



Received

Your Journey to First Communion

FIRST COMMUNION RETREAT

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Introduction

We are very excited to share this retreat resource with you as part of your students' overall preparation for their first Holy Communion. This retreat is a natural follow-up to the *Renewed Reconciliation Retreat*.

A retreat is an occasion to step away from the busyness of our lives so that we can focus on what God wants to say to us in the silence of our hearts. Some retreats can be lengthy—like the standard thirty-day version of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises. Don't panic though—this one is closer to three hours. It is designed for little souls with big energy to provide a way for them to connect more deeply with Jesus as they prepare to receive his Body and Blood in First Holy Communion.

These retreats feature rotating stations, with a larger gathering at the beginning and end of the retreat. This structure is similar to the way many groups run their vacation Bible schools. The different stations allow for a more focused and interactive experience, with plenty of movement and activity to keep your young students engaged. We are providing a menu of options and suggestions so that you can tailor the retreat to the particular needs and resources of your parish.

The five stations are:

- Crafts
- Games and interactive activities
- Snacks
- Practice
- Prayer

Larger groups may find it helpful to duplicate some stations and station leaders. Larger groups may also wish to have a small group leader for each group of students. Smaller groups may opt to simplify the schedule to keep the students in one group and run through the morning station by station.

This retreat guide will give you several options for each of the stations and is written with a range of parishes in mind. We know that, especially with interactive activities with moving parts, there isn't always a one-size-fits-all solution. Feel free to pick what works best for your parish, your team, and your available space.

These retreats can be experienced by the students alone or by students with one or both parents. The size and culture of programs will vary, but the retreats are designed with both options in mind.

Check In

Roll out the red carpet and make the check-in experience upbeat and welcoming. Consider having some music playing and have your team ready to go with smiles, clear directions, and a welcoming tone. Even if your group is smaller, and they are familiar with one another, consider using name tags that indicate which group each student will be part of.

If you are going to include parents in the retreat, plan hospitality. Consider providing coffee, tea, baked goods, and healthy snacks. This can be set up by your team, or you can create a sign-up form for parents to bring something. Having a hospitality spread can make a big difference in establishing a welcoming tone that draws parents into active participation. Students should be familiar with one another, but this may be one of the first times that parents are meeting. To help with community building, plan for name tags and ensure that parents know where to go. You could have a printed list of questions available at the tables to encourage conversation.

Greeting

Take some time to set the tone for the day. Note how exciting it is to prepare for receiving Jesus. Tell your students that today is a day to take some time away to really focus and prepare. Ask them to put away all distractions and thoughts about what might happen later so that they can make room for Jesus in their hearts.

At this point, or during check-in, you may want to prepare and hand out a retreat schedule. This will be especially helpful if you are including parents, to give them a sense of the order of events and let them know what is available for them to take part in. You can also include things like the opening prayer and retreat rules.

Opening Prayer

Setting a prayerful tone that connects with your very active group is important. Here is a sample opening prayer:

Lord Jesus, we offer this day to you.

We remember that in the Eucharist you give us the gift of your whole self.

Help us enter into this retreat.

Teach us new things, open our hearts, and draw us closer to you today.

Help us put aside all distractions and awake in us a hunger to receive you in the Eucharist. In your name, O Lord, we pray.

Amen.

Retreat Rules

Clear rules, boundaries, and consequences are vital to a smooth retreat. These should be delivered in a way that flows from hospitality, reminding the children that rules protect us all and ensure that we can all get the most out of the day.

Retreat Schedule

Check in	15 MIN.
Welcome	15 MIN.
<i>Move to first station</i>	5 MIN.
First rotation	20 MIN.
<i>Rotate</i>	5 MIN.
Second rotation	20 MIN.
<i>Rotate</i>	5 MIN.
Third rotation	20 MIN.
<i>Rotate</i>	5 MIN.
Fourth rotation	20 MIN.
<i>Rotate</i>	5 MIN.
Fifth rotation	20 MIN.
<i>Return to main gathering area</i>	5 MIN.
Closing	15 MIN.

