

✠✠✠ Celebrating the Lord's Day ✠✠✠

On Sunday, we gather as the Body of Christ to celebrate the Lord's Day, the day of Christ's Resurrection:

As "the first day of the week" (Mk 16:2) it recalls the first creation; and as the "eighth day," which follows the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by the Resurrection of Christ. Thus, it has become for Christians the first of all days and of all feasts. It is the *day of the Lord* in which he with his Passover fulfilled the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and proclaimed man's eternal rest in God. (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 452)

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus rose on the first day of the week—the day following the Jewish Sabbath. Shortly after daybreak, the women found the tomb empty and Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus' death and Resurrection opened for us the doors of salvation. Sharing in Jesus' death in Baptism, we hope to share in his Resurrection. We become a new creation in Christ. It is that new creation which we celebrate on Sunday:

This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice in it and be glad. (Ps 118:24)

Each Sunday is a "little Easter"—a celebration of the central mysteries of our faith.

THE SUNDAY EUCHARIST

The primary way in which we celebrate the Lord's Day is with our participation in the Sunday Eucharist. What better way to celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord than by celebration of the memorial of his Passion, death, and Resurrection?

This celebration is not a solitary, private event. Instead, we come together as the People of God, the Church, to worship with one heart and one voice. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that "participation in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is a testimony of belonging and of being faithful to Christ and to his Church" (CCC, no. 2182).

When members of our church community are absent from this gathering, they are missed. No member of the faithful should be absent from the Sunday Eucharist without a serious reason. The Liturgy should be the first thing on Sunday's schedule, not the last. We should arrive on time, prepared in mind and heart to fully participate in the Mass. Those who cannot attend because of illness or the need to care for infants or the sick deserve our prayers and special attention.

Often, people will suggest that going to Sunday Mass is not necessary. After all, they can pray at home just as well. This has clearly been an issue in the Church for more than a millennium. In the fourth century, St. John Chrysostom addressed this problem directly:

You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests. (CCC, no. 2179, quoting St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili* 3, 6: PG 48, 725)

Private prayer, though essential to the spiritual life, can never replace the celebration of the eucharistic Liturgy and the reception of Holy Communion.

In some communities, the lack of priests makes it impossible to celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday. In such instances, the bishop may make provision for these parish communities to gather and celebrate the Liturgy of the Word or the Liturgy of the Hours. These Sunday celebrations in the absence of a priest may or may not include the reception of Holy Communion. Still, these celebrations allow the People of God to gather and keep holy the Lord's Day.

KEEPING SUNDAY—ALL DAY

Celebrating the Sunday Eucharist—though central and essential—does not complete our observance of Sunday. In addition to attending Mass each Sunday, we should also refrain "from those activities which impede the worship of God and disturb the joy proper to the day of the Lord or the necessary relaxation of mind and body" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 453).

Sunday has traditionally been a day of rest. However, the concept of a day of rest may seem odd in a world that runs 24/7, where we are tethered to our jobs by a variety of electronic gadgets, where businesses run as normal no matter what the day of the week, and where silence seems to be an endangered species. By taking a day each week to rest in the Lord, we provide a living example to the culture that all time belongs to God and that people are more important than things.

As Pope John Paul II said in *Dies Domini* (*The Day of the Lord*), his apostolic letter on Sunday:

Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspective: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the true face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature—too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself—can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full. (*Dies Domini*, no. 67)

Not everyone has the freedom to take Sundays away from work. Some people, including medical professionals and public safety workers, must work on Sundays to keep the rest of us safe and healthy. Others must work for economic reasons beyond their control.

Resting on Sunday does not mean that we are inactive. Instead,

Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life. (CCC, no. 2186)

To celebrate the Lord's Day more fully, consider trying the following:

- ✘ Don't use Sunday as your catch-all day for errands and household chores.
- ✘ Share a family dinner after Mass. Have the whole family join in the preparation and cleanup.
- ✘ Go for a walk or bike ride and give thanks to God for the beauty of nature.
- ✘ Spend time reading the Bible or a spiritual book.
- ✘ Pray the Rosary or the Liturgy of the Hours, alone or with others.
- ✘ Volunteer in a local food pantry.
- ✘ Visit parishioners and others who are homebound.
- ✘ Read Bible stories to your children.
- ✘ Turn off your gadgets and enjoy the silence.

