
Amongst my earliest memories is the Eucharist: an image that whirls in my mind full of sensory rich colour, smells, and an overwhelming feeling of joy. This was the beginning of a journey.

For me, there is no stronger sense of coming before God – of his grace, love, and mercy – than through seeing and taking part in the Eucharist. As I've grown older, I've realized more and more that it is the week's destination, where I come alongside others who, like me, are carrying all that life has loaded on them. Whether we come with a spring in our steps or dragging heavy, broken hearts, we journey as equals, hands outstretched to Christ.

But how do we give what we are to Christ? How do we offer ourselves, as the bread and wine are offered, to be changed and used by God? How do we pray the Eucharist?



Perhaps the opening words and prayer remind us that everything we're about to do is done 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' and that God, to whom our hearts are open, enables us to open our hearts to him. By the Holy Spirit we become willing to make the sacrifice of ourselves which in the Eucharist meets Christ's sacrifice of himself on the cross.

Encouraged by the same Spirit we recall the things that have vexed us, or given us joy, and we examine our actions and our motives. Maybe we judge ourselves incapable of ever being the person we would like ourselves to be...but then we're assured of the transforming mercy of God.

Hearing and responding to scripture, we may find ourselves encouraged, challenged, or inspired. Perhaps we're brought more deeply into asking for, receiving, and giving forgiveness. Perhaps we realize that we have much to be grateful for and recall that there are others who need our prayers as much as we need theirs. In intercession we then bring them and our world into focus, and accept our calling to pray for and to serve the communities we're part of.

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

St Augustine
(354-430)

As we hear and respond to the words of the Eucharistic Prayer, we are drawn time and again into the agony of Jesus' passion and the beauty of his resurrection. We offer to him who offered all for us everything that has happened to us since we were last here, along with our meditations and prayers of the preceding days – those we have consciously laid before God and those we've only half managed to stumble through. We carry who we are altar-wards and lift ourselves to God in worship and awe.

In this gathering, drawing closer to God in this Eucharist, this union of heaven and earth, we learn that all we have experienced, taken part in, and been this week matters. We pour ourselves into this moment, even though we feel we shouldn't be here. 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.'

After we've received communion we ponder God's loving gift of himself to us, and as the service draws to a close perhaps we wish we could just stay where we are. But we are sent out to do his will and fulfil his intention for our lives. Yet leaving, we know that next week and all our lives we will come back to this place of transformation: this sacrament where we come face to face with the reality of the risen life, and where we find healing, forgiveness, and joy.

Praying the Eucharist

Christian Prayer

Friends, this is the
**Table of
our Lord.**
Come, not because
you are strong,
but
because
you are
weak.
Come, not because
of any goodness
of your own,
but because
you need
God's mercy
and help.
Come, because you
love the Lord a
little and would like
to love him
more.
Come, **because**
Christ
loves you and
gave himself for you.

attributed to George MacLeod (1895-1991)

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