Sample Rules:

TALK

Treat others with respect.

Ask for help when you need it.

Listen to the leaders.

Keep an open mind and heart.

Station 1: Crafts

The craft station is always a favorite. The crafts we make are a way to help us teach and model sacramentality—how invisible things are seen through visible signs. Crafts are also signs of how God invites us into his own creativity!

We have detailed a number of possibilities for the craft station. While this isn't an exhaustive list, these are some tried and true favorites. The key is for the craft to be a special takeaway for your children. Here are some things to consider, no matter which craft you pick:

- Have a catechist construct the craft ahead of time and talk about it before the activity begins. This can be a chance to share their own experience with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and will also serve as a general introduction to the craft.
- Consider praying over the crafts once they are finished. You can do this each time the students visit the station, or you can pray over all the crafts when you hand them out at the end of the retreat.
- Be sure to label crafts so they don't get mixed up. Preprinted labels can be really helpful.
- Have extra helpers at this station, if possible, and remember that your students have a range of abilities. Some might need some extra attention and special care to put their craft together, while others will be very independent.

NOTE: Some First Communion programs include a special banner to be made and displayed on the day of First Communion. Sometimes the banner is constructed at home with family, and sometimes it is built during a retreat like this. We encourage you to consider what will work best for your parish. There are many ways to go about building banners, and many kits can be purchased. We have listed two alternative craft ideas here for parishes that have opted to not complete the banner or that need a second craft option.

If you need extra volunteers at the craft station, it might be helpful to have each parent work on the craft with their child. There are a few tricky steps that parents could be very helpful with if you do not have enough volunteers or if you do not have adequate time to prepare the craft materials.

If you feel it would be better for the leaders and more beneficial for parents, you can have a separate session for parents to attend. For this first session, talk to your priest ahead of time about offering a Mass for parents. Mass can be helpful to set the tone for the day. It will settle the minds and hearts of the parents who just rushed to the retreat and are just happy that they made it on time, and it will take a little bit longer and perhaps last throughout the first two sessions of the retreat.

If Mass is not an option for parents, consider having parents attend a session teaching about the Mass. The popular program *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass* could be a great option here.

Option 1: Host and Chalice or Monstrance

Theme: The Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is fully present under the appearance of both the bread and the wine after the Consecration. This craft can help students reflect on that reality. As you set your students up with the craft, guide them through it with a simple, clear, and memorable teaching on the Eucharist. What they see, hear, touch, and build can deepen their understanding of how Jesus comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament.

This is a classic craft for First Communion retreats, and there are many different ways to go about it. Our version is shorter than most and can be done in twenty minutes without too much preparation.

Materials: Colored paper, gold paper, white paper (or cupcake liners, gold if you can find them), a host and chalice stencil, a stencil for a monstrance base, glue, scissors, decorative gems, and glitter.

Prepare: Cut out a chalice or monstrance base and a host for each student ahead of time. Use gold paper for the chalice or monstrance base, and white paper for the host. Give each student a piece of colored paper as the background, letting them choose the color, if possible. Give each student either a gold paper chalice and a paper host or a monstrance base and a cupcake liner.

Direct:

For students making a picture of the host and chalice:

- Direct students to glue the chalice to the colored paper, lining up the bottom of the shape with the bottom edge of the paper.
- Then ask them to glue the host onto the background paper above the chalice.
- Invite them to decorate the chalice with gems and glitter.

For students making a picture of a monstrance:

- Direct students to glue the monstrance base to the colored paper, lining up the bottom of the shape with the bottom edge of the paper.
- Ask them to flatten the cupcake liner carefully and glue it to the top of the base. If using gold cupcake liners, have them glue the white side to the paper so the gold side shows.
- Tell students to place the white circle in the center of the cupcake liner.
- Invite them to decorate the monstrance with gems and glitter.

