3.4

SACRAMENTS

THE EUCHARIST

Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Luke 22:14–23.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

Notes

The Chinese authorities burst into the church. The commander ordered the soldiers to tear down the tabernacle from the sanctuary.[1]

They opened the tabernacle and scattered the consecrated hosts across the floor. The men trampled on the Eucharist, while the commander sneered at the crowd: "Do you still believe in those fairytales your priest told you?"[2]

The soldiers arrested the priest and locked him in a metal bunker inside the church. Trapped, he peered out through a small slit, watching as he saw his people forced outside. He could see the Eucharistic hosts left desecrated on the church floor.

For days, the church remained totally silent. Guards were posted around the church, and no one was allowed to enter. But one day, the priest looked through the slit in the bunker where he was confined and saw someone sneaking into the church. It was a young girl, 13 years old, kneeling in prayer, crawling on her hands and knees toward the hosts on the floor. She bent down and received a single host on the tongue, prayed for a while, and then left.

The next day, the little girl returned, taking one more host. She did this daily, receiving one host at a time. For a month, she entered the church each day, risking being caught by the authorities. Finally, only one host remained. She entered the church again to receive it. She made her prayers as usual, but shortly after she leaned down and received Jesus for the last time, she made a slight noise. The guard heard her, and the church doors burst open behind her. The priest heard a shot and saw the body of the young girl fall to the floor.

She died as a martyr, giving her life for Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. As he pondered the little girl's witness, that same soldier was struck to the heart; inspired by her faith, he later came and let the priest free from the bunker. The soldier told the priest, "If in every city there were one such girl as this one, there would not be a soldier left who would fight for Communism."[3]

Notes

DISCUSS

Does this story change your perception of what it means to be devoted to Jesus in the Eucharist? How so?

REAL PRESENCE

What this little girl did makes no sense at all if the Eucharist is just a piece of bread. But she saw something more in those consecrated hosts. This was not bread. She understood the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist — the fact that the bread and wine at Mass are changed into Christ's Body and Blood. And it was this truth that drove her to risk her life to protect Jesus in the Eucharist from further desecration.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.

— CCC 1324

But where do Catholics get this idea of the real presence? If you had to explain the Catholic belief in the Eucharist to someone else, could you do it? Could you explain how something that looks, feels, and tastes like bread and wine is really Jesus' Body and Blood? And where in the Bible does Jesus ever teach about such a mysterious doctrine as this? Whether you've heard this teaching long ago or this is a new concept to you, this mystery of the Eucharist is so central that we can never ponder its awesome reality enough — lest we become the kind of people who take for granted the greatest gift Jesus left us before he died.

Notes

First, let's make sure we clearly understand the doctrine itself. Since the time of the apostles, Christians have believed that the bread and wine at Mass are changed into Christ's Body and Blood. But this is not a chemical change. If you put the consecrated host under a microscope, you would see all the chemical properties of bread. But Catholics for 2,000 years have believed what that young girl in China believed and died for: that, during the Last Supper on the night before he died, Jesus took bread and said "This is my body..." — and underneath those outward, sensible appearances of bread is the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ.

Second, we need to grasp clearly the biblical foundations for the Eucharist. While many Scriptural passages shed light on this mystery, there's one in particular that gives the richest insights. Let's look at chapter 6 of John's Gospel, where Jesus delivers his clearest teaching about the Eucharist.

Although many non-Catholic Christians think of the Eucharist in a purely symbolic way — that the Eucharist is just a symbol of Jesus' Body and Blood or a sacred reminder of Christ — Jesus tells the crowds something different in this scene from John. He says that he is the true Bread of Life and that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood if they want to have eternal life. That's strong language. And it's clear he's not speaking merely in a figurative or metaphorical way: He's speaking literally. He really wants us to partake of his Body and Blood.

Consider Jesus' own words: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven ... and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world *is my flesh*" (Jn 6:51; emphasis added). Here, it is clear that the crowds understand Jesus' words literally. They're appalled, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52). Notice how Jesus doesn't try to clear up a misunderstanding, soften his language, or say he was just speaking metaphorically. He instead presses the issue further: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53).

