

Good morning. My name is Emily Gutknecht, and I am a sophomore at Warren Township High School. But I am a graduate of Prince of Peace, so I grew up around the Eucharist, and the mass.

When I was little, I loved the mass, and I loved church. At one point I told my parents I was “Mary’s Biggest Fan.” When my grandmother and I used to play dress-up, I used to wear all of her blue clothing, pretend to be Mary, and go around to talk to her angel statues. And my favourite part of mass was the singing, and watching the people walking back from communion. It was so interesting to me to see people who were always so talkative around my parents and me to become reverent and somehow joyous at the same time.

In second grade, I started learning about what the eucharist really was. We prepared by understanding how important it was in the mass, and how it was called the “sacrifice of the mass.” Of course, I never really understood completely why it was so important until I finally received my first communion. I couldn’t quite put it into words, but I felt like I was finally a part of the church in a really important way. From then on, every Wednesday and Sunday I received communion. In religion class, I learned more and more about our church and our faith, and grew closer to God through my prayers and my experiences. I found different ways to be involved in our celebration of the Eucharist- from singing in the school choir, to becoming an altar server, to playing my flute in the teen choir for a while, to now being a lector. But, being surrounded by all catholics, it never really occurred to me how much I was taking for granted the eucharist’s role in my life.

Last year, I started high school, and was introduced to public school. I made many friends, some of whom also go to mass and others who go to different protestant, muslim, or jewish services, and a few who just stay at home on Sundays. That sounds like it would be difficult. And it was, for a bit, but really it has just helped me grow in my faith. Being curious about their faiths and them being curious about mine has helped me strengthen my beliefs. Being able to explain why we do what we do and believe what we believe has just solidified my faith. We always have friendly discussions, but never debates, about beliefs and do our best to try to understand each other. The most common questions I get are always about the eucharist, and why it is so important to us. But I always have trouble trying to explain to them how I feel empty without the mass every Wednesday I was used to. How I was filled with joy and awe and humbled every Sunday, and how I wish they could feel the same way with me. How it wasn't so much just a ritual but a remembering of the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and how we strive to live our lives in His image every day because of it. How I enjoyed hearing the readings, and how it wasn't weird to me at all that we had written prayers as well as speaking to God without pre-scripted words. And then I finally realized how much I took for granted a lot of things.

Being a catholic from birth, I never thought of how to explain to an outsider how the eucharist was so vital. My tight-knit community I always saw school as grew from around 200 people at Prince of Peace to over 4,000 at Warren. And with my school's size had to grow my ability to adapt to change, my patience, and my perseverance. Through this intense change that dominated my first couple of months, what got me through was mass every Sunday. I found that I started to look forward to mass much more than before. It helped me keep my patience and kindness to my

classmates, and helped me grow in wisdom to help them with whatever issues they would be facing, just as my teachers and religious leaders at prince of peace had helped me. I pulled from it integrity and a strong set of morals that helped me through that time.

However, as soon as I had adjusted to high school and its demands, life threw me another curveball. In November of 2016, my dad had a colonoscopy, and they found a few cancerous polyps in his large intestine. It was a difficult process through all of it- his surgeries and recoveries, but what got me through it all was prayer and the Eucharist. It gave me strength to get through the tough times, but also helped me to really appreciate every blessing God has given me.

It seems like a lot has happened in the short 15 years I've been on this earth, but I've, hopefully, got a lot more years to go. I know, through good times and bad, God will always be by my side and there to give me strength through the sacrament of the Eucharist every Sunday.

Thank you so much, and God bless.