



FAITH FEEDS

Having a faith conversation with old and new friends is as easy as setting the table.

**FAITH FEEDS GUEST GUIDE
EUCHARIST**



The C21 Center Presents

FAITH FEEDS

The **FAITH FEEDS** program is designed for individuals in Catholic parishes who are hungry for opportunities to talk about their faith with others who share it. Participants gather over coffee or a potluck lunch or dinner, and a host parishioner facilitates conversation using the C21 Center's bi-annual magazine, *C21 Resources*.

This **FAITH FEEDS** themed conversation will be on the Eucharist. All articles have been taken from the Fall 2011 issue of *C21 Resources*.



EUCHARIST: THE MANY FACETED JEWEL

By John F. Baldovin, S.J.

O sacred banquet!
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.
Alleluia

— Antiphon for the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

With these beautiful poetic words the great medieval theologian St. Thomas Aquinas summed up the centrality of the Eucharist for us Christians. The Eucharist is indeed the center of our lives quite simply because Christ himself is the center of our lives—not only the Lord Jesus who lived, taught, healed, was crucified and raised from the dead 2,000 years ago, not only the Christ whose saving and self-giving sacrifice we are mysteriously attached to every time we celebrate, not only the Christ whose bodily presence sustains us week by week (or even day by

day), but also the Christ who beckons us forth to our ultimate vocation, living with him in the glory of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

For Catholics, and indeed for a great many Christians, the Eucharist is one of the most important and vital aspects of the faith. There is a story told of Christians on trial in an early third-century persecution of the Church at Abitina in North Africa. The judges clearly thought the Christians were out of their minds since they were willing to die for what they believed in, but they showed that they weren't dying for a set of ideas as much as for the Lord himself when they responded, "But we cannot live without what we do on the Lord's Day." In other words, "we cannot live without our weekly celebration of the Eucharist." We clearly need to regain a sense of the importance and centrality of the Eucharist today, especially when so many Catholics regard the Sunday Eucharist as an option rather than a matter of life or death.

Much wonderful theology with regard to the Eucharist has been done within the Roman Catholic

tradition, but I think it's important to recognize how significant the Eucharist is for so many Christians: Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant. The ecumenical importance of the Eucharist can be discerned in a very important convergence (not yet consensus!) document published by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches almost 30 years ago: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, Lima, 1982). That document lays out a remarkable amount of agreement achieved by Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant scholars. (The commission included Avery Dulles, S.J., and Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P. The main architect of the document was Professor Geoffrey Wainwright formerly of Duke University, a British Methodist.) BEM deals with the Eucharist under five headings:

1. Thanksgiving to the Father
2. Memorial of the Son
3. Invocation of the Holy Spirit
4. Communion of the Faithful
5. Meal of the Kingdom

As all of our eucharistic prayers reveal, the main verb governing what we do at Mass is “to give thanks.” Gratitude for what God has done for us in making us (creation) and saving us (redemption) is always at the forefront in our worship. That’s why we can make “Eucharist” even when we celebrate a funeral. Formal Christian prayer has traditionally been directed to the Father, but it is done through Christ, because in the Eucharist (as well as all of our liturgical prayer) it is Christ’s living, dying, and rising (the Paschal Mystery) that gives us access to the one he called “Abba.” Memorial means that we act out the pattern of Christ’s person and acting for us as we repeat his actions at the Last Supper:

1. Taking — Presentation of the gifts
2. Blessing — Eucharistic prayer
3. Breaking — Fraction
4. Giving — Communion

But the “we” has to be qualified by the fact that we can do nothing of worth without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That is why in all of our eucharistic prayers since Vatican II the invocation (or epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit has been made explicit: “Therefore,

O Lord, we humbly implore you: By the same Spirit graciously make holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, of your Son our Lord Jesus that they may become the Body and Blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose command we celebrate these mysteries.” And so BEM alerts us to the fact that all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in our Eucharist. And as the Body of Christ the Church is involved as well. We often forget that the ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is not only the transformation of the bread and wine into the true Body and Blood of the Lord but also our transformation into his one Body, the Church. BEM also reminds us that the Eucharist is the foretaste of the meal of God’s Kingdom. This generous self-giving and sharing of the Lord with us looks forward to the Kingdom—to the final realization of God’s plan. And so the Eucharist has profound ecclesial and ethical implications.