If parents are participating in the craft section, you may want to ask them to guide their child in cutting out the chalice or the monstrance base if you did cut them out ahead of time.

Option 2: “My Offerings” Box

Theme: The word *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving.” When the Body of Christ—the parish community—gathers together on Sunday, we offer thanksgiving to God for all he has done for us. We remember that Jesus sacrificed himself for us and rose from the dead. He now feeds our souls with his Body. We give him our thoughts, our hearts, and our prayers. We can also remember and offer God all the things he has given us that we are thankful for, such as family, friends, meals, beds, and school.

Materials: Approximately fifty popsicle sticks for each student, a bottle of glue, stickers, glitter, markers, and other supplies to decorate their boxes.

Direct:

- Tell the students to make a base for their box by laying ten popsicle sticks down flat next to each other (like a raft) and then gluing one popsicle stick along each edge of rounded ends to hold the base together.
- Then ask students to build a box by placing dots of glue on each corner and layering flat popsicle sticks until the box is tall enough to hold folded papers.
- The students can then build a top for their box like the bottom, laying down another ten popsicle sticks and then gluing one popsicle stick along each edge of rounded ends to hold the top together.
- Invite the students to keep paper and a pencil next to this box. Throughout the week, they can write down things that make them happy and things they are thankful to God for and put them in the box.
- The students can bring this box to Mass with them, or they can simply offer the box up to God in the silence of their hearts when the offering of bread and wine is brought forth to the altar.

Station 2: Games and Interactive Activities

This station is a chance to interact, teach, review, and have fun. The activities suggested here will engage children on different levels, and we recommend that you pick the one that is most suited to the needs of your group.

Once again, if parents are involved, they can be very helpful with these activities. They may enjoy collaborating with their children, and it can be special for children and adults alike to go behind the scenes and see the sacred instruments used in the Mass.

Option 1: Church and Sacred Vessels Tour

Theme: This activity will allow the students to see up close some of the sacred vessels and objects that are used during Mass.

Prepare: Ahead of time, ask a priest from your parish if he would be willing to give the First Communion students a tour of the church and allow them to see some of the sacred vessels and vestments that are used during the Mass. The priest will explain each of these items to the students and allow them to ask questions. It is possible that some students in your program do not attend Mass every Sunday, so this is a wonderful way to familiarize them with the priest and the church.

Option 2: Dough Creations

Theme: The Eucharist is the Bread of Life. This lesson will help the students understand that a miracle happens at every Mass. The bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Prepare:

- Have the students view the *Received* 2.1 video (“Bread Crumb Trail”), which focuses on the Last Supper, and answer the discussion questions. As an alternative, if video equipment is not available, you can use the session teaching below.
- Make the bread dough ahead of time. Find a quick and easy recipe for baking bread online. You may need to double or triple the recipe depending on the size of your group. If you are pressed for time, there are recipes that use a fast-acting yeast and take less time to rise.
- If baking the bread is not an option, consider buying pizza dough or other store-bought dough. You will want to make sure there is enough for each child to have a handful of dough.

Materials: You will need audio visual equipment, a large work space (preferably a kitchen or room with an oven), parchment paper, baking sheets, oven mitts, flour, some type of nonstick spray, a permanent marker, sandwich bags, and a volunteer baker.

Direct:

- Tell each student to put some flour on their hands so the dough doesn’t stick.
- Give each student a piece of parchment paper and a handful of dough.
- Ask them to shape the dough into a cross or, alternatively, a fish or Chi-Rho symbol.

- Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- Place each child's dough creation on the baking sheet, and use the marker to write the initials of the child on the parchment next to their design.
- Bake for 15–20 minutes. This can be done as students are rotating through their other stations.
- You will need to put a leader or volunteer in charge of watching the oven.
- At the end of the retreat, students can take their bread creation home to eat.

