

Pastor's Perspective Series of Articles on the Eucharist (June-September, 2003), in Preparation for the Implementing of the 2002 General Instruction on the Roman Missal. And Series of Articles Connected to Yearly Teaching Masses (2003-on). And Articles connected to Implementing the new English Translation of the Roman Missal (2010-11).

June 1, 2003 *The Eucharist

What are the focal points at any Eucharistic celebration? How we answer that tells a lot about our understanding of this sacramental action. The tabernacle is not one of them, by the way. That in no way lessens respect for and honor given toward the Blessed Sacrament we reserve in the Eucharist. Quite the contrary. Unless we understand the Eucharist we celebrate we will not understand the real presence of Christ we honor by reserving the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

The main focal points are the altar and the ambo (lectern), along with the assembly gathered, and the presider's chair (not because the priest uses it!), with the altar taking pre-eminence. These four focal points all highlight a true presence of Christ. Christ is present when we gather as a community of baptized believers, ready to listen to God's Word and offer who we are to God through the sacrifice of Jesus. The priest who presides is not the focus in himself, but rather a sacrament of Christ's presence who is our true presider. The Word that is proclaimed is a true sacramental presence of Jesus Christ the Word of God. And the bread and wine we offer in the sacrificial meal and receive in communion is the real presence of Christ in his body and blood in sacramental form.

Because all that we do at Eucharist leads toward communion with the body and blood of the Lord, the altar takes on the primary role and focus. We gather around the altar as baptized believers or seekers. We listen to God's Word so that we can offer the gifts of bread and wine, which represent our lives broken open and ready to be shared because of that Word. At the altar, we remember all that God has done for us and give thanks to God, especially what he has done in Jesus and what Jesus did for us on the night before he died. We come toward the altar for a share in that communion with the Lord, which in turn unites us to one another. We are sent forth from the altar to go and be that body and blood of Christ, broken and poured out and shared with the world, until the next time we re-assemble around that altar.

By entering consciously, actively, more fully into this dynamic reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, we then can understand the role and importance of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. We do so in order to have communion to bring to those who become suddenly ill. The Church considers communion the "last sacrament", not anointing! Secondly, and very importantly, we reserve the Blessed Sacrament so that we can take time in prayer, in the presence of that Blessed Sacrament. We remember who we are, and we pray for the ability to not just believe in the real presence of Christ but to be that real presence of Christ to others. To the extent that periods of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament can help engender that willing faith, they are strongly encouraged.

So, as we enter the Church each Sunday, we are encouraged to remember we are baptized in Christ and touch the water from the baptismal font, as we make the sign of the cross. We are encouraged to genuflect toward the tabernacle and spend a few moments in prayerful openness to the presence of Christ. Finally, we are encouraged to bow toward the altar or pay some attention to the altar, around which this amazing sacramental reality of Christ's presence will become real as the Mass unfolds.

When we celebrate the "teaching Mass" on the weekend of June 28/29 I ask that you try to do all these things. Before the liturgy, touch the baptismal water and take a moment to honor the presence of Christ through his blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. We will begin the liturgy with an invitation for all to come forward, bow toward the altar, climb the steps and kiss the altar. The altar, the central focal point, represents Christ and the many ways that Christ is and will be present to us. The priest kisses the altar on behalf of the

people gathered, not for his own sake. At least once a year it is good for all of us to more consciously participate in this beautiful gesture so that it stays with us at any Mass we celebrate. Next week: God's Word proclaimed. Do we let it touch our hearts or only our minds?

June 8, 2003 *Eucharist: God's Word Proclaimed

In preparation for our June 28/29 "Teaching Masses" I want to continue the reflection on the various actions of the Mass. What is it that we are doing when we enter into the "Liturgy of the Word"? We listen to readings from the Old Testament, from the letters of Paul and other New Testament books, and then highlight the gospel. Symbolically we are calling attention to our need to first listen attentively to God's Word before we dare do the action that gives us that very special presence of Christ in his body and blood.

At the Second Vatican Council forty years ago the bishops of the Church were very conscious of the fact that Catholic life had not fully nurtured a desire to read, reflect and pray with the Scriptures. They insisted that we need to view the "table of the Word" (the ambo) as reverently as we view the altar. They reminded us that there is a true presence of Christ that comes to us, every time we so proclaim God's Word.

The word "presence" is key. What we are doing at the time of the readings is not Bible study. It is not a time for "head knowledge" though it is important to point out the meaning of various passages at times. The most important thing we are doing is letting our hearts be touched by the proclamation of God's Word. What word or phrase or image tugs at you as you listen to the readings being proclaimed? What part of your life comes to mind as you listen to the readings or homily? That is where the real liturgy of the Word takes place—God touching our hearts. As you find yourself thinking about an image from Scripture and connecting it to your life, you might begin to drift from hearing what the next reading or homilist is saying. That is all right! No, not to daydream for its own sake, but to let your hearing of God's Word lead you into a meditation about some aspect of your life. There is no way we are meant to be fully attentive to every reading and understand them as they are read. Rather, the Church gives us an abundance of sacred words so that the living Word, Jesus himself, can stir us to some sort of personal meditation and resolve.

Just as we are certain that Christ becomes sacramentally present in his body and blood when we pray the Eucharist, so certain should we be that Christ's Word is a living Word present to us, every time we read in faith the Scripture at Eucharist. At the "teaching Mass" in order to highlight the fact that we are not passive recipients of someone else's wisdom but active participants opening ourselves to God's wisdom through his Word, I will not have a homily. Instead we will listen and try to name for ourselves some way that one of the readings touched our lives. Next week: the Eucharistic Prayer and the consecration of the bread and wine.

June 15, 2003 *The Eucharistic Prayer

As we prepare for June 28/29 as a "Teaching Mass" weekend, we need to look at the central prayer of the Mass: the Eucharistic Prayer. This prayer extends from the "Lord be with you" dialogue, through the Preface and Holy, Holy, all the way to the Great Amen. During this prayer we give God thanks for creation, for salvation, for all that God has done for us. We especially focus on what God has done for us in his Son, Jesus Christ, and most especially on the night of the Last Supper, when Jesus gave us the true memorial of his body and blood, which were to be given up for us. We pray for the needs of the Church and all humanity and recognize that the high point of our prayer is in giving praise and thanksgiving for the gracious goodness of God. There are now a number of Eucharistic Prayers available for use, unlike before Vatican II when only one was available to most Catholics. What is striking in all the Eucharistic prayers is how often the presider prays "We". It is very clear that this is the prayer of the community, which the presider is leading on behalf of the community. When Mass was in Latin, we often said a rosary or other prayers during this long prayer. Now that it is in English, we are asked to actively engage ourselves in the prayer. It is very difficult because it is so long, nearly all the prayer is spoken (or sung) by the presider and we have only a few parts in which to share ("Holy, Holy", "Christ has died...." "Amen",

etc.). I think it is important for us to all be engaged in this great central prayer of the community. For the teaching Mass I will invite you to repeat after me the second-half of the Eucharistic prayer. Please notice how many times we pray “We offer” or “We pray”. It is the whole community’s prayer. Next week: Communion.

June 22, 2003 *The Eucharist: Communion

On this feast of Corpus Christi the Church both honors the special presence of Christ in the sacrament of his Body and Blood and creates a yearly feast that asks Catholics to review their own sense of Eucharistic identity.

In his most recent encyclical, which was published on Holy Thursday and focused on the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II reminded us how the Eucharist “makes” the Church. When we gather around the altar in the name of the Lord, listen actively to the Word of God, freely offer ourselves and all that we are through Jesus’ Eucharistic sacrifice, receive the gift of Christ’s sacramental body and blood and then go and be that gift to others—the Lord literally re-forms, re-members, makes the Church again and again. It matters what we do and how we do it. If we are attentive to the Eucharist and celebrate it with life and faith, the Eucharist will form us into the Church Christ needs and desires.

The Mass is so structured that the prayer culminates in the Eucharistic Prayer of thanksgiving I talked about last week. But the action culminates in the communion we are invited to receive and become. Communion is at the heart of our understanding of Church. Communion with God through Jesus Christ and communion with one another through the gift of Christ’s life and communion with all humanity, especially those most vulnerable through sharing the gift of that body and blood of Christ in the world.

Communion is, whenever possible to be taken from the consecrated bread and wine at that very Mass. In that way we are to experience how closely our offering and thanksgiving is connected to the gift of communion. In that way, communion becomes true “union with” one another, not a private action where each receives his or her own personal communion. Let us not underestimate what full attention to and openness to communion can bring into our lives. We can be transformed into and conformed more closely to the gift of Jesus himself.

With smaller groups, the action I invite everyone to do at a “teaching Mass” is to all receive communion together at the same time, taken from one large consecrated bread. Doing it this way, we can visibly experience our common union. That is a bit more difficult at Sunday gatherings. So this year I will be asking you to do the following (and I’ll explain it again next week): instead of saying “Amen” rather routinely, this one time let us say “Amen. I will become the gift of Christ to others.” This will highlight one significant aspect of the communion rite. In future years maybe we can highlight other aspects. Next week: the closing rites and dismissal.

June 29, 2003 *The Eucharist: The Closing Rites

Have you ever noticed how quickly we move from that awesome reality of receiving communion to being sent forth to the world? The Eucharist is deliberately structured to remind us that we are not to think of our act of receiving communion as the final product or reality for celebrating the Eucharist. No, the final reality takes effect only when we become the body broken and blood poured out for the sake of others. In other words, only when we go forth and live the Eucharist.

We reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle so that the church will always have a place of prayer connected to the sacramental presence of Christ and so that communion will always be available for those in situations of serious illness. We sometimes highlight that presence through holy hours or days of adoration. When we do so, the Church is inviting us to desire even more deeply to partake of the gift of Christ’s sacramental body and blood. We adore the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and come to realize even more profoundly the amazing reality that Christ invites us at every Mass to both experience that presence and become one with that presence.

“The Mass is ended. Go in peace.” This is shorthand for “This action of the Eucharist in church is ended. Go now transformed by it and become for others what you have celebrated and received.”

July 13, 2003 *Theology of the Eucharist

In the Middle Ages theologians began to ask questions pertaining to the sacraments such as “which signs are the most important?” “how many sacraments are there?” “what exactly happens to water, oil, bread, wine, etc. when used in a holy way?”—these become the stuff of debate. Out of such discussion comes the realization that certain sacramental events are more central to continuing the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ and some less so. The core actions are named as our seven sacraments. The ones less so are called “sacramentals”. Sacraments are considered “efficacious signs of grace”—that is, they truly bring about the presence of Christ not because we say so but because Christ has promised it so.

Along with such questions comes a desire in the Western Church to analyze each of the sacraments and pick out exactly what is essential and what is not; which words are key and which are not; what the effect of each sacrament is that distinguishes it from the other sacraments, and so on. A three-fold understanding of the sacraments will result, which still influences us to this day. The 13th-14th c. theologians will distinguish between (1) the “sign alone”, (2) a middle reality, which has a bit of the character of a sign and yet contains a bit of the effect that the sacrament is intending, called a “sacramental reality” and (3) the “final reality or effect”.

Thus for baptism the “sign alone” is seen as the action of water poured or immersed along with the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. The “middle or sacramental reality” is the character or so-called “indelible mark” on the soul that marks us as baptized forever in Christ and orients us to a life of grace, if we remain open to it (i.e., “takes away original sin”). The “final reality or effect” is a full, mature sharing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus throughout our life.

For Eucharist the “sign alone” is seen most particularly as the bread and wine offered by the priest with the words of consecration. The “sacramental reality” is then the Blessed Sacrament, the bread and wine that have become the body and blood of Christ, a process theologians call by the name transubstantiation. The “final reality” is the union of the Church and the outreach of charity as a sign and instrument of Christ’s love to the world that results from the community receiving the body and blood of Christ in communion.

Notice how easy it is, when working with such a three-fold distinction, to stop at the second or middle, sacramental reality, because something has happened by the grace of God. Original Sin has been taken away (Baptism); the bread and wine have been transformed into the body and blood of Christ (Eucharist); an unbreakable, permanent bond has been created (Marriage), and so on. And these things happen (because Christ is at work and guarantees it, no matter how attentive or holy or good the minister is) as long as the minimum necessary actions, signs, and words are used.

With that comes the danger, often realized, of not doing everything we can to bring the full and final reality to fruition. Baptism is not mostly about taking away Original Sin but about becoming mature followers of Christ who unite everything in their lives to the pattern of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Marriage is not just about the permanent bond that is established but about allowing the ongoing, deepening relationship, good and bad, to be transformed into a sign of God’s creative, covenant with us. Eucharist is not just about turning bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ but about us receiving that gift and becoming that gift, broken and poured out for others as a sign and instrument of Christ for the world.

There is nothing complete or absolute about the middle-age three-fold schema for understanding the sacraments. Earlier theologians made no attempt to be so precise as to the when and how of each sacrament.

The second Vatican Council and its aftermath tried to treat the sacraments in their entirety rather than making so many specific distinctions. But many of us have been immersed in the medieval theological view, often without realizing it. So as we look more deeply at Eucharist, the sacrament par excellence, throughout the summer and fall, one way to understand what the Church invites us to is to ask how we can maximize all three parts of that middle age three-fold understanding of Eucharist.

“Sign alone”: Do all our actions, gestures, responses, music, processions, symbols, readings, praying of prayers, postures, and so on maximize the belief that we are all part of the sign that will become the real presence of Christ? Or do we still look toward just what is essential and only minimally necessary? For example, every time we don’t respond, don’t sing, and don’t listen actively we are a counter-sign and help to minimize this important part of the eucharistic action. “Sacramental reality”: Do we believe in and appreciate the amazing presence of Christ that comes to us in the consecrated bread and wine, truly a sharing in his body and blood? Do we take it too for granted? Do we see it only as a mere sign and not also the awesome reality that it is?

“Final reality”: Do we desire to receive and become that body and blood of Christ? Are we willing to be broken and poured out for others, especially those most in need? Are we a community that is a credible sign and instrument of God’s unity and love? Every way that we do not embody such a final reality is a counter-reality to what the Eucharist is all about. The Eucharist then can be a goad toward doing better or a reminder of our need to be humbly trying to live as Christ’s body.

May all our Eucharistic “Amens” be true by holding back nothing that is within us when we offer the Eucharist, by fully believing in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, by being willing to be transformed by the Eucharist and sent forth to witness to God’s goodness.

July 20, 2003 *Theology of the Eucharist (continued)

Last week I used a typical understanding of the sacraments that we inherited from the middle ages, in order to show both the importance of keeping in mind the full sacramental action and its intended effect, as well as to show how we too easily stop short of allowing the sacraments to be fully realized. You can read that article at www.ssjohnandpaul.org our parish website.

If we look at the significant changes the second Vatican Council initiated in our Sunday experience of Eucharist, nearly all were rooted in one core principle: the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist. No longer passive spectators but active participants. No longer the priest and servers alone doing all the roles, but a variety of roles shared by the assembly. Thus we get the use of the vernacular (in our case, mainly English) as the main language of prayer rather than Latin so that people can more actively participate. We get a Roman Mass that is stripped of repetitive prayers and gestures that had accumulated for less than important reasons over the years so that people might not mistake the unimportant for the important.

We hear the Word proclaimed in English and homilies based on the Scriptures so that people can apply that Word to their lives. We include General Intercessions that speak to current needs we can identify with. We get a structure of dialogue where responses and acclamations from all present become part of the intrinsic structure of the Mass. Communion becomes offered under both the form of bread and the form of wine so that we might have a more direct experience of what Jesus asked us to do in his memory. The altar gets positioned away from the wall and the tabernacle to emphasize the gathering of the whole people and not just the priest around the one altar. Baptismal fonts get moved into the church proper or enlarged to become more visible signs of the baptism that we all share. And on and on. What all these changes have in common is the desire to let the “sign” of the sacrament be experienced as fully as possible, in the hope that we could more readily experience the final reality of becoming Christ’s body for the world.

As mentioned last week, even though the inherited theology stressed the importance of all three dimensions, leading to a full and final reality, we tended to stop our focus on the middle or so-called “sacramental reality” and ask what are the minimum words and signs necessary for us to have that happen. In the Eucharist of the western Church that resulted in a focus on the priest and his saying the words of consecration “This is my body...This is my blood.” At times we lost sight of the fact that we must become that body and blood of Christ ourselves and help transform the world. It is not enough to believe in Christ’s real presence and adore that and stop there. We must become that presence through a willingness to be broken and poured out for others.

And most certainly we lost nearly always the sense that the fuller the sign, the more easily we can enter into the full and final reality. We lost the sense that it is everything we do, not just the priest saying the correct words, that is part of that full sign. That includes every person present and what they offer in their hearts to the Lord. That includes a conscious and active listening and response to the prayers (“Amen!” and all the other responses, sung or prayed). The full sign includes the priest’s attention to gestures, clear words, uncluttered altars, where he stands, the vestments he wears, the chalices and ciborium we use. The full sign includes the artwork, statuary, seasonal decorations, lighting, sound system and all those practical realities. The sign includes lectors who can read clearly and with conviction, eucharistic ministers who show reverence and care with communion, servers who walk and work with dignity, music ministers and cantors and choirs who help us enter more fully into various parts of the Mass rather than simply calling attention to themselves. And, of course, the full sign includes the bread and wine brought forward to the altar. In the aftermath of Vatican II, although we have a long way to go, we have done much to focus on a fuller experience of the sign.

This renewed attention on the full sign of the Eucharist has been a huge blessing for the Church. Yes, some liturgists go too far and make the external sign everything or get upset when everything is not perfect. And, yes, we can no longer expect the Mass to be an individual exercise of prayer or a quiet time that will simply leave us alone! But thank God we are far from the time when priests were told to recite the words without feeling, use only small gestures, exhibit as little emotion as possible, do nearly everything themselves, and so on. But we must never forget that the “sign alone” is to lead us through a sacramental reality to a final and full effect. If we have the grandest liturgies of all but end up as a community that does not show forth Jesus’ inclusive, healing love, then we have missed the boat.

As we continue to look at the theology of the Eucharist and at how the new General Instruction on the Roman Missal envisions that Eucharist being celebrated, let us keep in mind the final and full goal—to be transformed as a community into the sacrament of Christ’s presence to others. At the same time, the fuller the sign, the more fully we can enter into that reality. So let us pay attention to our full, conscious, and active participation at every Mass. Such participation forms the fuller and wider sign within which our offering of the bread and wine makes sense. Next week: a fear that we have lost reverence for the Blessed Sacrament.

July 27, 2003 *Theology of the Eucharist (continued)

The renewed emphasis on the full sign and active participation of all in the Eucharist ironically led to a fear by some that we were neglecting the middle or sacramental reality, the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated bread and wine transformed (transubstantiated) into the body and blood of Christ. The focus on the full celebrating of all the human and ritual elements of the liturgy (the “sign alone”) was felt by some to be a downplaying of that “vertical” relationship with God and an overplaying of the “horizontal” relationship of the community. Some even saw the changes initiated after the second Vatican council as in direct competition with a proper reverence for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The moving of the altar away from the tabernacle was interpreted as a sign of disrespect for the Blessed Sacrament. The focus on the people and the environment for worship was interpreted by some as a de-emphasis on the mystery and awe of the Eucharistic body and blood. And so on.

In recent years there has been a concerted effort by many to re-focus on the Blessed Sacrament. Many churches have built chapels of adoration and set times of exposition and veneration. These can be wonderful places of quiet prayer and are to be commended. However, a few have taken on the habit of calling attention to the Blessed Sacrament by genuflecting before receiving communion or even insisting on kneeling and making the eucharistic minister bend over to give them communion. A very few have tried to insist on complete quiet in the Church before the Mass, as though talking to one another is being irreverent to Christ. [A little aside: we can be irreverent to Christ, not by talking before Mass, but by disrespecting each other or mocking each other or belittling each other.] Just as some who emphasize the full sign but forget that the Mass is not simply a grand celebration and an end in itself, so similarly do some emphasize only the middle reality, the Blessed Sacrament, and forget that Jesus gives us his sacramental presence as food for our journey of life. Please do not misunderstand me. The Catholic practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in a tabernacle and making it a place for prayer is part of our Tradition and is a worthy and admirable practice. Nearly every day I try to get to the church early and in the quiet to spend time in the presence of Christ's Blessed Sacrament to pray and reflect. I encourage as many of you as possible to build such times of prayer into your weekly rhythm. You will find your life helped by such a practice.

But we do no real honor to the Blessed Sacrament by diminishing the full Eucharistic celebration. It is not an accident that the Church strongly insists (even though many priests unfortunately ignore this) that we consecrate enough communion at every Mass so that the people present receive from that newly consecrated communion, not from the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle.

Why? Because the Eucharist we celebrate is far more than simply "receiving the Blessed Sacrament". The Eucharist, as we celebrate it, constitutes us as the Church; it re-forms and remembers us as the body of Christ. That is done by celebrating the whole Eucharist: the gathering, the Word, the gifts, the Eucharistic prayer and communion, and the concluding rites. The new General Instruction on the Roman Missal will remind us of how to celebrate the full sign and create active participation, as well as incorporate some of the concerns of those who fear that we are de-emphasizing a focus on the Blessed Sacrament. We will look at those sections down the road. For now I want to conclude this rather heady theological background to the Eucharist in two ways. First, by reminding us that we are to be as attentive to the full sign as we can be and we are to be as respectful of the real presence of Christ in his Blessed Sacrament as we can be. But we are never to forget that the Eucharist has a full and final reality that must impact on the world around us. Beautiful liturgies and wondrous experiences of prayer in the presence of Christ's Blessed Sacrament do not substitute for a community that has been transformed and willing to be a sign and instrument to the world of Christ's healing, reconciling presence.

Secondly, I will quote Pope John Paul II in his most recent encyclical, *The Church of the Eucharist (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)*: "This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became human in order to restore all creation in one supreme act of praise to the One who made it from nothing. He, the eternal high priest who by the blood of his cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father of all creation redeemed"

Pope John Paul II calls this the Eucharist's "cosmic character": we are about the reconciling of the universe every time we gather for Eucharist! In essence, he suggests a very ancient understanding of the Eucharist. That when the Church gathers and celebrates Eucharist in authentic faith, there is something "right", something healed or whole about the universe, something timeless and eternal. How can we not then go forth and bring that wholeness to the world, even at a cost to ourselves?

August 17, 2003 *The Eucharist: the New Instruction on the Roman Missal

During June and July I tried to give a theological background to the Eucharist in general. Now I want to begin a series of articles that looks more specifically at the theology of the new general instruction and the changes it envisions.

In order to help us be more active participants in the liturgy, from time to time the bishops and the Vatican issue instructions on how to properly celebrate this Eucharist of ours, received as a gift from Christ. Recently the Vatican issued a new “General Instruction on the Roman Missal”, the first one in 35 years. By and large it repeats and re-emphasizes how we have been celebrating the Eucharist. But in a few places it suggests some changes. I will go through the theology behind the changes in the new instruction. That will set the background for understanding some of the specific changes suggested by this new instruction and give us a basis for evaluating how best to implement the changes here at SS. John and Paul.

Cardinal Maida has set the first Sunday of Advent this coming December as the implementation date for the new Roman Missal. The Archdiocese has set up some training days in September to look at what is new and what is expected. I will be asking anyone on the Worship commission who has the freedom to attend one of these days, to please do, along with our music minister and other staff who are interested. Let me know. The training date is September 22, repeated on September 23, at St. John’s Center in Plymouth. After the September training days we will discuss some specifics at the Worship Commission and then come to some conclusions about what we will do here.

The following quote comes from chapter one of the new instruction, “The Importance and Dignity of the Eucharistic Celebration”: “Because, however, the celebration of the Eucharist, like the entire Liturgy, is carried out through perceptible signs that nourish, strengthen, and express faith, the utmost care must be taken to choose and to arrange those forms and elements set forth by the Church that, in view of the circumstances of the people and the place, will more effectively foster active and full participation and more properly respond to the spiritual needs of the faithful. This Instruction aims both to offer general guidelines for properly arranging the Celebrations of the Eucharist and to set forth rules for ordering the various forms of celebrations....”
“Moreover, in order that such a celebration may correspond more fully to the prescriptions and spirit of the sacred Liturgy, and also in order to increase its pastoral effectiveness, certain accommodations and adaptations are specified in this General Instruction and in the Order of Mass.

