

- Greeting
- Opening prayer

Your children will receive two Sacraments this year for the first time:

Reconciliation or Penance and Eucharist or Holy Communion. I would like to talk about the Church through which we receive the sacraments.

My grandmother, Nell Mullooly, grew up in Liverpool, England, at the turn of the last century. An Irish Catholic in England in those days was at best a second-class citizen. The “Mary’s”, as the women were called, were maids and laundresses. The men worked on the docks or on the ship lines such as Cunard. They did not have much but they did have a fierce devotion to their Catholic religion. Their faith kept them going through some very hard times.

After my grandparents and my mother immigrated to the States in 1926, the family—as did most Irish Catholic families—grew quickly. One day Nell was walking to Mass and was, as usual, pregnant. The parish priest, Fr. White spied her trudging along through the snow and said: “Nell—you don’t have to come to Mass when you’re in such a state. God understands.”

Nell, always ready to defend the faith against all comers, drew herself up to her full four feet, eight inches of height and said “Now Father dear, you

know that if you don't go to Mass and receive Communion you lose your faith."

My grandmother knew very well the importance of Holy Communion to Catholics. It's what kept her going back in Liverpool and it's why she would walk three miles to Church in the snow when she was seven months pregnant in order to receive Communion. The Eucharist is what defines us as Catholics and what sustains us. We believe that Jesus is REALLY PRESENT IN THE EUCHARIST and so it is truly the only time we touch God while we are still here on earth.

Why do we have a church in the first place?

- God knew that we would need a tangible and spiritual way to stay close to him

From the church, we get all the help we need to stay close to God.

- The Sacraments
- Our liturgies
- Devotions

- Prayers

Why does God want us to stay close to him?

- We are his children--He loves us.
- He has a place for us in heaven
- He wants us to come home to him some day.
- The church helps us to accomplish that.

Sacraments are visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ to give the grace of God to all those who receive them with the proper disposition.

Grace is friendship with God. When we say we are in the state of grace, it means that we are friends with God.

When we sin, our friendship with God can be weakened or severely damaged.

The good news is that the sacraments can restore us to friendship with God.

First of all, there is Baptism. In Baptism

- God adopts us—we become his children
- Original Sin (Adam and Eve) is wiped away

- We receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- We receive sanctifying grace.

Next is Confirmation, which completes the grace we receive in Baptism:

- It seals the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in us.
- Confirms us as adult members of the Catholic Church and helps us to take on new responsibilities within the Church. (service)

Then we receive the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sacrament in which the Lord Jesus himself is present under the appearances of bread and wine.

To receive communion is to receive Christ himself.

Jesus knew that we would need the same closeness to Him that the Apostles had 2000 years ago. To understand this, we need to go back to the Last Supper and the events that followed.

At the Passover Seder that was the last supper, Jesus took bread and said the Hebrew blessing and broke it and gave it to his apostles. Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."

Then he took a cup of wine, blessed it and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."

We can't explain the mystery of the Eucharist, but we can understand why Jesus did this. The Apostles, even after three years of witnessing Jesus's miracles and teachings, would desert him that night. Peter would even deny that he knew him. What hope would have of staying faithful 2000 years later. Jesus gave us himself in the Eucharist so that we would have the same closeness to him that the Apostles did all those years ago.

What we have today that the Apostles did not have at the Last Supper is Baptism and Confirmation. The apostles received that at Pentecost.

They were both baptized and Confirmed when the spirit came to them with a great roaring sound like a strong wind and visible tongues of fire over their heads. Their fear and trepidation left them and Peter immediately began telling the world about the good news of Jesus Christ.

These sacraments, especially the Eucharist, have sustained the Church ever since. The Eucharist is what defines us as Catholics and it is what sustains us along the way.

And, we lose touch with God because of sin, we have reconciliation to get right with him again. God forgives all sins through his priests. He loves us and will always take us back. The Prodigal Son parable underscores this.

The Catholic Church is not difficult to understand. It does not have a lot of rules, and those it does have are simply designed to help us stay close to God. For example, two of the five are to attend Mass on Sundays and go to Confession once a year.

- The Mass, the Great Prayer of the Church.
 - Scripture
 - Eucharist
- Reconciliation –
 - We get right with God.
 - Our souls are healed