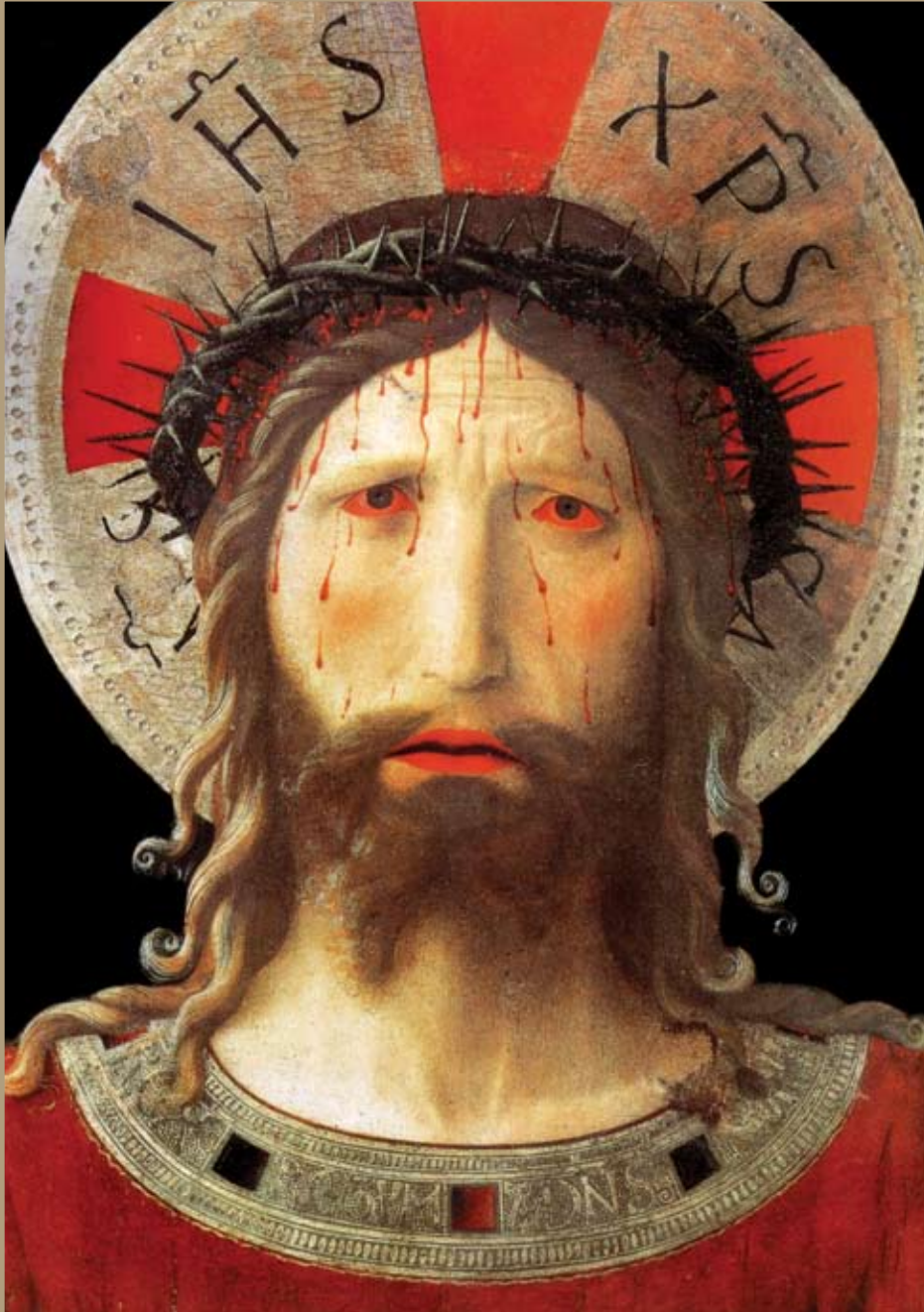


Emmanuel



Eucharistic Spirituality

March/April 2020



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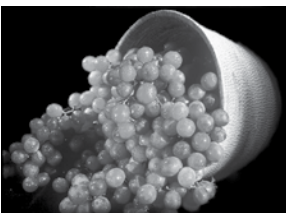
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Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 126 Number 2



EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Scars of Brokenness and Transformation
by James Menkhaus 72

Forgive to Live
by Victor Parachin 78

EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Caryll Houselander on the Eucharist
by Dennis Billy, CSsR 83

EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

The Truth About “Cold,” Modernist
Church Architecture
by Michael DeSanctis 92

EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Pain as Prayer
by Dennis Ruane, SSS 99

Images and Ideas of Prayer
by Stephen Bevans, SVD 101

Eymard Along the Journey
by Michael Perez, SSS 110

EUCCHARIST & CULTURE

Art, Music, Film, Poetry, and Books 132

COLUMNS

From the Editor 70

Pastoral Liturgy 113

Breaking the Word 117

Eucharistic Witness 136



FROM THE EDITOR

As much of the Catholic world was consumed with developments at the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region last October, the Holy See quietly released *Aperuit Illis*, an apostolic letter instituting the Sunday of the Word of God on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time annually. In paragraph 2, Pope Francis writes:

“At the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, I proposed setting aside ‘a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people’ (*Misericordia et Misera*, 7). Devoting a specific Sunday of the liturgical year to the word of God can enable the Church to experience anew how the risen Lord opens up for us the treasury of his word and enables us to proclaim its unfathomable riches before the world.”

In the previous paragraph, the Holy Father quotes Saint Jerome’s hallowed dictum, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

The observance of the inaugural Sunday of the Word of God is already past, but the Church is just now entering into the great penitential season of Lent, intended to renew the grace of baptism in the life of all believers and, particularly, to prepare those who will receive the sacraments of initiation and rebirth at the Easter Vigil and during the Easter season for the surpassing mysteries they will experience.

Throughout the time of the catechumenate, and especially in the final, most intense period of prayer and spiritual formation, the Church’s catechumens and candidates are immersed in the word of God. It can truly be said, “Knowledge of the Scriptures is knowledge of Christ!”

And, of course, this year, they and we will be exposed to the ancient catechumenal readings of Cycle A on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth

Sundays of Lent. These texts from Saint John's Gospel (The Woman at the Well; The Man Born Blind; and The Raising of Lazarus) comprise the oldest set of readings specifically used in the preparation of those about to be baptized. Why are they so significant? Taken together, they closely correspond to the journey of encounter and conversion leading to baptism; and they powerfully convey the importance of faith in Christ as the mark of readiness to follow his way.

One of the beauties and strengths of our Catholic liturgical tradition is that the entire parish can consider and pray the same readings as the elect are doing, even if those who are in final preparation for the sacraments of initiation are not present at every Eucharistic celebration on these pivotal Sundays. In this way, the whole parish family is bound together.

It also unifies the prayer life of the parish, as all focus their prayer and supplication specifically on the complete conversion of the elect. Through these readings, moreover, the faithful can deepen their own conversion in preparation for renewing their baptismal promises.

Wondrously, we move from word to the table of Eucharist, and find Christ in each!



Anthony Schueller, SSS
Senior Editor

In This Issue

Pain, suffering, the struggle to forgive; these are all to frequently part of life's journey. In this Lenten issue of *Emmanuel* there are a number of profound reflections upon these life experiences from a Eucharistic perspective. James Menkhaus offers a meaningful reflection upon the transformative potential of the scars we carry. Victor Parachin shares varied methods of forgiveness. Stephen Bevans and Dennis Ruane help us to pray, whether in the humdrum of daily life or the depths of pain. These coupled with Paul Bernier's reflections on the Word of God make for enriching material to help us through the challenges of our Lenten journey and lead us to new life in Christ.



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Scars of Brokenness and Transformation

by James Menkhaus

How can our wounds help us to become more Christ-like?

James Menkhaus, Ph.D. has published articles on spirituality, social justice, and Christian ethics in numerous journals and is a member of Emmanuel's editorial board.

WHEN JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES DURING THE CODA OF LUKE'S GOSPEL THEY are rightfully shocked at his unpredictable presence. Following his death and fearing persecution, Jesus' followers were hiding when a form appeared in their midst. Clarifying that he was not an apparition or phantom, Jesus confirms his identity through the wounds in his flesh. His hands and feet still bore the marks of suffering from his execution. Eating fish and instructing the disciples, Jesus blesses them and is taken to heaven before their eyes. At no point are we told these wounds were eliminated from Jesus before, during, or after the ascension. Despite a new form, Jesus bore the wounds of his experiences on earth. The wounds that caused his suffering during the passion and confirmed his identity before the disciples, were part of Jesus as he ascended to the Father. The importance of these wounds should not be summarily dismissed.

