

How Holy this Feast Notes

Introduction

This series of small group sessions are intended to deepen people's love of the Eucharist, encourage their participation in the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and to make connections between the Eucharist and the life of the Church and the World. The Eucharist 'is the source and summit of the Christian life' (*Lumen Gentium* 11)

The underlying movement or premise of these sessions might be considered as a spiral:

- The abiding presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is the fruit of the celebration of the Mass, which is...
- the focus of Adoration, at which...
- we contemplate the mystery of Christ, this in turn leads to...
- our deeper participation in the Mass, from which...
- we are sent to be Christ in the world.

The Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament derives from the Mass and leads us back to Mass.

There is a great deal of flexibility as to how many sessions and how they are organised (for more details see below). The aim of this material is to offer people a time of reflection and a time of prayer; that people should listen, reflect and discuss but should there should also be prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Who is it for?

The groups are for anyone who is interested. Groups should be between 6–10 (with a maximum of 12) to allow smooth running of the time. In some parishes it may be possible to more than one group at the same time with all coming together for the prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

A further consideration might be to open up the prayer time to anyone in the parish.

Who is involved?

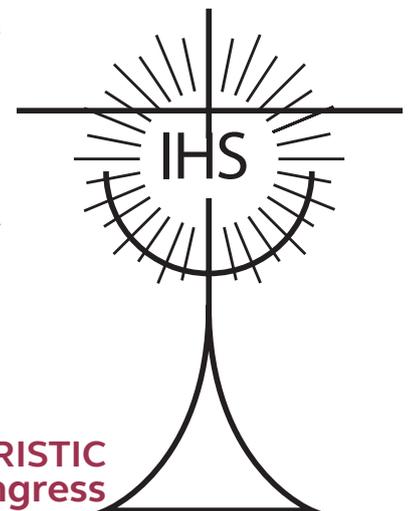
The group will need a leader. The task of the leader is to keep to the rough timing of the session, ask the questions and seek to involve the whole group. They should take time to prepare the session — it will be useful to consider how they will answer the questions themselves and what might be helpful follow up questions. The leader will also ask people to read the various passages in the session.

For the time of prayer the presence of a priest or deacon will enable the blessing (Benediction) to take place (see below for more details).

Liturgy preparation: suggestions here and at the end of each session someone will need to decide what will be done and also what readers etc. will be needed. One or more musicians will also assist the prayer.

Timing

The whole session should last about 90 minutes with about 45 minutes for discussion and 30 minutes for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This allows 15 minutes for the prayer to be set up and for the group to move from the space for discussion and the church, or other place of prayer.



Within the discussion session the following rough timings are suggested:

- Welcome, Opening Response, Introduction 5 minutes
- Listen to Scripture 15–20 minutes
- Read with the Church 15–20 minutes
- Preparation 5 minutes

For the time of prayer it is suggested that longest part, adoration, be about 20 minutes.

Consideration should also be given to hospitality.

Sessions

There are 6 sessions; an Introduction which explores the link between Adoration and Mass and then further sessions which look at the Eucharist and aspects of the life of the Church. After the first session the remaining sessions may be done in any order, and indeed a parish may choose just to do some of them. The Sessions are give below in roughly alphabetical order with a short description.

- Introduction: *the connections between Mass and Adoration*
- The Eucharist and the Environment: *giving thanks for God's creation*
- The Eucharist and Evangelisation: *the encounter with Jesus*
- The Eucharist and the Family: *living lives shaped by the Eucharist*
- The Eucharist and the Parish: *the relationship between individual and communal worship*
- The Eucharist and Social Action: *the Eucharist and our care for our neighbour*

It is expected that the sessions will be done on a regular basis, for example weekly, but they are not tied to any time of year.

Structure

Welcome

The leader welcomes everyone to the group and makes sure that everyone knows each other. At the first session it may be helpful to mention the potential confidentiality of any discussions within the group.

After the first week a short time might be given to hearing from people if they have had any further reflections in the intervening week.

