

2016 EUCHARISTIC MINISTER RETREAT – ONLINE VERSION:

Welcome to the online version of the 2016 Eucharistic Minister Retreat. We have wanted to share this retreat with you for some time. In fact, it has been on our staff to-do list for several years, but like many items on our list, it kept getting pushed aside for more urgent matters. So as we share digitally, please know that we have dreamed of this moment and wanted to share it with you for quite some time. As your pastoral staff, it is our job to equip you for ministry, to enable you to live as the Church in the world. Each of you reading this has received a calling from God, a calling to distribute the Eucharist to others either at mass or by taking communion to the sick. We hope to provide you with a time to reflect on this call and to come to a greater appreciation of the gift of the Eucharist. Grab your Bible and a partner (if you have one available) and quiet yourself before you begin.

Opening Prayer:

Responding to the Call¹

Inviting God, as I recall my invitation, my call to become and serve as a Eucharistic minister,

Many feelings come rushing in.

Am I worthy enough? Who am I to do this?

Yet, Loving God, I am constantly aware of how I am surrounded by and experience –

Over and over again – your unconditional love.

You never think in those terms of worthiness and unworthiness.

You created each of us uniquely in your image.

You love me totally, unreservedly.

The feeling, the question, then, is not one of worthiness, but one of being overwhelmed,

Overwhelmed by a love that is so complete, so remarkable, so astounding,

That there aren't words to capture it.

There aren't words to say thank you.

All I can do is live it.

All I can do is be faithful.

Amen.

¹From *A Prayerbook for Eucharistic Ministers* by Janet Schaeffler, O.P., Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, 2010. Free copies of this book are available in the parish office to all our Eucharistic Ministers..

Partner Share: These questions were originally intended to be shared one-on-one with a partner. If you can, grab someone to go through this retreat with you. Consider calling a friend who is a Eucharistic Minister and going through the retreat while on the phone. Of course, the alternative is to reflect on these questions alone, either silently or by journaling. Do what is best for you at the current time.

Partner Share: Turn to person next to you. Take turns answering one question: **Why did you become a Eucharistic Minister?**

We recognize him in the breaking of the bread:

Keep your answer to that Icebreaker question in your mind for the next two hours. We will come back to it later. For now, however, we are going to read a passage from scripture. Actually, we are going to practice a form of scripture-reading called lectio divina. Some of you may already be familiar with this practice, and there are several variations on lectio divina, but I'm going to ask you to do it as follows. Read the passage through. Then pause, and I want you to call out a word or short phrase that jumped out at you from the reading. Don't analyze why it struck you. Just repeat the word or phrase and focus on it for a few moments. After a minute or two, read the passage again, and again, I want you to call out a word or phrase that struck you. Maybe it will be the same word or phrase as the first time, and maybe it will be something different. Then read the passage a third time. After this last reading, I want you to be silent for a few minutes and reflect in your own heart on what God is saying to you through this passage. So now, close your eyes, relax, and still your mind and heart in preparation.

Read the Road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35.

Partner Share: After a time of silent reflection, turn to your Sharing Partner. **Discuss what each of you felt God was trying to say to you through this passage. When did the disciples recognize Jesus?**

It is no coincidence that the disciples recognized Jesus just as he broke the bread because only days before, at the Last Supper, Jesus had instituted the Eucharist so that he could be present to us in the bread and in the cup. As Catholics, we believe that during the Eucharistic prayer, the presence of Christ comes upon the bread & the wine in such a way that they are substantially changed into the Body & Blood of Christ. Now in physical substance & appearance, they remain bread & wine. If you put them under a microscope or ran a DNA test on them, the tests would show them to be bread and wine, but the deeper reality is that they become our spiritual food & drink, our spiritual nourishment, the Body & Blood of Christ. Jesus is extraordinarily present in the ordinary. He comes to us in simple foods, dietary staples of the first century, staples of our modern tables.

While Christ is present in a special way in the consecrated bread & wine, he is actually present with us in four different ways during the mass:

Jesus is present with us in:

1. *The Consecrated Bread and Wine – as we have just discussed*
2. *The Presider – who acts in the person of Christ during the mass*
3. *The Word – John 1:1*
4. *The Assembly – Christ's Body*

It is important to recognize all the ways Jesus is present with us during the mass, but as Eucharistic ministers, we should be particularly aware of how Jesus is present with us in the Host/Cup & and in the assembly. By understanding the Church as the Body of Christ, we are able to understand the significance of what happens during the Communion Rite of the mass.

The Body of Christ gives the Body of Christ to the Body of Christ:

Cardinal Mahoney from Los Angeles in an open letter to his diocese called "Guide for Sunday Mass," wrote: *"During Eastertime the homilists talked...about what the Communion time means. The key was unfolding the wonder and thanksgiving Catholics feel toward the Body of Christ – the consecrated bread and wine, and the Church. Both have the same name. What does it mean when the Body of Christ comes forward to receive the Body of Christ?"*

Partner Share: What does it mean when the Body of Christ comes forward to receive the Body of Christ?"

What does it mean to be the Body of Christ?

