

Celebrating the Eucharist

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Nihil Obstat: Rev. John Sauer
Censor Librorum
1 April 1998

Imprimatur: Rev. Michael J. Hoepfner, JCL
Administrator, Diocese of Winona
1 April 1998

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The acknowledgments continue on the inside back cover.

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Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-0-88489-459-9



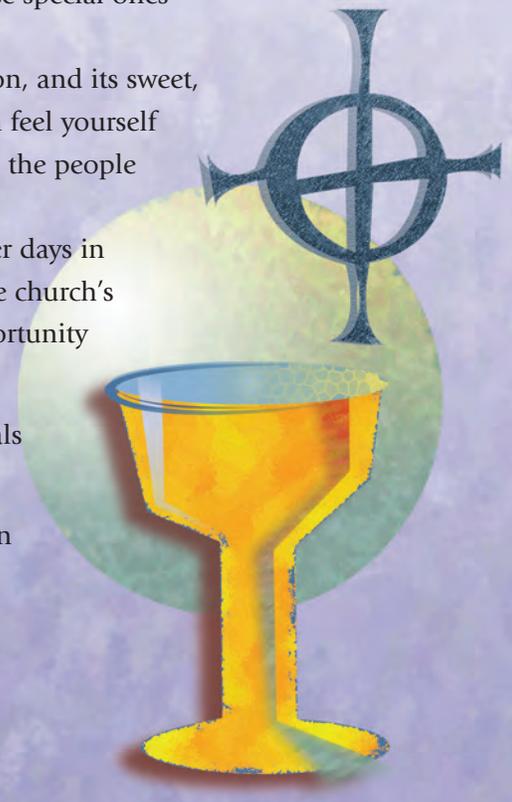
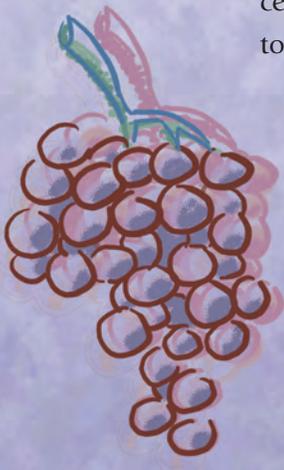
Red- LETTER Days

Your birthday, the season opener, the last day of school, the first day of camp, Christmas. These are all red-letter days—the best days of all. You have your own variety of red-letter days. You circle them on the calendar. You draw a big, sloppy X over each day before these special ones as you count down, 10, 9, 8, 7 . . .

Each red-letter day has its own preparation, its celebration, and its sweet, lingering memory. As you wait and plan for the day, you can feel yourself getting a little happier, a little more grateful, a little closer to the people around you.

This course can help you think about one set of red-letter days in particular: it can help you understand a little more about the church's celebration of the Eucharist. In this course you have an opportunity to learn the following things:

- how rituals shape your life, and how you shape rituals
- how, for two thousand years, the celebration of the Eucharist, or Mass, has gathered people as God's own
- how your participation in the celebration of the Eucharist connects you with God and with other people
- how the celebration of the Eucharist strengthens you to love and serve the Lord in your life today



Let the Games Begin!

Almost everyone in the world knows something about the Olympics. The first Olympic Games took place in Greece about fourteen hundred years before the birth of Christ. The Greeks believed that sports competitions were pleasing to their gods and honored the spirits of dead ancestors. The first sports competitions were peaceful ways to show rivalry. They surely were better than constant warfare between city-states! These sports competitions were called the Olympics because the most important of them took place in the Greek valley of Olympia, in a stadium that seated about twenty thousand spectators.

As time passed the games became so important that the Greeks organized their calendar around them. The games were held every four years, so the four-year period between them was called an olympiad. This calendar was a great help, for athletes could plan and prepare to compete, and spectators could count off the days until the next Olympic Games began.

The Olympics continued for hundreds of years. They even survived the conquest of Greece by Rome. But gradually the Olympic Games deteriorated. The competitions became more and more brutal. Finally, in 394 C.E. Emperor Theodosius of Rome put a stop to them altogether.

And so the world was without the games for about fifteen hundred years. Then, about one hundred years ago, a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, led a movement to revive the Olympics. He thought that the games would help build world peace and cooperation.