These adaptations consist for the most part in the choice of certain rites or texts, that is, of the chants, readings, prayers, explanations, and gestures which may respond better to the needs, preparation, and culture of the participants and which are entrusted to the priest celebrant. Nevertheless, the priest must remember that he is the servant of the sacred Liturgy and that he himself is not permitted, on his own initiative, to add, remove, or to change anything in the celebration of the Mass.”

Thus there is recognition that the underlying core principals are the nourishment of faith and the full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful in the celebration. And we must be attentive to how the liturgy can best allow that. Yet, as you can see, there is a sense that adaptations are pretty limited and that every priest is to celebrate the Mass exactly as it is written in the Instruction. Clearly there is a concern about false adaptations or individualistic styles that change elements of the Liturgy for no good reason. On the other hand, taken to the extreme, the Instruction could be read as wanting automaton priests—just say and do what is in the book, and nothing else.

In practice, there will always be a tension between strict adherence to the letter of the guidelines and rules and interpretations that adapt the guidelines more loosely. When priests go too far and make the liturgy their own

personal, individual plaything, it is very hard to see how the eucharistic unity of the Church as a whole is served. On the other hand, liturgy is a living act of worship, always new and always changing, not in essentials but in the ways the essentials are experienced. It is not a museum piece or a performance of an artistic work that is complete and needs no changing. It always includes the living faith community and how we are experiencing the elements of the liturgy. We believe that Christ uses the full sign of our diverse humanity to make himself present.

So, there will always be tension between letter and spirit of guidelines. Let's ask questions, discuss, see what underlying theology is at work, and then, if necessary, agree to disagree. I have been part of the Mass in many areas of the world, in many languages that I do not personally know, with adaptations I had never experienced before, and I have never found myself not knowing exactly which part of the Mass we are at. The great beauty of the Catholic rite is that we can so easily share such unity, even with such great cultural diversity. I hope the Church and its priests don't make the mistake of thinking that all needs to be uniform now. That would violate the very essence of what a living act of worship is about. On the other hand, the introduction of the new general instruction is a perfect time to take a look at our liturgical practices and evaluate them. Over the years we can become sloppy with some of the rites, actions and gestures. Or, such a look might re-affirm much of what we do well.

August 24, 2003 *The Eucharist: The New Instruction on the Roman Missal (continued)

There are three main principles at work in the revisions to how we are to celebrate Mass. The first and most important comes from the Second Vatican Council, has been emphasized repeatedly since, and is again well-emphasized in this document: the liturgy requires by its nature the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful. This was the core principle that produced the way we now celebrate the Eucharist differently than 40 years ago. Readings and prayers in English (or the language of the people); full use of liturgical ministers such as servers, lectors, ushers and greeters, cantors and choir, extra ministers of the Eucharist for Mass but also to bring communion to the sick and homebound; presenters of the gifts of bread and wine, and so forth. The new instruction accepts all the above and asks that we look at how to promote the full participation of all of us, not just liturgical ministers, in the singing, in gestures and posture (such as bowing), in understanding the flow of the Eucharistic action.

The second underlying principle in the new instruction is emphasizing the holiness and sacredness of what we are doing. The new instruction deliberately uses language such as "sacred vessels and vestments", "sacred altar", "holy mystery" and so forth, so that we remember what it is we are doing each time we gather for Eucharist. This core principle affects things like the use of "sacred silence" during the liturgy (we need to look at a greater use of periods of silence), gestures and actions especially during communion (for example, bowing) and so forth.

The third and final principle that influences the new instruction is the highlighting of the role of the ordained person—bishop, priest or deacon—throughout the document and in terms of their role in the liturgy. This affects some of the Instruction's suggestions for the greeting of peace and the procedures for communion, as well as a couple of minor areas. Over the next few weeks I want to bring out the most important areas that we need to look at here as SS. John and Paul. I will highlight what the document says, what we currently do, and give some questions for our consideration.

August 31, 2003 *The Eucharist: The New Instruction on the Roman Missal (continued)

Last week I mentioned the three main principles at work in the new instruction: (1) The liturgy requires by its nature the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful; (2) Highlighting the holiness and sacredness of what we are doing; (3) Emphasizing the role of the ordained person. These principles lead to some suggested

changes in our eucharistic practice. I will take them in reverse order, one a week. So, how does the new instruction's emphasis on the role of the ordained person affect specific practices? I see three areas.

(1) Encouragement for the priest celebrant to sing, especially on Sundays and feasts, those parts of the Mass that are specific to the presider, namely the opening prayer (called the 'collect'), other such collects, and using a simple chant to sing the eucharistic prayer. We currently do not usually sing such parts. At Christmas and Easter I will generally do so, but other than that, no. The document encourages singing because such singing automatically signals something special is happening—a festival, a celebration, a way of communicating and interacting that is beyond the daily and ordinary way. Of course, there is singing/chanting and there is showmanship. How often is too often? When should such singing/chanting be done by priests in this parish? I will discuss that with the Worship Commission and we will test out any changes, after the September 22/23 meetings with the diocese on how to implement the new instruction.

(2) The priest presider not leaving the altar or sanctuary area for the greeting of peace, except on "special occasions". I find the change here strange. It might make some sense for the priest to exchange the greeting of peace only with those in the sanctuary area, if we are talking about a large concelebrated liturgy with lots of liturgical ministers nearby. But usually it is just the one priest. To not go down and exchange the greeting of peace with the assembly would violate the spirit of the liturgy we are trying to preserve. So, I am inclined to ignore this new guideline here at the parish. But what do you think? Again, I will be discussing this with the Worship Commission.

(3) Eucharistic ministers for communion who are not ordained are to approach the altar only after the priest receives communion and are to be directly given by the priest their plate or cup for distribution of communion. The motivating factor for this seems to be a fear that people will confuse who the priest is and the proper role of the priest with other liturgical ministers. Right now we do not make the extra eucharistic ministers wait until the priest has received communion to come forward. Nor do we have the priest hand each one their plate or cup necessarily. I have never found my role as the priest presider diminished or obscured by having the eucharistic ministers come forward before I receive communion. Quite the contrary. I do wonder if following the guidelines will simply add "wait" time for everyone while all the practical communion matters are done. Do we institute the practice of everyone watching the priest receive communion and then waiting for the eucharistic ministers to come forward?

September 7, 2003 *The Eucharist: The New Instruction on the Roman Missal (cont'd)

The second principle underlying much of the changes in language in the new instruction is an emphasis on the holiness and sacredness of what we are doing. The word 'sacred' is attached again and again to everything connected to the celebration of the Eucharist: sacred altar, sacred vessel, sacred vestment, sacred action, sacred silence, and so on. Attention is called repeatedly to the fact that this is not just ordinary actions and language and communication. It is special, sacred, holy. Very little specific is changed because of this, more a matter of emphasis. I want to point out four areas in particular.

(1) Silence. The appropriate use of 'brief periods of silence' is one of the hallmarks of the new instruction. Such times for silence can include after the "let us pray" and before the opening prayer (or "collect" as it is called); before the first reading begins and after each of the first two readings and after the homily; after communion or before the prayer after communion. These times for silence remind us that we are not the initiators of the action, God is. They remind us to be active listeners, open to what God is doing. They remind us that there is a holy reality happening in Word and Sacrament before which we come in reverence. Even though the periods of silence are to be 'brief' I think we need to look at whether ours are too brief and, if so, how long a period of silence seems best in each instance.

(2) The altar. The altar and the ambo and the presider's chair are the three focal points in the sanctuary area, with the altar holding a certain pride of place and centrality. The altar top (called the mensa) is envisioned as fully covered by a white cloth on top, no matter the liturgical season and other coverings beneath, in order to highlight this dignity and sacredness. A cross with an image of the crucified Lord is to be nearby the altar to mark the altar's connection to Christ's sacrifice. Should we place our processional cross (which has an image of the crucified Christ) nearer the altar? Do we make cloths to cover the top of the altar or do we show proper reverence for and dignity toward the altar already by how we cloth it?

(3) Bowing as a sign of reverence. The new instruction suggests that everyone who approaches communion make a 'slight bow' before receiving. This is the common gesture envisioned. Not a genuflection but a slight bow. This will slow down the process for communion slightly, if we all do it. It is to help us be attentive to the great gift we are being given. Not new but not too often followed, the same slight bow is suggested at the words of the creed 'by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man,' to show our reverence for the gift of the Incarnation. On the feasts of the Annunciation and Christmas, a genuflection replaces the slight bow during the Creed. To what extent should we practice these gestures and make them something that become our common way of acting?

(4) Overall care and reverence toward liturgical actions, people, spaces, and furnishings. All of the elements of the liturgy are to contribute to a sense of the dignity and awe and mystery of what we are doing. From servers to lectors to priests to eucharistic ministers; from chalices and ciboria to candle stands, presider's chair and vestments to the Sacramentary, gospel book, and lectionary; do we show all the proper care in how they look and are treated? Where do we have to be more careful in how we handle things? Next week I will conclude the overview on the new instruction by looking at the key principle: how do we encourage full, conscious, active participation of all of us in the liturgy?

September 14, 2003 *The Eucharist: The New Instruction on the Roman Missal (conclusion)

I have looked previously at two principles that explain some of the changes in the new Instruction—(1) an emphasis on the holiness and sacredness of what we are doing and (2) an emphasis on the role of the ordained person. I want to finish this series of articles by looking at the most basic principle: the liturgy requires by its nature the full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful. The Second Vatican Council articulated this principle forty years ago. It led to all the many changes we experienced at that time: Mass in English, the altar moved out from the wall, development of lectors and other ministries, communion under both forms, and so on. It continues to be the most important liturgical principle. The new instruction re-affirms all the changes that have taken place but nuances a few. The most important is in the area of posture. The Instruction reminds us that having a united, common posture is one of the clearest ways to symbolize shared and participative action.

In particular, the universal common posture envisioned during the Eucharistic prayer is standing. However, the bishops of the United States, without forbidding standing, voted to change the expected posture at that time to kneeling: from after the Holy, Holy (Sanctus) to after the Great Amen, at the end of the Eucharistic prayer. We currently stand. We do not have kneelers. Do we need to do any catechesis here about that? The Instruction does ask that, if standing, all make a profound bow at the two times the priest genuflects at the consecration. I think we need to think about encouraging that here at SS. John and Paul. What do you think?

Secondly, all standing together is the common posture from the start of communion (as the priest receives) until the last person receives. The Instruction envisions people receiving, moving back to their places, remaining standing and singing. Then, once all have received, people would either kneel or sit, whichever posture the community has designated as appropriate. We are used to receiving our own communion and then focusing on our private prayer. The Instruction is trying to get us to think about communion as communion, a community's common action, not just a private reception of communion. While such posture is not to be forced, it does invite

us to think about how communal is our reception of communion? Should we teach this and encourage this at our parish, always being gentle with those who disagree?

Thirdly, when receiving communion, the Instruction has now designated a common gesture, a simple bow. In other words, it is asking people who used to do nothing as well as those who genuflected, to change to this common posture of a simple bow, acknowledging the presence of Christ in the communion before receiving the consecrated bread and wine. How do we encourage this in a way that is meaningful and not just routine or legalistic?

Fourthly, while there are other small areas that need to be looked at, two that are repeated in this instruction that have generally been ignored, are the common actions of a profound bow during the Creed when we pray “by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man” (a genuflection on Christmas and the feast of the Annunciation), as well as a simple bow at the mention of the name of Jesus, Mary, or the saint whose feast we are celebrating. Should we try to do these together or not?

Finally, there is a strong reminder that we are to sing out the acclamations and hymns, respond vigorously with Amen and other acclamations, and take seriously the times when we are to be silent and when we are to respond.

May 30, 2004 *Reviewing Our Participation in the Eucharist

About one year ago I began some reflections on the Eucharist and what it means to participate actively as we celebrate the Eucharist. I then did a “teaching Mass” on one of the weekends in June (something that I want to do once every year). Since then we prepared for and then implemented some minor changes in the Mass, as a result of a worldwide new instruction on the Mass. It is time to review how our celebrations of the Eucharist have been going, in light of the changes, as we look toward this year’s “teaching Mass.”

Posture and gesture. We actively participate whenever we enter into the suggested postures and gestures at the Mass. In particular, the new instruction focused on bowing. We are invited to do a profound or deep bow at the time of the Creed when we pray “by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the virgin Mary and became man” and after the consecration of the bread and the wine (since we are standing rather than kneeling). To help encourage the bow at the consecration, we decided that the presider would do that profound bow as well, instead of the usual genuflection. I would encourage those of you who have not yet entered into that gesture to do so. The Eucharistic prayer is quite long and can seem to be the “priests’ prayer” since he alone says the words aloud. But it is everyone’s prayer and bowing after the consecration of the bread and the wine is a way to stay attentive and make that prayer an action of the whole community. So, when the consecrated bread or wine is held up, we are not bowing then. Rather, we are looking at the gift of Christ and praying. Once it is placed back on the altar, as a whole community we bow.

As to the profound bow at the Creed, I must admit that I sometimes forget myself. Also, a deep bow seems awkward and out of proportion. However, I think, again, to allow gestures to become part of our prayerfulness is a good way to more actively enter into the full celebration of the Eucharist. I would suggest we try to do at least a simple bow during those words of the Creed.

Finally, at the time of receiving communion we are asked to make a simple bow—not a genuflection or profound bow, not kneeling, not even the sign of the cross. This, along with standing, is the common posture and gesture for all receiving communion. Many more are now doing the simple bow. I would encourage it, because it makes

one focus on the reception of the Eucharist. It is a way to focus one's thoughts and heart on the great gift being received in the consecrated bread and wine. It is not to take away from the more important participation of clearly saying "Amen" before receiving. Thus the best time to make the simple bow (a nod of the head done slowly and reverently) is just before you step forward to receive, as the person in front of you is receiving. Next week I will continue to highlight some of the areas of liturgy that have been affected by the changes.

June 6, 2004 *Teaching Mass

Last week I began a review of how we celebrate the Mass here at SS. John and Paul, especially in light of the recent minor changes. I went through some of the ways we enter into the liturgy through our posture, especially the times we bow. To continue that review, there are a few more things that the new instruction emphasized and that we tried to implement more clearly at our parish liturgies.

Silence. We actively participate by allowing times of silence and the prayer of the heart that inspires. I must say that this community does very well on this. I never worry if a child or baby breaks the silence, and that doesn't happen all that much. I truly find myself able to be more prayerful now that we include these suggested times of silence. We do so before the "Lord have mercy" and the opening prayer, and after the first and second readings, homily, and communion. In fact, I would like to see us extend them just a few more seconds so that there is time to let our hearts be quiet before God. If we allow our hearts to be open to God's Spirit in those moments of silence, the Mass will never be something passively done around us. Rather, it will always actively engage us.

Singing. The new instruction strongly encourages participation through singing. We added a sung opening prayer for Advent, Lent, and Easter, along with the dialogue to the preface for Advent and Easter. I like that ability to highlight the various seasons differently through what we sing. So, we did the following over the past year. For Advent we do not sing the Gloria but we did sing the Lord have mercy and ended the opening prayer so that we proclaimed a sung "Amen, along with singing the dialogue and preface. For Christmas we sang the entire opening prayer, added the sung Gloria and continued with the sung dialogue and preface. For Lent we omit the Gloria, ended the opening prayer in song, but did not sing the preface dialogue or preface. For Easter season the Gloria came back in, along with the singing of the entire opening prayer, preface and dialogue, and the double alleluia at the end of Mass. Finally, in Ordinary Time we will sing the Gloria and the ending of the opening prayer, but not the preface or the dialogue.

In addition, we have tried to encourage singing through the various choirs that have developed, through our weekly two minute practice before Mass, and by singing various verses of hymns without accompaniment. Singing brings about such powerful participation. We do well and can do even better. One time I especially note is at communion. We almost always use a refrain that can be memorized and sung without a hymn book at that time. Part of communion is entering into that hymn both as we come forward to receive and after we return to our seats. Reverence. Nearly all the concerns about so-called "abuses" at Mass have to do with areas of reverence. How we dress, how we treat the vessels and books used at Mass, how we pray, how we approach communion, and so forth—all bespeak a basic reverence for the presence of Christ, if we are attentive to these things. We do pretty well here at SS. John and Paul. I would encourage some attention to the following areas though, as we try to strike the correct balance between reverence and comfort.

(1) How we dress. Yes, dress comfortably. No, do not dress as though we are going to a picnic or an activity such as that. I especially ask lectors and ministers of communion to pay attention to dress, since they exercise such visible roles. We should never show an unwelcoming attitude to someone, based on their dress. But those of us who are the parish members need to be an example of how to properly dress for Mass. (2) Chewing gum. Is it really ever necessary to come into the church chewing gum or to chew gum during Mass? Perhaps for the rare instance of a person who needs to for some medically-indicated reason. But for the rest of us: let's show some respect by not chewing gum at church. (3) Receiving communion. Let your "Amen" be strong. Don't grab for the

host but, if possible, hold one hand underneath the other and receive the host as a precious gift. Do not dip the host into the chalice, but take a small sip of the consecrated wine. Keep up the singing at communion. When communion is over and we are no longer singing, enter into the silence. We don't focus on the tabernacle. The communion minister does that for us by reverently placing the unused consecrated bread in the tabernacle and bowing. We must not just believe in the body of Christ present in communion. We must become that body of Christ to the world. Let us try to make all that we do at Mass a reflection of our basic reverence toward God, toward the gift of his Son Jesus, and toward all people.

June 13, 2004 *Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

We celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi on this second Sunday after Pentecost. It originated in one diocese in France in 1246 but became so immediately popular in many areas of Europe that by 1264 it was made a feast of the universal Church. Since the 14th century many churches incorporated a Eucharistic procession of the Blessed Sacrament, often tied to a whole festival in the town. Today, such processions are less common, though still allowed. More often parishes are starting to incorporate an extended period of adoration in the Church. I will be asking the Worship Commission to think about how we might bring some of that focus on adoration and prayer, tied to a festive community spirit, into our yearly celebration of this feast. This feast invites us to a more concentrated focus on the real, continuing presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament (consecrated bread and wine), something we presume but do not specifically focus on during our usual celebrations.

You read that correctly. Mass is not primarily a focus on the consecrated bread and wine. We know that occurs as part of the whole action of the Mass. But we celebrate Eucharist as a full cycle of actions. (1) Gathering as we are, ready to let go of all that blocks us from being part of the body of Christ. (2) Opening our hearts and lives to God's Word, yearning to hear a word that can sustain us, challenge us, or even heal us. (3) Bringing forward gifts of bread and wine and offerings for the needs of others and the good of the Church, recognizing that we must place our whole lives at the altar to be part of the offering to God. (4) Offering God the perfect sacrifice of praise, because we are uniting our prayer to that of Jesus Christ and doing what Jesus asked us to do in his memory. (5) Being fed by the body and blood of Christ, thus literally united by that gift, so that we might be transformed more deeply into the body of Christ. (6) Going forth to live that good news, allowing what we have done to affect how we view all that we do during the week. (7) Gathering the next week to continue and deepen that cycle.

Eucharist, then, is not a one time only sacrament or occasional event. It is the central, repeating, deepening rhythm of our lives that we celebrate each week. Yes, the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ in that very important sacramental way. Yes, we reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle so that we can bring communion to the sick as well as have a chance to pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. But no, we do not primarily focus on the bread and wine becoming that body and blood. Of course that happens. We trust in Jesus' words. But at Mass we focus primarily on connecting ever more deeply to God's Word and Christ's presence so that we are transformed, not simply the bread and the wine.

If we understand the focus above, then it is good to celebrate a feast each year that asks us to re-affirm our belief in and reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. May our "Amen" at communion be a way to do that today and each time we gather. For our "Amen" means we believe that this is truly the body and blood of Christ and that we are willing to be the body of Christ broken and blood of Christ poured out for the kingdom of God.

May 22, 2005 *Preparation for the Teaching Mass

On June 4th and 5th we will have our usual Mass schedule, but I will be the priest celebrant at all four of them. Instead of the usual homily, I will spread my “remarks” out over the whole Mass and invite everyone to participate in a more focused way at each stage of the Mass. Mass will be the usual hour or so, and it will be the Eucharist, but with an effort to understand some of the history and theology behind what we do every weekend. Thus a “Teaching Mass.”

Last week I shared some thoughts on the gathering rites and how to prepare for Sunday Eucharist. This week I want to offer some reflections on actively participating in the Mass. When the Church changed the liturgy forty years ago, the guiding principle was the desire to increase the “full, conscious and active participation of all the faithful.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, par. 14). Active participation begins before the liturgy by looking over the readings at home, by trying to get to church a few minutes early to pray and greet people, by picking up a hymnal and/or worship aid and be ready to sing.

Within the Mass active participation begins with the Opening Song. I cannot stress enough the difference it makes if everyone sings out. I hear people say “I don’t sing; I don’t have a good voice; I don’t know how to follow notes.” I’m sorry, but that doesn’t cut it. It is amazing the beauty of the sound, if everyone sings, not at the top of their lungs, but aloud. “Off” notes get harmonized and the whole sounds magnificent. Singing by its very nature brings us into active rather than passive participation. Not to sing by its nature, makes us passive participants. We actively participate through various gestures as well. While praying the creed, we are invited to bow during the words ‘By the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.’ At communion the gesture of preparation and respect for the presence of the Lord in that communion is a slight bow before saying “Amen.” At this parish we stand during the Eucharistic prayer. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal asks that communities which do this to make a deep bow after the consecration of the bread and another after the consecration of the wine. As the presider I would ordinarily genuflect at that time, but to help create that sense of unity and participation, the presiders have also been bowing at that time. Join in such gestures. They probably seem awkward at first, but become more natural as you do them more regularly. Such gestures automatically bring about a level of active and not passive participation because they move our bodies to be in sync with the words and reality of the liturgy.

Perhaps the most important “gesture” in the recent Instruction on the Roman Missal is the invitation to incorporate a deeper sense of silence into the flow of the Mass. Prior to the “Lord have mercy,” after the first two readings, after the homily, and especially after communion, the community is invited into a period of silence. It is always tempting to shorten that period. I have to resist the tendency, the cantors as well, because unless an adequate length is given to such silences, we really don’t get a chance to experience our minds/heart at rest. These silences add about two minutes to the total time of the Mass, but allow us to take a few deep breaths and actively open our hearts to the work of the Spirit during the Liturgy. Try taking three or four deep breaths at those moments of silence; invite the Spirit into your heart and place all that is going through your mind at that point in the Spirit’s hands.

At the greeting of peace our active participation takes the form of offering the sign of peace to those around us. Please note: we are offering the peace of Christ, not our own peace or greeting. What’s been going on in our lives, hellos, best wishes, etc. are very appropriate before and after the Mass. But at the time of the greeting of Mass we are remembering that unless we are able to be at peace in Christ with one another, everything that we do at communion is contradicted. Communion then is in danger of becoming for us not the binding of the body of Christ together in Christ but a very empty ritual. Even if we have ill feelings and misgivings towards others, in Christ we can find a way to be at peace with one another. If not, then what are we doing so that we can be reconciled with those persons? “The peace of Christ” or “the peace of the Lord be with you” is what we say. This is not about our personal feelings, but about Christ and being the body of Christ.

At communion the gesture we are asked to do is stand together while all receive communion and to sing. Yes, sing! Almost always the music at this time is some sort of refrain that we don't need hymnals for. Communion is focused on community, not individuals. Standing and singing while all receive is the way the Church envisions the community making this a concrete reality. In introducing this two years ago, a number of people found the standing difficult, since we also stand throughout the Eucharistic prayer. We decided to encourage people to stand until they receive communion and then sit. But to continue to sing!! I have to be honest. Most who sit seem to stop singing. We have been so trained, myself included, to think of communion as a time to be praying individually to the risen Lord we receive that we contradict what the liturgy asks us to do. Please continue to sing throughout communion, until all have received.

For the teaching Mass I will ask us to stay standing and singing to experience the full effect the Church's liturgy calls for. But I don't think the issue is standing or sitting after receiving communion. The key is to keep singing and praying for those still receiving communion. Then, if we allow for a decent period of silent prayer after the singing is ended, we can enter into that personal time of prayer and praise.

