



ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST

Disciples Called To Worship

A Pastoral Letter from
Bishop David L. Ricken, DD, JCL



Diocese of
Green Bay

Worship Jesus 2022–2025

TIMELINE

JUNE 19, 2022

Feast of Corpus Christi: *Launch of the Eucharistic Revival and Worship Jesus Years*

JUNE 19, 2022 – JUNE 11, 2023

Diocesan Years: *To inspire an encounter with Jesus Christ in the Word and the Eucharist for those involved in key formation roles in our parish and school systems.*

JUNE 11, 2023 – JULY 17, 2024

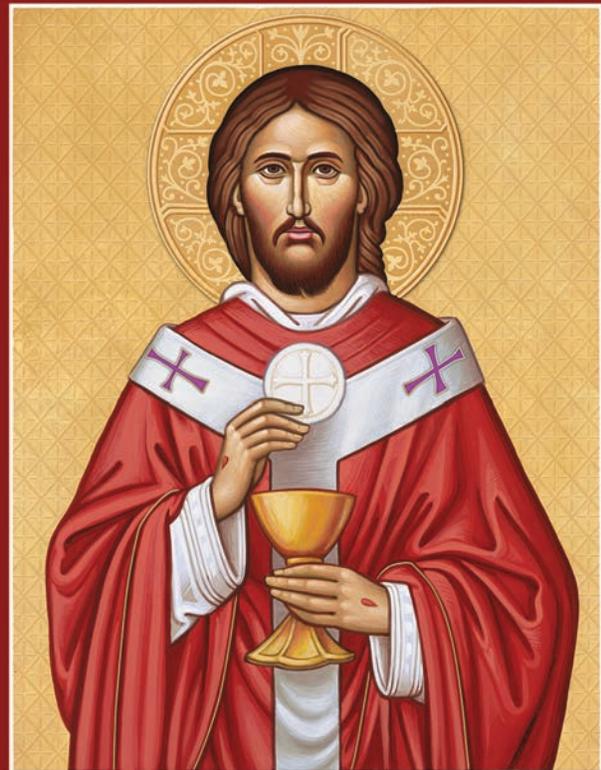
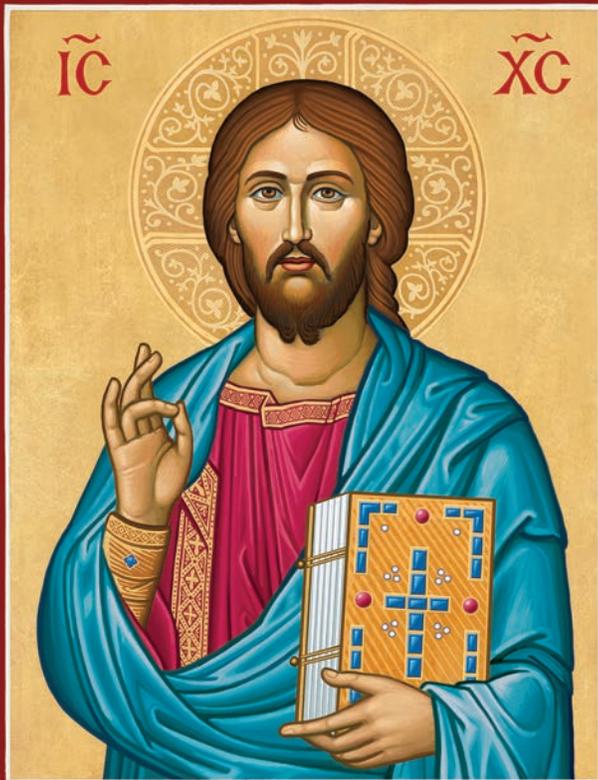
Parish/School Years: *To equip key formation leaders in our parishes and school systems, students and school staff to more fully encounter Jesus Christ in the Word.*

JULY 17–21, 2024

National Eucharistic Congress | Indianapolis, Indiana

EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESS 2025

Launch of Share Jesus: *To equip parishioners, students and school staff in our parishes and school systems to more fully encounter Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.*



ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST: Disciples Called To Worship

*A Pastoral Letter to the Priests, Deacons, Religious & Lay Faithful
of the Diocese of Green Bay*

Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL
Twelfth Bishop of Green Bay



Feast of St. Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

August 28, 2022

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Introduction

My brothers and sisters, for the past several years, we have been on our diocesan journey of discipleship called “Disciples on the Way.”

This process is not a program but a real journey together to discover, follow, worship and share the goodness of Jesus and to grow more deeply in love with him as he gives our lives meaning and hope.

“Disciples on the Way” has been like any journey, physical or spiritual — filled with joys and answered prayers and with struggles and pain. We are striving to follow in the footsteps of the Master, Jesus, to become more like him and experience the qualities of the Kingdom of God already here in our midst so that we can share them with others.

In this pastoral letter, I will review with you the journey that we as bishop, priests, parish leaders and many of the faithful have been taking together and provide an overview of where we are going in the next few years.





Part 1 — Overview of Our Diocesan Discipleship Journey

Introduction to the Journey (2014-2016)

This journey began in 2014, with the publication of my pastoral reflection entitled, “Teach My People to Pray,” and was used across the vicariates and in parishes throughout the diocese. Several types of prayer, meditation and contemplation, deeply rooted in the Scriptures and Catholic spiritual tradition, were introduced in our parishes and homes. We also asked the Holy Spirit to bless this journey into the New Evangelization that we were embarking upon. By learning to pray and deepen our prayer life as individuals and as a community, we were preparing to encounter Jesus more personally and to be exposed to the great treasury of the Church’s spiritual and mystical life.

Please see the “Discipleship Pedagogy” below, which highlights the stages of growing in discipleship and the dynamic we have been using to move our diocese to fulfil the mission, given by Jesus, to go forth, to preach the Gospel to all nations and baptize them “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:18-20).

DISCIPLESHIP PEDAGOGY

DISCOVER JESUS

“Come and See” (Jn 1:39)

Disciples: I am invited to encounter Jesus.

Missionary Disciples: I intentionally introduce others to encounter Jesus as their friend and savior.

FOLLOW JESUS

“Follow Me” (Mt 9:9)

Disciples: I am accompanied to grow in friendship with Jesus and his body, the Catholic Church.

Missionary Disciples: I accompany and form those who desire to grow in friendship with Jesus and the Catholic Church.

SHARE JESUS

“Go and Make Disciples” (Mt 28:19)

Disciples: I am sent on mission to share my love for Jesus and the Catholic Church with others.

Missionary Disciples: I equip and send others on mission to evangelize and make disciples.

WORSHIP JESUS

“Remain United with Me” (Jn 15:4)

Disciples: I respond in love to worship and praise God in the midst of the Catholic community.

Missionary Disciples: I form and support people to worship in community as the body of Christ, the Catholic Church.



Discover Jesus Years (2016-2018)

Every one of us is invited to become a friend and follower of Jesus and to realize this profound gift: ***If you were the only person who ever lived, Jesus would still have gone through all he did in his life, ministry, death and resurrection just for you.***

The Discover Jesus stage began with teaching and catechesis of diocesan and parish leaders to help people have a personal experience of Jesus and to encounter the presence of Jesus within and around them. This is an ongoing stage that deepens as we continue to build our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and share him with others in our lives.

Brothers and sisters, I long for each and every one of you to know Jesus personally, to have experiential knowledge of Jesus as your best friend, your Lord and Savior. St. Teresa of Calcutta used to worry about her sisters in the community she started, the Missionaries of Charity. She wrote in a famous address to them:



“The personal love Christ has for you is infinite. You are special to God. He is waiting for you to come to him in prayer. He wants to honor you with his Presence. Jesus loves you tenderly, you are precious to him. Turn to Jesus with great trust and allow yourself to be loved by him.”

Please, take the time to ponder over these beautiful words from Mother Teresa. I beg of you to have a simple conversation with the Lord Jesus. **He hears every word you speak and knows every breath you take. He can count every hair on your head, and he loves you personally.** If you already know him, ask him to take you more deeply into his love and into his service.

You might say, “I am not worthy.” You are right, and neither am I. But all he wants from each of us is an openness of heart that permits him to enter our lives more deeply. Pray: *“Lord, you have my permission to fill me with your presence. Come Holy Spirit, you are welcome here in my soul. Come Holy Spirit, you are welcome here.”*

Follow Jesus Years (2018-2020)

Once you know and love someone, you want to be around that person, to spend time with him or her, to find out what pleases that person and what makes that person happy. Brothers and sisters, this is what following Jesus means. This is the stage of maturing in following Jesus. This is also a stage of self-denial, commonly called *asceticism*, and our taking up the cross of Jesus in sacrifice and prayer. In doing so, we learn to say yes to the will of God in our lives. You learn to cultivate the relationship with God and others through works of love and mercy.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): “The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead” (no. 2447).

This is also the stage of *“making disciples.”* Once you know and love Jesus, you want to share that experience with others. If each Catholic made two disciples over the next few years, by introducing them to Christ and walking with them into full and active participation in the Church, the face of the world would be completely transformed! Curtis Martin, who founded the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) which serves on college campuses and universities, said, *“If even one millennial does the work of discipleship with two or three people in that young person’s lifetime, the entire world would be converted to Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church in thirty-three years.”*

Think what it would be like if each of us were making disciples! We would be more available to the plans of God for our lives and in the life of the Church. We would be better prepared to welcome Jesus when he returns for the full establishment of the Kingdom of God. *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10).

I encourage each one of you to make more space in your time and in your life for Jesus. Continue to share your faith journey and introduce a new friend to Jesus, whether it is growing through Bible study individually or in a small discipleship group at your parish, school, campus or home. The pattern can be easily explained in the following way, which has been made popular by the Cursillo movement and written about by Bishop John Doerfler of Marquette — *“Become a friend of Jesus, make a new friend and introduce your new friend to Jesus.”*

The pandemic years have been filled with challenges and opportunities. We have been learning what mobilizing for mission means in a very constricted context and under trying circumstances. That has been a blessing in this time of grief and loss. But the Lord is with us, and he is faithful.

Worship Jesus Years (2022-2025)

In what has been called the *“Discipleship Pedagogy”* (see chart on page 7), we now enter into the Worship Jesus years. Providentially, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is launching a three-year initiative called the *“Eucharistic Revival”* centered on the Eucharist. The aim of the Eucharistic Revival is to encourage **“a movement of Catholics across the United States, healed, converted, formed and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist — and sent out in mission for the life of the world.”**

In the Diocese of Green Bay, we will be implementing this priority in addition to other facets of our Worship Jesus years as we learn to know and cherish the treasure that is the Mass by focusing on the presence of Christ in Word and Sacrament.

According to several national research studies, there are four specific signs of a strong Eucharistic culture in a parish:

- Reverence for the Eucharist
- A sense of authentic Christian hospitality
- Cultivation of a deeper sense of sacred music
- Excellent preaching

During these Worship Jesus years, we will strive to undertake a journey to become parishes centered on the Eucharist so that all may come to greater devotion to God our Father and his most beloved Son, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Share Jesus Years (2025-2028)

So many people today are broken and hurting. Many do not know God or have rejected him. Our increasingly secular society thinks that it can save itself, but it cannot. By proclaiming the Gospel and the Kingdom of God, present now and still to be fully established at the time of his return, we can reclaim our identity in and for Jesus Christ.

