

P R E S E N T E R ' S G U I D E

A Child's First Communion...And So Much More!

Discussion Questions, Prayers, & Exercises to complement the DVD

For Adults

OUR DEEPEST HUNGERS

Summary

Fr. Joe looks at three of the ways God feeds the deepest hungers of the human heart through the Eucharist. First, we are nourished by *the gathering itself*. As a community of believers, we draw strength from the people with whom we gather. Second, we are fed by *the Word proclaimed*. As we listen to sacred scripture, our hearts and minds are challenged, encouraged, and inspired. Finally, our deepest hungers are fed by the meal itself, the sharing of bread and wine which has become no less than this: *the very Body and Blood of Jesus*. Fr. Joe then describes the fourth great feeding of the Eucharist: how the Mass sends *Us* out to feed the deepest hungers of the world.

Discussion Questions

The following can be used as individual reflection questions or for small-group discussion.

1. The Eucharist feeds “the deepest hungers of our hearts.” Our fast-paced culture rarely encourages us, nor gives us time, to consider the *real* hungers of the human heart. What do you really hunger for? What do you see as truly essential to your happiness?
2. As you reflect on how you currently live your life, what aspects of your lifestyle serve as obstacles to authentic happiness and personal fulfillment? Do you currently make time for prayer—both private prayer and prayer in communion with others?
3. Human beings hunger for intimacy and connection with other human beings. Thus, the *gathering as a community of believers* is indeed an action that feeds our deepest hungers. What feelings and attitudes (both positive and negative) do you bring with you about the people with whom you worship?

Try to identify prejudices, grudges, or mindsets that consistently work as barriers to feeling connected to others in the assembly. What personal attitude adjustments might help you to enter the church with a freer, more open heart?

4. The story of the young soldier who risked his own life to save the life of his friend, reminds us that there are people in our lives who will be there for us, no matter what the cost. We learn about God's ever-faithful love through these special people. When you are lying wounded in the trenches of life, whom do you trust will come for you? What have you learned about the nature of God through your relationship with this person (these persons)?
5. Fr. Joe tells us that we are fed by the Eucharist through the gathering itself, through the Word proclaimed to us, and through the meal of bread and wine. Then God sends us out to feed the hungers of the world. How do *you* feed the hungers in your family? Your school or workplace? Your community? How are you able to go forth and in some small way, bring love to a hungry world?

Closing Prayer

If used in a group setting, the following prayer can be read in unison, or it can be read aloud by a leader with the group echoing each line.

God, you feed the hungers of our hearts.
Open our eyes to all the ways
you satisfy our deepest hungers—
through the gathering of believers,
your Word that teaches and challenges,
and your Body and Blood broken and poured.
As we are sent forth
to bring your hope, your compassion, your peace
to a hungry, waiting world,
fill our spirits with strength and courage,
and our hearts with self-sacrificing love. Amen.

Exercise

During a family meal, preferably a Sunday dinner, talk about the importance of *each member's* presence at the table. When even one person is not present, in what ways are he or she missed? When there is an empty chair at the table, what feelings and emotions are experienced by those present? Take a few moments to talk about the unique gifts each individual brings to the family. Focus on intrinsic value—characteristics like a great sense of humor, an always-positive attitude, or a willingness to lend a helping hand—rather than on accomplishments. Spouses should make sure to include each other! Make every effort to emphasize that *each member* of the family is valued for who he or she is, and that he or she is *irreplaceable*!

FIRST AND 1500TH COMMUNION

Summary

Fr. Joe offers suggestions about preparing our children—as well as ourselves—for First Communion. The importance of parents as teachers and role models is emphasized so that children learn to find great value in their “fifteen-hundredth Communion” as well as their first. Parents are reminded that unless their children see that *they* value the Eucharist and what it teaches us about life, when their children grow older they are unlikely to remain faithful participants in Sunday Mass or truly embrace the way of Jesus.

Discussion Questions

The following can be used as individual reflection questions or for small-group discussion.

1. Imagine that you are making a “book of lasts” for your child as he or she prepares for First Communion. What important events or memories would you include in that book? What sacred moments in your child’s life are already especially important memories? What do these important “lasts” teach us about what really matters in life?
2. Take a moment to honestly evaluate the importance *you* personally place on regular attendance at, and participation in, Sunday Mass. Do you make Sunday Mass a priority in your life, or is this an area that could use some re-commitment?

3. If you struggle with regular attendance at Sunday Mass, what other activities tend to interfere? Think truthfully about the usual excuses you make when you do not attend Mass. Try to uncover the *real*, underlying reasons you miss Mass (“I have a lot more fun at my son’s soccer games on Sunday morning,” “I don’t feel like anyone cares if I am there or not,” or “I work really hard all week and just need a day to do nothing.”) and; perhaps, give some thought to re-evaluating priorities. Remember Fr. Joe’s words, “No matter how good the preparation program at church, your child needs to find the example in *you*.”
4. Fr. Joe tells us that “though much in our culture pushes us to be individuals, the Eucharist calls us to community...therefore it is essential that all people be welcomed at the table with us.” Name the diversity you see in your faith community. Do you see this diversity as a blessing or a curse? Reflect silently on those people in your faith community whom you find most difficult to love or to see the goodness inside of them. Can you acknowledge the possibility that these individuals could help you to heaven? Reflect out loud how that could be true.

Closing Prayer

If used in a group setting, the following prayer can be read in unison, or it can be read aloud by a leader with the group echoing each line.

