus Christ is the defining moment of human history. His coming is the turning point. Jesus is not just one more fact in history. He is the decisive fact. Our encounter with him is an encounter like none other. Our response to him is the most important response we will ever make.

The other gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) likewise insist that Jesus matters in a way that nothing else matters. The Kingdom he announced and inaugurated is mysterious. Like leaven, it works in a hidden way. Like a seed, it sprouts in secret. Yet it makes all the difference.

Throughout the New Testament, the story of Jesus unfolds as good news. Again and again, those who encounter the mystery of Jesus are filled with joy. People are changed for the better as Jesus and his Good News take hold in their lives. Suffering, hardships, and conflict seem to have no more power over them. They count themselves blessed, even when the world regards them as worthless. They praise God. They tell others what they have seen and experienced. They love with new generosity. They persevere. They know a peace that the world cannot give.

The Good News of Jesus spills over into the lives of those who encounter him. It continues in the life of the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The accounts in the Acts of the Apostles are full of amazing experiences. And in the midst of many signs and wonders stands the sturdy, humble, yet perhaps most wondrous sign of all: the community of faith. This community grows up around the Apostles because

they heard and believed the Good News. St. Luke writes, "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The "breaking of the bread" to which the community was devoted is the Eucharist.

To the outside world, the Christian community was remarkable because of the way they lived. Tertullian, a North African Christian writer of the late second century, commented that it was first and foremost the charity of Christians that shone forth to their neighbors: "See, they say, how they love one another." To be a living embodiment of the love of Christ has been the Church's mission throughout the ages. The Church itself, as gift of God and work of the Spirit, is part of the Good News.

The Paschal Mystery

At the heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ—this glorious unfolding of his Gospel of joy—there is one central mystery: the Paschal Mystery. Sometimes called the Easter mystery or the mystery of Christ's passover from death to new life, the Paschal Mystery shows the depth of the Father's love for all humanity. The cross and resurrection of Jesus, the dying and rising of the Lord, is the central act of God's saving love.

Had Jesus only been born in Bethlehem as Son of God and Son of Mary, it would not have been enough. Had he only preached the Kingdom and taught a way of life, it would not have sufficed. Had he only healed the sick and performed signs and wonders, humanity would still stand in need of a savior. No, it is the absolute self-giving of Jesus himself, in his cross and resurrection, that frees and saves. His dying and rising makes everything else bear fruit.

The Paschal Mystery is the center point on which every other aspect of the story of Jesus turns. The challenge, the hope, and the glory of our faith all find their wellspring here.

Thus it is fitting that the Paschal Mystery stands at the heart of the liturgy. It is central to the Church's way of reckoning time, because from ancient times Sunday (the Lord's Day) has been honored as the day of Resurrection in our weekly cycle of days, and the Easter Triduum is the high point in the liturgical year. The Paschal Mystery anchors every one of the sacraments. And, most especially, it is the mystery celebrated in the Eucharist.

The Main Thing

If you asked any ten Catholics today why they go to Sunday Mass, the Paschal Mystery would probably not be the first reason that occurs to them. They might say they go to pray. They might say they go because they love receiving Communion, or because their pastor and the people at their parish are important to them. They may go because they want to accompany a spouse or some other family member. They might say it's how they were raised, or that it's an obligation they wish to fulfill.

All of these are good reasons. But participation in the Sunday Eucharist should gradually lead to a deeper awareness that *what God has done in Christ* is indeed the main thing. It's the paramount reason we gather.

Disillusionment and Rediscovery

Continuing to worship God over a lifetime is not always easy. For some, a sense of disillusionment

with the Church can "take the heart out" of their experience of Sunday worship. When the Church they see appears diffuse and weak, or lacking direction, they may begin to wonder what it is all about. Does the sharp and brilliant Good News of Jesus still matter today? Is it even "news" to anyone anymore that *God has sent his Son* to save us? That he died and rose for our salvation?

Only by returning to the core meaning of the liturgy, and indeed to the story of Jesus himself, does it become possible to "take heart" again. All people are called to encounter afresh the amazing gift of Jesus Christ in each new phase of life, and especially when they are disappointed or discouraged. When this rediscovery happens, the mystery of his death and resurrection opens up at an even deeper level.

The Church today is not so very different from the first followers of Jesus. In spite of hearing the message directly from the Master, they often felt confused and weak. It was not unheard of that they lacked courage or acted foolishly. Sometimes they recognized the immense importance of Jesus. At other times, they were focused on themselves.