St. Paul VI, in his document "Evangelii Nuntiandi" ("On Announcing the Good News," no. 14), writes that "the Church exists in order to evangelize." A missionary disciple is a disciple who is "sent on mission" to evangelize or share Jesus with family, friends, fellow parishioners, people in the neighborhood and the wider world and especially the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized. God willing, during these years, we will be mobilized and sent on mission as missionary disciples.

Please do not think that you have to wait and go through these years of formation to do this work. This grace comes to us all through the sacraments — especially baptism and confirmation. We have been taking our time with this formation because we are working toward systemic change, not in the nature or the teaching of the Church, but in our approach to sharing the Gospel.

A Catholic missionary disciple loves the Mass and engages in worship every Sunday. The Mass is the liturgy of heaven anticipated and entered into with every Mass on earth. This is the central act of missionary discipleship.

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Part II — Disciples Called To Worship

The Importance of Sunday

The greatest prayer of all is Mass, and Sunday Mass is that special day of the week when the whole community comes together to give honor and glory and praise to God. This is “*Thee*” day of the week. It is the first day of the week and not the end of the weekend. It is a day of rest and recreation. It is the one day when we especially rejoice in the gift of the Eucharist which is the food for our journey. Sunday is the day we go to church and come together as Church to give public witness in thanksgiving for the blessings of the week that has just passed and ask God for his blessings on the week ahead.

In many ways, the seeds of my own vocation to the priesthood were sown in going to Mass with my family on Sundays. I remember as a child that we all prepared well for Sunday. Mom and dad dressed up for Sunday Mass and made sure we did as well. We sat in the front pew so that I would behave, and we would pay attention to the actions of the Mass and come to understand it. The Mass was in Latin in those days. Now the Mass is in the vernacular, and we are able to study and pray over the readings before going to Mass. The Sunday Mass is a time to give of the substance of our time, talent and treasure to God and to the community. This is a time also to give to causes of great need, an opportunity to give of ourselves as we move out of our own particular little world and into the communal, universal and eternal world.

Sunday can and ought to become the center point to our discipleship as individuals, as families and as parishes and faith communities. The Mass is the “source and summit of our Christian life,” of our prayers and meditations and Christian living throughout the week (“*Lumen Gentium*,” no. 11).

A significant part of the purpose of the new evangelization is to invite our family members and friends to return to active practice of the faith by attending Sunday Mass. The Mass is the highest form of prayer available to human beings as it is a participation in the heavenly liturgy which is filled with abundance in comparison to our feeble attempts here on earth. “*The immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent*,” says Pope Francis in “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel,” no. 264).



Encountering Christ in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

Christ is calling each of us to deepen our prayer lives, and the most intimate way to experience this encounter is in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. This encounter in the Eucharist overflows in love and leads us to turn to him in our daily prayers. As St. Peter Julian Eymard reminds us, "The Eucharist is everything, because from the Eucharist, everything is."

The culmination of our daily prayers finds its highest expression in the celebration of Sunday Mass. We are never engaging in a private activity, even when we pray and meditate alone. We are joined mystically to other members of the body of Christ, those who have preceded us in death and our contemporaries today as we render praise and thanksgiving. In many ways, every act of prayer enters into the communal engagement of the Church, flows from the Eucharist and returns to it.

The Eucharist is "... the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (CCC, nos. 1324-1327).

The Eucharist is the most intimate way in which Jesus Christ is present to us, because he himself is the sacrament. He is fully present in the Eucharist. Every time we participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, we renew our belief in the truth that Christ gave his very life for each one of us. By receiving Jesus Christ himself, we are able to become more and more like him. This encounter is at the core of who we are as Christians, and our hope is to one day join St. Paul in saying, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

"Every celebration of the Eucharist is a *ray of light* of the unsetting sun that is the Risen Jesus Christ. To participate in Mass, especially on Sunday, means entering in the *victory of the Risen*, being illuminated by his light, warmed by his warmth."

- POPE FRANCIS

"The more ardent the *love for the Eucharist* in the hearts of the Christian people, the more clearly will they recognize the goal of all mission: to bring Christ to others. Not just a theory or a way of life inspired by Christ, but *the gift of his very person*. Anyone who has not shared the truth of love with his brothers and sisters has not yet given enough."

- POPE BENEDICT XVI

"From this moment on, *live the Eucharist fully*; be persons for whom the Holy Mass, Communion, and Eucharistic Adoration are the *center and summit* of their whole life."

- ST. JOHN PAUL II



Part III — Unlocking the Meaning of the Mass

What do Catholics mean by the word worship? Worship is right honor, praise and thanksgiving to God which we do through the public prayer of the Church — liturgy — and in our private prayer. The Mass is the perfect act of worship, offered by the Son to the Father in the Holy Spirit. We can (and we should) pray in many different ways, but only in the Mass can we offer the prayer of perfect praise and thanksgiving that we owe to God. In the Mass, it is Christ who makes the offering for us, with us and in us. He is the high priest and mediator — and the Mass is the place and time he established for the re-presentation of his sacrifice. When he took bread and wine and blessed them, he pronounced them to be his Body and Blood, and he said, “Do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19); and so we do.

When we come to worship, Jesus is present in Word and Sacrament. It is an appointment he made, and he always keeps it — not because God needs our worship but because we need to worship God.

Worship is the deepest human need, and it is a debt we owe to God. We were created in the divine image and likeness — made by God for God. In the Mass, in communion with Jesus, we receive the love the Son has known from eternity. In the Mass, in communion with Jesus, we return love to the Father in a way that is appropriately divine.

In the Mass, we are caught up in nothing less than the love of the Blessed Trinity. This is beautifully expressed in the great doxology, the words you hear at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer just before the Our Father begins: “Through him, with him, and in him, O God Almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever. Amen.”

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we abide in Jesus; and with him and through him we give glory and praise to the Father. In communion with Christ, we are united in communion with one another.

This is the love we hope to know forever in heaven. We receive it as a foretaste right now in the Mass.

Again, this is perfect worship, and it is what we were made for. If we do not worship the one, true God, we will nonetheless worship something else. We will put something in God’s place and make it an idol, giving it the best of our love and attention. For some people it’s politics; for others it’s wealth; for still others — cars, food, shopping, sex or travel. All of these are good things, but when we make any of them the most important thing it destroys us. Such substitutes can never satisfy the longings of the human heart. St. Augustine put it most memorably: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

Worship is the goal, the end to which all discipleship tends. Worship provides the only lasting satisfaction of our deepest desires.

“Do this in memory of me.” - Luke 22:19



Themes to Unlock the Meaning of the Mass

The Mass is a subject that is infinitely rich. You could fill a library with the books that have been written about it. You could fill a book with reflections on only one aspect or element of the Mass: sacrifice, sacrament, presence, ritual, history, doctrine and scriptural background. We live in a time of great development in media, and new books, videos, podcasts and articles appear every day — some very technical, others quite pastoral. Yes, we are witnessing a crisis of belief in the power of the Mass. But we are also witnessing a great and heroic response by clergy and laity.

I do not intend to reproduce all their efforts! In this section I want to consider just a few thematic keys that open up the Mass to our deeper understanding.

Paschal Sacrifice

The most important meal in the Old Testament was the Passover meal, called in Hebrew the *seder*. God established this feast as the gravest obligation: “This day will be a day

of remembrance for you, which your future generations will celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD; you will celebrate it as a statute forever” (Exodus 12:14).

The Israelites consumed the Passover as their last meal in Egypt, where they had been held as slaves for many years. When the time came, they had to make a hasty departure and there was no time to let dough rise for bread. Instead, they ate unleavened bread with a lamb roasted whole and several other deeply symbolic side dishes such as bitter herbs. Through the centuries that followed, at every *seder*, a family member (usually the father or eldest brother) would explain the significance of the particular foods as they were served in successive courses.

The lamb was essential. God had sent a final plague upon Egypt, claiming the life of every firstborn in the land. Each family of Israelites redeemed its firstborn by offering the Passover (Paschal) lamb. They were to spread the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their homes (Exodus 12:2-23), so that the Angel of Death would know to pass over them.

Ever afterward, every Israelite household was under obligation to commemorate the Exodus. At the *seder* meal, the family renewed its covenant with God. When Jesus was growing up, Joseph and Mary, as faithful Jews, celebrated the holy day as pilgrims in Jerusalem (see Luke 2:41).

It was at a Passover *seder* that Jesus instituted the Eucharist. That day he told his closest disciples, the Twelve: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). He proceeded then to celebrate the *seder* in an unusual way. He took some of the traditional elements, bread and wine, and blessed them, assigning them a new meaning. He said of the bread: “This is my body, which will be given for you” (Luke 22:19). Then, over the chalice of wine he said: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (Luke 22:20).

There are four complete accounts of this seder in the New Testament, but none of them mentions a lamb. Only in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians do we find a reason for this seeming omission. The apostle explains that Jesus himself is the lamb of the new Passover: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). In the next verse he continues: "Therefore let us celebrate the feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (5:8).

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist had enigmatically addressed him as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Thus, as he offered his Body and Blood, Jesus presented himself as the perfect paschal sacrifice. He was God's Lamb. As his life drew to a close, he would apply his own blood to the wood of the cross, evoking the blood of the paschal lamb and its life-saving purpose. The wood of the cross becomes the doorway into freedom from sin and death.

To those of us who have attended many Masses, those lines and images are very familiar: the unleavened bread, the chalice of wine, the blessings pronounced over both, the command to "Behold the Lamb of God." When we go to church, the liturgy makes clear that we are seated at the seder of the New Covenant, the Passover of the new Exodus.

The Old Testament Passover had been a great and important event, but it was still just a shadow of the Passover to come in Jesus Christ. In the old Exodus, the twelve tribes were set free from slavery and settled into a "land flowing with milk and honey." But in the new Exodus, the whole world was set free from bondage to sin and death — and allowed to enter a far greater promised land: heaven, which is an everlasting share in the life of God himself.





Heaven on Earth

So many of these themes are expressed in their most refined — and startling — scriptural form in the Letter to the Hebrews and the visionary Book of Revelation. In both books, the Mass is presented consistently as the unified worship of heaven and earth.

In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 12:1-2, we find ourselves "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" — the angels and the saints — "while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus." We find ourselves in "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven" (22-23). There, Jesus is "the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel" (24). Remember that, at the Last Supper, Jesus had referred to the Eucharist as the New Covenant in his blood. For that reason, the Mass is a moment of tremendous significance, and we should recognize it as such. Scripture tells us: "We should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire" (28-29).

The Book of Revelation seems a cryptic and puzzling book to many Christians. But it makes far better sense if read in light of the liturgy. We recognize so many of its small details as items familiar from Sunday Mass. There are priestly vestments, incense, chalices, hymns, the "Holy, Holy, Holy," the "Lamb of God." There is the "hidden manna" of the Eucharist.



Even the structure of the book reflects the Mass, which has been divided in two since the beginning of the Church. The early chapters deal with the opening and reading of the scrolls. The later chapters deal with the banquet of the Lamb of God.

The author of the Book of Revelation, St. John, presents heaven as a sacred banquet that lasts for eternity. Yet that banquet does not begin when we die. It begins when we go to Mass, whenever we go to Mass and wherever we go to Mass, because the Mass is the one place where — really, truly, substantially and sacramentally — heaven touches down to earth and God feeds us with the Bread of Life. In Revelation, we see the heavenly-earthly liturgy as the perfect act of thanksgiving (see Revelation 4:9, 7:12 and 11:17). In the Lamb, we see the perfect paschal victim, whose feast is everlasting.

