

# *Emmanuel*



*Eucharistic Spirituality*

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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 125 Number 6



## EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Discovering the Rich Treasures of  
Popular Piety, Part II  
by James H. Kroeger, MM 352

Christ Is at the Door  
by Richard Gribble, CSC 361

From Heart and Soul to Stone and Mortar  
by Owen F. Cummings 366

## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

J. R. R. Tolkien on the Eucharist  
by Dennis Billy, CSsR 370

Is the Mass a Propitiatory or  
Expiatory Sacrifice?  
by John Zupez, SJ 378

## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

“A Crib Fit for a King”  
by Michael E. DeSanctis 382

Pondering the Parables:  
The Parable of the Wedding Feast  
by Bernard Camiré, SSS 385

Counsels for Spiritual Life 388

## EUCCHARIST & CULTURE

Art, Music, Film, Poetry, and Books 408

## COLUMNS

From the Editor 350

Pastoral Liturgy 389

Breaking the Word 393

Eucharistic Witness 416

Annual Index 417



## FROM THE EDITOR

Each Christmas, we listen to the story — a simple story, the details of which we know well: Caesar’s decree, a census; Joseph and pregnant Mary journey to Bethlehem, the City of David; no room in the inn; shepherds; a newborn baby lying in a manger; a new beginning in the midst of tyranny, greeted with great joy by angels and the faithful remnant of God’s people.

This story becomes a defining narrative for all of human history; it shapes the way we see God and ourselves. God, our deepest longing, is present in it. What does the birth of Jesus, the incarnation, tell us about God?

A kindergarten teacher invited the children in her class to draw a picture. It could be of anything they had heard or learned in their religion lesson that day. As the children drew, the teacher walked from desk to desk, noting everything. She stopped beside one little girl who was working especially intently, and asked, “What are you drawing?” The child replied, “I’m drawing God.” The teacher smiled and said, “But, Sophie, no one knows what God looks like.” Without skipping a beat, the girl answered, “Well, now they will!”

The Author of life and all creation shows us in Jesus the face of God. It’s not just a sketch, but a full immersion into our human existence. God the Word, wanting to speak a word of boundless love, takes on flesh. And when in Jesus we saw God’s face, it wasn’t what we were expecting to see. God doesn’t appear in the grand halls of a royal palace, but in the poverty of a stable, a child born into a broken world; not in pomp, but in simplicity and vulnerability; not in power, but in smallness.

Smallness holds the key for us in recognizing God’s revelation in Jesus. Early Church fathers used an interesting phrase to speak of

the incarnation; they said that in Jesus the eternal Word becomes “abbreviated,” small enough to fit in a manger, so that we might see with our eyes and touch with our hands the mystery of God. In the incarnation, we learn that God is willing to go to any lengths in search of us, even to the point where the All-Powerful becomes all-fragile; the “Ancient of Days” is carried in a womb, the author of existence is born in a manger, the “Master of the Universe” is swaddled in the arms of his mother. All this, so that we might know God and have life.

Father Eugene LaVerdiere, SSS, *Emmanuel's* longtime editor and a noted biblical scholar, often wrote and spoke of the “Word of God become flesh, become Eucharist.” How utterly amazing it is that God still makes himself small for us that we might approach the table of the Eucharist to receive a morsel of Bread and a sip of Wine . . . and take God into us!

### **In This Issue**

As we bring another publishing year to an end, our issue offers quite a variety of articles for your reading and prayer. You will find Michael DeSanctis' winsome “A Crib Fit for a King” and John Zupez, SJ's examination of language and liturgy, “Is the Mass a Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice?” There is Part II of James Kroeger's reflection on popular piety and Dennis Billy's continuing series on the Eucharist in the writings of various theologians.

This is my final issue as editor of *Emmanuel*. I will be taking on the role of senior editor and welcome Father John Christman, SSS, to the role of editor with his energy, ideas and fresh vision. Thank you for being loyal subscribers, and please, if you are so moved, consider giving gift subscriptions to the Magazine of Eucharistic Spirituality this Christmas. We appreciate you very much.



Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Editor





## *EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# Discovering the Rich Treasures of Popular Piety, Part II

by James H. Kroeger, MM

*Popular piety, nourished by the word of God and reflecting the encounter of faith and culture, can be for many a powerful complement to the Church's liturgical worship and prayer and an entry into a deeper lived faith.*

Father James H. Kroeger, MM, is professor of systematic theology and mission studies in Manila at Loyola School of Theology, East Asian Pastoral Institute, and Mother of Life Catechetical Center. His most recent books are *Exploring the Priesthood with Pope Francis*, *Walking in the Light of Faith*, *Becoming Missionary Disciples*, and *Asia's Dynamic Local Churches: Serving Dialogue and Mission*.

### **VII. How can customary popular religiosity be renewed?**

TO RESPOND TO THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION, ONE COULD DRAW AN EXAMPLE FROM the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart. The Church dedicates the month of June to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In addition, many Catholics are familiar with the "First Friday" tradition of receiving the Eucharist for nine consecutive months. This custom originated in the promise that Christ is alleged to have made in a private revelation to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), a French Visitation nun. She asserted that those keeping the First Fridays would not die in sin or without the sacraments; Christ would be their refuge at the hour of death.

How can such a devotion, which could often be limited to a personal, private practice, be renewed and become relevant today? One could look back to the original symbol that was manifested to Margaret Mary: *a heart afire with love for humanity that was surmounted by a cross*. This symbol clearly implies that devotion to the Sacred Heart is intimately connected with the paschal mystery: the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising again. In a word, it means that the Sacred Heart calls the Christian to a self-sacrificing love for one's neighbor, a committed and concerned love that is ready to face the challenges of genuine social service.

Our hearts must be transformed into loving replicas of the heart of Jesus, who reached out to the lost, lonely, little, least, and last in society. Thus, in contemporary society, devotees of the Sacred Heart are called upon to concretize their love in face of challenging social realities. Filipino theologian Antonio Lambino has written:

“Today, much more than in earlier times, serving the poor and the disadvantaged involves intelligent effort to change unjust structures in society. To be holy means to fight what is inhuman, un-Christian, and sinful in public life and to work generously to make public life more human, more Christian, and more abounding in grace. This could be for many of us a revolutionary change in the idea of holiness and Christian spirituality.”<sup>13</sup>

Linking the Sacred Heart devotion with growth in heartfelt compassion for the needy would contribute significantly to the renewal of this traditional popular devotion, making it more responsive to contemporary social realities and the need to become “a Church which is poor and for the poor” (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 198).

### **VIII. How are popular devotions related to the Bible?**

The Bible stands at the core of God’s revelation to the Church. Thus, genuine popular devotions should naturally be strongly linked with biblical themes and imagery. Pope Paul VI noted: “Today it is recognized as a general need of Christian piety that every form of worship should have a biblical imprint” (*Marialis Cultus*, 30).<sup>14</sup> The pope applied this principle to Marian devotions: “What is needed is that texts of prayers and chants should draw their inspiration and wording from the Bible, and above all, that devotion to the Virgin should be imbued with the great themes of the Christian message” (MC, 31).

In speaking of the rosary, Pope John Paul II emphasized that it is not a substitute for reading the Bible: “On the contrary, it presupposes and promotes” prayerful reading of the Holy Scriptures. While the mysteries of the rosary “do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 29).<sup>15</sup>

The previous section presented the devotion to the Sacred Heart. The deepening and renewal of this devotion can readily be linked with the Scriptures. One could validly recall the parable of the Good Samaritan as it is told in the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37). It is only the person with a compassionate heart (a “sacred” heart) who reaches out to the traveler attacked by robbers; the Good Samaritan spends of his own time and money to care for the stranger. Is not this a model of Christian love in our day? Jesus’ life and teaching were a constant reaching out to the needy (the woman caught in adultery, the man born blind, the ten



lepers, the hemorrhaging woman, the widow who lost her only son, the hungry crowd, etc.). Linking popular piety with texts of Scripture will contribute significantly to its genuine renewal.

### **IX. What is the relationship between popular religiosity and culture?**

Popular piety arises out of the interaction between culture and the Catholic faith. When the faith enters a cultural milieu, two kinds of transformation take place (missionaries are very cognizant of this dynamic). First, the newly introduced faith begins to have a transformative effect on the culture; the Gospel and its values begin to leave an imprint on the people and their socio-cultural realities. However, at the same time, the Church begins to assimilate certain cultural aspects, absorbing positive elements into her life and practice. In brief, this is the twofold action found in the process of inculturating the faith.

A short description of the growth of popular religiosity, drawn from the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*<sup>16</sup>, follows: “In genuine forms of popular piety, the Gospel message assimilates expressive forms particular to a given culture while also permeating the consciousness of that culture with the content of the Gospel, and its idea of life and death, and of human freedom, mission and destiny” (DPPL, 63). This means that the Christian faith is able to enter every culture, and people are able to begin living their faith within their own cultural milieu.

As the document of the U.S. bishops [“Popular Devotional Practices: Basic Questions and Answers”]<sup>17</sup> notes, “While this inculturation of the faith takes place in the liturgy, popular devotions carry the faith a step deeper into the everyday life of a particular culture. When properly ordered to the liturgy, popular devotions perform an irreplaceable function of bringing worship into daily life for people of various cultures and times” (4). A clear benefit of this “religion-culture interpenetration” is that faith begins to permeate the daily lives of the ordinary faithful. Such “inculturated proclamation” is the goal of all effective missionary evangelization.

### **X. How does one explain the fact that there are so many different forms of popular devotion?**

Popular devotions clearly manifest the fact that “one size does not fit



all." Various devotional practices correspond to the diverse spiritual needs of certain people at different times and places.

In addition, cultural diversity and sensibilities differ greatly; various artistic and aesthetic expressions possess a different appeal to a variety of individuals. In a word, what appeals to a Filipino may not attract a Korean; the religious "tastes" or "preferences" of an African believer are divergent from those of a Japanese Christian.

*Popular piety arises out of the interaction between culture and the Catholic faith.*

Commenting on the different forms of Marian devotion emerging from various cultural and historical contexts, Pope Paul VI explained that the Church "does not bind herself to any particular expression of an individual cultural epoch or to the particular anthropological ideas underlying such expressions. The Church understands that certain outward religious expressions, while perfectly valid in themselves, may be less suitable to men and women of different ages and cultures" (MC, 36).

Clearly, this present discussion surfaces the larger question of effective approaches to evangelization and the communication of the faith. Evidently, adaptation and flexibility are necessary in selecting and promoting the popular devotions most suitable for diverse groups of people. The Church and her evangelizers need to enter deeply into the realities of a particular people, so as to understand their unique spiritual needs and gifts. Incarnating the faith in new missionary situations is a never-ending, challenging task, needing the active guidance of the Holy Spirit coupled with the creativity and dedication of committed evangelizers.

### **XI. What is the ideal relationship between the liturgy and popular devotions?**

The liturgy remains the center of the devotional life of the Church; thus, popular devotions should never be portrayed as equal to the liturgy or as a substitute for it. The liturgy-popular piety relationship "must be approached primarily from the perspective of the directives contained in the constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [the Vatican II document on the liturgy], which seeks to establish a harmonious relationship between both of these expressions of piety, in which



popular piety is objectively subordinated to, and directed towards, the liturgy” (DPPL, 50).

Succinctly stated, the position of the Church is: “The liturgy and popular piety, while not coterminous, remain two legitimate expressions of Christian worship.” Indeed, “the liturgy and popular piety are two forms of worship which are in mutual and fruitful relationship with each other.” It is also a fact that “popular piety, because of its symbolic and expressive qualities, can often provide the liturgy with important insights for inculturation and stimulate an effective dynamic creativity” (DPPL, 58).

Pope Paul VI recognized that maintaining a proper balance may not always be easy. He noted that there are two extreme attitudes that should be avoided. On the one hand, he rejected the position of those “who scorn, *a priori*, devotions of piety which, in their correct forms, have been recommended by the magisterium, who leave them aside and in this way create a vacuum which they do not fill. They forget that the council has said that devotions of piety should harmonize with the liturgy, not be suppressed” (MC, 31).

On the other hand, Paul VI likewise did not accept the position of “those who without wholesome liturgical and pastoral criteria mix practices of piety and liturgical acts in hybrid celebrations. It sometimes happens that novenas or similar practices are inserted into the very celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice. This creates the danger that the Lord’s memorial rite, instead of being the culmination of the meeting of the Christian community, becomes the occasion as it were for devotional practices” (MC, 15). Themes such as balance, harmonization, proper independence, prudent coordination seem to express the guiding norms for relating liturgy and popular piety. In this area, much pastoral sensitivity and wisdom is required by the leaders of the Christian community.

## **XII. Has Pope Francis expressed his views on popular piety?**

In his comprehensive apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*<sup>18</sup>, Pope Francis devotes an entire section to “the evangelizing power of popular piety” (EG, 122-126). Some brief selections capture the thought of the pope.

“Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes

embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on. Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the council. In the exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gave a decisive impulse in this area. There he stated that popular piety ‘manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know’ and that ‘it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief.’ Closer to our own time, Pope Benedict XVI, speaking about Latin America, pointed out that popular piety is ‘a precious treasure of the Catholic Church,’ in which ‘we see the soul of the Latin American peoples’” (EG, 123).

“The Aparecida Document describes the riches which the Holy Spirit pours forth in popular piety by his gratuitous initiative. On that beloved continent, where many Christians express their faith through popular piety, the bishops also refer to it as ‘popular spirituality’ or ‘the people’s mysticism.’ It is truly ‘a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly’. . . . It is ‘a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church, and a manner of being missionaries’; it brings with itself the grace of being a missionary, of coming out of oneself and setting out on pilgrimage” (EG, 124).

*The Bible stands at the core of God’s revelation to the Church. Thus, genuine popular devotions should naturally be strongly linked with biblical themes and imagery.*

“Underlying popular piety, as a fruit of the inculturated Gospel, is an active evangelizing power which we must not underestimate; to do so would be to fail to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, we are called to promote and strengthen it, in order to deepen the never-ending process of inculturation. Expressions of popular piety have much to teach us; for those who are capable of reading them, they are a *locus theologicus* which demands our attention, especially at a time when we are looking to the new evangelization” (EG, 126).

More recently, when he addressed the participants at the international convention of the rectors and pastoral workers of shrines (November 29, 2018), Pope Francis said: “How much we need the shrines in the daily journey of the Church! They are the place where our people most willingly gather to express their faith in simplicity, and according



to the various traditions that have been learned since childhood. In many ways, our shrines are irreplaceable, because they keep popular piety alive, enriching it with a catechetical formation that sustains and reinforces the faith and at the same time nurtures the testimony of charity. This is very important: keep popular piety alive and do not forget the jewel that is number 48 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. . . . It is a gem. That is the inspiration of popular piety, which, as an Italian bishop once said, 'is the immune system of the Church.'"<sup>19</sup>

### **XIII. Did Pope Francis speak about popular piety before he became pope?**

In a 2012 lecture, then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio spoke about the "theology of the people," which he holds in high esteem.<sup>20</sup> He explained the inner sense of this "theology of the people," emphasizing that popular piety is the antithesis of widespread secularization. This theology is founded on common peoples' culture and devotion, including spirituality and sense of justice; it manifests "the faith of our humble people."

