



Eucharist

The central tenet of the Catholic faith is the belief in and celebration of the Eucharist. First instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper, the Eucharist (often referred to as the Mass) is "the source and summit of the Christian life".¹ It is one of the seven sacraments of the Church (SEE: Sacraments).

The word Eucharist is a Greek word meaning *thanksgiving*, which captures the sense of the people of God gathering regularly to give thanks and praise for the many gifts bestowed on them by a loving God.

The first apostles would gather in houses for the "breaking of the bread" (*Acts 2: 42-47*). Over time this simple ritual was formalized to become the Mass celebrated daily in Churches around the world. Until the Second Vatican Council (SEE: The Second Vatican Council), the Mass was celebrated in Latin. Since 1969, the vernacular (the native language of a country) has been permitted for use as the language of the liturgy.

The Eucharist is comprised of two primary actions. In the Liturgy of the Word, the gathered hear the Word of God proclaimed through readings drawn from the Old and New Testaments and the gospels. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the gathered are nourished at the altar, following Jesus instructions: "Take and eat, this is my body... take and drink this is my blood" (*Mark 14:22-24*). For the Catholic believer, the bread and wine brought to the altar during the Procession of Gifts become the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Jesus' presence is encountered in four modes in Eucharist: in the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Christ, in the Word proclaimed, in the priest who presides over the celebration, and in the people gathered. The Catholic community by its very essence is a Eucharistic community.

¹ POPE PAUL VI (2015). *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - Lumen Gentium*. n. 11 [online] Vatican.va. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [Accessed 20 November, 2018].