Jesus implied all of this in his declaration that the Eucharist is his body (Luke 22:19) and his real presence (John 6:26-65). If Jesus is truly present, then heaven is there. Wherever the King goes, he is attended by his court. We acknowledge this so many times when we attend the liturgy. In the Penitential Rite, we recognize that we stand in the presence of “all the angels and saints.” As we begin the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest observes: “And so, with angels and archangels, with thrones and dominions, and with all the hosts and powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim ...”

This is how the great figures in Church history have experienced the Mass. In the fourth century, St. Athanasius told his congregation: “My beloved brethren, it is no temporal feast that we come to, but an eternal, heavenly feast. We do not display it in shadows; we approach it in reality” (“Festal Letters;” Letter 4, para. 3).

In reality! That is why we speak of the *real* presence. We are going to see the King of Kings, and this should instill us with awe. St. John Chrysostom, in the fifth century, urged his people to cultivate a profound sense of eucharistic amazement. And yet they were reluctant even to show up for Mass! He said to them: "Look, I beg you: a royal table is set before you; angels minister at that table; the King himself is there ... [Christ] has invited us to heaven, to the table of the great and wonderful King, and do we shrink and hesitate, instead of hastening and running to it?" ("Homilies on Ephesians," Homily 3).

The saints I invoke are not outliers. They represent the mainstream of Christianity, and the doctrine they express has been the constant faith of the Church since the beginning. It is still our faith today. You can read it in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

"In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory" (CCC, no. 1090; see also 1136 and 2642).



Such has been the devotion of Christians since the first generation. But have you and I brought it home? Have we made it our own? Listen again to St. John Chrysostom, who speaks for the united, ancient Church: "When you see the Lord sacrificed, and laid upon the altar, and the priest standing and praying over the victim, and all the worshippers empurpled with that precious blood, can you then think that you are still among men, and standing upon the earth? Are you not, on the contrary, immediately transported to heaven?" ("On the Priesthood," Book I). To the degree that you and I do not remember this, we must be converted.

To be with the King, Jesus Christ, is to be in heaven. It might not look or feel like our ideas about heaven. As bishop, I regularly hear complaints from people that their parish church is too hot in the summer or too cold in the winter. At the consummation of history, those imperfections will presumably be remedied. In the end we shall see things as they are and see God as he is (1 John 3:2). Now, however, we behold Jesus with eyes of faith, and that is itself a privilege greater than we could ever have imagined. It is a profound gift.



God is the ultimate source
of every good thing.
Worship always involves
thanksgiving.

Greatest Act of Gratitude

It is common courtesy for us to say “thank you” for any gift, and God is the ultimate source of every good thing we’ve had in life. God’s gifts to us are beyond counting — in both the natural and supernatural orders — and so our debt of gratitude is beyond our capacity to express. We owe him something more than common courtesy. We owe him a debt that only the Mass can repay, because there Jesus himself is making the offering — and Jesus himself is the offering. Worship always involves thanksgiving.

“Eucharist” is one of the earliest terms applied to the Mass. Its Greek root means simply, “thanksgiving.” When Jesus takes bread in the Gospels, he gives thanks and, having given thanks (*eucharistēsas*), he blesses and distributes the bread. This happens when he feeds the multitudes (Matthew 15:36, John 6:11). It happens, most importantly, at the Last Supper (Luke 22:17-19). In remembrance of Jesus, it happens for the Apostles in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles as well (Acts 27:35).

If you and I take a moment to reflect, we will conclude that each of us has been generously blessed in life. Even those who are struggling mightily must acknowledge that they have been blessed in many ways. In fact, many of our struggles involve blessings that we once had, but then lost. We are always on the receiving end of many blessings, but we rarely appreciate them while we have them. We rarely take the time to give thanks. The Mass is the perfect time to do so, as Jesus and St. Paul did.

Some people keep a journal of blessings. Others find other ways to give thanks every day. People who do this report a steady improvement in their attitude and their appreciation for the gifts of life. Gratitude moves them along the path of transformation to a much greater joy and happiness.

When we want to acknowledge blessings, we should instinctively look to the Giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). God gives us his gifts through many mediators. He gives us life through our parents. He gives us work through our employers. He gives us affection through our friends. We can and should thank the people who bring us blessings great and small, but we should always remember to thank God. He is the ultimate source of all our blessings.

This is one of the primary purposes of the Mass. At least once every week we give gratitude to the One who sustains. At Mass we hear these words: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. ... We offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice."

Gratitude is beneficial to us in many other ways. It helps us acquire seemingly unrelated virtues, such as humility. When we are habitually thankful, we recall even our greatest strengths as gifts received from others: from parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, siblings, managers and friends — but ultimately from God. When we stop to calculate how much we've been given, we begin to recognize our own littleness and unworthiness. Then we are moving into the true spirit of worship.

The "School of Thanksgiving"

In the Mass, we join Jesus in returning thanks to God with, in and through Jesus. With him our lives also become living sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving as this quote from Wilfrid Stinissen reminds us: *"The Eucharist is a school of Thanksgiving. There we learn again to give thanks, not only for the beautiful and delightful, but also for the difficult, for suffering and death. United with Jesus, we give thanks for his death, which has become our salvation and thereby we give thanks also for our own death. ... The Eucharist can teach us to give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:18)"* ("Bread That Is Broken," page 7).

Gratitude is at the root of our obligation to attend Mass on Sunday. In the New Testament, Sunday is the Lord's Day, and Christians have always honored it as such. The week belongs to the Lord, and we recognize that symbolically by giving him the first day. In the early hours of that day, we cultivate our personal and communal relationship with our Creator. We are not just obeying a rule — although attendance at weekly Mass is a serious obligation and must be fulfilled. We are enjoying a privilege. It is an honor to be counted as one of God's people. It is a blessing to have the freedom to gather as a community of believers. It is good for us to remember these things — and give thanks.

Every day is a gift. Every breath is a new gift to us; the use of each of our senses is a gift. For all these we give thanks in the Mass. God promises none of us the next day or even the next breath. We are not entitled to these; they are pure gifts from the Creator. When we recognize the sheer gratuity of each day and breath, we become more appreciative to the author and dispenser of the gift of life. Counting our blessings every day is a tremendous practice and habit. Saying "thank you" diverts our focus from the things we lack and want — and places it instead on the good things we already have.

If you visit the country of Greece today, you will hear storekeepers express gratitude with a single word: *Eucharisto!* When we keep in mind the origin of the word "Eucharist," we'll appreciate one of the primary reasons we go to Mass: to say thanks!



Sacrament of Communion and Charity

In the very early days of the Church — in the second century, in North Africa — a convert named Tertullian wrote a book to explain the Catholic faith to his unbelieving neighbors. He tells them about Sunday worship, but also about the effects it has on the worshippers. The greatest effect is love.

He speaks of the collection, where Christians voluntarily make donations, and he details the many charitable activities funded by it. The collection is used, he says, “to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons” (“Apology,” chap. 39). The treasury of the Church is used to care for real needs of real people.

The Mass is not about money — not now, and not in the second century. Tertullian observes: “It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, *how they love one another*” (“Apology,” chap. 39). In Tertullian’s narrative, this is the love that flows from the Mass. In the Mass, people are drawn into communion with Jesus — and, in Jesus, they experience communion with one another. That is why St. Paul can call the Church the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

In the Eucharist, Christ gives everything he has: his body, blood, soul and divinity. He holds nothing back; not just from the Church, but from each of us individually. We are obliged, then, to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). We are accountable to the life we have received in the Eucharist. As we have experienced mercy, we must dispense mercy. As we have known kindness, we must show kindness. As we have received charity, we must extend charity. The Eucharist is the model and the measure for our own self-giving.

Not everyone can do everything. Even in the ancient Church, people did what they could, not more — but not less, either. The Christians who visited the mines and the prisons were probably not the same ones who were burying the dead or tending the orphans. Everyone did something. Everyone found a way to share out the infinite love he or she had received in the Mass. That is how the Church converted the Western world in a relatively brief span of time. Christians, fortified by the love of God in the Eucharist, went out and loved their neighbors. The love received at Mass overflowed into the world, and it changed the world. So we can be certain that success in evangelization is not only possible. It’s proven. It’s been done.

As St. Peter Julian Eymard reminds us, “How kind is our Sacramental Jesus! He welcomes you at any hour of the day or night. His Love never knows rest. He is always most gentle towards you. When you visit him, he forgets your sins and speaks only of his joy, his tenderness, and his Love. By the reception he gives to you, one would think he has need of you to make him happy.”

It’s all about love, and it starts at Mass.

So let’s explore now in this next section an overview of the parts and structure of the Mass, which will help us to appreciate the “why” behind the “what.”

Part IV — Overview of the Structure of the Mass

As all of these themes suggest, the Mass is the greatest event in human history; and that is true of every Mass. It may appear humble to our human senses. Other events may excite our emotions or entertain us to a greater degree. But none of that witnesses against the truth and power of the Mass, especially when we come to more fully understand the Mass and how it shapes us into the body of Christ. Many of Jesus' contemporaries, after all, were unimpressed by his ordinariness. He was from the unimportant village of Nazareth, they said. His parents were poor. But those who looked with eyes of faith recognized him for what and who he was. They saw that he was the fulfillment of the oracles of the Hebrew prophets. Informed and attentive, they knew that they must follow him.

If we consider the Mass as those first disciples considered Jesus, we will see its divine meaning and purpose. It is not a random assortment of gestures and texts. It is the greatest work of art, composed by God himself and carefully arranged by saints throughout two thousand years of history. When we grow in our understanding of the parts of the Mass, we'll grow also in amazement — that God has loved us so much!

In the pages that follow, I will walk through the parts of the Mass, explaining their origins and symbolism. Each segment could be the subject of a book by itself! But I will be necessarily brief and instead urge you to take up further study in the many quality resources that are available today.

The Structure of the Mass

The Mass is divided into two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These have different and complementary purposes. In the Liturgy of the Word, the faithful are instructed from the books of Sacred Scripture. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Church celebrates the rite established by Jesus at the Last Supper — the sacrificial offering of his Body and Blood.

The Mass is divided into two parts:

the Liturgy of the Word + the Liturgy of the Eucharist



The Liturgy of the Word

Introductory Rites

Though we may start our gathering with a hymn, the Mass itself begins with a few short, traditional prayers. The first is the Sign of the Cross. This is a most ancient prayer, including words and a gesture. In a homily given by Pope Benedict XVI on the 150th anniversary of the apparition at Lourdes, he called it “a kind of synthesis of our faith,” because it calls upon the Trinitarian name of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as it acknowledges the means of our salvation (the cross).

The early Christians loved this prayer and believed that they were tracing the mark of God upon their bodies — the gesture prefigured by the Prophet Ezekiel (9:4) and mentioned several times in the Book of Revelation (7:3, 9:4 and elsewhere).

