



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 8 November 2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today we begin a new series of catecheses, which will direct our gaze toward the “heart” of the Church, namely, the Eucharist. It is fundamental that we Christians clearly understand the value and significance of the *Holy Mass*, in order to live ever more fully our relationship with God.

We cannot forget the great number of Christians who, throughout the world, in 2,000 years of history, have died defending the Eucharist; and how many, still today, risk their lives in order to participate in Sunday Mass. In the year 304, during the Diocletianic Persecution, a group of Christians from North Africa was surprised as they were celebrating Mass in a house, and were arrested. In the interrogation, the Roman Proconsul asked them why they had done so, knowing that

it was absolutely prohibited. They responded: “Without Sunday we cannot live”, which meant: if we cannot celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live; our Christian life would die.

Indeed, Jesus said to his disciples: “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:53-54).

Those Christians from North Africa were killed because they were celebrating the Eucharist. They gave witness that one can renounce earthly life for the Eucharist, because it gives us eternal life, making us participants in Christ’s victory over death. This witness challenges us all and calls for a response as to what it means for each of us to partake in the Sacrifice of Mass and approach the Lord’s Table. Are we searching for that wellspring that “gushes forth living water” for eternal life?; that makes of our life a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and makes of us one body in Christ? This is the most profound meaning of the Holy Eucharist, which means “thanksgiving”: thanksgiving to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who engages us and transforms us in his communion of love.

In the forthcoming catecheses I would like to answer some important questions about the

Eucharist and Mass, in order to rediscover, or discover, how God's love shines through this mystery of faith.

The Second Vatican Council was deeply inspired by the desire to lead Christians to understand the greatness of faith and the beauty of the encounter with Christ. For this reason it was necessary first of all to implement, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an appropriate renewal of the Liturgy, because the Church continually lives of it and renews herself thanks to it.

A central theme that the Council Fathers emphasized was the liturgical formation of the faithful, indispensable for a true renewal. It is precisely this renewal as well as the purpose of this series of catecheses that we are beginning today: to grow in our understanding of the great gift that God has given us in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is a wondrous event in which Jesus Christ, our life, makes himself present. Participating in the Mass "is truly living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord. It is a visible manifestation: the Lord makes himself present on the altar to be offered to the Father for the salvation of the world" (*Homily at the Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 10 February 2014). The Lord is there with us, present. So often do we go there, look at things, talk amongst ourselves while the priest is celebrating the Eucharist ... and we do not celebrate close to Him. But it is the Lord! If today the President of the Republic were to come, or some very important world personage, it is certain that we would all be close to him, that we would want to greet him. But think: when you go to Mass, the Lord is there! And you get distracted. It is the Lord! We have to think about this. "Father, it's that the Masses are dull" — "But what are you saying, that the Lord is dull?" — "No, no. Not the Mass, the priests" — "Ah, may the priests convert, but it is the Lord who is there!" Do you understand? Do not forget it. "Participating in Mass is living again the redemptive passion and death of Our Lord".

Now let us try asking ourselves a few simple questions. For example, why do we make the sign of the Cross and perform the Penitential Rite at the beginning of Mass? And here I would like to add another side note. Have you seen how children make the sign of the Cross? You do not know what they are doing, whether it is the sign of the Cross or an outline. They do this [*gesturing*]. Children must be taught how to make the sign of the Cross properly. This is how the Mass begins; this is how life begins; this is how the day begins. This means that we are redeemed by the Lord's Cross. Watch the children and teach them how to make the sign of the Cross properly. And those Readings, during Mass, why are they there? Why are there three Readings on Sunday and two on the other days? Why are they read? What do the Readings at Mass mean? Why are they read and what is their purpose? Or, why does the priest presiding at the celebration say at a certain point: "Lift up our hearts"? He does not say: "Lift up your cell phones to take a photo!". No, that's bad! I tell you, it makes me sad when I am celebrating here in Saint Peter's Square or in the Basilica to see many cell phones lifted up, not only by the faithful but also by some priests and even bishops! But please! Mass is not a spectacle: it is going to encounter the Passion and Resurrection of the

Lord. This is why the priest says: “Lift up our hearts”. What does this mean? Remember: no cell phones.

It is really important to return to the basics, to rediscover what is essential, through what we touch and see in the celebration of the Sacraments. The question of the Apostle Saint Thomas (cf. Jn 20:25), seeking to see and touch the nail wounds in Jesus’ body, and the desire to be able in some way to “touch” God in order to believe in him. What Saint Thomas asks of the Lord is what we all need: to see him, to touch him so that we may be able to know him. The Sacraments meet this human need. The Sacraments, the Eucharistic celebration in a particular way, are signs of God’s love, the privileged ways for us to encounter him.

Thus, through these catecheses that we are beginning today, I would like to rediscover with you the beauty that is hidden in the Eucharistic celebration and that, once revealed, gives full meaning to each person’s life. May Our Lady accompany us on this new stretch of road. Thank you.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, particularly the groups from New Zealand, the Philippines, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly I greet *young people*, *the sick*, and *newlyweds*. May today’s remembrance of the Holy Martyrs, whose relics are held here in Saint Peter’s Basilica, cultivate in you, dear *young people*, attention to the Christian witness even in difficult contexts; may it help you, dear *sick people*, to offer your suffering in order to support the many persecuted Christians; may it encourage you, dear *newlyweds*, to trust in God’s help and not just in your own abilities.