



Essential Quick Guide for Catechists to Preparing Children for First Holy Communion - the Eucharist

Brief introduction to the Eucharist:

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1322)

"At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.'" (Sacrosanctum Concilium 47)

Eucharist in Scripture:

The Eucharist is rooted in the Covenant community of the Old Testament. The promise that God made to Noah, and then to Abraham and continually throughout the Old Testament was a promise of love, that God would protect and care for his people. It was a covenant that was sealed in blood.

Gen. 15:9-11 Abraham is told by God to sacrifice the animals as a sign of the Covenant.

Ex 24:1-11 Moses receives the Law from God, and the Covenant is sealed with the pouring of blood (sacrifice) and the eating of the sacrificial food (communion). Only those ready to enter fully into God's covenant by following his law could share in the sacred meal. Through the prophets God promised his people a 'covenant of peace', "I will be their God, and they will be my people."

In Jesus the new covenant, sealed not in the blood of sacrificial animals but in the shedding of his own blood, is made.

The lamb sacrificed at Passover is replaced by Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The offering and sharing of bread and wine in the Old Testament are linked with sacrifice, freedom, joy.

Gen. 14:18 Melchizedek, King of Salem and 'priest of God most high', greeted Abraham in the Valley of the King with bread and wine, prefiguring the Church's own offering of bread & wine, 'fruit of the earth, work of human hands'.

Num. 18:12 In the Old Covenant, that of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, bread and wine were offered to God among the first fruits of the earth, in thanksgiving to God.

Ex 12:1-14 Bread & wine received a new significance at the Exodus, that flight of the Israelites into the freedom of the Promised Land from the slavery of Israel.

Ex 16:12-13 The manna in the desert is a sign to the people of Israel that they live by the bread of the word of God.

The wine, the cup of blessing, at the Jewish Passover meal is a sign of festivity & joy; but it has also a far more significant dimension; the expectation of the Messiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. In the Institution of the Eucharist Jesus gave a dramatically new meaning to the blessing of bread and wine.

Moments in Jesus' ministry which lead us to the institution of the Eucharist:

Matt. 14:13-21, 15:32-39 The miracles of the loaves, enough to feed the multitude, prepare us for the gift of the bread of the Eucharist, available to all.

John 2:1-11 The miracle of water to wine at the marriage feast of Cana, 'the first of the signs' heralds the wedding feast in the Father's kingdom:

Mark 14:25 'I tell you solemnly, I shall not drink any more wine until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.'

Other meals shared by Jesus: with Levi (**Mark 2:15...**), with Zacchaeus (**Luke 19:1...**), at the house of Simon the Pharisee (**Luke 7:36...**); these were meals which proclaimed the kingdom and its openness to all who accept Christ. In the world of Jesus the shared meal was always a sign of peace, trust and community.

John 6:32-58 The first announcement of the Eucharist, after the multiplication of the loaves, divided the disciples. It was a hard teaching for many to accept.

John 13 tells of the Last Supper but writes of the washing of the disciples' feet rather than the Institution of the Eucharist

Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20 The three synoptic Gospels have handed on to us the account of the institution of the Eucharist. By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus' passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist, which fulfills the Jewish Passover and anticipates the final Passover of the Church in the glory of the kingdom.

1Cor. 11:23-25 The oldest account of what happened at this meal is contained in Paul's first letter to the people of Corinth, written about AD57.

Acts 2:42, 46 From the earliest days the Church has followed the command of Jesus to 'Do this in memory of me.'

Eucharist in the Catechism:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives the teaching of the Church on the sacrament of the Eucharist in paragraphs 1322-1419

IN BRIEF (*the summary of the teaching of the Church on the Eucharist from the Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

1406 Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; . . . he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and . . . abides in me, and I in him" (*Jn 6:51, 54, 56*).

1407 The Eucharist is the heart and the summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church.

1408 The Eucharistic celebration always includes: the proclamation of the Word of God; thanksgiving to God the Father for all his benefits, above all the gift of his Son; the consecration of bread and wine; and participation in the liturgical banquet by receiving the Lord's body and blood. These elements constitute one single act of worship.

1409 The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, that is, of the work of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a work made present by the liturgical action.

1410 It is Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the

Eucharistic sacrifice.

1411 Only validly ordained priests can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and the wine so that they become the Body and Blood of the Lord.

1412 The essential signs of the Eucharistic sacrament are wheat bread and grape wine, on which the blessing of the Holy Spirit is invoked and the priest pronounces the words of consecration spoken by Jesus during the Last Supper: "This is my body which will be given up for you. . . . This is the cup of my blood. . . ."