For Cardinal Bergoglio, Latin America is largely characterized by poverty and Christianity; the latter is expressed by various and colorful forms of popular piety such as processions, vigils, and public prayer. He said: "When we approach our people with the gaze of the good shepherd, when we do not come to judge but to love, we can find out that this cultural way to express the Christian faith is still present among us, especially in our poor." He affirmed that "popular spirituality is the original way through which the Holy Spirit has led and continues to lead millions of our brothers."

Cardinal Bergoglio himself promoted various forms of popular piety in Buenos Aires. For example, he popularized the devotion to Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. He propagated the suggestive image of *La Virgen Desatanudos*, a title originating in Augsburg, Germany [*Maria Knotenlöserin*]. He has also popularized the image of the Sleeping Saint Joseph during his January 2015 pastoral visit to the Philippines. Cardinal Tagle of Manila has affirmed that Pope Francis is very comfortable with popular religiosity because it is a means "to strengthen the faith"; in popular piety, "the Holy Spirit and the culture of the poor meet."

Confirming his plans to visit Mexico in 2016 during a Mass held on

December 12, 2015, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Pope Francis said that he will pray for Christian communities that they may be “oases and sources of mercy.” Francis added: “To profoundly supplicate her for this, I shall go to venerate her at her shrine on 13 February [2016]. Thus, I shall implore her for all this for the whole of America, of whom she is the special Mother.”<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis’ appreciation of popular piety and spirituality can serve as an inspiration for the entire Church.

## **Conclusion**

The lengthy experience of the Church has taught it that authentic popular devotions are an invaluable means of promoting the faith and a deeper love of God. The profound spiritual values present in popular piety are to be preserved and promoted. Popular religiosity has, in fact, preserved the faith of countless Catholics across the globe, especially those who have lacked adequate catechesis and the presence of ordained ministers of the Church.

*The liturgy is the center of the Church’s worship. Vatican II said that devotions of piety should harmonize with the liturgy, not be suppressed.*

These conclusions are truly valid in the Philippine context [the *locus* of this author’s pastoral experience], where the people-per-priest ratio is among the highest in the world. The veracity of these assertions would be readily confirmed by priests, religious, catechists, and missionaries working in diverse contexts — in *all* local Churches and basic ecclesial communities around the world.

Undoubtedly, Filipino popular religiosity, especially its Marian dimensions, has been recognized for its significant contribution in preserving and promoting the faith-life of local Christians, as this author can verify. One of the best-loved hymns in the Philippines asserts that Filipinos are a people who have a special love and devotion to Mary (*pueblo amante de Maria*). In 1988, Pope John Paul II spoke these words to Corazon Aquino, the president of the Philippines: “In this Marian Year, I entrust you and your family and the entire Filipino people to the loving protection of the Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. Filipinos are proud to call themselves a ‘*pueblo amante de Maria*.’ May her spiritual presence continue to comfort and sustain Filipino families in responding to the demands of the present challenging hour of





your history.”<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Saint John Paul’s words clearly resonate with fervent Catholics, whether in Asia, Africa, Europe, or the Americas.

Indeed, popular piety remains a potent resource that necessarily must be at the service of a renewed evangelization for future generations of believers — all across the face of global Catholicism. Folk religiosity should figure prominently in all effective programs of the “new evangelization” — especially for the youth. The challenge to profoundly integrate faith and life remains urgent. As fervent Catholics, the popular prayer to Mary remains in our hearts, on our lips, and guides our efforts as missionary disciples: “Mary, show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.”



### Notes

<sup>13</sup> Lambino, Antonio. “Modern Man and the Devotion to the Sacred Heart,” *Philippine Priests’ Forum* 7:3 (September 1975): 70.

<sup>14</sup> Detailed information is available in note 6 of this paper.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (“The Rosary: Contemplating Christ together with Mary”). *The Pope Speaks* 48:2 (2003): 97-120.

<sup>16</sup> Detailed information is available in note 2 of this paper.

<sup>17</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). “Popular Devotional Practices: Basic Questions and Answers,” *Origins* 33:25 (November 27, 2003):425, 427-433.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013. Hereafter cited as EG.

<sup>19</sup> Source of quote: Vatican Website (vatican.va), accessed on March 5, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Source of quotes: Mother of the Americas Institute [mainstitute.org], accessed on March 25, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis. “To the Mother of Mercy in Mexico,” *L’Osservatore Romano* 48:51-52 (December 18-25, 2015):15.

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II. “Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the President of the Republic of the Philippines, H. E. Mrs. Corazon C. Aquino, June 18, 1988,” Source of quote: Vatican Website [vatican.va], accessed on March 19, 2016.



## *EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# Christ Is at the Door

by Richard Gribble, CSC

*The situation of refugees in the world today is a complex one. What is the role of the Church in addressing it, and what principles do Christians and other persons of faith bring to the conversation?*

IN NOVEMBER 1958, FATHER VINCENT McCAULEY, A HOLY CROSS PRIEST, AND three of his fellow religious arrived in Fort Portal, Uganda, a region in the western part of that nation bordering on what is today known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. These men came to establish the first Holy Cross mission in East Africa.

As the leader of the group, and a former missionary to East Bengal (today Bangladesh), McCauley demonstrated dedication to purpose and responsibility to the people and God whom he served. In 1961, the Holy See created the Diocese of Fort Portal, and McCauley was appointed by Pope John XXIII as the first bishop. He was devoted to his new ministry, especially to the people, many of whom were new Christians. His work was made especially difficult since Uganda had just gained independence from England and after a short period of democratic rule, the nation came under the dictatorship of Idi Amin, whose ruthless ways led to much suffering. Nevertheless, McCauley persevered, and in 1970 turned over the diocese to an African priest. He had done his work well.

However, Bishop McCauley's work was far from completed. He traveled east to Nairobi, Kenya, to become the chairman of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA). Although he had moved to another country, Ugandans kept coming to him, refugees from Amin's oppressive rule. Friends said that not a single Ugandan who came to McCauley at the AMECEA offices was ever turned away.

One day while the bishop was in a very important meeting, two

Father Richard Gribble, a member of the Congregation of Holy Cross, is on the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts.



refugees from Uganda arrived at the front door of the office, looking for the bishop. McCauley's secretary, Rosaleen, told the visitors that the bishop was busy and could not be disturbed. Later, she told the bishop about the visitors. Instead of being grateful, he told her never to send away a refugee. When she did, she was sending away Christ himself. A few days later, the doorbell rang and again there were Ugandan refugees on the front step. This time, however, Rosaleen went immediately to McCauley, who was in another meeting and informed him, "Bishop, Christ is at the door."

### **A Global Crisis**

The situation that Bishop McCauley found in the early 1970s on the micro level of one country, is now seen on a global scale that has not been present since the aftermath of World War II. Estimates suggest there are some 65 million refugees in the world. The rise of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), the continuing civil war in Syria, and numerous other lesser reported but nonetheless violent clashes, such as the under-reported war in Yemen, have exacerbated the situation to its present record level.

The question for nations and their governments is how to deal with this reality. Some nations, Germany, for example, have been quite open to resettling many of these refugees. Others, like our own, have been more reticent, with fears that terrorists will be present among those gaining access to the country. Yet many in the United States challenge this policy, suggesting that most of those who are seeking entrance simply want a safe place to live, work, and raise their families. The debate will certainly continue.

### **The Role of the Church**

What has the Church said about the situation? Answering this question requires us initially to ask what the Bible teaches. While the law and all of its precepts were essential to the Israelites and Hebrews, God makes it perfectly clear that aliens should not be harassed or rejected in any way. God tells the Israelites, "Do not oppress the alien, for you were once aliens in a strange land," referring to the 400 years the Jews spent as strangers in Egypt.

The story of Ruth carries the same message of the need to welcome the outsider. The Book of Ruth is a powerful teaching on how acceptance

needs to be found on all levels, including welcoming aliens who might be or do things differently than the majority. Recall as well how Elijah, who was an alien in the land of Zarephath, was treated with great kindness by a widow, providing him with sustenance out of her own need (see 1 Kgs 17:9-16).

As God played no favorites during the time of the Hebrews, so Jesus, similarly, plays no favorites in the writings of the New Testament. Rather, all who listened to the word of God and heeded it were acceptable to him. While Jesus was sent to the children of Israel, his mission was broader in scope.

*Church teaching concerning refugees is consistent with the Bible's message of compassion for the stranger.*

The longest conversation recorded in the New Testament between Jesus and another person was when the Lord encountered a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Samaritans, the ancestors of the so-called "ten lost tribes of Israel" (the destruction of Israel and the capture of Samaria occurring in 722 BC) were the most hated of peoples in Jesus' time. Yet he reached out to her in a very special, preferential way. Jesus visited people in Tyre and Sidon (Mk 7:24-30) and cured the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1-20), all of whom were outside the confines of Israel. Thus, the Bible presents a fairly clear and consistent message on the value of the stranger.

Church teaching today concerning refugees is consistent with the Bible's message. The USCCB document *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* presents three basic ideas: 1. People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. 2. A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration. 3. A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy. With respect to the Church's role, the bishops specifically stated:

We bishops of the United States reaffirm the commitment of the Church, in the words of Pope John Paul II, to work "so that every person's dignity is respected, the immigrant is welcomed as a brother or sister, and all humanity forms a united family which knows how to appreciate with discernment the different cultures which comprise it."<sup>1</sup> We call upon



all people of good will, but Catholics especially, to welcome the newcomers in their neighborhoods and schools, in their places of work and worship, with heartfelt hospitality, openness, and eagerness both to help and to learn from our brothers and sisters, of whatever race, religion, ethnicity, or background.”<sup>2</sup>

As well as the U.S. bishops, the Church’s message to immigrants and migrants was manifested through action by Pope Francis. The first place he visited outside the immediate confines of the Vatican and Rome was a coastal town in southern Italy where many refugees, escaping violence and problems in the Middle East and North Africa arrive, having braved harrowing conditions in crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Not long thereafter, in April 2016, Pope Francis visited the Greek island of Lesbos, the first stop for many migrants fleeing fighting and poverty in their homelands. Clearly, Pope Francis’ attitude is that refugees are God’s children as much as any person and, thus, must be afforded the dignity given to all. Echoing the Pontiff’s words and actions, the United States bishops have written:

As Catholics, we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as children of God. We commit ourselves, accordingly, to working to strengthen understanding among the many cultures that share in our Catholic faith, to promoting intercultural communication among our people, and to seeing that those in ministry to our communities gain the language and cultural skills necessary to minister to the immigrants in our midst.<sup>3</sup>

Today’s worldwide refugee problem will not be settled in any short amount of time. But the message of the Bible and the teachings of the Church must be brought into the equation. If decisions made do not consider these ideas, then policies are being generated without the full and complete picture. How would any of us feel if we were denied the welcome of others if we had no safe place to stay? Hopefully, we would be open to assisting those in need. Yes, Bishop McCauley had it right,




many times it is Jesus Christ at the door and we do not recognize him.

The refugee problem is not a simple situation and thus proper responses will not be easy. Yet, to bury our heads in the sand, like the proverbial ostrich, will solve nothing. Our Christian vocation calls us to act on behalf of our brothers and sisters in need. We cannot solve such a massive problem tomorrow, but as the expression goes, think globally, but act locally. Let us do what we can today to alleviate the suffering of someone we know; God will do the rest!

*Many times it is Jesus Christ at the door and we do not recognize him.*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “Holy Mother Church believes that she should celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once each week, on the day which she has called the Lord’s Day, she keeps the memory of the Lord’s resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at Easter, that most solemn of all feasts.

“In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ. . . . Thus, recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord’s powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present in every age; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace” (1163).

The underlying spirituality of the Triduum, the center of the Church’s liturgical year, is beautifully expressed in number 1168: “Beginning with the Easter Triduum as its source of light, the new age of the resurrection fills the whole liturgical year with its brilliance. Gradually, on either side of this source, the year is transfigured by the liturgy. It really is a ‘year of the Lord’s favor.’ The economy of salvation is at work within the framework of time, but since its fulfillment in the Passover of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the culmination of history is anticipated ‘as a foretaste,’ and the kingdom of God enters into our time.” 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Message for World Migration Day,” 2000, 5.

<sup>2</sup> “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity.” <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/pastoral-care-of-migrants-refugees-and-travelers/resources/welcoming-the-stranger-among-us-unity-in-diversity.cfm>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



## *EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# From Heart and Soul to Stone and Mortar

by Owen F. Cummings

*The anniversary of a great cathedral is a reminder of the importance of signs of God's presence and grace in our world.*

Deacon Owen F. Cummings is the Regents' Professor of Theology at Mount Angel Seminary in Saint Benedict, Oregon, and a frequent contributor to *Emmanuel*.

THIS YEAR, 2019, WAS THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF MY ORDINATION TO THE permanent diaconate, and six of these years were spent serving in the Cathedral of the Madeleine, Salt Lake City. In September 2019, I was invited to be the guest speaker at the "Bishop's Dinner," an annual fundraising event for the cathedral. The invitation was an opportunity to meditate on the meaning of the cathedral and its presence in the city. What follows is the substance of my meditation.

Not long before his death, the Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats visited the National Gallery in Dublin. When he entered the gallery, immediately he saw the portraits of many people he had known in life, and this called forth from him the following poetic sentiment:

Around me the images of thirty years. . . .  
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,  
And say my glory was I had such friends.

That's how I feel this evening looking out on everyone gathered here — parishioners from the Cathedral of the Madeleine, sisters and brothers in the Lord from around the diocese, friends in this great state of Utah.

One of the most iconic and life-altering events in America's history — the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad — took place in Utah on May 10, 1869, 150 years ago. "Spike 150" was the celebration organized to link up with all those celebrating the 150-year anniversary of the Golden Spike ceremony in Utah. Through a series of activities and events, the "Spike 150" initiative intended to inspire, educate, and reflect on the Transcontinental Railroad legacy as it unifies Utahns

to see that great things are possible with vision and dedication and collaboration. In many ways, the railroad “united” the United States.

The Cathedral of the Madeleine is another Golden Spike, as it were, but it came a little later. The cathedral was begun in the year 1900 and completed in 1909. The Church was here, however, before the cathedral. All those legions of largely anonymous Catholic women and men who came out here with the railroad, to work in the mines, to labor on the land, to work in the service industries, to establish schools, hospitals, newspapers — all of them came together on the Lord’s Day, on Sunday, to worship, to celebrate the Eucharist, the Mass.