As we take time each week to celebrate the Paschal Mystery in the Eucharist and to rest from the burdens of our daily lives, we remind ourselves that we are made in the image and likeness of God who “rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken” (Gn 2:2).

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Eucharist

Body of Christ, Broken for the World



The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* [*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*], no. 11). In the Eucharistic Liturgy and our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, we encounter God’s presence in personal and profound ways. But the Eucharist is also social, as Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Deus Caritas Est* (*God Is Love*): “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented” (no. 14). The Eucharist, celebrated as a community, teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves, and others. As the Body of Christ, it sends us on mission to help transform our communities, neighborhoods, and world. Church teaching, rooted in both Scripture and Tradition, emphasizes both the personal and social natures of the Eucharist. This guide highlights the writings of Popes St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis about the social nature of the Eucharist. Their words challenge and move us to encounter Christ in the Eucharist in ways both personal and social.

We experience the Eucharist as a community.

The Eucharist draws each of us closer to Christ as individuals, but also as a community. As Catholics, we never really worship alone. At the Eucharistic Liturgy, we gather with the young and old, the rich and poor, as well as millions around the world and the saints in heaven, to celebrate Christ’s sacrifice. This powerful reality reminds us, in the words of St. John Paul II: “A truly Eucharistic community cannot be closed in upon itself” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [*On the Eucharist*], no. 39); rather the Eucharist challenges us to recognize our place within a community and the human family.

The Eucharist awakens us to our own dignity and to that of others.

The Eucharist is a sign of our incomparable dignity as human persons. This dignity, given to all equally, regardless of our social or economic status or where we come from (Jas 2: 1-9), causes us to recognize “what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one. . . . If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person,” St. John Paul II writes (*Dominicae Cenae* [*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*], no. 6).

The Eucharist unifies and heals divisions.

St. Paul taught that the celebration of the Eucharist is insincere if there are divisions

within the community based on class (1 Cor 11), status, or privilege (Rom 12), or if there are factions within the community (1 Cor 1). Partaking in the Sacrament as equals in the Body of Christ challenges us to unity as one family.

The Eucharist sensitizes us to those who suffer.

As we meditate on the Eucharist, we experience Christ’s love for us—and for others. In the depth of prayer, we become so moved and sensitized to his love for those who suffer that the words of St. Augustine become a reality for us: “The pain of one, even the smallest member, is the pain of all” (*Sermo Denis*). When we receive the Eucharist but “turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* [*The Joy of Love*], no. 186).

The Eucharist moves us and inspires us to respond.

In the Eucharist, the boundlessness of the Father’s love “springs up within us a lively response” that causes us to “begin to love” (*Dominicae Cenae*, no. 5). Contemplating Christ’s sacrifice for the world in need, we are compelled to follow his example. Drawn “into the very dynamic of his self-giving” we are moved to self-giving action in solidarity with the members of our human family who face injustice (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 13). St. John Chrysostom’s words in the fourth century become real for us as we reflect on Matthew

25:31-46: Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked.

Eucharist-inspired love allows us to live out our Christian vocation.

St. John Paul II writes that our ability to go and do likewise in imitation of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet is the "criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine* [*Stay with us, Lord*], no. 28). "Eucharistic worship," he says, is the expression of "the love that springs up within us from the Eucharist"—that love which is "the authentic and deepest characteristic of the Christian vocation" (*Dominicae Cenaе*, no. 5). Pope Francis reminds us: "It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation"; therefore, "the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* [*On Care for Our Common Home*], no. 236).

The Eucharist challenges us to recognize and confront structures of sin.

The Risen Christ in the Eucharist acts as "a compelling force for inner renewal, an inspiration to change the structures of sin in which individuals, communities and at times entire peoples are entangled" (St. John Paul II, *Dies Domini* [*On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy*], no. 73). These structures include racism, violence, injustice, poverty, exploitation, and all other systemic degradation of human life or dignity. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, our "fraternal communion" in the Eucharist leads to "a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* [*Sacrament of Charity*], no. 89).