The appearance in Luke 24 is similar to his encounter with the disciples in John 20. According to John, Jesus passes into a locked room and stands before his followers. However, Thomas was absent from this initial encounter and believes such claims to be spurious fantasy. A week later, Thomas is present when Jesus returns. He is offered the opportunity to place his fingers and hands into the wounds of Jesus. To his shock, Thomas declares, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). Again, Jesus does not only rely on his appearance, but allows the disciples to confirm his identity through close examination of his wounds. Would it not have been enough that a figure appeared in a bolted room or that the figure bore some resemblance to Thomas' friend, Jesus of Nazareth? Perhaps that would have been satisfactory, but Jesus makes special mention of touching his wounds. These moments, in

both gospel accounts, highlight the importance of wounds for the confirmation of identity. In fact, the importance of the wounds of Christ in the appearance narratives may guide us towards a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of our wounds.

Accepting Wounds to Accompany the Wounded

In some cases scars are inflicted by others. These scars may be emotional, psychological, or physical. Fr. Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest and founder of an organization called Homeboy Industries. This Los Angeles based center works with gang members to help them find jobs, undergo rehabilitation, or to “dismantle messages of shame and disgrace” that are often foisted upon them by society.¹ Many stories of the scars worn by these courageous women and men are described in Boyle’s two popular books: *Tattoos on the Heart* and *Barking at the Choir*. He also gives hundreds of talks per year on the experiences of gang members and the call of the gospel to accompany those on the margins.

One particular story calls to mind the experience of Christ in the upper room as he bore his wounds before the disciples. Fr. Boyle talks of a young man, Sergio, whose mother used to beat him daily with “every object she could find.”² His back was bloodied and scarred from these attacks. When he went to school he had to wear three t-shirts. The first to soak up the blood on his body, the second because one was not enough to soak up the blood and a third so others could not see the blood on the second shirt. He was often ridiculed at school for wearing so many layers in southern California. He continued to wear three t-shirts into his adult years to hide his wounds because he was ashamed of them. Boyle remarks that Sergio paused and reflected in telling this story for the first time. Then Sergio confidently declared, “Now I welcome my wounds, my wounds are my friends. After all, how can I help others to heal, if I don’t welcome my own wounds?”³

The depth of Sergio’s reflection about the need to bear one’s wounds as a transformative experience is very powerful. A young man, whose life was for so many years beset by hatred from his own mother, has processed a way to turn the hatred he received into a love that he can give. This does not mean he recommends being hurt by others to achieve spiritual insights. It does not glorify his experience, nor elevate his reality above others. Sergio soundly affirms his experience and invites accompanying others into his narrative. His wounds serve as a reminder of his own call to help heal the wounded that bear pain and scars.



The Power of Vulnerability

While scars can be caused by others, they can also be part of our identity through medical necessity or through natural processes. For example, those undergoing chemotherapy may feel ostracized when losing their hair, or those with a physical disability that causes them to lack mobility may feel objectified. People who are advanced in age may begin to feel cast aside as they move, think, or act more slowly. Sadly, there are a myriad of possibilities. In many cases, these wounds or scars can cause people to feel marginalized. Society easily objectifies that which is viewed as different and illness or disability can unfortunately become a target for ridicule.

If we are to accept the Eucharist as the actual presence of Christ, we should acknowledge that a component of acceptance is the taking on of our scars as potential moments of self-revelation and offers to accompany others in finding their identity.

Five Feet Apart (2019) is a movie directed by Justin Baldoni and stars Cole Sprouse and Haley Lu Richardson as two teenagers (Will and Stella) who have Cystic Fibrosis (CF). CF is a genetic disorder that damages the lungs and digestive system. Currently, 30,000 people in the United States have CF and approximately 70,000 people worldwide suffer from this condition. There is no cure for CF and the severity of the disease can fluctuate widely from one case to another. The life expectancy for a CF patient is approximately 40 years.⁴ *Five Feet Apart* is based on the true experiences of a young woman who died from the disease and the treatments offer a rare insight into the daily life of a CF patient. While Will and Stella represented those who experience more extreme examples of living with CF (Stella was waiting for a lung transplant at the age of 17) the movie was warmly appreciated by many CF patients for its authenticity.

In one particular scene, Will and Stella decide to go on a date while they are undergoing treatments in the hospital. This is rare because CF patients are supposed to remain six feet apart due to the possible of bacterial cross contamination. However, daring to break the rules

and take something back from the disease that has robbed them of so much, Will and Stella decide five feet apart is enough. Their date brings them to a pool in the hospital where they sit five feet apart and discuss the meaning of their lives. They then decide to go for a swim. Perhaps in other teenage love stories the two would eagerly throw off all their clothing and jump into the pool. For Stella and Will, however, it is not that simple. Their hesitation at removing their shirts is obvious. Eventually, they slowly remove them revealing their bodies, covered in the scars from their treatments. It is a moment of beautiful vulnerability and acceptance. Their eyes take in the other as their reaction demonstrates that it is not the scars they bare on the outside that makes them who they are on the interior. The characters remove no more clothing and swim together, still keeping their distance.

As a Cystic Fibrosis patient, I openly wept in the theater during this scene. I, too, have many of those same scars across my body. I, too, spent years hiding them at water parks or as a child at a friend's pool in fear of the judgment of others. And I also remember moments in my life where I felt accepted, despite my scars, for who I am. Vulnerability is challenging for people of all ages and conditions, but especially in moments where you truly want another person to accept you for the person that you are. The acting in this scene brought out the dual reality of the give-and-take of acceptance and vulnerability. It took many years before I was able to see my scars as Sergio did: wounds that teach me how to help the wounded. But this is not just a journey for CF patients. It is the invitation in the gospel that challenges everyone.

When Catholics say “amen” and consume the Eucharist, they are inviting the actual presence of Christ to transform their hearts and minds. They consume his body, they take on his mission, and they acknowledge the power of his scars.

The Wounded Body of Christ

All human beings have wounds, whether they are physical, mental, emotional or spiritual. It is impossible to live life without the realization of the frailty of the human condition. However, moving to a place of recognition, acceptance and, perhaps, cherishing, wounds is quite



difficult. Sergio endured tremendous suffering before arriving at the realization that his pain could be used to accompany others in their pain. Patients with terminal diseases or those with disabilities can be bogged down by hopelessness and suffering, finding it equally difficult to embrace the gift of life. The challenge of living the gospel example of Christ is never easy. But Christ's promise to never leave those who believe in him, the power of the believing and prayerful community, and the love of God compels us to keep striving for the grace to accept and transform our wounds.

Drawing from the above examples, we can turn to the Eucharist for a way towards transformation. When Catholics say "amen" and consume the Eucharist, they are inviting the actual presence of Christ to transform their hearts and minds. They consume his body, they take on his mission, and they acknowledge the power of his scars. This does not mean that one cannot truly follow Christ unless they are brutally disfigured. While one should be open to the call for such a harsh reality, it is not endemic of every Christian call. However, Christ's wounds should become part of the transformative element of the eucharistic "amen." Christ's body becomes part of us. The scars that he did not dismiss as inconsequential during his appearance narratives are part of us as well.

Christ's wounds should become part of the transformative element of the eucharistic "amen." Christ's body becomes part of us. The scars that he did not dismiss as inconsequential during his appearance narratives are part of us as well.

I'd like to offer three eucharistic ways that Christians can engage the world demonstrating the importance of the wounded Christ on their hearts. First, the story of Sergio reminds us to accompany the wounded. We are called by the gospel to seek those in need and to learn from our scars how to be present to others in their pain. Second, we are called to examine our own scars and allow ourselves to be vulnerable to others. These humble acts, as Stella and Will demonstrate, can lead to a new understanding of giving and receiving of one's self. Such actions can also teach us humility before God as we accept our own scars. Finally, having practiced internal reflection and external willingness to act, we should strive to minimize our fear of

the future. We will continue to take on new scars as that is part of the human condition. Christ faced his agony, betrayal and abandonment keeping the love of God central to his mission. As we work towards making our world more truly reflect the Kingdom of God, let us keep God's love in our hearts. It is that love that transforms our scars and binds our wounds for the journey ahead.



Notes

¹ Greg Boyle, SJ *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2010), 196.

² Greg Boyle, SJ, *Barking to the Choir* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2017), 53.

³ Ibid, 54.

⁴ <https://www.cff.org/>



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Forgive to Live

by Victor Parachin

The Eucharist calls us to greater communion. Often this requires us to forgive others. But how do we do that?

Victor M. Parachin is a minister and writes extensively on matters of spirituality. He has authored a dozen books and is a regular contributor to *Emmanuel*.

