My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are present in the Eucharist. Take the blindness from my eyes, so that I can see all people and things as you see them. Take the deafness from my ears, so that I can hear your truth and follow it. Take the hardness from my heart, so that I can live and love generously. Give me the grace to receive the Eucharist with humility, so that you can transform me a little more each day into the person you created me to be. Amen.

Matthew Kelly
7. THE EUCHARIST

For most of Jesus’ public life people crowded around him. If he was teaching in the synagogue, they crowded around him. If he was walking in the street, they crowded around him. If he was having a meal in a home, they crowded around him.

But there were two times when people fled from Jesus.

The obvious one was after his arrest and crucifixion. Where were all the crowds that had followed him? Where were all those people who witnessed his miracles? Where were all the people he had cured and fed? Nowhere to be found.

The other time people fled from Jesus was when he spoke to them about the Eucharist. He said, “I am the bread of life. . . . Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:48, 53)

Immediately after this, we read in the Gospel: “When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This is a difficult teaching; who can accept it?’” (John 6:60) And a few lines later we read, “After this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.” (John 6:66)

Notice Jesus didn’t say, “Oh, come back. I was only kidding. Let’s talk about it. Maybe I was wrong. Perhaps we can change this teaching. We can work something out.” No, he turned to his disciples, just as he turns to you and me today, and said, “Do you also wish to leave me?”

Will you flee from Jesus or remain by his side?

The Eucharist is at the core of our faith. Let’s explore what it is and what it means to you.

7.1 THE ONE THING

There are a lot of things I love about being Catholic, but at the top of the list is the Eucharist. Most people have never really stopped to think about it, but the Eucharist is amazing.

I was asked once: What would have to happen for you to leave the Catholic Church? I thought about the question for a long time. I combed through the lowest moments in Catholic history, testing each to see if one of them would have been the breaking point that made me leave, But after thinking it through I decided I could never leave the Catholic Church. The reason is because I believe that Jesus is truly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the Eucharist. Where else can I get the Eucharist?

Sure, some other churches might have better music, but in the whole scheme of things music is trivial compared to the Eucharist. Other churches might have more engaging preachers, but these are trivial compared to the Eucharist. When we go to Mass on Sunday the danger is in thinking that the music and the homily are the most important things. Don’t take the trivial and make it important. That’s the way of the world. Get clear about what’s really important, what matters most, and life will be a lot simpler and more joyful.

At Mass on Sunday, the homily could be in a language I don’t understand, the music could be a complete train wreck, there could be kids running up and down the aisles screaming at the top of their lungs, throwing crayons and eating snacks (or eating crayons and throwing snacks), and that’s OK—because the moment when I receive the Eucharist is a pivotal moment in my week. It’s a moment of transformation, a moment when I get to receive who and what I wish to become, And I could never leave that. It doesn’t matter how good the music or preaching is elsewhere; I cannot leave the Eucharist, I will not leave Jesus. I hope you won’t either.

When I reflect on the gift of faith I have been given, I am led to the conclusion that once we believe in the Eucharist we are given the grace to look beyond a bad homily and the grace to look beyond a good homily; the grace to look beyond uninspiring music and the grace to look beyond music that elevates our hearts, minds, and souls. For it is beyond all of these things, way beyond all of these things, that we find Jesus in the Eucharist.

This sets the Catholic Church apart: Jesus truly present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is uniquely Catholic.

Let me ask you a question. If you had to spend the rest of your life on a deserted island, and you could only take five people with you, whom would you take?

I can tell you a priest would be on my list of five people. No priest, no Mass, no Mass, no Eucharist. I can’t live without the Eucharist. More important, I don’t want to. And once you come to understand the power of the Eucharist, you won’t want to either.

I was born Catholic and I will die Catholic. There are lots of reasons for that, but none more compelling than the Eucharist.
1. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT BEING CATHOLIC?

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2. WHICH OF JESUS’ TEACHINGS DO YOU FIND MOST DIFFICULT TO LIVE?

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3. IF YOU HAD TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE ON A DESERT ISLAND AND YOU COULD ONLY TAKE FIVE PEOPLE WITH YOU, WHOM WOULD YOU TAKE?

