

*We set the
Table.
God
is the one who
comes and does the
Work.*

-MARK HART-

STEP
1

Welcome, Prayer & Challenge of the Week Review (6 minutes)

The opening Scripture verse and prayer are based on the session topic for the week. You may want to ask a volunteer to read the Scripture verse aloud and then lead the prayer yourself with the group praying aloud. Suggested opening words are found next to the prayer.

SESSION THREE

The Mystery Revealed

"Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

– Matthew 26:26-28

Lord Jesus, we hear these words during the consecration at every Mass. Help us to look beyond what we have seen and heard before. Through the intercession of Mary, your Mother, help us to think bigger. Help us to realize how much God loves us and to receive his love through the Eucharist.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

In this session, we will be taking a deeper dive into what is actually taking place at Mass. Let's ask God to help us to put our preconceived ideas aside and be open to learning more about the mystery and meaning behind the things that we have taken for granted so many times. In the name of the Father...

Encourage students to share their experiences of the "challenge" they chose to do the previous week. You could ask if anyone would like to share a "challenge experience." To break the ice, you might ask questions like, "Who chose the first challenge?"; "Did you find it easy or difficult?"; or "Would any of you like to share what you wrote or any insights you gained?"



DIVE IN

There once was an old farmer who was cleaning out his attic. As he sorted through all the dust-covered family heirlooms, antiques, and paintings that had been stored there for many years, the farmer decided to pack it all up and sell (or trash) it.

He filled up his pickup truck and drove to town, hoping to make a few dollars. People came and looked over the stuff, but showed little interest in most of it. Finally, someone noticed an irregularity on one of the paintings. A corner of its canvas had been scratched away, revealing not a hole, but another canvas underneath.

Imagine everyone's surprise when a simple, dusty painting of a bowl of fruit was peeled back to reveal a stunning and priceless work of art from a famous Renaissance artist. The farmer, in shock, screamed with joy. Ultimately, he sold this masterpiece and returned to his farm a wealthy man.

STEP
2

Dive In (5 minutes)

Read the Dive In aloud, have a teen read it aloud, or have the group read it silently.

“Jesus’
presence is
veiled.”

As the saying goes, “One man’s junk is another man’s treasure.” Not everyone believes that the Eucharist is truly Jesus’ Body and Blood. Recent studies have shown that even many Catholics who attend Mass regularly do not believe—or at least “aren’t sure”—that Christ is really and “substantially” present in the Eucharist. What about you? What do you believe the Eucharist is? A wafer of bread and a sip of wine? Or the true Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ?

Consider the Communion host (or wafer) you receive at Mass. It does not look or taste like “normal” bread. But if you put it under a microscope and examine it, you would discover that, *from all appearances*, it is bread (though of a different kind than you might be used to).

Our Faith teaches us, though, that after the bread and wine are consecrated by the priest at Mass, what still looks and tastes like bread and wine has been transformed into Christ’s Body and Blood. Jesus’ presence is veiled; he is truly present “beneath the surface,” hidden from our earthly eyes. Bread and wine now conceal history’s greatest and perfect masterpiece, the Bread of Life, the Son of God.

Remember that most of Jesus’ contemporaries did not accept him as the Messiah. It is possible for God to be in our midst, right in front of our eyes, and for us not to recognize him. So, look again now. Take a closer look—with faith—at the bread and wine and behold the Body and Blood of Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Segment 1: Lean In

What does Mark mean when he says Mass is “a collision of heaven and earth”?

Though we play a part in the Mass, it is more about what God is doing for us. Have you ever thought about the Mass as something God is doing rather than something we are doing?

Segment 2: The Greatest Gift

This program is called *Altaration*. What does Fr. Mike say that gives some idea of why this title was chosen?

Do you see Mass as an amazing, mysterious event or as just another Sunday “worship service,” similar to those your non-Catholic friends may attend?

Do you take a few moments after receiving Communion to thank Jesus for what he has just given you—his very Body and Blood? Will you do that from now on?



Video Presentation and Journaling (25 to 35 minutes)

Play the video presentations for Session 3, beginning with Segment 1. At the end of each segment, give the students 3 to 5 minutes to answer the questions in their workbooks on their own before moving on to the next segment. There are three segments in this session.

