

SESSION 1

GOD IS WITH US

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

You've probably heard some variation of the statement that the Bible is God's love letter to us. The story of salvation is one long romance. It's the story of the God who is Love drawing near to his people and seeking them out as they stray time and again. Finally, God himself came down from Heaven to make a way for us to be united to him. As Vatican II puts it: "Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with himself (*Dei Verbum*, 2). This is a beautiful description of the kind of intimacy God desires to have with each of us, and the Church desires that modern men and women come to know this amazing love of God.

In this session, we will see that God wants to unite us to himself, to pour his love into us, and to receive our love. He wants this so much that he humbles himself to be truly and completely present to us under the appearances of bread and wine. The Eucharist is the most perfect expression of God's love for us, and when we receive the Eucharist it is the most perfect expression of our love for him. He allows us to receive his Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in this sacrament so that he can draw us into total communion and intimacy with himself.

God becoming man in the Incarnation was the culmination of his plan to be present to his people—and he continues to be present to us in all the Tabernacles of the world. He continues to accompany us on the journey of this life, just as he accompanied Israel in the wilderness under the appearance of a pillar of cloud and fire. He is present, and he is calling to each one of us to return that love through the gift of ourselves.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Understand that a sacrament is a sign instituted by Christ to communicate his grace, his divine life, to us.
- Recognize that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.
- Be able to define transubstantiation as a real change in the substance of the bread and wine, such that they truly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, though the appearances of bread and wine remain.
- Understand that God wants to be united to us through the Eucharist.



STEP 1 | OPENING PRAYER

Begin this session by leading the OPENING PRAYER, which is also found in the Study Guide on page 10. Then read or summarize the INTRODUCTION for your group. Then discuss the related questions in Step 2: CONNECT.

Divine Savior, we come to your sacred table to nourish ourselves,
not with bread but with yourself, true Bread of eternal life.
Help us daily to make a good and perfect meal of this divine food.
Let us be continually refreshed by the perfume of your kindness and goodness.
May the Holy Spirit fill us with his love.
Meanwhile, let us prepare a place for this holy food by emptying our hearts.
Amen.

—St. Francis de Sales



STEP 2 | CONNECT

Discuss these questions with participants to help them engage with the session's topic.

What is your favorite way to enjoy the presence of your family or close friends?

We tend to enjoy the presence of others by doing something together—sharing a meal, playing a game, watching a movie, going for a hike, etc. This quality time nourishes our relationships. In a similar way, we enjoy the presence of God by adoring him in the Blessed Sacrament, and we are united to him when we receive Holy Communion.

What comes to mind when you think about God's love for you?

Some images of God's love might include the Cross, all of creation, a particular answer to prayer, a Bible verse, a sensation of being loved, etc. The gift of the Eucharist is a beautiful expression of God's love for us because in it we encounter Jesus himself and we are given a foretaste of the union we will experience with God in Heaven.



DIGGING DEEPER

WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the sacraments as “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC 1131). This means that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the sacraments actually give us the grace that they represent.



The sacraments are visible, tangible signs that make present to us the invisible, supernatural actions of Christ. God desires that we intimately know his love and the presence and power of his grace, so these sacramental signs allow us to experience in a real and human way God’s gift of divine love and grace.

Grace is a totally free and unmerited gift from God that gives us a participation in his own divine life. The graces imparted by the Church through the sacraments are called sacramental graces. The effects of these graces are both personal and ecclesial: communion with God and with the Church (see CCC 1129; 1134). They bear fruit in daily life through fidelity to the demands of Christian life and active participation in the Church’s mission.

The *Catechism* also tells us that it is actually Jesus who is at work in the sacraments. Although we see and hear the priest speaking the words and performing the actions, it is really Jesus who is working through the sacraments to offer us the grace he won for us through his sacrifice on the Cross (see CCC 1084–85).

HOW DO I KNOW THE SACRAMENTS WORK?