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7.2 **The True Presence**

You might be thinking to yourself, “I’m not sure if I believe that Jesus is truly present in the host I receive at Mass on Sunday.” You wouldn’t be the first person to have doubts. Great faith and great doubt often go hand in hand. There was a priest who lived in Lanciano, Italy, around the year 700, who was plagued with doubts about the true presence... until one day. After that day he never again doubted that Jesus was truly present in the Eucharist.

What happened on that day? I’m glad you asked.

On that day, the priest was celebrating Mass in the small church, even though he was filled with doubts about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. As he said the Words of Conssecration (“Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my body which will be given up for you.”) the bread changed into living flesh and the wine changed into blood, before his eyes.

Today, you can go to Lanciano and see the flesh and blood that has remained there for more than thirteen hundred years. The flesh and blood have been studied by scientists on a number of occasions, and the following conclusions have been drawn: The flesh is real human flesh and the blood is real human blood, the flesh is muscular tissue from the heart, and there is no evidence of preservatives or any other chemical agents present.

This is one of thousands of Eucharistic miracles that have been documented throughout the life of the Church.

At the Last Supper Jesus “took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19) We take Jesus at his word. At Mass on Sunday the priest extends his hands over simple bread and wine and asks the Holy Spirit to transform them into the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

If the Holy Spirit can do that to bread and wine, imagine what he can do with you if you open yourself up to the experience of Confirmation.

You are not just a body. You are a delicate composition of body and soul. If you haven’t already, one day you will discover you need to feed your soul in order to live a full and happy life. And when that day comes I want you to remember today, because there is no better way to feed your soul than with the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is astonishing. God himself wants to nourish us. God himself wants to feed us spiritually. God wants to dwell in you.

Some people say that the bread and wine are just a symbol of Jesus’ body and blood, but that is not what we believe as Catholics. And the evidence found in Divine Revelation suggests that it is not just a symbol. The Scriptures don’t suggest the symbol. Jesus didn’t say, “Unless you eat a symbol of my flesh and drink a symbol of my blood you will not have life.” And remember there are two aspects of Divine Revelation: Scripture and Tradition. And from the earliest times, Christians have believed that the Eucharist was the body and blood of the risen Jesus, and not just a symbol.

Can I prove it to you scientifically? No. Not everything can be explained or proven scientifically. If you could prove everything scientifically, there would be no need for faith. There is such a thing as mystery. We human beings don’t know everything. If we did we would be God, and there is plenty of evidence in our daily lives that confirms that human beings are not God. Life is full of mystery, and mystery is a beautiful thing.

At the heart of the mystery that is the Catholic faith is the Eucharist. I hope with every passing year of your life you will explore and embrace the mystery of the Eucharist more.

The wiser you become, the closer you will want to be to God. And God wants to be close to us. Saint Francis de Sales wrote, “In the Eucharist we become one with God.” To be one with God is a beautiful thing, and whether you are aware of it or not, it is your deepest yearning. You have an insatiable yearning to be one with God. I hope you will start listening to that yearning.

If you want to have a life-changing experience, find an Adoration Chapel in your area and visit it, Sit there in Jesus’ presence for one hour, You will be amazed how powerful Jesus’ presence is, and how much he will teach you about yourself and your life in one hour.

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**Who Was St. Francis de Sales?**

Saint Francis de Sales (1567–1622) was a priest and bishop and is regarded as one of the great spiritual writers of all time. During his era it was widely believed that holiness was only for monks and nuns, but he banished that idea. The central theme in his classic introduction to the Devout Life is the idea that God calls every man and woman to live a holy life. Francis also spoke about the allure of money and things, pointing out that the danger of possessions is how easily they can possess us. Possessions increase our happiness only when we use them for our good and the good of others. Francis de Sales is the patron saint of writers and his feast day is January 24.

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**All the Answers are in the Tabernacle.**
1. IS THERE A PERSON IN YOUR LIFE WHOSE PRESENCE JUST MAKES YOU FEEL CALM AND SAFE?

2. WHEN DID YOU FIRST LEARN ABOUT JESUS BEING PRESENT IN THE EUCHARIST?

3. HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR LIFE WOULD CHANGE IF YOU SPENT ONE HOUR EACH WEEK SITTING QUIETLY IN JESUS’ PRESENCE?
7.3 The Eucharist

When was the last time you did something that you knew wasn’t good for you? Why did you do it? Think of reasons, come up with excuses, but at the end of the day it comes down to this: You have disordered desires that are very difficult to control.

