



**Catholic Parent Guide**

# First Communion

*Preparing Your Child for the Sacrament*



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# You Are Your Child's Best Teacher

Dear Parents,

A child's First Communion is an important and exciting milestone in the life of a Catholic family. Speaking about the Eucharist, Pope Leo XIV has stated:

"What happens between us and God through the Eucharist is precisely that the Lord welcomes, sanctifies and blesses the bread and wine that we place on the altar, together with the offering of our lives, and he transforms them into the Body and Blood of Christ, the sacrifice of love for the salvation of the world. God unites himself to us by joyfully accepting what we bring, and he invites us to unite ourselves to him by likewise joyfully receiving and sharing his gift of love" (General Audience, June 22, 2025).

As the primary educators of their children, parents present their children for Baptism, model gratitude for the opportunity of one's family to receive the Eucharist, and guide them toward Christ as they are initiated into the Church community. Handing on our faith to the next generation can feel like an awesome responsibility, but God gives parents the grace to raise their children to know and love him.

One key to teaching children about the Faith is tapping into our own experiences. We may find that the things we know best can be powerful illustrations of our faith. Amy Welborn has written about how we can better understand the Mass from our own family experiences:

• **Preparing for Mass** is important, just like preparing for major family events, such as a baby's birth, the first day of school, or a move. If we don't prepare well for these important experiences, we may become so preoccupied with details that we miss the experience itself. Preparing for Mass by discussing the readings before and after Mass, and allowing plenty of time to get to the church and get settled, can help us really experience the celebration.

• **The Penitential Rite** is our time to experience

God's mercy and forgiveness as we acknowledge the times we have failed him. All families sometimes have misunderstandings, miscommunications, and conflicts. Like a loving parent, God always takes us back. His love for us is unconditional.

• **The Liturgy of the Word** is the time in the Mass when we listen to our sacred stories, when important truths are communicated and passed down. Just as important lessons in families are repeated, so the important truths of Scripture are repeated, from the Old Testament, to the Psalms, to the Gospels, to the epistles, and in the cycles of the readings at Mass.

• **The Liturgy of the Eucharist** is our family meal that includes the presentation of the bread and wine, the consecration into the Body and Blood of Christ, and communion itself. In our individual families, we come together out of the common need to be nourished. Family meals bring us together and give us a collective identity. As a Church, we desire to stay close to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Through our communion with Jesus and with one another, we are formed as the Body of Christ.

• **The Dismissal Rite** is like a commencement, or sending forth. Just as we leave our families to go out into the world, so we are sent by Christ to live what we have learned.

We hope this booklet will assist you in reflecting on your own knowledge and experience of the treasures of our faith and help you with some of the practical details in planning for your child's First Communion. May God bless you as you lead your little one into communion with him.



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Joseph D. White, Ph.D.

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Ana Arista White

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# The “Rite Way”

## *How to Receive the Eucharist*

Because the Eucharist is a memorial to Christ’s sacrifice and a universal prayer of thanksgiving to God, it is important that we as Catholics understand how to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. Traditions and form vary somewhat around the world, but some responses and norms are consistent. Here are some of the unifying practices outlined by the U.S. Catholic bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy. These actions remind us that the Body and Blood of Christ are the sign and source of our unity.

- **As we join the Communion procession, we are united as the Body of Christ, moving forward together to share in this sacred meal.** Communicants are asked to respectfully process to the front of the church with their hands folded in a sign of prayer.

- **Communion is typically received standing.** Because communicants are receiving Jesus himself, they should give a slight bow of reverence immediately preceding reception of the Eucharist.

- **A communicant may receive in the hand or on the tongue.** When Communion is received in the hand, the following directions apply. If the person receiving is right-handed, the left hand should rest upon the right. The person distributing will lay the Host in the palm of the left hand. The Host is then taken by the right hand to the mouth by the communicant. If the person receiving is left-handed, this is reversed.

- **The person distributing Communion will say to each person receiving, “The Body of Christ.” Each communicant should clearly respond, “Amen.”** This response affirms and proclaims his or her belief that the most blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist is the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Jesus, meaning the whole of Christ is truly and substantially contained. (See CCC, 1374.)

- **Communicants should not reach out with their fingers to take the Host from the person distributing.** The Host must be consumed as soon as it has been received. Girls and women who are wearing gloves and plan to receive the Host in the hand must remove their gloves before receiving.

- **When a communicant is receiving under the form of wine, the person holding the cup will say to each person receiving, “The Blood of Christ.” Each communicant again responds, “Amen.”** Communicants are not permitted to dip the Host into the chalice. If the person receiving is not able or willing to drink from the cup, then he or she should receive only under the form of bread.