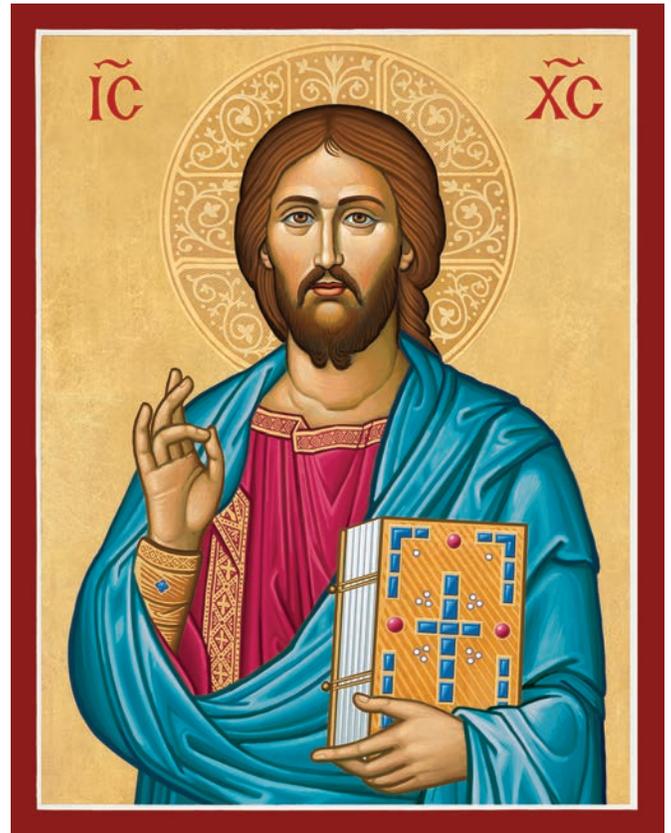
In second-century North Africa, Tertullian wrote:

“We Christians wear out our foreheads with the Sign of the Cross.”

The priest then extends a simple greeting, invoking God by name and drawn from the words of Scripture. He may say simply, “The Lord be with you” (see Ruth 2:4), or something more elaborate, like “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (see 2 Corinthians 13:14).

The Penitential Rite follows. This is a necessary stage in our worship — an examination of conscience regarding our acts since the last time we received Communion or the sacrament of reconciliation. We call to mind any sins we have committed in that time; and using the prayers of the Church — traditionally called the *Confiteor* (“I confess”) and the *Kyrie* (“Lord, Have Mercy”) — we ask forgiveness.

Through the Mass itself, God grants us forgiveness for all our venial sins. If we are aware of having committed any mortal sins, we should remain at Mass but not go forward to Holy Communion and take the first opportunity we can to go to confession where we can set ourselves right with God.



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We should be aware of the difference between mortal and venial sin (see 1 John 5:16-17; CCC, nos. 1854-1864). The best way to acquire this awareness is through regular sacramental confession. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that one must confess serious sins at least once a year (CCC, no. 1457).

On Sundays and other special days, the Mass will proceed with the prayer called the Gloria ("Glory to God"). This ancient prayer begins with the prayer of the angels at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14). It is a beautiful and exultant prayer of praise to God.

These introductory rites are very brief. In fact, you probably spent more time reading about them just now than you'll spend praying through them at most Masses! They conclude with a prayer called the Collect, which focuses on a spiritual theme for the Mass and prepares the congregation to hear the word of God. We come next then, to the heart of the Liturgy of the Word.

The Readings and Homily

One of the most important reasons we gather is to hear the Scriptures proclaimed and let them form our hearts and minds. It is not enough to be present. We should be attentive. All of the books of the Bible are inspired by God. They are his Word in human language. And *only* the books of the Bible are inspired by God. Other books may be good or even great, but only Scripture is divine. Thus, only these books may be proclaimed in the Mass.



At every Mass, Catholics hear a great amount of Scripture. On Sundays and special feast days, there are four readings. The first is usually drawn from the Old Testament; the second usually comes from the New Testament letters. In between those two readings is a responsory from the Book of Psalms; this is often sung by a psalmist, who is often also the cantor, and the congregation.

The final and most important reading is from the Gospels, the divinely inspired accounts of Jesus' life. The ritual gives us many indications of the Gospel's unique importance. First, only a member of the clergy, a priest or deacon, may proclaim the Gospel during Mass. We preface the Gospel reading with an *Alleluia* — a Hebrew exclamation meaning "Praise the Lord!". We also stand for the Gospel's proclamation, though we were sitting through the earlier readings.



One of the most important reasons we gather is to hear the Scriptures proclaimed and let them form our hearts and minds.

Afterward, we address a prayer directly to Jesus Christ, because we believe he is specially present when the Gospel is read aloud at Mass. On weekdays, the number of readings is reduced from four to three.

There is nothing random about the selections chosen from Scripture. They have been carefully chosen by the Church and arranged to unfold over the seasons of the year. They are prescribed in a book called the Lectionary. Christians (and Jews) have been using lectionaries since ancient times. They ensure that our readings are varied and always relevant, and that no parts of the Bible are neglected in our worship.

The current Catholic Lectionary (in use since 1969) prescribes readings over a three-year cycle. At the end of the cycle, we start over from the beginning. The Lectionary is like a course of studies we repeat many times throughout our entire lives. It ensures that we will be familiar with the Bible — if we are listening! — and that we'll grow in our understanding as we advance in years.

When all the readings have been proclaimed, the priest or deacon may deliver a homily — a sermon commenting on the readings and applying them to everyday life. After the homily, the congregation will (on Sundays and special feast days) recite the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed. Both are ancient professions of faith — compact distillations of basic Christian doctrine that remind us of the truths from which all our beliefs flow: the unity and Trinity of God, the person and natures of Jesus Christ and the mission and authority of the Church.

We conclude the Liturgy of the Word with the Prayers of the Faithful (sometimes called the Universal Prayer). These are brief petitions recited by a reader, or most appropriately, the deacon, to which the congregation responds with a prayer. The content of the petitions will vary, but they often include intercessions for the Church, the world, the local community, public authorities and for people who face particular difficulties.

There is a noticeable shift between the first “half” of the Mass (the Liturgy of the Word) and the second (the Liturgy of the Eucharist). The first is primarily concerned with the delivery of information — the imparting of a message. That is the purpose of the readings, the homily and the creed. The Liturgy of the Eucharist, however, focuses primarily on sacrificial action. It is to this that we now turn our attention.





The Liturgy of the Eucharist

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Church fulfills Jesus' command to "do this in memory of me" — to offer his Body and Blood under the appearances of bread and wine. Jesus' sacrifice was "once for all" (Romans 6:10, Hebrews 7:27, 1 Peter 3:18). His sacrificial gift of himself is not repeated, but rather, re-presented. The "once" was long ago but, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, it is immediately present "for all," in every place and in every age.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is divided into three sections: the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer and Holy Communion.

The Preparation of the Gifts

Now the priest or the deacon prepares the altar, sometimes assisted by altar servers. The gifts to be offered — wine and unleavened bread — are brought to the altar. The community, joined together as the body of Christ, presents their gifts to be offered by the priest as he elevates them with a prayer of blessing. He may do this silently, while the congregation sings a hymn, or he may recite the prayers aloud, with the people responding, "Blessed be God forever." The blessings he prays are based on formulas that have been used by God's people for thousands of years.

The priest pours the wine into a sacred vessel, called a chalice, along with a small amount of water. The mixture of wine and water signifies many things: the blood and water that poured forth from Jesus' side after his death (John 19:34), the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ and the communion of our weakness with Jesus' strength. At this time, too, the congregation may take up a collection of donations, to be used for upkeep of the church and relief for the poor. These monetary gifts are placed at the foot of the altar.

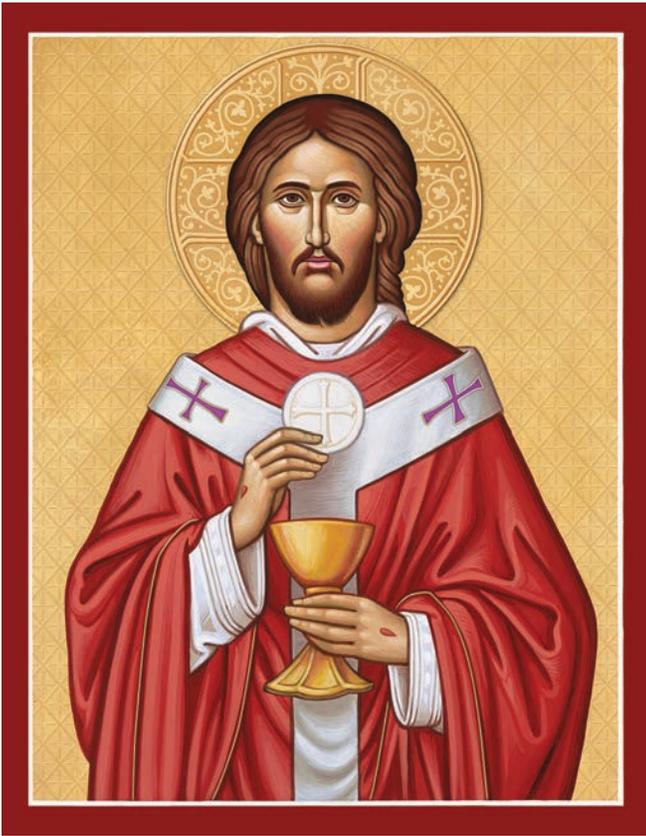
The Eucharistic Prayer

This is the centerpiece of the Liturgy of the Eucharist — and indeed of the Mass. All of the other parts we have discussed (the prayers, the readings, the recitation of the creed) may be incorporated into other services and events. The Eucharistic Prayer, however, may be used only at Mass; it is the prayer that gives the Mass its distinctive character.

It is preceded by a brief prayer called the Preface, which concludes with the singing or recitation of the *Sanctus*: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts ..." The *Sanctus* appears twice in the Bible, once in the Old Testament (Isaiah 6:2-3) and once in the New Testament (Revelation 4:8). In both places, it arises from the seraphim in heaven as they worship before God's throne. Sung now, the *Sanctus* signifies the union of heaven and earth that takes place in the Mass.

The Eucharistic Prayer itself is a long prayer and may be offered only by an ordained priest. He prays as the representative of the worshipping community, and he prays "in the person of Christ," having been conformed to Jesus through his ordination — the sacrament of holy orders. At this point of the Mass, it is no longer the priest who offers the sacrifice, but Jesus Christ through the ministerial priesthood of the priest who "makes the offering of his own Body and Blood." Christ is both priest and victim in the Mass.

The congregation also has been conformed to Christ in the "common priesthood," which every Catholic has received in baptism. Thus, every baptized person at Mass has the power to unite his or her life — and everything in it — to the gifts on the altar.



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The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) spoke of this in a most powerful way: “For their work, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily labor, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life if patiently borne — all of these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (see 1 Peter 2:5). During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord’s body. Thus as worshippers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God” (“Lumen Gentium,” no. 34).

That is the power of mere attendance at Mass! We consecrate the world to God. We offer it with the gifts of bread and wine on the altar; and with those gifts the world is transformed. During the Eucharistic Prayer, those humble gifts — “fruits of the earth, works of human hands” — become what one of the early Christians, St. Ignatius of Antioch, called the very “flesh of Jesus Christ” and the “blood of God.”

Within the Eucharistic Prayer, Jesus, the High Priest, through the ministerial priest at the Mass, prays the “narrative of institution” which is found in three of the Gospels — Matthew, Mark and Luke — as well as in St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Jesus told his disciples to “do this in memory of me” (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25), and so we do as he demands. The action remains his, and so it is not merely a psychological act of remembrance. It does what he says it does. It makes the bread become his Body and the wine become his Blood. In the words of the old catechisms, the action “effects what it signifies.”