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Segment 3: What If?

Were you surprised to learn that Mark had some of the same struggles many of you have?
Have you ever had similar struggles?

During his confirmation retreat, Mark asked the question that changed his life: "What if?"
Why do you think asking this question had such a profound impact on him?

If you really receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, what does that mean for
how you should live your life?

FIND IT

What are the only Greek words used in the Mass? What do they mean?

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison (Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.)



Small-Group Discussion (15 to 20 minutes)

After the final video presentation and journaling time, facilitators will lead their small groups through the discussion questions. Do not worry about getting through all the questions. Be willing to stay on any question that elicits a strong reaction. Do not be afraid of silence. Just keep encouraging them to share, and wait until one or two do. Be aware of digression, and do your best to keep your students on topic.



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Entering the Mystery Question

Can you think of examples of times when God has been present and active in your life, even if you did not “see” him?

ENTERING THE MYSTERY

STEP
5

Entering the Mystery (10 minutes)

After the video presentation, read the Entering the Mystery story aloud, have a teen read it aloud, or have the group read it silently. Thought-provoking questions are included above to foster a brief class discussion.

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At every Mass, we see our humanity and God's divinity meet as Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross and Last Supper are both made present on the altar in the Eucharist.

Have you ever considered this deep and mysterious reality?

Note that Jesus is not being *re-sacrificed* on the altar during Mass. His sacrifice on the Cross on Good Friday was a unique, unrepeatable, historical event. Its consequences, though—the liberation of every person who ever lived or will live from sin and death—are timeless and transcendent. In God's great love, Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is *re-presented* at every celebration of the Mass. When we go to Mass, we are not only witnessing what happened on Good Friday, we are transported to the Upper Room on Holy Thursday, when Jesus took bread and wine and offered them as his Body and Blood to his apostles, the first priests.

Now do you see why Mass is called a "mystery"?

There are visible and invisible realities transpiring at every Mass, just as there are in other areas of human experience.

Consider wind or love. In themselves, they are "invisible" realities, but you can see their effects. Though wind itself is invisible, we see flags and trees blowing and feel it on our faces, so we know it is present. Its effects are undeniable. Similarly, you cannot "see" love in itself, but you can see it being expressed in the care a mother gives to her child and in the affection a married couple shows toward one other.

God is like this. Strictly speaking, God is invisible to us on earth. But we can see his presence in the beauty of his creation—in majestic mountains, in the vastness of the oceans, in the seemingly limitless expanse of space, in the stars, in the profoundly complex mystery that is man. In a sense, nature is an evangelist pointing us to God like a compass points us north.

In the Incarnation, when God took on human flesh, the invisible God now had a visible face. When the apostles asked Jesus to show them the Father, he reminded them that, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Following Christ's ascension into heaven, we were given the Holy Spirit at Pentecost so that our "invisible God" could continue to make his presence known in visible ways through his Church.

Every Sunday and holy day, we proclaim the Nicene Creed, which begins: "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible ..." Proclaiming him as the maker of things "visible and invisible" reminds us that God, as Creator, is constantly working and moving throughout creation. God is at work, and his work is for our salvation. The Mass is filled with actions, gestures, and movements where we see the visible and invisible "meet."

CHALLENGE



- Fast for an hour before Mass (the Church actually requires us to fast for an hour before receiving Communion). Dress up a little. Arrive at least fifteen minutes before Mass begins, and spend some time praying. Give thanks after receiving Communion. Pay attention to any difference these things make in your overall experience of the Mass.

Share your experience here:



Challenge of the Week (3 minutes)

This week, there is only one challenge. During the week, students will complete the challenge and write about it in the space provided in their workbooks. Remind them to be prepared to share their experiences at the beginning of the next session.

WRAP-UP

At every Mass we, in all our humanity, come to meet Jesus in the most real way possible. The hour that we set aside on Sunday, where we meet our Lord in the Eucharist, is actually the beginning of our week. It is the place where we bring God all the junk in our hearts, all our hopes and desires, and place them as an offering on the altar, and in return receive the food that brings us to everlasting life.