Session Teaching

- Begin by asking students why they think Jesus comes to us under the forms of bread and wine.
- Remind students that throughout the Bible, God performs many miracles using bread. Ask students if they can remember any of these stories:
 - When God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he led them out into the desert, where there was no food. There he gave them bread from heaven, called manna, to feed them.
 - At the wedding at Cana, the bride and groom ran out of wine, and Jesus turned water into wine for the people to drink.
 - Later, Jesus fed five thousand people using just five loaves of bread and two fish. There was enough for everyone to share in the meal, and there were even leftovers!
 - At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and wine and changed them into his Body and Blood.

Tell Students

- God is a good Father. He knows what we need, and he is always there to provide for us. Throughout the Bible, God used bread to feed his children. Today he still uses bread to feed his children. He feeds our souls with himself.
- In his good creation, God gives us wheat and grapes. By the work of their hands, people make bread from the wheat and wine from the grapes. These offerings are then brought forward in the Mass. In the hands of the priest, God changes these good gifts into the greatest gift of all, the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Today we made our own creations out of bread dough. We formed the dough into crosses or other Christian symbols and baked it. At the end of the day, you can take your bread home and share the stories of Jesus' miracles with your family.

Discussion Questions

1. Can you name some of the ways that God provided for his people in the Bible using bread and wine?
2. God provides for all his children today too. Can you think of some ways that he has provided for you and your family? How does God provide for our souls today?

Video Discussion Questions

1. Just like Theo, we know how we feel when we are hungry for food. How can we know when our souls are hungry for Jesus?
2. Just as God provided manna for the Israelites in the desert, God provides for all his children. Can you think of a time when you or your family needed help and God provided for you in some way?
3. Why do you think Jesus comes to us in the form of bread? What are some of the signs in the Bible that point us to the Eucharist?

Other Interactive Games

Simon Says SLOWLY Stand, Sit, Kneel

Theme: There are many different postures that we take during the Mass. We stand, we sit, we kneel, we genuflect, we bow, we make the Sign of the Cross. Likewise, there are many things we say during Mass in response to the priest. It can be a lot for students to remember, especially when they are nervous on the big day. Use these games to help students remember the various ways we worship God at Mass with our bodies.

Prepare: You will need a large open space. The students will need room to spread out comfortably. This first is a game based on the classic game Simon Says. You will need a list of actions or gestures that we complete while at Mass.

Direct:

- Tell students to spread out. Before playing the game, practice each of the gestures we perform at Mass with students.
- Begin saying the commands below. If students perform these actions without Simon saying to complete them, then they will be out of the game or asked to sit down.
 - » SIT
 - » STAND
 - » KNEEL SLOWLY (be careful, as this one will hurt if done too fast)
 - » GENUFLECT
 - » BOW
 - » PRAYER HANDS
 - » COMMUNION HANDS
 - » SIGN OF THE CROSS
 - » WALKING TO COMMUNION
 - » SIGN OF PEACE

Dodgeball Call-and-Respond

Direct:

- Direct the students to form a circle. They should be able to stretch their arms out comfortably without touching the person next to them.
- Begin throwing the ball to different students. You can go around the circle in order or throw the ball to the students at random.
- When you throw the ball to a student, yell out a line that the priest will say at Mass—for example, “The Lord be with you.”
- The student you throw the ball to should throw it back and yell out the correct response—for example, “And with your spirit.”
- If it is a longer response, like the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” continue throwing the ball back and forth with multiple students until they say all the words.

CALL:

“The Lord be with you.”

“Lift up your heart.”

“Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.”

“Go forth, the Mass is ended.”

RESPONSE:

“And with your spirit.”

“We lift them up to the Lord.”

“It is right and just.”

“Thanks be to God.”

Station 3: Snack Time

Take a break now, and enjoy a tasty treat. The best thing about these snacks is that they come with a lesson that will help students taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Before beginning the snack station, you may want to plan a bathroom or hand-washing break, or have hand sanitizer available. For bathroom breaks, it's best to take the children in small groups.

