

October 2023 Synod Summary

We had 11 groups in 6 Synod sessions with 64 total participants.

Question 1: Tell us about a meaningful experience you or someone close to you had when participating in the Eucharist.

There were three major reoccurring themes among all the groups: 1) The joy experienced when witnessing a child or grandchild receiving the Eucharist for the first time, 2) The feeling of joy and closeness to Jesus when receiving the Eucharist after a prolonged period away from the Eucharist or the Church, and 3) The joy at being able to take communion, as a Eucharistic Minister, or Family member to someone who otherwise would not been able to receive the Eucharist.

Another strong theme mentioned by several was the strong sense of community felt processing up to communion

This along with the reverence shown by those receiving and the priest at consecration (many noted Father Ron here) drew them to the church as a non-Catholic, or back to the church as a non-practicing catholic.

One mentioned how comfortable they became evangelizing after having received the Eucharist.

The importance of Spiritual Communion during Covid was mentioned.

Other unique experiences making the Eucharist more special were the RCIA program, a trip to the Holy Land, having Communion brought after surgery, and husband receiving Viaticum before he passed.

One said they felt born again with a clean slate after receiving the Eucharist.

Question 2: Tell us about a challenge you or someone close to you experienced related to the Eucharist.

There were multiple themes in answer to this statement but there were also a couple of reoccurring themes across the groups: 1) Distractions before, during, and after mass (too much talking before and after affecting private preparation for mass and prayer after), 2) rules of the church regarding reception of the Eucharist (both those denied reception, especially at funerals and weddings, because they are not catholic, or divorced, or gay, or a myriad of reasons, and on the flip side of the coin, struggling on what to say without further alienating children or others you know don't believe or are not practicing when they receive.

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Great sadness is felt by parents and relatives when a relation is alienated and stops going to church. One participant's son and wife now attend a non-denominational church because they were denied a mass at their wedding because the wife does not believe in the real presence. One respondent said they were excommunicated after remarriage. **Sounds like a misunderstanding of excommunication**

Some of those struggling with distractions mentioned distraction of thinking about something in the readings or said at the homily. Those who mentioned return of the bells at consecration was more of calling them out of distraction to focus on the sacredness of the consecration rather than just a return to the former pre-Vatican Latin rituals.

Regarding the real presence, many shared how they have to consciously and intentionally remind themselves of the real presence and the specialness of receiving the Eucharist that the weekly routine can dilute.

One said his greatest challenge was no longer being a Eucharist Minister because of health concerns.

Children no longer practicing and people fallen away were struggles for several as was the church being locked during Covid, and alienation after divorce and remarriage.

My observations and recommendations

When it comes to the return of the bells, rules surrounding the reception of communion, etc., there seems to be a lack of understanding not of the rules or dictates, but the whys behind the rules and dictates. We need to do a better job of loving those who have been hurt or alienated by what they may perceive as negative rules and help them to understand the whys and cherish the rules that are meant to honor the sacredness of the Eucharist. Even more importantly, we need to do a better job of helping them be able to respond with love to those unable to receive, who feel rejected, alienated, on the fringe because of their choices. One thing I do when I notice someone not receiving is to lovingly let them know they are welcome to come up in the communion procession, with arms crossed, to receive a blessing. I think this would go a long way, especially at Funerals and Weddings, to be more inclusive and welcoming.

Question 3: As you leave this experience, how can you be the living presence of Jesus in your parish and community.

The answers to this question were as varied as the respondents but the underlying theme, expressed in many different ways, was reflecting and imitating Jesus in our "missionary fields."

Answers included Loving one another, being positive and accepting, nonjudgmental, seeing the down trodden as image of God, being true to self, not acting as friends do for acceptance, being more

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welcoming, being kind, patience, reaching out and helping when no one else will, giving complements, being humble, trusting, letting your joy show, showing gratitude, listening better.

One said we need something between masses and said how special the Synod was for them.

Another said offering their day to Jesus and not getting upset if things don't go as they planned.

One said remembering the church is a field hospital for sinners.

Others said seeing Christ in others, looking for people open to encounter, or strangers hurting, being Christ to those you don't understand, and seeing everyone as unique, eternal, and created in God's image which enables us to love better.

I also heard "What would Jesus do [or say]?" and "Preach the Gospel, and when necessary, use words."

And one mentioned inviting others to Father Mike's Bible in a Year and Catechism in a Year.

Two comments particularly stand out to me from all the others. Talking about praying and showing youth what church can be and mean.

Finally, one said speaking out in support groups.

One shared how they were converted by witnessing how a Catholic friend fell back on their strong faith to get through a crisis calmly.

The last two groups were with the Youth, and we altered the questions to be more relatable to them.

Youth Question 1: Tell us about a time you felt particularly inspired or close to the church or the Eucharist.

I was surprised and encouraged by the responses from our youth.

A common theme among the youth was the powerful experiences they had in adoration, receiving the Eucharist, silent prayer, and retreats, and reconciliation. Many shared how they felt closest to God during these experiences.

One in particular shared their experience of hearing God while praying.

Another mentioned the power of being with like minded teens at youth events.

One said they were moved to tears during silent prayer.

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Youth Question 2: Discuss a time you felt disappointed by the church of your church leaders.

There did not seem to be a uniform response to this question as each had unique negative experiences.

One related working for a parish and being treated cruelly by their supervisor.

One felt judged for not being dressed right for mass.

One mentioned general mistreatment of women in the church and seriously considered whether to continue practicing their faith.

One felt the priest in reconciliation came across dismissive to a confessed sin they seriously struggled with.

Prayer without results was mentioned as was priest abuse.

A couple mentioned priests who were transferred out of the parish who they were finally able to relate to. The churches being shut down during Covid was an issue.

Priest making an accusation against a teen girl, without really knowing her, was a devastating experience.

One mentioned rioting around church, and another mentioned the issue of politics and infighting in the hierarchy of the church.

One common theme was the lack of good examples set by church leaders.

Youth Question 3: Discuss something you would like to see from the church and her leaders to help inspire you in your faith.

Very strong themes were more opportunities for Adoration, Reconciliation, Bible studies, more music, more opportunities to meet other youth of the same faith, and more interaction with priests.

They would like to see the church pivot back to be more community focused as opposed to business focused. I heard "more youth programs," "bring God to youth," "more teaching about what we believe," "lighten up the mood around the church."

The teens generally don't feel understood or appreciated by priests.

And they are hungry to grow and be supported in their faith journey. They would like to know more about what the church believes.

My observations:

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We had two youth groups of seven each, and this was impressive. It may not be a representative cross section of all the youth in the parish, but they are hungry to be understood, supported, educated, and involved. And if we work on maturing and retaining even this core of the youth group, they will be the catalyst that will evangelize and disciple other youth. Their strong faith and conviction, and the resulting peace and joy will draw others hungry to fill the emptiness of their lives.