- **Upon returning to their seats, communicants who have just received the Eucharist should offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God, especially by singing the Communion hymn.** Sacred music always helps us to worship God.



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## *Explaining the “Real Presence” of Jesus to Children*

In the United States, First Communion is typically celebrated some time between the first and fourth grades, most often in grade two, when children are seven or eight years old. Children this age are in what Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget called the “concrete operational” stage of cognitive development. They see and understand things in very concrete, black-and-white terms. They still have some difficulty thinking in the abstract or understanding symbolism. It can be a challenge to offer direct, concrete explanations of abstract concepts such as transubstantiation and why Jesus would offer himself to us as food.

One way to accurately but simply explain transubstantiation to a child is to say: “When we celebrate the Eucharist, God changes the bread and wine so they become Jesus himself. It still looks and tastes like bread and wine, but it’s really Jesus. He comes in the form of bread to remind us of his body, and in the form of wine to remind us of his blood.” We can explain why Jesus gives himself as bread and wine by saying: “Jesus wants to be very close to you. He wants to become part of you and for you to become part of him. The Eucharist helps us be more like Jesus.”

Remember that a child’s understanding of the Eucharist will unfold and grow over time. Children need a solid assurance that God comes to us in a special way in holy Communion and that what happens is much more than what we see. Other terms for the Eucharist, include bread of life, the living bread, the paschal banquet, and the memorial of Christ’s sacrifice. This will plant the seed they need to keep learning about Jesus’ greatest gift to us — the gift of himself, the eternal high priest and the Lamb of God.



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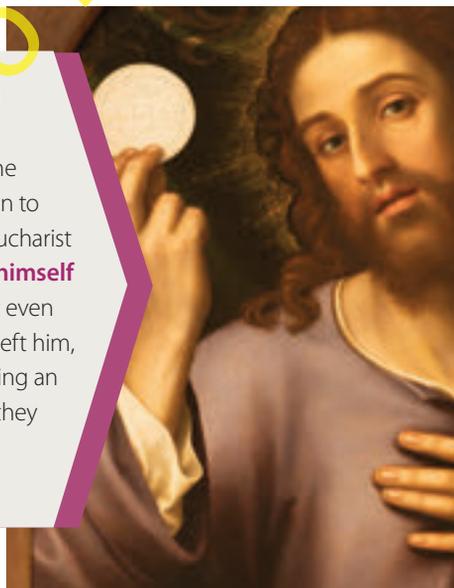
# What Scripture Teaches Us about the Eucharist

Throughout history, God has prepared his people to receive the gift of Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is foreshadowed in Old Testament Scripture and is made explicit in the Gospels and epistles of the New Testament. Here are a few examples of Scriptures relating to the Eucharist, along with what we can learn from them:

## Jesus teaches that his flesh and blood are real food and drink

(John 6:22–59).

Jesus frequently spoke in metaphors, but he seemed to go out of his way with repetition to emphasize the fact that he intended the Eucharist to be understood literally: **He was giving himself to us as food and drink.** This was difficult even for his followers to understand, and some left him, but Jesus did not try to stop them by offering an alternative explanation, an indication that they understood what he meant but could not accept it.



## Manna from heaven

(Exodus 16).

Scripture tells how God provided bread from heaven, called manna, to the Israelites as they wandered through the desert after leaving Egypt. This account teaches us that **God provides his people with what we need.**

## Jesus feeds the five thousand

(John 6:1–15).

Jesus takes one small boy's lunch and feeds a multitude of people. The account of this miracle teaches us that **Jesus can feed everyone who "hungers" for intimacy with him.**

**Jesus celebrates the Passover with his disciples** (Matthew 26:17–30). On the night he was betrayed and arrested, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, a Passover meal with his disciples. This meal commemorated the freedom of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. As part of the first Passover meal, the Israelites were commanded to eat the flesh of the Passover lamb that was sacrificed to save them. (See Exodus 12:1–14.) Passover was intended to prepare God’s people for Jesus, the “Lamb of God” who would be sacrificed to save us from the bondage of sin. In fact, St. Paul calls Jesus “our paschal lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7). When Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples, he offered the bread and the cup with the words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood.” Jesus spoke clearly about the Eucharist so we would know that **he is truly present — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — in this great meal. At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We refer to it as “the holy Sacrifice of the Mass,” which reflects the reality and sacredness of the Mass itself.**



