



## Pope Francis on the Holy Mass

Because sharing at the Eucharistic Table is a sign of unity in the Body of Christ, only those in spiritual union with the Catholic Church may receive Communion. To invite others to receive Communion implies a belief and unity which does not exist.

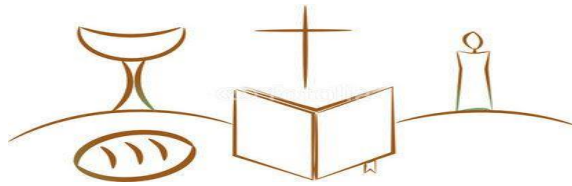
A central theme that the Council Fathers emphasized was the liturgical formation of the faithful, indispensable for a true renewal. It is precisely this renewal as well as the purpose of this series of catecheses that we are beginning today: to grow in our understanding of the great gift that God has given us in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a wondrous event in which Jesus Christ, our life, makes himself present. Participating in the Mass “is truly living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord. It is a visible manifestation: the Lord makes himself present on the altar to be offered to the Father for the salvation of the world” (Homily at the Domus Sanctae Marthae, 10 February 2014).

The Lord is there with us, present. So often do we go there, look at things, talk amongst ourselves while the priest is celebrating the Eucharist ... and we do not celebrate close to Him. But it is the Lord! If today the President of the Republic were to come, or some very important world personage, it is certain that we would all be close to him, that we would want to greet him. But think: when you go to Mass, the Lord is there! And you get distracted. It is the Lord! We have to think about this. “Father, it’s that the Masses are dull” — “But what are you saying, that the Lord is dull?” — “No, no. Not the Mass, the priests” — “Ah, may the priests convert, but it is the Lord who is there!” Do you understand? Do not forget it. “Participating in Mass is living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord”.

Now let us try asking ourselves a few simple questions. For example, why do we make the sign of the Cross and perform the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass? And here I would like to add another side note. Have you seen how children make the sign of the Cross? You do not know what they are doing, whether it is the sign of the Cross or an outline. They do this [gesturing]. Children must be taught how to make the sign of the Cross properly. This is how the Mass begins; this is how life begins; this is how the day begins. This means that we are redeemed by the Lord’s Cross. Watch the children and teach them how to make the sign of the Cross properly. And those Readings, during Mass, why are they there? Why are there three Readings on Sunday and two on the other days? Why are they read? What do the Readings at Mass mean? Why are they read and what is their purpose? Or, why does the priest presiding at the celebration say at a certain point: “Lift up our hearts”? He does not say: “Lift up your cell phones to take a photo!”. No, that’s bad!





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I tell you, it makes me sad when I am celebrating here in Saint Peter's Square or in the Basilica to see many cell phones lifted up, not only by the faithful but also by some priests and even bishops! But please! Mass is not a spectacle: it is going to encounter the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. This is why the priest says: "Lift up our hearts". What does this mean? Remember: no phones.

It is really important to return to the basics, to rediscover what is essential, through what we touch and see in the celebration of the Sacraments. The question of the Apostle Saint Thomas (cf. Jn 20:25), seeking to see and touch the nail wounds in Jesus' body, and the desire to be able in some way to "touch" God in order to believe in him. What Saint Thomas asks of the Lord is what we all need: to see him, to touch him so that we may be able to know him.

The Sacraments meet this human need. The Sacraments, the Eucharistic celebration in a particular way, are signs of God's love, the privileged ways for us to encounter him. Thus, through these catechesis that we are beginning, I would like to rediscover with you the beauty that is hidden in the Eucharistic celebration and that, once revealed, gives full meaning to each person's life. May Our Lady accompany us on this new stretch of road.

### Why do we go to Mass on Sundays?

The Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2177). We Christians go to Sunday Mass to encounter the Risen Lord, or better still to allow ourselves to be encountered by him, to hear his Word, to nourish ourselves at his table, and thus to become the Church, that is, his mystical living Body in the world.

From the first hour, Jesus' disciples understood this; they celebrated the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord on the day of the week that the Hebrews called "the first of the week" and the Romans called "day of the sun", because on that day Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, speaking with them, eating with them, giving them the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:1; Mk 16:9, 14; Lk 24:1, 13; Jn 20:1, 19), as we have heard in the Gospel reading.

The great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost also happened on a Sunday, the 50th day after Jesus' Resurrection. For these reasons, Sunday is a holy day for us, sanctified by the Eucharistic celebration, the living presence of the Lord among us and for us. Thus, it is the Mass that makes Sunday Christian. The Christian Sunday revolves around the Mass. For a Christian, what is a Sunday in which the encounter with the Lord is lacking?

There are Christian communities which, unfortunately, cannot enjoy Mass every Sunday; they too, however, on this holy day, are called to reflect in prayer in the name of the Lord, listening to the Word of God and keeping alive the desire for the Eucharist.

Some secularized societies have lost the Christian sense of Sunday illuminated by the Eucharist. This is a shame! In these contexts it is necessary to revive this awareness, to recover the meaning of the celebration, the meaning of the joy, of the parish community, of solidarity, of the rest which restores body and soul (cf. ccc, nn. 2177-2178). Of all these values, the Eucharist is our guide, Sunday after Sunday. For this reason the Second Vatican Council wished to emphasize that Sunday "is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the piety of the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work" (Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium, 106).



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The Sunday abstention from work did not exist in the early centuries: it is a specific contribution of Christianity. According to biblical tradition Jews rest on the Sabbath, while in Roman society a day of the week was not provided for abstention from servile labour. It was the Christian awareness of living as children and not as slaves, inspired by the Eucharist, which has made Sunday — almost universally — the day of rest.

Without Christ we are condemned to be dominated by everyday weariness, with its worries, and by fear of the future. The Sunday encounter with the Lord gives us the strength to experience the present with confidence and courage, and to go forth with hope. For this reason, we Christians go to encounter the Lord on Sunday, in the Eucharistic celebration.

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Eucharistic communion with Jesus, Risen and ever-Living, anticipates the Sunday without sunset, when there will be no more weariness nor pain, nor sorrow nor tears, but only the joy of living fully and forever with the Lord. Sunday Mass also speaks to us of this blessed repose, teaching us to entrust ourselves during the course of the week to the hands of the Father who is in heaven.

How can we respond to those who say that it is of no use going to Mass, even on Sunday, because the important thing is to live well, to love our neighbour? It is true that the quality of Christian life is measured by the capacity to love, as Jesus said: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35); but how can we practice the Gospel without drawing the energy necessary to do so, one Sunday after another, from the inexhaustible source of the Eucharist? We do not go to Mass in order to give something to God, but to receive what we truly need from him. We are reminded of this by the Church’s prayer, which is addressed to God in this way: “although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness but profit us for salvation” (Roman Missal, Common Preface iv).

In conclusion, why do we go to Mass on Sundays? It is not enough to respond that it is a precept of the Church; this helps to preserve its value, but alone does not suffice. We Christians need to participate in Sunday Mass because only with Jesus’ grace, with his living presence within us and among us, can we put his commandment into practice, and thus be his credible witnesses.”

Pope Francis