June 5, 2005 *Teaching Mass

Once a year I like to take all the Masses on the weekend and celebrate them with a conscious focus on deepening our understanding and appreciation of all that Sunday Eucharist is. Thus the focus this weekend on entering consciously into the celebration through song and veneration of the altar; of letting God's Word penetrate our hearts and not just minds; of claiming the words of the Eucharistic Prayer as our own and not just something the priest does by himself; of experiencing communion as a common bonding first and foremost and not primarily a private, individual experience.

I am currently teaching a class on sacramental theology to some students in Lansing who are enrolled in the course via Siena Heights University. As we began our discussion on the Eucharist, I asked them why the Church thinks it is so important to receive communion from the bread and wine consecrated at that Mass. The General Instructions on the Roman Missal call this, in ordinary circumstances, a "right" of the people—pretty strong language, implying that those in leadership have a responsibility to see that the right is not violated. Another way to phrase the question would be to ask, "Is there any difference between the full celebration of the Mass and a communion service?" A communion service would be one where readings and psalms are proclaimed, some intercessions shared, and so forth, and then communion brought from the tabernacle to the altar and from there distributed to the people. After all, we believe in the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. What's the difference?

That is my question for you. Is there any difference between Eucharist and communion service? If there is no difference, then why don't I just add extra bread at the next Mass— enough for a few thousand people, let's say—and then take a couple of months of vacation? In fact, we wouldn't need so many priests then, would we? We might reasonably only need a handful who celebrate Eucharist with a series of communities, leaving behind enough consecrated bread reserved in the tabernacle so that each community can continue to receive communion each week until the priest can make his way back again to them. Yes, I am being facetious. But I wonder if some people wouldn't be happier with a very short service, as long as they "got" their communion?

To allow the Eucharist to become the rhythm or heartbeat of our lives takes a willingness to commit to all that is happening as part of each Eucharist. Full, conscious, and active participation is the essential minimum demanded of us by the Lord himself, in order to enter into the Eucharistic mystery. Eucharist isn't something magically done to bread and wine so that we can make Jesus happen at the altar. Eucharist is something that happens to us. We become his Body. We become ready to be broken and poured out for the sake of others. As St. Augustine so famously said: "This is your mystery on the altar...so become what you receive!" That means active joining in prayers, in the "Amens", in the hymns; active listening and affirming with acclamations the great Eucharistic

prayer of praise; actively moving our bodies in gesture and procession; approaching communion as a member of the Body of Christ and knowing oneself visibly joined to each member of that Body, and finally being willing to be sent as part of that Body to those in the world who need Christ's presence in and through us.

Jesus himself invites us to that altar. The risen Lord invites us as we are. But he asks us to surrender to him all that we are, including all that distracts, all that harbors hurt and anger, all that doubts or grows weary and discouraged. Jesus himself becomes the Word proclaimed, penetrating our hearts, asking us to be receptive to something that touches on the kingdom of God, something that we can take with us as nourishment or encouragement or challenge. Jesus himself presides among us, joined by the whole communion of saints, as we pray and sing out the Eucharistic prayer and acclamations. It is not by accident that we enter into the Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy) with the words: "joining with all the saints and angels". Jesus himself becomes the nourishment we receive in communion, entrusting his Body and Blood so that we might be the Body of Christ in the world.

Eucharist is the ritual action that allows us to enter into that intimate communion with Jesus as the Body of Christ. It requires active work on our part so that the symbols and rituals can bear the fullest fruit. To reduce the Eucharist to a more passive reception of personal communion at a communion service is to misunderstand this greatest gift that the Lord offers us. Is there a difference between Eucharist and communion services? You bet. Shame on us if we don't celebrate Eucharist with the joy and life that comes from knowing this to be the highest and most central act of worship we can do.

June 12, 2005 *The Eucharist

The flow of the Mass, as mentioned during last weekend's "Teaching Masses" is as follows: we gather and come together as one community at the Lord's invitation (Introductory Rites); we listen to God's Word with open hearts, not just minds (Liturgy of the Word); we respond by giving God thanks and praise, remembering what God has done especially in and through Jesus his Son (Eucharistic Prayer); we receive the gift of the risen Lord's body and blood (Communion); we are sent forth almost immediately to be what we have received and celebrated—the body of Christ in this world. All of that is necessary for the Eucharist to truly be Eucharist. The Mass is not just about receiving our communion and feeling close to the Lord. It is about being invited to Eucharist by the Lord, being nourished through Word and Sacrament by the Lord so that we might become the Eucharist that is broken and poured out on behalf of the many.

There are two main parts to any Eucharistic celebration: 1) the Liturgy of the Word 2) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (which includes the Eucharistic prayer and communion).

This was the most ancient sense of Liturgy, though we lost some of its significance over the centuries and many were taught that the Mass had three main parts—Offertory, Consecration, and Communion. Wrong! Two main parts: we first listen during the Liturgy of the Word and then we respond by remembering, giving thanks and praise and receiving communion during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

These two main parts are surrounded by three minor parts of the Mass: 1) the Introductory Rites (Gathering, Opening Hymn, Penitential Rite or Sprinkling, Gloria, Opening Prayer), which take us out of our individual journeys and individual isolation and bring us into one worshiping body of Christ. 2) The Preparation of the Gifts, which marks a transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and really just has the practical purpose of getting the altar ready, the gifts collected and brought up, and having a little break before we begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist. 3) The Dismissal Rites (Blessing and Dismissal), which send us forth not to dwell on how great this experience has been, but to bring Christ to the world and transform the world.

June 19, 2005 *Some Questions on the Mass

As I mentioned during the 'Teaching Mass' a couple of weeks ago, I would from time to time take some column space and go into more details on aspects of the celebration of the Mass. This week, let's look at the choice of readings which are proclaimed. One of my students in the Sacramental Theology class I am teaching in Lansing asked "Why do Catholics not have the Bible with them at Mass?" A good question. He grew up a Baptist and misses preaching that has people open the Bible to set passages and read along and study.

The Catholic approach to Sunday Scripture readings is to encourage such reading and study outside the celebration of the Eucharist. At the moment of the Mass when the readings are proclaimed (notice that word, not just 'read', but 'proclaimed') we believe that the Living Word of the Risen Lord is able to touch our hearts, calling to mind for us some connection to any or all of the readings. It might be an image, a phrase, a word, a story, a memory that is stirred, a feeling that is raised, a question to ponder. To be open to that living Word means that we are asked not to read along in a missalette or Bible or other reading aid (unless someone is hearing impaired and so needs that aid). Rather, we are asked to listen with our heart to what is stirred up by these readings and/or homily.

The way the readings are selected is through a three year cycle for Sunday readings: Year A, B, and C. All the major passages from the gospel of Matthew are read during Year A. During Year B the gospel of Mark is portioned throughout the year. During Year C the gospel of Luke takes precedence. The gospel of John is proclaimed in all the years during the Easter season, during Lent in Year A, and during Ordinary Time in Year B. In that way those who come and open themselves to the Word of God each Sunday, over the course of three years, are fed with just about everything in the four gospels.

After the gospel passage was selected the Church authorities then selected a reading from one of the books of the Old Testament in such a way that nearly all of the Old Testament books are heard from in the course of three years, and the passage from the Old Testament has a tie in through words or images to the gospel passage.

In addition to the first reading and gospel reading, the Church adds a second reading from one of the New Testament books other than the gospels. This is a 'continuous reading' in that a whole book will be proclaimed over the course of several weeks in a row. It is not picked to correspond in image or theme to the other readings, only so that we will hear from every book of the New Testament over the course of three years. To finish the Lectionary (the book of readings for Sunday), the Church parcels out passages from the Acts of the Apostles in all three years during the seven week Easter season.

Come consistently to Sunday Mass over three years and we will have had a chance to hear from nearly every book of the Bible. Learn to listen with heart and not just head and we will have opened ourselves to myriad images, phrases, and stories that God uses to speak directly to our own situation. May this Living Word of God touch each of our hearts this day.

July 3, 2005 *The Eucharist and Catholic Vocabulary

One of the side benefits about growing up around the Catholic Church is the way one's vocabulary grows. I always tell the altar servers that if they learn all the proper names for things pertaining to the Mass they might have that million dollar answer to some obscure question on a game show some day! Our Latin and at times Greek roots in the Mass provide all sorts of examples. I thought it would be fun to name a few as a way to continue some teaching on the Eucharist and Eucharist-related Catholic practice.

For example, look at where the names for the priest's vestments come from. The long, white garment worn by priests, deacons, acolytes and at times other liturgical ministers is called the alb, which comes from the Latin word for white (albus). An alb-like tunic was an everyday garment in Greco-Roman society, worn by most people. The custom of wearing an alb for liturgy doesn't get established until the 5th and 6th centuries. Some

albs are very loose fitting and so it became customary to tie a rope-like cord around the waist to hold the alb in place. Our altar servers use such a cord with their albs, following the liturgical color of the day. It is called a cincture (from the Latin *cingulum* which means 'girdle').

The priest also puts on a stole, a long narrow cloth, typically worn over the alb but in recent years sometimes on the outside of all the garments. Its color corresponds to the liturgical color of the season (white, purple, red, green) and is worn differently by priests and bishops (around both shoulders) than deacons (over only one shoulder). In fact, this differentiation in usage harkens back to an older custom among Roman officials, who used different types of scarves to signify their respective rank. The word comes from the Greek word *stole* for clothing. Finally (or with some vestment sets just before putting on the stole) the priest puts on the chasuble, the cape-like outer garment with a hole for the head, again in the liturgical color of the season. Again, this was a common piece of clothing for all men in the Greco-Roman world, which falls into disuse in society in the 5th and 6th centuries, but is retained by the clergy for liturgical use. By the 9th century it was so completely associated with priesthood that the clothing of the newly ordained priest with the chasuble was put into the ordination ritual. In the Greco-Roman world the chasuble was often a hooded cloak and could completely cover the person for protection against the elements. Thus the name comes from the Latin *casula* for 'little house'.

Why does a priest vest, other than there is a rule to follow, a rather ancient but by no means necessary custom? The main reason is to allow the role of presider or priest-celebrant at liturgy to be less centered on the personality of the priest and more centered on being a sacrament of Christ's presiding. As one of the newer Eucharistic prayers says "Christ now opens the Scriptures for us and Christ breaks the bread." A priest is not to be unemotional or mechanical or without affect—that would mean he was not being himself. Our Catholic sacramental sense believes that in and through the ordinary the reality of God's saving presence in Christ can be experienced. But the point is to experience that presence of Christ, not have it all end focused on the personality of the particular priest. Thus the human reality of the priest is to be a sign pointing to and making present a deeper reality of Christ's mediation.

Whether wearing vestments truly helps or hinders that in today's world can be debated. Some believe that all liturgical ministers should at least wear an alb (readers, ministers of communion, choir and cantor, etc.), so that they, too, would have a sense of entering into a role of service rather than simply doing it for themselves. But where does that stop? Aren't we all active liturgical ministers by praying, singing, participating? To be honest, I like our practice here, where people who serve in any capacity are asked to dress for Sunday, exercise their ministry well and then sit with family and friends when not exercising their ministry. For obvious reasons the choir needs to sit together, but I do like the fact that they aren't in choir robes, but again in Sunday dress—one with us, not separated unnecessarily from the rest of the assembly. And, it would not bother me, if the priest celebrant were asked to dress and do the same.

May 21 2006 * "Teaching Masses"

Each year on the feast of Corpus Christi I review how we as a parish have been celebrating the Eucharist. I call these Masses "Teaching Masses," and use them to highlight the meaning of various things we do, what the Church intends by structuring the Mass as it does, and how we might more actively participate in the liturgy. For the next few weeks I will be writing about aspects of how we celebrate the Mass, as a way to lead into the feast of Corpus Christi, which is on the weekend of June 18th/19th.

Singing and responding as a community. It makes a huge difference if we all participate in the songs and in the spoken responses. Visitors pick up immediately from such participation whether a community really believes in what it is doing in liturgy. But it is not simply singing and praying. We need to be attentive to doing it as a common body. When done well, our responses have a unity that doesn't single out any particular voice, but every voice contributes. As a presider with a microphone on, I know I have to get much better at reducing my volume. Even as I write this I am making a resolution to be more attentive to that. Cantors as well need to be more careful, because their voice can overly dominate on the microphone in places that are for the entire community's response.

It is also dis-uniting when someone refuses to sing or respond, thereby setting himself or herself off from the rest of the community. At communion, for example, the Church's directives call for a hymn to accompany the receiving of communion, from the time the first person has received (usually the presider) till the last person has received. Only after that do we enter a period of personal, silent prayer. We have deliberately chosen communion hymns that have easy to memorize refrains, which we have repeated several weeks in a row. I know that we will have crossed a threshold in our common singing and responses, if and when our communion hymns are sung by most of us and the cantor's voice can sing the verses and not just the cantor can be heard singing the refrain!

It is dis-uniting as well when someone hurries the responses or slows them down, giving the sense of an individual response only. I see this quite a bit in the spoken responses. Often one or more will respond quickly and hurriedly, with no regard for praying the prayer together with the rest of the people. Another might go especially slowly, almost as if trying to slow everyone down, but having the end result of calling attention to their own response only. The next few times you participate in Mass be attentive to how you and others respond. What a powerful witness of worship when we do this together, in sync, all participating.

As to singing, the most common negatives I hear are "I can't/don't sing," "Don't know that hymn," "Too hard to sing it." But it is an interesting fact that one does not have to be a good singer to contribute to the overall song. As long as a number of people know the melody and sing it out, the rest of us can blend in as best we can. If we do, the end result is a beautiful unity of voice that is quite remarkable. In a group the size of a Mass (150-500), even those of us off-tone and a bit stumbling contribute to the overall beauty of the assembly's singing. Of course, if we know ourselves to not singing on key, we shouldn't belt it out loudly! But we should always sing.

Parents—dads pay attention—you become an example to your children by how you verbally participate in the Eucharist. They pick up very quickly whether you are there to "do a duty" or whether it is a conscious, faith experience for you. Also, it means that our children need to learn the responses. Go through them with your children, starting from a very young age. The sign of the cross, the times for "Amen," the words of the Gloria, "Thanks be to God" and "Alleluia" and "Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ," the Creed, "Lord, hear our prayer," the words of the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of power and might..."), the memorial acclamations, the Our Father and Lamb of God—we need to help our children know these by heart so they can participate fully in the responses at Mass. Our hymnals have all these responses beginning at #287. You can always put the ribbon in that position for your child and have them follow along.

It takes conscious work, discipline really, to unite as a body of Christ in song and spoken prayer. The more we do so at SS. John and Paul, the more the worship reflects what the Church fully intends. We all need to be attentive to this and do our part to make it happen.

June 4 2006 *Reviewing How We Celebrate Eucharist (Part Two)

This week I want to review our times of silence and use of gestures.

When the new instruction on celebrating the Mass came out in 2002, one area that was emphasized was the integration of periods of silent prayer into the Mass. **Silence** creates a time and space within which God's Spirit can work in us. Silence is not passive silence but active silence. We are praying and opening our hearts or we are reflecting on something from the readings/homily.

There are six moments for silence singled out in the instruction: (1) As part of the penitential rite, if that is used, in order to enter more consciously into the liturgy aware of God's goodness and mercy. (2) After the opening "Let us pray" so that when the priest celebrant prays the prayer, we have already added our own thoughts about what we are praying for. In fact, the prayer is traditionally called a "Collect", "collecting" all the prayers of the people gathered and placing them as one before God. (3) and (4) After the first and second readings, as a way to let God's Word more deeply penetrate our hearts; (5) After the homily, so that all the many words that we've heard can be reflected on in faith. (6) And after communion, when all have received, as a time of personal praise and thanksgiving.

I know as a priest-presider it is always tempting to skip over these times of silence, in order to "get on with" the next thing that has to happen. But when I do, I feel the difference in the celebration. There is a way in which silence, properly entered into by nearly all present, allows the liturgy to have a proper pace. The next time you notice such periods of silence, let yourself take a deep breath, let it out slowly, and ask God to be with you. I think you will find the Mass more meaningful, if you do this regularly.

The use of gestures. With all the hymns we sing and words we use, it is easy to lose sight of the many ways that celebrating Eucharist is not done so much by words as by gesture. By that I mean all the non-verbal ways we use in order to more actively participate in the liturgy. For example, we have *processions*— often symbolically done by servers, presider and at most a few others—but occasionally we all process. And when we do, that very act of processing is an act of worship. I can tell you there was a difference in experience and feel on Palm Sunday at the Masses where we all processed outside from the ones we didn't. Both celebrated the same feast, palms got blessed in both cases, and the Eucharist was fully celebrated, but in the ones with procession, there was more life, energy, and tangible embrace of the meaning of the day.

At each Mass we have a procession with the gifts. When possible we have tried to enhance that moment by having the servers lead up with the candles. What is being brought up are the gifts of bread and wine. But what these represent is everything we are at that moment, everything we need and hope for. In the words of one version of the prayer at this time of preparation of the gifts, we are celebrating a marvelous "holy exchange of gifts." We offer the gifts of bread and wine which represent all that we are and in return we are given the gift of the Lord's "divine life." As you see the gifts brought forward, place yourself with those gifts. Place all that you are praying for in those gifts, as you see them brought forward. Volunteer occasionally to bring them up on behalf of all the community.

In addition, we process at each Mass for communion. The communion procession is to be accompanied by a hymn. We are all standing until having received the gift of communion. The very act of standing together and singing and keeping the song going throughout communion allows the meaning of communion to come out—we are in this together. We stand at the beginning, sit for the readings, stand for the gospel, bow during the Creed, stand during the Eucharistic prayer, kneel at different times of the year, bow before receiving communion, and so on. The Eucharist is filled with little gestures. To be conscious of these gestures is to embrace a more active participation in the Eucharist. I want to especially call our attention to three times we *bow*.

The first is the bow during the Creed, while we pray "...by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the virgin Mary and became man." I sometimes forget to bow and I notice that most of us do not bow. But when I do

remember to bow, it automatically increases my sense of prayer. Because the whole body is involved and not just memorized words coming from the mouth, it makes the Creed more meaningful.

The second are the bows at the Consecration. Since our posture during the Eucharistic prayer is one of standing—the most ancient posture for this—the instruction on the Mass calls for an act of reverence immediately after the consecrated bread and wine are put back on the altar, after being raised for all to see. A number of us enter into this gesture. Many do not. Again, I strongly encourage you to do so. Try it out. By allowing yourself to bodily enter into the meaning of that prayer, you will find yourself more attentive and more aware of what is happening.

The third is the slight bow before receiving communion. This is the gesture of reverence and respect we are to show, in order to remind ourselves of the awesome gift/mystery we are receiving. It seems to work best, if we bow as the person ahead of us is receiving communion and then we are ready to look up and proclaim our “Amen” to the words “the Body of Christ” or “the Blood of Christ.” Again, a simply bow which can turn a routine act into a more consciously embraced act of worship.

Even if we did not open our mouths at all during the Mass—I am not encouraging this!!— we still have so many ways that we participate by our bodily actions. Our postures of standing, sitting, at certain seasons kneeling; our processions, our hand reaching out at the greeting of peace; our bows and signs of the cross. In order to increase our awareness of what we are doing at Eucharist I will be asking us to add two other gestures at the time of the Teaching Mass on the weekend of June 17/18. The first is to come up and reverence the altar. The priest does so symbolically for us all at every Mass, but at the teaching Mass I ask all to come forward and do so. As you kiss the altar (or bow toward it), think about what you are willing to place of yourself on that altar so that it can be transformed by the gift of Jesus’ body and blood. Think of it as a way to reverence all that Jesus does for us in the gift of offering his life.

The second gesture I will add at the Teaching Mass is the raising of hands in prayer—the presider does this all the time—at the Eucharistic prayer. The raised hands are a sign of praise and thanksgiving. In the ancient Church all the people would join in the gesture, not just the priest, in order to bodily participate in a prayer that otherwise can be quite long and seem to be only the priest’s. No, it is the prayer of us all and raising hands in the prayer gesture during that can help emphasize that. Next week I will look at active listening and the whole Liturgy of the Word.

June 11 2006 *Reviewing How We Celebrate Eucharist (Part Three)

As we prepare for the feast of Corpus Christi next weekend, at which we will celebrate the Eucharist in a “Teaching Mass” style, I have been reviewing some of the key ways we can more consciously and actively participate. Let’s review how we enter into and celebrate the Liturgy of the Word here at SS. John and Paul.

You will notice that the Book of the Gospels is placed on the altar as part of the Opening Procession. This signals that the Eucharist is not just about taking bread and wine, praying over these elements, and receiving the body and blood of Christ at communion. The full Eucharist always includes a Liturgy of the Word, wherein we receive really and truly the presence of Christ the Living Word, with the proclamation of the Gospel as the symbolic high point of that Liturgy of the Word.

There is a remarkable statement from 1965 in *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution on divine revelation. Such a dogmatic constitution within the context of an ecumenical council is the most authoritative way the Church shares its teaching. In paragraph 21 the Church reminds its members that: *“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God’s*

word and of Christ's body." We receive the bread of life in the Eucharist not just when we partake of communion. We receive the bread of life when we actively partake of God's living Word. It is not enough to participate inactively up to the time of communion and then finally come forward and actively receive communion. The Eucharist includes the true presence of Christ experienced in and through being an active member of the praying assembly, in the sacramental presence of Christ through the priest, but most especially in and through the real presence of the living Word and receiving the sacramental body and blood of Christ at communion.

How do we prepare for and participate in this bread of life that comes through the Liturgy of the Word? Not by trying to understand all the details of the Bible passages being used. We are inundated with so many words during that time—a reading from the Old Testament (or during the Easter season from the Acts of the Apostles), a sung rendition of part of one of the psalms, a reading from the New Testament other than the gospels, a brief gospel acclamation with a Scripture quote, all finally culminating in a proclamation from one of the four gospels. There is no way to absorb all these words. Even with the best lectors, sound systems, and willing listeners, there are too many words to hear and understand. So, something else must be intended by proclaiming all these words.

The key is to develop the habit of listening with our hearts and not just our heads. Have you ever listened to a song—one that you may have heard any number of times—and suddenly be struck by one of its phrases or images? It pops out at you, reminds you of something in your life, touches you more deeply at that point of your life. That is listening with your heart. Similarly the Eucharist's Liturgy of the Word is always an invitation to listen with one's heart.

It is an excellent practice to have read and reflected on the readings ahead of time. We provide anyone interested, free of charge, with the entire year's worth of Sunday readings. Just ask for the "Sunday's Word" booklet. But when the time of the Liturgy of the Word comes, it is time (unless you have difficulty hearing) to set down any books and listen as though you are listening to a song. Let the words come into the mind and stir up images, questions, connections to your life. Don't try to understand the context of the events taking place. This is not the time for Bible study. If some strong image or question or connection comes up, begin to go with that as a meditation. Turn it into a prayer or question to God. This takes practice. We so quickly tune out when we lose track of the literal meaning of the sentences, or the reader is too soft or stumbles over some phrase. No, hang in there. Practice praying a little prayer—"Let me hear with my heart, O Lord, what you need me to hear"—and let the words continue to come into the mind and pass as images, phrases, connections to the heart.

As a way to emphasize this "listening with our hearts," rather than giving a homily I will read the gospel several times, in a more meditative way, inviting you to slow the mind down and open the heart. Afterward, if a couple of people feel so inclined, I will ask you to share what your heart was hearing as you listened.

The Bread of Life, the true and real presence of the risen Lord, comes to us in and through the Liturgy of the Word. It is an essential part of celebrating Eucharist. If we develop the habit of listening with our heart, then we will find the remainder of the Eucharistic action—Eucharistic prayer and communion—to be much more connected to our lives and meaningful.

June 18 2006 *Teaching Mass

There are a number of items that I would like us to review in terms of how we prepare for, celebrate, and live out the Eucharist that is the heart of being a Catholic Christian people.

- ◆ Do we prepare for the Sunday Eucharist? Read the readings ahead of time (we have books free of charge for you if you need one)? Come early enough to spend a couple of minutes in preparatory prayer?