1413 By the consecration the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1640; 1651).

1414 As sacrifice, the Eucharist is also offered in reparation for the sins of the living and the dead and to obtain spiritual or temporal benefits from God.

1415 Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance.

1416 Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ increases the communicant's union with the Lord, forgives his venial sins, and preserves him from grave sins. Since receiving this sacrament strengthens the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ, it also reinforces the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

1417 The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion when they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so at least once a year.

1418 Because Christ himself is present in the sacrament of the altar, he is to be honoured with the worship of adoration. "To visit the Blessed Sacrament is . . . a proof of gratitude, an expression of love, and a duty of adoration toward Christ our Lord"

1419 Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his Heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints.

Eucharist in Canon Law:

Canon Law is the body of laws and regulations that government the Catholic Church and all its members.

Can. 913 §1 For holy communion to be administered to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and be accurately prepared, so that according to their capacity they understand what the mystery of Christ means, and are able to receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.

Can. 914 It is primarily the duty of parents and of those who take their place, as it is the duty of the parish priest, to ensure that children who have reached the use of reason are properly prepared and, having made their sacramental confession, are nourished by this divine food as soon as possible. It is also the duty of the parish priest to see that children who have not reached the use of reason, or whom he has judged to be insufficiently disposed, do not come to holy communion.

Can. 916 Anyone who is conscious of grave sin may not celebrate Mass or receive the Body of the Lord without previously having been to sacramental confession, unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, which

Eucharist and Church History:

The Last Supper, at which Christ instituted the Eucharist, was a Passover meal – in which the Jewish family not only remember the moment when their ancestors were freed from slavery in Egypt, but also become aware that God's freedom is experienced in the present. Jesus, at the last Supper, transforms the Passover meal when he takes, blesses, breaks and shares, asking the disciples to 'Do this in memory of me.'

After the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples continued to meet for what they called 'the breaking of bread' – a communal meal. Soon the rite was separated from the meal, developing a more prayerful setting and the celebration moved from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week and the day of resurrection.

The celebration included readings from scripture, singing of psalms and an instruction. Around the words of institution were added prayers of thanksgiving, praise and intercession. Communion was distributed and there was a collection for those in need. By 3rd century the ritual had completely replaced the fellowship meal. The concept of sacrifice began to develop alongside the idea of a memorial meal. The Breaking of Bread, the Lord's Supper, became the Eucharist. The language of the celebration was Latin – the language of the people. – and, as Latin came, over time, to be used more and more, the name Mass developed – partly from the last words of the celebration 'Ite, missa est'.

In the 4th century Constantine gave freedom to Christianity and Christianity became the official religion. Basilicas were built for Christian worship, numbers grew, celebrants wore the clothes of Roman officials, the plates and cups of house worship became ornate patens and chalices. Ceremonies suitable to large buildings developed; processions, ritualised movement on the sanctuary and the use of incense and bells.

In the early Middle Ages huge and beautiful Gothic cathedrals were built across Europe, colourful public processions on feast days and pilgrimages to holy shrines were met with great enthusiasm.

Participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, however, declined. Rood screens separated the choir and sanctuary from public view; fewer and fewer people received communion. This was such a concern the Lateran Council in 1215 decreed that people should receive communion at least once a year.

In 1545 at the Council of Trent, at the time of the Reformation, came the doctrine of transubstantiation, the teaching that at the celebration of the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus (see CCC 1374-76). At the Council a strong unified Catholic position on the Eucharist was declared with great authority. The Council's statements on the Eucharist reflected the desire of the bishops to see a unified practice throughout the Church. The language of the documents gives emphasis to the understanding of Eucharist as sacrifice over the fellowship-meal.

The clarity and uniformity were taken a stage further with the publication in 1570 of the Roman Missal, which remained unchanged until the Second Vatican Council. The Mass was celebrated in Latin, with priest and people facing East.

