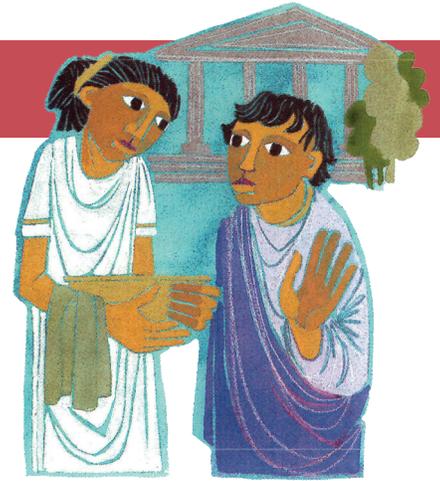


The Church at Home



1

Before you begin, please read the introduction on the right to yourself.

2

With the help of your child, prepare the meeting space. Pull out your Bible, light some candles, and add any other decoration you'd like to make the space beautiful.

Then begin with a prayer.

Nympha and the Church in her house are mentioned in Colossians 4:15. There is evidence that the early gatherings of the followers of Christ were held in what we call "house churches." Those who had homes large enough would host these celebrations.

This story is a fictionalized account of what one of these early Eucharists might have been like.

3

Getting started. Discuss together: What was the best party you ever attended? What made it so?

Have one family member read the text below out loud or take turns. Along the way, clarify anything your child might not understand.

A long time ago, people began to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They believed that God had kept the promise of the covenant with the Hebrews, the chosen people of God. Christian Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) would gather together to pray and to break bread as Jesus had told them.

They would meet in someone's house to share the stories and the food. The head of this house would lead the prayers. Everyone would bring something to eat and to share with others. A traveling preacher would tell them about Jesus. Then they would break the bread and pass the wine as Jesus had done.

This is a story about Nympha. Nympha is one of the women mentioned by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Colossians. We don't know much about these early churches in homes (or "house churches"), but we do know that this is where our Church today began.

Nympha busied herself looking over the room they would use. There were couches against each wall, but surely not enough for all who might be coming.

"Come here," she called to her servant. "Take out these two tables, then people may sit on the floor if they wish."

"Yes, ma'am," the boy answered. He worked happily because he, too, was coming to the celebration this evening. Nympha took Paul's words very seriously, that in Christ there was no difference between being a slave or being free. The boy looked forward to being with the other Christians.

Even though hers was one of the largest houses in Laodicea, the crowd seemed to be growing too large to be comfortable. "Well," she thought to herself, "they may always spread out into some of the smaller rooms if they wish."

Nympha reached into her pocket and removed the latest letter from Paul. She read it again to be sure to catch every word. Paul had come and spent time with this community when they first began meeting together. They owed much to his teaching and preaching. She was grateful for his prayers and encouragement.

As she was thinking, Archippus arrived. He also had a celebration planned for this evening in his home. Nympha was glad to see her brother in the Lord, and greeted him. "Peace of our Lord be with you."



He embraced her as warmly as she did him. “Grace to you, and peace from our Lord.” He looked around her room with admiration. “Again you help to build our community with your kindness, Nympha. How lovely you have made this room.” She had to accept his compliments with quiet pride. Her room was indeed striking. She was always concerned about creating a feeling of welcome. Nympha knew that Archippus would be no different. “I’m sure you, too, have had a busy day.”

He laughed and lowered his head. “Yes, but a good one. I hear you have a new letter from Paul.”

“Oh yes, I am reading it now. I will send it over to you as soon as we have finished.”

“Good, good, my thanks. Our preacher for this evening is resting. He has traveled far, but I think the Lord has sent him to the right place. We need to hear his message of God’s love and generosity.”

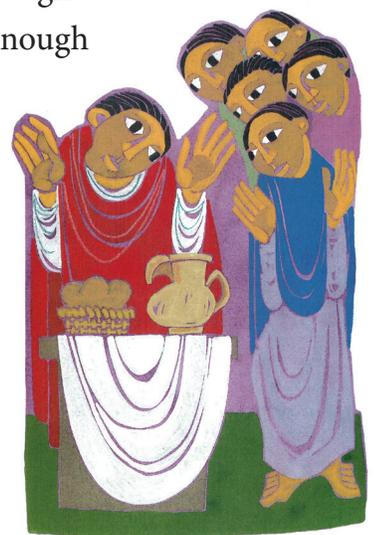
Nympha frowned slightly as she remembered the last gathering. Some of those who had brought the most food were unwilling to share with those who had brought less. Some of those baptized by Paul were claiming to be “better” than those baptized by other disciples. “You are very right, Archippus. We are in need of reminders that rich or poor, Greek or Hebrew, we are all followers of the Way of Christ.”

Shortly after Archippus left, Nympha returned to her preparations. She checked on the bread baking in her ovens. She polished the great cup they would use in tonight’s prayer. Then she retired to pray alone for a while.

As people began to arrive, they shouted each other’s names. They caught up on the week’s events and watched to make sure that everyone had enough to eat. Nympha and her family walked through the crowds. They were especially aware of any who seemed to be quarreling and tried to make peace before the meal began.

Eventually the time came for reading Paul’s letter. Nympha read aloud, “As people God has chosen and loved, you should put on certain good habits, like being kind and caring about others. If you are hurt, forgive the one who hurts you. The Lord has forgiven you, remember, so you, too, must be forgiving. Above all else, put on love, because this is what makes all the other virtues possible.”