From their hearts and souls came the stones and mortar of the cathedral. It is out of their gathering for worship, for the celebration of the Eucharist, that the building blocks of the Cathedral of the Madeleine were formed. The cathedral is the mother church of the diocese, and the mother church’s parish-children populated and continue to populate the entirety of the state of Utah.

### **A House for the Church**

The Church was here and was celebrating the Eucharist before the building of the Cathedral of the Madeleine. That is correct. The worshiping community is primary. That, however, does not mean that the building in which we worship is redundant or unimportant. Human beings need signs of those things which they value most. That’s why we put rings on our fingers to signify our intimate relationships. That’s why we have photographs — of our families, our spouses, our children and grandchildren, our friends. These signs help to make present, in a sense they *re-present*, the realities to which they point.

Catholics love signs, especially signs of God’s loving presence among us. That is what the Catholic theologian and novelist Father Andrew M. Greeley (1928-2013) was getting at when he wrote some twenty years ago these words: “Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained-glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see (God) lurking in creation. As Catholics, we find our houses and our world haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of grace.”<sup>1</sup> Revelations of grace — glimpses of God.

All of the things mentioned by Greeley exist to remind us of God; they



are glimpses of God, and most of all they help *us* to be *par excellence* glimpses of God.

So, our buildings are glimpses of God. Our buildings are signs of God's presence. They don't domesticate God; they don't confine God to a place. What our buildings and our cathedral do is raise the hearts and minds of those who see them — and not just Catholics or even Christians — to the God who is always there for them, to the God who loves them passionately.

This is the God who wants us to be, to exist, the God who is “the biosphere of all real love.”<sup>2</sup> All of our churches and especially the Cathedral of the Madeleine as our mother church remind us of the immensity of God, of the intensity of God as sheerly present and inviting us to communion, to be in union with him.

### **A Mystical Space**

When a worshiper or even a visitor finds themselves invited by the doors of the church as they swing open, she or he is moving into a mystical space, tense with invitation to self-awareness and divine communion. The door to mystical communion with God swings open in the lives of everyone, at least sometimes. These mystical moments are moments when we have an overwhelming sense of well-being, an experience that we would like to prolong.

*Buildings and other signs help to make present, they re-present, the realities to which they point. They are glimpses of God.*


One author puts it like this: “A church is a recognition, in stone and wood and brick, of spiritual awakenings. It nods, to each individual person. It constitutes a collective memory of spiritual insights, of thousands of mystical moments. A church reminds us of what we have known. And it tells us that the possibility of the door swinging open again remains.”<sup>3</sup> That phrase, “the church *nods*,” is very fine. It gives us a feel for the “aliveness” of a church, with all the many generations of worshipers who have been there.

The building is not just stone and brick, the building is invitation, and so it nods to the worshiper, or to the visitor, it offers a glimpse of God. “(The church/the cathedral) exists to help you, to get your mind

humming and to make you receptive. . . . A church is there to remind you to pay attention, and to awaken the poetry in your soul. . . . To walk into a beautiful church is to encounter understanding, to hear echoes of the soul's own experiences of epiphany, (of moments of wonder in God's loving presence). . . . It can be a matter simply of sunlight striking through colored glass and dappling the wall opposite, of the smell of flowers and lingering hints of incense, of the silent cold of stone. . . . or the memory of the people who have filled this building in the past. . . . It's a hole in the hard walls of the rackety every day, a reassurance that . . . a place has been made ready for silent contact with something enormous, something present, for anyone who wants it."<sup>4</sup>

*To walk into a beautiful church is to encounter understanding, to hear echoes of the soul's own experiences of epiphany, of moments of wonder in God's loving presence.*

The holiness of the Christian assembly, of the worshipers, and the holiness of the building of the church/the cathedral are not in competition, but are harmoniously related and mutually constitutive. The church building is both the house of God and the house of the church and, if attention is carefully paid to what the building is "saying," a potential house for humankind, for all people everywhere.

That is why every day in our churches, and especially in our mother church, the cathedral, we say "Thank you," we celebrate Eucharist, and we pledge ourselves to remain in and through these buildings, in and through this cathedral, growing and ever more attractive glimpses of God for all. 

## Notes

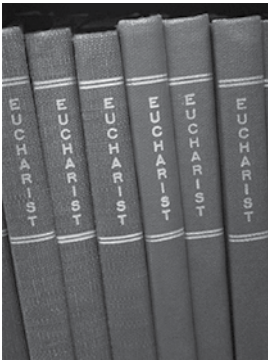
<sup>1</sup> Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Tomas Halik, *I Want You to Be* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Visser, cited in Owen F. Cummings, *Liturgical Snapshots* (New York-Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2012), 17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.





## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# J. R. R. Tolkien on the Eucharist

by Dennis J. Billy, CSsR

*J. R. R. Tolkien's vivid imagination and creative literary powers were surpassed only by his deep, heartfelt Catholic faith. His love for the Eucharist connected him to his convert mother and ignited his hope for an imperfect world.*

Redemptorist Father Dennis J. Billy, a regular contributor to *Emmanuel*, teaches moral and spiritual theology at Saint Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland.

JOHN RONALD REUEL TOLKIEN (1892-1973) WAS PROFESSOR OF ANGLO SAXON at the University of Oxford and the author of such popular and widely read works of fantasy fiction such as *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). He was also a founding member of an Oxford literary group called "The Inklings," among whom were numbered Owen Barfield, Charles Williams, C. S. Lewis, and others.

Born of British parents in 1892 in Bloemfontein, South Africa, he settled in the Midlands of England with his mother and younger brother after his father's death in 1896. In 1900, his mother Mabel converted to Catholicism and raised her sons in the faith. She died of diabetes in 1904, leaving her two sons orphaned. At that point, Father Francis Morgan, the priest who ministered to Tolkien's mother, looked after the two boys' material and spiritual needs. Tolkien attended King Edward's School in Birmingham and in 1911 matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, eventually focused on English Language and Literature, and graduated in 1915.

With the outbreak of World War I, he enlisted as a second lieutenant in the Lancashire Fusiliers, married in 1916, and went to fight on the Western Front soon thereafter. After four months in the trenches, he developed trench fever and was sent back to England to recuperate. After the war, he was employed briefly as assistant lexicographer for the *New English Dictionary* before accepting a position in 1920 as senior reader at the University of Leeds. He remained in that post until 1925 when he became the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo Saxon at Oxford. In 1945, he became the Merton Professor of

English Language and Literature and remained in that position until his retirement in 1959. He died on September 2, 1973, and is buried with his wife in Wolvercote cemetery just north of Oxford.<sup>1</sup>

### **Tolkien's Spiritual Outlook**

Tolkien once described himself as a Hobbit "in all but size": "I like gardens, trees, and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humor (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (when possible). I do not travel much."<sup>2</sup> He had a deep appreciation of the natural world and lamented its destruction at the hands of man in a mechanized age. If he had lived in Middle Earth, the world where his epic fantasy takes place, he would have resided in the Shire.

In one of his letters he writes: "... there are a few basics, which however drily expressed, are really significant. For instance, I was born in 1892 and lived for my early years in 'the Shire' in a pre-mechanical age. Or more important, I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic. The latter 'fact' perhaps cannot be deduced."<sup>3</sup>

Tolkien believed one's writing should speak for itself and objected to the trend in literary criticism that sought to find reflections of an author's life hidden in the text. Doing so, he believed, turned attention away from the work itself: "But only one's guardian angel, or indeed God himself, could unravel the real relationship between personal facts and an author's works. Not the author himself (though he knows more than any investigator), and certainly not so-called 'psychologists.'"<sup>4</sup> Middle Earth, the world in which his fiction unfolds, comes from the Old English word, "Middangeard," "an ancient expression for the everyday world between heaven above and hell below."<sup>5</sup> Tolkien's fiction takes place in Middle Earth during "the Third Age," an earlier time in earth's history, before the "Age of Man" had begun.

A devout Catholic, Tolkien's outlook on the world was shaped by his strong religious convictions. He believed in all the tenets of the faith: the Trinity, creation, the fall, the incarnation, the resurrection of Christ, redemption in Christ, the Church, and the sacraments. He believed in the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. He had a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother, believed in the communion



of saints, and awaited Christ's second coming. As might be expected, the Eucharist was also very dear to his heart.

### **Tolkien on the Eucharist**

One of Tolkien's most beautiful passages on the Eucharist comes in a letter he wrote to his son Michael, dated March 6-8, 1941. Writing on the subject of marriage and relations between the sexes, he observes that we live a fallen world and concludes that "the dislocation of the sex-instinct is one of the chief symptoms of the fall."<sup>6</sup> A bit later in the letter, he writes:

Out of the darkness of my life, so much frustrated, I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament. . . . There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves on earth, and more than that: death: by the divine paradox, that which ends life, and demands the surrender of all, and yet, by the taste (or foretaste) of which alone can what you seek in your earthly relationships (love, faithfulness, joy) be maintained, or take on that complexion of reality, of eternal endurance, which every man's heart desires.<sup>7</sup>

The Eucharist, Tolkien reminds his son, helps us to integrate all our human loves and orient them toward our final end in God. It gives our lives on earth a foretaste of things to come by drawing us into the eternal and making our earthly lives deeper and more authentic. By making the Blessed Sacrament the one great love of our lives, all our other loves become focused and fall into place.

In another letter to Michael, dated November 1, 1963, he speaks of how the Eucharist strengthens those weak in faith:

The only cure for sagging or fainting faith is Communion. Though always itself, perfect and complete and inviolate, the Blessed Sacrament does not operate completely and once for all in any of us. Like the act of faith, it must be continuous and grow by exercise. Frequency is of the highest effect. Seven times a week is more nourishing than seven times at intervals.<sup>8</sup>

Tolkien was a firm believer in frequent Communion because, like the act of faith, it grows by means of constant practice. He even identified Saint Pius X's promotion of frequent, even daily, Communion as "the greatest reform of our time" and wonders "what state the Church would be but for it."<sup>9</sup>

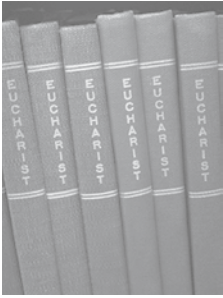
Later in the same letter, Tolkien tells his son of the difficulties he had early in life: "I witnessed (half-comprehending) the heroic sufferings and early death in extreme poverty of my mother who brought me into the Church; and received the astonishing charity of Father Morgan."<sup>10</sup> He goes on to write of his deep love for the Eucharist and laments his lack of faithfulness and failure to pass on his faith in this blessed and wonderful gift:

But I fell in love with the Blessed Sacrament from the beginning — and by the mercy of God never have fallen out again: but alas! I indeed did not live up to it. I brought you all up ill and talked to you too little. Out of wickedness and sloth I almost ceased to practice my religion — especially at Leeds, and at 22 Northmoore Road. Not for me the Hound of Heaven, but the never-ceasing silent appeal of Tabernacle, and the sense of starving hunger. I regret those days bitterly (and suffer for them with such patience as I have been given); most of all, because I failed as a father. Now I pray for you all, unceasingly, that the Healer (the *Hælend* as the Saviour was usually called in Old English) shall heal my defects, and that none of you shall ever cease to cry *Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*.<sup>11</sup>

*The Eucharist helps us to integrate all our human loves and orient them toward our final end in God. It gives our lives on earth a foretaste of things to come.*

Tolkien loved the Eucharist very much and deeply regretted those times when he had fallen out of the practice of receiving it, as well as his failure to pass on love of the sacrament to his children. Despite his failings in such matters, his love for the sacrament perdured.

Although Tolkien wrote that the fact that he was a Roman Catholic



“perhaps cannot be deduced from his writing,”<sup>12</sup> he recognized critics who thought otherwise:

. . . one critic (by letter) asserted that the invocations of Elbereth, and the character of Galadriel were clearly related to Catholic devotion to Mary. Another saw in waybread (*lembas*), viaticum, and the reference to its feeding the *will* . . . and being more potent when fasting, a derivation from the Eucharist.<sup>13</sup>

Although he was reticent about drawing such outright comparisons, there can be little doubt that Tolkien’s beliefs served as a backdrop against which the world of Middle Earth sprang from his imagination and into the minds of his readers. The Eucharistic overtones of the *lembas* bread are a case in point.

### Some Observations

Although these examples of Tolkien’s views on the Eucharist do not exhaust the richness of his love for and devotion to the sacrament, they provide a general context within which a deeper understanding of his beliefs can unfold.

1. To begin with, Tolkien’s deep attachment to the Eucharist and his Catholic faith throughout his life was likely influenced by the loss of his mother at such an early age. Her conversion to Catholicism in 1900 left her estranged from both sides of the Tolkien family, who were very much against it. Bringing Tolkien and his brother into the faith was a gift she had bequeathed to them. Her Catholic faith, in other words, was a piece of herself that she had left behind. When seen in this light, it makes perfect sense that Tolkien would feel close to her by loving the faith she loved and suffered for so much. Receiving Communion was a way of being united with Christ and the members of his body (and thus his mother).

2. Although Tolkien knew the world was fallen, he was also deeply aware that Jesus entered it and came to redeem it. Because of this sacrament, death would lose the stranglehold it had on our souls and be defeated by the power of love poured out on the cross and in the empty tomb.

3. For Tolkien, the effect the Eucharist has on a person takes

place not in a single instance but over a lifetime of continuous practice. Holy Communion means “union with” (in this case, “with Christ”) and has to do with fostering a personal relationship with him. We do so by spending time with him over the course of our lifetimes. Receiving him at Mass, serving him at Mass, adoring him before the Blessed Sacrament: Tolkien did all these things during his lifetime. Although he regretted those moments in his life when he slacked off in his practice of the faith, the silent draw of the Eucharist was always there ready to lure him back.

4. Tolkien regrets that he has failed as a father by not passing on a love for the Eucharist to his children. He laments his lack of initiative in that regard and wishes he had overcome his selfishness and sloth and done something about it. This failure to act spurred him on later in life to pray for all his children unceasingly. He prayed to Jesus, our Savior, to heal his defects and to kindle in his children a love for both prayer and the sacrament. The awareness of his own flaws, however, did not keep him from renewing his love for the Blessed Sacrament and hoping and praying that they would never stop crying out, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

*For Tolkien, the effect the Eucharist has on a person takes place not in a single instance but over a lifetime of continuous practice.*

5. The Church, Tolkien writes, “was not intended to be static or remain in perpetual childhood; but to be a living organism (likened to a plant), which develops and changes in externals by the interaction of its bequeathed divine life and history — the particular circumstances of the world into which it is set.”<sup>14</sup> It was for this reason that he opposed the “Protestant’ search backwards for ‘simplicity’ and directness.”<sup>15</sup> The seed of the Church planted by Christ some 2,000 years ago no longer exists. It would be a mistake for the keepers of the Tree to try to capture primitive Christianity and discard all the doctrinal and liturgical developments that happened over time. The Church’s deepening understanding of the profound mystery of the Eucharist over time was a case in point.