Note: Survey for allergies prior to the retreat.

If parents are present, perhaps have a separate meeting room with coffee and donuts for parents to take a break and talk to one another. Check with your priest ahead of time to see if he would be willing to come and talk to the parents during this time. If not, this might also be a nice time for parents to ask questions about the rest of the year. They may have questions about what time to arrive on the day of their child's first Communion, where to go, and what their child should wear. Be sure someone—yourself or a catechist or teacher—is available to answer parents' questions.

You may also want to facilitate a more specific discussion with parents. Here are some questions to help you get started.

Discussion Questions for Parents

1. How has preparing your child for First Holy Communion opened your heart to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?
2. The Eucharist is a central mystery of our Faith. We can know things about this mystery, but we will never fully understand it. What questions has your child had about the Eucharist that you are having trouble answering?
3. Our bodies need food to survive. Our souls need the Eucharist to survive. Knowing how important the Eucharist is to our spiritual life, what can you do as a family to become more centered on Eucharist?

Option 1: Five Loaves and Two Fish – Goldfish and Crackers

Theme: In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses five loaves of bread and two fish to feed five thousand people. Jesus feeds the Church today with the Bread of Life—his Body and Blood—the Eucharist.

Materials: Five pretzel nuggets in a small bowl, two fish-shaped crackers in a small bowl, a basket, enough snack bags of pretzel nuggets or fish-shaped crackers (or both) for everyone, and a Catholic Bible (for example, the Revised Standard Version–Second Catholic Edition or the New American Bible).

Direct:

- Gather all the students around a table and show them the two small bowls with pretzel nuggets and fish-shaped crackers.
- Tell them that unfortunately this is all there is, and there is not enough for everyone.

- Read aloud the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand (John 6:1–14).
- Tell the students that the five pretzel nuggets and two crackers in front of them represent the five loaves and two fish in the story.
- When you finish reading the gospel passage, bring out the basket with snack packs of nuggets and crackers, enough for everyone!

Option 2: Cookies Disguised

Theme: A miracle takes place at every Mass: the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. With our senses, we smell, touch, taste, and see bread. With our spiritual senses, we have faith that when the priest says the words of Consecration, the bread is no longer bread but the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Materials: A snack, such as chocolate chip cookies, napkins, and a container for a different snack, like a pretzel tin or bag. The container should have no clear or see-through spots in the packaging.

Prepare: You will only use the cookies, but you will need the pretzel container. (The pretzels can be saved for later.) Before students arrive, empty the pretzel container if necessary, and put the cookies in it. Make sure students can't see the cookies through the container.

Direct:

- Gather students around the table and show them the closed pretzel container with their snack.
- Ask, “What does it look like we are having for a snack today? How do you know?”
- Give each student a napkin. Then open the bag and place two cookies on each napkin. Students will probably be confused. They might start talking or laughing and wondering why cookies came out of a pretzel tin or bag. Once they have calmed down, ask them what all the confusion was about.
- When a student answers and says that they were supposed to be having pretzels for a snack, explain that it *looked* like they were having pretzels for lunch, but inside there was something quite different. At Mass, when the priest says the words of Consecration, the bread still looks, feels, and tastes like bread, but it is actually something completely different. The bread is the Body of Christ. With our physical senses we see bread, but with our spiritual senses we see Jesus Christ.

Station 4: Practice

Active practice and demonstration are a must. Even if you have another specific time carved out for practice, taking time to demonstrate reverent participation and reception of Holy Communion should be part of your retreat.

Practice is an important part of First Holy Communion. There are a number of smaller steps that students tend to forget in the moment. It is also important that students know the gift they are receiving and treat the Host with reverence.