It is easy to become “mindless” in today’s media-saturated world. Our brains are constantly stimulated by images and sounds, and it takes effort to escape the distractions. After a hard afternoon of practice or an intense night of studying, it is nice to fall on the couch, go mentally blank, and plug into the multimedia world. But, this makes it harder to develop a habit of prayer and can make it a challenge to “get quiet” during the ultimate prayer of the Mass.

Mass is the best opportunity you have during the week to quiet your soul, leave stress behind, and enter into a period of peaceful

contemplation and reverence. Mass is certainly not a time to be “mindless.” In fact, exactly the opposite is true: Mass should be the most “mindful” hour of your week, a time to contemplate *everything* that is going on in your life (engaging your mind, body, and soul) and listen to what God is saying.

The Mass is such a profound and amazing gift, that we should not just spend our time in the pew zoning out. We need to be focused on what is happening, listening to God’s Word, and preparing ourselves to receive Jesus’ Body and Blood in the Eucharist. And, after we receive Communion, we need to thank God for the infinite blessing he has just given us—his very self, a share in his very life.

You may be thinking, “Right, that all sounds nice, but I just can’t wrap my head around any of it.” That is OK. Just have the courage to ask the simple question, “What if?” ... and be prepared to see what God has in store for your life.

Closing Prayer

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

– *John 10:10*

Lord Jesus, you healed the blind and breathed light into the darkness. Thank you for helping us to see what you do for us during every Mass. May we never take for granted how much you love us or how incredible it is to receive you Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Create in us a greater hunger for you, and make us open to the ways in which you want to bless our lives. Amen.

STEP
7

Wrap-Up (3 minutes)

Before the Closing Prayer, have the students read the “Wrap-Up” silently. Remind them to read the “Any Questions” and “What’s That Word?” sections at home. Also, briefly review last session’s “Find It” at this time.

STEP
8

Closing Prayer (3 minutes)

Before beginning the prayer, you may want to ask if anyone has any special intentions.

Any Questions?



Can I invite my non-Catholic friends to Mass?

Absolutely! Everyone is welcome to attend Mass. Of course, when a non-Catholic friend or family member comes with us to Mass, we hope that they have a great experience. We pray for good music, stellar preaching, and friendly faces. But we do need to prepare our non-Catholic guests ahead of time regarding Communion. We must gently and respectfully tell them that they should not get in line to receive the Eucharist.

But why are non-Catholics not invited to receive the Eucharist in the Catholic Church? Why are they excluded, even though Catholics may be invited to receive Communion in their churches? Unless you know and explain the reasons for this, your non-Catholic guests could incorrectly view this as a lack of hospitality or charity on the part of the Church. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In saying that non-Catholics may not receive the Eucharist, the Church is actually showing respect for their faith and beliefs and protecting them from receiving the Eucharist unworthily. When we as Catholics come forward to receive the Lord in Communion, the priest (or an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist) elevates the host and says, “The Body of Christ,” to which we respond, “Amen.”

This is our acknowledgment of our belief in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, (i.e., that the bread we are about to receive is actually no longer bread but the very Body of Christ). By reserving reception of the Eucharist to those who have been formed in the Catholic Faith and share the Church’s belief in the real

presence, we are protecting the dignity of this great sacrament while at the same helping non-Catholics to remain faithful to their beliefs.

To allow those who do not share our Catholic Faith to receive Jesus in the Eucharist without fully understanding, believing, or proclaiming the same is actually a huge disservice to them. If they do not believe what the Church believes, then they should not be put in the awkward position of proclaiming, “Amen,” to something they don’t believe in.

If they do believe that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist *in the same sense that the Catholic Church does* (the phrase in italics is important, since many non-Catholic Christians believe that Jesus is “spiritually” or “symbolically” present), encourage them in their belief and gently ask if they have any questions about the Catholic Faith. Then, let the Holy Spirit guide them.

Ultimately, the best thing to do is to have this conversation with your non-Catholic family member or friend before Mass begins. Don’t hesitate to invite anyone and everyone to Mass with you, and reassure them that they are always welcome. In doing so, you share the beauty and glory of the Lord’s true presence in the Eucharist in such a way that they may see how significant it is in your life. This is the kind of witness St. Peter encourages us to make: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

Why do I have to give money to the Church?

