

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Acts 2:14, 22-33

Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11

1 Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word in Liturgy

In the first reading, set on the day of Pentecost, Peter's proclamation to the people of Jerusalem explains that the crucifixion and resurrection are part of the plan of God, foretold by sacred scripture. We see here the Spirit in action, empowering Peter to speak fearlessly (a common theme in Acts).

Luke's power as a storyteller is richly illustrated in today's gospel by the sense of place, drama, and vivid psychological details of the narrative. Like Peter in today's reading from Acts, the disciples on the road are reflecting on recent events concerning Jesus. But here the Risen Lord himself interprets these events in a way that stirs their deepest convictions and emotions ("Were not our hearts burning within us. . . ?")

Like other resurrection appearances, this one is marked by delayed recognition. The actions in which the disciples recognize Jesus are the familiar ones which accompanied any Jewish meal, and which are highlighted in the feeding of the five thousand, and the last supper: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. These four actions continue to be essential to the celebration of the Christian Eucharist. In fact, the entire story—including the dialogue with Jesus in which he explains the scriptures, the meal in which "their eyes were opened" (an expression used six times in Luke, to indicate insight), and their joyful haste in going forth to share the Good News of the resurrection—offers the pattern of the Eucharist that was to develop in the early Church.



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The disciples' invitation to the stranger they have met on the road ("Stay with us") has rich overtones of meaning in this context as well. In Luke's narrative, it indicates the openness of the disciples to receiving a further revelation. And in a larger context, it points toward the Eucharistic mystery, in which Jesus indeed continues to stay with us.

Catholic Doctrine

The Celebration of the Eucharist

Even though it is not the first sacrament celebrated in the life of the believer, the Eucharist is considered by Catholics as preeminent among all the seven sacraments. Indeed, the Eucharist is described by the Second Vatican Council as "the source and summit of the Christian life" (LG 11). In addition, the Council strongly asserted the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic life, saying: "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (PO 5).

Although Jesus himself instituted this sacrament on the night before he died, it is not a drama reenacting the Last Supper with the disciples. The Eucharist celebrates the whole of the Paschal Mystery: the suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ in which we continue to share by faith and baptism. In other words, the celebration of the Eucharist expresses our whole faith, in a unique ritual summation.

The Eucharist is ritually celebrated in one liturgy consisting of two parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. In the first part, the assembly hears and responds to the Word of God proclaimed and preached. In the second part, those gathered give thanks and remember what God has done for us in Christ by sharing a meal (CCC 1346). The very arrangement of Catholic churches reflects the great dignity of these two actions. The attention of the assembly is focused on the pulpit where the Word is proclaimed and preached and on the altar where the meal is prepared and from which it is offered.

This single act of worship, the Eucharist, contains such a richness and depth that Catholics understand and discern various ways in which Christ is truly present in it. The Church believes and teaches that this real presence of Christ is experienced in four ways: (1) in the very people who are gathered, in the worshipping assembly, the household of the faith; (2) in the priest, the one who is acting in the person of Christ (in persona Christi); (3) in the proclamation of the Word, the Sacred Scripture; and (4) substantially and permanently in the



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elements of bread and wine (GIRM 7).

In celebrating the Eucharist, we make present again the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. By his own action and by the power of the Holy Spirit the gifts of bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, the self-sacrifice which he offered on our behalf to save us by his suffering and death (CCC 1357). At the same time, the celebration of the Eucharist is also a banquet of praise and thanksgiving. The very word in Greek, *eucharistein*, means "to give thanks." In the Eucharist, the Church expresses gratefulness to God for all the blessings shown us, first, through creation, and, more importantly, through the redemption accomplished in Christ. Every celebration of the Eucharist recalls the banquet feast of heaven.

Sent forth from the Eucharist, we are encouraged to carry on the mission of Christ. The common name for the celebration, the Mass, comes from *missa*, the Latin word meaning "to send." Thus, this liturgy which expresses and celebrates the mystery of our salvation in Christ concludes with the faithful being sent forth to offer their lives for the sake of the gospel, to be a leaven of Good News in the world, transforming agents, and, as Saint Augustine wrote, to become what we are, members of the Body of Christ.