We recommend that parents join their child for the First Communion practice. Sometimes parents can be focused on the outlying details of the day, such as the party, the family coming from out of town, and pictures. They can forget what this day is truly about. Inviting the parents to attend the practice is a nice way to let them know what they should focus on at home before the big day. They can also be helpful with crowd control and especially helpful in role-playing with their child.

Another option to consider for parents during the student practice is showing them *Received* 6.2 video (“Felicity’s First Communion”) and discuss the following questions:

1. The day of your child’s first Holy Communion is one of the most important days of their lives. What are some ways you can help them to know that something truly special is taking place?
2. A gift is only as special as the person who gives it. What can you do to foster your child’s relationship with Jesus after this year of sacramental preparation, so they can treasure this gift throughout their lives?

Theme: Similar to receiving Reconciliation, receiving First Holy Communion is a big deal for many children. They are nervous about dressing up, seeing family members from out of town, and most importantly, receiving Jesus. The moment is very quick, but there is a lot for students to remember at that moment. The purpose of this session is to help students feel more comfortable on the big day.

Materials: You will need unconsecrated hosts and plenty of volunteers to model the proper way to receive Holy Communion.

Prepare: Consider having a volunteer in the center aisle to remind students of prayer hands, a volunteer at the front to help them in practicing to receive, and another volunteer gesturing prayer hands in the aisle as they return to their seat. Finally, consider allowing each child to take home two or three unconsecrated hosts to practice with at home. These should be given to parents after the practice.

Direct:

- Begin by reviewing the steps of receiving Holy Communion with the students. You may wish to follow the teaching outline below.
- Before students come forward to practice, have a few leaders demonstrate the correct ways to receive the Eucharist.
- Perhaps consider having one or two volunteer leaders show the wrong way to receive Holy Communion, e.g., waving to friends while walking up the aisle, cutting in front of someone in

line, grabbing the Host from the priest, putting the Host in their pocket, responding by saying “Thank you” instead of “Amen.”

- Consider asking the students to raise their hands if they see the leader doing something wrong.

Session Teaching

1. Tell students that when it is time to go up to receive Holy Communion, they will leave their pew and walk slowly in line with the others to the front, where the priest is standing. Remind the students to fold their hands and keep their eyes forward. While waiting, they can tell Jesus silently how much they love him.
2. When they reach the front, they should pause. The person in front of them will receive Holy Communion and move away from the priest. They will make a small bow and step forward. Many students tend to stand back from the priest and put their arms out far to receive the Eucharist. Encourage students to stand close to the priest. The closer they are to the priest, the less chance there is of dropping the Host.
3. The priest will hold up the Host and say “The Body of Christ.” They should respond with “Amen.”

4. If the student is receiving in the hand, they should raise their hands up about chin height to the priest and form a table with one hand on top of the other with their palms up. Remind the students that it is important that Jesus is always protected. If they are left-handed, their left hand goes under their right hand, and if they are right-handed, their right hand goes under their left hand. The host should always be picked up with their dominant hand.

If the students are receiving on the tongue, tell them to close their eyes and raise their head toward the priest. Remind them to fully open their mouth and let their tongue rest on their lower lip. The priest will place the Host on their tongue.

5. Remind students that when someone offers us a gift, we don't grab it from them. We wait and let them give it to us. This is why we do not take the Host from the priest or grab it from him. Jesus himself is the gift. We receive him gently and reverently in cupped hands or on our tongues.
6. Remind students that they can let the Host dissolve on their tongue and swallow it, or they can chew the Host with their mouth closed and swallow it.

Station 5: Prayer

Engaging the students in a meaningful time of prayer is central to the retreat—that is what makes it a retreat after all. We know that second graders can pray, experience Jesus, and connect. We also know that they are very active and will have a variety of experiences with settling into prayer. It takes patience to help them settle into prayer. Here are three different ways to lead them into a prayerful encounter with Jesus.