We give money to the Church during Mass at the offertory as part of our sacrifice to God. In the early Church, the collection at Mass was taken up for the needs of the poor of the community. Today, the regular weekly Mass collection typically supports the day-to-day operations of the parish.

The money we give to our parish actually goes to a variety of things, including electricity and other utilities and the modest salaries of the parish staff and school, but mostly it goes toward serving those who give it. It supports all the various parish groups and activities, some of which you may participate in. (It is important to know that the cash or checks you put in the collection basket every week don't go to the

priests. It is not like Father can use it to buy a sixty-inch HD TV for the rectory or a Porsche. Priests live very simply and are actually paid very little—and they also give money to the parish and to the poor.)

You may hear people criticize the Catholic Church for being “rich and extravagant” because of its beautiful churches and priceless works of art. They claim that such “wealth” is in contrast to the poverty of Jesus. Such a view, however, is ignorant and shortsighted. It is true that the Church owns precious art and stunning cathedrals, but in a very real sense, they belong not to the Church but to the entire world as a means of drawing people closer to the richness of God's truth. Just as the woman in the Gospel

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used expensive perfume to wash Jesus' feet, beautiful chalices, gorgeous stained glass, and stunning paintings and statues are intended to turn our hearts to sacred things.

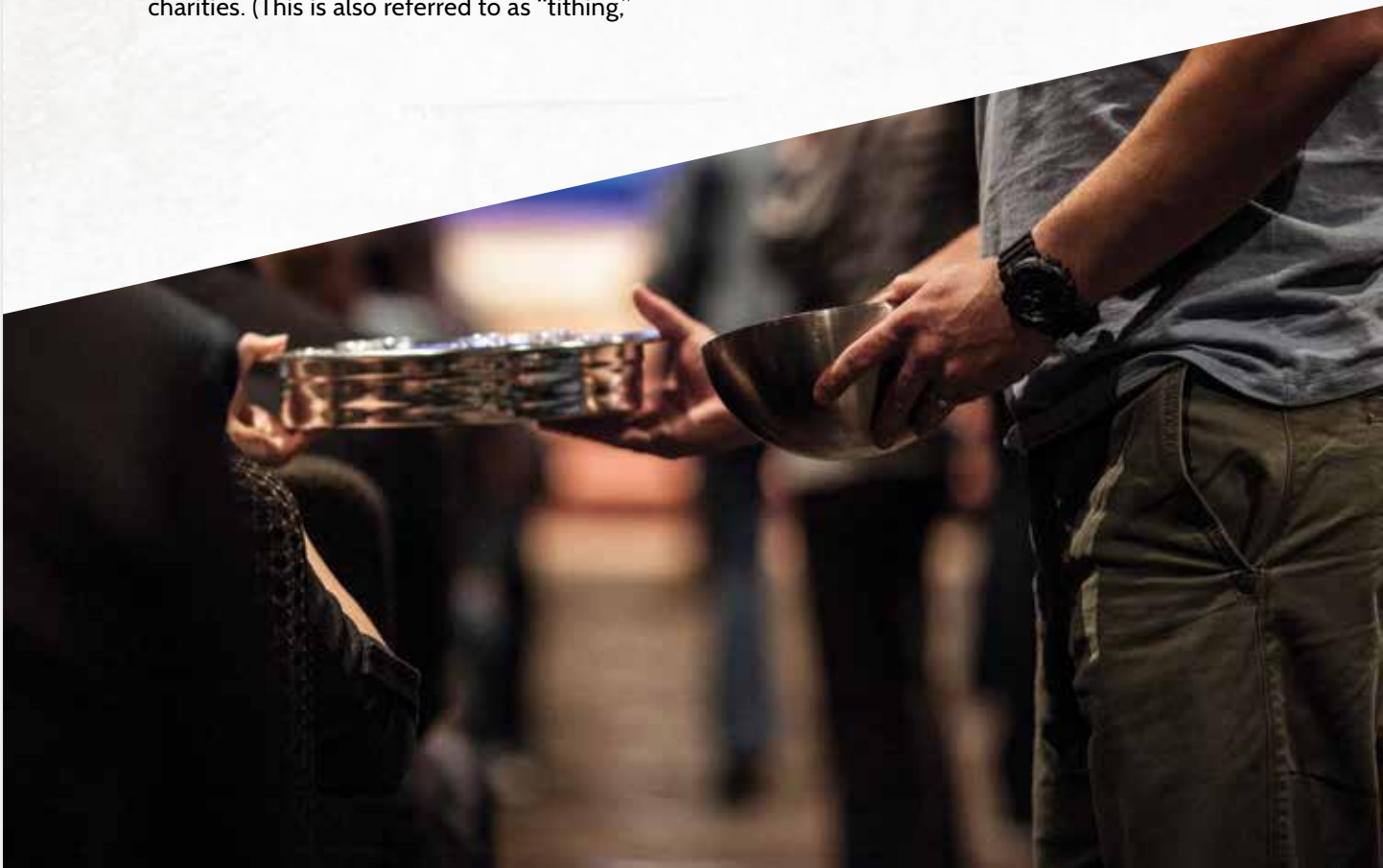
In addition, no other organization on earth even comes close to the Catholic Church's level of charitable giving. Whether through its hospitals and schools, its work in developing countries, its food, housing, and clothing aid, or its work with the imprisoned, no one "out-gives" the Catholic Church.

