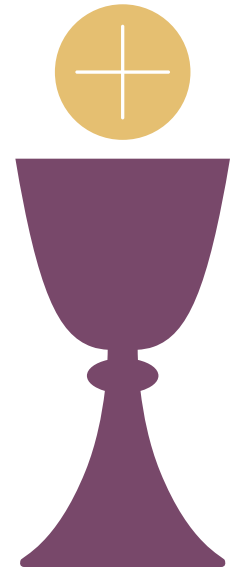


# Who are the Eucharistic Saints?



**Eucharistic saints. Who might they be? Are they the Apostles, with whom Jesus shared bread and wine at the Last Supper? Are they the ones whose feet he washed, and who heard him say, on the very night before he died: “Do this in memory of me”?**

Perhaps eucharistic saints must also include the earliest missionaries, who in the power of the Spirit built up communities of faith. Eucharist was the center of the life of these communities. They gathered on Sunday for “the breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42). Keeping alive the memory of what Jesus did, they rejoiced in his presence as Risen Lord and waited in hope for his future coming. They stand at the beginning of our eucharistic tradition.

## IN TIME OF PERSECUTION

But surely there are more. Are eucharistic saints the martyrs, like St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 170), who saw themselves and their own terrible fate lifted up by the Eucharist? Condemned to death for his Christian belief, Ignatius was taken in chains from Syria to Rome to be executed by being thrown to the wild beasts in the arena. On his way, he wrote: “I am God’s wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ.”

## PROTECTED AND PROTECTING

Perhaps eucharistic saints are those who defended the Eucharist with their lives, as St. Tarcisus did. This twelve-year old altar boy lived in Rome during the Valerian persecution (3rd century). On his way to bring the Eucharist to Christians in prison, he was stopped by a gang of boys who demanded to see what he was carrying. He wouldn’t hand it over. Infuriated, their rage turned into violence, and Tarcisus was killed—protecting the holy Eucharist.

Or, on the other hand, they may be the saints whom the Eucharist protected, like St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253). When mercenary soldiers invaded Assisi and came to sack her convent, Clare rose from her sickbed, took a monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament in it, and held it up before them. They turned and ran.

## PRAISE AND ADORATION

Are they the saints who composed hymns to the Eucharist, as did St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)? Here is a verse of one that is still sung today, translated by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore,  
Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more,  
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart  
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

Perhaps they are the saints who spent hours in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, like St. Pascal Baylon (1570-1592). A lay Franciscan brother in Spain, he chose to live in poverty. Pascal would often spend the whole night in ecstatic prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He is the patron saint of Eucharistic Congresses.

## COME AND RECEIVE

Are eucharistic saints the men and women who founded religious communities devoted to the Eucharist, as St.

Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868) did in nineteenth-century France? He established the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament to reach out to the unchurched and to prepare the faithful to approach Eucharist worthily.

Are they pastors and popes, such as Pope St. Pius X (1835-1914), whose decisions encouraged eucharistic participation? Pius lowered the age of First Communion to seven, because he had confidence in the faith of young children. He also urged all the faithful to receive Communion frequently—not only once a year or a few times a year, as had been their custom. Because of him, many Catholics in the twentieth century returned to the ancient practice of receiving Communion every Sunday.

## MINISTRY AND MISSION

Maybe eucharistic saints are those for whom Eucharist was central to mission, such as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997). Her care for the poorest of the poor was constant and passionate. Where did her energy come from? She and her sisters, the Missionaries of Charity, found strength in the Eucharist. “In each of our lives Jesus comes as the Bread of Life,” Mother Teresa wrote, “to be eaten, to be consumed by us. This is how He loves us. Then Jesus comes in our human life as the hungry one, the other, hoping to be fed with the Bread of our life, our hearts by loving, and our hands by serving.”

## EUCHARISTIC SAINTS TODAY

Finally, yes, there must be “eucharistic saints” living today. They may bring Communion to the sick, or prepare children for first Eucharist, or serve as special ministers of the Eucharist, or perform some other service. They are the ones who embody charity, the hallmark of Eucharist. Although the Church has not proclaimed them to be saints (worthy of universal devotion), their faith in Christ and the Eucharist shines brightly.

Down through the ages, men and women have gathered at the altar of God to remember and celebrate what Jesus has done. The term communion of saints, *communio sanctorum*, means not only the people whom the Church has canonized as saints, but all those who are united in the sharing of “holy things”: most especially, the Eucharist. The saints are those who have witnessed to Christ among us, full of thankfulness and praise. We all are eucharistic saints, “God’s holy ones,” when we faithfully participate in the sacred mysteries of Christ’s dying and rising—through the Eucharist.

## REFLECT

What does the Eucharist mean in my life? Do I have a deep reverence for the presence of Christ in the Eucharist? Do I feel that my participation in the Eucharist connects me with others in the communion of saints?

## ACT

This Lent, make an effort to attend Mass more frequently, or to spend some time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. From even a small investment of time you can reap a big reward.

## PRAY

Apostles and evangelists, pray for us! Holy martyrs and witnesses to Christ, pray for us! Saints who shaped the Church and changed the world—pray for us!

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