He also knew that individual athletes the world over would personally benefit from the discipline and teamwork needed to be a good Olympic competitor.

And so it happened. The first Olympics of the new era were held in Athens in 1896. Today the calendar for the games has changed. Over a four-year period, two sets of Olympic Games are held—the Winter Olympics and the Summer Olympics. According to this new calendar, Olympic Games take place every two years, alternating between the Winter and Summer Games.

Both sets of Olympic Games open in the same way, using the same rituals: There is a procession of all athletes bearing the flag of their nation. After the athletes are in the stadium, the Olympic flag is unfurled and raised on high. Its five interlocking rings stand for the unity of the five continents from which the athletes come. The rings are black, blue, green, red, and yellow. At least one of these colors appears on the flag of each nation competing in the games. Probably the most dramatic action of the Olympic ceremony is the lighting of the torch. At each new Olympics, the torch that ignites the huge flame has been carried all the way from Olympia, where it was lit by the sun's rays.

Tens of thousands of people attend the Olympic Games every two years. And millions more watch them on television. The nations of the world truly have a rite they can share with everyone.



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YOU CAN TELL A RITE

We gather in a special place, such as our grandmother's house or a stadium or a church. In this place we participate in something that is quite special to all who are present, a ritual or rite.

Think about your favorite holiday, and about one special ritual you observe on that holiday. Then read the key ideas about rituals below, and think of a characteristic for your chosen ritual that relates to each idea listed. Write your thoughts in the spaces provided here.

THIS IS MY
FAVORITE HOLIDAY:

THIS IS THE
RITUAL I LIKE
BEST ON THAT DAY:

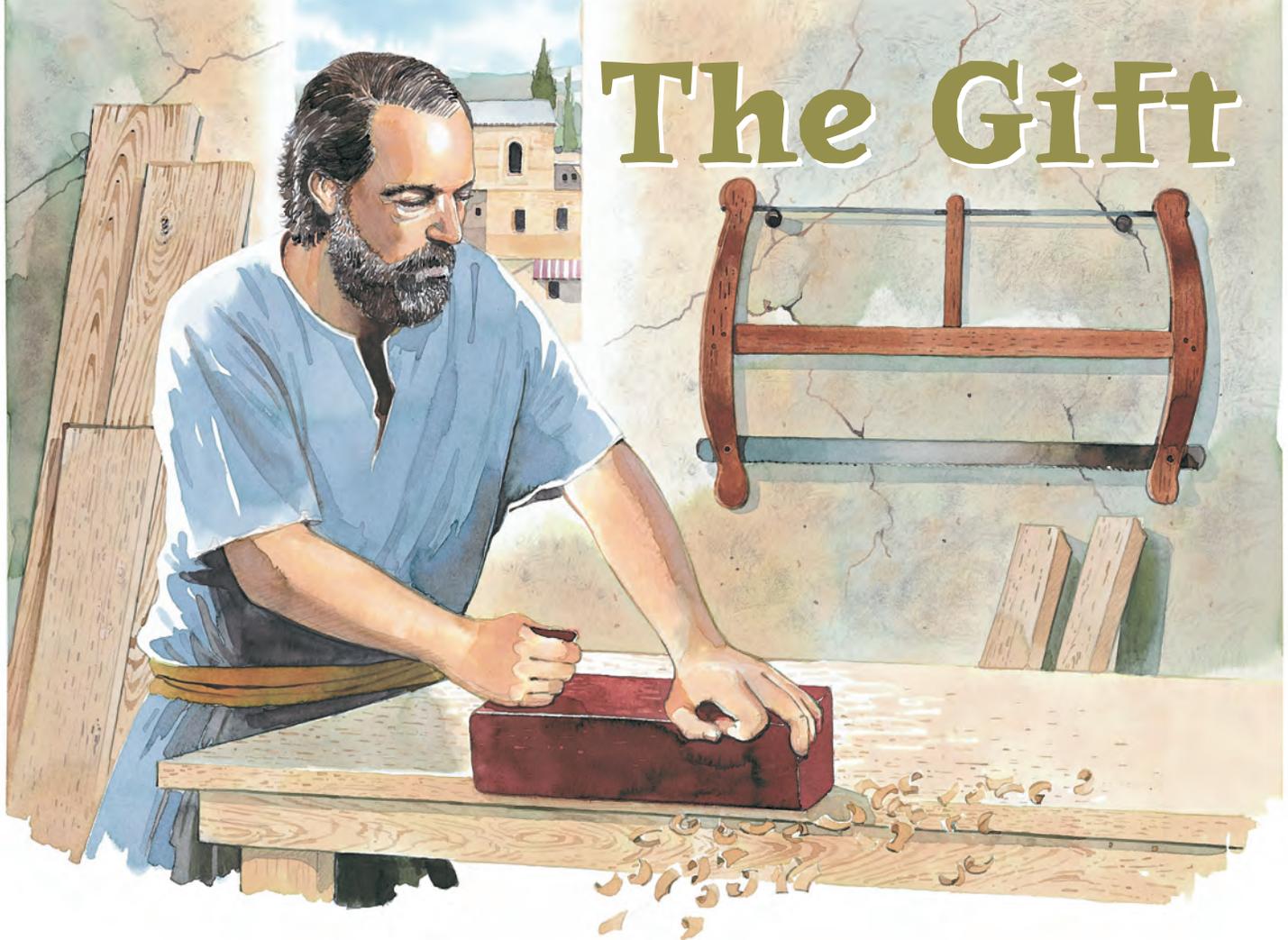
THESE ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS
OF MY FAVORITE RITUAL:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