If parents are present for this final session, consider providing them with the materials to make their child a First Holy Communion keepsake item. There are many different items to make with parents. A quick and easy keepsake item to make is a plate. Consider having each parent or set of parents bring a white glass plate with them to the retreat. Provide multi-surface paint, permanent markers, paintbrushes, and stencils. Stencils can be made using the host and chalice logo on the front of the *Received* workbooks and leaders' guides.

Give parents time to decorate their plate. Some ideas for the plate include the child's name, their First Communion date, a host and chalice, a monstrance, bread, grapes, a cross, a Bible verse, or the words "My First Holy Communion." Parents can take the plate home and bake it in the oven for 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Parents can look up specific baking instructions on the internet, as this is a popular craft at any time of year.

Note: The plate should not be used for eating. It is simply a decorative item.

Option 1: Closer Than the Angels

Theme: This imaginative prayer session is meant to help students quiet their hearts and reflect on God's mercy and love for them. In the Eucharist, we are drawn deeply into the life of God. While praying through this activity, your students will be invited closer and closer to the life of God until they are so close that they can hear God's voice whispering to their hearts.

Materials:

- You will need a room big enough to make five different sections that represent drawing closer to God.
- You will need tape and signage to represent each level.
- You will also want to find ways to signal a quiet and prayerful space. Consider electric candles, music, low lighting, and sacramental signs.

Prepare: Have your area marked out as a quiet and prayerful space with five areas that represent ways of drawing closer to God. The areas should be marked:

1. "God reveals that he is here."
2. "God tells us his Name."
3. "God gives us his law."

4. “God comes here, into our world.”
5. “God gives us himself as our spiritual food.”

You will be inviting your students to move through these different levels of Revelation, as the last one is a preparation for Holy Communion.

Direct:

1. Have your students quietly seated in the first level in the back of the room, furthest from you. Tell them that you will be leading them through a prayer to help them understand and enter into their First Communion. Make the Sign of the Cross and begin the activity.
2. Tell them that the first thing God does is reveal to us that he is here. God revealed himself to Abraham, Jacob, and many others in Scripture. Today he shows us that he is right here! Invite them to quietly say hello to God in their hearts.
3. Invite the students to move up to the next section of the room. Tell them that after God made himself known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses asked him his name. God revealed that his name is “I Am Who Am,” or Yahweh. This is a very sacred and special name. Later, when God came to us in his Son, he revealed that his name should be Jesus, which means “God saves”! Invite the students to take a moment and call God by name in their hearts. Remind them that God’s name is holy.
4. Invite the students to move forward again, and tell them that God also gave us his law, which is a way to love God and others and to live fully human happy lives. He gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, and later Jesus gave us the Beatitudes, which show us more about being happy and blessed by God. Have students take a moment to pray for God to help them in their thoughts, actions, and habits. Have them ask him to help them follow his law so that they can be free and joyful, the people he created them to be.
5. Invite your students to step closer again. Tell them that even more than telling us his name and giving us his law, God gave us himself. He became one of us through the Incarnation. Jesus is God with us. Jesus was their age once! Jesus played and laughed and learned and is here with them now! Invite them to take some time to talk to Jesus in their hearts, knowing that he is here and with them.
6. Finally, invite your students to take a final step. Tell them that it gets even more amazing. God is so close that he wants to live within them. In the Eucharist, Jesus gives them himself as food. He is the Bread of Life. When they receive him in Holy Communion, they are closer to him than they can even imagine. They are closer to him than if they were throwing a ball with him on the playground. The Eucharist brings them even closer to him than the angels! This really is amazing. Invite your students to pause, think, and pray about what it means that God gives them himself as their food.

Option 2: Communion Song and Adoration

Theme: This prayer session will help students worship Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus wants us to come and sit with him as often as we can. Being near him and talking to him makes our souls hungry to receive him in the Eucharist.