A WOMAN TELLS OF AN EIGHTEEN YEAR SEARCH FOR A BIRTH PARENT BECAUSE she was given up for adoption as an infant. She felt the questions which were constantly on her mind could only be answered by either her birth mother or father. "I wanted to know why they didn't want me. I wanted them to tell me why they gave me away," she explains. Finally, she succeeded in tracking down her father who agreed to meet in person. "I will never forget that day," she says explaining she was simultaneously frightened and excited hoping "this could be the start of a relationship I had longed for my whole life." As they met, she carefully looked at her father who spoke first saying: "You were just a mistake!" Ever since that first and only encounter, she has relived those words saying, "I've had the hardest time moving on from that hurtful moment. I don't know if I can ever forgive him for giving me up — or for those hurtful words that broke my heart all over again."

It is a sad reality that people do hurt each other by their words and deeds, by what is said or not said, by what is done or not done. Whether the act is intentional or unintentional, large or small, the wounding can linger long and cast a dark shadow over a person's life in powerfully painful ways. For that reason, forgiveness becomes essential. A quick glance at an antonym dictionary reveals that the opposite of forgiveness is taking revenge, inflicting wounds, seeking retribution, exacting punishment, holding grudges, responding spitefully.

Living with those negative emotions destroys peace of mind, expels joy, and erodes the quality of life. That is why the Bible instructs: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with

every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other" (Eph 4:31, NIV). In order to live, we must forgive. Here are some ways of moving toward the place of forgiveness.

Understand the benefits of forgiving.

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you," writes theologian Lewis Smedes, author of *Forgive and Forget: Healing The Hurts We Don't Deserve*. Motivate yourself to forgive wounds and hurts by understanding and appreciating that forgiveness is primarily beneficial to you. Frederic Luskin, director of the Stanford Forgiveness Projects, says, "forgiveness can reduce the physical manifestations of stress, reduce blood pressure in hypertensives, improve physical vitality and improve one's compassion and optimism." Dr. Luskin adds that the benefits of forgiveness apply to all whether the wounding is small and slight or profound and pervasive. He says, "Forgiveness is for everyone....hurt college students, angry and disappointed middle aged adults, stressed out business people, and people who have had families murdered by political violence."

Improve your ability to forgiveness through practice.

To become an exceptional forgiver, start with the small offenses. Promptly forgive every minor and slight infraction that comes your way. When a family member speaks harshly to you, forgive it and let it go. When a colleague is rude to you, forgive it and let it go. When someone cuts you off in traffic, forgive it and let it go. Iyanla Vanzant, author of *Forgiveness: 21 Days To Forgive Everyone For Everything*, explains, "You may be asking yourself 'Why would I want to practice forgiveness?' The answer is simple. Practice develops skill. Skill leads to mastery. When you master the practice of forgiveness, it becomes as natural as breathing.... The only true way to create a more loving, productive and fulfilling life is by forgiving the past. Releasing the past restores us to the full energy of the present moment."

Ask yourself "How am I complicit in this situation?"

That suggestion is made by Rabbi Rami Shapiro in his book *Guide To Forgiveness*. He explains, "When you are in a hurtful situation, ask yourself *how am I complicit in this drama?* What role am I playing that allows this drama to arise and continue? Don't take responsibility for the whole show, just your part in it. This is not a 'shifting the blame' exercise from the other to you, but a realization that, as trite as it sounds, it takes two to tango." Simply raising this question opens up



space to view the larger picture and find an exit point. “The more you notice your own complicity, the more you realize that you and the other person are both trapped in the same drama,” notes Rabbi Shapiro. He continues, “The more you realize the trap, the easier it is to focus on what you need to escape the trap, end the drama and move on with your life.”

Forgive quickly.

This, of course, is difficult for most people. Yet, moments arise when we are offended by someone and immediately an inner voice tells us to “let it go.” Act on that. Avoid delaying because delay often transforms into a denial of forgiveness. Singer Tony Bennett witnessed just such an act of quick forgiveness. He was ten years old when his father died. Though he has few memories of John Benedetto, one stands out and has influenced Bennett all his life. His father, an Italian immigrant to America, operated a small grocery store in New York City. The family lived above the business. One evening they heard noise downstairs. A man had gotten drunk and was attempting to break in but having a hard time doing it due to the alcohol. Benedetto crept downstairs and discovered the man unconscious. Evidently he had tripped over some egg crates. The police were called and they explained that if Benedetto pressed charges, the man would be arrested and jailed. Letting out a sigh, Benedetto walked over to the man and asked, “Do you have a job?” The man shook his head no, too embarrassed to speak. Then Benedetto told him, “Well, you have one now. You can work for me if you want to.” The man accepted the offer of employment immediately and harmony returned into the Benedetto home and family life.

Forgive quickly. Avoid delaying because delay often transforms into a denial of forgiveness.

Forgive slowly and incrementally.

Most forgiving is done gradually allowing time and thought to create the space necessary to forgive. Initially there is often anger or even rage. That usually softens into resentment and frustration. Finally, a more mature and balanced perspective replaces any lingering bitterness. In an essay titled *I Am Slowly Learning How To Forgive You*, author Holly Riordan outlines her forgiveness process, “I am slowly learning to take

baby steps toward forgiveness.... I am slowly learning to hate you less and pity you more.... I am slowly learning that remaining mad at you is another kind of punishment.... I am slowly learning forgiveness is not something that can happen overnight.... I am slowly learning how to forgive you." As she worked at forgiveness, Riordan began to see more and more clearly that harboring a grudge merely became, "another kind of punishment. Staying angry convinces me to keep my heart guarded. It makes me seem like a bitter, cold, unforgiving person. If I want to live my life to its fullest, then I cannot hold a grudge against you. I have to find a way to cope with what you put me through, even if forgiving you is the last thing I ever want to do. Even if it takes me some time to get used to the idea."

Motivate yourself to forgive wounds and hurts by understanding and appreciating that forgiveness is primarily beneficial to you.

Add generosity to forgiveness.

Moments may come your way when you not only forgive but can find ways to do so with a magnanimous heart and benevolent spirit. It was just this kind of generous forgiving attitude offered by General Douglas MacArthur which impressed citizens of Japan. At the Japanese surrender ceremony on September 2, 1945, and delivered on the USS Missouri which was docked at Tokyo Bay, General MacArthur said:

"We are gathered here, representatives of the major warring powers, to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored. The issues involving divergent ideals and ideologies have been determined on the battlefields of the world, and hence are not for our discussion or debate. Nor is it for us here to meet, representing as we do a majority of the peoples of the earth, in a spirit of distrust, malice, or hatred. But rather it is for us, both victors and vanquished, to rise to that higher dignity which alone befits the sacred purposes we are about to serve, committing all of our peoples unreservedly to faithful compliance with the undertakings they are here formally to assume. It is my earnest hope, and indeed the hope of all mankind,



that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past — a world founded upon faith and understanding, a world dedicated to the dignity of man and the fulfillment of his most cherished wish for freedom, tolerance, and justice.”

Remind yourself that each time you forgive you are strengthening your power to release pain, gain healing, experience joy, and increase happiness. Forgiveness requires both strength and maturity. That is why Gandhi said, “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”



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 F, G, H, and I are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during March and April.



EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Caryll Houselander on the Eucharist

by Dennis J. Billy, CSsR

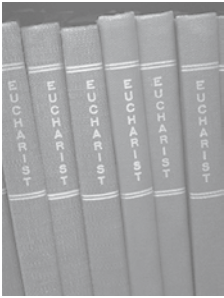
Through her own struggles with the Catholic Church in her day Caryll Houselander found a deeper relationship with Christ in the Eucharist. What might her experience offer us today?

FRANCES CARYLL HOUSELANDER (1901-1954), A BRITISH CATHOLIC AUTHOR, artist, poet, visionary, and mystic, wrote a number of popular books during her lifetime that had a deep impact on the popular Catholic spirituality of her day. Born in Bath, England, she was baptized into the Catholic faith at the age of six. After her parents separated, she was sent to a convent school and returned home in her teens to help her mother run a boarding house. She left the Catholic Church during her teens and returned in 1925 due to some mystical experiences that convinced her of Christ's deep love for all human beings and the call to see him in all people. A prolific author, she authored more than fifteen books and is most remembered for *This War is the Passion* (1943), *The Reed of God* (1944), *The Flowering Tree* (1945), her posthumous autobiography, *A Rocking Horse Catholic* (1955), and *The Risen Christ* (1958). Sickly for most of her life, she succumbed to breast cancer and died at the early age of fifty-three. Deeply devout, she had a way of explaining the faith that was, at one and the same time, both profound and easy to understand. Her teaching on the Eucharist is no exception. It flows from her deep Catholic faith and the conviction that the risen Lord has given us this sacrament to impart his divine life to all who believe.¹

Redemptorist Father Dennis J. Billy is a regular contributor to Emmanuel. He has authored or edited more than 30 books and 300 articles in a number of scholarly and popular journals.