The Church teaches that the sacraments act *ex opere operato*, which literally means “by the very fact of the action’s being performed” (see CCC 1127–28). The power of the sacraments comes from Christ—not from our holiness or the holiness of the one presiding over it. We can be disposed to be more or less receptive to the fruits of each sacrament, but each of the sacraments effectively communicates its proper grace. Just as the visible signs of the sacraments are humble, everyday things—water, oil, bread, wine—the effects of the sacraments are often hidden and imperceptible. Even with great faith and an open heart, we may not always feel fed when we receive the Eucharist, but the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and if we are properly disposed to receive this sacrament with reverence, it will nourish us, whether we feel like it does or not.



STEP 3 | VIDEO

Introduce and show this video episode, which will last about 35 minutes. Participants can follow along with the outline in their Study Guides and take notes as key points are made during the teaching. Then discuss the related questions in Step 4.

I. Martyrs and heroes of the Eucharist

- A. St. Philip Neri parish, New York, 1912
- B. St. Tarcisius, Roman Empire, AD 275
- C. St. Edmund Campion, England, 1581
- D. Young girl, China, 1900
- E. St. Clare, Assisi, Italy, 1224

II. What do Catholics believe?

- A. The Eucharist is one of the seven sacraments of the Church
 - 1. A sacrament is a channel of grace establish by Christ to convey his divine life
 - 2. Bread and wine become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ fully present
- B. Transubstantiation
 - 1. “trans”—to change
 - 2. “substance”—the essence of something; what it really is
 - 3. The outward appearance remains that of bread and wine, but the substance is changed into Jesus’s Body and Blood
- C. Humble outward signs of bread and wine point to the supernatural reality of spiritual nourishment

III. God is with his people

- A. Meals are about sharing relationships with other people
- B. God is love (see 1 John 4:8). He created us out of love in order to invite us into the communion of the Trinity
- C. God’s presence in the Old Testament foreshadows the Eucharist
 - 1. God’s revelation of his name at the burning bush—“I AM”—communicates not just God’s existence, but his presence with his people
 - 2. The refrain of God’s covenants with his people is “I will be your God, and you will be my people” (for example, see Exodus 6:7)

- D. The Incarnation is the culmination of God's plan to be with his people
- E. Jesus established the Eucharist to remain present with us
 1. At the Last Supper Jesus changed bread and wine into his Body and Blood, and then he told the Apostles to continue to do what he had just done
 2. God gives himself to us in the Eucharist not only to give us strength for our journey, but also to accompany us at every moment on the journey



DIGGING DEEPER

NAMES OF THE EUCHARIST

"The Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' . . . In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith" (CCC 1324, 1327).

The Eucharist is so important that the Church has many different names for it. Each name illuminates a different facet of the sacrament.



Eucharist—from the Greek word for "thanksgiving" because it is the perfect act of giving thanks to God.

The Lord's Supper—because Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and because it points forward to the heavenly wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Breaking of Bread—because Jesus broke bread at the first Eucharist at the Last Supper, and because it was by this action that his disciples at Emmaus recognized him; this was the name given to the sacrament by the first Christians.

The Eucharistic Assembly—because the sacrament is celebrated amid the faithful gathered together.

The Memorial of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection and The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass—because it makes Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross present to us and invites us as a priestly people to make a sacrificial offering of ourselves with Christ to the Father.

The Holy and Divine Liturgy and The Sacred Mysteries—because it is the center of the Church's whole liturgy and a participation in the heavenly liturgy.

The Most Blessed Sacrament—because it is the "Sacrament of sacraments" (CCC 1330).

Holy Communion—because it is by this sacrament that we are intimately united to Christ.

Holy Mass—(Latin *missa*)—because the liturgy ends (Latin *Ite, missa est*) by sending forth (Latin *missio*) the faithful to live out God's will in the world.

*“What wonderful majesty!
What stupendous condescension!
O sublime humility!
That the Lord of the whole universe,
God and the Son of God, should humble Himself
like this under the form of a little bread,
for our salvation.”*

—Saint Francis of Assisi



STEP 4 | DISCUSS

Read the following questions, giving the small groups time to answer each one. Refer to the suggested answers in italics as needed to help facilitate conversation. Answers will, of course, vary.