By the end of the 19th century a need for liturgical reform was recognised. Pope Pius X in 1905 encouraged people to receive

communion more frequently and in 1910 lowered the age of First Communion to 'the age of reason' (7yrs). Pope Pius XII in *Mediator Dei* (1947) gave greater impetus to the liturgical movement. In 1959 Pope John XXIII called a council – the Second Vatican Council – whose first document was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 1963). A number of changes were introduced. The priest now faced the people. Vernacular languages replaced the Latin. People shook hands at the greeting of peace. The congregation was asked to participate actively in the Mass, to sing and pray at various times. The three year cycle of readings was developed to introduce the people to a 'richer' experience of scripture. Communion under both kinds was allowed and the reception of communion in the hand. Lay participation developed in the ministries of the Eucharist and of Reader. The Second Vatican Council reinforced the centrality of this sacrament to the life of the Church. In the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, we are told that the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life'^{LG11} It is 'the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.'
Sacrosanctum Concilium – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 10

Essential elements of a programme of preparation for First Holy Communion:

The following should be included in some way in the programme

God as creator, loving Father, making us in his own image, who calls us to himself. the gift of creation and our responsibility to care for it.

Jesus - the person of Christ; our call to be his disciples and to grow in relationship with him.

The Holy Spirit, the giver of life, our guide, promised by Jesus.

The liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent, Holy Week and Easter, Pentecost –the gospel story and liturgical rites, signs and symbols.

The Church as the family of God, our belonging to that family. An understanding of 'sacrament' as the visible outward sign of an invisible internal reality

Baptism – the rite, signs and symbols of baptism and the way we live as baptised sons and daughters of God

That baptism is the first step in our journey of faith. We become more fully members of the family of God when we celebrate First Communion and continue to receive Jesus in Communion

What it is to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. How we should live following Jesus' law of love.

The Mass – its structure and prayers

That Jesus, whom we meet at Mass asks us to 'Do this in memory of me'.

The Mass as:
 Thanksgiving
 Praise, worship, adoration
 The time we hear the Word of God
 The great prayer of the Church
 A sacred meal where we share our lives and love
 A sacrifice – Jesus offered himself on the cross for us, we give ourselves to God, united with the sacrifice of Jesus himself to his Father
 The Mass as giving God himself to us in Jesus – the Real Presence/Holy Communion. At Mass, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus – Jesus' gift of himself, promised at the last Supper. Help children with the language of the host and chalice, Body and Blood of Jesus rather than bread and wine.
 The Mass as uniting us with each other – the Sign of Peace, Holy

Learning from the Order of Mass:

On entering the church we make the Sign of the Cross, dipping our fingers in the water in the font at the door of the church, a reminder of our baptism and that we gather as a baptismal community. We genuflect (bending on one knee) towards the tabernacle, which holds the Most Blessed Sacrament, as a sign of reverence and adoration.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

- Entrance song and procession
- Sign of the Cross and Greeting
- Penitential rite
- Gloria
- Opening prayer

The purpose of the Introductory Rites is to bring the people together into one body, a worshipping community, preparing them to hear the Word of God and to celebrate the Eucharist worthily.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Having unified our hearts, minds and voices and having acknowledged God's presence, we are now ready to open our ears so that the word of God might touch and transform us.

- 1st reading
- Responsorial psalm
- 2nd reading
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel
- Homily
- Prayers of the faithful

The Word of God, sacred scripture is what gives the Church her mission. In the liturgy it is proclaimed, celebrated, made alive – so that we may live our lives according to its teaching.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

At the last Supper, Christ instituted the Sacrifice and Paschal meal that make the Sacrifice of the cross present in the Church. From the days of the Apostles the Church has celebrated that Sacrifice by carrying out what the Lord did and handed over to his disciples to do in his memory. The celebration of the Eucharist has always retained this basic shape: taking the elements of bread and wine in the preparation of the gifts, the act of thanksgiving in the Eucharistic prayer, the Breaking of the bread, the giving and sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ in Communion. *Adapted from Celebrating the Mass 174*

- Preparation of the Gifts
- Eucharistic Prayer
- Communion rite

The eating and drinking together of the Lord's Body and Blood in a Paschal meal is the culmination of the Eucharist. The assembly is made ready to share in this banquet by a series of rites that lead from the Eucharistic Prayer directly to the Communion. The themes underlying these rites are the mutual love and reconciliation that are both the condition and the fruit of worthy communion and the unity of the many in the one.