Have you ever tried to quit a bad habit and failed? If you haven’t already, the day will come when you will try to end a self-destructive habit and find yourself powerless over it. You will use up all the willpower you can summon, but you will find yourself failing over and over again. These moments in life can be very humbling—and that’s good, because they make us realize our need for God and his grace.

Grace is the assistance God gives us to do what is good, true, noble, and right. And there is no better way to receive God’s grace than through the Eucharist.

There is a lot of talk these days about superfoods. Superfoods are high in nutrients and rich with antioxidants, and they keep your immune system strong to fight off disease. Some examples include pomegranate juice, salmon, alfalfa sprouts, sweet potatoes, kale, prunes, beets, apples, and beans.

The Eucharist is the ultimate superfood for the soul, loaded with grace to keep you spiritually healthy, give you the wisdom and strength to choose the right path, and fight off diseases like selfishness and other related vices and bad habits. And that is just a tiny fraction of the power the Eucharist holds.

When you go to Mass next Sunday, keep in mind, the Eucharist is not just a symbol. This is Jesus. The same Jesus who healed people with a touch. The same man who taught with more wisdom than any person who ever walked the earth. This is the guy who fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. The same Jesus who rose from the dead.

We’ve all got problems. We all have struggles. But whatever you’ve got, he can handle. You need grace. You may not know it yet, but the sooner you realize it the better. And the Eucharist is the supreme source of the grace you need.

Isn’t it time you allowed God to unleash the power of grace in your life?

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“FROM THE EUCHARIST COMES STRENGTH TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ZEAL TO SHARE THAT LIFE WITH OTHERS.”
—POPE JOHN PAUL II

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1. When was the last time you did something that you knew wasn’t good for you? Why did you do it if you knew it wasn’t good for you?

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2. Have you ever tried to quit a bad habit and failed?

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3. When you’re in a situation and you want to do what is good and right but are attracted to the wrong choice, do you call on God and ask for his help?
**What is a Monstrance?**

A monstrance is an open or transparent receptacle in which the consecrated Host is exposed for veneration.

**What is Eucharistic Adoration?**

As Catholics we believe that Jesus Christ—body, blood, soul, and divinity—is truly present in the Eucharist, and as such, we believe that being in the presence of the Eucharist is powerful. Eucharistic adoration is the practice of praying in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Simply to sit quietly before Jesus in the Eucharist can be incredibly powerful and has changed many people’s lives. In the silence and in his presence great clarity begins to emerge about who we are, what we are here for, what matters most, and what matters least.

**What is Transubstantiation?**

Transubstantiation is the changing of simple bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. This takes place at the consecration during Mass.

How many hours of her life do you think Mary spent in adoration of Jesus?
7.4 **Close and Stay Close**

What’s the most beautiful church you have ever been in? How did it make you feel?

I began speaking and writing when I was nineteen. At the time I was in business school, and since then, I have been blessed to travel in more than fifty countries. Few things inspire me more than traveling. There is something about experiencing different places, places, and cultures that opens our hearts and minds.

I grew up Catholic and my experience of the Catholic Church was mostly limited to our parish, St. Martha’s in suburban Sydney. But through travel I began to see how vast and impressive the Catholic Church is, in so many ways.

One thing that becomes abundantly clear when you start traveling is that the world is full of beautiful Catholic churches. Have you ever wondered why we build such beautiful churches? I can tell you this: It’s not about the art or the architecture. It’s because we believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist.

Stand in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Notre Dame or Sacre Coeur in Paris, St. Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney, Duomo Cathedral in Milan, Las Lajas Sanctuary in Colombia, St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC, or any of a thousand other incredible Catholic churches around the world and you will feel awe and sense the sacred.

What do these beautiful churches really say to us? They say that there is something greater here than art and architecture, something more than history—and not just something . . . but someone. That someone is Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, present in all these churches, and present in the tabernacle in your local church.

That’s why I love stopping by a church for a few quiet minutes.

We all have questions that we need answered, and we all need advice from time to time. But when we need advice we tend to ask people who know just about nothing about nothing, instead of going to the man who has all the answers.