6. Tolkien says that his Catholic faith probably could not be deduced from his fiction and that he would hesitate to draw a one-



to-one correspondence between certain characters or events in his writing, on the one hand, and Catholic teaching (e.g., *Galadriel*=Mary; *Lembas bread*=Eucharist), on the other. Although we must be careful to avoid a strictly allegorical interpretation of his saga, there are moments in his writing when the sun breaks through the darkened sky above and a particular reference to his Catholic faith shines forth. The clearest example of this comes at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* when Frodo and Sam destroy the ring and Sauron's hold over Middle Earth, doing so on the twenty-fifth of March, the day in the Catholic liturgical calendar which is the feast of the Annunciation and the day when Christ assumed human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary.<sup>16</sup> The mystery of the incarnation makes that of the Eucharist possible: both reveal the body of Christ to the world and are thus deeply intertwined.

7. Finally, because of his Catholic faith, Tolkien saw an intimate connection between the Eucharist, the Church, and the papacy. In a letter to his son Michael, he writes: "I myself am convinced by the Petrine claims, nor looking around the world does there seem much doubt which (if Christianity is true) is the true church, the temple of the Spirit dying but living, corrupt but holy, self-reforming and re-aring."<sup>17</sup> He goes on to note that the pope, as the head of the Church on earth, has ever defended the Blessed Sacrament: "'Feed my sheep' was his last charge to Saint Peter; and since his words are always first to be understood literally, I suppose them to refer primarily to the Bread of Life."<sup>18</sup> Tolkien's words should bring comfort to Catholics today who themselves, living through a period of corruption and needed reform, must turn to the Eucharist for healing and renewal.

*The mystery of the incarnation makes that of the Eucharist possible: both reveal the body of Christ to the world and are deeply intertwined.*


## Conclusion

By the time of his death in 1973, Tolkien had become famous for the world of Middle Earth he had created with such careful attention to accuracy and minute detail. The capstone of his work, *The Lord of the Rings*, a trilogy of epic proportions dealing with the struggle between good and evil, was widely read and translated into many languages. A popular British poll once designated this work the greatest book of the



twentieth century, while his good friend, C. S. Lewis, even nominated him for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Tolkien's vivid imagination and creative literary powers were surpassed only by his deep, heartfelt faith. He loved the Catholic Church and saw it as a living organism that, like a tree, was rooted in the earth but soared upwards toward the sky. The Church, for him, was both human and divine, a home to sinners and saints, a place for fellowship and worship. The sacraments, for him, were actions of Christ given to the members of his body as signposts on their pilgrim journey through life, into death, and beyond.

The Eucharist, for Tolkien, was food for this journey. He loved the Blessed Sacrament and believed it was the most important love a person could have in life. It gave nourishment to the faithful, strength to the faint of heart, and, most importantly, communion with Christ and his Church to those who received it. It was the means chosen by Christ to be present to his people through time. This presence was a real presence. At each Mass, Christ himself entered the world anew, to create it anew, making all things new. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This biographical information comes from David Doughan, "J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biographical Sketch," The Tolkien Society, <https://www.tolkienesociety.org/author/biography/>.

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, ed., with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000), 288-289.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Doughan, "J. R. R. Tolkien," <https://www.tolkienesociety.org/author/biography/>.

<sup>6</sup> Carpenter, ed., *The Letters*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-339.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 288

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, vol. 3, *The Return of the King* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 283.

<sup>17</sup> Carpenter, ed., *The Letters*, 339.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Is the Mass a Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice?

by John Zupez, SJ

*The precise meaning of words is important in understanding how the Church sees God's saving action in Jesus Christ and the meaning of the Eucharistic rite.*

Jesuit Father John Zupez has authored more than 50 journal articles and 400 Wikipedia articles. He has taught in major seminaries, served as a pastor, and at 82 is involved in parish work and prison ministry.

CHANGE IS DIFFICULT, AND PERHAPS NEVER MORE SO THAN WHEN IT RELATES somehow to the very heart of our religious practice. A change that has become a dividing issue in the Church today is the orientation of the priest at Mass. Should he face the people or face *ad orientem* ("toward the East," with back to the people)? One argument for the priest facing the people at Mass involves a development in theology. It is for those who are not aware of this development that I offer this explanation. While the magisterium does not change its teachings quickly, or for light reasons, a strong scholarly consensus will prevail over time, and the Church's doctrine will likely conform to advances in understanding.

### Propitiation or Expiation?

Central to this issue is the word "propitiation," which remains in the Latin version of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (end of paragraph 2), and was restored to the English version with the requirement of the Congregation for Worship in 2001 (*Liturgiam Authenticam*) that translations conform closely to the Latin. The 1975 English version of the ritual had substituted "expiation" for the word "propitiation" in the Latin *GIRM*.

The *Revised New American Bible* (1986), that is used in most Catholic lectionaries, uses the word "expiation" the three times that the word for sacrifice (the stem *hilas*) occurs in Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; and 4:10. A footnote at Romans 3:25 reads: "Expiation: this rendering is preferable to 'propitiation,' which suggests hostility on the part of God toward sinners. As Paul will be at pains to point out in Romans 5:8–10, it is humanity that is hostile to God." And so it is we who need

to be changed through the sacrifice of the Mass, not God. This is best effected through our conscious and active participation whereby we are transformed into other Christs, which is the purpose of the Communion bread.

## Historical Background

Saint Jerome translated the New Testament from its original Greek into Latin. But he did not have the historical studies at his disposal that we have today. He may not have known that by the intertestamental period even the Jewish people had moved away from the idea of propitiating God. His use of “propitiation” to translate *hilas* would, in retrospect, not seem to be a matter of divine inspiration. And the Council of Trent’s stamp of approval on Jerome’s Vulgate translation is understandable in light of the reluctance to admit changes at the time, due to controversies with the reformers and the lack of historical studies on which to securely base changes (*GIRM*, 7).

Today we have those studies, along with more than a century of biblical scholarship. And the studies have led to a consensus among scholars that “expiation” is the intended meaning of the New Testament in the three places where this word for sacrifice occurs.

## What Biblical Scholars Say

As Edward Kilmartin, SJ, of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, explains: “Sacrifice is not, in the first place, an activity of human beings directed to God and, in the second place, something that reaches its goal in the response of divine acceptance and bestowal of divine blessing on the cultic community. Rather, sacrifice in the New Testament understanding — and thus in its Christian understanding — is, in the first place, the self-offering of the Father in the gift of his Son, and in the second place the unique response of the Son in his humanity to the Father, and in the third place, the self-offering of believers in union with Christ, by which they share in his covenant relationship with the Father” (*The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999, 381-82. 30).

Robert Daly, SJ, has explained the background for this renewed understanding in two articles in the scholarly Catholic journal *Theological Studies* (May 2000, March 2003). He summarized his conclusions in the Jesuit weekly *America* (May 12, 2003). Daly points out that the initiative is entirely with the Father who “loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).



The Christian meaning of Christ's sacrifice is found not in the pagan idea of the destruction of the victim but in our being caught up in the eternal self-gift between Son and Father in the Trinity, our being caught up in that love. Daly also points out that "when we see the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Mass as a Trinitarian event, we see that, strictly speaking, there are no recipients." He compares the Eucharist to a marriage ceremony that receives its meaning by becoming the reality of one's life.

In the Eucharistic Prayers at Mass, the presider speaks always of what "we," the assembly, are doing. The presider never speaks as a mediator between God and the assembly. Daly points out: "What is taking place is not happening 'by the action of the priest,' as a popular hymn used to put it, but by the action of the Holy Spirit." By our conscious participation in what we do "in remembrance" of Christ, we are taken up by the Spirit into the self-giving love between the Father, Son, and Spirit.

*It is we who need to be changed through the Mass, not God.*

Daly finds that the Counter-Reformation emphasis at the Council of Trent obscured the real meaning of the Eucharist: "So much emphasis was put on the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, so much emphasis put on verifying a real — or at least symbolic (but with graphically real descriptors) — destruction of the victim that the real goal and ultimate reality of the Eucharist — transformation into Christ — was obscured" (*Theological Studies*, May 2000, 260. <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/61/61.2/61.2.2.pdf>).

In the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (1990), Joseph Fitzmyer, SJ, had earlier come to the same conclusion in his entry on Pauline theology (82, 73). He wrote that even in the Old Testament where a derivative from *hilasterion* is used, it is not a question of appeasing God's wrath. Fitzmyer insists that in Paul's epistles metaphors of debt should not be taken literally; "Paul insists on the gracious and loving initiative of the Father" and of Jesus Christ in reconciling not God to us, but us to God. We are the ones who are to be changed by Christ's sacrifice, even as later Hebrew sacrifice was a symbolic dedication of the life of the person to God.

In line with this, the entry on "sacrifice" in the *Theological Dictionary of*

*the New Testament*, after reviewing the epistles of Paul and Hebrews, concludes that “total self-giving, first that of Christ, and then, on this basis, that of his people, is the true meaning of sacrifice.” And Cardinal-theologian Walter Kasper, in his book *The God of Jesus Christ*, concludes that what Jesus effected was to give suffering “eternal import, the import of love.”

*The Christian meaning of Christ’s sacrifice is found not in the pagan idea of the destruction of the victim but in our being caught up in the eternal self-gift between Son and Father.*

Kasper points out that Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, working out of the New Testament, speak of a God who can freely choose to feel compassion, which implies suffering. Kasper adds that: “It is Origen who gave us the clearest statement. In Origen’s words: ‘First God suffered, then he came down. What was the suffering he accepted for us? The suffering of love.’ Origen adds that it is not just the Son but also the Father who suffers so. This is made possible by God’s freedom in love.” I suggest that you will find these insights to be faithful to the entirety of the New Testament revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Modern studies in historical theology and scriptural exegesis direct us away from the notion that the sacrifice of the Mass is a means of propitiation, in the sense of placating God or appeasing God’s wrath. The word for sacrifice, the three times it occurs in the New Testament, refers to an effect it has on us, the expiation of our sins, with our conscious cooperation.

If this understanding conveyed by the Catholic lectionary prevails also in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, it will eliminate a strong argument for the priest at Mass facing toward God (*ad orientem*). It will support the practice of the priest facing the people to elicit their active involvement.





## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

### “A Crib Fit for a King”

by Michael E. DeSanctis

*Can a crib modeled on a Medieval counterpart awaken faith and wonder in the minds and hearts of modern, restless onlookers?*

Michael E. DeSanctis serves as a professor in the Fine Arts, Theology, and Pastoral Studies departments at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania. He is a widely published author and has written previously for *Emmanuel*.

FOR ALMOST A DECADE, I HAVE BEEN BUILDING ORIGINAL NATIVITY SCENES TO DISPLAY at Christmastime on the campus of the Catholic university where I teach courses in the fine arts and theology. I consider this crèche-building a natural extension of the work I do in the classroom, where these days I am confronted by increasing numbers of students who admit to little interest in religion nor anything else that the Western mind once considered as life-sustaining as, say, beauty, truth, and goodness.

My seasonal constructions are larger and more intricately detailed than those one typically finds in Christian homes and places of worship throughout the Yuletide. They are also composed almost exclusively of second-hand materials, like the chalkware figures of shepherds, saints, and angels I rescue from thrift stores and auction houses on weekends, where no one would ever peg me as an academic.

Some years the “Bookstore Crèches,” as they have come to be known around campus, have been straightforward depictions of the scriptural accounts of Christ’s birth. Other years they have amounted to arrangements of objects inspired by some phase of art history I hoped would point obliquely to the events at the heart of the Nativity story. This past Christmas, for example, I fabricated a treasury of glittery things — jeweled reliquaries, gold censers, gilded flasks of myrrh — that looked as if they could have been among the gifts offered the Christ Child at his birth by the Magi two millennia ago.

The centerpiece of the display, in fact, was a fairly faithful reproduction of the so-called *Crib of the Infant Jesus* from the Medieval collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an object I have made a point of

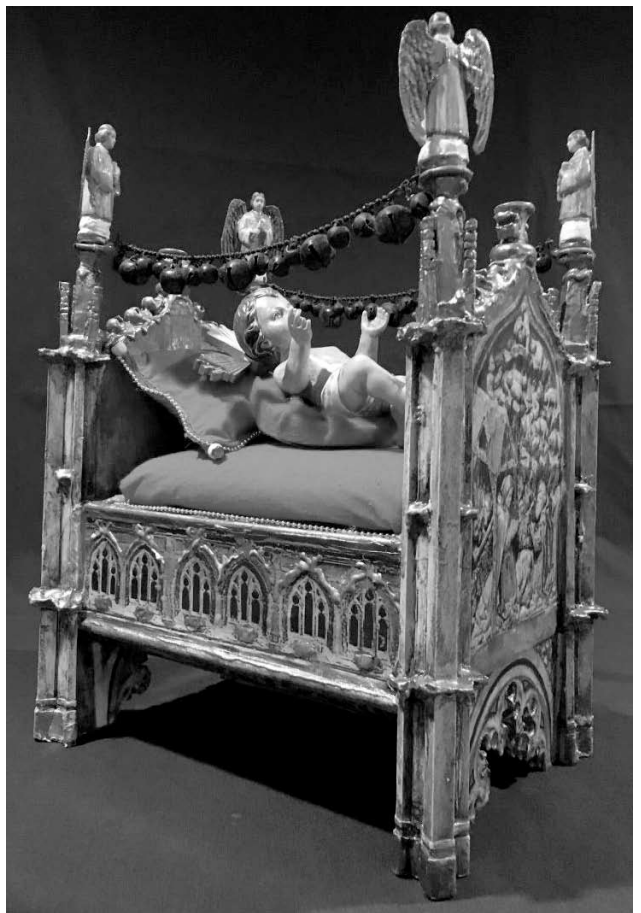
examining carefully with each visit to the Met over the years during trips to New York City. There, in the middle of Gallery 306, I have found it waiting for me as if preserved for my delight alone, though I know it is one of those extraordinary examples of handicraft in the Met's vast storehouse of such things for which New Yorkers and others with more regular access to it than I probably maintain special affection.

How could anyone *not* be beguiled by this curious, little token of Medieval piety encased in an acrylic box of its own? Constructed in the Southern Netherlands in the fifteenth century for the pleasure of cloistered women with no prospect of rocking infants of their own to sleep at night, the *Crib* invites viewers to imagine themselves custodians of a God who assumes the vulnerability of a human newborn.