Opening Response

The same text is used for each session. The leader says the first line and all continue together. This text, from which the whole series takes its name, is a translation of the Magnificat antiphon (*O sacrum convivium*) written by St Thomas Aquinas for the feast of Corpus Christi. It is a beautiful summary of the Church's faith in the Eucharist.

Introduction

This is intended to introduce the theme of the session. At the first session some will find it helpful if the shape of the session is explained.

Reading

Invite someone to read the passage out loud. If there is time have the passage read twice with a pause for silence in between. Encourage people to listen one of the times without following the text. The scripture version used is the English Standard Version which is a text being considered for further liturgical use.

Reflection 1

Before moving into the questions allow people time to respond directly to the reading: a word or phrase which struck them.

The given questions are not on the reading directly; rather the reading provides a context for asking the questions. Encourage the group to respond as much as they are willing. Have some follow up questions ready or speak from your own experience. Make sure that no one dominates the conversation.

Documents

These are extracts from a number of sources: the Introduction to *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* and Papal teaching. In particular. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, written by Pope Benedict following the Synod on the Eucharist in 2005, and more recent teaching from Pope Francis. Sometimes the text has been edited for length.

The texts can be either read aloud or invite people to read them in silence. Be aware of any in the group, for example, for whom English is a second language and/or may be unused to reading Church documents.

If time is short only one passage may be read and this indicated by †.

Reflection 2

Again, allow time for people to respond directly to the texts, to ask questions or to seek clarifications. Do not worry if you cannot answer every question - offer to find out before the next session.

The questions follow a similar pattern to those in Reflection 1.

Preparation

This is time to prepare for the prayer. There are some invitations and these are intended to offer something to take into the prayer. As noted in the group sheet these could be shared but people should feel free to keep them to themselves if they wish.

This is also a time for any practical instructions about the prayer and for any information about the following session.

Prayer

In each session a text is given which is intended to be used in the time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. A variety of texts has been chosen: biblical, from the early Church and from contemporary sources.

Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament

More information can be found in the Guide to Exposition on the Liturgy Office website.

Introduction

The rite of Exposition given in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* (and also available on Liturgy Office website) has four sections or movements:

- Exposition
- Adoration
- Benediction
- Reposition

The rite describes what happens but does not lay down in detail specific texts to be used. Though many may have memories and experience of songs, such as *Tantum ergo*, being sung before Benediction it is not integral to the rite. This is neither to say it should or should not be used but rather to highlight that the other songs may be sung at this point. Those who plan each liturgy will need to decide a path between what may be familiar to some and drawing suitable music from the parish's repertoire at Mass.

It is suggested that some of the elements in the liturgy are repeated each time:

- the opening Antiphon: *How Holy this Feast*
- the possible repetition of the Scripture reading (or part of it)
- the closing acclamation.

Though a separate leaflet could be prepared it is assumed that the session leaflet and the parish hymnbook will be enough.

Exposition

A hymn, song or chant is sung as the Blessed Sacrament is brought to the altar. In the sessions themes and titles are suggested.

When the song is finished and the Blessed Sacrament placed on the altar all say together How holy this feast.

Adoration

The time of Adoration, which should be the most substantial part of the time of prayer, should aim to be mostly silent prayer. However, for groups which are unfamiliar with longer periods of silent prayer this should be developed over time.

There is a great deal of flexibility as to what happens during the period of adoration: readings, songs and prayers — suggestions are made for each session.

Benediction

If a Priest or Deacon is presiding this section follows. If no Priest or Deacon is present and a lay person has exposed the Blessed Sacrament the Reposition follows on from the period of Adoration.

Eucharistic Song

There is a Eucharistic Song. Though many will be familiar with Tantum ergo at this point, no particular text is given in the Rite. Some suggestions are made with each session.

This followed by a prayer.

Benediction follows.

Reposition

The Blessed Sacrament is replaced in the tabernacle.

The Rite recommends that the liturgy ends with a short sung or said acclamation. It may be helpful to have the same acclamation every week.

If said:

- Glory be to the Father...
- or

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

If sung:

- Laudate Dominum (Taizé)
- Laudate omnes gentes (Taizé)