

GROUP
READING
GUIDE

EUCHARIST

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

— SMALL GROUP SESSIONS —

Gather. Welcome everyone to your group. Ask participants to introduce themselves if needed.

As your class or group session gets underway, begin with the Sign of the Cross. Offer an appropriate psalm or other prayer together. Ask God to bless your time together and send the Spirit to guide you.

Read. Moving around the circle in your group, read aloud the material for the particular session. Rotate readers with each paragraph. Pause for quiet reflection before entering into discussion and prayer.

Discuss and Pray. When you come to the group process notes, continue around the circle, discussing or praying as the notes direct. Use the guide's suggestions as a starting point and add your own questions, prayers, or action plans.

Finish. As you come to the end of your process, invite participants to identify the one or two large ideas that they will take away from your time together. Each participant may hear the material differently; there are no "correct" answers.

Conclude your session with a brief prayer and hospitality. Remind participants of the time and date of the next gathering.

SESSIONS

- SESSION ONE** Eucharistic Liturgy:
Gathered at the Summit
- SESSION TWO** Introductory Rites:
Entering Sacred Mystery
- SESSION THREE** Liturgy of the Word:
The Great Unfolding Love Story
- SESSION FOUR** Liturgy of the Eucharist:
Through Death to Greater Life
- SESSION FIVE** Communion Rite:
Feeding on Christ Jesus
- SESSION SIX** Concluding Rites:
Living the Liturgy

SESSION ONE

Eucharistic Liturgy

GATHERED AT THE SUMMIT

*What is home for you?
Where and who is your community?*

Have you ever taken a really long road trip? It can be a rite of passage for young people or a chance to check things off the bucket list when we're older.

The notion that life is a journey first really came to me when I encountered as a teenager the words of Welsh poet Gywn Thomas: "But the beauty is in the walking—we are betrayed by destinations." Later, in my thirties, I felt called to take my little Honda Civic on a six-month journey out west without a particular destination. It was the road trip where I came to understand myself, God, and my relationship to the world and the Church in a new light.

While I was off the grid, my religious sensibilities, my internal Catholic clock, compelled me to search out community with a familiar life-rhythm. Though I was a stranger in a strange land those months, I was able to find my way *home* each Sunday for nourishment in word, sacrament, and community. (The one place I could not find Mass was, of course, Death Valley.) Being home for the familiar sacred stories of Scripture and for the eucharistic Sunday supper with people who were my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus helped to restore me and sustain me for the days and miles that lay ahead.

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, from the Second Vatican Council, famously calls the eucharistic liturgy “the source and summit of Christian life.” Having memories of spectacular ridge hikes high in the Rockies and elsewhere, I particularly resonate with the Catholic sacramental imagery of the Eucharist as a mountaintop experience.

Imagine ascending with other valley dwellers, coming together from all directions to a high place, with a 360-degree vista, a place that allows you to step back from task-driven existence and see your life in a larger and meaning-inspiring context. As with scriptural mountain narratives, we are called, gathered, and readied at Mass to have a sacred encounter.

Mountain hikes and liturgy have this in common. We open ourselves to have an experience of grace, elevated time that helps us hit the reset button, that allows God to re-form us, and then send us renewed back into the world. Living at 12,000 feet is neither practical nor God’s plan for most of us. We go to high places in nature and to the summit that is the Mass so as to better live out our calling back at lower elevations, in our homes, workplaces, and communities.

REFLECT: *Have you ever thought of Mass as the mountaintop experience of your week? What does this do to your perception of the liturgy? Of your week? Does the eucharistic liturgy feel like home to you? What about when you are in an unfamiliar setting?*

Food for the Journey

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” MATTHEW 17:1-4A

Life is, indeed, a journey. If we're not paying attention, hitting "E" on the gas gauge, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, is a danger for us all. Taking time to fill up on the good things of life, through the Mass and otherwise, allows us to sustain at least a reasonably healthy lifestyle and hopefully feel like we're actually getting somewhere on the journey and not just spinning our wheels. This is the kind of approach life coaches encourage, making sure the debits and credits balance out over time, more or less. The trite saying is, nonetheless, so very true: *You can't give what you don't have*. If you've got nothing in the tank, at some point you'll roll to a stop on the side of the road.

God doesn't want us chronically exhausted or miserable as we make our pilgrimage in this world. As Pope Francis suggests, a "sourpuss" demeanor doesn't reflect the interior disposition of an intentional Christian disciple. Though there are occasions where life demands a great deal from us, God desires that we experience joy and fulfillment on our journey. God expects a lot from us but promises also that his abundant grace, in the end, will be enough.

In parent talks on the Eucharist, I ask why they attend Mass. (We also discuss why they might not.) And I eventually offer my three reasons for going to Mass:

For God. God is the eternal Creator and everything I have is divine gift.

God is good and deserving of my praise, my worship, my whole life lifted up and offered back to God. For all of God's goodness and mercy and love, I owe God every breath I take.

For me. I am weak and needy, who, by grace and mercy, am invited to live

a life of generous purpose and unfolding sanctity. But for me to have any hope of growing beyond my current smallness of mind and heart, I need to feed on Christ Jesus, in word, sacrament, and community.

I cannot reach my potential for goodness and beauty on my own.

No chance.

For you. You and I, gathered together at Mass, may not know each other.

But it doesn't matter. We are family. Whatever our differences, we share belief in the most profound eternal truths and are bound together in the love of Christ. I have a responsibility to stand and deliver on

my baptismal commitment to be there for you, at liturgy and in daily living. So I attend Mass and give you what I have that day. My song, my prayer, my hand, my smile. And you are there for me. There's something powerful in that, knowing we are not alone as we go. And amazingly, though I occasionally feel resistance in getting myself to liturgy, I have never ... not *once* ... left Mass saying, "*That was a mistake.*"

These seemingly distinct reasons for participating in the eucharistic liturgy actually have a perfect, organic unity. Our *summit* experience is courtesy of our *source*, God enfleshed in Jesus. And Jesus comes to us with one steadfast focus: *Mission*. He offers to us and invites our participation in the salvific mission he received from the Father. If we embrace our Christian discipleship radically, then *mission* becomes our singular reason for, well ... *everything!*

REFLECT: *Which of the above three reasons for participating in eucharistic liturgy most resonates with you and why? Where do you go (physically and otherwise) after Mass? How can you intentionally bring the graces of the liturgy with you out into the world?*

ACT: *Try to be "all in" at Mass, being fully present not only to God but those gathered with you.*

Good and gracious God, you call us home to intimately encounter you and one another in the eucharistic liturgy. Inspire us to respond to your invitation with joy and enthusiasm. May the blessings of word, sacrament, and community fill us and sustain us on our journey as baptized disciples of Jesus, our Savior.