The figurine of the divine infant that once lay atop the crib's embroidered cushion and pillow has long since disappeared. Still, we can imagine what the replica God-child might have looked like to its original caretakers, who no doubt slept in their dormitory at night with one eye open to aid the watchful angels adorning the crib's four corner posts. Should Satan himself emerge from the darkness to snatch the child from its sleep, the Met's explanatory materials explain, he'd likely trip the twin sets of miniature jingle bells strung between its posts to alert the conventual household. (Most of the bells, fortunately, remain intact, though it seems a shame they hang so silently in their showcase — the price we pay for asking a centuries-old expression of religious belief to function as a modern-day "work of art.")

My reasons for sharing a facsimile of the Met crib of my own making with the students I serve were simple. Mostly it was to impress on them the theological and artistic riches to be found in the Church's annual commemoration of Christ's birth without resorting to anything like the billboard-sized "Keep Christ in Christmas" messages that crop

CRIB OF THE  
INFANT JESUS,  
Michael DeSanctis,  
Wood, fabric, metal  
bells, reclaimed  
materials, 2018







up around the holiday from well-intentioned sources, but contribute in their own way to the noisy marketing frenzy that ultimately obscures its meaning.

The sheer quietude in which people — even apart from communities of nuns — once pondered and prayed about the most important of things is virtually unobtainable today, even in academic settings where the most spectacular versions of multi-media “edutainment” substitutes for traditional pedagogy. What better antidote could there be to the overstimulated psyches and under-attended souls my students smuggle into the classroom each morning with their jumbo lattes, I thought, than to present them an object that evokes a celestial kind of slumber?

My version of a crib fit for a King whose power lay in humility and love might dispel their restlessness just long enough to make them consider why, for centuries, peace and quiet were linked in the popular imagination as closely as grace and beauty. I have settled for hoping that they succumbed just a little to whatever second-hand charm my crib borrowed from its model in Manhattan, and to the subtlest sound of bells set jingling less by nocturnal specters of evil than by the power of their own imaginations.





## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Wedding Feast

by Bernard Camiré, SSS

*Parables were integral to Jesus' teaching ministry. His stories engaged the minds and hearts of his listeners and revealed the deeper meaning of their lives and God's power at work in and around them.*

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST IN MATTHEW 22:1-14 IS ALSO FOUND IN Luke 14:16-24, but in a form that reflects Luke's particular theological concern. In both versions, the parable has to do with a man who prepares a feast to which guests had been invited. However, when the announcement is sent out that the feast is about to begin, those invited offer various excuses for absenting themselves. In response, the man giving the feast substitutes for the invited guests people chosen haphazardly.

In Matthew's account, the banquet is pictured as a marriage feast given for a king's son. The opening scene of the parable was very much in accordance with Jewish custom. When invitations to a great feast like a wedding banquet were sent out, the precise time was not indicated. It was only when everything was ready that servants were sent out to inform the invited guests that it was time to come. We see this procedure reflected in our parable; however, when the guests were actually summoned they refused to come and even acted shamefully.

### Original Context

The original perspective of the parable would appear to be the rejection of Jesus' message by most of his contemporaries and their substitution by the motley group that made up the following of Jesus. A double focus is discernible: a vindication of Jesus' openness and offer of forgiveness to tax collectors and sinners, while the Jewish leaders (the invited guests) express rejection of him; also, a warning that

Blessed Sacrament  
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failure to act when the decisive moment comes, the actual summons to the feast, brings exclusion from the banquet.

A word must be said about a verse within the parable that seems strangely out of place, a verse that, likely, was not part of the parable as Jesus originally told it, but an interpretation by Matthew. That verse concerns the king who, enraged by the mistreatment and murder of his servants, sent troops who destroyed the murderers and burned their city. Matthew, who wrote his Gospel sometime after 80 AD, appears to be making a reference to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the armies of Rome in 70 AD.

*The parable follows accepted practice regarding banquets in the time of Jesus: the invitation, followed by an announcement that the feast was about to begin.*

We should also make mention here of something else that is particular to Matthew: his conclusion to the parable, which is not found in Luke. Actually, these concluding verses are a little parable within a parable: the story of a guest who appears at a royal wedding feast without a wedding garment and is therefore ejected. This idea of a parable used to conclude another parable would explain and soften somewhat the jarring effect we are left with. How would poor guests gathered in from the thoroughfares without a previous invitation be expected to be wearing proper attire? Their treatment by the king would seem to be unfair.

In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, we note that some of the originally invited guests refused the king's invitation in order to attend to matters that were not bad in themselves: to look after the administration of a livelihood or to attend to business. This reminds us that we must never be so busy with the things of daily living — work, social involvement, recreation — that we neglect the things of God; never so responsive to the clamor of the world that we do not hear the gentle invitation of the voice of Christ.

### **Interpretation**

Fundamentally, this parable is about God's gratuitous invitation to live in his grace, to partake of the lavish banquet of his loving favor. The

originally invited guests and, even more so, those who were invited in from the thoroughfares, had no claim whatever on the king. The invitation extended to them came from nothing other than the king's open-hearted and generous hospitality. So it is with us humans and God's munificent offer of grace in Jesus Christ.

*Neither the invited guests nor those who came in from the thoroughfares had any claim on the king.*

Finally, the parable's conclusion invites us to reflect that prior to the final judgment, the Church will necessarily be composed of both the good and the bad; however, that will not be true of the "eternal banquet" with God. Those who respond to God's invitation, both the good and the bad, must have something other than a "Yes, Lord" to bring to the judgment; they must be clothed with grace and with the deeds expected of a committed disciple.



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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Since its inception, *Emmanuel* has published a list of deceased members of the Priests' Eucharistic League, remembering those who have served the church generously and faithfully and have passed into the promised eternal life. Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with V, W, X, Y, and Z are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during November and December.



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Counsels for Spiritual Life from Saint Peter Julian Eymard

### **Mary Has Led Me by the Hand**

THE APOSTLE OF THE EUCHARIST WAS ALSO A GUIDE TO THE INTERIOR LIFE AND TO EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY for many. From childhood, owing to visits made with his mother to Marian shrines near his birthplace, La Mure d'Isère, Saint Peter Julian Eymard had a deep love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. He urged his religious and those he directed spiritually to look to her.

As we enter into an Advent of openness and preparation for Christmas, Mary is our companion.

In notes penned during his Great Retreat of Rome three years before his death, Father Eymard said: "I owe to Mary my preservation, my vocation, and above all the grace of the Most Blessed Sacrament. She gave me to her Son as his servant, his child of predilection" (March 11, 1865).

And again a few days later: "How Mary has led me by the hand, all by herself, to the priesthood! And then to the Most Blessed Sacrament! (March 17, 1865). From Nazareth, Jesus went to the Cenacle and Mary there made her dwelling."

In the Directory of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament (1863, 1997 edition), we read: "Become inspired with the spirit of Mary. Her spirit is the same as that of Jesus. . . . She is the true and perfect copy of the virtues of Jesus. The great mission of Mary is to form Jesus in us; she is the mother who educates us. Honor in Mary all the divine mysteries of her life as so many stations on the way to the Cenacle."





## PASTORAL LITURGY

# Final Comments on Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass

by John Thomas Lane, SSS

*The Catholic Church cherishes the relationship between the Eucharistic celebration and worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass.*

WE REVIEWED *HOLY COMMUNION AND WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARISTIC OUTSIDE MASS* (HCWEOM) in our column this year. One particular reason I developed this commentary was that I never did it before in the 20 years of writing for *Emmanuel*. We thank you, our loyal readers, for spreading the word about how this magazine and column share all realities of the Eucharist, and this column, all aspects of pastoral liturgy.

I wrote this series of columns on HCWEOM partly to address various problematic issues around this ritual. Some pastoral leaders (youth ministers, musicians, liturgists, theologians, and pastors) have been alarmed at the questionable practices that have developed around exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Well-meaning individuals are creating rituals that were not envisioned in the theology of HCWEOM. Let me list a few that:

- Chastity pledges during exposition;
- Stations of the Cross with the monstrance;
- "Camping altars" and processions through the woods;
- Stadium youth rallies with exposition but no Mass connected to the event;
- Parishioners at different points in the day going to the tabernacle to open the doors and pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, or placing the Eucharist in a monstrance, exposing and reposing multiple times daily;
- Penance services while there is exposition in the same worship space.

Some are annoyed by certain styles of music during exposition (praise and worship verses or something more traditional). We all have our own personal tastes for music, and the Church has always permitted

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a variety of musical styles, from chant to Taizé to hymnody to “praise and worship.” As long as the music meets the criteria of the Church, it is acceptable.

In the United States, our bishops, musicians, and liturgists identified three particular aspects and put them in a rubrical document called *Sing to the Lord* (STL) in 2008. The three criteria in STL are: First, *liturgical* (127): meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth in the liturgical books and the particular rite. Second, *pastoral* (130): taking into consideration the actual community gathered and asking whether the music will lead the assembly to participate, express their faith, and reflect the liturgical season. The music selected should ultimately bring one to the mystery of Christ (133). Third, *musical*: is it a worthy composition, technically, aesthetically, and flowing from the texts? Another helpful hint includes the preference for “live music” rather than streaming or other videos (see STL, 93), a focus on the Trinity, not “Jesus and me” songs, for it is the risen Lord we encounter and worship.

At one time, praying the rosary was not part of exposition, since the ritual envisioned Eucharistic Scriptures, prayers, and songs. Saint John Paul II encouraged the rosary as part of the prayer of exposition, when this was forbidden previously, and added the Luminous Mysteries as an attempt to reconcile the theology and Scripture of the rosary to be more in harmony with exposition.

Pledges or other rituals that occur during exposition are also not in harmony with the focus of praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. More appropriate times for such ritual actions are during Mass. Furthermore, the Mass is the setting for many “public” rituals found in the *Book of Blessings* (BB) or other sacraments and sacramentals.

Additionally, HCWEOM is about the primary focus of exposition: from the Eucharistic altar (table) and the mysteries of the Mass, leading to further reflection on these, and ending with benediction and reposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the particular worship site or space. Even for a Eucharistic procession, the ritual is quite clear that a procession begins at the conclusion of Mass and leads out into the world in service, only to return to the worship site to end the period of Eucharistic prayer.



There are notable exceptions that many notice and bring to our attention:

- International Eucharistic Congress Masses are usually held in large public spaces, such as a stadium, arena, or auditorium. However, it should also be noted that, at least at the events I have attended, the outdoor or public Mass then leads to exposition, and this “outdoor setting” still uses the prescribed rituals for Mass and exposition.
- National or diocesan youth meetings often gather later at night for prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, in the setting of exposition. Hopefully, the host used for exposition — usually a large one designed for the particular monstrance — should be consecrated at the Mass that precedes the time of exposition.
- Exposition on a retreat day after Mass, with the availability of the sacrament of reconciliation.

HCWEOM asked bishops across the globe to implement and develop rituals for their own conferences or nations. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, whose process for the development of liturgical texts followed a different protocol, asked its liturgical office to develop the *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist*. Liturgical Press of Collegeville, Minnesota, was engaged to publish this order in 1993.

The USCCB now votes on all liturgical texts, and publishes, if affordable, their own documents. All of us would do well to have a copy of this ritual and its various chapters situating the rite of exposition in proper relationship to the Mass, the liturgy of the hours, or other Eucharistic services. There are sample liturgical texts, taken from HCWEOM, for litanies and popular hymns from our American culture, all in one resource as a guide. This is a great starting-point to helping parishes that wish to promote exposition. Additionally, this author has written sample Eucharistic Holy Hours which include Taizé music. These are available for the asking.

Prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and exposition have become more popular, especially among young people. It is wonderful that this part of our Church’s liturgical tradition is being re-appropriated by a new generation of Catholics. Let us continue to assist in developing the special relationship that exists between the Mass and its extension in Eucharistic adoration and exposition.

From this will come a genuine renewal of the Mass and of Eucharistic worship outside of the Mass. The goal is to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's love, to worship "in spirit and in truth," and to draw strength and vision for lives of witness and service. Then our Eucharistic prayer will bear much fruit in our world!

### Reminders for November and December 2019

- **Friday, November 1 — All Saints.**
- **Saturday, November 2 — All the Faithful Departed (All Souls).**

See BB, Chapter 57 for the Order for Visiting a Cemetery.

- **Monday, November 11 — Veterans Day.**
- **Sunday, November 24 — Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.**

This is a better day to celebrate infant baptisms and the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of the Catechumenate than the First Sunday of Advent.

- **Thursday, November 28 — Thanksgiving Day (United States).**
- **Sunday, December 1 — First Sunday of Advent (Year A).**

See BB, Chapter 47 for the Order for the Blessing of an Advent Wreath.

- **Monday, December 9 — Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**

A holy day, but there is no obligation attached to the transferred feast day. The memorial of Saint Juan Diego is not observed.

- **Thursday, December 12 — Our Lady of Guadalupe.**

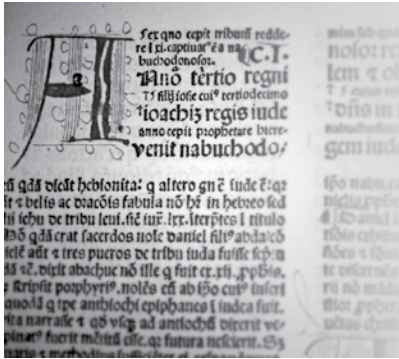
Celebrated as a feast in the United States.

- **Sunday, December 29 — The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.**

There is only one date in our calendar with the updated *Lectionary Supplement for the USA* for these months:

- **Monday, November 25 — Saint Catherine of Alexandria**





## BREAKING THE WORD

# Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Frederick D. Leising

November 1, 2019  
All Saints

**Revelation 7:2-4, 9-11; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; 1 John 3:1-3;  
Matthew 5:1-12**

Hopefully you will be reminded by homilists on this day that you are called/invited to be a disciple of Christ. And a disciple of Christ is a pilgrim saint. This means that although you are a sinner, there is a divine mercy that reconciles. Holiness is a continual happening as you daily attempt to put on Christ.

Each year, as we listen to the gospel proclamation of Matthew's version of the beatitudes, we see the attitudes toward being that, when received and lived, form saints, diverse, yet one in sanctity. Simultaneously, the First Letter of John reminds us that we are a mystery, with much yet to be revealed. Our completion in God is beyond our imagining. That, however, does not foreclose the Book of Revelation's symbolic scenes of fulfillment, abundance, and completion.

If you contemplate the lives of sainted folks, they can appear to be quite odd. Diverse cultures and eras of their Christian formation are worn in a plethora of ways. But if you look to their core or center, you will find Christ. Or, as Gerard Manley Hopkins poetically reminds us, Christ plays in ten-thousands of faces, places, and guises. So, I urge you, do not uniformly label saints. If you do, you will miss out on their presence near you and for you. Unfortunately, our artistic renderings of sanctity often erase the human qualities of saints, leaving us with devotional images of halos, folded hands, and eyes ascended toward eternal realms.