Houselander's Spiritual Outlook

Much of Houselander's spirituality can be gleaned from her autobiography, *A Rocking Horse Catholic*, a story that chronicles her entrance into the Church, the difficulties that led up to her leaving it, and her final embrace of it in her mid-twenties. She uses the image of the "rocking horse" to distinguish herself from so-called



"cradle" Catholics, many of whom never manage to delve beneath the externals of Catholic practice and fail to probe the deeper meaning of their faith. As her own experience would attest, a "rocking horse Catholic" is someone baptized not at birth, but at an early age in childhood, when rocking horses and other playthings occupy a child's growing imagination. Houselander's back and forth (one might say "rocky") relationship with Catholicism is also captured in the book's title. A rocking horse moves back and forth, giving the impression that one is on a journey when, all the while, one remains in the same place. In a similar way, at various times in her life, Houselander found herself outside of the Church, then in it, then out again, then in again. In the end, she found herself in the same place, but with a much deeper appreciation of her faith and the impact it has had on her life.

Houselander was not born into the faith, but was baptized at the age of six when her mother converted to Catholicism. As a teenager, she left the Church on account of a scandal that arose from her mother accepting a derelict priest as a resident in her boarding house, an action that was looked down upon at the time and treated with great suspicion. Houselander herself saw nothing wrong in the arrangement, since her mother was known to be someone who would fly in the face of convention. The malicious gossip and outright cruelty resulting from this situation, however, made her examine her allegiance to the faith. One incident in particular stands out:

One morning, quite by chance, I knelt at Holy Communion side by side with two people, a husband and wife, who had in the past been acquainted with my mother and the priest she now harbored. They were highly respected Catholics. After Mass I greeted them in the church porch. They ignored my greeting and turned away. From that moment I made up my mind to seek for some other religion. I did not doubt the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, but it seemed to me that Christ was a prisoner in the hands of hard and relentless people, people without compassion. I began to hope that there might be some other Church in which there would also be the Real Presence, but in which one could approach and receive Christ, not among respectable people, not among censorious people, but among those who were despised, who were failures, who were sinners, but who loved one another.²

Attracted by the liturgy's beauty and the drawing power of the Blessed Sacrament, she continued to attend Mass, since its mystery was the only thing that brought beauty and light to her otherwise drab existence. In time she began to wonder, however, if the powerful hold the liturgy had on her prevented her from seeing clearly and judging things accordingly. Was this fascination with the Mass a help or a hindrance? Was it a phase that she must pass through or a reality she must embrace?

The realization of her own self-righteousness helped her to see that the Eucharist was not something to be exploited at the expense of others, but a gift meant to help her become her deepest, truest self.

As it turned out, something happened one day that even turned her against Catholic worship. At the time, there still existed churches where the better seats were reserved for a price. On entering one of those churches one Sunday morning and finding no free seats available, she sat in one of those that cost. With not a penny in her pocket, she felt humiliated when an usher asked her for payment. When she protested that there were no seats available in the open section, the usher still demanded payment. Embarrassed and upset, she got up and started to leave the church. When a priest in the back aisle saw what happened and asked if she was leaving, she responded, "Yes, I am, and I will never come to Mass again."³

After experimenting with various churches—High Anglican, Methodist, and Russian Orthodox—she eventually found her way back to the Church, due to the influence of the Catholic Evidence Guild and its charismatic founder, Frank Sheed. At first, she was skeptical about this fledgling movement on account of her past experiences with Catholicism. In time, however, she realized that it was not a crank religion, but the real thing, "gradually I realized that it was nothing of the sort. It was the Catholic Church but it was the Catholic Church being Christ; not waiting for the people to come in, but coming out to the people . . . Christ following His lost sheep of whom I was one."⁴ This experience brought Houselander back to Catholicism and to what was arguably the central insight of her spiritual outlook—the Mystical Body of Christ:



For me, the greatest joy in being once again in full communion with the Catholic Church has been, and is now, the ever-growing reassurance given by the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, with its teaching that we are the Church, and that “Christ and His Church are one” and that because Christ and His Church are one, the world’s sorrow, with which I have always been obsessed, and which is a common obsession in these tragic years, is only the shadow cast by the spread arms of the crucified King to shelter us until the morning of resurrection from the blaze of everlasting love.”⁵

The doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ permeates Houselander’s entire spiritual outlook and has much to do with her teaching on the Eucharist.

Houselander’s Teaching on the Eucharist

In a certain sense, the Eucharist had as much to do with drawing Houselander away from the Church as much as it had with bringing her back to it. It was only when she came to a realization that she was just as unworthy of receiving Holy Communion as everyone else that she finally realized that she was called to see Jesus’ presence in all people, even those whom she disliked and believed had a very superficial understanding of their faith:

Nevertheless, I longed for the Blessed Sacrament and the beauty of the liturgy of the Church, and this longing was made bitter to me by the perverse idea I had fostered, that the Blessed Sacrament had been put out of my reach because it had been put into the hands of the hard and righteous people in whom I felt I could have no part. It did not dawn on me that in condemning others wholesale as Pharisees, I myself was a Pharisee.⁶

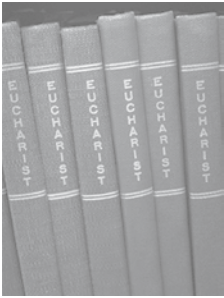
The realization of her own self-righteousness helped her to see that the Eucharist was not something to be exploited at the expense of others, but a gift meant to help her become her deepest, truest self, that is, someone molded after the image of Christ himself and capable of sensing his presence in all people. This insight enabled her to accept all of the Church’s members as they were, regardless of where they were in their spiritual journey.

This insight brought Houselander to discover the secret of surrendering. In her book, *The Reed of God*, she views the body as “the means by which we can give ourselves wholly.”⁷ “We surrender our intimacy, the secret of ourselves,” she states, “with the giving of our body; and we cannot give it *without* our will, our thoughts, our minds, and our souls.”⁸ By giving us his body, Christ imparted the secret of himself to each of us: “In Holy Communion this surrender of the secret of Himself goes on.”⁹ Christ, she asserts, longed for the moment when he would surrender himself in this way to each of us, “He waited thirty-three years in time for the Last Supper; two thousand years for me.”¹⁰

According to Houselander, this act of self-surrender, involves not only the pain and privations so commonly associated with the act of our redemption, but also an imparting of joy, “Not only did He take our sorrows to Himself, but He gave the delight, that happiness that He *is*, to our humanness. No man ever enjoyed life as He did. He gathered up the color, sound, touch, meaning of everything about Him and united it all to the most exquisite sensitiveness, the most pure capacity for delight.”¹¹ When receiving Holy Communion, we thus participate in Christ’s humble surrendering of self, “The gift of Christ’s Body makes everyone a priest; because everyone can offer the Body of Christ on the altar of his own life.”¹² The Eucharist, for Houselander, is a sharing in Christ’s kenotic self-emptying, “Every gesture in life can be one with the gesture of the priest in Mass. It is not in making our flesh unfeeling that we hallow God’s name on earth but in offering it to God burning with the flame of life. Everything can be put into the fire that Christ came to kindle; and whether it be the bitter wood of sorrow or the substance of joy, it will burn upwards with the same splendor of light.”¹³

Life in Christ enables us to take delight in the gift of life and to share in the happiness of who Jesus is and who we are by virtue of being members of his body.

In her book, *The Risen Christ*, Houselander goes on to draw an intimate connection between the Eucharist and the prayer of Christ’s Mystical Body, “The Liturgy is the expression of Christ’s love, his prayer in his Mystical Body, into which our own prayer is gathered and integrated.”¹⁴ The Mass does not depend on our personal moods and feelings, “It never fails, day after day from the rising of the sun to its setting, in age



after age, to adore God, to express sorrow for sin, to praise and thank God, to offer sacrifice, to petition for peace. It is the perfect expression of every individual, the voice of the inarticulate lifted in a hymn of love. At the same time it is the chorus of the whole human race made one in communion with Christ."¹⁵ The simplicity of the Mass is meant to overflow into life itself, "In its simplest terms the way to restore our souls in this prayer of the Body is to slow down our pace to the pace of the Liturgy, to prune our minds to its huge simplicities."¹⁶ In this way, we turn life itself into a liturgy. All of our sorrows and heartaches are united to Christ's suffering and death, "Every day the suffering of the Lord's body is shown in the breaking of the bread."¹⁷ For Houselander, as members of Christ's Mystical Body, we participate in Christ's paschal mystery, "This is the breaking of the bread, the supreme moment in the prayer of the body, the end of the liturgy of our mortal lives, when we are broken for and in the communion of Christ's love to the whole world."¹⁸ There is no end to the prayer of Christ's body. "Even our dust," she says, "pays homage to God, until the endless morning of resurrection wakens our body, glorified."¹⁹

Some Observations

Although the above summary of Houselander's teaching on the Eucharist does not exhaust the richness of her appreciation of the sacrament, it provides a solid backdrop against which the following observations come to light.