The Church’s ritual book, the *Roman Missal*, includes several Eucharistic Prayers, and a priest may choose any one of these. Some are much longer than others. Some are very ancient in their origins; and some have been composed only recently. Some have special purposes. There is a Eucharistic Prayer, for example, composed especially for Masses with many small children. There are Eucharistic Prayers for reconciliation, to be used in times of war or social unrest.

All of the Eucharistic Prayers have certain elements, or movements, in common. There are words of thanksgiving. There is an *epiclesis*, or invocation of the Holy Spirit, when the priest extends his hands over the gifts of bread and wine.

There is the institution narrative, already mentioned above. There is a movement of *anamnesis*, which is Greek for “remembrance,” when the priest calls to mind the life, death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus. There are intercessions. And there is a final prayer of “doxology” — the term comes from the Greek words for “a word of praise.” At the doxology, the priest elevates the gifts and refers to them in personal terms: “Through him, with him, in him ...” In other words, he praises the Eucharist as Jesus, because he is really present in the sacrament. The congregation joins in this praise by responding “Amen.” This conclusion is sometimes called “The Great Amen.”

The Communion Rite

Christ comes to us not merely to stand at a distance, but to be united with us — each and every one of us — to mingle his flesh and blood with our flesh and blood. That is what takes place in the Mass's Communion Rite. We begin this portion of the Mass by praying in the words Jesus taught us: the Lord's Prayer, the "Our Father." We dare to call God "Father" because we are one with Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God. It is our Communion with Jesus that makes this possible. In this prayer we ask for "our daily bread," which the first Christians interpreted in a eucharistic sense. In the Mass, God gives the Church its sustenance.

We follow the Lord's Prayer by exchanging a Sign of Peace. This varies from culture to culture. In some places in the world, people bow to one another. In our country, it has been customary to shake hands. We make peace in this way because Jesus asked us to do so. In the Sermon on the Mount, he said: "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

We proceed then to sing the Lamb of God (in Latin, *Agnus Dei*). This is an ancient hymn based upon the cry of St. John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We identify this "Lamb," as the Bible does, with the eucharistic Jesus. Remember the words of St. Paul: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast ... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Afterward, the priest breaks the host, as Jesus broke the unleavened bread at the Last Supper, and he elevates it, saying "Behold the Lamb of God ..." The congregation responds with another line adapted from the Gospel: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed" (Matthew 8:8).



Then, our path is clear. If we are practicing Catholics — not conscious of having committed any mortal sin since our last confession and fasting for at least one hour — then we may approach the altar for Holy Communion. “One is not to celebrate Mass or receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin without having sought the sacrament of reconciliation and received absolution. As the Church has consistently taught, a person who receives Holy Communion while in a state of mortal sin not only does not receive the grace that the sacrament conveys; he or she commits the sin of sacrilege by failing to show the reverence due to the sacred Body and Blood of Christ” (“The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church,” no. 47).

If we cannot fulfill these requirements, we may remain in our pew and silently pray for a “spiritual communion,” inviting Jesus to come into our hearts and remain there. Such prayers are efficacious — and underused! They are appropriate to pray at this time of the Mass, when needed. But they may also be prayed at other times, outside the Mass, and they should be.

We proceed to Holy Communion and should go forward reverently, concentrating on the importance of the event. If we are receiving the Host on the tongue, we should open our mouths wide and make our tongue easy to reach, moving it forward. If we are receiving in our hands, we should place our dominant hand below the other, and then use our dominant hand to move the host to our mouth. We should be careful to consume any crumbs that remain on our hands, remembering that every small particle of the Host contains Jesus in his entirety.

We consume the Host. We swallow the Host. We accomplish the impossible: the finite contains the infinite. Almighty God comes not only to dwell among us, but within us, in the closest communion he can bring about. When we are in heaven we will not be closer to him, though then “we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). At that moment we should speak to Jesus intimately, silently, in our hearts — praising him, thanking him and telling him our deepest concerns. This is powerful prayer, capable of transforming our minds and our lives. We should give our attention to Jesus, as much as we can. If there is a hymn, we can sing it to Jesus. If there is not, we can relish the silence.

What breaks the silence is a brief concluding prayer, then a blessing and then a dismissal. It can seem strange, after many long prayers that are rich in poetry, for us to reach the goal — Holy Communion — and then be sent away so abruptly. But the Mass takes its name from that dismissal. The final words of the Mass in Latin are “*Ite, missa est.*” — which, roughly translated, are “Go, it is sent.” From *missa* we derive many other English words, and all of them are relevant: Mass, dis-missal, mission, commission.

By calling its supreme form of ritual prayer “the Mass,” the Church tells us that we are fortified by Bread of Angels in order to do the work of Christ in the world. We are sent out to evangelize our neighbors and sanctify the world through our work. In our thoughts and our actions, we must bring heaven to earth, just as Jesus does in the Mass. We have no time to waste!

In our thoughts and our actions, we must bring heaven to earth,
just as Jesus does in the Mass.

Part V — Rediscovering the Power and Beauty of the Mass

My brothers and sisters, if you had been the only person who ever lived, Jesus still would have died on the cross for you; just for you. All because of his great love for you, Jesus still would have celebrated the Supper of the Lamb, endured the passion of the bloody death on the cross and risen from the dead, just for you!

During these Worship Jesus years, I encourage each and every one of you, whether in leadership as a priest or pastor, or a deacon or pastoral leader, parishioner or liturgical minister, or as an individual, or a husband or wife, a single person or married couple, as a family, young or old, child or adolescent, **I invite all of you to discover personally the love of Jesus for you, expressed perfectly in the sacrifice and the celebration of the Holy Mass.**

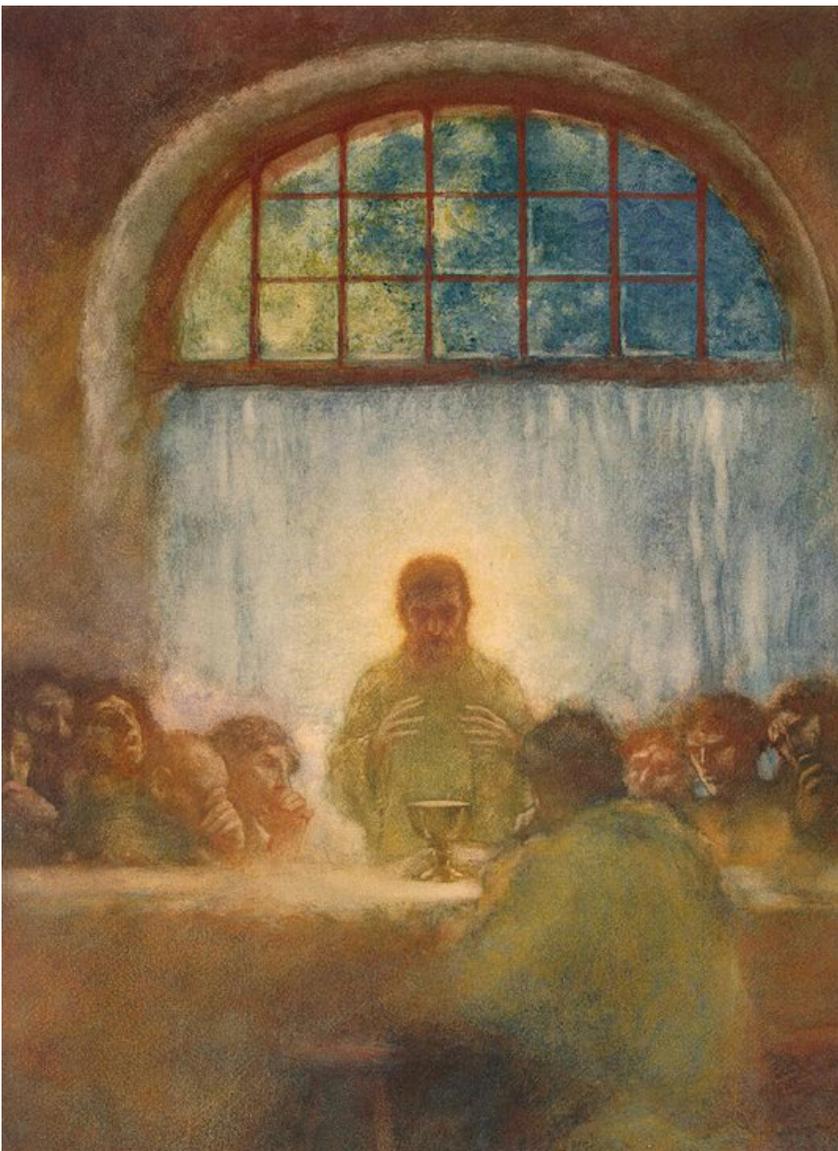
I invite you to discover, perhaps for the first time, or to re-discover the beauty of the Mass as the re-entry into the mystery of this greatest of loves. Jesus celebrated the first Mass with his disciples on Holy Thursday evening, the night before his passion, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. It is through all of this that he left the great legacy of the Mass as our point of

entry into this great and terrible beauty of the sacrifice and celebration of the Mass, the Lord's Supper. To know the Mass is very critical to understanding this mystery more deeply.

My invitation to each and every one of you is to enter into the Mass, whether daily and/or every Sunday, more deeply and with greater intentionality.

In this section, I want us to focus our hearts and minds on how to pray the Mass, how to love the Mass and how to more intentionally live the Mass — in our homes, parishes, communities and the world.

My invitation to each and every one of you is to enter into the Mass more deeply and with greater intentionality.



Praying the Mass

As with all things in life, the best things are the simplest and the most obvious. They are often so obvious that we miss them entirely! The treasure of renewal of the Church is already right in our midst. We do not have to invent something new or add more trappings to the Mass. We need to celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper with greater awareness and presence of mind and heart. We need to bring our very best to this re-entry every time we celebrate the Paschal Mystery; which means a re-entry into the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Word through whom all of creation of the universe and all of its parts have been established, the Word become flesh. The Eucharist is bread that is flesh and flesh that is GOD. Now that is a *mysterium tremendum*, a tremendous mystery, that is at once highly attractive and at the same time earth shattering and very terrifying!

The way into living and celebrating the Mass well is to enter each Mass with greater presence of mind and heart to the words that we are saying or are being recited publicly and the actions that we are engaging in at the present moment. In other words, as much as possible, we need to *pay attention* to what is going on at every moment and become absorbed in the flow of the Sacred Liturgy by being truly present to the presence of God in each and every word and action. We can do this with calm and prayerful attention to what is unfolding. In this simple, present moment exercise of attention, we can begin to notice the presence of the Holy Spirit as he vivifies the sacred words and actions in which we are so humbly engaged — moment by moment, word by word, action by action. Whether as priest celebrant, newly initiated Catholic in the pew or a veteran of Mass attendance for a whole lifetime, it is never too late or too early to enter into the beauty of the Mass.

We must keep in mind that the Mass is all about offering to the Father the gifts of our lives on each given Sunday or every day at daily Mass.

We give all glory and honor in, through and with Jesus Christ as he offers himself, his own body, as a sacrificial lamb, in union with the Holy Spirit.

Every time we enter into the Mass, we are not repeating the sacrifice but entering into the one self-same sacrifice offered by Christ in the Paschal Mystery. We are giving worship to the Father, along with, in and through Jesus Christ himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. What an honor, an honor that none of us is up to, but nonetheless the Lord Jesus has instructed us to "*do this in memory of me,*" each from our own place or role in the Sacred Liturgy.



The Mass is all about offering to the Father
the gifts of our lives.