Monsignor  
Frederick D.  
Leising is a  
retired priest of  
the Diocese of  
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His most recent  
assignments were  
at the Church of  
the Nativity of  
the Blessed Virgin  
Mary, Clarence,  
and Christ the  
King Seminary in  
East Aurora.

In so many articles in this publication, you are reminded of the expansive dimensions of the Eucharist. It remains a presence for us and with us in the deep-down simplest things. Eucharist is not for tabernacle keeping. Such is done for consumption to those we must reach with our service and prayer. So, sanctity is not a private accomplishment. Rather, it is a universal gift of right relating. God promises and gifts us with God's presence. This reality is to be mutually lived in holy communions.

Be attentive to your relationships, for they are the preeminent sites for growth in sanctity. You are already God's creation, a family member of God's divine community, the Trinity. Welcome God's others, especially those marginalized in this world, to your table, to your person, to your communion. We celebrate today not "Some Saints" but "All Saints."

Rejoice in being called to this communion of saints. Remember that "the saints" lived and died in this world, as do you. They received the same Eucharist as you. They sought the same virtues as you. They were sinners, as are you. So, persist on your pilgrimage in and toward sanctity. Blessed be you!

## November 3, 2019 Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Wisdom 11:22-12:2; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14;  
2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2; Luke 19:1-10**

When a twenty-year-old seminarian, I studied philosophy in preparation for doing graduate work in theology. One course was titled "cosmology." The priest-professor's primary text was meant to guide our contemplation of the universe. He used Teilhard de Chardin's *The Divine Milieu*. De Chardin was a Jesuit, a scientist of anthropology, a mystic, an explorer of God's cosmic, holy spirit. I was inspired. Nothing I had read before so filled me with wonder at our Creator-God.

Subsequently, I have pondered many works that have delved into the mystery of creation and its awesome revelation of our Maker. Two recent books, *A Biography of the Spirit* by John C. Haughey and *The Order of Time* by Carlo Rovelli, continue our exploration

of the relationship between God and the universe. They deserve your reflection.

A before Christ example of awe at creation and its author is today's Hebraic Scripture, which speaks to a receptive Jewish-Greek audience. We hear from the Book of Wisdom. Perspective is given its reader as the author is emphatic about God's grandeur. In these final weeks of the Church's liturgical year, as it contemplates "last things," how wise of it to provide us with a look at first and present things, opening our person to divine splendor and divine reconciling integrity.

Today we are hearing more laments focused on our busyness, our over-work, our multi-tasking, our noise. We are urged to discover silence, contemplation, a wholeness with a still center. The wonder of where we are is available to us in dynamic sciences that invite us to deepen our experience of our Creator-God and of Jesus' paschal mystery.

In a Church aware of life's sacramental dimensions, we, of all God-believers, need to attend to God's relentless creation. An abiding faith must also be restless as it explores the intimate, staggering mystery that is creation. We are members of a gigantic, cosmic web of life, a sacred process, always being reborn. An infinite longing, a deep incarnation, is with us and awaits us. Like Zacchaeus in today's Gospel, we should long to see Jesus and accept his salvation. God does not desire to be a stranger. In Christ, we see an accompanying gift, even to unjust suffering itself. In us pulses a divine energy always longing for a holy communion.

Spend some time thinking about why you are here. Wonder at the creative cosmos that surrounds you. Recognize the power of love to enable you to see beyond appearances. Everything is engaged in a transforming energy that is calling us to be one.

Zacchaeus came down from his place. Jesus came to his home. His home now lies within you and in your neighbor and all of creation. Come out of being singular. Get in touch with an immense story. So, you will be filled with God.

November 10, 2019  
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

**2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14; Psalm 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38**

It is commonplace for those who believe in an afterlife to assume that it is like life here and now, only perfect. Thus, our relationships here remain there, although they are without the infection of sin. A recently deceased priest-friend of mine told me that he believed that pasta in heaven was always perfectly cooked and that the sauces were made from scratch. Do not most believers assume that their relationships here continue in eternal life?

Today's Gospel has Jesus teaching the Sadducees, who did not believe in any form of resurrection, that there is a distinction between "this age" and "the coming age." Earth is not heaven. Heaven is not earth. However, there is surely life after death. Everyone shares one identity, albeit uniquely. Everyone is a child of God. This is true in this life. It remains true in resurrected life. All will be transformed. All will be glorified. Any attempts to capture this reality with analogies from this world will be wanting.

Paul, in today's Thessalonian's text, gets to the heart of these matters when he simply confirms that God's presence is always with us, seeking our well-being. This is especially good news when we are suffering from injustices, poor health, and aging. It is good to know God has your back. It is wonderfully recognizable when we incarnate this truth in our loving care of one another.

There are those in our world who believe that resurrected life will confirm with rewards their violent behavior toward their enemies. Recent pontiffs have taught us that such beliefs have no place in any genuine, religious tradition. They are aberrations to justify terror. Such ways of thinking and acting deform one's character, insulting the divine image in which all have been created. We are challenged by Jesus to love our enemies while simultaneously seeking a restorative and corrective justice. No easy ministry is this.

As you come to Eucharist today, recall that you should labor to become what you are receiving. This action always should be one of courage,

for we do not know the specific consequences of doing so in our daily ways of relating. Much may be asked of us in partnering with Christ in the transforming of this world. But be assured all will be well. God does not abandon us. An amazing grace is ours to share. Check your experiences. Have not all endings become new beginnings?

November 17, 2019  
Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Malachi 3:19-20; Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19**

Today's gospel passage from Luke contains the very accusation that Jewish religious leaders will use to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. This alone deserves his death. In truth, Jesus' criticism of Judaic religious officials is squarely within its prophetic tradition. Malachi's terrifying imagery is meant to be a challenge, as final times approach, to turn away from sinful attitudes and behaviors that make the temple sacrifices hypocritical. There is no excuse for not doing good. Paul alerts us today that being a busy-body rather than laboring in service to others is a significant handicap to being a faithful disciple. It is certainly no way to prepare for final days.

Since I was a child, I have been told that I am a temple, sacred and holy. Simultaneously, I was warned not to abuse this reality. A temple can be destroyed. I should never partner with or solely be someone who would act sacrilegiously. Doing so insults my Creator and brings irreparable damage to my identity. But justice and forgiveness can kiss. Healing and renewal are not only possible, but to be encouraged. Persistent purification is our handmaid.

Most of us are not running in a hundred-yard dash. A marathon demands that we pace our energies so as to keep on keeping on. At our center must be the vision of a compassionate God who is our companion on this life-journey. Never abandoned, we can be attentive to what our pilgrimage asks of us as we stay focused through all adversities. In union with Christ, we are indestructible.

We are responsible for and with one another. No one should be alone, forgotten, alienated to confront troubled times. Every darkness needs



a light. Where will that light appear for those in places such as nursing homes, hospice centers, war zones, immigration and refugee centers? Is Christ to be absent from such venues? Are not people there temples of God's Spirit? Who will be Eucharist for them? What kind of response is one of indifference or judgment?

Imagine yourself trapped in such circumstances. Would you not hunger for a communion of compassion? "Last things" are never "final things." There is always a "keeping on," even through death. You and I will inevitably be in one or more of these venues. Who will be there? Who will come to our temple to reverence the Creator-Spirit within us?

Be prepared now to merge your gift of self with your neighbor. Remember Jesus was once one of these forsaken ones. Pray you do not sleep or flee from being church. As we end Eucharist today, commit to respond to its final exhortation. "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." "Thanks be to God."

## November 24, 2019 Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

**2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43**

This last weekend of the liturgical year celebrates Jesus, the Christ, under the title of king. I cannot think of a title that Jesus would least identify with, given this ministry. Kings are always associated with wealth, power, and images of hierarchical authority. In truth, in particular historical periods, Roman pontiffs have taken on such trappings.

Jesus claims no power except that of the servant of God's will. He embraces that will in all that he proclaims and lives. Truly he invites us to be in communion with him as servants of God's will, one, embracing unity-in-love. The hallmarks of this divine kingdom are fidelity, reconciliation, suffering even through death, and a complete transformation, graced with peace.

When Pope Pius XI, in 1925, saw the crumbling of old royal kingdoms after World War I, he saw new ideologies questing for

a dominating power appearing in old and new nations. Nazism, Communism, and totalitarian Socialism were suddenly new forces seeking to claim human allegiances. In creating this solemnity, he wanted to challenge these emerging forms of governance. Thus, his attention turned to Jesus, the Christ, as “King.” ruler of human hearts, minds, and souls. We have a king unlike all other historical claimants. This king’s integrity embraces a passion and crucifixion to become the incarnation of glory. No candidate to be king could be more counter-cultural.

Most of all, Pius reminded the world that none of us, no matter our earthly powers, can claim to be God. There is only one God, and his Son reveals that God, as our companion Creator, our salvation, and our inspiration. True power’s purpose is in service to our human dignity.

This king is not only sovereign, but intimately loving toward us. God’s governance is eternal, gracious, humble, righteous, and always seeking our well-being. God desires to rule with forbearance and love. Never forget who the true master of your heart is amidst all that encompasses your life. God is a genuine public servant.

Our vocation is to partner with God in this service. Like Jesus, we must cling to God’s will. We know that will. It is that we have life, and have it to the full. As time goes by, and as histories are told, may we bear God’s presence to this creation. The kingdom of God is begun. It has yet to be completed.

Live well your role on life’s stage. Creation awaits your service. Seek to be now what you hope to be forever, the King’s obedient servant, partnering with everyone knowing and doing God’s will.

December 1, 2019  
First Sunday of Advent (Year A)

**Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 12:11-14; Matthew 24:37-44**

The liturgical calendar says that it is Advent. But what about you? Are you caught unawares? Are you already thinking of Christmas? Is Advent just a Sunday tradition?

Advent should be a wake-up time. Slow down. Take nothing for granted. Is not your conversion a process, not a *"fait accompli"*? Are you paying attention to Advent's Scriptures, chosen to ignite your conversion anew? Being caught unawares in anything proves to be discomfoting. You are a mystery invited to be the kingdom of God, a mystery both now and yet to be.

Jesus uses the Hebraic story of Noah to alert his contemporaries, and us, that lack of attention to God's here-and-now presence will leave you outside awareness of the Word made flesh.

Paul urges us to awake from sleep. Salvation is near. It comes in thousands of ways, all centered in Christ. Is not charity an endless appeal from the world's poor, disenfranchised, alienated, violated, and vulnerable? How can one have peace without justice? Isn't every hour "the hour" for our awakening and putting on of Christ? Jesus came as a displaced person, not in expected royalty. Eucharist comes in simple elements, not in splendid feasts.

What is asked of us as believers as we keep vigil for the Lord? Complacency is not a virtue. So, Advent's first weekend alerts us to not be caught unawares. Mystery is not revealed in abstractions. In our world, it is incarnate. But you must expectantly look. Seeking it is not an option. Doing so is your calling, part of your identity in being human.

Advent begins with scriptural warnings to be existential, to be alive to these moments. We cannot escape mundane decisions about holiday decorating and gift giving. But such things may take on sacramental significance. Mystery invites us to greater depths. Can you make Advent live in practicing corporal works of mercy? Are there not forgotten or abandoned souls that need your presence? Can your giving be selfless and less focused on reciprocal exchanges? Can you be the minister of God's kingdom suddenly surprising those who think of it as a postmortem? Saying "Yes" to these and similar questions will make Advent become Christmas for those truly in need of its Spirit.

This is your "watching time" for the Lord. Simultaneously, this is your time of sharing the Lord with you. Notice the dynamic of the Advent season is never disconnected from its Christmas goal. They are mutual realities, one mystery. You are the beneficiary of their

graces as well as the mediators of grace. Rejoice! It is Advent time, and you are to be its bearer of Good News to all.

## December 8, 2019 Second Sunday of Advent

**Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17; Romans 15:4-9;  
Matthew 3:1-12**

Three voices of Advent address us this weekend. All three (Isaiah, Paul, and Matthew) are voices of hope. Now, hope is a slippery virtue. It is usually needed in a context of anxiety, although anxiety does not produce it.

Rather hope springs from a confidence that things as they are need not be so. There are available reforms that can transform one's circumstances. Peace awaits. Hope has contact with a vision in which we can partner with real goods that can change us and our contexts. Things as they are need not define us. Reality bears potential for renewal and saving grace. Time measures motion. Getting stuck in the moment is not an option.

So, John the Baptist buries his people in cleansing waters, only to raise them up to new life. John heralds great good news. In his day, a herald was a soldier with a special mission. He would bring news of his sovereign's battles on behalf of the defense of his people. The good news was one of victory.

John was convinced that his calls to reform were preliminary to God's kingdom unfolding in their midst. Reforms/battles are anxious days. But they hold the promise of bringing us into rejoicing and peace.

But we have a mission in such times, indeed, like times such as our own. We want Christmas. We do not hope for a singular festive day. No, we long for endless times of communion with God's will. This demands of us some winnowing, some core reforms. The gift giving and receiving Advent challenges us to be about is identified in our being compassionate presences for one another. Particular emphases are on the victims among us of greed, prejudices, and indifference. To them we must come as family, brothers and sisters of God. We exclude

no one from this mission. We dip our fingers into holy water fonts, thus reminding ourselves of a baptismal promise we have yet to keep. Christmas awaits our Advent pilgrimages toward a new earth.

Is your Advent allowing you to be a voice of hope? Let us hope so! Doing this brings Christmas and its joy. Our world awaits this good news.

These are busy days. Do not become distracted from your ministry to be a bearer of hope. Accompany nature as more light comes to these days. Switch on your heart-light. You are an incarnation of God's spirit. Be good news for your neighbor. Advent is our coming toward and becoming the light of Christ. Can anything bring more hope? Christmas may be a calendar day. But it must not stay there. We have promises to keep. We have brothers and sisters hoping for a more just world. We can, and should be, a Christmas presence.

## December 15, 2019 Third Sunday of Advent

**Isaiah 35:1-6, 10; Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11**

Have you ever anticipated someone's coming into your home, your workplace, your life, or your neighborhood and community? I recall when I was in first grade getting excited about getting a puppy, a Cocker Spaniel. I remember going to visit relatives in Cleveland. Just a chance to broaden my world created an eager joy. Santa's arrival on Christmas Eve was an anticipated delight in all my childhood Christmases. My godfather's return from the war in Korea was looked forward to with hope. Sacramental moments such as First Communion, First Reconciliation, and Confirmation were anticipated with wonder and gratitude.

I am sure you can recall many anticipations of a joyful nature. Isaiah looks forward to the God of all creation personally entering human history. He detects that reality, while not complete, nonetheless is already appearing in part when signs of liberation break through the current bondage of sinfulness. There is no anticipation more joyful than one that frees anyone feeling trapped, confined, or imprisoned by decisions that have produced chaos, alienation, or

addictions.