All the answers are in the tabernacle. Jesus has all the answers and he patiently waits for us in the tabernacle, day and night, to share those answers with us. Next time you are grappling with a decision, stop by your church and ask Jesus for his advice. Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is the ultimate spiritual experience, but there is also something powerful about just sitting in his presence.

In the Gospels we read time and time again about Jesus leaving his disciples and the crowds and going to a place set apart. In the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel we read, “In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” (Mark 1:35) If Jesus needed this time in silence and solitude, how much more do you think we need it? The world is a busy and noisy place, and all of that tends to distract us from what matters most.

It is getting harder and harder to find a quiet place in this world, but one of the great gifts the Catholic Church gives to us all is places that are set apart for quiet reflection. Churches and chapels, retreat centers and monasteries—over the centuries the Church has established places in almost every community on earth for us to be still and quiet and reflect on what is happening within us and around us.

Once again, I want to encourage you to establish the habits of daily prayer in your life. This is a foundational habit that will serve you well for the rest of your life. The sooner you start taking your spiritual life seriously, the happier you will be.

Get close to God, and stay close to God.

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**God has declared Sunday—the Sabbath day—as a day of rest.**

**Mark 1:35**

**KNOW IT:** It seems that Jesus was always looking for quiet places to spend a few minutes in prayer.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** How hard is it for you to find a quiet place to pray each day? Is there one place that is most convenient?

**LIVE IT:** Renew your commitment to spending ten minutes each day in the classroom of silence.

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**If you live until you are eighty-five years old, how many Sundays do you have left?**

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**Have you ever thought of Mary as the first tabernacle?**
1. If you could visit one of the beautiful churches mentioned in this section, which would you choose?

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2. At this time in your life, what question would you like Jesus to answer for you? (Your question should be about something that applies directly to you.)

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3. What quiet places have you found to spend a few minutes in each day?

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__________________________________________________________________________
Every Sunday morning you make a decision. It’s the biggest decision of your week. To go or not to go, that is the question.

You might say that Mass is boring. I was bored at Mass for a long time, but then something happened. I started listening to what God was trying to say to me. I got myself a little journal and took it to Mass with me, and each week I wrote down the one thing that I felt God was saying to me. I have been doing this for fifteen years now. Each year I get a new journal. At home in my study, where I write, I have these fifteen journals on a shelf. When I get writer’s block I pick one up and just start reading. Some days when I don’t feel like praying I take one of these journals and just talk to God about some of the things he has said to me over the years. It is amazing the things God will say to us when we start listening.

I hope you go to Mass every Sunday for the rest of your lives so that God can nourish you with the Eucharist, but I also hope you will start to appreciate the bigger picture.

God has declared Sunday—the Sabbath day—as a day of rest. In Genesis 2:2 we read about God resting on the seventh day. Why? Why did God rest? Was he tired? No. God is a pure spirit and as such does not experience fatigue like we human beings do. So, why did he rest? He rested because he foresaw our need for rest. He wanted to show us how to live. He wanted to demonstrate that rest is a good thing, and something that we all need.

You have a legitimate need for rest. The Sabbath is God’s response to your physical and spiritual need for rest and renewal. And nothing will renew you like receiving the Eucharist. It is literally food from Heaven.

On average you will live for another seventy years. That means you have 3,640 Sundays left. Don’t waste a single one. It may seem like a lot, but you will be amazed at how quickly time passes. It feels like six months ago I was sitting where you are preparing for Confirmation... but that was twenty-five years ago.

You have a lot of decisions to make. Getting yourself to Mass on Sunday and receiving the Eucharist will help you make better decisions in every area of your life.
Psalm 63

1 O God, thou art my God, I seek thee,
   my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee,
as in a dry and weary land where no water is.
2 So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary,
   beholding thy power and glory.
3 Because thy steadfast love is better than life,
   my lips will praise thee.
4 So I will bless thee as long as I live;
   I will lift up my hands and call on thy name.
5 My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,
   and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips,
6 when I think of thee upon my bed,
   and meditate on thee in the watches of the night;
7 for thou hast been my help,
   and in the shadow of thy wings I sing for joy.
8 My soul clings to thee; thy right hand upholds me.
9 But those who seek to destroy my life
   shall go down into the depths of the earth;
10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword,
    they shall be prey for jackals.
11 But the king shall rejoice in God;
   all who swear by him shall glory;
   for the mouths of liars will be stopped.