

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

POPE FRANCIS

"The Eucharist is such a great gift. That's why going to Mass is so important. Going to Mass not just to pray, but to receive Communion, the Bread and Body of Christ. It saves us, forgives us and it makes us one with the Father. How beautiful!"

He then explained that the word 'Eucharist' stems from Greek, and it means thankfulness. The greatest gestures of all, he explained, is the Last Supper, where God's love and mercy come together. He then added that celebrating the Eucharist is not just about honoring the past.

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"The Eucharist is more than just a mere feast. It's a way to remember Jesus' Passover, a mystery that's central to our salvation. But when we talk about 'remembering' that doesn't mean that it's just a memory. It means that every time we celebrate this Sacrament we become part of the Mystery of His Passion, Death and Resurrection. The Eucharist is the peak of God's Salvation."

It's through the Eucharist he explained, that it's possible to be in true communion with the Church. That's why it's key for children to make their First Communion.

POPE FRANCIS

"It's important for children to properly prepare for their First Communion, so that there's no child without this Sacrament. The Eucharist is a firm step towards Jesus, along with Baptism and Confirmation."

FIRST COMMUNION

First Communion is considered one of the holiest and most important occasions in a Roman Catholic person's life. It is the first time that a person receives the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, which is the eating of consecrated bread and drinking of consecrated wine. Catholics believe these to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Most Catholic children receive their First Communion when they're 7 or 8 years old, because this is considered the age of reason. Other people can receive communion for the first time whenever they've met all of the Catholic Church's requirements.

Preparation

For anyone to receive communion, that person must be considered to be without serious sin and in a state of grace. Traditionally, young Catholic children will make their first confession, also called the Sacrament of Penance, a short time before receiving their First Communion. At confession, the child will tell his or her sins and misdeeds to a priest and receive a penance in exchange. The penance usually is several prayers to be recited immediately after leaving the confessional. After this, the child is considered to be absolved of sin, and he or she is ready for his or her First Communion.

Confession isn't the only requirement for receiving the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist; the Sacrament of Baptism must have been received as well. A child, or any person, who has not been baptized cannot receive communion. If the child has been baptized, he or she generally begins studying for First Communion in Year 3. Catholic children who don't attend Catholic school go to classes after school or on weekends. In most cases for young children, at least two years of religious education must be undertaken before they can receive communion for the first time.

On the day of one's First Communion, and whenever receiving communion thereafter, those who are partaking must fast — which means not eating any food — for at least one hour before receiving the sacrament. Drinking water or taking medicine, however, are exceptions. This type of fasting is called the Eucharistic Fast.

Meaning

A child's first communion is often a cause for celebration, but to many Catholics, the event has a deeper meaning. They believe that the event means that a child has studied and understood, to the best of his or her ability, what Catholics call the mystery of transubstantiation — the changing of the substance of ordinary bread and wine into the substance of Jesus Christ's body and blood, according to Catholic beliefs. Catholics believe that, before receiving communion, a child also should be able to tell the difference between Eucharistic bread and regular food.

Afterward

After First Communion, young Catholics must attend church every Sunday, and they are encouraged to receive communion frequently, even weekly. If one has missed Sunday mass without good reason or has committed a mortal sin, that person is expected to go to confession before receiving communion again. Most Catholics go to confession at least once a year, usually during Lent — a 40-day observance that typically begins in February or early March and ends in late March or April.