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

A few years ago, I thought I had sprained my wrist. At first I thought, it's just a sprained wrist, a very unimportant part of my body. After all, the only thing a wrist does is connect your hand to your arm. The hand and the arm are the important parts. I was not concerned at all. I wrapped it up and thought it would be good as new in about three days. Three days later I was lying on my couch with my arm elevated and packed in ice and taking pain medication around the clock. The pain from that insignificant part radiated throughout my body. I could feel it in my legs and my other arm and my back and my head. And that little insignificant part of my body brought my plans and activities to a screeching halt.

Our bodies are an organic whole, and if one little part, even one that we generally don't pay attention to, is injured, then our whole body doesn't function the way it should. It is like that with the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is an organic whole, and not a single part of it can be missing without it affecting the whole Body. No member of the Body is insignificant. We are dependent on each other, and just like one part of our physical body can affect the rest of our body, one part of the Body of Christ serves the rest of the Body of Christ. As Catholics, we neither rejoice nor mourn alone because what one part of the Body feels, the whole Body feels. Each and every part of the Body of Christ is an indispensable part of the whole. Whether you realize it or not, whether you feel it or not, you are an important part of the Body of Christ.

Partner Share: What does it mean to you that you are part of the Body of Christ?

When we celebrate mass, we celebrate as the Body of Christ, and we celebrate with our Head. The Body is not separable from its Head. If we drew a picture of the Church in stick figure form, Christ would be the round circle at the top, and we would be the sticks making up his Body. Wherever the Head goes, the Body goes as well, and vice versa.

It's important to plant this image deeply in our mind because just as you or I can't take off our own heads and leave them on a table while we go do something else, we can't separate Christ the Head from his Body. This means that when we offer the gifts at the mass and we re-present the sacrifice of Christ, we place ourselves on that altar. When we say we lift up our hearts, we are making an offering of ourselves. We present to God all our hopes and fears, successes and failures, triumphs and tragedies, good deeds and bad.

St. Augustine said: *"If you are the body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are you respond "Amen" and by responding to it you assent to it. For you hear the words, "the Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be then a member of the Body of Christ that your Amen may be true."*

He means that if we are truly the Body of Christ, then we are not only a part of the offering but also a part of the sacrament which we receive in the host and cup. When we say "Amen," we are consenting to being part of this offering and sacrament. If we are going to say that we are the Body of Christ, then we need to act like Christ's Body.

Partner Share: How do you recognize others as the Body of Christ?

A Closer Look at the Eucharistic Prayer:

If you have a missalette, go get it and look up the beginning of the Eucharistic prayers. If you don't have one, just read what follows and take a look at the Eucharistic prayers the next time you are at mass.

There are several different Eucharistic prayers listed in the missalette. What they all have in common is that they begin by recounting our Salvation History (interaction between God and humanity as revealed by God). We give thanks for what God has done for humankind as revealed in the Scriptures. This thanksgiving always culminates in giving thanks for the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

As we read through the different parts of the Eucharistic Prayer, we come to the Memorial Acclamation and are reminded that this story is also our own personal salvation history: *"Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption,..."* This isn't just the story of people who lived thousands of years ago. This is also our story. We are part of the story of salvation.

A good part of the Eucharistic Prayer focuses on giving thanks for our salvation. The word "Eucharist" means thanksgiving.

Partner Share: For what are you thankful when you come to the Eucharist? Are you thankful for different things as a Eucharistic Minister than when you receive the Eucharist without serving?

Calling:

Often we downplay our roles in ministry, but have you ever considered your service as a Eucharistic minister as a calling from God? Close your eyes. Get comfortable. Picture Jesus standing in front of you. He has something he wants to say to you. Something that was written in the Gospel of John a long time ago. Open your eyes to read the following passage.

Read John 15:16a: *“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.”* Pause and repeat verse. *How does it make you feel that Jesus chose you for this role?* Pause. *Listen to him speak one more time.* Repeat verse.

Partner Share: *Think back on your answer to the first question you discussed with your partner: Why did you become a Eucharistic Minister? Do you recognize being an EM as a calling from God? As a gift to share?*

Closing Prayer:

Prayer of Preparation²

Risen Christ, receiving you, ministering you to others,

Enlarges my understanding that we become you, poured out for the world.

Now you have taught me through Eucharist, through this ministry,

That I’m responsible for the others in your family.

I commit myself to live my call to Eucharistic ministry through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

Help me to prepare in prayer with the Scriptures and the newspaper, each in hand,

Praying for healing, understanding, peace.

Help me to prepare by living more simply in possessions, in actions, in speech.

At liturgy, let all that I do be your loving voice that welcomes others.

As a Eucharistic minister, I want to treat your Body and Blood as reverently as I can.

Help me also see you in each person who stands before me, hand outstretched,

To receive you and say “amen” to you and all that you have taught.

Amen.

² From *A Prayerbook for Eucharistic Ministers* by Janet Schaeffler, O.P., Twenty-Third Publications, New London, CT, 2010. Free copies of this book are available in the parish office to all our Eucharistic Ministers.