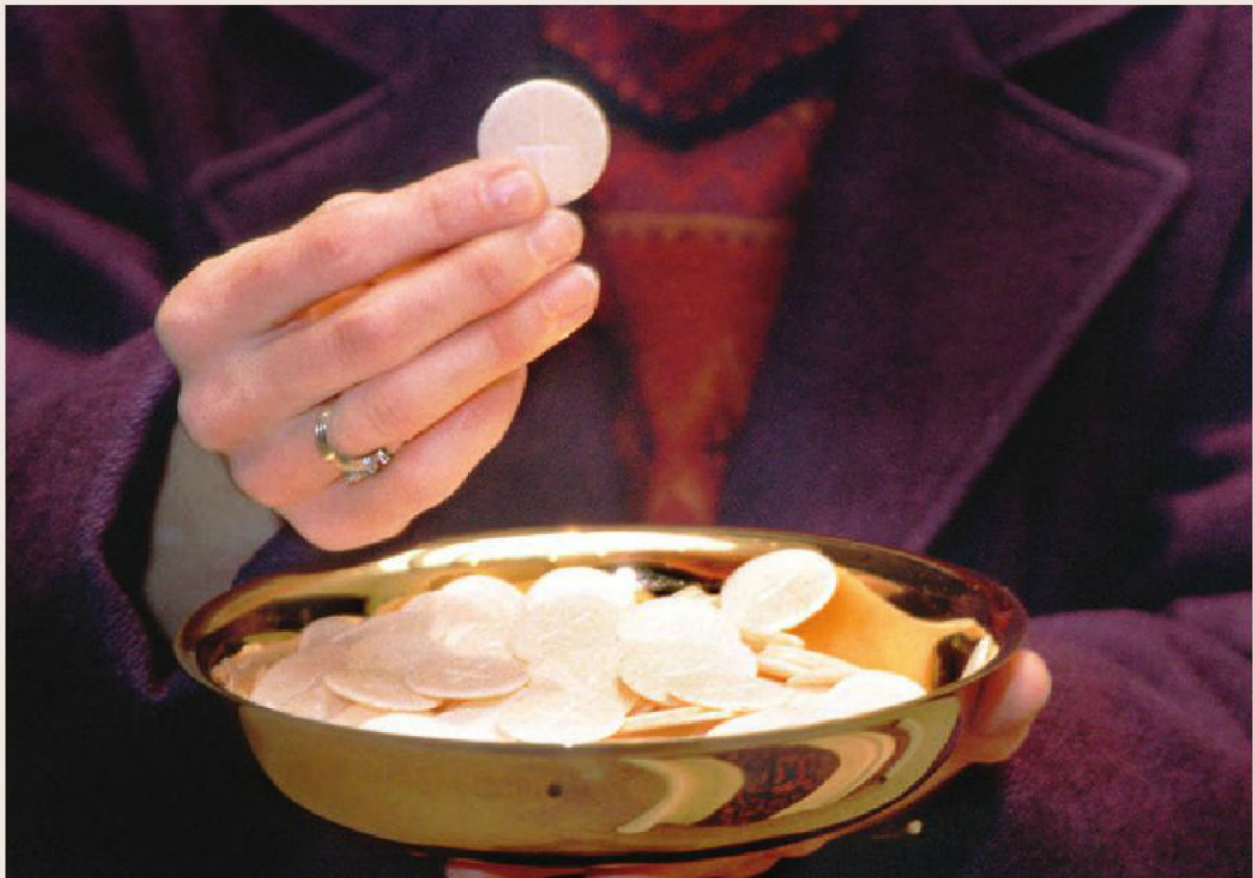


## THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MY DEVOTION?

The Eucharist is not merely a celebration of real presence, but something that brings about unity and reconciliation in the whole body. *by Thomas Richstatter, OFM*