- ◆ Do we acknowledge the presence of the risen Lord in the assembly gathered by greeting and welcoming each other?
- ◆ Do we acknowledge the presence of the risen Lord in the blessed Sacrament by taking a moment to look at the tabernacle, genuflect and make the sign of the cross before entering the row we will sit in?
- ◆ Do we acknowledge that presence in the Word by listening with our hearts and praying for the Spirit to touch us during the proclamation of the Word?
- ◆ Do we acknowledge that presence in the priest celebrant by letting the prayers led by the presider be our prayer as well?
- ◆ Do we show basic respect for the blessed Sacrament by getting rid of gum, by making a conscious but slight bow of the head as we approach for communion, by paying attention not to what people are wearing but to praying for all those coming forward for communion and participating in the communion hymn, by not grabbing for the host but receiving it reverently in the hand, by receiving under both the form of bread and the form of wine when appropriate?
- ◆ Do we focus not just on the transformation of the bread and wine, which is necessary, but also on how we need to be transformed and be a sign of Christ's presence to others?
- ◆ If we have guests with us who are not Catholic, do we review some of the things that will be happening and make sure they understand the guidelines for who may and may not receive communion?
- ◆ If we have little children with us, do we get them some picture books to help them understand the Mass? Do we try sitting closer to the front where they can see what is happening? Do we take ones that are crying loudly or acting up out into the back area of the church, where they can be less disruptive?
- ◆ If we have pre-school age children do we sign them up for the Sunday Early Childhood Program during the 9:30 a.m. Mass? If we have school age children from grades 1-4, do we encourage them to be part of the Children's Liturgy of the Word during the 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. Masses? If we have children from grade 5-8, do we encourage them to be altar servers? If we have high school age children, do we encourage them to be involved as lectors, communion ministers, members of the choir, ushers, sacristans, greeters? Have we taken seriously enough our own responsibility to share in one of these ministries?
- ◆ Do we actively participate in the whole Eucharist, by singing, listening, praying during the moments of silence, by bowing during the Creed, by bowing after the consecration of the bread and of the wine, by joining in the prayers of the Mass not just as individuals but trying to be part of the community's one voice?

June 10 2007 *Teaching Mass

Over the past few years I've taken the feast of Corpus Christi as a time for the parish to focus in on what we are doing when we celebrate Eucharist. I call these "teaching Masses", since we pause at various points to consider why we are doing what we are doing. Once again we are having "teaching Masses" on this weekend of Corpus Christi. I will especially concentrate this year on the Eucharistic Prayer.

But first, let us think about the Eucharist as a whole. As I say in the pamphlet "Our Sunday Eucharist" (available in the literature racks at the back of the church): "*The entire community of faith, fully and actively participating in the weekly (Sunday) Eucharist, is the heartbeat of Catholic life and faith.*" Jesus gives us the gift of the Eucharist so that we have a way to connect everything in our lives and everything happening in the world to his once-for-all offering of himself for the salvation of the world. But notice: Eucharist is not simply the communion we receive. It is not about the priest "doing something" so that we can have bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ. It is an action of the whole people of God. In fact it is a series of actions, each of which are essential to the full Eucharist.

We *gather* (coming to together as we are this very day); we *listen* (to God's Word—we cannot do Eucharist unless we are responding to God, not simply to ourselves); we *offer* ourselves in the gifts of *bread and wine*; we *give thanks*; we *remember* what Jesus did for us (consecration) and who we are; we *eat and drink* (communion); we *are sent forth* on mission to be the body of Christ broken open for others and blood of Christ poured out for others. The entire series of actions is Eucharist. It requires conscious and active participation through our joining in prayer, song (yes, song—to not sing is to diminish the full reality of Eucharist), attentive listening, reflective silence, communion, and acceptance of our identity and mission to be the body of Christ.

Now this year's focus: the Eucharistic Prayer. I invite you to think about and be more attentive to the Eucharistic prayer—the long prayer that we think of as "the priest's prayer". No! it is the community's prayer. I wish the Church would allow the community to pray more of the prayer together on a regular basis. But even without that, notice how the prayer is structured. It begins with a "dialogue" of priest and those gathered ("The Lord be with you..."). Then it moves into thanksgiving and praise to God the Father for all that God has done for us through Jesus the Son, in the Holy Spirit, most especially what God has done for us in Jesus at the Last Supper. The sense of it being the whole community's prayer is conveyed through the three acclamations: the Holy, Holy, Holy (often called by its Latin title, the Sanctus); the Memorial Acclamation (after the consecration); and the Great Amen (at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer).

For several centuries the presider would compose his own prayer, using the model of the Jewish "blessing prayer" (*berakah*) which Jesus himself used at the Last Supper. Over time certain prayers, especially ones used by influential bishops or in influential cities, became more standardized and took on the form we are more familiar with today. In our Roman Catholic tradition the following are considered essential in any complete Eucharistic prayer:

Thanksgiving (this will be especially prominent in the Preface.) *Acclamation* (this refers most particularly to the Holy, Holy, Holy; but we also have a Memorial Acclamation and a Great Amen acclamation.) *Epiclesis* (a Greek word for 'laying on of hands', an action used to signal prayer for the Holy Spirit to be with us and upon us and the gifts.) *Institution Narrative and Consecration* (we have versions of Eucharistic prayers that do not explicitly use a consecration prayer, since the epiclesis was considered sufficient, but in the Roman Catholic tradition we have especially focused on the consecration element.) *Anamnesis* (a Greek word for "remembering" but with the Hebrew biblical sense that when we let the Spirit of God lead us into remembrance, then we become re-member-ed—we become part of that seemingly past but eternal action.) *Offering* (explicitly offering the gift of Jesus' life and ourselves as united in that life to God the Father; in other words it is more than offering the bread and wine on the altar; it is an offering of all that we are that very day in union with Christ; for those old enough to remember, we no longer call the presentation of the gifts "the Offertory" because this is the true

offertory in every Mass, taking place after the consecration.) *Intercessions* (this is where our general intercessions most logically belong; the history of why they became a separate part of the Mass is too long to go into here, but the point is to recognize that we never remember what Jesus did just so we can “get” the sacrament of his body and blood. We become one with Jesus, the great mediator between God and humanity, so we too must be intercessors for the real needs, the real hungers of humanity.) *Final Doxology* (“through him, with him, in him...” which ends in the great amen; it culminates the eucharistic prayer and is our assent to all that we have just prayed.)

A few comments on the above structure of the Eucharistic prayer. It is meant to be prayed as a unity. There is no “stopping” and saying exactly “where” the body and blood become transformed. In the west (Roman Catholic) the focus has been on the consecration, which is one reason the customs developed to highlight the consecration with bells, incense, kneeling, etc. In the eastern Church (Orthodox) the focus has been on the epiclesis (prayer for the Holy Spirit to be present and transform the gifts and the people), which usually was prayed after the consecration and was considered the ‘time’ when such transformation occurred. But it is best to not dissect the prayer and its effects, since the whole prayer needs to be prayed in faith for the Eucharist to happen.

In churches where kneeling does not occur, the General Instruction on the Roman Missal asks that the faithful bow after the holding up of the bread and the holding up of the cup. Here at SS. John and Paul the presider joins in that action of a profound bow at each point so that we enter into the action as a united community of faith. For those who have not been so bowing I invite you to join in. It expresses reverence for what is happening, an acknowledgment of the mystery that is opening up before us, and a certain humility in recognizing we are part of that mystery, as unworthy as we may be.

To help us enter into the intercession portion of the Eucharistic Prayer I will generally pause at that time so that people can add silent prayers to God for all the people and situations we know need prayer. Such a pause is not called for by the General Instruction but it fits the spirit of the liturgy at that time.

I do invite people to use the laying on of hands gesture at the time of the epiclesis during the teaching Mass. Although we don’t do this in the course of the usual celebration of Eucharist, it is important to recognize that the priest presider is not doing this action as an isolated individual or as a possessor of some power apart from the community. Rather he acts on behalf of the whole community and as part of that community.

Finally, as the various elements unfold in the Eucharistic Prayer I will try to point them out. But it would be good to develop a rhythm during the Eucharistic prayer at any Mass. When the preface is being prayed, what are we thankful to God for? As the Holy Spirit is being invoked and hands raised above the gift, are we praying for that Spirit to come upon these gifts and upon us as community? When the consecration narrative is being prayed, try to place yourself with Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper. When the offering portion is prayed, it is our time at each Mass to say “Lord I offer myself even as we offer these gifts.” As we listen to the formalized intercessions, who/what do we need to pray for this day? As the final doxology and the “Amens” ring forth, do we let our heart say “Yes, Lord, I believe” to all that we have prayed?

May 11 2008 *Teaching Masses May 24/25

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) is on the weekend of May 24/25 this year. As has been my custom I will preside at all the Masses on that weekend and make them "Teaching Masses." They will be the usual Mass, but pausing at different times to reflect on what we are doing or how we are doing it. In addition to highlighting the basic structure each year, I want to focus this year on the non-verbal aspects of the Mass: standing, bowing, processing, hands raised in prayer, and other non-verbal gestures. We often take them for granted and don't think it makes a difference, whether we do them or not. Obviously, it doesn't make a difference in whether God will love us or not. But they can make a big difference in how we experience the Eucharist as a unified community of faith. Along with the prayers we pray and sing in common, non-verbal gestures are a key way that the liturgy forms us into a unified, worshipping community.

Take the gesture of bowing during the Creed when we pray "by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the virgin Mary and became man." Are we better people when we all bow during those words? Are our prayers more 'heard' by God? Of course not. Yet, if you have ever been in a parish or at a Mass where the vast majority bow at this time, something right happens. We become a true community at prayer. Attentive not just to our individual feelings or desires but part of the community Christ has gathered as his body, praying as one. More next time.

May 18 2008 *Teaching Mass on Corpus Christi (continued)

As I mentioned in the column last week, I will again shape all the Masses on Corpus Christ (next weekend) as "Teaching Masses." Last year I focused on the Eucharistic prayer and its meaning and practice. If you are interested in reviewing what was said go to our website, click on Sunday Bulletin, 2007, and then on June 10 and June 17, and read my columns. This year, in addition to emphasizing the overall structure and meaning of what we do at each Mass, I will concentrate on the meaning and significance of the non-verbal parts of the Mass.

Take the gesture of bowing. Some are very uncomfortable with this gesture, and for a good reason. They don't want to seem like they are "showing off" their faith or piety. But when we gather for Eucharist, we are no longer "coming to Church" as a private individual for personal prayer alone. The Church is open over 60 hours a week for that. Rather, we gather as a community of faith and nonverbal gestures like the bowing to the altar as we enter, the bowing during the Creed, the bowing before stepping forward to say "Amen" and receive the body and blood of Christ, all contribute to that public, communal nature of Mass.

A second non-verbal area to look at are the processions. While the opening procession and procession with the gifts use just a handful of members to symbolize the gathering of us all around the altar and Word and the placing of us all at the table with the gifts, the communion procession involves most of the community. The Church asks that we have a common posture during the communion procession. For that reason we all stand while coming forward to receive. In many churches the standing continues until all have received communion. Only then do people sit/kneel for personal, quiet prayer. Since we are one of the few churches that stands during the entire Eucharistic prayer (more on that next week), all are standing at the beginning of communion and then are seated (singing!), once returning to their seats. This provides a modified common posture that encourages our unity, as well as addressing certain practical matters.

Please note all the non-verbal parts of the Mass next week as we go through the Teaching Masses. I will continue some thoughts especially on the times of silence, the use of hands, both by the priest and the assembly and all the sitting, standing, and kneeling.

May 25 2008 *The Feast of Corpus Christi

When the New Testament and early Church used the term 'body of Christ' it was immediately understood to refer to the Church, the gathering of the people of God who belonged to the Lord. When the great patristic bishops and theologians used the term they stressed the intrinsic connection between the obvious 'body of

Christ' which was the Church and the body of Christ mystically constituted in and through the Eucharist. But by the thirteenth century, for a variety of reasons, when the term 'body of Christ' was used, most would first connect it to the consecrated host at Mass. In fact, there was such a disconnect between being the body of Christ as Church and the body of Christ we become and receive at Eucharist, that most received communion quite rarely. It was enough to simply view the consecrated host, now elevated above the head of the priest at the consecration on the high altar. The great reality was not so much that we are the body of Christ but that this bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ. Even a theological term was invented to describe how this happened— transubstantiation.

In the early 13th century a number of factors came together to emphasize even more the importance of the consecrated bread and wine. [Mostly focused on the bread, since for more and more places the practice of sharing the cup was a thing of the past.] The most influential council since the early centuries was held in 1215 (Lateran IV), and among other important matters, reaffirmed the theological understanding of transubstantiation and mandated that all receive communion at least once a year, preceded by confession. Thus the start of what later was called our "Easter duty." Hymns in honor of the real presence of Christ in the consecrated bread were composed. Theological treatises were developed. And a popular devotion that began in France to honor the Body and Blood of Christ spread so quickly throughout Europe that the Pope quickly made it a feast on the universal Church calendar, so that all would celebrate it.

Notice what happened over the centuries. Even though official theological manuals explained that the change of the bread and wine into the sacramental Body and Blood of the risen Christ was a "middle step" that still demanded a movement toward a "final reality" (the transformation of the Church into a sign of unity and instrument of Christ's charity in the world), the popular focus became concentrated on the consecrated bread. When in the 16th century the Reformers denied the real transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the Catholic Church even more strongly emphasized this aspect of Eucharist. Tied to the passive experience of watching the priest and the servers do the Mass, while privately praying, we too easily forgot the main reason for celebrating Eucharist. It is not to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Rather, in the course of doing what Jesus gave us as his memorial, we know such a change occurs, however one explains it, so that we can be remembered, re-connected into the living body of Christ at this place and this time. That was the great benefit of the liturgical reform of the 20th century that culminated in all the liturgical changes after the Second Vatican Council. On this feast of Corpus Christi, let's contemplate the awesome reality we are part of. We are the body and blood of Christ, ready to be broken and poured out for the salvation of this world. Although we can also be in wonder and awe at the presence of the risen Christ in and through the consecrated gifts, we need to be in even more wonder and awe that we are part of that risen body. We hunger for communion so that we can live that communion during the week. That is why the Church in recent years has insisted that we do all we can to prepare ourselves to participate fully in the Eucharist. Such participation includes coming to communion, if at all possible and our lives do not contradict the meaning of that communion.

One final reflection: Is there a difference between actively participating in the full Eucharist and a communion service in which we receive the consecrated host from the tabernacle as part of that service? If our answer is "no" or "not much," then we still have a long way to go in embracing a full understanding of Eucharist. And I think we do have a long way to go throughout the Catholic Church. If we truly took our theology seriously, it would be scandalous to accept communion services and deny the experience of full Eucharist to millions of people throughout the world, simply because not enough celibate men are priests. One of the linchpins of this reluctance is the centuries of custom that focused not on the full Eucharist as such, but only on the transformation of the bread and wine.

May 25 2008*Teaching Masses

This year, in addition to the overall meaning of the Mass, I am focusing on the nonverbal aspects. Take the times of silence. It is very hard to let those times extend very long. We get impatient and restless. We are not good at letting such times open up our personal connection to what is taking place. I exaggerated them a bit this weekend to help highlight their role so that in the future we might more easily enter into these times of silent prayer: at the penitential rite, before the opening prayer, after the first and second readings, after the homily, after communion. You will also note that, even though the official rubrics of the liturgy do not call for it, I try to have a time of silence during the Eucharistic prayer so that we can connect that prayer to all the intentions and needs we are aware of.

Another non-verbal part of the Mass is all the different postures we use: we genuflect to the tabernacle or bow to the altar, the priest and deacon kiss the altar, we stand for shared hymns and prayer, sit for readings, kneel (or stand) during the Eucharistic Prayer, sit (or kneel) for prayer after communion). What such changes of posture do is to provide a non-verbal way of participating actively in the Mass. As the General Instruction on the Roman Missal (G.I.R.M., no. 42) puts it: "A common posture, to be observed by all participants, is a sign of the unity of the members of the Christian community gathered for the sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants." Simply by sharing the common posture, we are participating with the community. Of course, it is even more powerful when we also share the verbal parts of the responses, the Amens, the hymns and communion.

In general, sitting is a posture of openness to listen and hear, a preparation for responding. Kneeling is posture of penitence or reverence. Standing is a posture of shared prayer and praise. Here at SS. John and Paul we do not have kneelers and so have the custom of standing during the Eucharistic prayer. I am aware that some would prefer to kneel and a few do kneel on the floor. I am also aware that the U.S. Bishops expressed a preference for kneeling during the whole Eucharistic Prayer. However, the longest and most ancient custom is to stand during this prayer, because the main focus is not simply on reverence but on praise and thanksgiving. Standing, with hands raised in prayer, is the most ancient custom for such prayer, not kneeling. In any case, without kneelers, we will continue to encourage standing during this prayer. And the G.I.R.M. envisions several reasons for such standing and reminds us that we then should "make a profound bow when the priest genuflects after the consecration. (no. 44)." I would like to see us get better at this common posture of a profound bow after the consecration. For that reason I also join in a profound bow, rather than genuflect, to encourage this common action. In our tradition genuflection and a profound bow are considered equivalent gestures.

This year I also want to call attention to the posture with our hands. The oldest customs encouraged all the participants to have hands raised in prayer during the common prayer portions of the Eucharist. I encouraged you to do the same for the teaching Masses, just to open up an experience and then reflect on it. If we could get over the feeling of awkwardness about it, how might such gestures help us enter more fully and communally into prayer? Many join hands at the Our Father, though that is not called for in the G.I.R.M., because it seems such a natural moment for visual connection before the greeting of peace. Even if some do not join hands with those around them, many still lift up their arms or open their hands, because the Lord's Prayer has that petitionary quality about it. I would encourage people to not be afraid to raise arms in prayer at the common prayer times, to extend hands outward toward the gifts during the Eucharistic Prayer, to attentively and purposefully make the sign of the cross rather than haphazardly and quickly. In all such gestures we reinforce our active participation in the Eucharist. If not comfortable with such gestures, then internally make a prayer that connects you to those moments of prayer, praise, petition, and calling up the Spirit.

Let us continue to take our common worship as an occasion for joyful and respectful shared prayer. Pay attention to all the ways we can either detract from or more fully contribute to the unity of the assembly at prayer. Join in the hymns and responses (and please, try to listen to everyone around and be part of a common

response, rather than an isolated individual response), but let these many non-verbal actions draw us more fully together as one body.

June 1 2008 *Teaching Mass Follow-Up

Thank you for your participation at last weekend's "Teaching Masses." I know it can be uncomfortable doing things a bit differently. But every once in a while it is good to take what is done routinely and examine how we are doing it and why. You are always welcome to raise your hands in prayer, whenever the presider does, though many are uncomfortable doing so, but it is not called for as a routine gesture. However, the deeper bow at the creed and after the consecration of the bread and wine, and the slight bow before stepping forward to say "Amen" to receive communion are normal, expected gestures at every Mass. I encourage you to enter into these as a way to non-verbally but actively participate.

Think once again about the movement and flow of the Mass. • The Lord invites us to gather in his name as one people and we accept that invitation. We start as a diverse group who has had many life experiences since the last time we gathered, and the Lord wants to re-form us anew as one body. This gathering movement ends with the Opening Prayer.

- Before we are truly able to pray as the body of Christ, we need to be filled by God's own Word and so we listen and reflect as the Liturgy of the Word is proclaimed. We then tentatively voice that Word within us by first professing the Creed and then interceding for others, as Jesus does.

- Having received God's Word we are now truly able in this church, at this time and place, to be the body of Christ in prayer and so as we give God thanks through the Eucharistic Prayer. Christ now becomes present not just in and through us, not just in his Word, not just in and through the priest, but in and through the bread and wine we offer on the altar.

- But this is not the end or high point. Rather, now that Christ has become present in all these ways and in particular in the sacrament of his body and blood, we need to receive that communion so that we can be the body of Christ not just in this church but throughout the week in all facets of our lives. We say "Yes" to that gift with our "Amen" at communion, remembering that it is not our individual gift alone but rather the collective gift of all who have participated.

- We are then sent forth or dismissed from the church to be the body of Christ in daily life. We need to presume that situations will arise in the week ahead which will call for us to be the bread broken or blood poured out for others, that is, to be the gift of Christ's risen presence to others. We then re-gather the next week and bring all that has taken place in our lives and allow that to be the "stuff" which the Lord takes and re-forms into his body yet again. The Eucharist is a wonderful gift. Let it become the rhythm or pattern for how we approach all of life.

May 17 2009 *Teaching Mass June 13/14.

The feast of Corpus Christi is always two Sundays after Pentecost. It was instituted in order to encourage a proper understanding of, devotion to, and living out of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the "source and summit" of our Christian lives, as Vatican II put it. Even though each part of the Mass has gone through various changes over the centuries and will continue to adapt in the future, the core of the Eucharist remains the same, given to us by the Lord himself.

The Lord invites us to a meal, to spend time with him, remembering who we are, praising God for what God has done, uniting us as a people through the gift of his body and blood in the shared bread and wine, and sending us forth to be Eucharist in our daily lives. It is the rhythm or pattern that is meant to be the heartbeat of all that we do as Christians and as a community of faith. Notice that at the core of this pattern is the constant repetition of God/Jesus calling and inviting, we responding, and so we are changed.

Jesus invites us to gather with his people each week. We respond by coming together at Mass. In so responding we are no longer simply individuals engaged in life's struggles. We are a community of faith. Jesus then invites us as a community of faith to listen to his Word, to let our lives be shaped by that Word. In so doing we are no longer just any community of faith, we are ready to be the community of faith that Jesus will use to create his Eucharistic presence. Jesus invites us to offer everything to the Father through him. We respond by doing so in the Eucharistic prayer and his body and blood become present in the form of the bread and wine. The risen Jesus invites us to communion; we respond by taking communion; we are now a community of faith literally united by the very communion we have received. Jesus then invites us to go forth into daily life as his Eucharistic presence; we respond by doing so and portions of the world's life are changed by our actions. Again and again, the Lord invites, we respond, life is transformed. That is the pattern of all life, lived in faith.

Interestingly, the gospel story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13- 35) helps to bring out this Eucharistic pattern in a dynamic way. Like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus enters into our lives as we are. Whatever is on our minds and hearts, he wants to walk with us. He asks us to tell him "what things" are going on. That corresponds to the "gathering rites" of the Eucharistic liturgy. We think we are here because we have chosen to be. But really the Lord is the one who has invited us, who has walked up to us and asked us to walk with him and share our story with him. He wants to bring all that is going on in our lives to the time of the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist.

Then, once the disciples have finished telling their version of what is going on, Jesus says "How foolish you are. Did you not know that the Messiah had to first suffer and die and on the third day be raised to life again?" Whereupon he proceeds to interpret all the Scripture, beginning with Moses and the prophets, which refer to him. That corresponds to the Liturgy of the Word. We come as we are and begin to unite our story with those around us and the Lord by singing the opening hymn together, sharing in the penitential rite, and giving that initial praise to God in the Gloria, but we really are not yet ready to see the Lord fully.

First we need to let the Lord interpret our lives, to connect what is going on in our lives to the Word proclaimed. We need to see our lives as "foolish" unless we understand how the Lord is present to them. Our openness to the Liturgy of the Word is like the Emmaus disciples' who say "Were not our hearts burning within us when he talked with us along the way!" When we connect our story to the Lord's story, letting his life, death and resurrection and the meaning of that interpret how we see our lives, then we are ready to be a community of faith who can see the Lord.

Now the Lord can break bread with us and reveal himself more fully. Like the two disciples with the Lord at Emmaus he prays with us at table, gives thanks with us to God the Father, and as the "bread is broken" we recognize him fully, most specially, in his real presence. The Liturgy of the Eucharist allows us to know and see that the risen Lord is present here and now, for us and with us. We take that transformed bread and wine so to be transformed ourselves. But, like the disciples at Emmaus, "he vanishes from our midst." That corresponds to the dismissal rite. We do not linger at the table with the Lord. Once we recognize that our lives, as limited as they can seem, have been united to the Lord and have been the occasion of his becoming present in the body and blood, we must act. The two disciples run back to Jerusalem to share their story. We are sent out from Mass to share the Lord with those in our life. We don't simply bring communion to others. We are that communion for

them, or at least the Lord invites us to live in that way. This year in preparation for the Teaching Mass I want to especially focus on the fact that the Lord takes us, our lives, who we are, all that we are, and makes it the “stuff” of the Eucharist. It matters who gathers together at the Lord’s invitation, because from that specific people the Lord will make his Eucharistic presence known. In that sense every Eucharist is different because we bring a different moment of our lives and unite it with at least a slightly different group of people. But because what comes of that communion is the presence of the Lord, every Eucharist has a commonality—the true, real presence of the risen Lord.