This weekend of Advent bids us rejoice because the Lord is near. In truth, the incarnation of God, present to and for us, will be revealed as having been with us all along. It is our awareness that has been shrouded. The one to be born will shed light into darkness. Thus, we will have scales lifted from our eyes. A reward renewing attentiveness to an always present serving and loving God will be operative. We will be assured that “the Lord is with you,” always. You are not forgotten, not abandoned. John the Baptist invites in his historical moment that a new and forever era is on the horizon. A process is unfolding that identifies God’s true nature, a God forgiving, compassionate, always seeking our welfare. We are now in gospel times. Hear the Good News of what is happening. Be empowered by it. Allow it to define and interpret all reality.

Some joys can be quite ephemeral. They do not last and their promise cannot sustain us in joy. But other joys, core joys, never fade. They enter our vision as operative memories that continue to interpret for us the kingdom of God with us, unfolding in connections that nurture us to be more fully alive than we could have imagined. As the star guides ancients, so watch for stars to guide you. Bethlehem is more than a place. It is a persistently unfolding revelation that puts you into its story as a player in creation’s trajectory toward the renewal of this earth and beyond. What a mystery we play in! Rejoice! Discover who is with you. Discover whose love you can count on. Rejoice! All this is grace. Recognize your worth in God’s eyes. Live up to it. Rejoice! Your birth continues. Rejoice!

## December 22, 2019 Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6; Romans 1:1-7; Matthew 1:18-24**

Silence is good, but not always. Gospel authors (indeed Sacred Scripture, in general) share with their readers this ambiguity about silence. It is generally acknowledged that communication is critical to healthy human relations. But silent meditation, including listening to

dreams, can play a role in nurturing lasting, loving commitments. How important are silence and communication as partners, as perhaps two sides of the same coin, in all human relationships!

Listening and speaking are symbiotic players. Keeping them in balance is crucial to mature growth as a person. Sometimes we might think God listens more than God speaks. As other moments, God's mediated speaking can seem totalitarian. Just ask fictional Job.

In Matthew's infancy narrative, the featured character is Joseph. That is not an easy role since he never speaks, but his actions reveal a trusting and committed listener. Joseph might relate well to Simon and Garfunkel's classic "Hello, darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk with you again." Like his forbearer, Joseph, one of twelve sons of Jacob, Joseph's dreams speak volumes. And they demand a response. That response can change everything. In Hebrew Joseph's response, a nation goes to Egypt and a 600-year stage is set for a listening Moses. In the New Testament, through Joseph's response, a world is saved. Its author, the Christ, will rely on Joseph's integrity and his nurturing Judaic presence, a collaboration with his wife Mary. Together, in silence and speaking, they will love each other and their God in the gift of a surprising child.

A man, Joseph, raised to obey the law, will listen to his heart. He will commit to a young maiden, Mary, whose child is a mystery bound to a revelatory and redemptive mission. Wife and child will depend upon his servant ministry as he lives and dies on their behalf. For Joseph cares for the two most important persons in all of human history. What a mystery. For nearly three decades, in a Roman backwater place, he will be responsible, reliable, and watchful. John the Baptist will become known as the precursor to Jesus' public life. This man, Joseph, will be the precursor, witness, and formator, along with his wife, of the humanity that will help us to appreciate God's true nature as one with our own nature.

As we come now to the precipice of Christmas, are we ready to take Joseph's plunge into a responsible, faithful, caring life? Are you ready to nurture life's extraordinary potential for a divine-human communion? It is not an accident that our first post-Christmas liturgy celebrates the Holy Family.

The fruit of Joseph's marriage is our very Eucharist. Make his virtues

your own. He is critical to that real presence that we consume. He witnesses to a life that our lives must share. Take your Communion gift from here to hearts that await your compassionate caring. Be Eucharist for and with one another!

## December 25, 2019 The Nativity of the Lord

**Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13; Titus 2:11-14;  
Luke 2:1-14**  
**Day: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; Hebrews 1:1-6;  
John 1:1-18**

Christmas has come again. So, our memories of Christmases past will return to us. Whatever we have planned for this Christmas will now unfold, perhaps with a few surprises. For a few thousand years now in our world, a wondrous diversity of cultural expressions has paid homage to Christmas. It is hard to imagine that for tens of thousands of years, there was no Christmas. Christmas now is not only highly anticipated, we rely upon its spirit to invite us to be compassionate, generous, and joyful.

Christmas reveals a mysterious, transcendent, surprising love, unimagined and timeless. God has become one-of-us; our identity is no longer in doubt. We are mediators of God's spirit. This is a choice, not an assurance.

Is it any wonder that such a possibility has elicited beautiful music and expansive art. We can hardly wait for each Christmas to come so we can decorate our homes, streets, businesses, and public places. Worship places themselves are now glistening with candles, wreaths, creches, poinsettias, and tree-fitting baubles of all sorts. It is hard not to be humming a familiar Christmascarol.

We, Christians, on this day proclaim glad tidings to our world, indeed, to all of creation. This day celebrates a beginning, a birth of a child to a Jewish couple not at home. A couple obliged by a ruthless empire to do a census of its conquered peoples. This couple is poor, but they have each other's love. So much to them in unknown. There will be so many surprises. Now, however, they



experience the good news of a child.

This child, too soon a man, will become the center of history. All human stories will radiate to him and from him. This child comes in time and place, yet transcends both. In and through this child, we will come to know the true identity of our Creator. We will experience that identity in Jesus. He will enflesh for us what it means to be human in the divine image. In him, we will sense our need for changing, growing, and being God's people. This is a process of more than a lifetime. Its completion is an amazing grace.

This year features Luke's nativity narrative at Midnight and John's poetic announcement all day. The ordinary produces the extraordinary for Luke. For John, when God speaks, creation happens and in time that Word takes flesh. God continues to say "Jesus" until a new world comes to forever be.

We gather at Eucharist on Christmas Eve and Day to hear God's word in Sacred Scripture, over bread and wine, and to each other in peace and good will. What we do at liturgy at Christmas, indeed on every day, is prayerfully allow the spoken Word made flesh to dwell in our hearts. So, Merry Christmas to all. Become what you have received. Bring glad tidings to all. Christmas lives, because you live with its power to be and bring good news.

## December 29, 2019

### The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

**Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

For this feast day to gift us, allow me to question where it has been and yet to suggest where it really ought to be.

When I was a child, I experienced the Holy Family as idyllic, a perfect communion of persons. Joseph was always featured with a carpenter's tools, working at his trade. Mary was always weaving clothing or preparing meals. Jesus, as a boy, was always there, attentive to parental commands. The Holy Family was the Waltons of Nazareth or the

Cleavers of Galilee. Jesus spent every moment in perfect obedience to his parents. The message was clear: aspire to be like this family.

My mother had five children in eight years. None of us stood around eager to be obedient. There were no perfect children in our family. In fact, there were none in any family I knew. Dad was a diligent worker and a faithful husband. But he would not be known for his gentleness and compassion. Mom was a bit overwhelmed, often wearied by daily chores and trying to keep up with what we were doing. To my parents, and I suspect to parents then and today, the picture of the Holy Family was unreal, if not downright discouraging; an impossible model.

In truth, Sacred Scripture is mostly silent about Joseph. Mary, infrequently mentioned, seems often confused by her son. Jesus has no nuclear family in his adult life. He is really formed by a village and its Judaic culture. In his public ministry, that family village is hostile to his vision of God and of God's kingdom.

This feast is not meant to celebrate an idealized perfection. There are no sinless members of families. What this feast does invite us to consider is how we might become a family with all those who enter our experience. Can we recognize others as our brothers and sisters? Can differences of nation, color, gender, culture, and religion be opportunities for growth and integration?

Today parenting and being family is a struggle as best. That being so, we need each other more than ever. Family can be composed in many ways. Its bonding virtues are what is important. The center of those virtues needs to be God, the God revealed in Jesus, the Christ. Then what is so fragile can be strong. Then compassion and mercy can bind up wounds. Then the Eucharist can nurture within and between is its sacred gift of life.

I have experienced holy families. I have not experienced perfect ones. However, I know that whenever I am at Holy Communion, it is my mission to become what I am consuming. To whatever degree I can be faithful to my "Amen," family can result. You, too, are challenged to create a holy family. It is a worldwide ministry. It is sacrificial. It is at the core of every vocation. Do not opt out, but opt in. We need holy families everywhere.





## *EUCCHARIST & CULTURE*

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

### Art Review



#### **SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST**

Sculpture marble  
Collection, Église  
Saint Jean Baptiste  
New York, New  
York

Bernard Camiré,  
SSS

This statue of Saint John the Baptist, very appropriately, greets worshipers and visitors as they enter the Blessed Sacrament Congregation's Church of Saint Jean Baptiste in New York City. Details concerning the provenance of the sculpture are not available, but it is most certainly of Italian origin. The lack of information, however, does not diminish the rewarding experience of reflecting on its particular features.

The Baptist's lithe frame and full, tousled hair speak of a man in his prime, while the rock-ground on which he stands reminds us that he made his appearance in the Judean desert by the edge of the River Jordan (Mt 3:1-6). His right arm is raised in a gesture of announcement that Israel's Messiah has arrived (Lk 3:15, 16). The gesture may also be seen as one of beckoning to his contemporaries to turn to the Lord in repentance and receive its baptismal expression (Mk 1:4, 5).

John is clothed in camel's hide (Mt 4:4), of which an interesting feature is a hanging portion of leg and hoof, as if to emphasize the dromedary-origin of John's wear. His left arm and hand embrace a tall staff to which a small transverse branch is attached, thus forming a cross and therefore a symbol of his Master's redemptive death, a death in which he would share as a martyr at the hands of Herod Antipas (Mt 14:10, 11). Hanging from the cross is a water flask, a necessity for sojourning in a wasteland. Also, the water-containing flask may be seen as pointing to John's baptism of water that was in preparation for the One mightier than he who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Mt 3:11, 12).

Lastly, but not of insignificance, is the lamb seated behind the Baptist. Here is a standard symbol of the Lamb of God who, as John announces, "takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Here then, at the church's entrance and in proximity to the baptismal font, we have

a welcoming sculpture that speaks revealingly not only of the Lord's precursor, but also of the redemptive grace celebrated and received therein. As we begin this Advent season, John the Baptist's words and his striking image direct our attention once again to the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

## Poetry

### Letter to Father Kolbe

Father Kolbe,  
We met in the library  
in Seattle.  
I had known of you.  
Once long ago I'd picked up  
the same book, but impatient and scornful,  
put it back without looking at it.

That day, though,  
I brought it home,  
settled into an empty room,  
and opened to the first page to read:  
surprised by a sudden shock  
of tenderness,  
your radiant life  
filled my mind that day,  
and when I took a break,  
walked down the path, ran into Hiroshi,  
visibly astonished when I gave him  
an off-the-ground hug. . . .

You gave up math, science, invention,  
or rather you gave it all to your way  
of faith and all to Love;  
you wanted to foster the good at all times  
and then you continued your giving ways  
in the death camp,  
you gave all your love away,  
no matter where you were;  
easy or risking life and torture to love,  
that love for you was the Real.

You insisted God was near to all in grace,

regardless of race or creed,  
and we should try to make  
our own will one with his.

You held them all close in the cruel,  
suffering hell of Auschwitz;  
gave your life for one you did not know;  
uplifting all those dying with you,  
even then you looked upward  
with the eyes of love.

Mystical son, ever looking through the gates of love,  
your light continues.

Joan Lerman

The Reminder:  
“Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring,”  
recorded by pianist Dinu Lipatti

I became religious  
about listening to every news item  
on the radio,  
and viewing them online.  
I pushed a button in my vehicle,  
and heard the most recent reports  
of crimes, ugliness, and unimaginable derangement  
as an everyday occurrence.

The airwaves,  
the screens,  
imported their data  
into my consciousness.

Then suddenly one day  
I heard it,  
softly in the distance:

As a procession,  
the hushed notes of the piano  
took over with strength  
from the depths of silence:

“Open the doors, the doors!” they called,  
heralding the arrival of Truth, Love  
Incarnate.

As if doing a double take within,  
I thought,  
Can it really be true?  
Strength, all-mercy, something always known. . . .

But he has already entered here,  
walking amongst us, sparking love’s reminders  
into our consciousness,  
taking our hands  
into his hands.

The deep melodic lines of the bass tones  
finally ring out their path,  
while the intricate treble voices create fresh, new patterns,  
turning themselves into homage  
like flowers strewn before him,  
onto the walkway  
at his feet.

“Open all the windows,” ordered the Mother Superior  
as the young nun Thérèse breathed her last breath.

Like then,  
all is silent,  
but I am filled  
with holy reminders  
of Love Incarnate.

The piano tones retain an echo of themselves,  
like invisible traces  
to nourish us  
in the quiet, live air.  
A breeze stirs gently.

We can only respond in thankfulness  
as we receive and drink  
of this strength, life, and hope.

## Book Reviews



**PRAISE GOD IN  
HIS HOLY PLACE:  
PSALMS AND  
CANTICLES OF  
SCRIPTURE  
FOR  
EUCHARISTIC  
ADORATION**  
Bernard J. Camiré,  
SSS

Cleveland, Ohio:  
Emmanuel  
Publishing, 2019  
viii, 210 pp.,  
Donation

In the Introduction to his book, Bernard Camiré defines the criteria around which his book is written. They are the psalms as prayer and the “four ends of the sacrifice” from the spirituality of Saint Peter Julian Eymard.

Father Camiré comments that the growing use of the liturgy of the hours, particularly among lay people, has fostered a greater familiarity with the psalms. He wrote this book to make the psalms and canticles more available in a user-friendly way in prayer and in Eucharistic adoration.

The second influence, as noted above, the “four ends” is drawn from the spirituality of Saint Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868). For well over 60 years, Camiré has been a member of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, which was founded by Father Eymard, and he would have therefore been thoroughly imbued with the spirituality of Eymard. A key point of that spirituality was that Eucharistic prayer should flow from and be characterized by the movements in the Eucharistic celebration itself. Camiré’s four divisions of the psalms (praise, thanksgiving, petition, and atonement) are Eymard’s four divisions.

One could choose to do a whole period of prayer using just the “praise” psalms or the “thanksgiving” psalms, or one could divide one’s prayer time in four parts and dedicate each part to one of the four categories. It was Camiré’s intention, in putting this prayer aid together, to foster the use of the psalms in a reflective way during Eucharistic prayer. His divisions make this prayer form easier.

Camiré should be commended for using the *Revised Grail Psalms* translations. They are a much easier read.

Father Camiré has created a wonderful tool for those who find the psalms inspirational or who might want to delve into the psalms and see if they are helpful in Eucharistic prayer. I intend to introduce this prayer aid to the members of my parish who have expressed an interest in resurrecting Eucharistic adoration as part of our centennial year celebration. Copies of it could be left in a parish’s adoration chapel with a brief introduction on how the book can be used.