I am convinced that if we approach the Sacred Liturgy with greater focused attention, and with a deeper humility before the sacred action that we are entering into and performing, the Lord will honor our intentions and work to draw the very best out of our intentions, words and actions and transform us in the process. **The Mass is not entertainment, it is a drama, a Divine drama that does not entertain but mystically moves us deeper into the reality of the Lord's self-giving sacrifice offered to the Father for the salvation of all mankind; each and every person and each and every age of human history.**

In the document of the Second Vatican Council, the term, "*ars celebrandi*" is used which means the "art of celebrating." In the briefest terms, this means the manner by which the priest, inspired by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Church, uses the ritual's various elements (words, gestures, vestments, music, etc.) to manifest the living face of Christ to the praying assembly. The minister of the sacrament cannot celebrate the sacraments like a robot, nor can his creativity carry him off script. Each and every one of us, and especially the priest and other ministers, are servants of the liturgy. The art of celebrating the sacraments is the act of allowing the Holy Spirit to animate the soul of the Church's liturgy.

Our responsibility is to be clear and transparent in the celebration of the Mass. **The Mass speaks and unites and imitates Christ crucified, risen and triumphant as he gives praise, worship and honor to the Father.** Praying the Mass will help each of us gathered for Sunday worship to do that which we are called to do as *Disciples Called To Worship*.

Preparation For Mass

Any important event requires preparation, and the Mass (as we have seen) is the most important event of all. Applicants don't just show up for a job interview. They prepare. Buyers don't just show up to close on the purchase of a house. There's much to do in advance. Well, since the dawn of Christianity, believers have been preparing for Mass in one important way: the sacrament of reconciliation. The instruction in the *Didache*, from the first century, could not be clearer: "But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure." We still do this today.

We need to do this, because we all sin and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), and even the righteous fall quite often (Proverbs 24:16). We should consider going to confession monthly if we would like to grow in holiness, and the Church obliges us to go at least once a year. It is important for priests to use their homilies to remind the faithful of this tradition — to make themselves available generously to hear confessions — and to take advantage of the sacrament themselves. When we go to Mass, we are approaching the holy of holies, the judgment seat of heaven, the real and substantial presence of God. We should prepare ourselves accordingly. "The obligation to attend Mass each Sunday, the Lord's Day, on which we commemorate the Resurrection of Jesus, and on other holy days of obligation, is therefore a vital expression of our unity as members of the Body of Christ, the Church" ("*The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*," no. 28).

The Mass is a powerful prayer. We are obligated to attend it every Sunday and on certain other holy days specified by the Church. Catholic tradition gives us many ways to enkindle and renew the fire of eucharistic devotion and there are five practices that I want to mention. These "five alive" practices will help us to come truly alive in the Mass.

Part VI — “Five Alive” Practices To Live the Mass

1. Mass

For most Catholics, our primary contact with the life of our parishes will be at Sunday Mass. It is our opportunity to encounter Christ in the sacrament of Eucharist. As such, the Mass is a powerful instrument for evangelization, and every effort should be made to cultivate an environment that fosters intentional discipleship during Sunday Mass. Attention and care should be especially directed to the welcoming process, the music, the preaching and to the integration of families with young children into the community. Attention should also be given to bridging the gap between Sunday Mass and a life of discipleship. This means connecting Sunday to our everyday life.

The National Directory for Catechesis published by the USCCB calls all “people to a more effective integration of daily prayer in their lives, especially the ancient practice of praying the psalms and the Church’s Liturgy of the Hours, contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ through the rosary and a greater reverence of the Eucharist through adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.”

Worship involves not only participation in Sunday Mass but also the celebration of the sacraments. It is in participating in the sacraments and the sacramentals of Catholic life that credible disciples emerge. Keeping Jesus at the center of our lives finds its fullest expression in the Mass.

I am reminding all Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday. It is an obligation which carries the weight of serious sin to miss Mass on Sunday. If you have missed Sunday Mass, please bring this to confession before your next Sunday Mass. Also, do try to go another day or two if possible. It can be a very different experience — quieter and more focused. Some people even have the habit of attending every day. Try increasing your Mass attendance by even one Mass a week for a time, then add another one. You will be amazed at how your desire for Jesus increases! Regular Mass attendance strengthens our faith through the Scriptures, the Creed, other prayers, sacred music, the homily, receiving Communion and being part of a faith community. Invite someone to Mass — a personal invitation can make all the difference to someone who has drifted from the faith or feels alienated from the Church.

What brings joy is the love of Christ and the realization that we are a part of the glorious living Christ. We are a part of his mystical body and, therefore, we are never alone! We must not look upon Sunday simply as a day of obligation but as a day to celebrate the resurrection with joy. It is not a day to oppress us but to liberate us, as the Gospel of Mark reminds us that “the Sabbath was not made for man, but man for the Sabbath” (2:27). We must always celebrate Sunday Eucharist with the joy of Christ whom we encounter as the one who loves and saves us.



2. Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a Latin word, which means “divine reading” or more often translated as “spiritual reading,” and describes a way of reading the Scriptures where we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. Scripture offers first-hand access to the word of God and tells the story of human

salvation. Catholics can pray the Scriptures through a method known as *lectio divina* to become more attuned to the word of God. Also, make prayers of spiritual communion when you can. Here’s a short, traditional one: *I wish, my Lord, to receive you, with the purity, humility, and devotion with which your most holy mother received you, with the spirit and fervor of the saints.*

A key means to reinvigorate the life of our parishes, our communities and our own prayer lives is this ancient practice of *lectio divina*. In “*Evangelii Gaudium*,” paragraph 264, Pope Francis reminds us that “the best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.”

The first stage in the process is *lectio* (reading), where we read the word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it can take root in us. You allow the words and or verses to capture your heart as God speaks to your heart.

The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection), where we think about the text that we have chosen and ponder it in our hearts so we can take from it what God wants to give us. Through the Scripture passage, you may imagine yourself at the scene, images, sounds and thoughts all come to mind to draw you even more deeply into the passage.

The third stage is *oratio* (response), where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the word of God. This stage moves you to a prayerful response as you converse with the Lord.

The final stage of *lectio divina* is *contemplatio* (rest), where we let go of our own ideas, plans and meditations and we simply rest in the word of God, a holy rest which renews and sustains us. Through this phase your attention is centered on God, and you allow him to refresh and restore you for a new beginning.



Lectio Divina — Praying with Scripture

This ancient tradition is a beautiful way of praying with the Bible and is critical to the New Evangelization, so that our members are energized continuously on the word of God, both at Mass and also in our own personal or group prayer.

The *Lectio Divina* Process

1. *Lectio* — Reading

- Select a passage from Scripture.
- Read through the passage a few times and allow the words to capture your attention and your being. In this way, begin to listen as God speaks to your heart.

2. *Meditatio* — Meditation

- During this phase, seek to acquire the mind of Christ and learn what he wants to reveal to you.
- As you read, certain words, phrases or even thoughts might have jumped out at you. Take some time during this stage to consider why these phrases and words might have jumped out at you.
- Imagine yourself as an observer in the Scripture passage, reflecting on what you see, hear, taste, touch and to what and whom you are drawn to.
- Consider how the words relate to your life today. At the end of your prayer, stop writing and speaking. Focus on the Lord, rest in him and enjoy being close to him in love.

3. *Oratio* — Praying

- During this phase, pray from your heart and respond to what Jesus has spoken to you in the holy words of Scripture.
- Allow the grace of these words, images and thoughts to move you to a heartfelt prayer.
- Ask Jesus personally for help, guidance, insight and direction. Find yourself talking to him naturally.

4. *Contemplatio* — Contemplation

- During this time, find yourself resting with and in the Lord. Rest in his presence so that the very core of your being is stilled.
- Center your attention on God.
- Allow the word of God to stir within you the courage, strength, energy and guidance for a fresh start and a new beginning.

“There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in his word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call *lectio divina*. It consists of reading God’s word in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us.” – Pope Francis (“*Evangelii Gaudium*,” para. 152)

“I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church — I am convinced of it — a new spiritual springtime.”

— Pope Benedict XVI (Address Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of “*Dei Verbum*”)

“It is especially necessary that listening to the word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”

— St. John Paul II (“*Novo Millennio Ineunte*,” para. 39)

3. Eucharistic Adoration

The importance of Eucharistic Adoration is shown in the fact that the Church has a ritual that governs it called the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction. This is



an extension of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which occurs in every Mass: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb."

Many people wonder what to do in Adoration. The word of God gives us the answer. In the psalms we are urged to "be still and know that I am God." What is important is that you are here. Give yourself the gift of peace and quiet with the King of Peace in Eucharistic Adoration. St. Catherine Labouré reminds us that silence is a masterful teacher, for it is in the stillness that God speaks. She said, "Whenever I go to the chapel, I put myself in the presence of our good Lord, and I say to him, 'Lord, I am here. Tell me what you would have me to do.' ... And then, I tell God everything that is in my heart. I tell him about my pains and my joys, and then I listen. If you listen, God will also speak to you, for with the good Lord, you have to both speak and listen. God always speaks to you when you approach him plainly and simply."

Find a church that keeps its doors unlocked and make occasional (or regular) visits to the tabernacle, where the Eucharist is reserved and Jesus remains truly present. If you hold any position in the Church — if you are a priest, deacon, teacher, catechist, lector, cantor — I strongly recommend that you consider taking up the practice of a daily Holy Hour before the tabernacle. What you're doing is so important, you need the grace that comes only from sustained and disciplined, intensely Eucharistic prayer.

St. Manuel González García, a Spanish priest and bishop who was recently canonized, reminds us that "Jesus in our tabernacles is not simply present in the way that a statue would be present, but rather he is present as a real and living Person. Therefore, we are called to respond to him, not just with our physical presence, as though we were a candle or a decorative piece of furniture, but rather we should strive to be present before him with our rational faculties and our entire living being. That is to say, there should be both a corporeal and a spiritual presence. If Jesus is present in the tabernacle with his eyes looking at me, then when I am before him, I should be looking at the sacred Host with my physical eyes as well as with the eyes of my soul — looking into the interior of that Host."

I would encourage you to bring your deepest desires to the Lord in Eucharistic Adoration, he is waiting for you. My desire is that in the Diocese of Green Bay, through the gift of our Eucharistic Adoration chapels, there would be prayers offered for an increase of vocations every hour of every day. Because vocations, especially to the priesthood, are coming from areas of the diocese where the faithful gather around the Eucharist in perpetual prayer, I am calling for a renewed commitment from our Eucharistic Adoration chapels to be open and available to all.

4. Confession

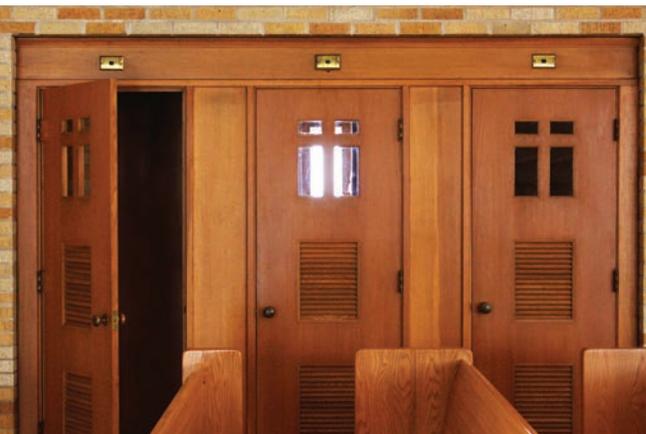


The sacrament of reconciliation contains the elements of conversion, confession and celebration. It is this sacrament which changes us, challenges us and equips us as disciples of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to reach out to others and transform the world for Christ. St. John Paul II says in "Novo Millennio Ineunte," paragraph 37, that "it is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance."