1. To begin with, Houselander's autobiography offers some key insights into both the attraction the Eucharist had for her and a deep aversion to it due to the Pharisaical attitude of many who participated in it. It was only when she saw her own self-righteous attitude toward these people that she came to recognize that the sacrament was not meant to be used as a means of judging others, but as a gift given to us by God to help us see Christ in other people. The Catholic faith is "universal," because it recognizes the presence of Christ in all people, "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).²⁰

2. Houselander's belief in the Mystical Body underlies her understanding of the Eucharist. The glorified body of the risen Christ that has ascended into heaven is really present in the consecrated bread and wine, which provides nourishment for the members of his body, the Church. Christ, moreover, continues to live his paschal

mystery in and through the members of his body. The breaking of the bread represents the breaking of his body happened not merely 2,000 years ago when he died on the cross, but continues in the suffering of his people.

3. The Eucharist, for Houselander, is also the sacrament of surrendering. Christ laid down his life for the salvation of the world and instituted the sacrament as a way of continuing that self-offering through the members of his body. When we break bread together, we share in the sacrificial offering of Christ and profess to live our lives accordingly. Just as Christ surrenders the secret of his life in his death on the cross and sacramentalizes it in the breaking of the bread, so do the members of his body, the Church, offer their lives through him as a living sacrifice of praise and glory to the Father.

4. For Houselander, Christ's action of self-surrender involves not only the pain and suffering typically associated with his sacrificial death, but also the imparting of delight to our humanity. Life in Christ, in other words, enables us to take delight in the gift of life and to share in the happiness of who Jesus is and who we are by virtue of being members of his body. Such joy is possible, because Jesus is the New Adam, someone fully alive to the Father and fully at home in the created world. By sharing in his life, we are able to delve beneath the appearances of things and appreciate the gift of life in an entirely new and different way.

5. For this reason, the Eucharist offers believers the opportunity to transform their very lives into a continuous liturgy. Worship does not end with the conclusion of Mass, but issues forth into the liturgy of life. Houselander offers many examples in her writings of how the Eucharist is designed to transform the ordinary circumstances of daily life. When seen in this light, it is the sacrament of the world's transformation that heralds in the new creation through the power of the risen Lord who has come "to make all things new" (Rev 21:5).

6. By making us members of his body, Christ also offers us a share in his priesthood. When we break open our lives and unite everything with Christ's offering to God, we share in his priesthood. Everyone is a priest when they celebrate the liturgy of life. While this priesthood is not the same as the sacramental priesthood, it is nevertheless a real participation in the Christ's priesthood in which all the members of Christ's body share. For Houselander, this insight is not a mere




metaphor but recognition of the deep significance of what it means to be a member of Christ's Mystical Body.

7. Finally, the Eucharist, for Houselander, enables us to view life through the eyes of faith and see things the way Jesus would see them. Doing so means viewing everyone as a child of God with the dignity of a son or daughter of the Father. The sacrament brings about a transformation of the human person by casting out the darkness from our minds, strengthening our resolve, and taming our emotions. It enables us to see Christ in others by first allowing us to encounter Christ within ourselves. This personal encounter with Christ within oneself is one of the deepest joys a person can have in life. Being able to recognize him in others intensifies that joy and makes the intimate unity of his Mystical Body palpable. Houselander experienced both in her life and was deeply grateful for the way the Lord had gifted her.

Conclusion

Caryll Houselander was a popular Catholic spiritual writer whose influence extended far beyond her lifetime. If she was not as popular as some of the other notable Catholic authors of her day, she is still widely read (many of her books are still in print) and her body of work has a noteworthy place in Catholic spiritual writing. Her insights into the Catholic faith maintain their freshness and are poetically conveyed. It is not unusual for those who read her writing to want to read more. It is unfortunate that, having died so young, her body of writing is relatively small when compared with other Catholic authors of her day.

Houselander's teaching on the Eucharist flows from her understanding of Christ's Mystical Body. The sacrament, for her, was the means used by Christ to surrender himself wholly to the will of the Father. By sharing his body with us, he gathers us into himself and offers this mystical union of bodies and souls to his Father in heaven. This intimate union of Christ and his Church cannot be undone. The Eucharist is the glue that holds it together. It conforms us onto Christ and makes us fully alive in him. It enables us to share in Christ's priesthood by allowing us to offer our lives up with his in the liturgy of daily life. It enables us to unite all our disappointments and triumphs, sorrows and joys, heartaches and delights with Christ's humble offering of himself to the Father.

Houselander's spirituality was thoroughly eucharistic. Deeply attracted to the beauty of the Mass, she gave the sacrament a central place in her writings. The reason for this is clear. Her belief in the Real Presence was just as central to her spiritual outlook as her belief in the Mystical Body of Christ. She saw a deep continuity between Christ's risen body, his presence in the sacrament, and his presence in the members of his body. She saw the sacrament as a way each individual believer could unite his or her life to the life of Christ—and vice versa. 

Notes

¹ This biographical information comes from Caryll Houselander, *A Rocking Horse Catholic* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955). See Internet Archive, https://archive.org/stream/rockinghorsecath008000mbp/rockinghorsecath008000mbp_djvu.txt. See also Karen Lynn Krugh, "Seeing Christ in All People," *Catholic Culture*, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=528>.

² Ibid., 106.

³ Ibid., 105.

⁴ Ibid., 132-33.

⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁶ Ibid., 236.

⁷ Caryll Houselander, *The Reed of God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1944), 84.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 86.

¹² Ibid., 90.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Caryll Houselander, *The Risen Christ* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 68.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁸ Ibid., 73-74.

¹⁹ Ibid., 74.

²⁰ All Scriptural quotations come from *The Catholic Study Bible. The New American Bible Revised Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).



EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

The Truth About “Cold,” Modernist Church Architecture

by Michael DeSanctis

Discussion about Modernist church architecture is often charged with emotion and rooted in personal taste. Why is this the case and how do we move beyond it?

Michael E. DeSanctis, Ph.D., is a retired professor of fine arts and theology at Gannon University, Erie, Pennsylvania. He writes widely on the subject of sacred architecture and is the author of *Building from Belief: Advance, Retreat and Compromise in the Remaking of Catholic Church Architecture* (The Liturgical Press, 2002) and *Renewing the City of God: The Reform of Catholic Church Architecture in the United States* (Liturgy Training Publications, 1993).

THERE'S A PERSISTENT REFRAIN ONE HEARS FROM CERTAIN CORNERS OF THE CHURCH today that goes something like this: The wholesale reconfiguration of the Catholic place of worship presumably called for by the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council was unnecessary. It proceeded from an erroneous reading of the council's intentions by a cohort of liberally minded pastors, liturgists and architects and others eager to “renovate” out of existence everything that once mattered to the faith. Thus, the beautiful buildings in which the faithful throughout this country once gathered, full of features quoted from the Church's long history of artistic achievement, have been replaced in recent decades by Modern-styled churches that are ugly (“ugly as sin,” in fact, one popular critique of the current scene alleges) and devoid of anything the average worshiper would recognize as distinctly “Catholic.” These newer churches are altogether “cold,” “stark,” and “sterile” places, according to their detractors. They are considered mere “soul garages” too closely resembling the Pizza Huts and Burger Kings with which they are now expected to rub shoulders as outposts of a “Church in the Modern World,” especially in the bland, commercialized expanses of the American suburbs.