**An angel brings bread to Elijah** (1 Kings 19:5–7). An angel met Elijah on his journey through the wilderness at a time when Elijah felt he could not go on. The angel told Elijah to get up and eat so he would be strong for his journey. From Elijah’s story we can learn that we need food for our own journeys. **Even when we feel we cannot go on, Christ provides us with the gift of himself in the Eucharist to strengthen us to live as his disciples and to commit us to the poor.**



**Jesus and his disciples on the road to Emmaus** (Luke 24:13–35). After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were walking. They later stopped and shared a meal. At first, the disciples didn’t know it was Jesus who was with them, but they recognized him when he broke the bread. This passage of Scripture can teach us that **the Eucharist reunites us with Jesus and we can recognize and know him in this meal.**



**Melchizedek’s offering** (Genesis 14:18–20). Melchizedek offered bread and wine to God in thanksgiving. This offering foreshadowed Jesus’ establishment of the Eucharist. Hebrews 5:6 calls Jesus “a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek.” Scripture speaks of Melchizedek’s offering to prepare us to **recognize the Eucharist as a feast of thanksgiving. Eucharist means thanksgiving, so we must live a life of gratitude to God.**



**Jesus changes water into wine** (John 2:1–12). Jesus’ first miracle was at a special celebration — a wedding in Cana. At the request of his mother, he turned water into wine. The Eucharist we celebrate in Mass is described in the Book of Revelation as the wedding feast between Christ, the bridegroom, and the Church, his bride. In the midst of this Eucharistic celebration, Jesus takes his first miracle one important step further by changing wine into his blood. **Through the Eucharist he also transforms all of us so that we become more like Christ as we live as the “Body of Christ” in the world.**

# Some Things Change, Some Things Remain the Same

In the past several years, a lot has changed about how First Communion is celebrated in many parishes around the country. This can sometimes be unsettling for parents who remember their own First Communion and long for a more “traditional” approach. However, some of the changes in form are more in keeping with what is done in other parts of the world and what was done in the United States in earlier centuries. In addition, some practices are being altered to fit more closely with what Catholics have always believed about the Eucharist. So, while we may fondly remember things being done a certain way, what’s “traditional” is not always easy to pinpoint. Let’s take a look at some of the major changes taking place in parishes around the country and the rationale behind them:

## **First Communion within the context of a regular obligation, rather than a special Mass.**

As a celebration of the Resurrection, the obligation of Sunday Mass is for the entire parish, the entire Church. We come together to worship God our Creator and to give thanks for Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross. Celebrating First Communion within the regular Sunday parish Mass makes sense for a number of reasons. After First Communion, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays is where most children will receive the Eucharist most often. They have joined in celebration with the whole parish, and their initial celebration should reflect this. Second, Church documents, such as the *General Directory for Catechesis*, remind us that catechesis is the responsibility of the whole parish. Individuals should be within the context of the whole parish community when they celebrate the sacraments of initiation, which bring us into the Church. Baptism unites us with Christ, making us children of God and members of Christ’s Body, the Church. Baptism is the beginning of new life in Christ; Confirmation strengthens us for our Christian life; and the Eucharist nourishes that new life with Christ’s Body and Blood in order to transform our lives in Christ.

Finally, celebrations such as First Communion are an important teaching tool for the parish as a whole. Seeing individuals celebrate the sacrament for the first time can renew our own appreciation for this wonderful gift.

## **Celebrating “family-style” versus all first communicants sitting and processing together.**

In the past, part of the charm (and photo opportunity) of First Communion celebrations has been having the communicants process down the aisle at the beginning of Mass in two lines (one for boys and one for girls) to take their seats at the front of the church. When the time comes for the Eucharistic procession, the children process to the altar in two lines to receive before the rest of the congregation. While this form has its aesthetic appeal, some parishes have used a family-style celebration in which the first communicant processes with his or her entire family. This is meaningful in a number of ways. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, parents are called the “primary catechists” of their children and the family is referred to as the “domestic church.” It is fitting that the child be presented for his or her first reception of the Eucharist (as for Baptism) by the family. This form also

highlights the fact that the child is joining the rest of his or her family at the Eucharistic table for the first time.

## **Focusing on lifelong celebration of the Sacrament, versus focusing on the child’s first reception of the Eucharist.**

While a child’s First Communion is certainly a time for special celebration, it should be the beginning of a lifelong celebration of the Sacrament that includes ongoing formation in the faith and in the sacramental life of the Church. Each time we receive the Eucharist and the other sacraments, we encounter Christ himself and share in his own life. We understand this even more deeply as we grow in knowledge of the Faith. For this reason, there is more focus in some parishes on teaching the meaning and implications of the Eucharist (not just how to receive, but what the Eucharist means in our lives) as well as a focus on using First Communion as an opportunity to educate parents and the parish as a whole about the Sacrament.