The sacrament of reconciliation brings us into intimate contact with Jesus where we are liberated from the sins that trouble our hearts and minds and experience God's unconditional forgiveness and mercy so that we can be a living fountain of forgiveness and mercy to others. When this liberation happens through the sacrament of reconciliation, we are better disposed to proclaim the Gospel with both words and deeds.



A renewed approach to the sacrament of reconciliation should be encouraged in the parish with an explicit invitation to those who regularly attend confession, those who attend sporadically and those who do not attend at all. Spend time reflecting on the reasons why people may not come to confession. They may not have a personal relationship with Christ or a sense of sin, they may need more catechesis regarding the sacrament, they may be fearful because they have not been in many years, they may have had a bad experience in the past or the times that confession is available may be limited and not convenient. Like going to Mass, we can find strength and grow deeper in faith through participation in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.



Confession urges us to turn back to God, express our sorrow for falling short and open our lives to the power of God's healing grace. This sacrament forgives the injuries of the past and provides strength for the future. If you have not been in some time, please do not be afraid. The Lord is waiting for you in the sacrament of reconciliation. All Catholics are obligated to go once a year, and Advent and Lent are particularly important times to go to confession. If you go a couple of times a year, consider going more frequently.

5. The Rosary

The rosary is a Scripture-based prayer and begins with the Apostles' Creed, which summarizes the great mysteries of the Catholic faith. The Our Father, which introduces each mystery, is from the Gospels. The first part of the Hail Mary is the angel's words announcing Christ's birth and Elizabeth's greeting to Mary. St. Pius V officially added the second part of the Hail Mary. The mysteries of the rosary center on the events of Christ's life. There are four sets of mysteries: joyful, sorrowful, glorious and — added by St. John Paul II in 2002 — the luminous.



According to our Catholic tradition, the rosary was instituted by the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. In the 13th century, the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Dominic (founder of the Dominicans), gave him a rosary and asked that all Catholics pray the Hail Mary, Our Father and Glory Be prayers. If you have not prayed the rosary in some time or pray it every day, this is a great time, with all of the unrest in the world to rededicate ourselves to praying the rosary.

I began praying the rosary as a child on my mother's knee. As I've grown in my spiritual life, I have noticed that the Blessed Mother is so solicitous. When you ask her something, she always answers. I haven't had one prayer that wasn't answered. It wasn't always what I thought or what I'd hoped, but almost always it was better than what I had asked for! Praying the rosary is a powerful way to restore order to your own spiritual life and a great booster to the quality of the spiritual life in the home when the entire family prays together. Pray the rosary as often as you can, individually or with your family or small group.

There are many people who no longer know how to pray even the vocal prayers of the Church. Many do not know how to pray the rosary. Please share this beautiful prayer form with others, especially those who do not know the basic meaning of the rosary or how to pray it. This too is a way to witness and share in the joy of forming disciples. There are people in our parishes who would love to pray the rosary and teach others to pray.

"FIVE ALIVE" PRACTICES

Mass | Lectio Divina | Eucharistic Adoration | Confession | The Rosary



Part VII — Sent Forth as Disciples on Mission

The Sunday Mass is the anchor of our lives as Catholics, and it is a great privilege to hear the word of God every Sunday and every day if we wish. This is a powerful nourishment of our mind, our soul and our daily activities. As we strive to follow Jesus better every day and every week, to receive him body, blood, soul and divinity, we must recognize that this is an unfathomable privilege. To celebrate with the body of Christ, the Church, the people of God in our parish and in our communities, is a great gift. To be united with Catholics celebrating the same Mass throughout the entire world is indeed a great privilege!

As I mentioned earlier, the Mass comes from the Latin word *“missa”* and carries within it the mission which we are entrusted with. Mass concludes with the following options for dismissal, which make it quite clear that we are being sent forth on mission: *“Go forth, the Mass is ended.”* *“Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”* *“Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”* *“Go in peace.”* Our response is always the same: *“Thanks be to God!”* What other response is appropriate except to glorify and thank God, who sends us out to witness in our homes, our places of work and our communities?

When we hear the words, *“Go forth, the Mass is ended,”* our work as missionary disciples begins anew. With these words, we share in the mission of Christ by bringing forth his message to the world. The dismissal at Mass invites us to respond to the Lord’s command to *“go and make disciples”* by the faithful witness of our lives — by reaching out to the lost, the least and the last.

The Mass ends — but it is then that our work in the world begins.

We can do this, but only if we call upon the Holy Spirit.



The Inestimable Role of the Holy Spirit in the Sacred Liturgy

A couple years ago, the bishops of Region VII (Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin) and I had a chance to meet personally with Pope Francis. During our time together, I shared with him the progress we are making in our effort to build a culture of missionary discipleship. He encouraged me (and us) to “lean into the Holy Spirit,” listening for where the Spirit is guiding us. He also said that we need to remember it is not so much that we bring the Holy Spirit to others; the Holy Spirit is already there. We simply help the people realize how close God is to them already and help them respond to God’s love. I remember how powerful his words felt at the time.

There are challenges ahead my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, but we should never forget that 2,000 years later the Holy Spirit is right here with us, in the constant love of Jesus. What a great comfort it is, knowing that the Holy Spirit is guiding us. In fact, there are many people of advanced wisdom and experience in the spiritual realm who believe that we are in a similar place as that of those early followers. **We are being poised by Divine Providence for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit — one that calls each of us to a deeper repentance of sin, one that will illuminate our minds and transform our hearts with the “fire of Divine Love” and compel us forward to witness to others the power of God in our lives.**

I pray this is true!

So with confidence, let us again entrust ourselves to the care and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That old hymn we sing during Pentecost seems much more poignant and efficacious during these times:

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, and in our hearts take up Thy rest; come with Thy grace and heavenly aid, to fill the hearts which Thou hast made, to fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

We call upon the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts anew as we go forth as missionary disciples.

We entrust all our efforts to the Blessed Mother, Mary, Mother of the Eucharist.



Mary, Mother of the Eucharist



My mother was a convert to the Catholic faith, and my dad often said she embodied the heart of the faith. Yet it was my father who carried within him the living tradition of Catholicism as a cradle Catholic, and together they passed on this living legacy to their children. One of her favorite sayings was, "I had my children as gifts from God to love and cherish." She did that for each one of us. When I was a child, I had fairly serious asthma. That was in the days before atomizers or other aids to asthma attacks.

In the middle of an attack, mom would take me in her lap and pray the rosary. Her loving embrace and her dependence on the gift of peace provided from the Blessed Mother helped me to recover my breath and gave me a deep peace. What a gift from a mother! I am a blessed man!

It's not surprising that my mom looked to Mary as her guide.

The mother of Jesus is the very first and the very best of disciples. She was the first to know him along with St. Joseph. She bore him, gave birth to him and raised him. She taught and instructed him, but she also learned from him about the Father and the love of the Father. She was the first of disciples and our model of enduring love, patient self-sacrifice and joyful witness. She is the most effective of all witnesses since she, from heaven, is still leading people to her son.

One of the lessons that we can learn from Mary is the importance of placing God's will before our own. We see this most clearly in the Annunciation, when Mary says "yes" to the will of God to bear his Son, Jesus. We know this could not have been easy for a young woman who discovered she was miraculously with child, yet Mary set aside what may have been her own desires to do what God asked of her. Mary's willingness to place God's will before her own also allowed her to put other's needs before her own, which is the definition of love. Her decision to sacrifice and surrender to God is something that we can all learn from.

In learning to accept God's will, Mary also learned to embrace challenges and difficulties. We see this in the circumstances of Jesus' birth when, after a long journey, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable, among the animals. We also witness Mary's strength at the crucifixion when, despite seeing her son tortured and brutally murdered, she remains at Jesus' side until the very end.

In learning how to love the Mass and to worship God the Father from whom all blessings flow, the Blessed Mother serves as our witness and guide. Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, teach us to love the Eucharist, as much as you love your son, Jesus, and his body, the Catholic Church.

We are uniquely blessed by having the only approved Marian apparition in the United States. The appearance of the Blessed Mother to a young Belgian woman immigrant in 1859 near Champion, Wisconsin, was officially approved by the Church in 2010. Since then, the numbers of pilgrims have increased from around 10,000 per year to nearly 200,000.

Many parishioners in our own diocese have never been there for a visit. I look forward to the day in the near future when each parish will bring a busload or more on pilgrimage to seek the intercession of Our Lady of Good Help for themselves and their parishes. Our Lady gives great gifts of personal peace and a greater desire to pray and, often, even heals people physically. What a gift!

We entrust all of our efforts to Our Lady of Good Help who is so present to us in the Diocese of Green Bay.

St. Peter Julian Eymard, Apostle of the Eucharist, *pray for us.*

St. Norbert, Apostle of the Eucharist, *pray for us.*

St. Clare of Assisi, *pray for us.*

Blessed Columba Marmion, *pray for us.*

St. Manuel González García, *pray for us.*

Blessed Carlo Acutis, *pray for us.*

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, *pray for us.*

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

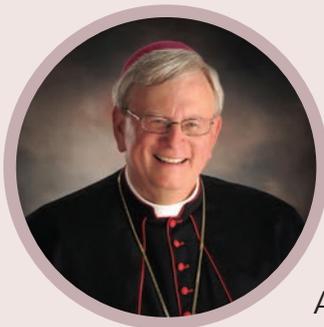


Bishop David L. Ricken, DD, JCL



Our Lady of Good Help,
pray for us!

Bishop David L. Ricken



David Laurin Ricken was born Nov. 9, 1952, to George William "Bill" and Bertha (Davis) Ricken in Dodge City, Kansas, the second of three children, including Mark and Carol. He was ordained a priest on Sept. 12, 1980, and on Jan. 6, 2000, he was ordained to the Episcopacy for the Diocese of Cheyenne at the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. Pope Benedict XVI named Bishop Ricken the twelfth bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay on July 9, 2008, and he was installed as bishop on Aug. 28, 2008, at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral in Green Bay.

Since childhood, Bishop Ricken has held a particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as to St. Francis of Assisi. He enjoys teaching the basics and leading people to reflect more deeply upon the beauty of the Catholic faith, especially through contemplative prayer and the Prayer of the Heart.

Recommended Resources

The Catechism of the Catholic Church | The publication of the universal Catechism of the Catholic Church has solidified and clarified the Church's position on our treasured tradition since the days of the early Church and the flowering of the catechetical mission of the Church over the centuries. The Catechism has been a unique gift to the Church and will continue to bear much fruit for the future. A complete and accurate exposition of Catholic doctrine, it contains the essential and fundamental context of the Catholic faith in a full and summary way. It presents what Catholics throughout the world believe, celebrate in the sacraments and live in morality, always centered in prayer. Also, see the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (USCCA) — each chapter includes stories, doctrine, reflections, quotations, discussion questions and prayers to lead the reader to a deepening faith.

"The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church" from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops | This document was developed by the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and was approved by the full body of the USCCB at its November 2021 General Meeting. These reflections on the Eucharistic faith and practice of the Church are meant to encourage Eucharistic renewal in parishes and communities and can be used for parish catechesis, as well as for individual personal meditation, reflection and study. Revive your Eucharistic faith by reflecting on the gift of the Eucharist in Part I and on the response of the faithful to this gift in Part II.