As I often say in teaching a course on the theology of the Eucharist, the Eucharist is like a precious jewel. You cannot appreciate it by looking at it from only one angle or in only one light. You need to turn it now this way, now that, now in this light and then another to begin to comprehend its true beauty. I would add that in order to appreciate it fully we need to celebrate it well, in faith-filled communities with good pastoral leadership. It’s also important to recognize that much of the meaning of the Eucharist is communicated through poetry, art, and music, all of which transcend simple, rational explanation.

The Eucharist indeed encompasses so many facets of our Christian lives: the sense that God is truly with us, the challenge to participate in his self-offering, the growth and true nourishment of our children, the awesome challenge to make gratitude (thanksgiving, Eucharist) the most significant element in our lives, the call to act morally and justly in our world, the invitation to let Christ break down the barriers that divide us and to become what we truly are, as St. Augustine so wonderfully says, the Body of Christ. Each of our authors or selections from official Church documents gives us a glimpse of a different aspect of the Eucharist. Thus the Eucharist is like a precious jewel that must be viewed from many angles and perspectives in order to be appreciated.

John F. Baldwin, S.J. is professor of historical and liturgical theology at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.



EUCHARIST: THE MANY FACETED JEWEL

“The word “Eucharist” means literally “act of thanksgiving.” To celebrate the Eucharist and to live a Eucharistic life has everything to do with gratitude. Living Eucharistically is living life as a gift, a gift for which one is grateful.”

—Henri Nouwen

Summary

John F. Baldovin, S.J., characterizes the Eucharist as a “precious jewel” that cannot be appreciated by looking at it from only one angle or in one light. For the author, “the Eucharist encompasses to many facets of our Christian lives: the sense that God is truly with us, the challenge to participate in his self offering, the growth and true nourishment of our children, the awesome challenge to make gratitude (“thanksgiving”) the most significant element in our lives, the call to act morally and justly in our world, the invitation to let Christ break down barriers that divide us and to become what we truly are...”

Questions for Conversation

1. Of the facets of the Eucharist that Baldovin lists, which resonate the most with you?
2. Do you consider the Eucharist central to your life? If so, how do you maintain that devotion? If not, what might you do to renew your commitment to it?
3. Baldovin argues that everything from poetry to art to a well-celebrated liturgy and community can enhance our appreciation for the Eucharist. What draws you more deeply into the mystery of the Eucharist?
4. The author says that “the ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is not only the transformation of the bread and wine into the true Body and Blood of the Lord but also our transformation into his one Body, the Church.” How does the Eucharist change you? Does it transform your attitude, outlook, or action?



WHY GO TO MASS?

By John F. Baldovin, S.J.

Not every Mass is going to be a great and deeply moving experience, not for the vast majority of us anyway. But there is a great deal to be said for simple fidelity to our worship. St. Ignatius Loyola says in the *Spiritual Exercises* that the person who is experiencing some desolation (dryness, “downness”) in prayer can be helped by remembering times of consolation in the past. I think that is true not only of individual prayer but of communal, liturgical prayer as well. In any case, the Mass may not always be a deeply emotional experience, but it is always an experience of the Lord giving himself to us in his word and his sacramental presence and calling forth our self-giving in return. Why bother? Why bother going to Mass at all when we can worship God anywhere?

1. Participation in the salvation of the world.

The most important reason for participating in the Eucharist is that God has invited us to share in the experience of the world’s salvation in the death and resurrection of the Lord every time we celebrate. We are invited to participate in God’s redeeming act each time we participate in the Eucharist and thereby commit ourselves to working for God’s reign.

2. Experiencing the glory of God. St. Irenaeus, a second-century Christian theologian and martyr, wrote that the glory of God is the human being fully alive, and that the human being fully alive is the one who is in Christ Jesus. The Mass is where we experience sacramentally our destiny as members incorporated into the body of Christ. This is what God wants the world to look like: human beings who give of themselves to others in faith, hope, and love.