KEY IDEAS

This is how you can tell a rite:

1. A rite commemorates a past event (and carries it forward).
2. It occurs over and over again.
3. It gathers people to share or participate in some way.
4. It is symbolic.



The Gift

ONCE UPON A TIME, A WOODWORKER MADE A TABLE. He cured the fine-hewn planks of oak. He sawed and fitted the legs and braces. He made the top fit just right. He polished and oiled the wood to a golden sheen.

Then, when the table was finished, he got down on his knees. On the underside of the table, he hand carved the words, "For my children."

Years passed, and the children grew up and went away. The man grew old and died. The table was sold to strangers, who in turn sold it again.

By chance the new owner found the words "For my children" on the underside of the table. The new owner wondered who had carved these loving words. He wondered who the children were. He wished that the woodworker's children had the table. He wished they could gather around the gift their parent had given. The new owner knew: Once, perhaps long ago, someone, somewhere had remembered the table and its maker. But that memory was now lost, maybe forever.

(Based on Neil Diamond, the song "Morningside")

A Place at the Table

Catholic Christians have been given a gift too. The gift is not a table, but it is given as we gather around a table.

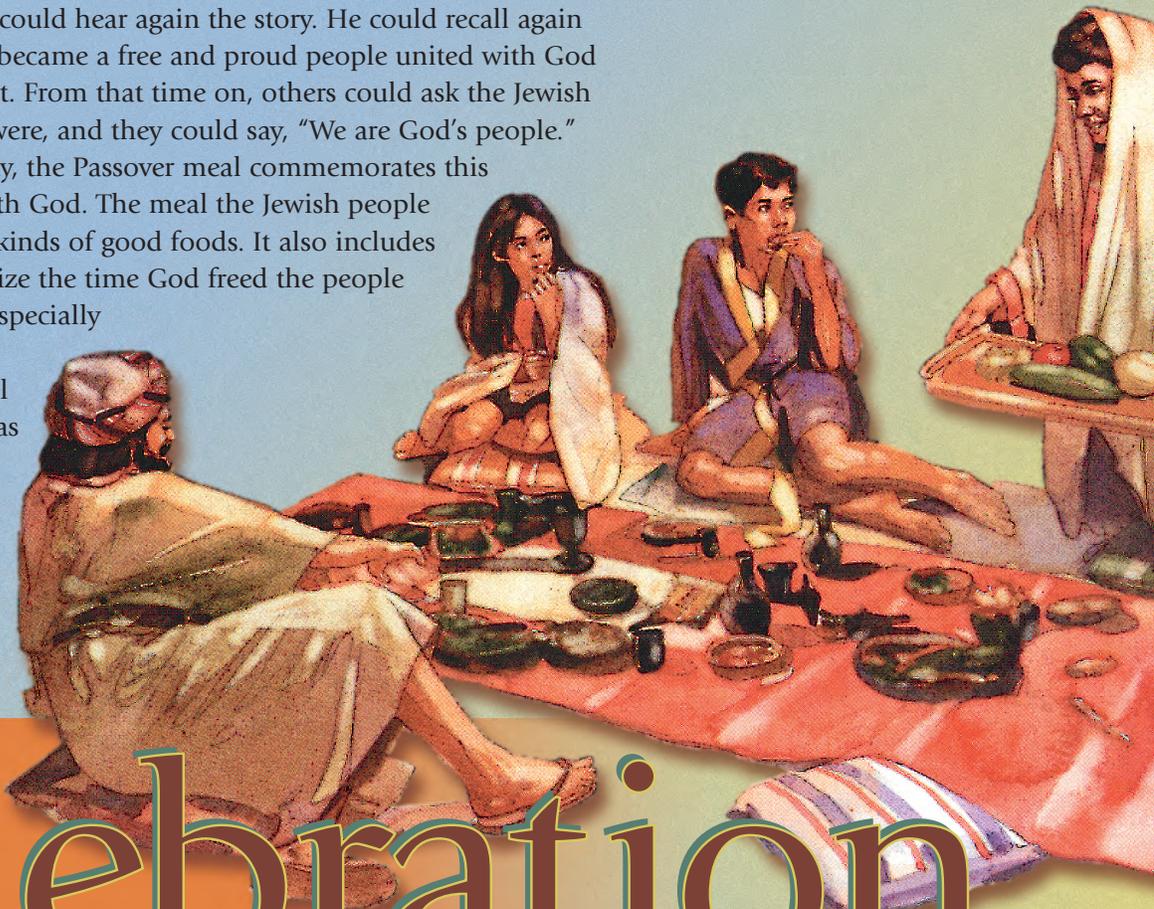
Followers of Jesus remembered the gift and became a family called Christian. They gathered at this table and broke bread together. As followers of Jesus shared a holy meal in memory of Jesus, they were shaped into his likeness. They became the Body of Christ, the church.

All baptized people of faith still have a place at this table, for they are family.

Jesus could always remember the celebration of Passover. In this celebration older children ask their elders certain questions, and together the questions and answers tell the story of how God delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery. Every year of his life, Jesus gathered with Mary and Joseph