



Preparing for First Holy Communion

A short prayer service to conclude preparation before the big day

MARC CARDARONELLA

The Eucharist is the ultimate sacrament of initiation. Some might think that role belongs to Confirmation since it's the last initiation sacrament we normally receive. But for reasons too lengthy to discuss here, the usual order is "mixed up." At the Easter Vigil, catechumens receive Baptism, then Confirmation, and finally the Eucharist. Baptism is first because it's the gateway that allows the sacramental life. Confirmation completes Baptism, so it's next. But in joining ourselves to Christ through reception of the Eucharist, we truly join ourselves to the Church ... and all her members.

At first Holy Communion, children take the ultimate step toward union with Christ and initiation into his Church. Initiation is not complete without Confirmation. However, the real union happens in Communion — which, given the name, makes sense.

This prayer service in preparation for first Holy Communion is adapted from rites used in RCIA, the process for initiating adults into the Church. On the first Sunday of Lent, RCIA catechumens go before the bishop with

their sponsors and godparents, who testify to their formation and sincerity of response. It's an ancient ritual that dates to the first centuries of the Church.

For this service, invite the pastor or another priest or deacon to celebrate. If none are available, you can take the place of the leader.

The reading and psalms are taken from the Holy Thursday liturgy, the Triduum Mass that celebrates the establishment of the priesthood and the Eucharist.

PRO TIP: Invite parents and godparents to attend. At Baptism,

they vowed to lead the child to this moment; this prayer service marks that task complete. You might also choose to offer this service at the final first Holy Communion practice for adults and children.

Sign of the Cross

Opening prayer

Priestly celebrant or leader: Dear friends, these candidates for first Holy Communion have dedicated themselves in preparation for reception of the Eucharist and hope to be found ready for this next step in their journey of initiation into the Church.

Addressing the parents/godparents: I turn to you, parents and godparents, for your testimony. Have they taken their formation in the Gospel and the Catholic way of life seriously?

Parents/Godparents: They have.

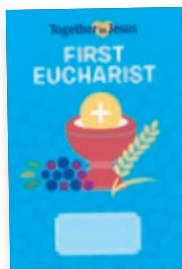
Celebrant: Have they given evidence of their conversion by the example of their lives?

Parents/Godparents: They have.

Celebrant: Do you judge them to be ready to receive this sacrament?

Parents/Godparents: We do.

Celebrant: My dear candidates, we gladly recommend you, in the name of Christ, to participate in the sacrament and be brought into communion with Christ's body, the Church. May God continue the good work he has begun



CATECHIST RECOMMENDS: *Together in Jesus* — Sacramental prep programs that involve parents, engage children, and support catechists. Learn more at CATmag.us/2SGHCvL.

in you through completion of your Christian initiation in the future when you receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Hymn/Song

We're blessed with two songs written by Catholic artists that beautifully capture the spirit of this service.

■ "Remembrance" by Matt Maher (with lyrics): See CATmag.us/2IwsL3g.

■ "Receive" by Audrey Assad (Lyrics in notes beneath the video): Listen at CATmag.us/2y5Q27o.

Psalm

Psalm 116:12-14, 17-18

I recommend dividing the psalm by verses as indicated above, with the antiphon in between.

ANTIPHON: Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

Reading

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Intercessions

Catechist or leader recites the petition. Students respond: "Lord, hear our prayer."

That the Eucharist may inspire these candidates to serve others, let us pray to the Lord: *R/*.

That their parents and godparents may be living examples of the Gospel, let us pray to the Lord: *R/*.

That their teachers may always convey the beauty of God's word, let us pray to the Lord: *R/*.

That these candidates may share the joy of closeness with Jesus, let us pray to the Lord: *R/*.

That their families may grow in charity and be constant in prayer, let us pray to the Lord: *R/*.

Father of love and abundant mercy, it is your will to establish

everything in Christ and to draw us into union with him. Guide these candidates: Strengthen their bond to you, give them a special love for the Eucharist, and mold them into the living stones of your Church. We ask this through Christ our Lord. *R/*. Amen

Concluding Prayer

My dear candidates, you are about to take a larger step toward full incorporation into Christ's mystical body. Christ will be your way, your truth, and your life. In his name we send you forth to be numbered among the guests at his wedding feast. Until we meet again for the celebration of first Holy Communion, walk in God's peace.

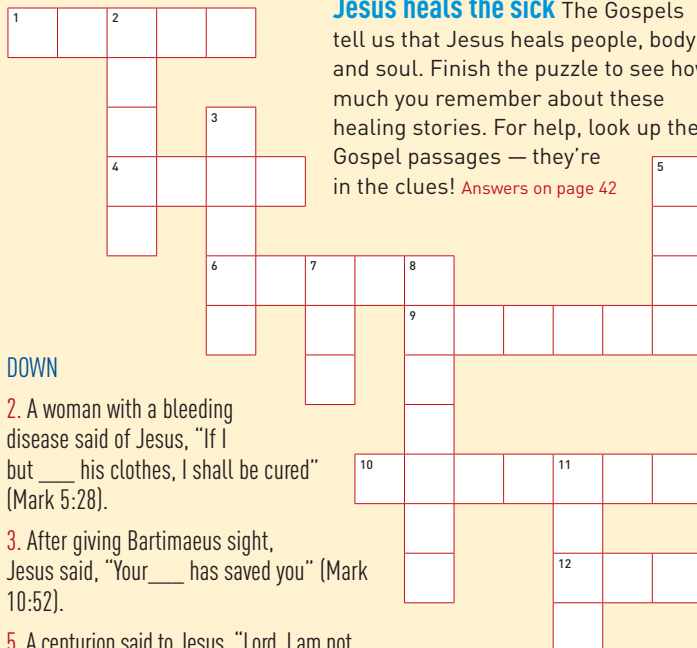
Sign of the Cross



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Puzzle from LIVING THE LITURGICAL YEAR on p. 28

Jesus heals the sick The Gospels tell us that Jesus heals people, body and soul. Finish the puzzle to see how much you remember about these healing stories. For help, look up the Gospel passages — they're in the clues! **Answers on page 42**



DOWN

2. A woman with a bleeding disease said of Jesus, "If I but ____ his clothes, I shall be cured" (Mark 5:28).

3. After giving Bartimaeus sight, Jesus said, "Your ____ has saved you" (Mark 10:52).

5. A centurion said to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the ____ and my servant will be healed" (Matthew 8:8).

ACROSS

1. Jesus healed this apostle's mother-in-law (see Matthew 8:14-15).

4. Jesus used this on a blind man's eyes (see John 9:6).

6. As Jesus was healing him, a blind man said, "I see people looking like ____ and walking" (Mark 8:24).

9. When Jairus learned that his daughter had died, Jesus told him, "Do not be ____; just have faith" (Mark 5:36).

10. Jesus brought this dead man back to life (see John 11:43-44).

12. The number of lepers who returned to thank Jesus after he had healed them (see Luke 17:15).

DOWN continued

7. Jesus' final healing miracle before his death and resurrection was to restore a man's right ____ (see Luke 22:50, 51).

8. Jesus often healed people on this day of the week (see John 5:9).

11. People lowered a paralyzed man through a hole in a ____ so that Jesus could heal him