Even after Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remained afraid. They gathered in the upper room, behind locked doors. Yet the Risen Jesus came and stood among them, precisely in the midst of their timid and uncertain gathering. He broke in through the locked doors. He granted them forgiveness and gave them his peace. He breathed on them his Spirit. And they were changed.

The Eucharist is the Church's gathering to hear the Good News and to encounter the Risen Lord Jesus in his Paschal Mystery, again and again. Jesus continues to "break into" our gathering, in order to breathe out

his Spirit upon us, to empower us to be the courageous disciples we are called to be. By listening, by active participation in the sacred mysteries of the liturgy, and by *living the Eucharist*, we are changed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What statement or idea in this essay particularly stands out for you and why?
2. What are your own top three reasons for coming to Sunday Mass? How have they changed over time?
3. Have you ever experienced disillusionment or rediscovery in your own journey of faith? Who or what helped you, during this experience? How has your faith and practice become different as a result? Share the story.
4. What is your understanding of the Paschal Mystery? What does this mystery (the cross and resurrection of Jesus) proclaim for today's world?

READINGS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm 25:4-5,6-7,8-9;
1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

PSALM RESPONSE: Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

FOR LECTIO DIVINA

MARK 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Renewed now with heavenly bread,
by which faith is nourished, hope increased,
and charity strengthened,
we pray, O Lord,
that we may learn to hunger for Christ,
the true and living Bread,
and strive to live by every word
which proceeds from your mouth.
Through Christ our Lord.

Lectio Divina: A Way to Pray with the Scriptures

Deepening communion with God is the invitation and adventure of our lives. We want it, and we are looking for methods that will help us realize it. We must have an *experience of God* if we are to pursue God with our whole heart, mind, and soul. Intellectual knowledge *about* God will not be enough to feed us and hold us. *Lectio divina* is an accessible way to have such an encounter.

The method is time-tested. The ecclesiastical writer Origen of Alexandria (185–254) and the monk John Cassian (360–435) trace out the method in their writings on prayer. The twelfth-century Carthusian monk Guido gave it sharper definition as a stairway of four spiritual steps—reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation—that came to be known as *lectio divina* (literally, “divine reading”). This process is a slow, contemplative way of praying with the Scriptures that enables the Word of God to become a means of union with God. The four steps, with their classical Latin titles, are:

STEP ONE:

Lectio – Listening to God’s Word

STEP TWO:

Meditatio – Reflecting and pondering on God’s Word

STEP THREE:

Oratio – Praying from the heart in response to what God asks of me

STEP FOUR:

Contemplatio – Resting in God’s presence

Lectio divina has no other goal than spending time with God through the medium of God’s Word. In doing this, there will be a gentle oscillation between the inner, spiritual activity of, on the one hand, reading, reflecting, and praying, and on the other, of receptivity. The spiritual activity is not outward, but inward, taking us down into the depths of the soul, where the Holy Spirit is transforming our hearts to that of Christ.

And in the receptivity phase—contemplation—we cease from interior spiritual *doing* and learn simply to *be*, to rest in God’s loving presence. Just as we constantly move back and forth in our public lives between speaking and listening, questioning and reflecting, so in our spiritual lives we must learn to move back and forth gracefully between spiritual *practice* and the refreshment of simply *being* in God’s presence. *Lectio divina* teaches us to delight in the different modalities—active and receptive—of experiencing God. In the gentle back-and-forth between spiritual activity and receptivity embodied in the *lectio divina* process, we are united ever more closely to God.

A Companion to Sunday Mass

Celebrating the Eucharist has been the central act of faithful Christians for centuries. The Mass is an extremely rich celebration, holding deep meaning for those who believe and lots of interest even for those who don't. The purpose of this reflection is to take a walk through the landscape of the sacred liturgy and notice things that have intrigued and inspired Catholic Christians throughout the ages. We hope you will come away from this tour refreshed, informed, and delighted. Most of all, we hope you will come away eager to *live the Eucharist* with new interest, engagement, and vitality.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Circling around the outer perimeter and seeing the general shape of the Mass is a good idea before exploring its details. Here is a map for you to follow:

Introductory Rites



LITURGY OF THE WORD



LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST



Concluding Rite

The Mass has two main sections: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Yet it remains one event. “[T]he liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 56). The introductory and concluding rites are the bookends for this experience.

The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are themselves made up of smaller units. When we zoom in to get a little more detail, we see something like this:

The Eucharist is our most beautiful treasure.

— POPE BENEDICT XVI