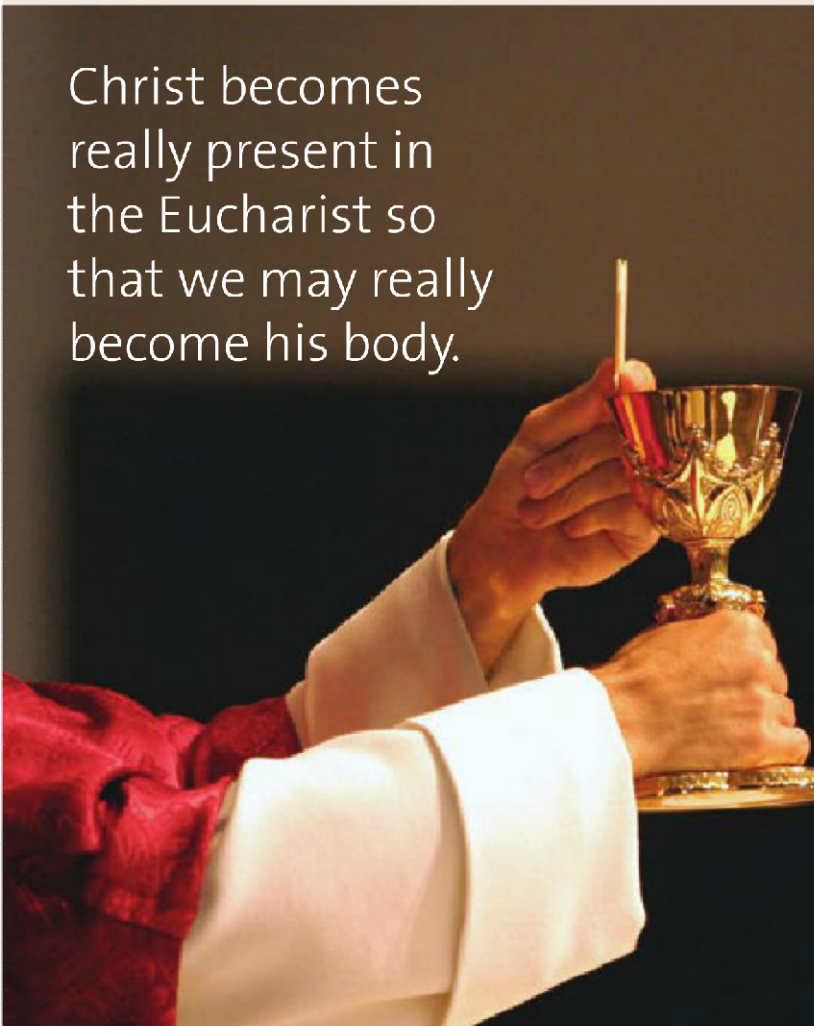
CNS PHOTO FROM CROSIERS

**W**hat happened to Benediction, kneeling for Communion, and silence in church? As I look back, I see that many of the devotions and signs of reverence for the Eucharist that were so dear to me in my younger days I no longer practice. What has happened to my devotion to the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist?

I have spoken about the Eucharist to many parish groups across the country. And as I listen to the questions and comments of people at these talks, I pick up their concern regarding the changes in eucharistic devotion. Many have experienced changes in their own devotion or witnessed it in others, and they sometimes worry that something important has been lost.

I hope that describing the change in my eucharistic devotion will help many other Catholics to understand and appreciate their own eucharistic devotion.

Christ becomes  
really present in  
the Eucharist so  
that we may really  
become his body.



CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

My devotion to the Eucharist is not something merely external, something that *I do*; it is something that *I am*. It lies at the very heart of my identity: how I see myself as a Christian, as a Catholic priest, as an American.

Changes in devotion to the Eucharist affect me—as they affect you—much more deeply than many other changes in my life. To explain the changes in external behavior I must talk about the inner changes in belief and understanding. I have come to believe that in order to understand the Sacrament of the Eucharist adequately, my understanding and my piety must include three images: Good Friday, Holy Thursday, and Easter Sunday.