The Eucharist prepares us for mission.

In the face of the sin and injustice we see present in our communities and in our world, the Eucharist "plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment

to the work before us," challenging us to live "Eucharistic" lives. It affirms our role as citizens and as men and women in various professions at different levels of society in "contributing with the light of the Gospel to the building of a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20).

The Eucharist propels us forth to transform the world.

The Eucharist "increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today." Christ in the Eucharist calls us to build "a more human world, a world fully in harmony with God's plan" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 20). Filled with awe for all we have received in Christ's self-gift, we respond with service and works of charity. We act to transform unjust structures, policies, and laws that degrade human life and dignity.

See also: *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, USCCB

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QUESTIONS FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION BEFORE THE EUCHARIST

1. Spend some time reflecting on the passages from papal writings that are included in this handout.
 - Which do you find inspiring?
 - Which do you find challenging?
 - How might God be speaking to you?
2. What issues affecting your community and the world today weigh deeply on your heart? Spend some time bringing these concerns before the Blessed Sacrament.
3. During your time before Christ in the Eucharist, can you sense his compassion? Love? Desire to transform all that opposes human life and dignity?
4. What gifts has God, the Father, given you? How might he be asking you to use these gifts in the service of others?
5. How does the Eucharistic meal compel you to care for those who are hungry?
6. How might the Holy Spirit be moving you to join with others to respond to problems in your family, neighborhood, or community?



The Eucharistic Liturgy

Formed, Transformed, and Sent



The Eucharist is the “sign” and “cause” of our communion with God and our unity as the People of God. In the Eucharist, we “unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy” and with one another. Together transformed, we are then sent forth to fulfill God’s will in our daily lives (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], nos. 1325-26, 1332). In this way, the Eucharistic Liturgy is social in nature. It is the celebration through which God draws us into communion with himself and with others, forming and transforming us to live as the Body of Christ in the world.

Gathering

The gathering for worship and the Introductory Rites emphasize our coming together as a community. From our individual lives and situations, we gather as one family. At the entrance song, we raise our voices in a united chorus. The ordained minister leads us in the Sign of the Cross, which recalls the Trinity’s divine communion of persons and to which we respond with one communal voice. As we make the Sign of the Cross, we turn to God, opening ourselves to his transforming presence.

Penitential Act

During the Penitential Act, we acknowledge the sin that affects our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world around us. We seek Christ’s healing love and forgiveness in order that we might be transformed—both as individuals and as a community, into a people of love. During the *Confiteor*, we ask the members of our heavenly community, “blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints,” and our brothers and sisters around us to pray for us, and we for them.

Liturgy of the Word

At this time, we hear a “proclamation of God’s wonderful works in the history of salvation” (St. Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*], no. 35). Through the Scriptures, we also receive teaching, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Tm 3:16). We are guided and instructed in faith and in how to live in right relationship with God, others, ourselves, and creation.

Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful

As St. John Paul II writes, “The Prayer of the Faithful responds not only to the needs of the particular Christian community but also to those of all humanity,” and the Church “makes her own ‘the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of the poor and all those who suffer’” (*Dies Domini* [*On Keeping the Lord’s Day Holy*], no. 38).

Preparation of the Gifts

Bringing forth donations to share with the poor along with the bread and the wine was part of the tradition of even the first Christian communities. The writings of SS. Paul, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Justin Martyr, and Cyprian describe these donations for use to help orphans and widows, the sick, the imprisoned, and sojourning strangers. St. John Paul II reminds us that we bring more than our money or donations, bread, and wine to the altar; we also bring our hearts. Through the presentation of the gifts, we contribute to “a demanding *culture of sharing*, to be lived not only among the members of the community itself but also in society as a whole” (*Dies Domini*, no. 70).

The Eucharistic Prayer

During the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest prays that we might share in the fellowship of the apostles, saints, and martyrs—recalling real and inspiring examples of the “very many saints who are living examples for us of Eucharistic worship” (St. John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae* [*On the Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist*], no. 5). As the

Eucharistic Prayer continues, the reality of Christ's sacrifice is proclaimed for us in order to make us "a holy people" and to allow us to "enjoy for ever the fullness of [God's] glory." The fourth prayer reminds us of the Father's desire "that we might live no longer for ourselves" and that his Spirit would bring "to perfection his work in the world."

