



E U C H A R I S T

Sacred Meal, Sacrifice, Real Presence

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A DEEPER LOOK *at the* EUCCHARIST

Welcome to Bishop Robert Barron’s in-depth study on the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the Christian life.” [CCC 1324]

This guide is designed to help you apply to your life what you will learn from Bishop Barron’s look at the Catholic Tradition. The aim is to help you study, reflect upon, and act in obedience to the will of God in Christ. You will have the chance to dig into the Catholic Tradition and grapple with Scripture and the Church’s teaching as it is summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. You will also be able to use the materials provided in Bishop Barron’s presentation in order to assess and enhance your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The core of each guide is the QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING and the QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION, which will reinforce the main points made in each section of Bishop Barron’s presentation on the different aspects of the Eucharist.

Throughout the study, you will be asked to reference different Bible verses and passages. We recommend the *New American Bible* or the *Revised Standard Version*, or you can also use another acceptable Catholic translation. To answer the questions, you will need to refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which can be purchased at your local bookstore or found online at: www.scborromeo.org/lcc.htm.

Over the course of this study, we will examine three important aspects of this inexhaustibly rich Sacrament: the Eucharist as sacred meal, as sacrifice, and as real presence. These elements unite the Church across time and unite us to our fellow Catholics in every sacred liturgy.

Before we begin looking at these three aspects in detail, let’s consider the importance of the Eucharist in our Faith. The Eucharist is not a luxury, but a necessity, for without it, in the spiritual sense, we would starve to death. The fathers of the second Vatican Council expressed this truth in an oft-repeated phrase from the document *Lumen Gentium* that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. It is both the fountain from which life in Christ flows and the goal toward which it tends; it is the alpha and the omega of Christian discipleship; it is the energy without which authentic Christianity runs down.



Without the Eucharist, we could be a pious congregation of like-minded people or a society dedicated to the memory and teaching of Jesus, but we couldn't possibly be the Church. As Saint John Paul II argued in what was, fittingly enough, his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (the Church comes from the Eucharist), the Body and Blood of Jesus are not simply the sacred objects at the center of the Church's concern; they *are* the church, its lifeblood and *raison d'être*.

In one of his sermons on the Eucharist, the great English Catholic preacher Ronald Knox made the following observation. The vast majority of Jesus' commands — to love one's enemies, to turn the other cheek, to forgive seventy times seven times, etc. — have been rather consistently disregarded. However, Knox says there is one command of Jesus that has, up and down the centuries, been massively obeyed. Throughout the long history of the Church, through a whole series of dramatic successes and failures, despite the stupidity and wickedness of so many Christians, the command "do this in memory of me" has been and continues to be obeyed. It is as though Christians, in all of their sin, have realized from the beginning that the spiritual life depends upon the Eucharist the way that physical life depends upon food, oxygen, and water. And so, despite themselves, they do what Jesus told them to do in his memory.

The topic of the Eucharist is huge and multivalent. Thousands of treatises, essays, sermons, and reflections have been dedicated to it over the centuries. Its mysteries and dimensions are endless precisely because the Eucharist is Christ, the one in whom, according to St. Paul, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). One could easily construct an entire systematic theology around the central motif of the Eucharist, showing how it is intimately related to the doctrines of creation, revelation, Christology, grace, redemption, and the last things. However, Bishop Barron follows the lead of many Eucharistic commentators and focuses on three major themes: meal, sacrifice, and Real Presence.

The Eucharist is, first, the great meal of fellowship that God wants to establish with his people, the joyful bond in which the divine life is shared spiritually and physically with a hungry world. There are many examples of the sacred meal throughout Scripture. However, communion in a fallen world is impossible without sacrifice. In a universe that has become twisted and off-kilter, beset by division, hatred, and fear, the establishment of real love and justice will come only

at the price of suffering. Hence, the Eucharist is also the embodiment of Jesus' great act of sacrificial suffering on the cross at Calvary. At the Last Supper, Jesus said "take this all of you and drink from it; this is the cup of my Blood." What the disciples are invited to consume is the very self that Jesus offers in sacrifice. What we eat and drink at the fellowship meal, therefore, is nothing other than the death of Jesus, the act by which he gave himself away for the salvation of the world.

Both themes of sacred meal and sacrifice are gathered up and given full expression in the Catholic doctrine of the "real" presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Though it contains a symbolic dimension, the Eucharist is more than a symbol, more than a concoction, however moving and evocative, of our own religious imagination. In it, Jesus is present to us through his own power and in his dense objectivity as both food and sacrificial offering. There is something terrible and uncontrollable in the *reality* of the presence. The Eucharist is not our product, but our Lord, and as such, it calls us to conversion.

In this interweaving of meal, sacrifice, and Real Presence, we discover the heart of a Catholic Eucharistic theology.



5. Read I Corinthians 10:16-17 and Romans 12:4-5. How does the way we participate in the Body and Blood of Christ during the Mass define who we are as we exit church?

6. Read Luke 22:17-20 and CCC 1342 and 1345. Bishop Barron, in his book *Eucharist*, says that “Throughout the long history of the church, throughout the whole series of dramatic successes and failures, despite the stupidity and wickedness of so many Christians, the command, ‘Do this in memory of me’ has been and continues to be obeyed.”^[1] What does this say about the role of the Eucharist in the life of the Church throughout history? In other words, how are we a “Eucharistic people”?

[1] Barron, Robert. *Eucharist* (2007, Orbis Books, NY), pg. 10.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

1. Bishop Barron tells of his experience as a Eucharistic minister at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, saying that he had the distinct feeling that he was distributing the Eucharist to people who were "starving for it." Have you, during a prescribed fast or otherwise, ever felt as if you were "starving"? How did it feel when you were finally able to eat? Have you ever been starving for the Eucharist? What was it like when you were able to partake in the Sacrament? What are the similarities and differences in those two experiences?

2. Read the description of the meal presented in the movie *Babette's Feast* in the excerpt from Bishop Barron's *Eucharist* book that is provided in the online support materials (<https://www.wordonfire.org/wof-site/media/eucharistbabettesfeastpdf.pdf>). How does a feast like this serve as a metaphor of the Eucharist? Have you ever hosted or participated in a feast like the one described? As the host, what was your motivation for having the feast? As a guest, what was memorable about the experience, and how did you feel toward the host?



3. How is Babette Christ-like? In what distinct ways does she empty herself in love for her guests? In what concrete ways can you participate in even greater generosity and humility in seemingly ordinary situations?