Critics of the course sacred architecture in the United States has taken since Vatican II insist their concerns have more to do with metaphysics than aesthetics, though it's precisely the look and feel of many newer churches they regard incapable of reflecting the celestial nature of the Church's rites. Modernist architecture of the sort that pervades the secular landscape, they argue, can't possibly offer its users a semblance of anything heaven-bound—though how they know precisely what this amounts to is anyone's guess. To this they attach the loss of reverence lately observed in the Catholic “house of God,” which, in their

minds, has devolved into a mere “house for the *People of God*,” one step removed in their minds from the “fellowship halls” of mainstream Protestantism. They likewise lament that the Church has fallen prey to the ideological free-for-all and relativism that characterize our time, against which objective standards for beauty—let alone for truth and goodness—tend to crumble. If they are inclined to interpret the “signs of the times” at all, as the bishops of Vatican II encouraged all Catholics to do (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 4), it seems only to point out the deficiencies in contemporary society rather than to welcome those insights on a range of topics that men and women of our day might offer the Church. One gets the impression by reading their published writings on sacred architecture that they’d be happiest were Catholic church buildings to be stand-alone structures entirely empty of worshipers, like the picture-perfect homes featured in house-and-garden magazines. The riot that emanates from the pews of churches these days, caused in no small part by the fidgetiness of the modern assembly and its insistence on playing an active role in every aspect of the Mass, only despoils for them that segment of Catholic real estate charged with enshrining in its requisite tabernacles the Real Presence of Christ permanently reserved there.

“Oh, why can’t the Church of today be as it was long ago?” these historicists lament in the vein of those sages rebuked in the Book of Ecclesiastes (Ecc 7:10), “and what’s so wrong with at least *pretending* to live in an era less hostile toward the Church than our own by surrounding ourselves with enough anachronisms of the liturgical and architectural sort to sustain the illusion?”

There is, to be sure, some validity to the complaints that Catholics of a traditionalist bent level against the state of sacred architecture. One can certainly find examples of both new and updated church buildings marred by at least *some* features that are less than attractive. There is, likewise, an informality of dress and comportment many laypeople carry with them into their places of worship nowadays, a result of the casualness that permeates the American lifestyle, that militates against efforts by pastors and parish liturgy planners to distinguish the rites for which

Immaculate Conception Church, Clarion, PA (1977)





they oversee from other forms of popular assembly. The problem is compounded by the fact that significant numbers of Catholics are not only aware of the jeans-and-sneakers approaches to worship promoted by the ever-multiplying Evangelical congregations in their vicinities but have shared in them sporadically with little sense of how these differ from the ritual habits of their own Church. One examines the faces of those in the typical Communion procession, as joyless a parade in many of our parishes as can be imagined, and wonders whether it's not partly, as critics argue, some aspect of their "Vatican Two-ized" architectural surroundings that leaves worshipers looking less inspired than if they'd entered the ticket line for a ball game or Broadway show. But what of the centuries-old church buildings dispersed throughout Europe? Have they, in all their supposed artistic superiority over Modern-styled structures, proven any more successful in stemming the departure of weekly worshipers from their interiors?

A troubling aspect of the line of criticism employed by anti-Modernists is its blindness to the implications of the Incarnation and, by extension, to the breadth of Catholic sacramentality at work beyond "the seven sacraments," which renders nothing in the material world, save sin, incapable of disclosing the sacred.

It's not helpful that so much of the criticism of Modern-styled liturgical settings relies on generalization. Catholic social media sites, for example, are replete with comments by self-described defenders of the Church, many of them members of the clergy with no apparent expertise in the areas of aesthetics, design, or architectural criticism, that amount to little more than *de gustibus* opposition to all things Modernist. They are quick to denounce the cultural milieu from which Modernist modes of thought and art first emerged a century ago, a swath of northern Europe full of free-thinkers and social engineers determined to elevate humankind to a place formerly reserved for God alone. They find no contradiction, however, in encouraging today's church designers to work, say, in the Classical style of Ancient Greece and Rome, cultures that erected the most splendid temple buildings while killing off their young through the practice of exposure, while trafficking in slaves, repressing women and indulging in pederasty as one of many forms of sexual immorality. Bad people yield bad art,

anti-Modernists hold, unless, apparently, the art in question is one your side prefers.

Even in relatively scholarly critiques of Modernist church design appearing, say, in the *Sacred Architecture Journal*, a publication linked to the University of Notre-Dame’s Classically-focused School of Architecture and explicitly devoted to “the renewal of beauty in contemporary church architecture,” or the e-journal *Sacred Liturgy and Liturgical Arts*, a kind of clearinghouse of “reform the reform”-mined commentary from promoters of the so-called “New Liturgical Movement,” one doesn’t find the sort of systematic analysis of specific church buildings on which sound architectural criticism traditionally relies. To dismiss out-of-hand and purely on ideological grounds an entire deposit of religious buildings reflective of the sensibilities

and modes of construction of our day, as contributors to these and similar sources routinely do, is to forget how receptive the Church has been over the centuries to a wide range of architectural types, forms, styles and devices bearing no obvious connection to the sacred. It is likewise to overlook how inconsistent over the centuries in their preferences for liturgical language, vesture, art, music and architecture have been the Church’s high- and low-ranking clergy, who nevertheless presumed to dictate liturgical

Immaculate Conception Church (Interior), Clarion, PA (1977)



and artistic tastes to the flocks of believers under their authority with no say in the matter. For example, there is nothing sacral, *sui generis*, about the longitudinal floor plan terminating in a semicircular apse from which countless Catholic churches have risen since the time of the Constantinian church of the 4th century, when it was appropriated from the civic architecture of Ancient Rome. The same may be said of the pointed arch so closely associated with Gothic-styled buildings. Though the device is invested with lofty, religious associations today, its origin, like much in architecture, is primarily structural, the outcome of medieval builders’ trial-and-error experimentation with spanning tremendously wide and high spaces by means of stone and mortar.



A more troubling aspect of the line of criticism employed by anti-Modernists, however, is its blindness to the implications of the Incarnation and, by extension, to the breadth of Catholic sacramentality at work beyond “the seven sacraments,” which renders nothing in the material world, save sin, incapable of disclosing the sacred. The charge that the paired-to-the-bone geometries exhibited by Modernist churches only befuddle those forced to behold them grossly underestimates the Church’s facility with abstraction, which is something its members are expected to demonstrate each time they approach in the Eucharist a precision-stamped sliver of “bread” or half-sip of altar wine as the body and blood of their savior. One has only to visit a Catholic cemetery today, a place filled with Modern-styled memorial monuments and mausoleums, to observe the reverence with which laypeople treat non-pictorial art of the most abstract kind. For example, was the Egyptian obelisk, once a staple of Catholic funerary art, ever anything *but* an abstraction (of a ray of sunlight)? What of the Christian cross, which free of a corpus, certainly ranks among the sparest of religious symbols? It may be easier simply to monitor the remarks an international Facebook group like “Modernist Churches,” whose members express nothing but enthusiasm even for failed attempts to pour ancient wine into the newest wineskins.

Interestingly, adult catechumens in my own parish, readily admit having been attracted to the faith precisely because of the Modernist pedigree of our church building.

When critics of post-Vatican II architecture *do* get around to identifying what it is exactly that bothers them about formal characteristics of Modernist churches, their comments often center on one of the hot-button issues that continue to dog Catholic liturgical renewal by appealing more to emotion than to reason. Among the latter concerns the spatial location of tabernacles, for which for the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* offers only two options: in sanctuaries, apart from altars of sacrifice, or in chapels of reservation (no. 315). Using a kind of “out of sight, out of mind” logic, however, traditionalists find only the first option acceptable, as anything other in their minds, will further diminish popular belief in the Real Presence of Christ that dwells in their midst. This argument seems irreconcilable, however, with the Church’s practice for centuries of sequestering furnishings

for the Rite of Baptism in rooms entirely removed from the main bodies of churches with no apparent effect on the laity's attachment to this sacrament. The same holds for critics' dislike of the “unfocused” and too “Protestant-looking” semicircular seating arrangements offered lay worshipers today in many newer churches, which seems at odds with their complete acceptance of the crescent-shaped configurations of chairs in basilica-style structures that have served the clergy for centuries.



St. Mary Roman Catholic Church, Star City, WVA (1966)

The most expedient way to counter the claim that Modernist churches are no good for the American Catholic populace, however, is simply to acknowledge the number of parishes nationally whose worship has benefitted from inhabiting structures free of the faux-antiquity on which, critics suggest, church architects must continue to depend. Such communities abound in dioceses throughout this country, as the testimonies of local offices of worship make plain. The truth is that Catholics in the United States have admitted into their liturgical consciousness “the art of our own days” (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 123) which the members of the Second Vatican Council judged neither “cold” nor “ugly,” nor intrinsically antithetical to the liturgical goals of the Church. Interestingly, adult catechumens in my own parish, readily admit having been attracted to the faith precisely *because* of the Modernist pedigree of our church building. A church designed, ironically, in 1969 by a graduate of the former Department of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame, then a bastion of Modernism under the chairmanship (1950-72) of professor Frank Montana. The Cor-Ten steel cross made of I-beams that tops its roof span needs no doo-dads culled from history to make its point. Modernist churches have become as normal and normative a part of American Catholic life as the vernacular Mass or so-called “Communion in the hand.” They have proven to be sources of pride, even affection, to the parish communities who inhabit them, mileposts in the spiritual-artistic journey of an stubbornly forward-looking Church, and proof that novelty can play as legitimate a role in the religious expression of 21st-century Catholics as anything marked by old age.



