

The Mass as a holy meal

The Mass is a unique and marvelous sacrifice. It is the mystical reality in which Christ's sacrifice on the cross is renewed. The Mass is also a sacred banquet where together as the Church family we fulfill Jesus' command at the Last Supper to "Do this in memory of me." In many ways, the liturgy is similar to (but certainly more than) a family meal. It may help children to think about Mass as a "holy meal."

Before we sit down to eat together as a family, we usually wash up and get ready. That is similar to what we do when we enter the church and bless ourselves with holy water. The holy water is a reminder of our baptism in which we were "washed clean" of sin in order to be able to share the Eucharist.

As families gather around the table, we hear about the important news of the day. We do the same thing at Mass when we listen to the readings, especially the Gospel (the Good News), and say the opening prayers. This helps us prepare our hearts for the rest of the Eucharistic meal.

In most homes, dinnertime is a time to talk as a family, to bring up issues that are important to the family as a whole. In some ways, this is what the priest is doing when he preaches the homily. He discusses aspects of our faith life and provides practical applications for living our beliefs after we leave the table of the Lord.

Of course, without food there would be no dinner, and without bread and wine there would be no Eucharist, so at Mass we bring up the sacred gifts to the altar just as we bring the food from the kitchen to the dining room table.

Before our family starts to eat, we say grace. Praying the Lord's Prayer and extending the kiss of peace is our Church's family's grace, a way to connect and be present to each other.

Jesus commanded us to "take and eat." During Communion, we, as

an entire Church family, do that when we share the Body and Blood of Christ. We all eat the same food and the same drink, in the same way as families do at home, only this food and drink, instead of merely nourishing the body, provides nourishment for our souls. We receive the real and true presence of the risen Jesus in the Eucharist, and we look to our eternal life with Christ at the heavenly banquet.

Finally, once our family dinner is complete, each of us leave to go about our separate activities. At Mass, the same thing occurs after the dismissal and final blessing, when we “go forth” to “announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

When we look at Mass as sharing a holy meal with our beloved brother Jesus and the rest of our Church family, we can come to understand that it is truly “in the breaking of the bread that we come to know him.”