**While some things change, some things remain the same. The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life.” (See CCC, 1324.) May we all be renewed and refreshed as we welcome our children to the table.**



Spencer Grant

# Spiritual Preparations for **First Communion**



**Talk to your child about his or her Baptism.** The Seven Sacraments are efficacious signs of grace where we encounter Christ himself and share in his own life. All of the sacraments are related to Baptism, the first sacrament we celebrate. Take out your child's baptismal candle and pictures and talk about the important day he or she was welcomed into the Family of God. Discuss how First Communion is an extension of that day, as now they are welcomed to the family meal.

**Help your child understand and participate in the Mass.** Encourage your child to pay attention to the Mass singing and praying the responses along with you. Special children's missals and books about the Mass often include both the prayers of the Mass and pictures. You may also wish to practice the prayers of the Mass with your child at other times. For example, say, "The Lord be with you," and encourage your child to respond appropriately. Any baptized person who wants to receive Holy Communion must understand that he or she needs to be in a state of grace. Anyone who knows they have committed a mortal sin must not receive the Eucharist without receiving absolution through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

**Talk with your child about your own First Communion experience.** Try to remember as much as possible about your own First Communion day and share this with your child. Encourage other family members (such as brothers and sisters) to talk about their experiences as well. Take out First Communion photos if you have them.



**Celebrate meals together as a family.** Unfortunately, our society's hectic pace has made sitting down to meals as a family less common; yet, the family meal is an important opportunity for sharing and becoming closer to one another. It's difficult for children to understand the Eucharist as the family meal of the Church if they have no experience with eating together with their families at home — the "domestic Church." If you don't already, make it a point to eat together at the table with no television on several occasions before your child's First Communion. It's a practice you may decide to continue.

**Spend time in family prayer.** In Pope Saint John Paul II's "Letter to Families," the pope called prayer the source of all renewal of family life. Spend some time praying together, asking God to prepare your child to receive Jesus in the Eucharist and thanking him for this wonderful gift. You may even want to pray a First Communion novena during the days leading up to your child's First Communion celebration. Our prayer life stems from the Eucharistic celebration at the heart of the Church's liturgy. Our daily prayers draw us closer to Christ each day.



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## **Attend Holy Thursday Mass and Eucharistic Adoration as a family.**

The Holy Thursday liturgy, which typically precedes First Communion on the parish calendar, can be a wonderful learning experience for children preparing for Eucharist. It recalls the story of the first Eucharist, Jesus' Last Supper with his apostles, and closes with the transfer of the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration. Some parishes also have other times for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Stopping by for a short time of prayer can help children better appreciate Christ's presence in the Eucharist. It is out of love for Jesus who gave his life for us that we desire to make sacrifices such as giving time in prayer, foregoing an event to attend Mass, or sacrificing our time to help someone.

# Table Prayers

Families should know and understand the important prayers and gestures in Mass. Examples of important prayers at Mass, including the Creed, the Our Father, the Eucharistic Prayer, and others. Important gestures include genuflecting, kneeling, and prayer hands.

Below are some examples of prayers your family can use before and after meals.

## Grace Before Meals

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts,  
which we are about to receive  
from thy bounty.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Grace After Meals

We give you thanks, O Lord,  
for all the graces and benefits  
we have received from your bounty.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Mealtime Family Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of our  
family.  
We love and treasure our time together,  
for we see how fast the days fly by.  
Please be with us in our eating and  
sharing,  
this day and every day,  
so we may become nourished in  
body and soul.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

For more Catholic prayers go to [teachingcatholickids.com/catholic-prayers/](https://teachingcatholickids.com/catholic-prayers/)

## Catholic Faith Words

**anaphora** is the Eucharistic Prayer that represents the heart and summit of the Mass.

**Anamnesis** is part of the Eucharistic Prayer when the Church evokes the saving events of Christ's Passion, Resurrection, and his glorious return, and presents the offering of God's Son to reconcile us with the Father.

**epiclesis** (calling down) is part of the Eucharistic Prayer when the priest invokes God the Father to send the Holy Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine enabling them to become the Body and Blood of Christ.

**transubstantiation** is the process by which the power of the Holy Spirit and the words of the priest transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus.



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Encounter  
with  
Christ

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Bishop of Fort Wayne–South Bend  
October 6, 2025

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Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division  
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 200 Noll Plaza,  
Huntington, IN 46750

ISBN: 978-1-63966-410-8  
Inventory No. CR3028  
Design by: Lindsey Riesen  
Cover photo: Gregory A. Shemitz

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CR3028

ISBN: 978-1-63966-410-8



9 781639 664108