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# Welcome

## AN INVITATION TO WORSHIP

**I**n the gift of the Eucharist, Jesus left his disciples with a way to enter into the mystery of his life, death, and resurrection. In every eucharistic liturgy, we gather with others as the Body of Christ *in community* to celebrate the Body of Christ. Noisy and harsh divisions, conflicting headlines vying for attention, viewpoints demanding our loyalty: these can distract, distress, and dull our appreciation of the unity and solidarity offered in the Eucharist. Perhaps it is time to renew our appreciation for this great gift, and to revive the connection between the Eucharist and the ways we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28) in today’s complex world.

The essential starting point for developing a strategy designed to support a Eucharistic revival in our Church must be the needs of Catholics today. Context is key. Those involved in catechesis and faith formation should make every effort to avoid an ahistorical presentation of the Eucharist that is disconnected from daily life.

With that in mind, I offer five themes that might be considered in shaping a process that invites dialogue among the faithful and reflects the personal, pastoral, catechetical, and formational challenges that are specific to our U.S. context today: the imperative to worship; the necessity of the Eucharist; the Eucharist as call to participation; the Eucharist as model of self-giving; the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Lord's abiding presence.



ONE

# The Imperative of Worship

**IN CATHOLIC TRADITION, THE EUCHARIST IS THE CENTRAL ACT OF WORSHIP THAT SUSTAINS THE LIFE OF FAITH.** Worship itself, however, is often marginalized in a culture that is driven by deep-seated commitments to individual freedom, self-fulfillment, and self-expression.

In practice, Americans, including many Catholics, view worship as one choice among many, something one does if one so desires, or has time. My predecessor in Chicago, Cardinal Francis George, OMI, suggested that many people, again including Catholics, put Sunday worship on par with other recreational choices or tasks to complete. If one has the time and inclination, one will go to church—

or, if not, choose to go shopping, do laundry, or watch football. And while our daily tasks are certainly important and may even be fulfilling, how do we help people grasp that the Eucharist is truly the “source and summit” of our lives in Christ? Further, how might we create an atmosphere in which encountering the risen Christ in the Eucharist is an essential part of our week?

If Eucharistic formation, catechesis, and revival are to happen, then all members of the Church community, as well as its leaders, must address this fundamental question of worship: Is it, in fact, optional or is it necessary? And how might those of us who are church leaders help ensure that the vital importance of the liturgy is reflected in our words and actions?

In Catholic catechesis, the Sunday obligation has traditionally had its roots in the Third Commandment, “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.” Of course, keeping holy the Lord’s Day entails worship. But perhaps the obligation and, even more, the necessity of Sunday worship is more tied to the First Commandment: “You shall not have false gods before me.” Inevitably, we will worship because there is something in our nature that moves us to awe and surrender before something greater than ourselves. The question, however, is what or whom will we worship? In a self-referential age plagued by all kinds of addictions and a (not unrelated) thick culture of consumerism, our worship can sometimes steer us away from God. The ever-present danger in this moment is idolatry. Consequently, if we are to spare ourselves the entrapments of the many idols that mark our lives, then worship

of God is necessary. Indeed, there is a Eucharistic imperative: The Eucharist is essential to our lives as Catholics. And this is a second and related theme of the vital importance of the Eucharist.

## For Reflection *and* Conversation

1. When I participate in Eucharistic worship, how is my spirit enriched and enlivened? When I experience the liturgy, do I fully grasp that I am worshiping with a community of believers, both living and dead, in the presence of God?

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2. Consider the difference between the “obligation” to worship on Sundays and the “necessity.” What does this distinction suggest? How does our communal experience of the liturgy reflect this sense of its *necessity* to our Catholic living?

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3. Which “self-referential” aspects of contemporary culture might leave me isolated and disconnected from my community of neighbors and colleagues? What aspects of contemporary culture actually support my faith and spirituality and connect me to community?

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4. How does participation in worship help me to refocus my attention on what truly matters in my life as well as in the lives of others?