

What is the difference between a Mass and a “Sunday service?”

Dear **Father Kerper**: I recently heard that the bishop will allow lay leaders to conduct Sunday services when a parish can't get a priest. Is this true? In my parish, some of our Masses, including my favorite 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, were dropped. Why can't a lay leader be used to retain these Masses? After all, isn't it enough to receive Holy Communion?



Thanks for your collection of interrelated questions. To begin with, we need to clarify the difference between a “Sunday service” and a Mass.

The bishop in our diocese has authorized deacons and trained lay people to lead official liturgical services called “Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest,” also called SCAP. While new to our diocese, such liturgies have existed since 1989, when the bishops of the United States first approved them. These liturgies, however, are not the same as Mass.

Here's what such a celebration looks like: It begins with a greeting, followed by an opening prayer identical with the one used for the day's Mass. Then a lector reads the three Scripture passages assigned for the day. If the leader is a deacon, he will read the gospel and can offer a homily. A lay leader does not preach. Next, everyone recites the Nicene Creed, followed by the intercessions and the Lord's Prayer.

Now we come to an optional element: the distribution of Holy Communion. Because only a priest or bishop can consecrate bread and wine, transforming them into the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Communion cannot be “produced” during the service. So what happens? The deacon or lay leader can distribute hosts

consecrated by a priest at an earlier Mass.

The decision to offer Holy Communion will depend primarily on the availability of sufficient consecrated hosts for everyone who can to receive. If, for example, the deacon or lay leader has only 50 hosts for 200 people, it would not make sense to distribute Holy Communion to part of the congregation.

“The ‘Sunday celebration’ includes the proclamation of God's Word. However, it does not set before us the saving sacrifice of Christ. We experience this *fully* only through the celebration of Mass.”

You suggest replacing some Masses with these “Sunday celebrations.” While I can certainly understand your desire to restore your favorite Mass, we must be clear that these “priest-less” liturgies are not substitutes for the Mass but temporary accommodations for emergencies.

In our diocese, “Sunday celebrations” can occur in just two situations: first, if a priest suddenly becomes ill or otherwise

indisposed; and second, if a priest is away on a planned vacation or retreat and is unable to find a replacement priest.

In your final question, you suggest that receiving Holy Communion is “enough.” Certainly, for most Catholics the experience of receiving the sacrament is the highlight of their Sunday. However, ordinarily the reception of Holy Communion is inseparably connected with a series of inter-related actions, specifically the proclamation of God's Word, a communal act of thanksgiving, and the active remembrance of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection through the sacramental ministry of the priest. The “Sunday celebration” includes the proclamation of God's Word. However, it does not set before us the saving sacrifice of Christ. We experience this *fully* only through the celebration of Mass.

Allow me to offer a rough comparison. Imagine that your mother had invited you to Sunday dinner in celebration of your brother's birthday. On the way, you ran out of gas, had trouble getting help, and finally arrived five hours late. Though you've missed the meal, there is still a warm dish saved for your arrival. In a way, you will have shared the family meal because you ate the same food. However, you were unable to enjoy the broader celebration, notably the



Send your questions to: “Dear Father Kerper,” *Parable Magazine*, P.O. Box 310, Manchester, NH 03105 or e-mail dearfrkerper@parablemag.com.

Saint Charles Borromeo



BORN: October 2, 1538

DIED: November 3, 1584

FEAST DAY: November 4

PATRONAGE: Learning and the arts

PATRON AND NAMESAKE OF St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Meredith, NH. This stained glass window can be found in the foyer of St. Charles Borromeo church.

■ Saint Charles Borromeo was born into an aristocratic family and his uncle became Pope Pius IV. His life as a leader in the Church began very early. At 12 years old, his uncle named him an abbot in the mountainous village of Arona. Charles gave all of the revenue from his position to the poor.

When his father died in 1554, his family requested that he take over the management of their household affairs. Later on, his family asked him to give up his work for the Church and raise children so that the family name would not die out. Charles refused and redoubled his efforts to improve the welfare of the Church.

