

Eucharist is jewel of our life

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The goal of Christian initiation is full participation in the Sunday Eucharist, says a Toronto catechist.

The Holy Eucharist is "the jewel in the initiation crown," which also includes Baptism and Confirmation, Catherine Ecker told a workshop on Christian initiation in Edmonton.

Ecker said the Eucharist brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life. "We are baptized and confirmed so that we may participate in Eucharist fully."

Because of the centrality of the Eucharist, "Weekly participation in Sunday Eucharist is the expectation and the goal of the entire sacramental life," said Ecker who serves in the Office of Formation for Discipleship of the Toronto Archdiocese.

"We cannot speak of a sacramental life if we are not participating in the weekly Sunday Eucharist."

Ecker led her workshop for about 90 catechists, pastors, parents and school teachers at the Catholic Pastoral Centre May 31-June 1.

She said helping people understand and embrace why we gather every Sunday is one of the most pressing pastoral needs we have today.

Because we put more emphasis on Confirmation than on Eucharist, many people today see Confirmation as the high point. It's not, she said. "The Holy Eucharist brings Christian initiation to completion and represents the centre and goal of all sacramental life."

"If the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the Church's life and mission, it follows that the process of Christian initiation must constantly be directed to the reception of this sacrament," Ecker said, quoting from Pope Benedict's apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*.

In the document, "Benedict is saying we need to ask ourselves whether in our Christian communities the close link between Baptism and Confirmation and Eucharist is sufficiently recognized," she said.

"I think most would say it's not sufficiently recognized. But it needs to be."

Ecker called Eucharist the "repeatable" sacrament of initiation and said every Sunday when we gather for Eucharist we are once again reunited with Christ and with one another at the table of the Lord.



WCR PHOTO | RAMON GONZALEZ

Catherine Ecker says helping people understand the importance of participating in the Sunday Eucharist is a pressing pastoral need.



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About 90 people took part in the workshop on Christian initiation led by Catherine Ecker

"The celebration of Eucharist means we live differently," she stressed. "We are obliged to live differently. To leave the Mass and not live differently is, as someone said, to live a lie."

The sacrament of Baptism by which we were conformed to Christ makes us part of the one Body of Christ, Ecker explained. "It is our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice which perfects within us the gifts given to us at Baptism."

In preparing children and adults for Initiation, she said, "we are preparing people for life at the Eucharistic table."

Paragraph 9 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults tells us that "the baptized are the primary ministers of initiation."

However, the role of the parents can never be overstated, Ecker said. "Parents are the ones who form their children in faith and in all ways of life whether we like it or not."

Catechists also prepare children and adults for initiation. They are ministers commissioned by the Church community to help pass the faith on to others.

"A catechist teaches with enthusiasm," Ecker said. "The catechist is a mentor that shows by his or her example how to live as a Catholic." More importantly, a catechist should never show his or her frustration in her face.

Catechists can provide experiences that lead others to prayer but "we really can't teach someone to pray."

In Baptism, we are immersed in the paschal mystery. "We are immersed in Jesus' life, death and resurrection through the waters of Baptism. We are joined to Jesus."

The highest responsibility of the baptized is to pray for the needs of the world. "That's your job – to pray for the needs of the world; not just the people we know but the needs of the world because we are anointed priests, prophets and kings."

As prophets, we are called to teach others about God through words, actions and witness. "People should recognize whose team we are on because we are the baptized," Ecker said.

As kings by virtue of being children of God, we are called to ensure that "all the people in the kingdom have their needs met."

"As the baptized, we have to figure out how to keep (the baptismal) candle burning brightly," Ecker said. "The best way to do that is to gather each and every Sunday to celebrate Eucharist."