My only critique of the book, which could be remedied in a second edition, is that Father Camiré seems to presume of the reader a familiarity with Eymard's "four ends" spirituality. A further explanation of this could be enhanced in the Introduction for those unfamiliar with this prayer orientation. Outside of that small point, I highly recommend this book to persons interested in enhancing their Eucharistic prayer with the psalms.

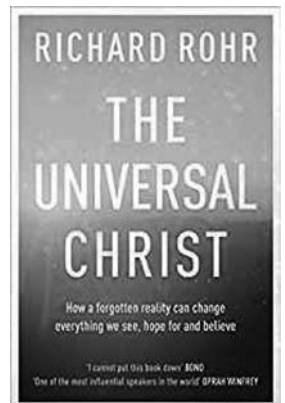
Patrick J. Riley, DMin  
Book Review Editor, *Emmanuel*

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Years ago, a friend of mine had just seen a Woody Allen movie. I asked her how it was. She replied, "You know how he is. He hits a lot and misses a lot." That's my reaction to Richard Rohr's latest book, although, in my opinion, he misses a lot more than he hits. He joins with theologians who reinterpret John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us") as if the Word became every creature, including all of inanimate creation. He does not explain the rest of the verse, which refers to "a Father's only son." Nor does he refer to the Prologue's insistence that the Baptist was not the One (Jn 1:8). Quite clearly John 1:14 refers to the Word becoming flesh in the individual Jesus, not the entire cosmos.

Throughout the book, Rohr mentions his pet black Labrador retriever as if she incarnated God. For him, the Divine Presence inhabits every living and every material thing. "The Christ Mystery" refers to the "indwelling of the Divine Presence in everyone and everything since the beginning of time as we know it" (1-2). Rohr uses the term "Christ" as if it meant "*the transcendent within* of every 'thing' in the universe" (5, italics in original). It becomes for him another name for everything in its fullness. But, historically, the designation "Christ" refers to a reality quite different from what Rohr thinks. Unfortunately, his arbitrary definition deprives his theology of much needed depth.

Rohr claims, "I don't want this to be a strictly 'theological book' . . .," and it's not (7). It consists of a series of meditations designed to shock the reader into an awareness of the Divine Presence in creation. Normally, this exercise would take the form of a theology of grace, while perhaps also developing the sacramental principle, but Rohr wants it to qualify as a theology of incarnation (13). That way, we all can be what Jesus is,



**THE UNIVERSAL  
CHRIST:  
HOW A  
FORGOTTEN  
REALITY  
CAN CHANGE  
EVERYTHING WE  
SEE,  
HOPE FOR, AND  
BELIEVE**  
Richard Rohr  
New York, New  
York: Convergent,  
2019  
260 pp., \$26.00



and his dog too!

Rohr claims that God loves things by becoming them (16). But doesn't God love things by creating them? God allows all of creation to exist by participation in his very being. This is not new theology. Mystics have long been able to perceive God in a blade of grass without calling the grass the incarnation of God. The grass remains splendid in its own right as grace.

Rohr's enthusiasm results in too many ambiguities, contradictions, and errors. For example, after rejoicing in the divine incarnation of his dog (37, 52, 160-161), he denies that technically "Jesus is God" (19). He also contends that the best thing about Mary was that she was not God (127). If he had considered Aquinas' subtle but important distinctions in ST III, Qu. 16, he could have achieved a much more powerful theology of the presence of God.

Rohr exhibits a deep confidence in human experience. "Just learn to trust and draw forth your own deepest experience, and you will know the Christ all day every day — before and after you ever go to any kind of religious service" (53). Rohr writes as if humankind were never expelled from the Garden, as if its original goodness were never marred.

He thinks of love as completely natural and self-evident (70). He has forgotten Toni Morrison's admonition that "wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, [and] stupid people love stupidly. . . ." At least some pedophiles really do feel that they are loving youngsters when they in fact abuse them. He refers to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow" (71) and Paul Ricoeur's "second naïveté" (244) without citing their works for the benefit of those who may want to search for the precise meanings of those terms.

Rohr makes the argument that reality is cruciform, and that, therefore, believers would do well to gaze at a crucifix, claiming that it is already an image of the resurrection (151, 155). While such an exercise can certainly benefit those who pray, inexplicably, he criticizes those who gaze at the Eucharist, a devotion that can produce profound results (136).

Another inconsistency involves René Girard, who criticizes sacrificial

violence. While Rohr endorses Girard, he recommends the truth of myths, apparently forgetting that Girard produced a massive critique of myths as stories that consistently justify the sacrificial violence that Rohr so deplores (145, 171).

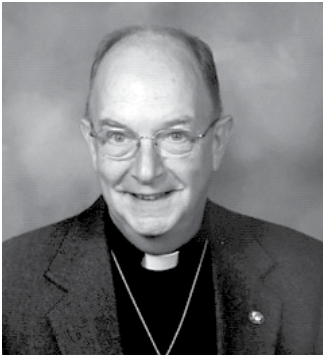
Rohr also considers the resurrection as a natural pattern of creation. It happens in the due course of nature. He thinks he can find clues in the recurring cycles of nature (169-170). Yet a mere four pages later, he claims that resurrection is as special as creation out of nothing — hardly a “natural” occurrence (174). Many other such difficulties arise in his text.

Readers would do much better to spend their time with Gerhardt Lohfink’s *Is This All There Is? On Resurrection and Eternal Life* (Liturgical Press, 2017), where he takes up the themes that Rohr has addressed. Lohfink clearly unfolds Scripture’s reverence for all creation and its relationship to the resurrection. He explains that, when John wrote that the Word became flesh, he consciously opposed thoughts about redemption as the liberation of a soul from a body (175). It has nothing to do with the incarnation of the universe. Lohfink further describes how matter, pets, and gardens become part of the new creation through a believer’s relationship with them (176). Perhaps most importantly, he advises that people not try to picture such unimaginable realities since they arise in a radically different context from this world (191).

Rather than trying to unravel the tangled web that Rohr has woven, readers will want to examine Lohfink’s book for a much more sober, consistent, and profound approach to the topic.



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Vice Rector and Professor of Systematic Theology  
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Cleveland, Ohio



## EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

William Fickel, SSS

Saint Vincent de Paul Church  
Holiday, Florida

The Eucharist is dynamic! Hidden as Sacrament is the fullness of the Divine Mystery; the living and active personal communication of God as the Body of Christ.



At our Congregation's Provincialate in Cleveland, Ohio, you can find the *Atomic Monstrance* designed by the late Father Daniel Roach, SSS. Surrounding the placement of the host is the constellation of the universe. Citing the Book of Revelation is the vision of heavenly worship, "an open door to heaven" (4:1). The four living creatures, symbols of the evangelists, are on the four arms of the cross. The atomic symbol swirls around the host, conveying Saint Peter Julian Eymard's message of the Eucharist as a fire.

Four years at Eymard Preparatory Seminary in Hyde Park, New York, where the Atomic Monstrance set on a globe of the world stirred my imagination with Mass and prolonged periods of quiet spent in prayer. A large wall map of the world showed the countries where the Congregation established communities. In words taken from Luke 12:49, "I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing!" Peter Julian interpreted that fire to be the One living in the Eucharist.

Saint Peter Julian's greatest gift was the experience of God's love in the Eucharist. He desired for everyone the grace of being an adorer, of encountering Christ. People in adoration meet the love of God in person. In the act of intimacy with God in prayer, the ego diminishes and the love of God increases. Eymard's vision as a spiritual father was to transform people's lives through the encounter with the risen Christ in the paschal mystery. "The only remedy I know to combat the spiritual indifference of our times is to surround it with fire, the fire of the Eucharist."

I have been somewhat like Father Eymard, "always on the move." Graduating from high school, my classmates characterized me as the happy wanderer: "*Val-deri, val-dera! Come join my happy song!*" I am a happy wanderer, with the Eucharist at the center of my life. I travel to direct contemplative retreats and be absorbed in the silence of prayer. The poor hold a place in my heart, as Christ is the poor one in our lives. The Eucharist draws us to a communion of life. My life is richly blessed by the laity, who pray and sing with me: "*Val-deri, val-dera! Come join my happy song!*"



# General Index 2019

## PAGINATION

1-68	JANUARY/FEBRUARY
69-144	MARCH/APRIL
145-208	MAY/JUNE
209-272	JULY/AUGUST
273-348	SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER
349-420	NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

## AUTHORS

Emmanuel Staff	Celebrating the Apostle of the Eucharist.....	217
Bednar, Gerald	The Rule of Law, Not the Law of Rules: A Gospel Perspective.....	305
Billy, Dennis	Basil Pennington on the Eucharist .....	21
	Catherine de Hueck Doherty on the Eucharist.....	222
	Henri Nouwen on the Eucharist.....	87
	J.R.R. Tolkien on the Eucharist.....	370
	Jean Vanier on the Eucharist .....	289
	Robert Hugh Benson on the Eucharist.....	155
Camiré, Bernard	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Two Sons.....	318
	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard .....	243
	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Lost Sheep.....	113
	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Net.....	36
	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.....	173
	Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Wedding Feast .....	385
Cummings, Owen	From Heart and Soul to Stone and Mortar.....	366
	Musings on the Church and Theology.....	297
DeSanctis, Michael	“A Crib Fit for a King”.....	382
Falardeau, Ernest	Pope Francis’ Remarkable Ecumenical Record.....	31
Gribble, Richard	Christ Is at the Door.....	361
Kroeger, James	Discovering the Rich Treasures of Popular Piety, Part I.....	276
	Discovering the Rich Treasures of Popular Piety, Part II.....	352
	The Fifty-first International Eucharistic Congress: Its Missionary Challenges, Part II .....	4
McCann, Mark	Eucharist and the Extraordinary Power of Ordinary Time .....	169
Owczarczak, Robert	Body, Mind and Spirit.....	99
Parachin, Victor	“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”: Living Out the Prayer of Saint Francis .....	237
	Bishop Fulton J. Sheen: Life is Worth Living.....	105
	Ministry Leadership Lessons from Moses.....	284

## AUTHORS (continued)

Pelton, Robert	Marcos Gregorio McGrath: His Initial Contributions to the "Bridge Theology".....	13
	The Role of the Laity in the Catholic Church: Reflections on the Experience of the Church in Chile.....	72
Riga, Peter	Can We Offer Our Sufferings?.....	96
Romero, Mary Jane	The Sacramentality of the Church.....	231
Schineller, Peter	Love, and Believe What you Will.....	164
Schueller, Anthony	Eucharist as a Reconciling Event.....	148
	Meal and Sign of the New Covenant.....	212
Zupez, John	Is the Mass a Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice?.....	378
	The Words of Everlasting Life .....	84

## TITLES

"A Crib Fit for a King"	Michael DeSanctis.....	382
Basil Pennington on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy .....	21
Bishop Fulton J. Sheen: Life is Worth Living	Victor Parachin .....	105
Body, Mind and Spirit	Robert Owczarczak.....	99
Can We Offer Our Sufferings?	Peter Riga .....	96
Catherine de Hueck Doherty on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy .....	222
Celebrating the Apostle of the Eucharist	Emmanuel Staff.....	217
Christ Is at the Door	Richard Gribble .....	361
Discovering the Rich Treasures of Popular Piety, Part I	James Kroeger .....	276
Discovering the Rich Treasures of Popular Piety, Part II	James Kroeger .....	352
Eucharist and the Extraordinary Power of Ordinary Time	Mark McCann.....	169
Eucharist as a Reconciling Event	Anthony Schueller .....	148
From Heart and Soul to Stone and Mortar	Owen Cummings.....	366
Henri Nouwen on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy .....	87
Is the Mass a Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice?	John Zupez.....	378
J.R.R. Tolkien on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy .....	370
Jean Vanier on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy .....	289
Love, and Believe What you Will	Peter Schineller .....	164
"Make Me a Channel of Your Peace": Living Out the Prayer of Saint Francis	Victor Parachin .....	237
Marcos Gregorio McGrath: His Initial Contributions to the "Bridge Theology"	Robert Pelton.....	13
Meal and Sign of the New Covenant	Anthony Schueller .....	212
Ministry Leadership Lessons from Moses	Victor Parachin .....	284
Musings on the Church and Theology	Owen Cummings.....	297
Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Two Sons	Bernard Camiré .....	318
Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard	Bernard Camiré .....	243

**TITLES (continued)**

Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Lost Sheep	Bernard Camiré ..... 113
Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Net	Bernard Camiré .....36
Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant	Bernard Camiré ..... 173
Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Wedding Feast	Bernard Camiré ..... 385
Pope Francis’ Remarkable Ecumenical Record	Ernest Falardeau .....31
Robert Hugh Benson on the Eucharist	Dennis Billy ..... 155
The Fifty-first International Eucharistic Congress: Its Missionary Challenges, Part II	James Kroeger ..... 4
The Role of the Laity in the Catholic Church: Reflections on the Experience of the Church in Chile	Robert Pelton.....72
The Rule of Law, Not the Law of Rules: A Gospel Perspective	Gerald Bednar ..... 305
The Sacramentality of the Church	Mary Jane Romero ..... 231
The Words of Everlasting Life	John Zupez .....84

**POEMS**

A Celtic Prayer	Author Unknown.....59
The Rich Man	Jared Barkan..... 139
Life Rolls on like Thunder after Easter	Patrick Dolan ..... 207
The Host	Philip Kolin ..... 265
eucharistia	Lou Ella Hickman ..... 344
Speaking in Tongues a.k.a. The Miracle of Pentecost Anew	Jared Barkan..... 344
Letter to Father Kolbe	Joan Lerman.....409
The Reminder: “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring”	Joan Lerman.....410

**EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS**

Eucharistic Witness	Beverly Burke .....68
Eucharistic Witness	Choy Ramos..... 144
Eucharistic Witness	RaviEarnest Sebastin ..... 208
Eucharistic Witness	Robert Dew.....272
Eucharistic Witness	Christine Anderson .....348
Eucharistic Witness	William Fickel .....416

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*Anthony Schueller, S.S.S.*

(Signed) Anthony Schueller, S.S.S., Editor, Emmanuel.

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“Live a little more in God as center, and nothing will be a burden; nothing will distract you, you then will be aware of the presence of God who gives life to everything, who sees everything and directs the soul in all its ways.”



*Eymard*  
S.P.S.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard



***John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said:***

***A voice of one crying out in the desert,  
Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight his paths.***

***John wore clothing made of camel's hair  
and had a leather belt around his waist.***

***His food was locusts and wild honey.***

***At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,  
and the whole region around the Jordan  
were going out to him***

***and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River  
as they acknowledged their sins.***

***Matthew 3:1-6***