During the *consecration*, the Holy Spirit transforms the gifts on the altar into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Christ's sacrifice does not remain at the altar but also enters into our hearts as we participate in it, that we might come to know and model the love that is present in the sacrifice. This *memorial* (which he said to do "in memory of me") recalls Christ's words at the Last Supper and invites our participation in "the very dynamic of his self-giving" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* [God Is Love], no. 13). It is "the Risen Lord's love, who today too breaks bread for us and repeats: 'Do this in remembrance of me,'" that strengthens Christians "to defend the dignity of all, especially the poorest" (Pope Francis, *Corpus Christi* homily, May 26, 2016).

The Communion Rite

During the Lord's Prayer, we praise the Father, pray for the coming of his Kingdom on earth, and recall again our need for reconciliation to God and others. At the Rite of Peace, we extend our hands and our hearts to one another in a sign of communion and charity. We then ask the Lamb of God for mercy and peace.

Before the priest raises the host, he proclaims how Christ, through "the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit" brought "life to the world." On behalf of the congregation, he prays, "Keep me always faithful to your commandments, and never let me be parted from you." In praying to

be faithful to the Church's teachings, God's help is sought in our daily lives to follow the mandates of Scripture and the tradition of our Church, which lead us to right and loving relationship with God, ourselves, and others.

Before receiving Communion, we acknowledge our unworthiness and pray for God's healing for ourselves and our community. We prepare for communion with Christ and the Spirit, but also with one another. St. John Paul II writes in *Dominicae Cena*, "We approach as a community the table." We receive Christ as "a gift and grace for each individual" but also "in the unity of His body which is the Church" (no. 4). The Eucharist is a "sacrament of [the Church's] unity" (no. 12).

Final Blessing and Dismissal

The Concluding Rites with the Dismissal prepare us for mission: empowered by the Holy Spirit, we live out our baptismal consecration in the world. Renewed by the Eucharist, we are sent back into our daily lives to transform our communities and world.

St. John Paul II writes that the Prayer after Communion, Final Blessing, and Dismissal should lead "all who have shared in the Eucharist" to "a deeper sense of the responsibility which is entrusted to them." Returning to their daily lives, Christ's disciples are called to "make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because of what they have received in the celebration" (*Dies Domini*, no. 45).

The Good News we have received should overflow into our lives and move us to mission in the world. Thus, the Concluding Rites are not an end but a beginning, calling us to make our entire

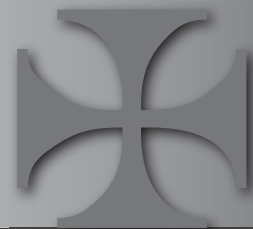
lives "Eucharistic," so that "the Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a *promoter of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation" (St. John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* [Stay with Us, Lord], no. 27). St. John Paul II issues this challenge:

Why not make the Lord's Day a more intense time of sharing, encouraging all the inventiveness of which Christian charity is capable? Inviting to a meal people who are alone, visiting the sick, providing food for needy families, spending a few hours in voluntary work and acts of solidarity: these would certainly be ways of bringing into people's lives the love of Christ received at the Eucharistic table. (*Dies Domini*, no. 72)

Participation in the Eucharist "heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world," and therefore affects "the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor" (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* [On Care for Our Common Home], no. 237).

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that our "fraternal communion" in the Eucharist, must lead to "a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness" (*Sacramentum Caritatis* [Sacrament of Charity], no. 89). Transformation by Christ in the Eucharist should compel us to address injustices that degrade the life or dignity of others—the poor, the unborn, immigrants, the elderly—all brothers and sisters in need.

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At its heart, the Eucharist is a sacrament of communion, bringing us closer to God and to our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. If we live the fruits of the Eucharist in our daily lives, we will fill our families and our communities with the life-giving qualities that the Liturgy brings: hospitality, concern for the poor and vulnerable, self-offering, and thanksgiving.