- the Lord's Prayer,
- the Sign of Peace
- the Fraction Rite (breaking of the bread)
- the Distribution of Communion
- the Prayer after Communion

THE CONCLUDING RITES

In the Concluding Rite we are sent forth to put into effect in our daily lives what we have celebrated. We are called to witness to Christ in the world and to bring the Gospel to the poor

- Blessing
- Dismissal

For further detail see 'Celebrating the Mass' in 'Further Reading' below

Resources for First Holy Communion Preparation:

Published resources:

We Believe & Celebrate First Communion, publ. Sadlier 2006 (6 sessions)

I Belong, Aileen Urquhart, publ. Redemptorist Publications, 1998 (11 sessions (2 of which prepare the children for the Sacrament of Reconciliation) and 7 parents meetings)

God's Greatest Gift – Preparing for First Communion, Bernadette Wilson, publ. ViewPoint Resources Direct, 1995 (10 sessions and 10 celebrations; includes preparation for First Reconciliation)

Meet Christ with Joy, Joan Brown, publ. Kevin Mayhew, 1991

Celebrating the Gift of Jesus, Sr. Mary Fearon and Sandra Hirstein, publ. Brown-Roa, 1993 (7 sessions + 3 celebrations)

Celebrating Our Faith - Eucharist, Dr Jane Marie Osterholt, SP, publ. Brown Roa, 2000 (8 sessions)

DVDs:

Welcome to the Mass – Large format poster book & CD-ROM, Pauline Multimedia, www.pauline-uk.org

For working with parents:

This is My Body – 2 part reflection & 5 talks on the Mass – CaFE (Catholic Faith Exploration), www.faithcafe.org

First Holy Communion & Reconciliation – to run 2-4 sessions - CaFE, www.faithcafe.org

Parents – You, Your Children & their Catholic Faith – David Wells – 7 talks - CaFE, www.faithcafe.org

Further Reading:

For parents:

Will our children believe? Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., publ. Veritas Family Resources, 1999

Your Child's First Communion, Rosemary Gallagher, publ. Redemptorist Publications,

Your Child's First Communion, Carol Luebering, Handing on the Faith Series, publ. St. Anthony's Press, 2000

Training for the Preparation Team:

- Training and formation will be initially offered by the parish priest who will be able to guide catechists in an understanding of the sacrament and will have resources available in the parish such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church and existing resources for First Communion preparation
- Contact your diocesan Catechetical Adviser or check the diocesan website: www.rcdow.org.uk/catechesis, to ask what supplementary training opportunities there are in the diocese. Check the diocesan website for information, articles and resources.

Reading & Resources for catechists:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, publ. Geoffrey Chapman, revised 1999

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, publ Catholic

Truth Society, 2005

Celebrating the Mass - a pastoral guide to the celebration of Mass, a companion to GIRM, publ. Catholic Truth Society 2005, *With Hearts and Minds - a resource for small groups.* publ. Catholic Truth Society, 2005

One Bread One Body, a teaching document from the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, on the Eucharist in the life of the Church. Publ. Catholic Truth Society 1998

On the Threshold – the report of the Bishops' Conference Working Party on Sacramental Initiation, Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, publ. Matthew James Pub, 2000

A New Look at the Sacraments, William Bausch, publ. Twenty-third Publications, 1983

Sacraments Revisited, Liam Kelly, publ. Darton, Longman, Todd, 1998

Diocesan Guidelines:

It is diocesan policy for children to be prepared for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion in the parish. This preparation should take place in school Year 3 (the year in which the child turns 8 years old).

Parents are expected to attend a number of sessions; firstly, so that they can understand the process of preparation that the parish is providing for the children and secondly, to understand their own particular and important role in helping prepare their children for their first and continuing reception of these sacraments. This involvement of the parents in the catechesis, and in witnessing to the place of the sacraments in the life of Catholics is regarded as a critically important element in the parish-based preparation for First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

In accordance with the mind of the Universal Church, First Reconciliation precedes First Holy Communion.

How to help and encourage parents who are not practising:

- It is important to help parents who are distanced from the Church to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold*, in the resources for catechists listed above.)
 - Introduce parents who are not practising to parents with children of about the same age who are practising.
 - Invite parents to come to the Parent & Toddler group (or other social groups for young parents and their children).
 - Do not assume knowledge and be careful not to come across as patronising.
- Invite – but do not pressurise – the parents to become involved in the life of the parish.

How to help and encourage a non-Catholic or a non-Christian parent:

- It is important to help parents to feel welcome and to appreciate the importance of belonging to the Christian community. (See *On the Threshold* in the resources for catechists listed above.)
 - Consider inviting parents to come to the RCIA sessions in the parish, where they will learn more about Catholicism (without putting any pressure on them to become Catholics)
 - Introduce the couples to other couples of mixed faith
- Consider giving them publications such as *How to survive being married to a Catholic* or *Your Faith – a popular presentation of Catholic belief.*