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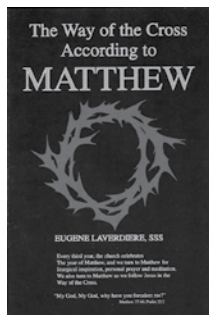
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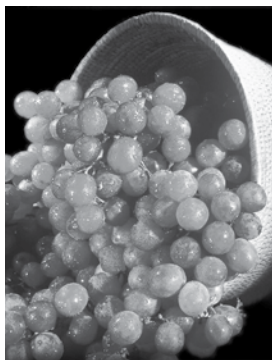
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EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Pain as Prayer

by Dennis Ruane, SSS

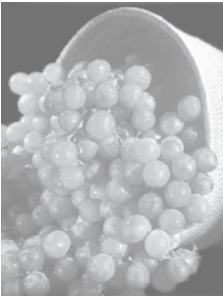
After a lifetime of ministering to people dealing with pain and suffering Fr. Dennis Ruane, SSS penned these thoughts and experiences. He wrote them by hand, not long before he died. We are honored to share them with you.

AS AN ORDAINED PRIEST, WELL BEYOND THE GOLDEN MARK, I HAVE WITNESSED PEOPLE experience pain on a scale of zero to ten (from toothache, to appendix, to terminal cancer). The depth of the human spirit that is not only capable of enduring excruciating pain, but able to conquer it as well, always awes me. What follows are some examples of that courage.

Pain embraced is pain returned with a different meaning.

African people experience certain kinds of pain that others will never know, for example draught. In the 1960's up to the 1980's, like clockwork precision, severe droughts crept into East Africa. I lived and worked with a Nilotic tribe there. In one decade, for two consecutive years, there was not a drop of rain. The pain started with the loss of scarce precious resources, the cattle and goods and their milk. These people were herdsman. No agriculture. When I drove through the bush, I had to close the windows of the land rover, because the stench of the corrupting corpses of cattle and goats filled the air. There is no such stench that accompanies different kind of pain: The loss of infants and children who turned into stick-figures because the lustrous light in their eyes disappeared. You knew things were terribly wrong when the mothers said they had no milk to offer you because there is not enough for the children. These African's are not a group of stoic people. When their child died of starvation, they expressed their grief and pain in a traditional way. The father would lie on the ground, his head over his arms, while family and friends, sat in a silent circle, experiencing his pain. The silence was punctured with beautiful ancient hymns that the women sang. The women always sang the prayers because, as

Blessed Sacrament Father Dennis Ruane served as a missionary in Uganda, hospital chaplain in New Jersey and Connecticut, spiritual director and counselor in Utah and Hawaii. He had a PhD in psychology (drug and rehab counseling). He died in 2018.



they said, God was a woman and always listened to them first. Pain embraced is pain returned with a different meaning.

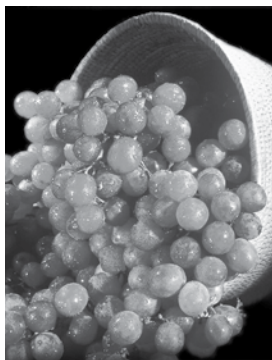
Another pain filled experience happened when I was called in an emergency to the local hospital. The nurse explained that a brand new dad while bathing his infant in the tub reached to turn the cold water on, so the water would not be too hot for his child. The infant, held in his hand like a tiny doll, slipped from his fingers and fell head first to the floor of the tub. The child died of brain injury a few hours later. When I came to the inconsolable couple the mother asked me to ask the nurse to bring her the infant. I brought her the child and placed him in her arms. Another Bethlehem with all the expanded boundless expectations for this great gift from God crushed in pain and loss. The parents sat exchanging the infant as the tears baptized the child again. The sword of death pierced their hearts as they searched for meaning. I shall never know that kind of loss. I saw how reverently, lovingly and prayerfully they caressed their child.

When what interrupts our lives is pain and we struggle to embrace it in our hearts, that struggle, is a prayer that echoes in the hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Many are called to experience that kind of prayer, often in a senseless killing of their child. In this world of chaos, this couple knew that they and their child belonged to God. In the temple Mary experienced the same. What did Mary ponder in her heart, first at what the angel said, then at the temple? Imagine what fears and apprehensions filled her as well. All these experiences raised her fears and pain beyond herself to a cosmic dimension. This child is for the women and men of the world.

A priest friend told me that once when he was counseling a patient in the hospital a eucharistic minister suddenly knocked at the door, entered and offered him communion. He politely refused. The young patient sitting with him was surprised and asked why he declined. The priest said when I am with another person I feel like I am with Christ. When what interrupts our lives is pain and we struggle to embrace it in our hearts, that struggle, is a prayer that echoes in the hearts of Jesus and Mary. You need say nothing. That struggle for acceptance will, like a rocket, transcend the boundaries of time, space and separation. Just so does the Eucharist transcend the barriers of time, space, pain and separation. Pain embraced is prayer not only yours individually but Christ's as well. It is for the world.





EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Images and Ideas of Prayer

by Stephen Bevens, SVD

Living in an increasingly visual culture, what images and ideas might help your prayer?

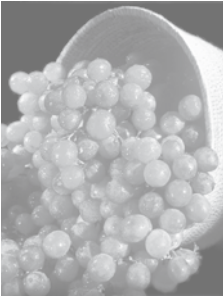
FOR ABOUT A YEAR NOW—I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHEN I STARTED—I HAVE BEEN noting down various images or ideas about prayer that I have come across in various places and times of reflection. These images and ideas have helped me quite a bit in my own prayer life, even though I still feel like I'm very much an amateur when it comes to praying. At some point I thought that I'd try to bring these images and ideas together in a reflection that I might share with people during a retreat or day of recollection. If they have helped me, perhaps they would help others.

So I share them with you here. This is not so much a systematic presentation as it is just stringing a bunch of images and ideas together. In many ways they are all pretty much the same, but the different ways of expressing them and imaging them give this basic idea a kind of depth or perspective. I do hope they will be helpful.

Stephen Bevens is a priest of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD Professor of Mission and Culture, Emeritus at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.

Be Vulnerable Before God

The first image I'd like to share is one that I heard from Cardinal Francis George, the former archbishop of Chicago, on the day he died. I have to say that I was never a great fan of Cardinal George. I didn't really agree with his more conservative theology. I really disagreed with his promotion of the new translation of the liturgy that forces us to pray in often ugly, wooden, and un-understandable English. But on the day he died I was driving to visit a friend on the north side of Chicago, and on the local PBS radio station they were playing short excerpts from Cardinal George and various interviews he gave. At one point, they played a short piece in which Cardinal George spoke about prayer. I don't recall the absolute exact words, but he said something like—



“you know, prayer is when you make yourself vulnerable before God.” That really struck me as true—and really beautiful. Prayer is simply sitting there and making yourself vulnerable before God. It reminded me of that beautiful song that is the title to evangelist Billy Graham’s autobiography: “Just as I am.”¹ There is also a beautiful contemporary song that I love as well that captures the idea wonderfully: John Bell’s “Take, O Take Me as I Am”:

Take, O take me as I am
Summon out what I shall be
Set your seal upon my heart
And live in me²

We could do a lot worse in our prayer than just repeating those words over and over again—or listening to the song on You Tube or some other place where it is recorded. Prayer is where you are vulnerable before God.

Show up!

A second image comes from what might be a very unlikely source: the Jewish, atheist, comedian, and filmmaker Woody Allen. An unlikely source, and Allen didn’t offer his word of wisdom in the context of a reflection on prayer, but I think it is amazingly applicable to it. Allen says, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.”³ Just showing up! So often during my morning meditation (I try to get up at 5:30 every morning and reflect on the day’s readings until 7:15 when we have Mass at home—and even at Mass) I realize that I haven’t been very successful at a really intense prayer time. But I have shown up. I’ve put in the time. I’ve been there. I was struck a few months ago by a line or two in a reflection by a Presbyterian clergywoman named Loretta Ross-Gotta in the publication *Give Us This Day*, the book I use to read the daily readings every morning. Ross-Gotta wrote: “Sometimes I do not know what prayer is beyond the long worn rag of human longing waved toward the heavens like a tattered flag. Today I think prayer has to do with putting down one foot after the other upon this earth, while being honest with ourselves and God about our limitations.”⁴ Just showing up. Just being there.