- 1. What was one thing from the video that you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?**

Some of the stories of the martyrs and heroes of the Eucharist might be new. The emphasis on God’s love and how much he wants to be united to us might be striking. The significance of meals and the meaning that has for the Eucharist might be something new.

- 2. The Eucharist is called by many names. Which one is your favorite? Why?**

See the “Digging Deeper” box on page 17 with the names of the Eucharist.

- 3. The video asks the questions “How big is God?” and “How small is God?” How would you answer these questions? How is God both “big” and “small” in the Eucharist?**

God does not have size. We can say that he is greater than everything because he created everything. Because he created everything and upholds and sustains all things, even the smallest things, nothing is beneath God’s notice or attention. God is “big” in the Eucharist because he is present in all his Divinity—he is not divided or diminished. But he is present in the humility of coming to us under the appearance of a small piece of bread and allowing us to consume him.



STEP 5 | COMMIT—ENCOUNTERING GOD’S PRESENCE

Have participants turn to page 15 and encourage them to look over the week’s COMMIT assignment and be prepared to share the next time the group meets.

How have you experienced God’s presence in your life?

From the very beginning, God has desired to be with his people. From the Garden of Eden to the Exodus, from the Tabernacle in the wilderness to the Temple in Jerusalem, the God of the universe has chosen to accompany his people and dwell with them. When he revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush, he revealed not only his power but also his presence.

Read the following verses slowly and prayerfully.

And the angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.”

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM . . . this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

—Exodus 3:2–8, 10–15



What stands out to you in this passage?

When he reveals his name, God also reveals his faithfulness—not just “I Am” but “I am with you, always.” He identifies himself according to the promises he made to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God of the covenant: “I will make a covenant of peace with them. . . . My dwelling place shall be with them and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Ezekiel 37:26–27). This promise is fulfilled in the New Covenant, where in Baptism the Trinity comes to dwell in our soul, and in the Eucharist Jesus gives us his Flesh and Blood to consume. The New Covenant realities far surpasses the prefigurations in the Old Testament.

*“The LORD, your God, is in your midst,
a warrior who gives victory;
he will rejoice over you with gladness,
he will renew you in his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.”*

—Zephaniah 3:17

This is Jesus’s promise to you: “Behold, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). He is present in the Eucharist, to accompany you through every moment of life. How can this presence of Christ in the Eucharist be the source of strength and consolation as you journey through your life? In what ways can you grow in appreciating and embracing Christ’s presence in the Eucharist?

How can this presence of Christ in the Eucharist be the source of strength and consolation as you journey through your life? In what ways can you grow in appreciating and embracing Christ’s presence in the Eucharist?





STEP 6 | WRAP-UP and CLOSING PRAYER

Review the key points of this session with your group, and then end in prayer.

- *A sacrament is a sign instituted by Christ to communicate his grace to us.*
- *The Eucharist is the Sacrament of sacraments and the source and summit of the Christian life.*
- *Transubstantiation means that in the Eucharist the bread and wine really change into the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, although they retain the appearance of bread and wine.*
- *God wants to be united with us, and he accomplishes this through the Eucharist.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.

With joy I will draw water from the wells of salvation.
Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the nations,
proclaim that his name is exalted.

Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;
let this be known in all the earth.
Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,
for great in our midst is the Holy One of Israel!
Amen.

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

—Venerable Fulton Sheen

FOR FURTHER READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1077–134 (“The Liturgy—Work of the Holy Trinity” and “The Paschal Mystery in the Church’s Sacraments”), 1333–44 (“The Eucharist in the Economy of Salvation”), 1373–81 (“The Presence of Christ by the power of his word and the Holy Spirit”), 1996–2005 (“Grace”)

Joan Carroll Cruz, *Eucharistic Miracles and Eucharistic Phenomena in the Lives of the Saints* (TAN Books: 1991)

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* (Ignatius Press: 2003)

Robert Barron, *Eucharist* (Orbis Books: 2008)

NOTES

[illegible]