In 1560 his uncle, Cardinal Angelo de' Medici, was made pope and Charles was then elevated to the post of cardinal of Romagna and supervisor to the Franciscans, Carmelites, and Knights of Malta. At age 22, Charles was made archbishop of Milan.

His numerous accomplishments include persuading Pope Pius IV to reconvene the Council of Trent, founding and endowing a college at Pavia (*Almo Collegio Borromeo*), and having a significant share in the creation of the *Tridentine Catechism*, the formal instruction in the teachings of the Catholic Church that was used up until Vatican II in the late 1960s. After the death of his uncle, Charles devoted himself to the reformation of his diocese. He believed that abuses in the Church stemmed from clergy ignorance and he subsequently established seminaries, colleges, and communities for educating candidates for holy orders.

In 1576, during the time of the plague, Charles proved himself fearless by leading efforts to minister to the sick and bury the dead. Another great work of Charles was establishing the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) so that children would be taught about their faith. It was the beginning of what is now known as catechesis.

As a result of his lifelong work establishing schools and colleges, Saint Charles Borromeo is regarded as the patron saint of learning and the arts. He died November 3, 1584, at the age of 46.

exchange of fond memories, songs, and the joy of being together with loved ones. Holy Communion apart from Mass is somewhat similar.

While reception of Holy Communion at a “Sunday celebration” is indeed a genuine partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, the recipient receives the “fruit” of the Mass without direct participation in the sacred event that “produces” it. To put it another way, the “food” is separated from the “meal.” In its original form, the Eucharistic celebration was never to be chopped up into specific acts separated by various periods of time.

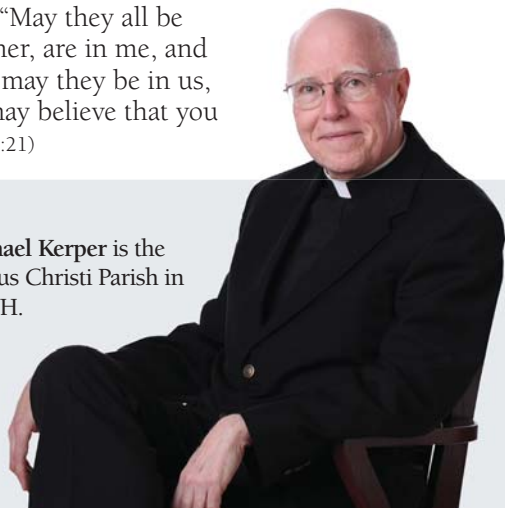
Some people, of course, will ask: “Why do we need a priest? Why can't the gathered community ‘make’ the Eucharist?” Good question. According to Catholic teaching, the priest or bishop, whose ordination “officially” connects him with the Apostles chosen by Christ, acts as the necessary unifying link between the particular community and the broader Church.

This brings us to your question about using lay leaders to “retain Masses” that have been or may be eliminated in your parish. The Eucharist, properly understood, is a sacrament of unity, which draws people together to worship at a common altar through the leadership of a priest or bishop, the symbolic agent of the community's unity with Christ and the universal Church.

In light of this, the suggested coexistence of Masses and “Sunday celebrations” in a single parish for the sake of mere convenience would seriously undermine the unifying force of the full Eucharistic Sacrifice, which happens only at Mass.

Christ always empowers the Church to provide the Eucharist to as many people as possible. Until recent times, Catholics in New England could participate in the Eucharist in many places — sometimes at several churches in one small town — and at many different times. To promote maximum convenience, the Church sometimes inadvertently fragmented communities through the excessive multiplication of Masses and parishes, which allowed Catholics to segregate themselves according to time preferences, ethnic background, and geographic location.

Now, as the ratio of priests to baptized Catholics has changed enormously, genuine need has replaced mere convenience as the Church's principal consideration in arranging celebrations of the Eucharist. Though this certainly involves painful change, perhaps it will eventually foster greater unity, which, after all, the Lord earnestly prayed for on the first Holy Thursday: “May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.” (John 17:21)



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