and their family and friends. When Jesus finally was old enough, he was able to ask the questions, and he could hear again the story. He could recall again how the Israelites became a free and proud people united with God in a holy Covenant. From that time on, others could ask the Jewish people who they were, and they could say, "We are God's people."

To this very day, the Passover meal commemorates this great Covenant with God. The meal the Jewish people share includes all kinds of good foods. It also includes foods that symbolize the time God freed the people and made them a specially loved people.

The ritual meal Jesus celebrated was similar to the one presented here.



Celebration

Opening Prayer

Leader. O Lord, our God, at this time we celebrate the feast of Passover, a time of freedom and thanksgiving. We remember your kindness throughout the ages. Be with us now as we celebrate your presence among us today.

Blessing

Leader. Blessed are you, Lord and God, ruler of the universe. You give us this time of remembrance. You made Israel a holy people and brought us to this day.
[The leader holds up her or his cup.] Blessed are you, Lord and God, ruler of the universe. You have given us the fruit of the vine.

All. Blessed are you, our Lord and God.

Leader. *[The leader holds up her or his plate.]* This is the unleavened bread for our meal. This is the bitter-tasting herb of sorrow and the sweet food of remembering. All who are hungry, come. Remember our bitter sorrow and our sweet gladness.

Remembering

All. Why is this festival time different from all other times?

Leader. At this time we celebrate the Passover. We remember that the Lord brought our ancestors out of slavery in Egypt. If the Lord had not done this, we would not be a free people.

First guest. Why do we eat unleavened bread at this time? *[All eat a half portion of their bread.]*

Leader. We remember that our ancestors fled in the night. In their haste they could not wait for the dough to rise.

Second guest. Why do we eat these bitter herbs only at this time?