I am always amazed at how many Catholics, in a sense, demean the awesome reality of the Eucharist by thinking of it primarily as a communion service, as though there is no difference between celebrating Eucharist and becoming Eucharist and saying a few prayers and receiving communion. I am convinced that until we recognize the difference between Eucharist and a communion service we will never really “get” what it is that Jesus is doing at Eucharist. More in two weeks.

May 24 2009 *Understanding the Eucharist (continued)

In preparation for this year’s Teaching Masses (Corpus Christi weekend, June 13/14) I am writing about the difference between “doing” Eucharist and simply “getting” communion. I mentioned in the May 17th bulletin that I am convinced that until we recognize the difference between Eucharist and a communion service we will never really “get” what it is that Jesus is doing at Eucharist. What do I mean? One of the certainties of our Catholic faith is the true, real, substantial presence of the risen Jesus—body and blood, soul and divinity, as the tradition puts it—in the transformed Eucharistic elements of bread and wine.

Searching for a way to name that belief, western theologians in the middle ages coined the term “transubstantiation,” in order to highlight that something substantial had changed. Gathered in the name of the Lord, doing what he asked the disciples to do, led by a properly ordained priest, the bread and wine, though still materially in the form of bread and wine, can no longer be appropriately called bread and wine. It has become the substantial presence of the risen Lord, his body and blood, his real presence. The Catechism of the Catholic Church talks about his real presence in this way: *“This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presences as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is the presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”* (#1374). This alerts us to the fact that the Lord is also truly present in many other ways, among which the Church highlights are his presence in the assembly of faithful gathered, in his proclaimed Word, and in ministry of the priest celebrant. But clearly our Tradition has especially focused on and even cherished that real, sacramental presence in his body and blood under the form of consecrated bread and wine.

As a result, we have tended to see the consecration of the elements during the Eucharistic prayer as “the” moment when such substantial change takes place. And, once consecrated, as though the reason for the Mass is fulfilled—the risen Jesus is now present to us, really and substantially in the consecrated bread and wine. And so we pay more attention to making sure that everyone treats the consecrated bread and wine with care, how it is disposed of if there is extra left after communion, focusing on the tabernacle until the remaining communion is secure there, and so forth, then the fact that the Lord has invited us, spoken his word to us, offered what we have brought to the Father, has given us a share in his body and blood and thereby uniting those into a visible body of Christ.

As a result, in the pre-Vatican II days of 45 and more years ago, many Catholics would approach for communion only if they had gone to confession the same day or the day before. And if you ever wonder where the habit of leaving right when communion begins started, it was due to this excessive focus on the consecration. Or where the practice of ringing a bell at the consecration started, so that people would look up from their private prayer and “see” the consecrated host or chalice of consecrated wine, which the priest lifted over his head, since his

back was to the people. Or the practice of priest and ushers looking at the tabernacle and sitting down only when the tabernacle doors were shut. Or the belief that the Offertory (Presentation of the gifts of bread and wine) part of the Mass was more important than the liturgy of the word. You could miss the whole liturgy of the Word and still only commit a "venial" sin but miss the Offertory and it turned "mortal". Or, not receive communion and leave early and again a "venial" sin but miss the consecration and it was mortal.

In other words, due to the focus on the consecration the Catholic faith there has come into Catholic faith a dead-certain faith in the risen Lord's presence when we come together at Eucharist and offer bread and wine. That is a gain and gift to Christian faith that Catholics have to offer. But, unless properly understood and lived, such a belief in the real presence can distort how we understand what Eucharist is. We don't gather for and do Eucharist so that we can consecrate bread and wine and then have that consecrated bread and wine available for communion. No! We gather for and do Eucharist because that is the pre-eminent way that the risen Lord made his presence known to the Church from the earliest times on. It so happens that he chose the setting of a meal and it so happens that he gave special significance to the blessing with the bread and the blessing with the cup of wine. But these blessings (our consecration) are part of a larger whole in which the Lord is fitting us together as a people, forming us by his Word, praying with us and offering our lives to the Father, feeding us with the gift of his body and blood, and sending us forth as his body and blood to be broken and poured out for others.

If the Eucharist was mainly about consecrating enough communion to have available, then I could gather a humongous amount of hosts at one Mass, consecrate them all, reserve them in the tabernacle (we would have to buy a big tabernacle), and then go on vacation for a few months until the parish needed more. You could have daily communion services at which people receive communion.

June 7 2009 *Teaching Mass (continued)

Next weekend I will preside at all the Masses in such a way that, in addition to truly celebrating the Eucharist, there will be a focus on teaching what the Mass is about and how the Church invites us to celebrate the Mass fully. In preparation for next week I invite you to read the pamphlet *Our Sunday Eucharist*, available on the parish's website www.ssjohnandpaul.org under "New and Noteworthy", as well as these columns from May 17, May 31, today and next week.

For me the key to understanding Eucharist is to appreciate the "flow" of every Mass and enter into that flow consciously, positively, actively. Have you ever swam in a river with a current? You know how hard it is to fight against the current or to try and stay exactly near the spot you started. In fact it can be exhausting. The same with the Sunday Eucharist. We have our own "flow", what is happening in our lives. Or we want Sunday worship to be a certain way and we refuse to actively sing, respond, and enter into the flow of the Eucharist. That can be spiritually exhausting or make it seem as though the Mass is "boring," when in fact we are the ones causing that to happen. Instead, why not try to go with the Eucharistic flow? Enjoy the "river"; don't fight against it or try to stay in the same place as when you entered. At each Eucharist the Lord is doing a wondrous thing, not simply with the bread and wine, but with us who are present.

What is that flow? What is that wondrous thing? At each Eucharist the risen Lord takes who we are individually as we gather; calls us out of our pure individuality into a community of faith; shapes and forms that community by his Word; unites that Word-centered people to his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross and offers the totality of who we are at that moment to the Father in an act of praise and thanksgiving using the symbols of bread and wine; thereby transforming that community, and its symbols, into a concrete expression of his living, real presence.

We are the “stuff” of the Eucharist. Not simply the bread and wine. It matters that we are there, not just that we get to receive communion. It is our lives as they are, uniquely at that moment, that the Lord uses to transform the bread and wine, not simply some magical words of the priest. The deeper we understand that, the more we will know (and want, I hope) to participate consciously, actively, fully. To move from being spectators or feeling disconnected from what is happening, to recognizing that we are essential to what is happening. Each Eucharist is unique to that community at that time, because we never come to the Eucharist exactly the same each time. New life experiences, different people, new challenges— all of which shape what Eucharist is each time.

So, yes, the Lord is taking “John’s” struggle at work last week, “David’s” regret at hurting his family on Tuesday, “Jane’s” worry about a job, “Lucy’s” devastation at losing her mother yesterday, “Bob’s” discovery Friday that he has cancer, “Mary’s” grief in going through a divorce, “Jimmy’s” pride at doing well at baseball Saturday, “Miriam’s” joy of being asked on her first date, “Reggie’s” love for music that led him to practice many hours that week and so on. The Lord is taking all of that each time and making it the “stuff” of Eucharist. That is what is transformed into the body and blood of Christ, not simply the bread and wine.

We “get” what Eucharist is about, not simply when we reverently receive communion or reverently reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, as important as that is to our faith tradition. Rather, we “get” Eucharist when all of that leads us to the awesome recognition that we are Eucharist, our lives have been united and transformed into Christ’s Body and Blood, and that to receive communion is to be given the mission of being communion—bread broken and wine poured out, our lives broken and poured out—for the salvation of the world around us. So, yes it does matter if we come on time. Yes, it does matter if we leave early. Yes, it does matter if we sing and respond, listen and enter actively into the liturgy. Yes, it does matter if we take communion seriously enough to have our lives, not perfect, but open to and able to receive communion. Yes, it does matter if we see the difference of receiving the communion that has become present in this specific Eucharist and the communion reserved in the tabernacle for those who are sick and unable to attend this Eucharist. Yes, it does matter whether a community has a true Eucharist or simply celebrates a communion service, even though in both there is a reception of the sacrament of Christ’s body and blood. Some concluding thoughts next week.

June 14 2009 *Teaching Mass (conclusions)

On the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) I have the custom of celebrating all the liturgies as “Teaching Masses.” Once a year I think it is good to step back and recall what it is that we are doing. Each year I take a slightly different aspect to concentrate on. This year it has been the difference between truly doing Eucharist and simply getting communion. You can find the other parts of these reflections online at the parish website in the bulletins for May 14, May 31 and June 7.

Think about the invitation and response at every Eucharist, as we transition from presenting the gifts of bread and wine into the Eucharistic prayer. The priest celebrant invites: *“Pray, brothers and sisters, that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.”* The whole assembly responds: *“May the Lord accept this sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all the Church.”* The “sacrifice” isn’t simply the bread and wine. The sacrifice is our entire lives at that moment, united to Christ’s own sacrifice on the cross. The bread and wine are the symbol of that. So, when the bread and wine are transformed into the real, substantial presence of the risen Lord during the Eucharistic prayer of praise and thanksgiving, our lives as they are at that moment are part of that transformation. We are the “stuff” that the Lord wants to unite with, transform and turn into food for others. The consecrated bread and wine are the sacramental sign and reality through which that can happen.

This means that each Eucharist, even though it follows the same ritual pattern and words, is unique to that gathering of people. The Lord doesn’t have us gather and go through this ritual so that we can eventually receive

consecrated bread and wine. The point of Eucharist isn't a lot of ritual stuff so that the "magic" of the transformed bread and wine appear. [Aside: that was the origin of the term 'hocus pocus': in Latin the consecration words begin with *hoc est enim corpus meum*; 'hocus pocus' was a corruption of those words, mocking them, in effect saying it was all just some false magic; this then became part of the magician's language in implying something magical was happening.] The point of the Eucharist is precisely to enter into that ritual pattern so that **we** are transformed.

This means being at the Sunday Eucharist is essential. When we absent ourselves from that communal worship, we alter what the Lord is offering at Eucharist and changing the extent of the communion being formed and received. The same for getting to Mass on time. Of course there can be good reasons that make one late or even keep us from Mass altogether. Don't ever worry about those times, when illness or taking care of someone or something unforeseeable happens. But when it is avoidable and we come late or when we choose to absent ourselves from the community on Sunday, we are missing the invitation of the Lord himself to be fully part of his people. The Lord will still make his presence known but it is altered by our decision. The communion doesn't fully include us and therefore we miss something significant and the whole community loses a piece of the full communion the Lord intended.

The Opening Rites (Entrance Song and Procession, Penitential Rite or Sprinkling Rite, Gloria, Opening Prayer) take us from our individual journeys and through song and prayer unite us into a community of prayer. Singing is so important for this. Any type of voice, any pitch, on tune or a bit off tune, when blended with many others forms a unified voice that is very beautiful. Yes the music ministers have to keep working on not dominating through instrument (organ, piano, guitar, drum, etc.) or voice (especially the cantor at the microphone). Yes, the priest celebrant has to work on not dominating through his microphoned voice (I try to keep it turned off during the opening hymn). Yes, it helps when it is a song or refrain that has become more familiar and is easily singable. But so often all of this does come together into a unified whole and is a powerful symbol for what the Lord is about at the Eucharist. All these unique individuals, blended together into a communion, into the assembly of God's people here and now.

The extended moment of silence before the Penitential Rite or after the priest invokes "Let us pray" can be especially helpful to this process of transforming individuals into community. Use those moments of silence to say something personal from your heart and your own circumstances of life. Interestingly, there is such a thing as "actively participating" in the silence just as in the singing. The more we actively participate, the more the "stuff" of our lives becomes the "stuff" that is transformed by the action of the Eucharist into communion with and of the Lord.

If successful, the Opening Rites have helped us become a communion, an assembly together, not just individual pray-ers. But now we need to be further shaped into an assembly of the Lord's own people. To be a community formed by God's Word. The Liturgy of the Word proclaims out to us hundreds of words—first reading (from the Old Testament or, during Easter, the Acts of the Apostles); sung responsorial psalm (going through many of the 150 psalms in the course of three years or occasionally one of the poetic canticles from another book of the Bible); second reading (from one of the New Testament letters or books other than the gospels, thereby touching on most New Testament book in the course of the three year Sunday cycle of readings); and finally the high point, the gospel (from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in successive years of the three year cycle, with John inserted into several places).

So each Sunday we get hundreds of words proclaimed to us, but we are listening not only with our ears but our hearts for the one Word, the living Word, Jesus, to speak to us, to shape something in our lives in a new way, to give us a word of hope and encouragement, or a word of chastisement and challenge, or a word of comfort and compassion. It takes practice to not get caught up in all the words being proclaimed and thereby tune them all

out. Ideally we have read the readings sometime earlier. [NB: all those who participate in the liturgical ministries are given the Sunday readings each year and we provide “Sunday’s Word” in all the hymnal racks, free for using or even taking home, so that anyone can have a copy of the readings ahead of time.] Such preparation makes active listening at the time of the Liturgy of the Word much more fruitful. But even if this is our first listening, we are still invited to trust that the risen Lord, in his living Word, can speak to our lives and hearts through some image, thought, idea, or word that we hear and connect to.

Think of the process in this way: we are various handfuls of “flour” thrown together. To help that flour (us) be joined together some water is added to blend us together (Opening Rites). But that is not enough. That flour and water combination now has to be kneaded, rolled, and “punched” again and again to be suitable dough for the bread. The Liturgy of the Word is that time of kneading, rolling, “punching”, which shapes our lives, even if only in small ways, into suitable material for the “bread” of the Eucharist. Thus it matters, whether we listen and reflect on God’s Word at the time of the Liturgy of the Word. Yes, lectors have to be vigilant to proclaim those words slowly, clearly, smoothly, and if unable to do so, need to serve in other ways. That is why we give them a book of all the readings and ask them to prepare well before even coming to the Mass. Yes, cantors have to enunciate the refrain and words of the psalm so that we can understand them. Yes, deacons and priests need to prepare homilies that are understandable, applicable to life, and which open up the richness of the readings. But each of us as well has to be willing to be shaped by God’s Word and listen with our hearts and not “tune out.” Trust that God has a word for you in the midst of all these words. Listen not for historical meaning of a passage but for what words provoke some thought and reflection on your life. Go with such reflections and see what God might be saying to you.

Gathered from our individual journeys into a community; shaped more specifically into a community of God’s Word through the Liturgy of the Word; now we can be the bread that is transformed into Christ’s real presence through the Eucharistic offering and praise. As one of the newer Eucharistic prayers puts it “Christ opens the Scriptures for us, Christ breaks the bread.” Our limited, sometimes broken and fragile, sometimes hopeful and joyful lives that we have brought to the time of Eucharist now become the vehicle through which Christ becomes present in his Body and Blood.

Think about that reality. Your life, my life, as they are but opened to Christ’s Word and leadership, are the “stuff” that makes Eucharist possible. We are not mere onlookers. Yes, the ordained priest is the visible sacrament of Christ’s leadership at that moment, but he is not simply saying some words and manipulating bread and wine. It is our lives gathered and formed by Christ which make that specific Eucharist possible. Whatever unity with Christ which takes place at that time comes from our specific though transformed lives. Wow! Christ uses our lives to become Eucharist to the world! To actively participate in this transformation is to consciously place in the symbols of bread and wine all that we are offering to God that day. To actively participate is to sing the responses (Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation; Great Amen), to let Christ’s prayer through the priest be our prayer. That is why at the teaching Mass I have people extend their hands over the gifts, when the priest does it or raise hands in the ancient gesture of prayer of praise when the priest does so—because it is not the priest’s action but Christ’s action with and through us that is happening.

Yes, it matters if the priest prays the Eucharistic prayer clearly and strongly. Yes, it makes a difference if we respond in the acclamations with one voice in song. Yes, it matters if we enter into the gestures. I have found in this parish, because we have no kneelers, a much more engaged participation in the Eucharistic prayer through our standing. That is the more ancient and universal posture of prayer at that time. Out of reverence for what is happening at the time of the consecration, the current instructions invite people to kneel at the time of the consecration, but these instructions also recognize that people also might be standing, and so direct the community to make a profound bow after the consecration of the bread and the wine. I encourage you to join in

that action. I think you might find it helps make that time not just the priest's time but an action of the whole community of faith.

Then, wonder of wonders, if we have allowed our lives to be the stuff that has been kneaded into the bread of life, we now literally become one with each other in the act of receiving the communion now present. Although we are allowed to go to the tabernacle, if we do not have enough for the Mass, the instructions strongly discourage such an approach. The instructions say that people have a right to receive from the communion consecrated at that Mass. I hope you have a sense from what was said above, why that is so. Because the intent of communion is not an isolated or individual reception of the Lord's body and blood. Rather, the intent of communion is a sharing in the unity that Christ has formed among this people here and now. That communion is then the gift which strengthens us for our continued journeys of faith. That communion is what we are to draw upon during the week in order to have the strength to be broken open and poured out for the good of others.

So, yes it matters if we receive communion at that Mass we are participating in. Only if we are sick or absent for good reason do we receive from the reserved communion in the tabernacle. That is why at times the communion minister might break a host in half—so that a person will be receiving from the Eucharist transformed at that Mass. It also matters, then, if we are ready to receive communion at each Eucharist. If our lives are significantly, seriously or grievously, out of step with God and God's people, then we are asked to first go to the sacrament of Reconciliation so that we can be ready to fully participate in the Eucharist that day by receiving communion.

We are the Eucharist. Yes, receiving communion is integral to the Eucharist, even its high point, but only if we recognize what has been transformed. Not simply bread and wine but all of us, as we are, shaped by God's Word, offered to the Father by Christ. That is the bread, the "stuff" that has become the real, substantial presence of Christ among us.

June 6 2010 *The Eucharist

Each year the weekend Masses on the feast of Corpus Christi are a chance to look more carefully at what we do at Eucharist. We do this action we call Eucharist so often that it is easy to become lackadaisical about it, to take it for granted, or to see it merely as a ritual we "have" to do on Sunday. Or, we focus on the consecration of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus and pay little or no attention to how the Mass is deliberately structured to lead us not to stop at the consecration or even at communion but to be transformed as a community sent out into the world to make Christ's presence known in the coming week.

I put together a pamphlet a few years ago to capture the overall sense of what Eucharist is about and what each part of the Mass contributes to that overall reality. It is titled "Our Sunday Eucharist" and copies are in the literature racks at the back of church or can be downloaded from the parish website [click on "Site Index" and then find "Sunday Eucharist"]. Here is some of what that pamphlet says:

"The entire community of faith, fully and actively participating in the weekly (Sunday) Eucharist, is the heartbeat of Catholic life and faith. Through the Eucharistic Liturgy all that we are and believe and experience, all that we do and hope for, enter into the once-for-all saving work of Jesus Christ. We connect our lives to and participate in the saving sacrifice of Christ, which we call his "Paschal Mystery"— his life, death and resurrection. As a weekly ritual the Mass [the popular name Catholics give to the Eucharistic liturgy] has a defined structure and flow. We

come as we are this day; we listen; we offer ourselves and give thanks; we remember; we eat and drink; we go forth to live the paschal mystery in our own daily lives until we come again to the Eucharistic celebration.

We experience Christ as present in the people of God gathered in Christ's name around the altar, as well as in and through the leadership of the ordained bishop or priest. Christ is actively present in the Word proclaimed. Christ is truly and fully present in his Body and Blood through the consecrated bread and wine we receive at communion.

Our linear, historical time—each changing day, week and year—becomes part of the eternal, once-for-all time of Christ's salvation, with the whole communion of God's people, living and deceased joining in. The Sunday Eucharist is the weekly heartbeat of the faith community that sustains us in good times and in bad.

Eucharist is a participatory drama, which forms and transforms us so that we can more deeply embrace the reality of our lives. It is divided into two great "acts" and three "transitional moments". We hope the following outline will help you better understand and enter into this celebration of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. We use voice in song and response; we lift our hands in prayer, bow our heads and bodies in reverence, walk in procession, listen with open ears and hearts, meditate in silence.

Full participation in the Eucharistic liturgy touches all our senses as our whole being is invited to be part of this great act of worship, praise and thanksgiving."

As we celebrate the "Teaching Mass" today I will be especially focusing on those multiple ways that Christ is truly and really present in the Eucharistic celebration. I will also be highlighting the structure and flow of the Mass: two main "acts" and three brief "transition moments" that are structured so as to make this not an observation of a play or theater but a true participation by us in the body of Christ here and now.

June 13 2010 *Teaching Mass Follow Up

As a follow up to last week's "Teaching Masses" I want to focus a bit more on the way the Mass is structured and the many different ways the Eucharist connects us to a "real presence" of Christ.

I think most of us are aware of how the Mass has two major parts—the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the centuries prior to the second Vatican Council of the 1960s, this structure was obscured and lost sight of by many. Catholics were told that there were three essential parts to the Mass—the Offertory, the Consecration, and Communion— and to miss one of these three was a "mortal sin." Think about that. We were told, incorrectly by the way, that we could miss the entire Liturgy of the Word but as long as we were there in time for offering of the bread and wine on the altar at the Offertory, it wasn't too serious. The corollary to this mistaken notion was that as long as we stayed until the priest received communion, we could leave without it being a very serious matter. You wonder where the custom of coming late to Mass and leaving early arose? There you have it.

Thankfully, the second Vatican Council recovered for us as Catholics the importance of God's Word, of the proclamation of the Scriptures, of recognizing a real presence of Christ in such a Liturgy of the Word, a presence that we are to venerate just as we venerate the body and blood of Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. In other words, there is no true Eucharist without the Liturgy of the Word. Eucharist is not just about the priest taking bread and wine and saying the correct prayers of consecration. Eucharist is about us becoming the body of Christ. For that to happen we need to be prepared, shaped, changed, made into the offering that is symbolized by the bread and wine offered at the altar. For that to happen we need to be shaped by God's Word.

This emphasis on the Liturgy of the Word means that we are encouraged to read and meditate on Scripture in our daily prayer. Certainly it is good to prepare for Sunday Eucharist by taking a few minutes to reflect on that

day's Scripture readings. [NB: in the hymnal racks are books titled "Sunday's Word, Year C." They can be used before Mass to reflect on the readings. They can be taken home and used at home as well—no charge.] The Catholic approach to Scripture allows us to not get hung up on an excessively literalistic interpretation. The Bible is filled with many types of literature and it is not to be taken as a literal history of what happened. Rather, it is a faith-filled, inspired by God, imaginative and in the deepest sense truthful, account of being a people of God and how God relates to us. When you read and reflect on the day's readings, trust that the Spirit of God can show you something that connects to your life. The more we read the Scriptures at home or in preparation for Mass, the more God's Spirit can make that Liturgy of the Word a living connection to Christ' real presence for us.

In addition to these two major "real presences" of Christ—in his living Word and in his sacramental Body and Blood—the Church recognizes other ways that Christ is truly and really present in and through the Eucharist. Since it is Christ who invites us to gather, when we gather in his name, the risen Jesus is present there in and through the assembly. We know the Scripture: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." (Matthew 18:20). But the importance of this real presence of Christ in the assembly of people needs to be appreciated. This people gathered. Not some theoretically perfect group. This people here and now; people we know and don't know; maybe even people we like and don't like. Because of this aspect of Christ's real presence we can see the importance of gathering as a full community on Sunday. Christ will be present even if only a few gather. But since Christ is present in and through the particular people who gather, his presence is richer and fuller, if it includes us all.

The whole flow of the Opening Rites— the gathering, Opening Song, Penitential or Sprinkling Rite, Gloria, Opening Prayer—is designed to help this people here and now, diverse as it is, no matter what has brought us there, to become that real presence of Christ as a united community of worship. This common purpose is symbolized by the gathering around the altar and, specifically, by the priest and deacon's kissing of the altar around which we all gather at that moment. That is why I had everyone process up and kiss or venerate the altar at the Teaching Mass. But in practice, the key action which achieves this common bonding so that the presence of Christ in the assembly can be experienced is the Opening Song. Voices lifted in praise and prayer together form one voice. A hymn is able to have a discernible melody line and unity, even when many of us sing a bit off key. In fact, such imperfection only adds to the overall richness and unity of the event. So, don't take that Opening Song for granted. Even if you know yourself to be a less than good singer, sing. Christ is using that time to unite us as his real presence, a common people of God gathered around his altar.