"Becoming Eucharistic People: The Hope and Promise of Parish Life" by Timothy P. O'Malley | We can't just talk about Christ's presence in the Eucharist; we have to believe it, celebrate it and live it both individually and as a community of the faithful. And we must cultivate a culture in our parishes that treats Real Presence not only as an important Catholic doctrine, but also as the most important part of parish identity. This book outlines four essential facets of a Eucharistic parish culture: liturgies of joyful reverence that celebrate the gifts of diversity; formation that engages the mind, imagination, understanding and will; a rich life of popular piety and the vibrancy of the domestic Church; and a commitment to solidarity with your neighbor.

"Behold the Mystery: A Deeper Understanding of the Catholic Mass" by Mark Hart | Popular speaker and author Mark Hart helps Catholics see the Mass for what it really is: a heavenly banquet, a wedding feast, in which heaven and earth meet. In his engaging style, Hart guides readers toward a deeper understanding of the Mass, its roots in the Jewish Sabbath, its sacrificial character and its signs and symbols. As we are told to go in peace, he inspires us to see the Mass as a place to be nourished so that we can further Christ's mission in the world. In the last part of the book, Hart provides pithy answers to frequently asked questions, such as, "Why can't I leave right after Communion?" or "Why did the words change?" Finally, Hart offers 10 things we can do to get more out of Mass.

"A Biblical Walk Through the Mass: Understanding What We Say and Do in the Liturgy" by Dr. Edward Sri | Dr. Edward Sri takes us on a unique tour of the liturgy. Based on the revised translation of the Mass, this book explores the biblical roots of the words and gestures we experience in the liturgy and explains their profound significance. This intriguing look at the Catholic Mass is sure to renew your faith and deepen your devotion to the Eucharist.

"The Bishop of the Abandoned Tabernacle: St. Manuel González García" by Victoria Schneider | St. Manuel felt called to the priesthood at the age of 12. After his ordination in 1901, he was sent to preach at a church that he found to be unclean and abandoned. There, praying before a tabernacle covered in dust and cobwebs, with torn altar cloths and oil dripping onto the floor from the sanctuary lamp, he decided to dedicate his life to providing for Jesus's needs in the tabernacle. This poor, abandoned tabernacle taught the young priest more about the love of Jesus than his years of theological study. It marked his entire life from that moment. This saintly bishop will help you to receive Holy Communion more fervently and to love Jesus more deeply in Eucharistic Adoration.

“Bread That Is Broken” by Wilfrid Stinissen | The Holy Eucharist is the Church’s most precious treasure, the source and summit of her worship and life. The Church is built upon and around the Eucharist. In this book, a renowned spiritual writer and Carmelite priest shows how receiving the Lord in the Eucharist has profound consequences, because the Eucharist is not only the great sacrament that brings about oneness with Christ and with the faithful but also the foundational norm for Christian behavior. The author explains that the Church must therefore guard this precious gift. She correctly challenges the faithful to approach the Eucharist with great reverence and a clear conscience so as not to receive the Lord unworthily but to become his sacrificing and serving people.

“A Devotional Journey into the Mass: How Mass Can Become a Time of Grace, Nourishment, and Devotion” by Christopher Carstens | Explaining the spiritual meaning behind the signs and symbols, words and actions of the Mass, author Christopher Carstens teaches you spiritually-enriching ways to enter the church building, make the Sign of the Cross, pray the Opening Prayer, listen to the Readings, prepare your soul at the Offertory, participate in the Eucharistic Prayer, receive Communion and even respond to the Dismissal.

“Eucharist” by Bishop Robert Barron | In this engaging theological treatise, Bishop Robert Barron offers a reintroduction to the ancient meaning and power of the Eucharist. Through a threefold analysis of the Eucharist as sacred meal, sacrifice and Real Presence — distinct but tightly interwoven motifs grounded in Scripture — Bishop Barron draws readers into the profound truth flowing out of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper: “Take, eat; this is my body ... Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant.” We are not merely invited to remember Jesus or imitate his moral example; we are invited to the grace of communion — and ultimately, to the realm of God — by eating and drinking the very self that he offers in sacrifice.

“Eucharist: Pathway to Transformation, Healing and Discipleship” (DVD/Book) by Dr. Mary Amore Weaving Scripture, stories and easy-to-understand presentations of Catholic teachings together, this three-part series is designed to invite listeners to encounter Jesus in the Eucharist in three ways: by being interiorly transformed, spiritually healed and renewed in discipleship. Whether you struggle to find a reason to go to Sunday Mass every week or you want to reawaken your love for Jesus in the Eucharist, this powerful one hour with renowned speaker Dr. Mary Amore will lead you to discover new meaning in the Eucharist for your everyday life.

“Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper” by Dr. Brant Pitre | This book shines fresh light on the Last Supper by looking at it through Jewish eyes. Using his in-depth knowledge of the Bible and ancient Judaism, Dr. Brant Pitre answers questions such as: What was the Passover like at the time of Jesus? What were the Jewish hopes for the Messiah? What was Jesus’ purpose in instituting the Eucharist during the feast of Passover? And, most important of all, what did Jesus mean when he said, “This is my body ... this is my blood.”?

“Living the Mass: How One Hour a Week Can Change Your Life” by Fr. Dominic Grassi and Joe Paprocki Grassi and Paprocki show how each part of the Mass relates to our baptismal call, closing the chasm between Sunday Mass and daily life. This newly revised edition takes into account the changes in the new *Roman Missal*, yet rather than isolating those texts or commenting on them, the authors have integrated the changes seamlessly into the book. This assimilation ensures that readers stay focused on the core message of the book — how the Mass as a whole changes us — rather than become sidetracked by the Missal’s new texts. Ideal for the countless Catholics who attend Mass simply out of habit, for the many who haven’t been to Mass in a while or for anyone seeking to join the Catholic Church, “Living the Mass” compellingly demonstrates how the one hour spent at Mass on Sunday can truly transform the other 167 hours of the week.

“Understanding the Mass” by Mike Aquilina | Mike Aquilina not only answers practical questions about this central act of Catholic worship, but also walks you through the Mass, explaining the meaning behind the prayers and practices. You may be surprised by how much you’ve missed in your understanding of the Mass. Find answers to such questions as: What is the Real Presence? What are the Jewish roots of the Mass? Why is the Mass a sacrifice? Why do some people receive Communion on the tongue and others in the hand?

Photo & Art Credits

Cover: Photography by The Karma Group (2019)

Inside Cover: Christ the High Priest and Byzantine Christ, courtesy of MonasteryIcons.com.

Page 5: Employee Recognition Mass on the diocesan campus (Sarah Gietman, 2017).

Page 6: St. Mary Parish in De Pere celebrates its 150th anniversary (Sam Lucero; Nov. 30, 2019).

Page 8: St. Teresa of Calcutta (Wikimedia Commons).

Page 9: Photography by The Karma Group (2019)

Page 10: Photography by The Karma Group (2019)

Page 12: Photography by Sarah Gietman (2016)

Page 14: Bishop David Ricken joined Fr. Alvan Amadi and members of St. Mary Parish's Rosary Society in Algoma for a 150th anniversary Mass (Sam Lucero; Feb. 23, 2020).

Page 15: "The Sacrificial Lamb" (1670-1684) by Josefa de Óbidos.

Page 16: "The Disputation of the Holy Sacrament" (1509-1510) by Raphael.

Page 17: Transitional Diaconate Ordination at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral (Sam Lucero; May 19, 2019).

Page 18: Bishop David Ricken joined Hispanic Catholics from St. Philip Parish in Green Bay for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Sam Lucero; Dec. 12, 2016). The dedication and blessing of the new church at Holy Trinity Parish in Oconto (Sam Lucero; Jan. 27, 2019). Photography by The Karma Group (2019).

Page 19: Bishop David Ricken joined Hispanic Catholics from St. Philip Parish in Green Bay for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Sam Lucero; Dec. 12, 2016). Photography by The Karma Group (2019).

Page 20: Photography by The Karma Group (2019)

Page 22: Bishop David Ricken celebrated a Jubilee Year Mass for Youth and Youth Ministers at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral during the diocese's 150th anniversary year (Sam Lucero; Jan. 14, 2018). Notre Dame Academy in Green Bay hosted a Mass for nearly 2,000 Catholic school students, faculty and staff, followed by a presentation by internationally-known speaker, Chris Stefanick (Sam Lucero; Sept. 17, 2019).

Page 23: Icon courtesy of MonasteryIcons.com. St. Nicholas Parish in Freedom held an Ash Wednesday Mass for St. Nicholas School students and parish members (Sam Lucero; Feb. 26, 2020).

Page 24: Members of SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Green Bay and students from St. Thomas More School, located on the parish campus, gathered for Ash Wednesday Mass (Sam Lucero; March 6, 2019). Rural Life Day Mass at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Waupaca (Sam Lucero; April 10, 2021).

Page 25: Dcn. Tony Abts elevates the Book of the Gospels at the Mass of Ordination to the Permanent

Diaconate at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral (Sam Lucero; May 18, 2019). Fr. John Girotti preaches at Rural Life Day Mass at St. Mary Magdalene Church in Waupaca (Sam Lucero; April 10, 2021).

Page 26: Bishop David Ricken celebrates Catholic Schools Week Mass for students from St. Mary School in Luxemburg and Holy Trinity School in Casco at Holy Trinity Church (Sam Lucero, Jan. 29, 2020).

Page 28: Icon courtesy of MonasteryIcons.com.

Page 29: Fr. Walter Stumpf celebrates Ash Wednesday Mass at St. Nicholas Parish in Freedom for St. Nicholas School students and parish members (Sam Lucero; Feb. 25, 2020). Confirmation retreat and Mass with Fr. Mark Vander Steeg at St. Bernard Parish in Green Bay (Sarah Gietman; 2017).

Page 31: "The Last Supper" (1897) by Gaston de La Touche.

Page 32: A Mass of thanksgiving was celebrated at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral, 150 years to the day that the Diocese of Green Bay was created (Sarah Gietman; March 3, 2018).

Page 34: Sun shines through windows of an incense-filled St. Bernard Church in Green Bay during Mass (Sam Lucero; Sept. 10, 2008).

Page 35: Photo from Unsplash.com. Photo from Bigstock.com.

Page 37: The Quad Parishes of Green Bay held a procession with the Blessed Sacrament from St. Jude Church to Annunciation Church for the feast of Corpus Christi (Sam Lucero; June 2, 2018).

Page 35: Photography by the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Green Bay. Photo from Unsplash.com. Photography by Sarah Gietman (2016).

Page 39: Photo from Unsplash.com. The annual Chrism Mass at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral (Sarah Gietman; March 22, 2016). Photo from Unsplash.com. Photography by Sarah Gietman (2016). Photo from Unsplash.com. Photo from Bigstock.com.

Page 40: Photography by The Karma Group (2019).

Page 41: "The Pentecost" (1620-1625) by Juan Bautista Maíno.

Page 42: "The Virgin Adoring the Host" (1852) by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres.

Page 40: Stained glass image at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion, Wisconsin. Portrait of Bishop David Ricken by Harmann Studios (2013).

Special thanks to The Compass for the use of their photos, which has helped us tremendously to illustrate the life and faith of those in the Diocese of Green Bay.



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