The preacher waited patiently for his turn to address the community. When he stood, he spoke with words so moving that some cried. He reminded them how Jesus loved them all and sent the Spirit to be with them. “This bread and wine we share tonight is sign of what Jesus



asked of us,” he reminded them. “We remember our Lord each time we gather together to break this bread ”

“Yes, Lord,” Nympha thought quietly to herself as they passed the bread among them, “this is noisy and crowded and not perfect. But it is yours, and we are yours, and we thank you for your Body and Blood.” She smiled at the people around her.

Whether we meet in church buildings or homes now, we are still one family. This is one of the gifts the Spirit gives us. Another important gift is our prayer together. Our most special prayer is the Eucharist. Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” When Jesus left us with his Spirit, he also left us with bread and wine to become his Body and Blood. Receiving the Body of Christ at Communion, we remember that we are the Body of Christ in this world. For such a wonderful gift, we need to always give thanks.

1

Now discuss the story with your child. Use the following or other questions:

1. What most struck you in the story? Why?
2. If you were Nympha, what would you want to do to get ready?
3. Can you think of ways to make your meals with family or friends into times when you also remember the Body of Christ? How?

2

Have your child start their activity on the next page. (The answers are D, E, B, H, I, C, F, A, G.) Then continue to read below.

3

Just for you: The most special time we gather with others to pray is the Sunday Eucharist.

In the Gospels, Jesus commissioned Christians to “do this in remembrance of me.” The Sunday Eucharist can be traced back to these gospel times.

Eucharist is still the greatest source of grace and nourishment for our community. At every Mass Christ offers his sacrifice to the Father for our salvation. He gave his life in self-giving love for us, and we pray that we might also live lives of sacrifice. We receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and we reclaim our title as “the Body of Christ.”

What Do You Mean Mass Is a Celebration?

Think about it for a moment: What do you see happening at Mass?

There are two main parts of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And there are things that happen within these two that closely resemble other celebrations in our lives. While we approach Mass in a different way from other celebrations—prayerfully and reverently—this comparison can help us better understand what happens at the Eucharistic celebration.

See if you can match up the activities on the left with parts of the Mass most like them by putting the appropriate letters in the blanks:

- A. Eating the food
- B. Hearing all the family news
- C. Bringing food to share
- D. Being welcomed by the host
- E. Apologizing to anyone there whom you have hurt
- F. Preparing the food to eat
- G. Relaxing afterward (and thanking the hosts)
- H. Getting some good advice from a friend
- I. Worrying about those who are not there, or remembering them with affection

Introductory Rites

- ___ Greeting by priest/presider
- ___ Penitential Rite (e.g. “Lord, Have Mercy”)

Liturgy of the Word

- ___ Readings and Gospel
- ___ Homily
- ___ Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions)

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- ___ Preparation of Gifts (Offertory)
- ___ Eucharistic Prayer
- ___ Communion
- ___ Prayer After Communion



The Pleasure of Your Company is Requested

1

Have your child start their activity on the next page, and then continue to step 2.

2

Read the text below to yourself to learn about the Mass.

3

Explain to your child that one way to think about the Mass is as a special celebration that Jesus gives for his friends. Work together to fill out the invitation below. Decorate the invitation in any way you like. When you finish, hang your invitation somewhere to remind you that the Mass is an ongoing celebration and all are welcome!

Just for you: Have you ever heard Mass called a celebration? While we approach Mass in a different way from other celebrations—prayerfully and reverently—the similarities can help us better understand what happens at the Eucharistic celebration.

Sunday Eucharist is divided into two main parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word, when we hear the readings and the homily, is not unlike that time period at any gathering when people catch up with each other. We hear the stories of our tradition, the Good News of Jesus, and applications to our lives.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is an even more obvious parallel. At some celebrations we bring gifts, while at Mass we prayerfully bring forward our offering of bread and wine, plus gifts for those in need. At Mass, the altar (“Eucharistic table”) is prepared. Bread and wine are consecrated by the priest during the Eucharistic Prayer to become the Body and Blood of Christ which are offered to God as a pleasing sacrifice. Finally, the Body and Blood of Christ are shared as Communion.

An Invitation

You are cordially invited to a special gathering of friends!

Who is invited:

When:

Where:

Why:

What you will bring:

See you soon!

*Love,
Jesus*

RSVP

Your Invitation to Jesus

With your adult partner, you will fill out an invitation from Jesus to Sunday Eucharist. Good manners, however, means we often invite to our celebration those who have invited us to theirs. So let's say you "owe" Jesus an invitation. The phrases below are to help you decide where and when and to what you would like to invite Jesus.

The place I'd most like to have a party is _____

The food I would serve is _____

The music I would play is _____

The decorations would be _____

The people I would invite (besides Jesus) are _____

The time of year I would have the celebration is _____

The time of day I would have it is _____

The reason I want Jesus to come is _____

Food for Thought

1

Discuss the upcoming or recent Sunday readings. Look for whatever “food for thought” you may find.

Make a plan to volunteer some time or somehow support a program in your community that feeds the poor.



Closing Ritual

2

Answer your invitation from Jesus to come and remember him at Mass by finishing this prayer:

“Thanks for inviting me, Jesus. I look forward to your celebration because...”

