

The Mass

What happens at Mass, and why it matters every Sunday.

In short. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.”¹ At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of His Body and Blood, to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages.²

Key points

- Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper and commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me.”^{2,3}
- The Mass re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross: the two are one single sacrifice.^{4,5}
- In the Eucharist the whole Christ is truly, really and substantially contained.⁶
- The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist together form one single act of worship.⁷

Try this, this week

1. **Read Luke 22:14–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.** Notice that Paul hands on the same words.
2. **Go to one Sunday Mass and just watch.** Look for the two great parts: first the readings, then the altar.
3. **Arrive ten minutes early.** Sit quietly and notice what people do as they come in.
4. **If you are not Catholic, stay seated during Communion.** You are still fully welcome, and nobody will mind.

“He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me.” Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Luke 22:19–20, World English Bible

Watch out: what this does not mean

- The Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive Communion on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily.¹⁷
- Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.¹⁸

Common questions

Can I receive Communion if I am not Catholic?

Video answer: Ascension Presents, stoneandincense.com/en/questions/can-i-receive-communion-if-i-am-not-catholic/

The ordinary rule: Catholic ministers give the sacraments licitly “to Catholic members of the Christian faithful alone”, with certain exceptions the same canon lists.⁸ The Catechism quotes St. Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, that “no one may take part in it unless he believes that what we teach is true, has received baptism for the forgiveness of sins and new birth, and lives in keeping with what Christ taught.”^{9,10} Members of the Eastern Churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church (for example the Orthodox) may receive “if they seek such on their own accord and are properly disposed”; the same holds for other Churches the Apostolic See judges to be in the same condition.^{8,11} Other Christians may receive only “if the danger of death is present” or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, “some other grave necessity urges it”, and then only if they “cannot approach a minister of their own community”, “seek such on their own accord”, “manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and are properly disposed.”^{8,12} The divisions among Christians break the common participation in the table of the Lord, and the Church prays urgently for complete unity among all who believe in Him.¹³

Why do Catholics go every Sunday?

Video answer: Ascension Presents, stoneandincense.com/en/questions/why-do-catholics-go-every-sunday/

Sunday is the day of Christ’s Resurrection, and the Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice.^{14,15} So the faithful are obliged to take part in Mass on Sundays and holy days, unless excused for a serious reason such as illness or the care of infants.^{16,15}

Remember: Jesus said, “Do this.” The Church has done it every Sunday since.

Sources

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| 1. CCC 1324 | 9. CCC 1345 |
| 2. CCC 1323 | 10. CCC 1355 |
| 3. CCC 1356 | 11. CCC 1399 |
| 4. CCC 1366 | 12. CCC 1401 |
| 5. CCC 1367 | 13. CCC 1398 |
| 6. CCC 1374 | 14. CCC 1166 |
| 7. CCC 1346 | 15. CCC 2181 |
| 8. Code of Canon Law, can. 844 (vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann834-878_en.html) | 16. CCC 2180 |
| | 17. CCC 1389 |
| | 18. CCC 1385 |

Quotation above: Luke 22:19–20, World English Bible. Catechism: official text on [vatican.va](https://www.vatican.va).

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Full lesson, video and every source:
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