The end of Mass also is a transitional time. We must transition from this experience of worship to living the Eucharist, being the Eucharist, being the body broken and blood poured out for the salvation of others. The blessing and dismissal send us forth so that we see ourselves as the face of Christ to others and are able to see the face of Christ in others, especially the poor and those most in need. The final real presence of Christ never stops at what we do at Mass. It always leads us into the world with all its challenges, asking us to make that presence more visible in some way that week.

There is yet another "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist that the Church talks about at Eucharist. It is in the person of the priest. Since we are ending the "Year of the Priest" this month, I will do some reflection on being a priest in the column next week. As part of that reflection I will share a bit on how I understand the meaning of the priest being a sacrament of Christ.

June 20 2010 *Teaching Mass Follow-Up (conclusion)

What about the image of brother to brother/sister? In this understanding there is more commonality before God, no matter our responsibility or role in the Church. Each of us is to relate to Christ as the "first born" or elder brother. Each of us is challenged to live out a life of baptized discipleship, no matter what we do in or for the Church. This image speaks a bit more strongly to me. The Second Vatican Council resurrected the title

“presbyter” and used it fairly often when talking about priesthood. The presbyter was an “elder” in the community, not necessarily by age but by role. The bishop would consult or delegate him to take on the bishop’s role if he could not be there. In that sense the priest as presbyter is a link between the local community and the wider Church of the diocese. He is both closely related to the joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles of the local community and yet constantly viewing and connecting that local community to the larger, universal Church. He is one of the local community, sharing in their civic, cultural, economic, and religious life and yet also has one foot in the larger diocesan Church.

Thus priest as supportive brother, “elder” in the sense of having certain responsibilities to the community of faith, does resonate more with me. It is a good way, I think, to understand what the liturgy means by the “real presence” of Christ in and through the priest. We looked last week at the real presence of Christ in the assembly gathered here and now for the particular Eucharist; in the real presence of Christ in his Word proclaimed; in the very special real presence of Christ in his body and blood; and in the real presence of Christ in the world, especially those in need and those responding to those in need. The other “real presence of Christ” the liturgy embraces is that of the priest presiding.

A symbol for that is the presider’s chair, a way to visibly represent that this is about Christ and not the personal life or style or personality of the priest. Along with the altar and ambo (where the readings are proclaimed) the presider’s chair is meant to symbolize Christ and his ministry among us. Unlike the ambo (where not just the priest but all who proclaim the Word stand) and the altar (around which the whole community stands—that is one reason for letting go of sanctuary rails which too severely divided the sanctuary from the rest of the Church), the presider’s chair is used by only the priest. There is a way in which the community is meant to experience Christ’s presence in and through the ordained priest (or bishop) presiding at Eucharist, which adds to the other real presences of Christ previously mentioned.

This is a difficult one to get a handle on, because there is always a constant interplay between priest and community on several levels. The priest can never forget that he is a fellow baptized Christian; that his “holiness” is no more and no less than anyone else’s as he struggles to live out the Christian life as a baptized human being; that his human weakness and even sinfulness clearly mark him as they do all people. At the same time, as lead teacher of the Word, lead presider of the sacraments, and lead organizer of the community, the priest has a leadership role which, even if he isn’t great at doing, is to be lived and received by the community of faith, as a sacrament of the leadership of Christ. The Church talks about this by describing the priest as being *in persona Christi capitis* (“in the person of Christ the head”).

For the local Christian community gathered, the priest is that permanently marked/ordained sacrament of Christ’s headship. I think a good way of thinking about that leadership is the priest as a sacramental sign of Christ our elder or “firstborn” brother. Paul in his letter to the Romans (8:29) writes: “*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers*”. The New Testament uses that image of Christ as firstborn or eldest as a way to imply that what Christ has received by his nature as human and divine we can share in by adoption. Christ leads by example. Where he has gone we hope to follow. His headship or leadership, then, is not one of command and obey but of going ahead of us, encouraging us, persuading us to follow. That is the way I and all priests are to sacramentally make present Christ’s leadership—to be an effective sign of Christ’s persuasion and encouragement to follow Christ; to be, in that sense, an “elder”, supportive brother in faith.

May 29 2011 *Teaching Mass Weekend: This Year's Focus: Why Was the Eucharistic Celebration Structured the Way It Is Today?

Later this year we will be looking at some word changes in the various prayers we use at Mass, in preparation for their full use at Advent. These word changes are for the English translation of what is called the "Roman Missal." The Vatican desired a closer connection to the underlying Latin text than the prayers currently show. After a long, arduous and contentious process, that new translation is finally complete and ready for implementation at the end of November. But please note: NOTHING has changed in the way we celebrate Eucharist. The underlying Latin text is exactly the same one that was used for the changes in the Mass that happened after the Second Vatican Council 45 years ago. There is a new translation of that Latin text into English, based on new principles of translation. That is all.

Because some people are overstating the changes that will happen and acting as though the celebration of the Eucharist will somehow be very different, I can't stress enough that the STRUCTURE OF THE MASS WILL BE PRECISELY THE SAME. All the changes that the Second Vatican Council has brought into the celebration of the Eucharist remain. So, this year, in addition to the overall understanding of the Eucharist I always try to highlight at the Teaching Masses, I will pay special attention to the way the Eucharist is structured as it is today. I will point out some of the key ways it differs from the way it is celebrated in what is sometimes called the "Tridentine Mass" form and talk about why it was changed. What is the underlying theology, the underlying experience, that the Church believes it is important to connect to in celebrating the Eucharist in the way we now do?

***The Introductory Rites: We Gather at the Invitation of and in the Name of Jesus Christ** By the end of the introductory time (we signal that by praying what is called the "Collect" or sometimes more informally the "Opening Prayer"), the goal is to know that we are there not because we chose to be there. Rather, we find that, once present and engaged with the celebration, it is the Lord who has called, invited, maybe even commanded us to be part of this people, here and now. We are there at Jesus' beckoning, so that he can take all that we are and all that we offer and make present the gift of his Word and Sacrament for our salvation and for the transformation of the world.

If we use the image of bread—made from scratch then shared and eaten—to help get a feel for each part of the Mass we are celebrating, then the Introductory Rites are like the wheat gathered from the fields, threshed and winnowed, and stored together as grains, ready to be turned into flour. Coming to Eucharist we have lots on our mind and many distractions. The introductory rites take us out of our own diverse, individualized worlds and bump us up against one another, forming us into one communion through prayer and song, and help us let go of the "chaff", which might keep us from actively participating in the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The pre-Vatican II Roman Missal said the Mass began "when the priest is ready." That was deliberately changed to our current words which say "when the people have gathered." That might seem a minor point but it points to a significant change of outlook and structure. The Eucharist is not mainly the priest's Mass, which starts whenever he is ready and the bell at the sacristy door is rung and a short procession to the altar takes place (remember that sacristies were usually up front, off to the side of the altar). No, the Eucharist is always the whole people. And not just when the priest or people are ready. That implies it is mainly the movement of our own will and decisions. At a deeper level, the Eucharist begins when we experience ourselves as gathered by the Lord. The Eucharist is from start to finish an action of Jesus through the Spirit, making himself present and transforming us into his living Body and Blood so he can be present through us to the world. The Eucharistic celebration begins when the whole community is gathered by the Lord; not just when we are ready.

What are the specific components of the **Introductory Rites**? I will comment on them and offer some questions for us to think about as we prepare for the Teaching Masses at the end of June.

Procession: Notice how most churches have processions that come through the entire Church, with more than just priest and server. In many ways, we should see our getting ready at home, driving in the car/walking, meeting people as we come through the parking lot to the church, and greeting people in the church as an extension of that opening procession. The Spirit of God is working through all of that to gather us into one assembly. Reflection: *How do we gather? Are we conscious of becoming part of a community? Do we arrive on time? Are we open?*

Entrance Chant/Song: There is no better way to engage an entire assembly in a common action than to sing together. Voices blended don't have to be all on tune or all of the same quality. Singing, even if softly, is a 'giving in' to the Spirit of God, an acknowledgement that this is the Lord's Eucharist, not ours. Guests immediately can read how engaged a community is by their participation in the Entrance Song. In the past this entrance chant was often done only by a choir or spoken alone by the priest quietly as he prayed what were called the "prayers at the foot of the altar." Now, the whole assembly is to be actively engaged in this action. Here as elsewhere the full, intentional, active participation of all the faithful in the Eucharist is the foundation principle for why the Eucharist is now structured as it is. Reflection: *Do we join in the singing? If not, why not? Do we see the Eucharist as "ours" or mostly the "priest's"? What would be lost if only the choir or cantor or priest alone were to do this action?*

Veneration of the Altar: This includes a bow in front of the altar by all ministers that are not holding a symbol of Christ, kissing the altar, placing the Book of the Gospels on the altar and, on special occasions, incensing the altar. Our altar is not a fixed altar and has no "altar stone" or inserted relics of saints. But even if it did, the kissing of the altar is no longer to be seen as a kissing of that stone or those relics. The altar symbolizes Christ. It is the central focus of the entire Eucharist. More central than the tabernacle. In fact the directives make clear that, even if a church has positioned the tabernacle directly behind the altar, there is to be enough distance between altar and tabernacle, that people experience them as two separate spaces within the church. Reflection: *What is your experience of or comments about how our liturgical ministers come toward and reverence the altar? Any suggestions?*

Sign of the Cross and Greeting: It might seem like a small point, but notice how the Eucharistic words start with a dialogue. Before, the sign of the cross and "Amen" was done by the priest alone, or people imitated it by doing it on their own at the same time. Now it is a common action of the whole people. That makes the "Amen" an important opening response. It sets the tone for all the other dialogue parts of the Mass: at the readings, before and after the gospel, at the gifts, the preface, memorial acclamation, great Amen, and so on. One of the great tragedies of the celebration of the Mass as it was done for several centuries was how a priest would do so alone and in private. That can happen in an emergency. But the essence of Eucharist is the forming of communion, not just the bread and wine, but of the people gathered. Reflection: *How attentive are we to that opening Amen and greeting. Are we consciously entering into the whole flow of the Eucharist or are we more passive observers?*

Introduction to the Mass: This was completely new when introduced into the current structure. When used, it is meant to be brief and help us understand that the Mass is not simply a repetitive ritual or the exact same thing each time we celebrate. No, it is always new. The Lord is coming anew here and now, with this people who are like no other people. The introduction can help connect this gathering to the unchanging structure of the Eucharist that is to follow. Reflection: *Does the use of this element help focus you on this particular celebration? What would make that happen better for you?*

Penitential Act or Sprinkling Rite: Especially during Easter Time and with baptismal Sundays the sprinkling rite is recommended. But ordinarily it will be one of three forms of the Penitential Act, each including the “Lord, have mercy” or “Kyrie eleison”. Notice how we all share in that litany, not just the choir or cantor as was done in times past. Also, notice how the invocations to Jesus are meant to be focused more on his mercy and goodness and not on our specific sinfulness. One option is the Confiteor (“I confess to almighty God”). In times past this was prayed only by the priest and servers as part of “their” prayers at the foot of the altar. Now, it is the whole assembly. Again, full, active participation of all the faithful; not just the priest and/or servers. And the type of participation varies. Sometimes it is in dialogue; sometimes in singing/praying together; sometimes, even in silence. In fact, here and then with the opening Collect and then the readings, the Church introduced something new into the Eucharistic celebration: brief periods of silence where all of us can place before God what is in our heart. **Reflection:** *At the time of the “Lord, have mercy”, are you more focused on your own sinfulness or on the Lord’s overwhelming mercy?*

Gloria: Although it can be said, it is a hymn of praise and so usually it is sung. It is omitted during the time of Advent and Lent, in order to change the tenor of those seasons and to allow the seasons following (Christmas, Easter) to experience the Gloria in a refreshed, stronger way. **Reflection:** *How does the singing rather than reciting of the Gloria affect your experience of this prayer?*

Collect: :One focused prayer (whereas in times past two and more were sometimes prayed, depending on how many things were being focused on that day), which gathers (“collects”) the heart-felt prayer of all who are gathered together at this time. For such a “collecting”, there needs to be a decent period of silence, something stressed in the structure we now have for the Mass. **Reflection:** *How long should the silence be after “Let us pray” so that you truly have an opportunity to quietly pray? Is the “Amen” at the end by all of us strong enough or fairly weak?*

I invite you to pay attention to these introductory rites as we prepare for the Teaching Masses and your own sense of being “gathered” by the Lord into a communion of people.

June 5 2011 *Preparing for Our Yearly Teaching Masses (continued) The Liturgy of the Word: We Listen to and Are Formed by the Living Word of God

As I mentioned in last week’s bulletin I want to focus on the structure of the Mass, as it is currently celebrated. The Mass we celebrate has a structure that comes from the Lord himself: he gathers us, he forms us by his Word, he offers us to the Father by offering himself, he feeds us in communion, he sends us forth to be his people in this world. Forty five years ago, after the Second Vatican Council, the Church made some changes in how the Mass is celebrated in order to bring out that underlying structure more clearly. Last week we looked at the Introductory Rites (the Lord gathers us into one communion) and why they were structured as they are. This week let’s look at the Liturgy of the Word and see how and why it is structured as it is.

The Liturgy of the Word is one of the two essential parts of the Mass. Keeping with the analogy of making and sharing bread, the Liturgy of the Word is analogous to taking the grains of wheat that have been gathered, cracking them open and pounding them into flour, adding a little water and forming the dough, and then thoroughly kneading the dough. At the end of all this activity the dough is now ready to be baked. Each individual grain adds something to the texture and taste, but has now become part of something much bigger and more nourishing. The key, then, to the Liturgy of the Word: a willingness to be “cracked open” and changed by the Word of God being addressed to our minds and hearts.

One of the biggest and most welcome changes in the structure of the Mass as we now celebrate it and will continue to celebrate it, occurred in the Liturgy of the Word. No longer just the priest or deacon proclaiming all the readings; proclaiming all the Scriptures from the one ambo, a symbol of Christ that is to be given similar

reverence as the altar; no longer just one reading, brief Psalm verse and one year cycle of gospel readings but two readings, fuller Psalm response and a three year cycle of readings. Now 14% of the Old Testament is proclaimed in the liturgy and 71% of the New Testament (whereas before only 1% of the Old Testament and only 17% of the New was listened to by the Sunday assembly).

The challenge of the Liturgy of the Word is to be able to listen with our hearts and not just our heads. This is not a time of Bible study—that is for earlier in the week or afterwards. Rather, the Catholic Eucharist is structured with the faith that the risen Jesus is present and active in our lives as the Living Word. Listening with our heart means an openness to a word, an image, a connection to our life, a phrase, or an idea more than to an analysis of the whole text/story.

Here are the components of the Liturgy of the Word with some reflection questions, to help us prepare for this year's Teaching Masses at the end of June.

First Reading: Outside Easter time, from the Old Testament and connected to some image, word or idea that is present in the Gospel reading. During Easter, from the Act of the Apostles. The whole assembly now responds "Thanks be to God" after the reading, when the lector proclaims "The Word of the Lord", whereas there was no such involvement of the community before. *Reflection:* *How noticeable is it to you that the ambo is reserved for readings/prayers connected to the Liturgy of the Word? How much silence does there need to be after the reading to allow you to reflect?*

Responsorial Psalm: Usually sung and led by a cantor (officially called a "psalmist" when they do so), it is taken from one of the Biblical psalms or canticles. The assembly joins in by singing the antiphon while the psalmist chants the psalm verses, thus creating a "responsorial" structure to it, instead of an elaborate musical adaptation sung by the choir alone. The structure now helps us appreciate the Psalm as a proclamation of Scripture, not simply a musical interlude by the choir. *Reflection:* *Does the psalmist's (cantor's) gesture of raising their arm to signal that we are all to join in the antiphon encourage you to do so?*

Second Reading: Except during Lent and Easter, this is a semi-continuous reading week after week, from a New Testament book other than the gospels. In this way, most major passages in the New Testament are heard in the course of the three-year cycle of readings. At the end we respond "Thanks be to God," again followed by a short period of silent reflection. *Reflection:* *Is the silent time after this reading sufficient? Does having two different lectors, and therefore two different voices, proclaim the first two readings help? Do you read and reflect on the Scripture readings for Mass before coming to the church or as part of your preparation for Mass?*

Gospel Acclamation: We stand and sing together the Alleluia (or other acclamation during Lent), rather than listen to the cantor and choir sing it alone, as in times past. Over and over in the changed structure of the Mass that came out of the Second Vatican Council, there was a conscious decision made to involve the active participation of the entire community gathered. *Reflection:* *Does the gospel procession with the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo help people appreciate the special importance of the proclamation of the Gospel?*

Gospel: The three year cycle of gospel readings divides the major passages of the four gospels thus: Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, Luke in Year C, and John during Easter of all years, the 3rd through 5th Sundays of Lent in Year A and some Sundays in Ordinary Time in Year B. This replaced a one year cycle where far fewer passages were read. Moreover, by taking the readings out of the Roman Missal and publishing them as a separate ritual book, and even further, taking the gospels and placing them in a separate "Book of the Gospels" which is placed on the altar as part of the opening procession, the liturgy is now more clearly structured toward focusing on the proclamation of the Gospel as the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. *Reflection:* *Do you sign yourself on the*

forehead, lips and over the heart when the priest/deacon does so? Do you respond with “Glory to you, O Lord” and “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ” when invited to do so?

Homily: Although most Sunday Masses included a time for preaching, it is now specifically required for all Sundays and holydays of obligation so that the Scripture texts are connected to the mysteries of our faith and our daily lives. *Reflection:* When does the homily help you connect the Scriptures to daily life? Is it helpful to hear homilies from three different preachers in the course of the month?

Profession of Faith: The creed we pray together at Mass is called the “Nicene-Constantinople” Creed (or Nicene Creed for short). It is the creed that eventually united the Church after great controversy as to how to name God and Jesus as God in the 4th century. The Apostles’ Creed, a baptismal creed, may also be used, especially during the seasons of Lent and Easter. A gesture in the Creed that is often not followed but is part of its proclamation is a profound bow during the words about Jesus’ incarnation. *Reflection:* How often do you pay attention to the meaning of the Creed as we are praying it? Do you make a bow toward the altar at the words about Jesus’ incarnation?

Prayer of the Faithful: This practice, which has ancient roots, was lost over time and the Church put it back into the Liturgy when structuring the current Mass. They are meant to be a ritual way of responding to the Liturgy of the Word. Having listened to God’s Word and re-affirming our common faith, we are led to pray for the wider needs of the Church universal, the world around us, and the local community. *Reflection:* How important is it to you to hear prayers that are connected to current events and tragedies and situations? We pray for the sick and those who have died each week in these prayers; should that practice be continued?

By the end of the Liturgy of the Word, something of the living Word of God should have penetrated into our heart. Yes, it helps if the homily has some interest or dynamism. Yes, it is necessary for lectors, deacons and priests to proclaim the readings with joy, energy and clarity. But the primary question is: Are we open to letting our lives be re-shaped and re-formed not by our needs but by God’s Word? Saying “Yes” to that (actively listening during the readings) means we share a common faith and an ability to be not many people praying many different prayers, but one people united in one faith sharing one common prayer. Only after that are we ready to offer ourselves in the Liturgy of the Eucharist as one community of faith through and in Christ to God our Father. Next week: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

June 19 2011 *Teaching Mass Preparation (continued). The Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has two main parts—the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion Rite. As we celebrate these, we actively participate in two more of the five significant actions which structure how to celebrate Eucharist. In the Introductory Rite we GATHER; in the Liturgy of the Word we LISTEN; in the Eucharistic Prayer we OFFER; in Communion we RECEIVE. In the Concluding Rite we are SENT FORTH. Knowing and being attuned to that five-fold pattern of action allows us to participate actively in the Eucharist every time we celebrate. It is that pattern which makes Eucharist the central sacrament of our faith. It is that pattern which makes the Eucharist so much more than a Communion service. It is that pattern which Jesus uses to take who we are and shape all of it into the gift of his body and blood.

Currently in the United States we have thirteen Eucharistic Prayers: four that were composed when the Mass changes occurred after the second Vatican Council; two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation; three for children’s Masses; and four versions of a Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions. The first Eucharistic Prayer is sometimes called the “Roman Canon.” It was the sole Eucharistic prayer in the Latin rite for many centuries. Because it was the only such prayer allowed, it was seen as the norm or “canon” for what was considered a valid Mass in the Latin rite.

The very fact that three new Eucharistic Prayers were composed and given equal weight was a significant signal, after the second Vatican Council, that the Eucharistic liturgy had to be more than just a rote recitation of the “right” words and the same words. If that were so, then we would reduce Eucharist almost to a magical incantation. No! It is the gathering by the Lord of his people and the active transforming of that people, with their participation, into the body of Christ. Yes, words are important. Yes, the Church holds as important certain ways of praying these prayers. But these are living prayers—prayers of the people gathered here and now—not just recitations of some formula.

In the 20th century liturgical historians re-discovered that there were many, many different Eucharistic prayers in the history of the Church, east and west. All that were accepted were equally valid in enabling the community and its gifts to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In fact, the earliest such prayers were not so much fixed words but a set structure, so that the presider would follow a pattern, even though he would compose many of the actual words more spontaneously. Only later did certain ways of praying that pattern become fixed in place.

The English word “Eucharistic Prayer” captures the central attitude behind such prayers. “Eucharist” comes from the Greek word for “thanksgiving”. The Eucharistic prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done for the world, in the history of salvation, especially in his Son, most particularly in his Son’s death and resurrection and his invitation to “do this in my memory”. The Eastern Church prefers the Greek word “anaphora” for this part of the liturgy: which means “offering up”. We offer up to God our Father, through the risen Lord his Son and in the Holy Spirit our praise and thanksgiving and all that we have become as one community of faith through Jesus’ invitation to gather and to be shaped by his Word.

