

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

PART 2: ADORATION AT MASS AND BEYOND

Eucharistic adoration proclaims our belief in the unique presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, and is a sign of our communion with our Lord as well as with each other. Adoration is our response in awe and worship to divine presence and our fitting response to God's desire for union with us. This is remarkable: God desires union with us! As we become more and more attentive to God's presence and desire for us to be one with the divine majesty, we cannot help but respond in adoration. When we are attentive to God's presence, adoration is as natural to us as brushing our teeth!

Adoration is an attentiveness to divine presence that helps us grow in our love for God and each other. Adoration begins in and always leads us back to the Eucharistic celebration.



Eucharistic Adoration during Mass

We begin by noting that gestures of adoration have always been included in the celebration of Mass itself, even to now. We do so many of the gestures and postures at Mass out of habit that it is good to stop and reflect on the many acts of adoration that are actually expressed during the Eucharistic celebration.

There are some clear and pronounced gestures of adoration during Mass, even if we have not thought of some of them in these terms. If the Blessed Sacrament is visible in the worship space, when we assemble and when the ministers and priest come in during the entrance procession, we all genuflect toward the tabernacle; this is first and foremost an act of adoration. At the end of the entrance procession, before the priest goes to the chair, he pauses at the altar and leans over to kiss it, thereby recognizing that the altar is consecrated with Holy Chrism and stands prominently in the sacred space as a presence of Christ; the priest's kiss (and that of other ordained ministers if they are present) is an act of adoration. The assembly's kneeling posture during the Eucharistic prayer is an act of adoration. After the elevations of the host and chalice during the Eucharistic prayer, the presider genuflects in adoration; if the assembly's posture during this great thanksgiving prayer is to stand, then they bow in adoration. Just as the priest's kissing the altar at the beginning of Mass is an act of adoration of the presence of Christ, so might we consider the kiss of peace exchanged among all present as an act of adoration recognizing the presence of the risen Christ in each other, a kind of "adoration" of attentiveness. Before taking up and showing the consecrated Elements to the assembly at the invitation to Communion, the priest genuflects. Before we receive Holy Communion, each of us bows our head and makes a "throne" of our hands to receive our Lord—all acts of adoration. After the Communion procession has concluded, we spend some time in worshipful prayer, also an act of adoration acknowledging the Eucharistic presence of Christ now within us. Once a year the liturgy itself proscribes an extended period of adoration for the faithful—that is, on Holy Thursday evening at the end of the Mass of the Lord's Supper.

There are also some adoration times proscribed by the Church that are directly connected with Mass, but take place after the Eucharistic ritual has been completed. For example, in some dioceses and parishes the practice of Eucharistic processions and the adoration that accompanies them (for example, on or near

the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ) is continued. When distributing Holy Viaticum (Communion for the dying) or distributing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, a brief period of adoration is prescribed.

Adoration, then, already begins during Mass. In once sense, all of Mass is a profound act of adoration. Continuation of Eucharistic adoration beyond Mass is just that—a continuation of what is already being done during Mass. We can understand ourselves as a Eucharistic people not only because our very identity is as Body of Christ, but also because everything we do and everything we are is an act of adoration. Eucharistic adoration and celebration are linked because one (adoration) is a natural and necessary response to the other (celebration of Christ's presence).

Adoration and Mass are also linked because the Blessed Sacrament we adore is a sacred species consecrated by the prayer of the Church during a Eucharistic celebration and directs us toward communion. The Holy Communion we receive during Mass and the contemplative communion with the Blessed Sacrament during adoration both have the same end—prolonged unity with Christ and with each member of his Body.

Mass leads to Communion—not simply as an act of eating and drinking, as important as that is, but also as a visible sign of what happens to us as the Body of Christ during our celebrations. That is, by uniting ourselves with Christ through eating and drinking his Body and Blood, we are united not only with Christ but also with each other. Basic to any holistic understanding of Eucharistic adoration, then, is an appreciation of the unity we share in Christ. This unity assures that even something so seemingly private as adoration before the Blessed Sacrament still remains a communal event. The relationship between Eucharist and Communion helps us understand the goal of adoration as unity with Christ, and this is why adoration cannot be separated from the liturgy.

Eucharistic Adoration beyond Mass

Our times before the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass (whether the Blessed Sacrament is exposed or not) are all a continuation of the adoration begun during Mass itself. We spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament because this is such a great mystery that to appreciate it and contemplate it we need much more time than can be given during Mass. Surely the small bit of time we spend in silent adoration after Holy Communion is not enough to satisfy our need to express love and appreciation for the Eucharistic mystery as God's most precious Gift given to us.

We might think of Eucharistic adoration beyond Mass as our time to “savor” this holy mystery, to lift our hearts more adequately and extensively in thanksgiving, and to “practice” the awe and wonderment at God's presence that mark our whole being during every living breath. Our adoration time beyond Mass is directly linked to our regard for the mystery of the Eucharist. If we never spend time reveling in the mystery, we cannot grow in what this mystery does for us: transform us into ever more gracious and holy members of the Body of Christ.



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415 Michigan Avenue, N.E., Suite 70, Washington DC 20017.
www.fdlc.org; email: publications@fdlc.org; voice: 202-635-6990; fax 202-529-2452.
Author: Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S., Director, Institute for Liturgical Ministry, Dayton, Ohio.
Art: Jane Pitz.