An ancient saying in the Church reads “*lex orandi, lex credendi*,” meaning that the law of prayer is the law of faith. More loosely: as we pray, so we believe. To that we might add *lex vivendi*, meaning that as we pray, so we believe, and so we live. In the third edition of the *Roman Missal*, the bishops and translators took great care to ensure that the prayers accurately and fully reflect the mysteries of our faith. Thus, the words that we pray in each liturgical celebration help to form and strengthen our understanding of the faith.

However, if the effects of the Liturgy stop at the doors of the church, we have not made our prayer and our faith part of our law of living. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches that the Eucharist helps us to grow in union with Christ, avoid sin, increase in charity, strengthen communion with our brothers and sisters, and recognize Christ in the poorest and most vulnerable members of society (see CCC, nos. 1391-1397). But what does that mean in daily life?

LIVING A LIFE OF PRAYER

Our prayer lives should not be limited to a single hour on Sunday mornings. In fact, the richer our prayer lives are throughout the week, the more fully we will be able to enter into the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. Here are some ways to make your daily life more prayerful:

- ✠ Try attending daily Mass at least once a week. Your parish may have an early morning Mass, or a church near your job may offer a lunchtime Mass.
- ✠ Stop in a church before or after work or on your lunch hour for fifteen minutes of quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

- ✠ Make it a practice to say grace before every meal—even if you are eating in the car.
- ✠ Schedule time for family prayer at least once a week. This prayer can be as simple as saying the Our Father or a decade of the Rosary together.
- ✠ Take time during the week to read or listen to the readings for the upcoming Sunday. The readings are available online (in print and audio) at www.usccb.org/bible.
- ✠ Begin your day with a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God, offering your day to him.
- ✠ End your day with an examination of conscience, looking at your successes and failures in what you have done or what you have failed to do. If you are aware of serious sin, receive the Sacrament of Penance before you receive Holy Communion again.

LIVING A LIFE OF LOVING SERVICE

Celebrating the eucharistic Liturgy and receiving Holy Communion should strengthen us to conform our lives more closely to the example of Christ. As Jesus knelt before his Apostles to wash their feet (see Jn 13), giving them an example of humble service, so must we who bear the name Christian live our lives in service to our brothers and sisters.

To help us in this endeavor, Church Tradition has identified works of mercy. These fourteen practices demand great sacrifice and generosity, but they also draw us more deeply into conformity with the Lord. Focusing on one of these works each week may be a practical way to integrate them into our personal, family, and parish lives.

Corporal Works of Mercy

- ✠ Feeding the hungry
- ✠ Sheltering the homeless
- ✠ Clothing the naked
- ✠ Visiting the sick
- ✠ Visiting the imprisoned
- ✠ Giving drink to the thirsty
- ✠ Burying the dead

Spiritual Works of Mercy

- ✠ Converting sinners
- ✠ Instructing the ignorant
- ✠ Advising the doubtful
- ✠ Comforting the sorrowful
- ✠ Bearing wrongs patiently
- ✠ Forgiving injuries
- ✠ Praying for the living and dead

Our parishes and civil communities offer numerous opportunities to live out these works, from assisting with religious education classes or volunteering at a food bank to encouraging our legislators to put forward policies that protect the life and dignity of each person. As we grow in conformity to Christ, we see more clearly that all people are made in the image and likeness of God (see Gn 1:26) and so have an inherent value and dignity. By helping to build a more just and compassionate society, we act as Christ's Body in the world.

IT ALL COMES BACK TO THE EUCHARIST

Living the Christian life is not easy. "What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ . . . preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage" (CCC, no. 1392).

And so, each Sunday, we return to the eucharistic table, bringing all our efforts of the previous week, the good and the bad, the successes and the failures, the

joys and the sorrows. We gather with our brothers and sisters in the Lord and, together with our priest, we join these efforts to the perfect sacrifice of Christ, asking that God will receive what we offer back to him in humble thanksgiving. The *Catechism* explains it as follows:

The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head. With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering. (CCC, no. 1368)

Then, strengthened by Holy Communion, we are once again sent forth into the world to glorify the Lord in our lives.

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