Regarding our financial support of the Church, there is no specific amount you must give. That said, many parishes today operate on a "stewardship" model, where parishioners are encouraged to give of their time, talent, and treasure. In terms of the "treasure" part, some parishes encourage their parishioners to give ten percent of their income to the Church and other charities. (This is also referred to as "tithing,"

from the Old English term "tithe," meaning "tenth.") The amount of ten percent comes from the book of Genesis, where Abram (later Abraham) meets Melchizedek:

Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" and Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (Genesis 14:18-20).

Notice that Abram gives a tenth of *everything*. This should be a model for us. It is a way of reminding us that we must never put creation above the Creator nor forget where all our gifts ultimately come from (see James 1:17). Recall how much God has blessed you, and prayerfully give back to him—and his Church—what you can.



WHAT'S THAT WORD?

ELEVATION

At various points in the Mass, you will see several items raised up, or elevated. Whether it is the elevation of the crucifix in the entrance procession, the elevation of the Book of Gospels by the priest (or deacon) as he processes to the *ambo* to read the Gospel, or the elevation of the sacred host during the consecration, things are regularly being “lifted up.”

The elevation of the host and chalice during the Eucharistic Prayer is the most important of the actions. It is intended to draw our eyes to the sanctuary and also serve as a reminder of the various “elevations” in the Bible that symbolize and point to the Eucharist: Moses lifting up the healing serpent in the desert (see Numbers 21:4-9) and Christ being raised up and nailed upon the Cross to redeem us from our sins. Alluding to his future death on the Cross, Jesus himself recounts the story of Moses and the serpent during his late-night discussion with Nicodemus (see John 3:14–16).

In the thirteenth century, St. Eudes de Sully, a French bishop, began elevating the gifts in a pronounced way during the Liturgy. If you look closely, you will actually notice five elevations during Mass, both minor (subtle) and major (noticeable), to signify something important happening. These elevations make present the past and propel us toward the future throughout the timelessness of the Liturgy.

EPICLESIS

During Mass, have you ever noticed when the priest extends his hands over the gifts (i.e., the bread and wine) upon the altar and brings them down in a sweeping motion? This liturgical moment is called the *epiclesis* (which is Greek for “calling down upon”), and it is a powerful symbol of the priest “calling down” the Holy Spirit upon the gifts so that they might be transformed into Christ's Body and Blood.

Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah almost three thousand years ago, the priest stands at an altar, one built on twelve (apostolic) stones. God rained down power, wind, and fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice, and during the *epiclesis*, the Holy Spirit descends in power to consume and transform our sacrifices of bread, wine, monetary offerings, and prayer that have been brought to the altar.

LAVABO

Have you ever noticed when the priest “pauses” to wash his hands at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist? An altar server is usually there to pour water over the priest's hands and offer him a towel. The basin or bowl used to wash the priest's hands is called the *lavabo* (Latin for “I will wash”). During this moment of ceremonial washing, the priest quotes from the prayer of King David in Psalm 51:2: “Lord, wash away my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” In this liturgical action, the priest is imploring God's mercy for his own sinfulness, asking that he be purified to celebrate the Eucharist.