Dear Jesus,
We ask your forgiveness for all the times
we put *you* on a shelf,
put *you* on the “back burner,”
or failed to find time for you.
Help us to rethink priorities
and to honestly ponder what we value.
Give us the wisdom and strength
to be models of Christian maturity
and commitment
for the young people entrusted to our care
as they prepare to receive First Communion.
We ask these things in your name, dear Lord.
Amen.

Exercise

Take time to get out your child's "book of firsts" and share it with him or her. Talk about the joy and importance of first words, first steps, and first birthdays. (For example, first words are the beginning of our ability to communicate for a lifetime; first steps mark the beginning of our independence; first birthdays help us to realize we are loved, valued, and celebrated). Make a place in the book for the First Communion pictures, cards, and memories to come. Though your child may not yet be able to fully understand, talk about why First Communion is among the most important firsts. Emphasize that just as walking and talking are firsts that are meant to last a lifetime, so it is with the gift of the Eucharist.

AN EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER

Summary

Fr. Joe leads participants through a guided meditation that encourages them "to see more deeply what is already there." Through the power of words and imagination, we come to recognize what is most real, and to see Jesus both in the Eucharist and in the everyday people who fill our lives.

Discussion Questions

The following can be used as individual reflection questions or for small-group discussion.

1. As you were guided through the meditation, were you able to see the ordinary people with whom you live and worship? Describe any part of your experience.
2. On a typical day, do you find it difficult or easy (or somewhere in between) to experience God among us in your family members, friends, and people who are part of your everyday life?
3. What usually helps you to remember that you are not alone?

Closing Prayer

If used in a group setting, the following prayer can be read in unison, or it can be read aloud by a leader with the group echoing each line.

Gentle God,
Give us new eyes. Your eyes.
Eyes that see with compassion, forgiveness,
and understanding.
Eyes that see the extraordinary
in the most ordinary.
Eyes that look past tough exteriors
and find fragile hearts yearning for love
and acceptance.
Eyes that see your son, Jesus,
in sons and daughters,
husbands and wives,
great-grandparents and newborn babies,
closest friends, and even those we find
most difficult to like.
Gentle God,
Give us new eyes. Your eyes.

Exercise

Again imagine your family gathered at table to share a meal. As you did before, picture them one at a time. This time, however, after you look at each person for a little while, ask yourself this question: "If I could say one thing to this person, what would I say?" In your imagination, go ahead and speak to that person what is on your heart to say.

For Children

THE BEST FOOD OF ALL

Summary of First Children's Message

In Part 1, Fr. Joe, with the help of his friend, Big Al, talks to First Communicants. Even as we eat healthy foods that nourish our bodies, so we must also eat the special food that feeds our hearts—the food that is Jesus, the food we call "Communion." Though we don't necessarily *FEEL* different after Communion, we are meant to *BE* different!

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you want to receive Communion?
2. Do you have to do everything perfectly on the day of First Communion? What would you say to someone who is afraid they might make a mistake?

3. Fr. Joe said that we usually don't *feel* different after we receive Communion. What is one way that you hope to *BE* different?

Exercises for Home or School

1. Have the children work in small groups of two to four. Give each group a simple puzzle that can be put together in 10 to 15 minutes, *but before giving the groups their puzzles, remove ONE key piece from each puzzle.* Do NOT tell the children that a piece has been removed from the puzzles. Allow the children ample time to assemble their puzzles. As they begin to inquire about the missing pieces, pretend to be unaware of the problem.

Once the puzzles have all been assembled with their missing pieces, make an analogy between a puzzle with a missing piece and Sunday Mass with just *one* person missing from the pews. Draw as many comparisons as possible. Why is each piece—each person—important?

2. At the dinner table with your family, name one thing you would like to thank God for at Mass next Sunday; share one thing you remember from a homily or a reading; say why you are usually glad you went to Mass.

AN EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER

Summary

Fr. Joe leads the children through a guided prayer experience in which they imagine an intimate conversation with Jesus and more fully realize that Jesus is with them *always*.

Discussion Questions

1. What was it like for you when you imagined being alone in your special place with Jesus? Where were you? What did you talk about? How did you feel?

2. Think about how a normal day is for you (with school, homework, play, and extra activities like sports or dance or scouts). Can you make quiet time in your day for Jesus? When might that be?
3. Think about your best friend for a moment. What would happen to your friendship with this person if you never talked or played together? What might happen to our friendship with Jesus if we never make time to talk to him or listen to him?
4. How does Jesus let you know that he is with you each and every day? (Children might need some hints with this one: "What about the love of your mom and dad, your grandma, your best buddy?")

Exercises for Home or School

1. Use your imagination to again picture yourself in a quiet place where Jesus will visit you. What would you want to thank him for this time; say you are sorry for; or ask his help with?
2. Take a walk outside with the children. Have them look carefully at all the leaves on the trees and search for the perfect leaf. Have them each select a leaf that is robust and healthy and gently pull it from the tree. Make observations about the leaf—its intense color, its softness, and flexibility. Bring the perfect leaf into the classroom or home. Place it on a windowsill or other dry place. Observe the leaf daily. What begins to happen to the perfect leaf when it is no longer drawing life from the tree? Describe your observations—the leaf grows dry, loses its color, and begins to wither.

Make the analogy that Fr. Joe uses in his introduction. Compare our lives without the Eucharist to a leaf detached from its tree. While we may appear fine for awhile, something inside of us begins to die.