

# Eucharist unites us with Jesus in intimate way

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



When Catholics receive the Eucharist, they receive, under the consecrated species of bread and wine, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, receiving the Eucharist increases a communicant's union with the Lord, forgives venial sins, and preserves him from grave sin. It also reinforces the unity of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ. (nos. 1414, 1416)

Pat Moss, a high school parish religious education teacher at Mary Mother of God Church in Harrison, has seen the power of the Eucharist work within his own life and has shared that knowledge with his students.

"I was raised as a Baptist," he said, "but attended Mass with my wife, Nancy, regularly. One day I heard a homily in which a Vietnamese priest said, 'Many of you only sip the water of life, but you have plenty of Miller Lite.' His words locked me into the Eucharist."

During his Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults sessions, Moss said he saw how belief in the Eucharist was rooted in the Scriptures he had studied from childhood, and began to desire baptism and Eucharist for himself.

"I couldn't explain why except for my fervent belief that this was truly the Body and Blood of Christ in every way," he said.

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Moss was baptized, confirmed and received his first Eucharist in Atlanta, Ga., at the Easter Vigil Mass in 1996.

Jesus Christ himself instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper where he

gave his Body and Blood to his Apostles. He did this, “to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again.” (catechism, no. 1323)

Therefore, it is Jesus, “the eternal high priest of the New Covenant” who acts through his priesthood to offer the eucharistic sacrifice. (no. 1410)

The Eucharist completes Christian initiation. The word, “Eucharist” comes from the Greek *eucharistein* and *eulogein*, which “recall the Jewish blessings that proclaim — especially during a meal — God’s works: creation, redemption and sanctification.” (no. 1328)

This sacrament is called “the heart and the summit of the Church’s life” because it is the “memorial of Christ’s Passover, that is, of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. (nos. 1407, 1409)

Rita and Mike Ferguson, parishioners at Sacred Heart of Mary Church in Barling, have been visiting the perpetual adoration chapel in St. Boniface Church in Fort Smith, ever since it opened in 1999.

“We’ve gone as a couple to adoration every Saturday morning from 8 to 9 a.m. for the past nine years,” Rita Ferguson said.

In 1998, one year before they started attending weekly adoration, Mike Ferguson, a devout Baptist for most of his life, converted to Catholicism. The Fergusons became active in a charismatic prayer group and provided music for the annual diocesan charismatic conferences. Their joint decision to commit to weekly adoration has given them a greater appreciation and love for the Eucharist.

“During our nine years of adoration, Mike and I have had the time to read the entire Bible from beginning to end,” Ferguson said. “And when you sit in the chapel and read it for yourself it’s a lot different from hearing it read at church. The readings on the Eucharist are so much more meaningful when you read them yourself instead of listening in Church with all the distractions.”

The Word brought them to love the Eucharist. Both teach PRE at Sacred Heart of Mary, and, over the years, they have led Bible study and “Why Catholic?” groups, music ministry and gone on mission trips.

The Fergusons’ son, Josh, is getting ready to complete his second tour of duty with the Army National Guard in Iraq, but in good times and in bad, the Fergusons will continue to pray.

“It gives you a time to get away from the world and be closer in communion with the Blessed Sacrament,” Ferguson said.

What the Fergusons have experienced is explained in the catechism.

“Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his (Jesus’) heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints.” (no. 1419)

Moss said he too has received this strength in everyday life.

“When I receive Communion, I am more able to resist temptation. After Mass, I am able to be more patient with my four children. The little things they do don’t bother me,” Moss said. “By Thursday, I start getting spiritually worn out and can’t wait to start over on Sunday. The effect of the Eucharist, for me, is that I can handle things a lot better during the week.”

#### Eucharist at a glance

✘ Bible background: “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. ...’” (Matthew 26:26-28)

✘ Who can receive: A baptized person who is at least 7 years old in a state of grace; anyone aware of a mortal sin must not receive Communion until being absolved in the sacrament of

penance.

✘ What are elements: Proclamation of the Word of God, thanksgiving to God the Father, consecration of the bread and wine and reception of Jesus' Body and Blood — these constitute a single act of worship

✘ Who can confer: Christ himself, the eternal high priest, acts through his priests to offer the eucharistic sacrifice; only validly ordained priests can consecrate the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ

✘ What are signs: Wheat bread and grape wine

✘ What are effects: As the "source and summit of the Christian life" the Eucharist increases a person's union with God, forgives his or her venial sins and helps him or her avoid grave sins. It also reinforces unity of the Church as the mystical Body of Christ.

✘ How often can you receive it: There is no limit. It should be received each time a person participates in Mass; which must be at least once a year.

*See also: Catechism of the Catholic Church 1322-1419; John 6:47-66; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-30*

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