Prepare:

- Ask the priest at your parish ahead of time if it would be possible to expose the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration.
- Lead children to the front of the church, as close to the Blessed Sacrament as possible. Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).
- Find a simple worship song online that students can learn quickly and possibly even without background music.
- Consider a song that they already know. Have a leader lead children through the song once or twice before asking them to sing along.

Direct:

- As you enter the Church, remind students to genuflect. Practice genuflecting with them if necessary. Direct students to kneel or sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Tell them that they are in a very special place, and remind them that whenever they enter a Church where there is a tabernacle, they can look for the sanctuary light to remind them that Jesus is there in the Eucharist. Explain that during Adoration, the Eucharist, which is the Body of Christ, will be moved from the tabernacle to the monstrance, where Jesus will be exposed so that we can focus our eyes, minds, and hearts on him. Explain that when this happens, we kneel as a sign of worship. Also invite them to look and listen with the eyes and ears of their hearts as Jesus shows his heart to them in the Blessed Sacrament.
- Once they kneel and the Eucharist is exposed, invite them into a few moments of quiet silence and lead them in a simple song of worship. There are many choices that could work here, from simple traditional Eucharistic hymns to more contemporary songs. This is up to your discretion. There is also the possibility of this time leading into Benediction. Talk to your priest or deacon about this. Simple exposition and reposition might be more appropriate for your young students, but some parishes have frequent Adoration and Benediction, so the students may be ready to enter into it.
- After a time of Adoration—it can be relatively brief since this is an introduction for a young group—the Eucharist will again be reposed by the priest or deacon. Take a few moments to talk this through with your students.

Discussion Questions

1. How many of you went to Adoration for the first time today?
2. What are some things that you saw or noticed during Adoration?
3. What did you feel? (If they felt like it was hard to stay still, affirm that it takes practice and time to settle down, and it's okay if it was hard today.)
4. What did you hear Jesus saying to your heart?

Option 3: A Letter from Jesus

Theme: This reflective prayer session will help students understand how special their first Communion is for them and their relationship with Jesus. Their first Communion will be one of the most special days of their lives, and their relationship with Jesus is the most special relationship they will ever have. When students receive Jesus' Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, they will be given the strength to become more like Christ and share him with others through their witness.

Prepare: You will need one letter from Jesus for each student.

Sample Letter:

My Child,

I am so excited for your First Holy Communion.

Do not be afraid.

I cannot wait to come into your heart and make it my home.

You will be nourished by the Bread of Life and will become a living tabernacle.

I love you very much, more than you can even imagine.

Love,

Jesus

Closing

After the students are together again in the main gathering area, thank them for their time and attention during the day. Affirm everything that you can about their participation.

If parents joined them, affirm the parents' commitment and role as the primary catechists of their children. If parents were not with the students during the retreat, perhaps they could join you for this brief closing session.

You can quickly recap as follows: "Today we had a chance to prepare our hearts for a big step in our Catholic Faith. We made things, we played, we learned, we prayed, and even practiced. We hope that you got to know each other better too, since we are all one faith family in our parish." Then ask a few questions:

1. Can anyone tell me what their favorite part of the day was?
2. Can anyone tell me one thing that surprised them today?
3. Can anyone tell me what they are most looking forward to?
4. What is one thing that you are going to do after today to prepare for the big day?

After this, make announcements and provide needed information about the day of First Communion.

Then invite your students to settle in for a closing prayer. Tell them that they will be making an Act of Spiritual Communion as we get excited to receive Jesus very soon in Holy Communion. (This prayer can be found in *Receiving Jesus: My Guide to the Mass* on page 80).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**My Jesus,
I believe that you
are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.**

**I love you above all things,
and I desire to receive you into my soul.**

**Since I cannot at this moment
receive you sacramentally,
come at least spiritually into my heart.**

**I embrace you as if you were already there
and unite myself wholly to you.**

Never permit me to be separated from you.

Amen.

If a priest or deacon is present, they can lead the prayer and conclude the event with a blessing. As an alternative, conclude simply with the Sign of the Cross:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.