### **GOOD FRIDAY: THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS**

Good Friday was the main image that shaped my eucharistic devotion when I was a child.

I learned about the Mass and the sacraments from the *Baltimore Catechism*, which older Catholics remember. I remember Question 357: “What is the Mass?” I memorized the answer: “The Mass is the sacrifice of the New Law in which Christ, through the ministry of the priest, offers Himself to God in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine.”

I never thought much about the meal aspect of the Mass when I was a child. My devotion to the sacrament was shaped by the image of kneeling at the foot of the cross, gazing at the sacrifice of Jesus, and expressing gratitude for so great a love and sorrow for sins that caused so great a suffering. The image of Good Friday remains an essential element of my understanding of the Eucharist; but while it is essential, it is not enough.

### **HOLY THURSDAY: EUCHARIST AS SACRED BANQUET**

If Good Friday was the dominant image in my understanding of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the image of Holy Thursday and the Lord’s Supper was never absent. I remember as an altar server kneeling and staring at the picture of the Last Supper carved on the front of the altar at St. Anthony’s in Wichita. But it was only during the 1950s and ’60s when more and more people began to receive holy Communion

during Mass that the image of Holy Thursday gradually began to play a larger role in my understanding of the Eucharist.

During the '70s the parish with which I celebrated began to use a host for the Eucharist that looked and tasted more like real bread. People began to receive Communion in their hands and to drink from the cup. Mass began to look more like a meal. Altars began to look like tables. The prayers of the Mass and the songs we sang spoke openly about eating and drinking, about meals, suppers, and banquets. All of these things caused the image of Holy Thursday to be added to the image of Good Friday in helping me to understand the Sacrament of the Eucharist. My devotion began to take on a more joyful tone.

## EASTER SUNDAY: UNION WITH THE RISEN LORD

If the addition of the Holy Thursday image to Good Friday enriched my understanding of the Eucharist, the addition of the Easter Sunday image has helped me even more. When St. Paul experienced the risen Lord at his conversion, he experienced a Christ who was so identified with us that to persecute the Christians was to persecute Christ.

Later Paul himself retells the incident: "I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' I replied, 'Who are you, sir?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 22:7-8). Paul tells the story again in Chapter 26: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (26:15). The experience revealed to Paul that Christ cannot be separated from his members. The risen Lord is so united to the Christian that what we do to one another, we do to Christ.

This was the very point that was at issue in Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 11, the earliest written account we have of the Last Supper. When Paul writes to the Corinthians in about the year 50 AD, he has some concerns about their eucharistic devotion:

"In giving this instruction, I do not praise the fact that your meetings are doing more harm than good. First of all, I hear that when you meet as a church there are divisions among you, and to a degree I believe it. . . . When you meet in one place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. Do you not have houses in which you can eat and drink? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and make those who have nothing feel

*(continued on back page)*

## WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MY EUCHARISTIC DEVOTION?

One way of answering this question is to say that formerly my devotion stopped short. My devotion was focused on the first transformation: the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. I had forgotten the warning of St. Paul and did not recognize the second transformation: the transformation of the Christians into Christ. This second transformation is the purpose of the first: Christ becomes really present in the Eucharist so that we may really become his body. This is precisely what Eucharistic Prayer 3 is saying when it pleads, "Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may *become one body, one spirit in Christ.*"

I think the second transformation is especially hard for American Catholics. Our American culture places a high value on the individual, on independence, and on freedom from obligations to one another. If a culture is infected with racism or sexism, the Christians who are formed by that culture will find it difficult to express devotion to a Eucharist that proclaims that there is no longer "Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

In Baptism I renounced "Satan," I renounced racism and sexism and exaggerated individualism, and I was born into Christ Jesus. Each time I approach the Eucharist I renew that baptismal promise. As I come to the Church for Eucharist, I dip my hand in the baptismal water and renew those baptismal vows. Each time I get up and go to holy Communion I give a sign to the community that I am committed to all that the Eucharist stands for—I am committed to "do this" in memory of Jesus—to live as he lived, to live no longer for myself but for his body.