3. Discipline of faith. A third reason to bother is the formation of the habit of worshiping and glorifying God. Human beings ordinarily develop by forming habits, some good and some bad. These are patterns that shape our lives. The discipline of worshiping God helps us to grow into being habitual “adorers of God,” even when we do not feel like it.

4. Hearing the Scriptures communally. The Bible is the word of God, but let’s face it, individualistic and idiosyncratic readings of the Bible have led to some pretty wacky and even destructive interpretations. We need to experience the Scriptures both alone and in community. This is what Christians mean by tradition: the way we have learned throughout history as a church to interpret the Scriptures together. Hearing

the Scriptures in community is a way of deepening as well as safeguarding our experience of God's communication with us.

5. Developing the moral life. If the basic structure of the Eucharist is taking, blessing, breaking, and giving in imitation of the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, then the habit of weekly (or even more frequent) celebration of the Mass ought to help us in our development as moral human beings. If we celebrate faithfully, we ought to be conforming more and more, as individuals and as a community, to the image of generosity and love of the one into whom we were baptized. The final test of whether the Mass "works" is: "By their fruits shall you know them."

6. Companionship with Christ. If I believe that Christ is the savior of the world, God incarnate, who has given his very self for me, then I want to share in the most intimate experience of self-giving—holy Communion—and I also want to recognize him in the brothers and sisters with whom I am sharing the act of self-giving. We have a vital human need for both food and meaning. The word "companionship" is derived from the Latin *cum* (with) and *panis* (bread). We find companionship in sharing food with others. There is no companionship without sharing what our bodies need. There is no companionship with Christ except by sharing in his body—sacrament and Church.

7. Focusing my needs. From the earliest days of Christianity, men and women have brought their deepest needs and desires to the table of the Lord, confident that they can be joined to Christ's great act of intercession before the Father (Heb 7:25, 10:1-22). This is why we pray for the dead at Mass; we place them before the merciful and compassionate God in the midst of this great work of our redemption. I can bring my deepest desires to the table of the Lord, confident that I will be heard.

8. Praying for the world. Of course, we bring not only our own personal needs but the state of the world to the celebration of the Eucharist. There is a kind of cosmic dimension to every celebration in which the realities of our world (bread, wine, men, and women) are transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

The world with all of its needs, joys, and struggles is present every time we celebrate the Eucharist together, and our consciousness of the world helps to make the Mass the experience of Christian life in a concentrated way.

9. Welcoming the kingdom. If the Eucharist is the celebration of how God wants the world to look, then every time we celebrate, we anticipate the banquet of God's kingdom "when every tear will be wiped away." In other words, the reign of God looks like human beings who, recognizing their sinfulness, know that God's mercy is far greater. The reign of God looks like people who are gathered to receive his word gratefully. The reign of God looks like people who allow God's Holy Spirit to form them into a community that accepts life from God, blesses God with everything that is in them, are broken and poured out for others in imitation of the Lord Jesus who has given us this pattern. The reign of God looks like people who share the most unimaginably precious gifts freely because they know that all is gift in Christ. The reign of God looks like people who are sent forth to do the works of faith, hope, and love with courage.

10. Pure joy. A final reason for celebrating the Eucharist is that here God invites us to the deepest peace and joy that is possible—sharing in his own divine life. St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*: "O God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The Mass is a foretaste of that perfectly joyful rest. The Mass is an obligation to be sure, but it is an obligation that comes not so much from the outside as from the nature of what it means to enjoy Christian fellowship. We are who we are because of our sharing with our brothers and sisters. And what we share is Jesus Christ himself. How could that not be the cause of pure joy? In the Gospel of John, Jesus invites his followers to "come and see." Nowhere is that invitation from the Lord clearer than in the invitation to share in the celebration of the Mass.

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GATHERING PRAYER

Be With Us Today

St. Thomas More (1478-1535)

Father in heaven,
you have given us a mind to know you,
a will to serve you,
and a heart to love you.

Be with us today in all that we do,
so that your light may shine out in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

For more information about Faith Feeds, visit bc.edu/c21faithfeeds

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