Remember, we don’t do this as individuals. And WE AREN’T the ones doing the offering. It is the whole Body of Christ that is offering, with Christ as the head, making the continuous offering of himself to the Father. This is not a remembrance of a past event. Christ’s death and resurrection have broken open all time and space. This is a present participation in that once-for-all saving event of Christ. That is why it is not just the gifts of bread and wine that are transformed. We—all who participate—are transformed. As St. Augustine was so fond of saying to his people: *“It is your mystery that is on the altar. Become what you receive.”*

Not every Eucharistic Prayer is identically structured, even today, but most have the following elements in common. **Thanksgiving:** Each Eucharistic prayer starts with a dialogue: *“The Lord be with you...Lift up your hearts...Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.”* This dialogue prepares us to enter into a time of praise and thanksgiving. The Preface connects us to such praise and thanksgiving and often makes it specific for the season or the feast we are celebrating. The word “preface” is often misunderstood as implying that this is something taking place before the Eucharistic prayer is prayed. Actually, it is part of the Eucharistic prayer and refers to the ancient practice of the presider turning to the people to introduce the dialogue and then, after the Holy, Holy (Sanctus) turning back to the altar and facing the same way as the people. **Reflection:** *Would it make sense to sing the dialogue when we sing the other acclamations in the Eucharistic prayer?*

Acclamation of praise (Holy, Holy or the Sanctus): In the Middle Ages the singing of the Sanctus could be so elaborate that the priest prayed the Eucharistic prayer up to the consecration in quiet, then the choir paused for the consecration prayer, then the rest of the Eucharistic prayer was prayed in quiet while the choir sang the last verse of the Sanctus. The post-Vatican II changes were very significant and important in this regard. Instead of isolating the people from the priest during this central, most important part of the Eucharist, we now hear it in our own language, with the priest facing the people so that it is clear we are all gathered around the altar. The challenge is to make this prayer our own, as mentioned. The challenge for the priest is to pray it in a way that invites people to enter into its meaning. **Reflection:** *Do we pay attention to how the Preface is often connected to a specific season or feast day?*

Epiclesis: The word means “laying hands on/over” and refers to the way most Eucharistic prayers call upon the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts of bread and wine (and by implication the people gathered). The priest makes the gesture of laying hands over the gifts at this time. For the Eastern Church this was traditionally the moment of transformation of the bread and wine, because if the Holy Spirit came upon the gifts, they could no longer remain the same. Interestingly, and to the consternation of many liturgists, the Roman canon (Eucharistic Prayer I) does not have such an invocation. The epiclesis is there but no calling on the Holy Spirit. *Reflection: Do you think of the epiclesis as the priest’s gesture over the gifts or symbolic of all of us calling upon the Holy Spirit at that time? When the priest prays “make holy these gifts?” do you relate that to yourself and all the people gathered as gifts?*

Institution Narrative (consecration): For the western Church the remembrance of what Jesus did on the night before he died became the focal point. Chant, if going on, stopped. The host and then the chalice raised high (so that all could see them, remember that the back of the priest was to the people). Bells rung to signal “look now”. Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament. It so much became the high point that people would consider seeing the consecrated Host as almost as “good” as receiving communion. Interestingly, there is an ancient Eucharistic Prayer from an Eastern rite which is accepted by the Catholic Church, which has no mention of the words of institution and yet is accepted, due to its ancient use, as a legitimate Eucharistic prayer. In other words, the Church does not really focus on some magic moment when the bread and wine are transformed (transubstantiated is the word we Catholics use). Rather, the whole Eucharistic prayer is consecratory. At the same time, this is a moment for us to enter into that living reality. *Reflection: What do you pray at the time of the consecration to connect yourself and all present to that moment?*

Anamnesis (Remembrance): -Following the consecration we have a second acclamation by all the people who respond to the “Mystery of Faith” by affirming the saving significance of what Jesus has done for us. We remember, however, not as a past, ancient event. Rather, we remember, and in so remembering, we become connected to that event as a living reality. This is the way the Jewish people understand the remembrance of the Passover. *Reflection: Do we take too much for granted what Christ has done for us? Would we participate more enthusiastically in this acclamation if we did acknowledge it?*

Offering: We are now able to offer these gifts and ourselves as a Church to the Father. Christ has made that possible by transforming us and the gifts. Again, it is never an individual offering. It is always the whole Church and on behalf of the whole Church. *Reflection: What do you pray at this time of offering? Who do you offer it for?*

Intercessions: Now transformed, we are able to intercede, in a sense to be one with the priesthood of Jesus, for the needs of the whole Church and wider world. Although we have given such intercessions their own distinct place at the end of the Liturgy of the Word (much as we have given the breaking of the bread its own place just before Communion), you get a sense of how the Eucharistic Prayer originally allowed for all of that to be done within the context of this central prayer. *Reflection: Are we willing to let our lives intercede for the needs of others in the Church and the world?*

Doxology: The Eucharistic prayer ends with a final prayer of praise: “Through him, with him, in him, ...” The “Amen” that ends it all is our Amen. It is meant to be a joyous, strong, overflowing Amen. That is why it is often called the “Great Amen.” Though we have entered into the prayer mostly be listening, we now make that prayer fully our own with this “Amen.” The rubrics of the Church actually suggest that the consecrated bread and wine be held at their highest point at this time, not at the consecration. *Reflection: Do we understand this “Amen” to be as important as the one at communion time?*

Notice that in the Eucharistic Prayer it is always “we offer, we pray, etc.” The priest proclaims it, but it is the prayer of the whole people. Make the Eucharistic Prayers your own by spending time praying them. The main ones are in the “Sunday Word” in the hymnal rack. Use that for your prayer before Mass. It will make a difference when it is time to participate in that prayer through careful listening. Next week: the Communion Rite, along with the actual celebration of the Teaching Masses.

June 26, 2011 *Teaching Mass Preparation (continued). The Liturgy of the Eucharist. As we celebrate “Teaching Masses” on this weekend of the Feast of Corpus Christi, let’s take a look at the elements of the Communion Rite. Two underlying ideas are important to keep in mind. First, it is our own mystery on the altar. The bread and wine are never transformed (transubstantiated is the language we Catholics use) into the Body and Blood of Christ for its own sake. If that were so, we would end the Mass at the great “Amen” which concludes every Eucharistic prayer. No. Unless we who partake of this communion are also transformed into the Body of Christ then and there, the purpose of the Eucharist is not complete.

Secondly, this is a sacramental participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not magic. The hosts don’t bleed if you chew them. Gone are the days when people believed you shouldn’t chew the communion wafers. Returned are the days when we are encouraged to receive under both the form of bread and the form of wine, so that we might more consciously and fully embrace the reality being offered us. For a true sacrament, according to Catholic teaching, there always needs to be some outward sign(s) through which the deeper, true and real presence of Christ becomes present to us as a Church. How do we know in faith that the risen Jesus is fully present in the particular outward signs we use at Eucharist? We believe Jesus’ own words to us. He is the one who has told us so. Faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, then, is not faith in some kind of molecular transformation of the elements. It is faith in Christ’s own word and promise to us as his community of disciples. When we eat this bread and drink this cup, under the form of bread and wine, we receive the true and real gift of Jesus’ risen life. The Communion Rite of the Liturgy of the Eucharist is structured in such a way to help us experience precisely that reality.

The Lord’s Prayer (Our Father): Unlike the centuries old custom of the priest alone reciting the Lord’s Prayer in a low voice (only in 1958 did it become permitted to pray it together in Latin), the current Mass has made this a prayer we pray together in order that we all might be more conscious of preparing for the reception of communion. Notice that there is no “Amen” at the end of it because we are not praying it as an individual, devotional prayer (as we do, for example, during the recitation of the rosary). It is leading us toward communion. *Reflection:* *Do we pray this prayer in unison with everyone around us or race through it on our own, as though we are praying it individually?*

The Embolism and Doxology: Although not in any of the earliest manuscripts of Matthew’s gospel, very early on Christians would conclude the Lord’s Prayer with the lines of praise (the meaning of doxology): *“For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.”* When Protestant Reformers put together their manuscript of the New Testament, many included this ancient ending to the Lord’s prayer, believing it went back to Jesus. Thus a difference in praying the Our Father arose between Catholics and Protestants. The Catholic liturgy restored the use of this ancient doxology but first inserts (the meaning of “embolism”) a prayer for deliverance from evil and awaiting the coming again of Jesus. By structuring it in this way, it reinforces the dialogue character of much of the liturgy: the priest prays a prayer, the people respond.

The Rite of Peace: Again, we see here a shift to an active participation of all the faithful in this action of the Mass, whereas before it was the priest alone who kissed the paten as a symbol of this. There has been lots of discussion whether it would be better to place this rite just prior to the presentation of the gifts but it has been retained as part of the communion rite, moving people to recognize their connection to one another as established, not by their own will power or commonality, but by the grace of the Spirit and in the name of Christ.

We can offer the peace of Christ, even to our enemies, because it is the peace of Christ we are offering. And we must offer the peace of Christ to one another, if we dare to prepare to receive communion. *Reflection: Are you conscious of offering the peace of Christ to the people around you rather than simply a hello or your own greeting? Does holding hands at this time take away from or add to the meaning of this part of the Mass for you? Why?*

The Breaking of the Bread and the “Lamb of God” (Agnus Dei): If a community routinely goes to the tabernacle before communion rather than trying to make sure that all who receive, receive from what has just been offered to the Father, then that community doesn’t yet appreciate the difference between true Eucharist and a communion service. One way the Church tries to keep this idea alive, is by having the priest break the bread so that he is not the only one receiving communion from what has just been consecrated. *Reflection: Why does the Church insist on Eucharistic celebrations rather than merely communion services as obligatory for Sunday?*

The Invitation to Communion: Prior to receiving this inestimable gift, we remember our unworthiness. This gift is sheer grace. “Lord, I am not worthy....”

The Reception of Communion: We make a slight bow before approaching for the consecrated bread and wine. But the most important participation is our “Amen” to the words “The body/blood of Christ”. Yes, we believe. We believe this is the body and blood of Christ. We believe we become that body and blood in receiving this gift. We affirm that we will be that body and blood of Christ for others. During the reception of communion, from the time the priest receives till the last person receives, we are encouraged to actively participate by singing together the Communion Chant/Song. Too often after we receive we turn communion into our own individual union with the Lord or we stop singing and watch who is coming forward to receive. No, it is communion with the whole body of Christ. We share that communion and encourage that unity by singing together until all have received, and then take time for personal prayer/silent reflection. *Reflection: Does singing a simple refrain as we do at communion help you with singing at this time, so that you do not need a book or worship aid while coming forward for communion? Do you say your “Amens” strongly and firmly?*

Next week we will finish this year’s focus on the Eucharist by looking at the Concluding Rites.

July 3 2011 * Some Final Thoughts on the Teaching Mass: The Concluding Rites

As mentioned at the Teaching Mass, there are five significant actions we enter into in order to truly celebrate Eucharist: we Gather; we Listen; we Offer thanksgiving; we Receive; we are Sent Forth. The Concluding Rites of the Eucharist focus on that fifth and final action, being sent forth. Notice how quickly we are sent forth. We have just reached the highest point of the Eucharist—Communion—and instead of slowly coming down from that point, we are almost immediately dismissed and sent out into the world. That structure clearly captures how Eucharist is not simply about the bread and wine becoming the real presence of the risen Jesus for us. Rather, it must also embrace how we become the Body of Christ for the world, sent forth to be broken and poured out for the nurturing, the salvation of the world.

The following are part of the Concluding Rites:

Announcements: Meant to be brief. At SS. John and Paul they are used to reinforce a couple of the more important announcements mentioned before the Mass began. Ordinarily birthdays and anniversaries would not be considered typical of announcements. But that was the custom at the parish when I arrived and so I have kept that custom. Rather than relying on spoken announcements, however, I do hope everyone reads the weekly bulletin. It is always available online at our parish website.

Final Greeting and Blessing: For many years there was no formal blessing at the end of Mass. Instead the priest/bishop would bless people as they left the church/cathedral. In the pre-Vatican II liturgy it was done after the dismissal, preceded by a prayer to the Trinity and followed by another greeting and what was called the “Last Gospel” (the opening verses of the gospel of John, “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...*”). Now that the final greeting and blessing have a more logical place; it allows for blessings tailored to the feast day or events on hand; and then the dismissal acts truly as a dismissal.

Dismissal: “*Ite missa est*”. “Go, the Mass is ended.” This is the place from which we get the word “Mass” for the whole Eucharistic liturgy. Though we don’t know for certain the origin of that phrase, it seems to have been used in law courts and the secular context for the ending of formal meetings. It was then taken over into the Roman liturgy to signify its ending. The key word is “Go”. Go. Get out of here. Don’t linger here. You are sent forth to be the body and blood of Christ for the good of the world.

Veneration of the Altar and Recessional: This is just a practical issue—getting the priest and ministers out of the altar area. The earliest evidence for such a gesture is the 9th century and it probably came into the liturgy as a way to balance the beginning, where the priest venerates the altar by kissing it. Interestingly, there is no mention of a hymn/song for recessional, even in the most recent edition of the Roman Missal; but neither is it forbidden. In many ways some music makes sense in the current liturgy because the priest and ministers don’t walk from the altar off to a side sacristy near the altar. They process back down through the whole church.

Over the last month and a half I have outlined the basic structure of the Eucharistic celebration as it has been celebrated for over forty years, since the second Vatican Council. As we approach the fall you will be hearing more about “changes in the Roman Missal.” I think it is very important to know what is meant by that phrase. The structure of the Mass is staying exactly the same. There is no change in the Mass as such. What has happened is that we have received a new English translation of the underlying Latin texts of the Mass. The new English translation tries to be more literal in rendering the Latin and less concerned about making all the language of the liturgy a more common English. That means that there will be minor changes in the English translation used for the Greeting, Penitential Rite, Gloria, Preface, Holy, Holy, and preparation for Communion. There will be slightly more significant changes in the English translation of the Creed and in the prayers led by the priest (Opening, Preparation of the Gifts, Eucharistic Prayer). I will write about this in the fall. You will get a mailing on all the translation changes as well. And we will dedicate our October monthly G.R.A.C.E. to these translation changes, in order to prepare for their full use in Advent (end of November). For those who know the basic structure, however, and understand what it means to consciously, intentionally, actively participate in the Eucharist, the new translation will take nothing away from that.

In summary, then, there are two major parts to the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word is preceded by some Introductory Rites, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist is followed by some minor Concluding Rites. In the Introductory Rites we GATHER at the invitation of the Lord. In the Liturgy of the Word we LISTEN to the living Word touching our minds and hearts. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist we OFFER praise and thanksgiving to Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit (Eucharistic Prayer) and we RECEIVE the gift of the body and blood of Christ in the transformed (transubstantiated) bread and wine (communion). In the Concluding Rites we are then SENT FORTH quickly to be that body of Christ for the world.

May 27 2012 *Teaching Masses

On the weekend of June 9/10, the feast of the Body and Blood of Our Lord (Corpus Christi), we will once again be experiencing the Masses as "Teaching Masses". I will pause at various points of the Mass and ask us to consider what it is we are doing. The goal is to deepen our appreciation for what it is that the Lord is doing each time we gather for Eucharist; why Eucharist is so much more than simply a communion service; and why we are all meant to be an essential part of that Eucharistic action. In addition, this year I want to reinforce our responses throughout the Mass. The new English translation from the Latin changed nothing in terms of the structure of the Mass. But I've noticed that we have become a bit more reticent in our responses throughout the Mass. The "Amen's" and "Thanks be to Gods" can be pretty weak at times!

There is nothing we do as Church that is more important than Eucharist. It is the central action of the Church. In the words of the second Vatican Council, it is the Church's "source and summit". All that we do as Church is in some way connected to Eucharist and its meaning. That is why the second Vatican Council insisted that full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful is an essential criterion for evaluating how we celebrate Eucharist.

More next week, where we will look at what that means in practical terms and how well, from my perspective, we are doing here at SS. John and Paul in terms of such full, conscious, active participation. But for now, I ask that you take notice of your own participation. Is it truly full and conscious and active? Or is it more passive and private? Is there a way to be more assertive in our responses? To participate better in the singing? To listen with more attention? To take on a liturgical ministry in a more regular way?

June 3 2012 *Teaching Masses (continued)

Even though I will not be with you this weekend (some R&R visiting old college friends in Texas), I want to continue some reflections in preparation for our Teaching Masses next weekend. As I mentioned last week, there is nothing we do as Church that is more important than Eucharist. It is the central action of the Church. That is why the second Vatican Council insisted that **full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful** is the essential criterion for evaluating how we celebrate Eucharist. What does full, conscious and active participation mean in practical terms?

The Lord invites us to participate by GATHERING in his name. Saying yes to that invitation and joining in the Sunday Eucharist is, in a sense, the minimal level of active participation. "Full and conscious" participation in the gathering includes, when possible, praying for the parish community and the whole Church throughout the week, with perhaps a simple prayer for all who will be with us as we prepare to come to the church. I think it would be a good practice with our children, on the drive to church, to say "Let's pray for everyone who will be at Mass today" and then ask if there is anyone in particular the family wants to pray for at Mass.

Reading and reflecting on the Sunday Scriptures ahead of time (that is why we make *Sunday's Word* available to any who want it, free of charge) is also an excellent way to participate fully and consciously when we gather at Eucharist. If someone is a liturgical minister (usher, greeter, lector, cantor, communion minister, altar server, sacristan and the like), think about what that ministry entails and pray for the grace of God's Spirit to work in and through you when you do that ministry on the weekend.

Participate by greeting people on the walk toward the church entrance and as you enter the church, and not just those we know. A good way to focus consciously and intentionally on the worship we are about to do is to go to the baptismal font, touch the water and make the sign of the cross as we remember that we are baptized disciples of the Lord. Take a moment to attend to the reality of the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle, genuflecting and/or bowing toward the altar as the symbol of Christ around which we will be gathering. Spend some brief time in silent, personal prayer and think about all we are bringing to this time and

whom we are praying for. Participate in the music warm-up before the liturgy and get the hymnal marked and ready for the opening song.

Then, enter into the prayer. Sing the opening hymn or refrain. One's ability to sing is not the criterion. There are enough singing the melody and the musical accompaniment allows our voices to blend into the whole, whether we think we are good singers or not. Make the sign of the cross at the beginning as part of the now gathered assembly and speak out the "Amen" at the end of that sign of the cross with some enthusiasm. Respond together at the "*And with your Spirit*" to the opening greeting. When we pause before the penitential rite, let us compose ourselves and acknowledge our need for God's mercy. Use the worship aid or words in the blue pamphlet and participate in the Glory to God. At the "*Let us pray*"—really pray! And, then, at the end of that opening prayer (called the Collect), say/sing out the "Amen" with some life and energy, please, but in unison with everyone else.

I guarantee that everyone's connection to and energy for the Eucharist will increase, if we fully, consciously, actively participate in these times of gatherings. We will make a difference if our common responses are truly done in unison and with some life! And I guarantee that our energy and connection to the action is lessened when we don't. If people stand silently or simply mumble a low "Amen" or say "Amen" or other responses out of sync with everyone else, it takes away from the common action we are participating in. I think that is the primary reason why the Church ideally envisions a fully sung liturgy. When we sing, we can blend all voices into one. On the other hand, in practice, such sung liturgy usually leads to the priest and cantor or choir doing most of the responding and can lessen the active participation of all in the liturgy. Here we sing some and speak out other responses and prayers. Let's support each other in prayer by entering into these, whether sung or spoken, with some life.

The Lord invites us to participate by LISTENING to God's living Word as it is proclaimed at Eucharist. It takes practice to listening actively to the Scriptures proclaimed. It is so easy to become distracted, to start our own daydreaming, to let the worries of the day take over the quiet. That is why full, active, and conscious participation requires lectors, deacons, cantors and priests to prepare their readings well and carefully, and then to proclaim them clearly, confidently, and with meaning. We are all dependent on the gift of another at such times, but it is never one-sided. Reading the Scripture readings ahead of time and/or listening attentively no matter how well they are proclaimed, we open ourselves actively to the work of God's own Holy Spirit, who then is able to bring to mind within us something of importance.

The Church believes that the living presence of the risen Jesus, the Word, becomes active and united to us, when we participate fully, consciously and actively in the Liturgy of the Word. Our "*Thanks be to God*" after each of the first two readings affirms our openness to Jesus the Word. Singing the refrain of the responsorial psalm and letting it sink into our minds and hearts is an important part of active participation. The gospel responses ("*And also with you*", "*Glory to you, O Lord*", and "*Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ*") keeps us actively connected to the gospel. That gospel proclamation is the apex of the Liturgy of the Word. That is why we have a procession to the ambo with the sung "*Alleluia*" and short Scripture refrain.

The homily is then an extension of the Scripture proclaimed. I know it makes a huge difference to participation, if we as priests and deacons offer some substance to our homilies, connecting the Scriptures to your daily lives. I know we are not perfect, but I do know that Fr. Ron and Deacon John and I do put time and effort into this part of our ministry. We deliberately rotate through all the Masses so that you have a chance to get three different styles of reflection over the months. It is our responsibility to take our preaching ministry seriously and to prepare well for it. But there is also a way in which each person is responsible for that Word. Take a word you hear, an image that comes to mind, a phrase from one of the readings and begin to mull on it. Maybe a scene from the gospel will especially strike you. Or something in the readings or what is being preached

will connect directly from your life. We are never passive participants, even when there is no specific spoken response.

The Liturgy of the Word ends with an affirmation of our faith (Nicene Creed usually, at times the Apostles' Creed) and then a formal, symbolic intercessory prayer for the universal Church and world. We are still all learning the Creeds by heart and so in the meantime we perhaps continue to need to use the blue "Order of Mass" pamphlets in the inside of the hymnal. The new words will become familiar, if we try. "*Lord, hear our prayer*" after each intercession unites us to the universal needs the Church and world. Though these are mostly symbolic, rather than detailed, specific prayers, they are meant to convey how Christ intercedes for us and we, in turn, with Christ, intercede for the needs of others. Because they are mostly symbolic, we can and should be silently adding our own intentions during this time.

That brings up a key aspect of full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist. In times past people felt so disconnected from what the priest and servers were doing that many simply said their own set of prayers for long stretches of time, only paying attention at the homily or looking up at the consecration when bells were rung. Now, we are asked to be active throughout the liturgy. That is a tall order and not easy to do. I know when I am on vacation and attend Eucharist "in the pews" rather than presiding, I find myself fighting to stay focused. Full, conscious and active participation includes the ability to listen, to pray during moments of silence, and to let the words of the rote prayers (such as the Creed or our responses) become "our" prayers.

The risen Lord invites us to participate by OFFERING THANKS AND PRAISE in union with him as we "do this in memory of him". What I mentioned above about staying active, even when we are not verbally praying, especially kicks in at this time. The Eucharistic Prayer is quite long. It contains moments of dialogue where our lively response is needed ("*And also with you*", "*We lift them up to the Lord*", "*It is right and just*", singing the "*Holy, Holy, Holy*", "*We proclaim your death O Lord and profess your resurrection, until you come again*" or some other memorial response, the great "*Amen*" sung at the end). I would like us to become equally comfortable singing or saying these responses. But the vast majority of the Eucharistic Prayer is prayed aloud by the priest celebrant alone on behalf of us all. It is easy to "tune out" and let the "priest do his thing" until we hear the invitation to respond "Amen".

The prayers themselves are quite dense, theologically, and not at all easy to understand upon hearing them once or only a few times. But over time, as the main ones get repeated again and again, we can begin to connect to certain images and phrases and have a greater sense of the prayer being "our" prayer and not just the "priest's prayer". If there is any part of the Eucharist which we as priests must practice again and again, no matter how many times we have prayed the prayers, it is the Eucharistic prayers. I have written brief commentaries on Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV, and Reconciliation I and II. They are available on the website by clicking on the Roman Missal logo. In the weeks ahead I will do the same for the quite difficult Eucharistic Prayer I and for the Eucharistic Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions. In that way we will have had a chance to hear all the new translations of Eucharistic Prayers multiple times, with some background given to each of them.

To help the active listening you will notice that at times I offer slight changes in the phrases of the Eucharistic Prayers or add to the words in order to better convey the intended meaning. It would be tragic to pray the central prayer of our worship and have people come away with the completely wrong understanding. I find that there are two words in particular that need lots of careful understanding. The first is when we pray "*which will be poured out for you and for many*" at the time of the consecration of the wine. As I've mentioned numerous times, "*many*" here does not mean some place in between "few" and "all". "Many" means that this covenant is being made for all, that there is no way to limit it only to a few. For that reason I think it important

to quite often remind us of that by substituting “All” in place of “many” at this time. That was the prior English translation and, I believe, a better one.

The second word I am most hesitant about is the word “*merit*”. It comes up often in the opening Collect prayer but is also in Eucharistic Prayer II. In our culture “merit” is tied to what we earn on our own initiative and, for our culture, focuses us on our own achievements. It means nearly the exact opposite in our prayers at Mass. When we pray “*may we merit*” we are supposed to have an immediate sense of our inability to do anything on our own, apart from God’s grace. It has nothing to do with our efforts and everything to do with the sheer grace of God. For that reason, I will sometimes add “*may we be found worthy through God’s grace*”, when the word “merit” comes up. As the summation of the Eucharistic Prayer always says: it is in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ that we do everything that we do as a Church. We do nothing on our own, because it is only by our connection to Christ that the Church has any true meaning. More next week.

June 10 2012 *Feast of Corpus Christi and Teaching Masses (continued)

Each year on the feast of Corpus Christi we take time to review and appreciate and celebrate just what Eucharist truly means. The feast itself arose in the Middle Ages, precisely as a way to encourage people to appreciate the Eucharist and to have both a hunger for and do better at receiving communion in a regular way. In preparation for this weekend’s “Teaching Masses” I have been focusing on the essential criterion which comes from the Second Vatican Council for evaluating how well we are celebrating Eucharist as a community today: **full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful** in the Eucharist. What does full, conscious and active participation mean in practical terms for the five actions or movements which make up the full Eucharist—we gather, we listen, we offer thanks and praise, we receive, we are sent forth. Last week I looked at the first three; let’s now look at the fourth one (we receive) and then I will conclude this series of reflections next week with the fifth one (we are sent forth).