Notes

Next, Jesus goes on to use a more graphic word for "eat," meaning "to gnaw" or "to chew" in verses 54–57. He says, "He who *eats* [chews] my flesh and drinks my blood will have eternal life" (Jn 6:54). He wouldn't talk this way if he was only speaking metaphorically about the Eucharist — as if the Eucharist was supposed to be just a symbol of his presence. If anything, he's making his statement more literal. Indeed, he goes on to state explicitly, "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:55–56). Jesus is clear: This is his flesh and blood.

We can see from the crowd's response that they clearly understood Jesus in this literal way. They grumbled and complained about this radical idea. Even "many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (Jn 6:66). If the Eucharist were just a symbol, why didn't Jesus call them all back, saying, "Wait, I was only speaking figuratively!"? Instead, he lets them go. He loves us so much that he is not willing to compromise on his supreme gift to us — the gift of his very Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

DISCUSS

Do you believe in the real presence? Could you explain it to someone else? What difference does this truth make in your life?

LOVE NEAR US

Love wants to be near the one it loves. And the God who is love ardently longs to be close to us. That's why he dwells among us here on Earth in the Eucharist.

The presence of that divine love in Christ had a powerful impact on people's lives 2,000 years ago in Galilee. It overcame illness, drove away darkness, brought healing to those who were suffering, shared forgiveness in the face of sin. Did you know we can encounter that

same powerful presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? And we can encounter him not only when we receive him in Holy Communion at Mass, but also when we draw near to him in all the tabernacles in all our Catholic churches around the world.

If you want to draw near to divine love himself and experience the power of his real presence in your life — the power to guide, comfort, and strengthen you — receive Jesus in the Eucharist as often as you can and visit him in the chapel where he continues to reside in the tabernacle, where the sacred hosts are kept.

Do we approach Holy Communion with the same reverence and devotion that the little Chinese girl had? She went to such great lengths, even risking her own life, to draw near to Christ's presence in the Eucharist, to love him in Eucharistic adoration, and receive him in Communion each day. Do you have that same desire? What sacrifices are you willing to make to draw near to him?

Jesus in the Eucharist is readily available to you in your own parish. Have you ever thought of going to Mass not just on Sunday, but also during the week to receive him? Do you make the effort in your busy day to stop by the chapel, to tell him you love him, to bring your needs to him, to rest in his presence? Jesus is waiting for you in this sacrament. He longs for you to come to him.

Notes

The greatest love story of all time is contained in a tiny white host.

— Venerable Archbishop Fulton Sheen

DISCUSS

Jesus desires to draw close to you. Do you have that same desire to draw close to him? What sacrifices do you need to make to be more devoted to Jesus in the Eucharist?

Notes

TAKE ACTION

Take some time to research parish locations and Mass times near you. Are you committed to attending Sunday Mass each week? If you do not attend regularly, decide on a parish and make a plan to go. Think about any obstacles that might prevent you. How can you ensure that those things don't get in your way to attend Sunday Mass?

Can you begin to make going to daily Mass a part of your life as well? It might not be the most convenient, but the things that are best for us rarely are. Consider how your schedule could change for you to attend daily Mass more frequently.

Finally, a beautiful way we can grow in our devotion to the Eucharist is by visiting Jesus in the tabernacles of our churches or in Eucharistic adoration. Which churches near you offer times of adoration? Brainstorm a time in your day or your week that you could do your prayer time in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

KEY CONCEPTS

Real Presence: The Eucharist is truly the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Frequent Communion/Visits to the Blessed Sacrament: Jesus longs for us to encounter him regularly in the Eucharist.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Notes

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist by Dr. Brant Pitre

A Biblical Walk through the Mass by Dr. Edward Sri

CCC 1322–1419: "The Sacrament of the Eucharist"

SEEK2015 Talk on focusequip.org: "The Hour That Will Change Your Life" by Fr. Mike Schmitz

Jesus, Present Before Me: Meditations for Eucharistic Adoration by Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P.

Notes

[1] This story is adapted from: Karl Maria Harrer, *Die schönsten Eucharistischen Wunder* (Miriam-Verlog, 1990, vol. 1 – 5).

[2] "The Little Girl Who Inspired Archbishop Fulton Sheen's Vow," *America Needs Fatima*, accessed February 25, 2020, https://www.americaneedsfatima.org/Conversions/the-little-girl-who-inspired-archbishop-fulton-sheen-s-vow.html.

[3] Ibid.