



Dear Parents,

Greetings from Joliet! As director of our diocesan Religious Education Office, and on behalf of Bishop R. Daniel Conlon, I wish to congratulate you on the upcoming celebration of your child's First Eucharist. It is an exciting time, a time for focus on family, parish and faith. I hope you and your family are experiencing the joy of coming to know more fully the love of our Lord, Jesus, in this period of preparation and anticipation.

Thank you for having brought your child, in conjunction with your parish religious formation program, to a point of readiness to fully enter into the experience of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Surely, you appreciate how essential is your role in nurturing the gift of faith God has placed in your child. Christian parenting is a holy vocation, a sacred responsibility of bringing your family to know and live the "good news" of Jesus and our Catholic faith. I invite you each day to ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit so that you can be the heart and hands of Jesus for your family. I pray that you may be blessed in seeing your child grow in "wisdom, age and grace", as Mary and Joseph experienced in Jesus (Luke 2:52).



I'd like to offer two strong encouragements to you in this final time of preparation and, perhaps more importantly, in all the days after your child's First Eucharist. First, I hope you will strive to attend to your own faith life, seeking to continue to understand our Catholic faith and how it can be a rich source of hope and meaning for life. In Baptism, each of us were set forth on a journey of a lifetime, on which we are called to faithful Christian discipleship. We must never consider our Confirmation as a graduation from growing in faith, whether spiritually or intellectually. As your child continues to reveal a developing grasp of Catholic faith and a maturing relationship with God and the Church, so too may you see yourself as a work-in-progress, desiring to live out your baptismal identity ever more deeply. In this process, connect with your parish's personnel, ministries and resources, so that the entire faith community can accompany you in your continuing faith formation. This is a part of what parish is all about.

Secondly, I encourage you to value the precious gift of celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist each Sunday with your parish community. For 2000 years this liturgy, our Mass, has been the core Christian act, the centerpiece for life as the Body of Christ, the Church. Liturgy is as much *who we are* as Catholics as *what we do*. It is, since the time of the apostles, where we have come to be fed in Word, Sacrament and Community. It is where we not only give worship to God and obey Christ's command to "do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19), but also where we nourish ourselves and support one another for the remarkable and ordinary challenges of living the week ahead. In short, if Baptism has set us on a journey, Eucharist is our food for the journey.

Dear friends in Christ, you are precious in the eyes of our God and to our Church! You have been called to bring yet another generation into relationship with Christ. Please see your child's First Eucharist as a beautiful beginning for your entire family. Be present and active in your parish community. The great challenge of the Eucharist is to love as we have been loved, to feed one another as Christ feeds us. May the Eucharist strengthen you and your family in His love, so that you may join in the mission of the entire Catholic Church to transform our world into God's reign, a place where justice and peace and love abound!

Yours in Christ,

Thomas S. Quinlan  
Director