## DIG DEEPER

What does the Sacrament of the Eucharist mean to you?

How has your devotion to the Eucharist changed over time?

How does the Eucharist sustain you on your faith journey?

(continued from page 3)

ashamed?” (1 Cor 11:17-22).

Paul reproaches the Corinthians for celebrating the Eucharist without recognizing the body of Christ—the poor who go hungry while the rich get drunk. His criticism of their eucharistic devotion is not directed toward some liturgical rule, toward the songs they were singing or the vestments they were wearing or not wearing, or whether they received Communion standing up or kneeling down—or any of the issues that might disturb some Catholics today—the issue was much more important. They were trying to remember Christ without remembering his body, which includes the poor. They wanted to celebrate the head without the body—a risen and glorified sacramental Christ separated from his actual body now.

Paul reminds us of an awesome responsibility. Coming forward at Mass to receive holy Communion is a promise that we will treat each person who receives the bread and drinks the cup as a member of our own body! It is no longer “us and them” but “us.” Sharing the meal is a promise that we will treat all men and women as Christ would treat them, indeed as we would treat Christ himself.

It is easy to lose sight of this relation: risen Christ—mystical body—eucharistic presence. The Eucharist is not merely a celebration of real presence, but a celebration of real presence that brings about unity and reconciliation in the whole body. As the early Christians sang at Eucharist: as many grapes are brought together and crushed to make the wine—as many grains of wheat are ground into flour to make the one bread—so we, although many, become one body when we eat the one bread.

.....

*Thomas Richstatter, OFM, a popular writer and speaker, has a doctorate in liturgy and sacramental theology from the Institute Catholique de Paris.*



CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHERITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

## BALANCING GOOD FRIDAY, HOLY THURSDAY, AND EASTER SUNDAY

**B**alancing the images of Good Friday, Holy Thursday, and Easter Sunday (sacrifice, banquet, unity of creation) is not an easy task. Sometimes I feel like a juggler at the circus, trying to keep three objects in the air at once. I am no good at juggling three objects. Yet, I think the Church is asking us to keep all three of these ideas balanced in our minds—just as the opening paragraph of the Second Vatican Council’s treatment of Eucharist very carefully balances the three:

“At the Last Supper [Holy Thursday], on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he should come again and in this way to entrust to his beloved Bride, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection [Easter Sunday]” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 42).

### KEEP THE FAITH

VISIT [CATALOG.FRANCISCANMEDIA.ORG](http://CATALOG.FRANCISCANMEDIA.ORG) for more faith-formation resources—including *Catholic Update*, *I Believe*, *Youth Update*, *Homily Helps*, and *Bringing Home the Word*. Or use your smartphone to scan this code to get there.



**ST. ANTHONY**  
Messenger

**SUBSCRIBE TO BUILD YOUR FAITH**

*St. Anthony Messenger* is a national Catholic magazine published by the Franciscans. See the current issue at [StAnthonyMessenger.org](http://StAnthonyMessenger.org).

#### GET A 12-MONTH SUBSCRIPTION:

Single: \$18.00 • 2-9: \$12.00 ea. • 10-49: \$6.00 ea. • 50-99: \$5.40 ea.  
• 100-199: \$4.20 ea. • 200-299: \$3.60 ea. • 300-499: \$2.76 ea.  
• 500-999: \$2.40 ea. • 1000 or more: \$1.80 ea.

*For bulk rates, all copies must be mailed to same address.*

#### ORDER COPIES OF CATHOLIC UPDATE:

1000 or more: 19¢ ea. • 500-999: 23¢ ea. • 400-499: 25¢ ea. • 300-399: 28¢ ea. • 200-299: 33¢ ea. • 100-199: 39¢ ea. • 10-99: 49¢ ea. • 1-9: 75¢ ea. For more information call **1-800-488-0488** or visit us at [FranciscanMedia.org](http://FranciscanMedia.org). Prices are subject to change.