Leader. We remember the bitterness of the slavery and sin that kept our ancestors in bondage. *[All eat of the bitter food.]*

Third guest. Why do we eat only this sweet-tasting food at this time?

Leader. We remember the great hope our ancestors had. The remembrance of the bitterness of slavery is sweetened by the assurance of God's freedom. *[All eat the sweet food with their remaining bread.]*

of Freedom

Singing Praise

Leader. *[The leader again holds up her or his cup.]* This is the cup of unity and peace. May the name of the Lord be blessed now and forever. *[All drink from their cup, then pause.]* Give thanks, for the Lord's love is everlasting. The Lord has gathered us from the east and west, from the north and south.

All. The Lord's love is everlasting.

Leader. The Lord made the heavens in wisdom.

All. The Lord's love is everlasting.

Leader. The Lord brought Israel out of slavery.

All. The Lord's love is everlasting.

Leader. The Lord led the people through the wilderness.

All. The Lord's love is everlasting.

Leader. The Lord guided us in our exile and grief.

All. The Lord's love is everlasting.

Leader. May the Lord continue to guide and save us, now and forevermore.

All. Amen. Alleluia.

A New Covenant

It was spring, and Jesus was a long way from home. Passover was coming. He knew that he soon would face his death. He thought of the men who had been with him for nearly three years. He wanted to celebrate his last Passover with them, and he asked Peter and John to make preparations for doing so. He told them to go to Jerusalem, where they would find a man carrying a jar of water. Normally, getting water from the well was women's work, so it would be easy to spot a man with a water jar. Jesus told Peter and John that this man would have a place set aside for him and the Apostles to share a meal.

Peter and John did as Jesus asked. The man led them to a large upper room that was furnished and ready. There Peter and John made preparations for the Passover meal. (Based on Matthew 26:17-19, Mark 14:12-16, and Luke 22:7-13)

To see how Jesus and the Apostles celebrated the Passover meal, read one of these passages:

Matthew 26:26–29

Mark 14:22–25

Luke 22:14–20

Use these questions to guide your reading, and prepare to share your findings with the rest of the class:

1. How was the Passover meal Jesus celebrated similar to the one you celebrated?
2. How was it different?
3. What did sharing the bread that was broken and the wine that was poured mean to the people at this Passover meal?

—Key Ideas—

1. The Passover is the most solemn and important ritual meal of the Jewish people.
2. On the night before he died, Jesus gave this ritual meal a new meaning. He established a new covenant between himself and his followers.
3. Jesus gave his followers the command, “Do this in memory of me.”
4. All who share in this new meal share in Jesus’ life—in his body and blood. All are one with him and one in him.

Talking a Stand

Put an X in the box that tells how you feel about each statement below.

	Never	Almost never	Most of the time	Always
1. I understand what the Eucharist is about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I like going to church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I feel close to God when I celebrate the Eucharist.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I think the Eucharist is boring.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I feel close to my family and friends when I celebrate the Eucharist.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I think praying together is really important.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I can pray better when I'm alone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I can think of ways to help make Mass better.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I like sitting up front where I can see what's going on.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

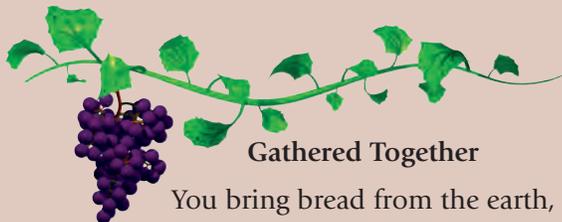
I Like

I understand



Umuntu, ngamuntu, ngabantu.
 "A person is a person because of other persons."
 (Bantu saying)

- | | Never | Almost never | Most of the time | Always |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. The readings and the homily have something to do with my life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. I like the part where we shake hands with people around us. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I like it when there are get-togethers after church. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. I like to go to church when I get to do something like be a server or sing in the choir. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. I think adults in our parish would be interested in my ideas about Mass. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. I think it would be interesting to help plan our parish Masses. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Gathered Together

You bring bread from the earth,
 and wine to gladden our hearts,
 Oil to make our faces gleam,
 food to build our strength.

(Psalm 104:14-15)