

Why Eucharist Is a Challenge to Us

The Eucharist celebrates community -- our being called together by God as brothers and sisters in the family of God. This is a challenge because

Our society...

- values personal freedom and individual autonomy
- admires self-sufficiency and independence
- de-values people who are dependent or vulnerable
- values competition more than cooperation
- fears the commitment and responsibilities of belonging to a group or participating in relationships

Eucharist assumes...

- that human beings are social by nature
- no person is entirely independent or self-sufficient
- everyone is connected and inter-dependent
- our ability to thrive depends on cooperation with God's grace and one another
- we have a response-ability to and for others

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The Eucharist reminds us that this community we belong to has a past and a future which shapes who we are and what we do in the present. This is a challenge because

Our society...

- devalues the importance of history and tends to ignore the lessons of the past
- over-emphasizes individual autonomy and self-determination
- believes individuals are free to shape their own future, regardless of the past or present
- limits truth to factual accounts which can be objectively validated

Eucharist assumes...

- human beings and communities are shaped by time and space
- no person or community exists entirely disconnected from the past
- who we are and what we do is shaped by our origin and our destiny as human beings
- that deeper truths are often communicated through narrative or stories

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The Eucharist celebrates God's presence—historically through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, sacramentally through in the Body of Christ. This is a challenge because

Our society...

- is a "disenchanted," secular society
- does not appreciate the spiritual, transcendental, un-material dimension of life
- expects concrete, "objective" proof for everything
- is uncomfortable with mysteries which defy reasonable, understandable explanations

Eucharist assumes...

- that there is more to reality than "meets the eye"
- there is a deeper, transcendental, spiritual dimension which cannot be fully explained or understood by human reason or science
- the mystery of God is present in time/space
- material reality reveals this sacred presence

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The Eucharist prepares and empowers us to be people-on-a-mission, to be disciples who witness to God's presence in word and deed. This is a challenge because

Our society...

- over-values the role of a few but de-values the role of many
- empowers those who are especially gifted
- is shaped by theologies which de-value the role of human activity in the world and believe that only a few are worthy of salvation
- leaves many individuals feeling useless discouraged, powerless and vulnerable

Eucharist assumes...

- that every human life has purpose and value
- that what human beings do in this world does make a difference, for good or bad
- that every person has the response-ability and the right to contribute in some way to God's saving work in creation
- that faith is expressed in works of the human body, mind and spirit, in individuals and human communities

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Community in the Eucharist

1. Think about the ways in which you have experienced a tension between individual freedom and community responsibilities in your own life.
2. Remember the occasions or circumstances in which you have experienced the value – and the challenge – of living in a community or family.
3. Imagine how you might enter more fully into an awareness of belonging to the community which gathers to celebrate the Eucharist.

Sense of History in the Eucharist

1. Think about ways in which you have experienced or used narratives (stories) to communicate the truth about some experience which could not be fully described or explained by the “facts”.
2. Recall where, when or how you have experienced the value of history – of belonging to a family or a community whose identity and behavior is shaped by its past and its future.
3. Consider the benefits – and challenges – of belonging to the People of God, a community like the church, whose behavior is shaped by its past and by its destiny.

The Divine Presence in Eucharist

1. Think about times when you have experienced the tension that exists between the mysteries of life and factual knowledge revealed to us by human reason or science.
2. Recall examples of where, when or how you have experienced god’s presence in nature, in other people, in the sacraments or in the Eucharist.
3. Consider why it is important to you that in the Eucharist the bread and wine – and the assembly itself – are transformed into the Body of Christ on earth.

The Importance of Mission in Eucharist

1. Think about some of the concrete circumstances in which you have felt under-valued, discouraged or powerless as an individual, as a family member, a member of a organization, business or community, or as a member of society in general.
2. Recall examples of where, when or how you have experienced a sense of purpose, meaning and hope about your life – a sense of mission, which shapes how you feel and how you act.
3. Consider the difference it makes to individuals and to society if each human person is considered to have value, purpose and meaning.

See a further discussion of the Eucharist and these challenges online at:

<http://waterloocatholics.org/guide-to-the-mass>