The Lord invites us to participate by RECEIVING the gift of his Body and Blood in communion. Full, conscious and active participation in the Eucharist means that all Catholics who are of age are invited to receive the gift of the Lord’s Body and Blood at every Eucharist, if we are properly prepared and disposed to do so. There were many centuries when Catholics almost never came to communion and let the physical communion be done by the priest alone, contenting themselves to a “spiritual communion”. There can be reasons for not coming forward—the classic ones are if someone believes they are in a state of mortal sin or are in a publicly compromising situation and in conscience know they must refrain from communion until that situation is resolved—but ordinarily the “default position” is to receive communion at each Eucharist.

We are in an odd situation as a Church today where some priests at communion time try to list who should and should not come forward to communion. That is truly neither helpful nor wise. It takes matters that are meant to be dealt with individually and personally and implies a certitude that is simply not there. It needs to be the person herself/himself who makes that decision of conscience. A “state of mortal sin” would mean that one is in danger of hell, of freely and permanently rejecting God’s love. Because God gives us freedom we can do that. But it is not something that is easy to do. It has been my experience as a priest that a number of Catholics exclude themselves from communion, falsely thinking they are in a state of mortal sin, when they are not. That is something people should talk through with a spiritual director or a priest whose pastoral guidance they trust.

The situation of being potentially in a publicly compromising situation is more common today with people sexually active outside of marriage or in marriages that have not been blessed by the Church. But even these situations do not automatically exclude one from communion. On the public, objective level, they are situations the Church cannot endorse and for which the Church asks people to make a change of life. But, even here, the person in his/her conscience needs to make the decision. I cannot know at the moment of communion

what is in another's heart. If they come forward to receive, I must presume they are in good conscience unless I know for certain they are not.

Moreover, please remember that communion is not a reward for living a worthy life—we are all unworthy; it is a gift to us to strengthen us on our journey. I believe many of us receive communion without really appreciating what we are being given and what we are committing ourselves to. We are being given the gift of the Lord's risen life in this sacramental way and we are committing to being the presence of the risen Lord to the world around us. Don't take that lightly. It is both awesome gift and awesome responsibility. Prepare for and accept that gift in faith, if you know yourself open to it and willing to try to live it. Think otherwise if you are not.

Full, conscious and active participation in Eucharist, then, ordinarily means receiving communion. We prepare for this part of the Eucharist by actively joining in the Lord's Prayer. Many will extend their hands and join hands with others during this prayer. It is not specifically called for but is very appropriate, because we are moving toward that pre-eminent sign of unity: receiving communion. At the same time please be sensitive to those who do not want to join hands. They can have many appropriate reasons for not doing so. Join in the doxology "*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever*", then in the "*Amen*" and then in the greeting of peace. Our energetic and active participation in all of these adds to the experience of communion for us all. As we give each other the sign of peace, remember we are offering the peace of Christ. Not simply hello, how are you; not our peace; but the peace of Christ. We can offer that, if we are open to God, even to our enemies and those we do not like. Be sensitive, again, to those who do not want physical touch, but do not hesitate to shake hands, hug, or kiss those who are able to accept that as a sign of Christ's peace. Don't be afraid to look around you; to cross the aisle; to take a few steps toward others.

We then move into the Lamb of God and the invitation to Communion. We sing the Lamb of God as the extra ministers of communion come forward. You will notice that the basic refrain "*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us*" may be repeated more than two times, while the cups and ciboria are being portioned. We always end with a final Lamb of God ending in "*Grant us peace.*" The invitation to communion goes back to the scriptural words of "*Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof*" as well as to speaking of the "*soul*" to be healed. Again, the more we use the new phrases, the less we will need to refer to the Order of Mass booklets.

During this time we are standing. In fact, at SS. John and Paul the ordinary posture for the entire Eucharistic prayer until communion is received is one of standing. That differs from the norm and people are free to kneel or sit as they prefer. But there is something about standing that I find increases both participation and the sense of common action. Kneeling invites more of a individual prayer posture and traditionally was meant to signal either repentance or adoration. Standing is the more ancient and universal practice for times of praise and thanksgiving, precisely what we are doing throughout the Eucharistic prayer and while all are receiving communion. The practice of kneeling arises in conjunction with the diminishment of people receiving communion. Rather than seeing Communion as the apex of the liturgy, receiving so as to become more truly the Body and Blood of Christ, the focus was on the moment of consecration and adoring the Blessed Sacrament thus created.

The Second Vatican Council's call for full, conscious and active participation has led to a re-appreciation of Communion as the apex of the liturgy. We should both want to receive, put ourselves in a state of being able to receive, and accept the responsibility of what it means to receive communion. But it is not simply the act of receiving that is the pinnacle. It is receiving the consecrated bread and wine from that altar. In other words, Eucharist is not to be seen as a communion service, where the only really important thing is to "get communion". Nor is it to be seen as primarily an act of adoration, where the only important thing is to "create

and see” the Blessed Sacrament. Eucharist is the taking of each of us who gather, all that we are and all that we open ourselves to through the Word, uniting that specific gift to the offering of Christ to the Father, and receiving the gift of Christ in communion that comes from that specific gathering. In other words, though each communion is a reception of the Body and Blood of Christ, each communion is new and unique. We are part of each other’s communion. That is why those not able to be present (the sick and infirm) are brought communion from that Mass. That is why we do not, except in an emergency, take communion from the tabernacle and distribute it at a Sunday Mass. Full, conscious and active participation means receiving the gift of the risen Lord he makes possible through the very people we are gathered with.

So, at each communion let us receive from each other a portion of the Body and Blood of Christ, for that is truly who we are. Let us sing the common communion refrain to surround each one of us until the last has received. Let us make the slight bow before we step forward to receive. [Aside: though it would not keep one from receiving communion, I ask that people not genuflect or kneel immediately before receiving; it does not show greater reverence and it only calls attention to oneself rather than to the communion being received; the Church has designated a ‘slight bow’ as the appropriate gesture.] Let us make our “Amen” to “*The Body of Christ*” and “*The Blood of Christ*” strong and clear. Let us hold our hands open to receive, or open our mouths, and take communion reverently. No talking to someone just before receiving; no gum chewing; if you have a guest with you who has never received, please do not have them come forward to receive; some ask for a blessing rather than communion but in general this is meant to be a time for communion, the blessing comes at the end of Mass for all.

Communion ministers: what an awesome experience to convey to others the gift of the Lord’s Body and Blood. Let us do it attentively, reverently, not rushing, holding up the host or cup, waiting for the “Amen” to be said (or saying it for someone if they do not say it), taking care to see that those who could not make it forward do receive communion, reverently placing the remainder of communion in the tabernacle and genuflecting/bowing as you close the tabernacle door.

If we “get” what communion truly is and how we are all part of making true communion happen at each Eucharist in a unique way to that Eucharist, we will truly know what full, conscious and active participation means. We will try not to be late or rush in at the last minute or leave early for we know that diminishes Eucharist. We will try to be respectful of others in our dress, our language, our participation. We will be eager to be in a position to be able to receive communion. We will be overwhelmed by the sheer grace, giftedness, of being able to receive the Lord’s own life in this way. Concluding thoughts next week.

June 17, 2012 *Teaching Masses (conclusion)

For the Corpus Christi “Teaching Masses” this year (celebrated last week) I focused on the essential criterion which comes from the Second Vatican Council for evaluating how well we are celebrating Eucharist as a community: **full, conscious, and active participation of all the faithful** in the Eucharist. What does full, conscious and active participation mean in practical terms for the five actions or movements—we gather, we listen, we offer thanks and praise, we receive, we are sent forth—which make up the full Eucharist? Over the past two weeks I looked at the first four. Let’s now conclude this series of reflections by looking at the fifth one (we are sent forth).

The Lord invites us to full and active participation by SENDING US FORTH from Eucharist to be his Body, his presence to the world. It is interesting how quickly the Eucharist itself refuses to let us linger simply on the gift we have received. Yes, there is a time of quiet reflection, thanksgiving and praise after all have received communion. But then, after any necessary announcements and a final blessing, we are immediately “sent forth” with the words “Go forth, the Mass is ended” and our response is “Thanks be to God”. As with all our other responses, our “Amen” at the time of the final blessing (three times, if it is one of the solemn blessings) and our

“Thanks be to God” needs to have some energy behind it. We have been blessed! “Amen”! We have been chosen to be Christ’s emissaries to the world! “Thanks be to God”!

A little aside. We get our common name for the Eucharist, the “Mass”, directly from this dismissal. In Latin the deacon or priest would say “*Ita, missa est*”. It is not very clear how this phrase came into the liturgy. The best guess is that it comes from the non-religious setting, probably court procedures, and was used as a way to indicate that the proceedings were concluded and all were free to go. Sometime in the 5th century or so it came into the Latin liturgy as a similar way to signal the Eucharist was completed. Over time, however, other prayers were added to the liturgy (such as the reading of the gospel of John chapter one, verses 1-14 or the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel) and so it lost any ability to send people forth to be Eucharist for others. Due to the historical work of scholars, when it came time to revise the liturgy after Vatican II, these extra additions were seen as late intrusions into the liturgy and left out. So, once again, the dismissal acts as a true ending, in effect telling us: Go forth, be Christ to others; bring the good news of Jesus to the world; don’t just receive Eucharist or believe in the transformed bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Christ, but be that gift of Christ’s communion to all you meet.

The Eucharist, then, is not fully Eucharist unless we embrace our mission to be the body of Christ broken and the blood of Christ poured out for others. Classical medieval sacramental theology tried to capture this idea by distinguishing the bread and wine (called the “sign alone” or *sacramentum tantum*) from the consecrated bread and wine (called “both sign and reality” or the *sacramentum et res*) and from the wider effect every Eucharist points to, the unity and salvation of the world that can come about as a result of that gift (called the “final reality alone” or *res tantum*). In the earlier, Patristic era St. Augustine simply said “*This is your mystery on the altar. Become what you receive so that your Amen may be true.*” In other words, we celebrate Eucharist not so that bread and wine can become the body and blood of Christ; rather so that we can become the body and blood of Christ effecting the salvation of the world and for that we need to be fed by the body and blood of Christ we receive in communion. The Dismissal Rite is a short but concrete reminder that Eucharist does not end in church but only in living gospel-centered lives.

One of the unfortunate vestiges of our Catholic way of celebrating Eucharist, which we still struggle with, is the separation of the action of the priest from the action of the rest of the people. In the past it was literally marked by an altar rail and reinforced by many silent prayers audible only to the priest. Since the focus was on “what was accomplished” (the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of our Lord) rather than on participation of all in the reality of the Eucharist, many would simply pray their own prayers (rosaries, for example) and have a sense that nothing they did added to what was being accomplished by the priest.

The Second Vatican Council’s emphasis on full, conscious, and active participation by all in the liturgy directly challenged that historically deficient understanding of Eucharist. It is a challenge to truly embrace it in each of our celebrations, but it is always worth trying. Through preparation, openness, a sense of joining into a common celebration, singing, praying, listening, reflecting in silence, sharing in one of the liturgical ministries, offering thanks and praise, receiving communion, and knowing oneself to be sent forth as an essential part of Christ’s own body, we can embrace such full participation. It makes a difference not only to one’s own experience of Eucharist but to that of everyone else as well.

***May 19 2013 Teaching Masses**

Next week we will celebrate the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). As has been my custom here at the parish I will preside at all the Masses and celebrate the liturgy as a "Teaching Mass". In preparation for those Masses begin to think about the following: why do we gather every Sunday and why does the Church understand that as necessary? What exactly happens at Eucharist which makes it more than a commemoration of a past event? How is Eucharist different from a communion service? What difference does Eucharist make and how can we better participate actively in the liturgy each week? Let's review some of the ways that active participation does or does not happen.

It makes a huge difference if we all participate in the songs and in the spoken responses. Visitors pick up immediately from such participation whether a community really believes in what it is doing in liturgy. But it is not simply singing and praying. We need to be attentive to doing it as one spirit, as a common body. When done well, our responses have a unity that doesn't single out any particular voice, but every voice contributes. As a presider with a microphone on, I know I have to be careful about my volume, when participating in the songs and common responses. Cantors as well need to be careful, because their voice can overly dominate on the microphone in places that are for the entire community's response or be too soft at places we need the cantor to lead.

One does not have to be exuberant in singing or responding—though it quite alright if you are. But for those who simply refuse to say or sing anything, I ask that you re-think that approach. Even though one isn't intending it this way, it can be dis-uniting when someone refuses to sing or respond, thereby setting himself or herself off from the rest of the community. At communion, for example, the Church's directives call for a hymn to accompany the receiving of communion, from the time the first person has received (usually the presider) till the last person has received. Only after that do we enter a period of personal, silent prayer. We have deliberately chosen communion hymns that have easy to memorize refrains, which we have repeated several weeks in a row. I know that we will have crossed a threshold in our common singing and responses, if and when our communion hymns are sung by most of us and the cantor's voice can sing the verses and not just the cantor can be heard singing the refrain!

It is dis-uniting as well when someone hurries the responses or slows them down, giving the sense of an individual response only. I see this quite a bit in the spoken responses. Often one or more will respond quickly and hurriedly, with no regard for praying the prayer together with the rest of the people. Another might go especially slowly, almost as if trying to slow everyone down, but having the end result of calling attention to their own response only. The next few times you participate in Mass be attentive to how you and others respond. Try to respond in unison. Try to respond with some energy (*Amen!*). What a powerful witness of worship when we do this together, in sync, all participating.

As to singing, the most common negatives I hear are "I can't/don't sing," "Don't know that hymn," "Too hard to sing it." But it is an interesting fact that one does not have to be a good singer to contribute to the overall song. As long as a number of people know the melody and sing it out, the rest of us can blend in as best we can. If we do, the end result is a beautiful unity of voice that is quite remarkable. In a group the size of a Mass (150-500), even those of us singing a bit off tone and stumbling can contribute to the overall beauty of the assembly's

singing. Of course, if we know ourselves to not be singing on key, we shouldn't belt it out loudly! But we should always sing.

Parents—dads pay attention—you become an example to your children by how you verbally participate in the Eucharist. They pick up very quickly whether you are there to “do a duty” or whether it is a conscious, faith experience for you. Also, it means that our children need to learn the responses. Go through them with your children, starting from a very young age. The sign of the cross, the times for “Amen,” the words of the Gloria, “Thanks be to God” and “Alleluia” and “Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ,” the Creed, “Lord, hear our prayer,” the words of the Sanctus (“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of power and might...”), the memorial acclamations, the Our Father and Lamb of God—we need to help our children know these by heart so they can participate fully in the responses at Mass. Our hymnals have all these responses in the blue pamphlet in the front or back of the hymnal.

It takes conscious work, discipline really, to unite as a body of Christ in song and spoken prayer. The more we do so at SS. John and Paul, the more the worship reflects what the Church fully intends. I will use our “Teaching Masses” in two weeks to highlight our common sung and spoken responses and be attentive to how unified or disparate we sound.

***May 26 2013 Teaching Masses Next Weekend**

As has been my custom, I will be the priest celebrant at each of the Masses next weekend, the feast of Corpus Christi, and shape these Masses in a way I call “Teaching Masses”. Really, it is simply the Mass with a bit of commentary thrown in, with no homily to speak of to help compensate for some of that extra speaking. . The flow of the Mass is as follows: we gather and come together as one community at the Lord's invitation (Introductory Rites); we listen to God's Word with open hearts, not just minds (Liturgy of the Word); we respond by giving God thanks and praise, remembering what God has done especially in and through Jesus his Son (Eucharistic Prayer); we receive the gift of the risen Lord's body and blood (Communion); we are sent forth almost immediately to be what we have received and celebrated—the body of Christ in this world.

All of that is necessary for the Eucharist to truly be Eucharist. If the goal of Eucharist is to fulfill an obligation or to get communion, then the difference between a communion service and Eucharist is rather minimal. But if Eucharist is the central way that the Lord takes his people, shapes them, feeds them, and commissions them for service, then the difference between the two is huge. The Lord invites all his people to gather, but he can only work with the ones who actually say yes to that invitation. They become the very “stuff” out of which the risen Jesus will make himself present in Word and Sacrament. Their (your!) offering of all that you are in that moment becomes the vehicle through which the Lord chooses to share his body and blood. All who are part of the Eucharist in some way are essential to that Eucharist.

Not so for communion services. They can be personally meaningful but they are not essential to the Church's prayer. I will confess to a huge irritation for me: people who come to Mass (on the weekend or during the week), thinking that it doesn't matter what they do, how they participate, just so long as they get to receive communion. Such people might feel as though they are close to Christ in communion but they are missing the very way that he is inviting us to be intimately involved in his action which is creating his presence in the first

place. When we hunger to be part of Eucharist and not simply receive communion; when we know ourselves as diminished when we are not part of the community's Eucharistic experience, then we will have understood how greatly different Eucharist is from a communion service.

More next time.

***June 2 2013 Corpus (et Sanguine) Christi**

The Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ arose at a time when many Catholics were not going to communion, only making a type of "spiritual communion" by looking at the consecrated host as it was raised above the priest's head. The bells rang, one looked up and saw the host, then back to one's private prayers. So rare was going to communion that at an ecumenical council in 1215 (Lateran IV) the Church legislated the requirement that all Catholics receive communion at least once a year. This comes down the centuries to us as our "Easter obligation". Today we have a much richer, fuller understanding of Eucharist and communion. The goal of the Mass is not simply to consecrate the bread and wine nor to only receive the gift of communion. Eucharist is the Church at its core: called together by Christ; shaped into his Body by the action of the Eucharist; fed by his Body and Blood present in communion; sent forth as the Body and Blood of Christ to nourish and transform the world we live in.

***June 2 2013 Teaching Mass (continued)**

Today all the Masses take the form of a "Teaching Mass" in order to better appreciate just what it is that we do at Sunday Eucharist.

Some of us are old enough (I know I am so there are lots of others in this category!) to remember being taught that there were three main parts to the Mass—Offertory, Consecration, and Communion. To miss any one of these was considered a serious sin. But, in fact, there are only two main parts to any Eucharistic celebration: 1) the Liturgy of the Word 2) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (which includes the Eucharistic prayer and communion).

These two main parts are surrounded by three minor parts of the Mass: 1) the Introductory Rites (Gathering, Opening Hymn, Penitential Rite or Sprinkling, Gloria, Opening Prayer), which take us out of our individual journeys and individual isolation and bring us into one worshipping body of Christ. 2) The Preparation of the Gifts, which marks a transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and really just has the practical purpose of getting the altar ready, the gifts collected and brought up, and having a little break before we begin the Liturgy of the Eucharist. 3) The Dismissal Rites (Blessing and Dismissal), which send us forth not to dwell on how great (or less than great!) this experience has been, but to be Christ to the world, committed to transforming the world through Christ's love.

One of the side benefits about growing up around the Catholic Church is the way one's vocabulary grows. I always tell the altar servers that if they learn all the proper names for things pertaining to the Mass they might have that million dollar answer to an obscure question on a game show some day! Our Latin and at times Greek roots for words and actions in the Mass provide all sorts of examples. Think about the vestments used at liturgy.

For example, look at where the names for the priest's vestments come from. The long, white garment worn by priests, deacons, acolytes and at times other liturgical ministers is called the **alb**, which comes from the Latin word for 'white' (*albus*). An alb-like tunic was an

everyday garment in Greco-Roman society, worn by most people. The custom of wearing an alb for liturgy doesn't get established until the 5th and 6th centuries. Some albs are very loose fitting and so it became customary to tie a rope-like cord around the waist to hold the alb in place. Our altar servers use such a cord with their albs, following the liturgical color of the day. It is called a **cincture** (from the Latin *cingulum* which means 'girdle').

The priest also puts on a **stole**, a long narrow cloth, worn like a scarf, typically over the alb but in recent years sometimes on the outside of all the garments. Its color corresponds to the liturgical color of the season (white, purple, red, green) and is worn differently by priests and bishops (around both shoulders) than deacons (over only one shoulder). In fact, this differentiation in usage harkens back to an older custom among Roman officials, who used different types of scarves to signify their respective rank. The word comes from the Greek word *stolē* for 'clothing'

Finally (or with some vestment sets just before putting on the stole) the priest puts on the **chasuble**, the cape-like outer garment with a hole for the head, again in the liturgical color of the season. Again, this was a common piece of clothing for all men in the Greco-Roman world, which falls into disuse in society in the 5th and 6th centuries, but is retained by the clergy for liturgical use. By the 9th century it was so completely associated with priesthood that the clothing of the newly ordained priest with the chasuble was put into the ordination ritual. In the Greco-Roman world the chasuble was often a hooded cloak and could completely cover the person for protection against the elements. Thus the name comes from the Latin *casula* for 'little house'.

Why does a priest vest, other than there is a rule to follow, a rather ancient but by no means necessary custom? The main reason is to allow the role of presider or priest-celebrant at liturgy to be less centered on the personality of the priest and more centered on being a sacrament of Christ's presiding. As one of the newer Eucharistic prayers says "[Christ] opens the Scriptures and breaks the bread." As with all sacramental actions the challenge is to accept the simple sign—the bread and wine for Eucharist, the water for baptism, and so on—as transformed by Christ at work in the community of faith. Our Catholic sacramental sense believes that in and through the ordinary the reality of God's saving presence in Christ can be experienced. That is true of the Sacrament of Orders as well. The "simple sign" is the human reality of the deacon, priest or bishop. The deeper reality of Christ works in and through that human reality. Vesting, though not essential, is meant to aid both the priest and the community at prayer in focusing on that presence of Christ.

Whether wearing vestments truly helps or hinders that in today's world can be debated. Some believe that all liturgical ministers should at least wear an alb (readers, ministers of communion, choir and cantor, etc.), so that they, too, would have a sense of entering into a role of service rather than simply doing it for themselves. But where does that stop? Aren't we all active liturgical ministers by praying, singing, participating? To be honest, I like our practice here, where people who serve in any capacity are asked to dress for Sunday, exercise their ministry well and then sit with family and friends when not exercising their ministry. For obvious reasons the choir needs to sit together, but I do like the fact that they aren't in choir robes, but again in Sunday dress—one with us, not separated unnecessarily from the rest of the

assembly. And, it would not bother me, if the priest celebrant was asked to dress and do the same.

***June 9 2013 Teaching Mass (conclusion)**

I want to offer one more image for consideration, as I conclude this series connected to the Teaching Mass: being invited to an important dinner event by someone we admire and enjoy spending time with, knowing that he/she will also be inviting a number of other guests. Would we be looking forward to such a dinner? I think so. Would we make sure we got dressed properly for it and gave ourselves time to get there? Yes. Would we try to participate in the conversation at the meal or ignore everyone else there? Would we 'eat and run'? That would be rude.

Because the Eucharist is structured as a meal, that image of being a dinner guest does help us reflect on how to participate at Eucharist. Jesus is the one inviting us to his Eucharistic banquet. Though the Church has structured it over the centuries into what it looks like now, it is the Lord who created it. It is his dinner. We are the guests. Things can come up in a pinch that can make us occasionally run late or have to leave early. But if that is our consistent practice, think about what that is saying to the Lord. Also, although no one is turned away who shows up, are we dressed for this banquet? It doesn't have to be the fanciest dress but it is a special dinner and we don't usually go to such dinners in super-casual clothes. We don't usually chew gum either, especially when eating the specially prepared food, so why do some come forward to communion chewing gum? I could go on, but you get the point.

I think where I get annoyed the most—yes, it is my annoyance and so I own it—is how some seem to treat the Eucharist as a private dinner between them and the Lord. No interaction with anyone else at Mass, no response to the prayers or singing or not trying to respond in unison, and so on. It is almost as if the Eucharist is a private devotion and not a communal feast. It is not accidental that the Lord invites us to a community gathering. Eucharist, to be Eucharist, always involves a community. Ideally, every baptized Christian gathers each Sunday around one of the Eucharistic tables of the Lord. Minimally, there is to be at least one person present, other than the priest. The Eucharist is all about how the Lord is re-forming, re-remembering, re-shaping his people into the body of Christ. It is necessarily communal, and therefore always involves the whole community interacting and praying together.

In the end that means each of us is important to every Eucharist we are celebrating. You don't have to sing or respond loudly, but your response helps to build up the body of Christ. Let's try to continue to bring energy and enthusiasm to all that we do each Sunday.