

Introduction

**Our commitment to the Catholic social mission
must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives.
In our relationship with God we experience
the conversion of heart that is necessary
to truly love one another as God has loved us. ¹**

The *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, published by the United States Catholic Conference in 2000, reminds us that : “The key is to look at the social meaning of symbols and texts, not just at their personal meanings. Given our individualistic culture, this is a challenge.”

One of the graces in the liturgical movement coming out of the Second Vatican Council was to see more clearly the communal character of the sacraments. The sacraments are a celebration of the community—not something that is normally done in private. They are a celebration for the nourishment of the community. It is in the renewal of the communal aspect of our sacramental life, that we find a powerful challenge to our social life and the possibility to receive the grace to put our faith into practice more powerfully.

**In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition
proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. . . .
The Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and
achieve fulfillment in community. . . .
While public debate in our nation is often divided between those
who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social
responsibilities, our tradition insists that both are necessary.²**

A Pre-note: Do not force your justice concerns into the liturgy. One does not need to do violence to the liturgy in order to acknowledge our social teaching or in order to be empowered into action on behalf of justice. A healthy celebration of the sacraments supports social ministry. Our sacraments are meant to be communal celebrations and to empower us into action. The following reflections are not an invitation to make every sacramental celebration into a rally against the death penalty or a reflection on the moral issues around world trade and globalization or a spelling out of right to life issues or a call for an increase in the minimum wage. Rather, these thoughts are presented to promote awareness—an awareness of the social values imbedded in our liturgical practice when it is at its best—an awareness of the larger implications that flow from the story of Jesus and the living practice of Christ among us. Our desire is to nurture awareness, not a political ideology. As Jesus says: “The truth will set you free.”

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

² Ibid.



THE EUCHARIST AND CST

Liturgical Practice	Comment	Connection to Catholic Social Teaching	Implications
Sharing the Word, The Scriptures and the Homily	An essential part of the Catholic Liturgy is to share the scriptures together, to break them apart, and to connect them to life in the world.	“The homily presents an excellent opportunity for sharing Catholic social teaching. The word of God announces God’s reign of justice and peace. Our preaching of the just word continues the preaching of Jesus and the prophets.” ¹	The word of God cannot be heard without a context – the social context in which it was written and the social context in which we hear it today. The Word speaks to real life and the problems of the world. We listen to it as a community. It is only then that it has its full, life-giving power.
Breaking Bread and Sharing the Cup	A meal that is shared is what our Eucharist is all about.	Sharing food is a image of what we are all about as a church.	A shared meal is the most powerful sacrament of solidarity.
Breaking Bread and Sharing the Cup	The Eucharist is an expression of what God wants us to become – one body – one community – one living Christ.	The Social Teaching of the church is concerned with the nourishment of all the people of the world – spiritually and also physically. We desire to become what we celebrate.	Whenever we share the Eucharist, we cannot but be aware of our those who are hungry. We cannot but be aware of our need to share what we have. We cannot but be aware of the need for justice.
Remembering the great story of our salvation in Jesus Christ	The Eucharistic Prayer is a remembering of the great story of our liberation and freedom in Jesus. Jesus faces life, death and resurrection.	The great story of Jesus is the story of solidarity, liberation and freedom. It is the story of life, death and resurrection. It is the story that continues in the living out of Catholic Social Teaching today.	Service to those in need, challenging those in power to work for justice, living in solidarity with those in need—these all make present today the living story of Jesus.

¹United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

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Listening to the word and the world	Listening to God and to the world is at the heart of what liturgy is about.	“The fundamental moral criterion for all economic decisions, policies, and institutions is this: They must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.” --U.S. Catholic Bishops, <i>Economic Justice for All</i> , #24	Eucharist makes sense when it is a celebration of a connection with people. Direct contact with people who are experiencing injustice is essential for a community to be ready to celebrate the Eucharist. It is a form of listening to God.
Thanksgiving	The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving.	Catholic Social Teaching cannot be based in an attitude of hatred for the world or indifference for the world. Rather it is rooted in a love for the world and its people and the God who made it. This is what Thanksgiving is about.	The Thanksgiving of the community is not a naive thanksgiving that sees everything as beautiful and wonderful and pretends there is no suffering or pain or struggle in the world. Rather our Thanksgiving reflects a gratitude to a God who is with the world and the poor in their journey and in their struggle.
Welcome as equals	Chapter two of the Letter of James reminds the community “. . . to show not partiality as you adhere to the faith . . .”	The Eucharist is a celebration of the God who welcomes all men and women to share a common meal as equals.	This value needs to be reflected in our worship and in the way we behave outside of worship.

The whole Church as such, is directly called to the service of charity: “In the very early days the Church added the *agape* to the Eucharistic Supper, and thus showed herself to be wholly united around Christ by the bond of charity . . . charity gives life and sustains the works of solidarity that look to the total needs of the human being.¹

In the Sunday Eucharist, the believing heart opens wide to embrace all aspects of the Church . . . Far from trying to create a narrow “gift” mentality, St. Paul calls rather for a demanding culture of sharing, to be lived not only among the members of the community itself but in society as a whole.²

Catholic Social Teaching is built on a commitment to the poor. This commitment arises from our experiences of Christ in the Eucharist.³

¹Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

²Ibid.

³United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

Questions for Reflection

How has this study guide expanded your ideas about the implications of the Eucharist?

Brainstorm ways in which you can creatively weave Catholic Social Teaching into your parish’s celebration of the Eucharist.