

The great St. Thomas Aquinas, in one of his well-loved Eucharistic hymns, calls the Eucharist “a pledge of future glory.” Jesus offered perfect worship to God, not just on the cross, but also in his Resurrection. –Bishop John T. Folda

The Eucharist at Easter

Brothers and sisters, we are at the threshold of Easter, so I proclaim to you what Christians have proclaimed with great joy over the last two millennia: “The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia!”

One of the most beautiful and moving liturgies of the year is the Easter Vigil. This is the first celebration of our Lord’s Resurrection after the solemn season of Lent and the awesome liturgies of Holy Week. With an outburst of joy, the faithful rejoice once again that Christ has risen, and he calls us to share in his risen life. A central part of this great Vigil is the sacramental initiation of Catechumens and Candidates into communion with the Catholic Church. First the Catechumens are baptized with the newly blessed Easter water. Then they, along with the Candidates, are confirmed with sacred chrism in the Holy Spirit. And finally, as the culmination of their initiation, they all come to the altar and receive their first Holy Eucharist. It is a unique privilege to offer our Lord’s Body and Blood to those who have looked forward to this moment with such great expectation and prayer. The expressions of awe, joy, and gratitude that I see on their faces every year are a reminder to me of the sublime gift we have in this great Sacrament.

All of this happens in our celebration of Easter, because the Eucharist is a sacrament of resurrection, of new life in Christ. It is the *risen* Christ whose Body and Blood we receive in Holy Communion, and who gives us in this Easter sacrament the pledge and promise of our own resurrection. Every celebration of the Mass is a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ, but it is also a participation in his resurrection. In a very real way, every Mass recalls the event of Easter, because the Eucharist is the *risen* Christ.

Pope St. John Paul II wrote: “The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Savior’s passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the ‘bread of life’ (John 6:35, 48) and ‘the living bread’ (John 6:51). St. Ambrose reminded the newly initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection to their lives: ‘Today Christ is yours, yet each day he rises again for you.’”

The great St. Thomas Aquinas, in one of his well-loved Eucharistic hymns, calls the Eucharist “a pledge of future glory.” Jesus offered perfect worship to God, not just on the cross, but also in his Resurrection. When we attend Mass, and especially when we receive the Eucharist, we share in what Christ won for us on the cross, and in the promise of partaking in the victory of his Resurrection. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:54). If we have any doubts about the importance of the Eucharist for our eternal destiny, these words of Jesus should dispel them.

One of the precepts of the Church requires that we receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2042). This ensures that all the faithful at the minimum receive our Lord’s Body and Blood in connection with the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. Of course it makes sense that we should receive our Risen Lord in the Eucharist at Easter if at all possible. But rather than thinking in terms of a mere precept or obligation at Easter, we should see our participation in the Eucharist as a privilege, as an opportunity not to be missed. If the Eucharist is an encounter with Christ risen from the dead, then who wouldn’t want to encounter him in this way every Sunday, and every Holy Day, and as often as possible?

The celebration of Easter also entails a mission for all of us. In our celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus, we receive him in the Eucharist, and then we are sent forth as his witnesses in the world. By our living faith and the example of our lives, we announce what has happened and what we have received: Christ is risen, and he lives among us. Through our communion with Christ in the Eucharist, we are strengthened and nourished by the grace of his Resurrection. But we are also blessed with the joy of knowing that our Lord lives within us. He sends us out to share with others the joy of this new life in the

Risen Christ. This is the call that we hear so often from Pope Francis, a call to be “missionary disciples.” Even in a hostile culture, the early Christians couldn’t hold back their joy at the Resurrection of Christ, and neither should we.

As we continue this time of Eucharistic Revival in the Church, it’s good to remember that the celebration of Easter is one with the celebration of the Eucharist. If we wish to share in the life of the Risen Christ, we have a supreme opportunity in every Mass we attend. Many of us try to attend Mass or Eucharistic adoration a little more often during Lent, but there is no reason that this has to end with Easter Sunday. In fact, there is no better way to continue the spirit of Easter than to remain close to our Risen Lord in the holy Eucharist, the sacrament of his Resurrection.

So once again, to all the good people of the Diocese of Fargo, “The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed! Alleluia!” Happy Easter to all!