

# Manna from Heaven

## *The Eucharist Today*

### **What is the center of a church's worship?**

In many Christian traditions, the sermon is the focus on Sunday mornings. The service is primarily the sermon, preceded and followed by music and prayers. In other traditions, the music might be the focus. Both preaching and music are important for Catholics, but these are not our focus. We strive for beautiful music and excellent preaching so that we can more fully enter into the heart of our worship, the celebration of the Eucharist.

### **The Eucharist is the center of Catholic worship.**

We celebrate the Eucharist every Sunday in our services, which we call the Mass. At the beginning of the Mass, we listen to several readings from Sacred Scripture, followed by a sermon of modest length. In this way, we prepare our hearts to encounter Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. As the priest prays the Lord's words at the Last Supper, Jesus works a miracle. Jesus becomes truly present in Holy Communion, giving himself to us in a supernatural manner.

### **The Eucharist is not a symbol but truly Jesus himself.**

This Catholic understanding of the Eucharist is not something made up in the Middle Ages. All the way back to the earliest days of Christianity, one finds Christians proclaiming that when they come together to worship, they receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus in what appears to be ordinary bread and wine. In churches founded since the sixteenth century, it has become common to view Communion as a symbol or reminder of Jesus.

### **This gift has been passed down through the centuries.**

Jesus gave authority to celebrate the Lord's Supper to his apostles, who passed it on to other chosen leaders through the laying on of hands. This authority has been passed down through the centuries by this laying on of hands, which is now known as the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Through the ministry of priests who have received Holy Orders in this way, Jesus continues to work the miracle of the Eucharist, feeding his people with the Bread of Life.

### **Catholics see the Eucharist as our greatest treasure.**

In most Catholic parishes, people can participate in Mass every day of the week and receive Holy Communion daily. Since we believe that the Eucharist is truly Jesus, we believe that to receive Holy Communion, a person must be Catholic and spiritually prepared. When we receive Holy Communion, we give ourselves completely to Jesus and become one with him, in body and soul. It is the closest union we can have with Jesus this side of heaven.

### **On our way to heaven, Jesus feeds us with the true manna.**

On their journey through the desert on the way to the Promised Land, God fed the Israelites with special bread called manna. As followers of Jesus, we are the New Israel, journeying to our true heavenly homeland. Through the Eucharist, Jesus nourishes us as we travel through the "desert" of this world, helping us to turn away from sin and love him with all our heart. With this heavenly food, Jesus prepares us for eternal life. "Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." (John 6:58)