Climb the Mountain

A former student of mine, Matthew Dalman, is an Episcopal priest. In

the course of his studies he discovered a relatively neglected Anglican theologian who wrote in the 1950s and '60s by the name of Martin Thornton. One of Thornton's books, that Matthew reissued in his own publishing house, is entitled *The Purple Headed Mountain*. Toward the beginning of this book, which was the Archbishop of Canterbury's "Lent Book" for 1962, Thornton provides a third image for Christian prayer: mountain climbing. Like mountain climbing, he writes, prayer is "hard work, demanding discipline, strength, courage, skill, and above all, stamina; stamina to plod on, step by step, when the immediate prospect looks dull, uninviting or even dangerous." This is very close to Woody Allen's advice about "showing up." But Thornton goes on with his analogy. It is not only hard, disciplined work that demands that we work at being spiritually "in shape." It can also be "adventurous and exhilarating," and by God's grace, "it frequently is." Nevertheless, Thornton adds, this is "only *because* of our day to day, step by step, disciplined plod."⁵ Yes, mountain climbing is hard work, but anyone who has ever climbed a mountain, or even a large hill, know that the often-breathtaking view from the top is worth the effort and the training required. Once in a while, again by God's grace, we get that breathtaking view when we climb God's mountain in prayer.

Seek Beauty

That breathtaking view is close to another image that I discovered in the writings of another Anglican, the great theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury. Rowan Williams likens prayer to bird-watching: you have to get up very early in the morning, and you have to be very quiet and patient, perhaps waiting for hours in the rain for a sighting. But then it comes, he says, once in a while: the glimpse of what T. S. Eliot calls "'the kingfisher's wing' flashing 'light to light,'" totally dazzling, totally worth the wait.⁶ Of course it only flashes forth for a few seconds, and then flits away. But the experience of beauty and wonder is unforgettable, and, for the avid bird-watcher, will get her or him up another early morning and try her or his patience another day. Williams's image reminds me of one of my favorite poems by the American poet Wendell Berry:

Best of any song
Is bird song
In the quiet, but first
You must have the quiet.⁷



Be Present

An image of prayer that has inspired me for a long time is one offered by the late archbishop of San Francisco, George Niederauer. Niederauer tells a “tale of two benches” to describe prayer: the tale of the bus bench, and the tale of the park bench. When we sit on the bus bench, he writes, we are full of expectations. We are not there just to *be* there; we are there to wait for the bus. Our hope is that our stay on the bus bench will be as brief as possible. We hope that the bus will come on time, and we are annoyed when the bus does not meet its published schedule. So not to waste time, we bring along something to read, or listen to podcasts on our phone. We’re constantly looking down the street, constantly looking at our watch, or perhaps the “bus tracker” on our phone to see how far away the bus is. But sitting on the park bench is very different from sitting on the bus bench. We are there just to *be* there, to rest, to feel the sun and the breeze, to smell the fragrance of the freshly-mown grass, or to delight our eyes with the dazzling color of a bed of flowers. We smile at children playing nearby, and just enjoy how they interact with their parents, or with one another. Niederauer’s guess is that probably ninety percent of our time in prayer is of the bus bench variety, but he insists that the essence of prayer is much more like sitting on the park bench. “When we inveterate bus benchers come to [prayer], we can easily arrive with our bus bench expectations; then frustration is a likely result. Over and over we must make the difficult but essential choice to let go of such expectations and let the Lord lead us to the park.”⁸ In a beautiful book on the spirituality of patience, Anglican priest and hospital chaplain Margaret Whip quotes another image by Rowan Williams: prayer is like sunbathing, “something that happens simply by lying there.” Williams writes: “You give the time, and that’s it. All you have to do is turn up. And then things change, at their own pace. You simply have to be there where the light can get at you.”⁹ Sitting on a park bench just enjoying the sun! A truly wonderful image of prayer.

In many ways, prayer is just wasting time. It’s not doing anything. It’s not expecting anything. It’s just being present. Being empty. In her truly stunning book *Lost in Wonder*, spiritual writer Esther de Waal gives the example of another spiritual writer, Sheila Cassidy. Cassidy writes that she gets up every morning and starts the day in silence and prayer, clasping a cup of tea “like a comforter.” She sits cross-legged on the floor in front of an icon and a candle, and “turns an hour glass upside down” and “abandons the hour to God.”¹⁰

This is waste-of-time, holocaust prayer. I often feel really lousy, tired, nauseated, dreadful and long to creep back to bed, but I do not because this is God's time, not mine, and I know that its quality lies not in what I feel but in the totality of my gift. This is a time of abandonment to God, a time in which I try to still my mind and just be open, receptive to him. My prayer is totally without images and largely without words.¹¹

In many ways, prayer is just wasting time. It's not doing anything. It's not expecting anything. It's just being present. Being empty.

At the end of every chapter of her book, de Waal quotes a number of prayers and poems, and I think two of them are worth quoting here. The first is by Bonnie Thurston:

Prayer is not
scribbling together
a few paltry words,
flinging them like stones
at the windows
of ineffability.

It is *Gelassenheit*,
letting go,
being carried on a current
toward a vast ocean,
deep beyond imagining;

sitting silently,
gaze firmly fixed
on one golden,
inscrutable face,
waiting
with the patience of love;

pouring out life,
that alabaster vial
of costly ointment,
at the feet of One



who washes others
with His tears.

Prayer is
asking nothing,
desiring nothing
but this,
only this.¹²

The second poem de Waal quotes is from Ann Lewin:

You do not have to
Look for anything, just
Look.
You do not have to
Listen for specific
Sounds, just
Listen.
You do not have to
Accomplish anything, just
Be.
And in the
Looking, and the
Listening, and the
Being, find
Me.¹³

Sit on that park bench. Let the sun bathe you. And be. Don't do anything. Waste time.

"Clear Off the Rubble"

The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner was asked to give a series of Lenten talks in Munich in 1946, just after the end of World War II. Rahner chose as his topic prayer, and in a wonderfully apt image for bombed out Munich, he described the first act of prayer as clearing off the rubble over one's heart. Robin Ryan writes of Rahner that "this 'rubble' can consist of many different things: the worries and anxieties that flood our minds; the experiences of disappointment and suffering, which can leave us hardened or even embittered; resentments that we have harbored because of the way others have treated us; the masks we wear to impress others."¹⁴ I find this a powerful and consoling

image of prayer. If we can imagine ourselves as clearing off the rubble, stone by stone, and just trying to expose our heart, we have a lovely image of what praying is. As Esther de Waal writes of Sheila Cassidy that “if her mind is invaded by a kaleidoscope of thoughts and ideas she simply ignores them—or if they are too insistent to be ignored she will gather them up and include them in her prayer.”¹⁵

If we can imagine ourselves as clearing off the rubble, stone by stone, and just trying to expose our heart, we have a lovely image of what praying is.

Let God Gaze Upon You

Another Jesuit, Pope Francis, offers an image of prayer that I have found to be most useful and inspiring. It is the image of being “gazed at.” In a talk he gave to catechists about six months after his election as pope, in September, 2013, Francis asked the catechists how they prayed. “When you visit the Lord, when you look at the tabernacle, what do you do?” Pope Francis answers his own question, “I speak, I talk, I think, I meditate, I listen...” and he says, yes, that is very good. But then he says: “But do you let yourself be looked at by the Lord? ... let ourselves be gazed upon by the Lord? ... You look at the tabernacle and you let yourselves be looked at ... it is simple!” Even if we fall asleep, Francis says that that’s OK. “He is still looking at you. But know for sure that he is looking at you!” In the same talk, Francis tells about meeting a young man who said that he didn’t believe in anything, and asked him what he thought about that. Francis said: “Don’t be discouraged. ... God loves you. Let yourself be gazed upon by him. Nothing else.”¹⁶ In the wonderful interview that Francis gave to Fr. Antonio Spadaro some months after his election, he spoke about one of his favorite paintings, “The Call of Matthew” by Caravaggio. In the painting we see Jesus pointing to the tax collector Levi, in the act of calling him, and gazing upon him. Francis comments: “Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze.”¹⁷ Margaret Whipp tells the well-known story about a conversation that St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, had with one of his parishioners, Louis Caffangeon. Caffangeon was frequently found in the church, where he would sit for hours at a time. One day the Curé asked him what he was doing all this time, and Caffangeon responded simply “I look at the Good Lord, and the Good Lord looks at me.”¹⁸ I wonder if this is where Pope Francis got his idea—or he might have gotten it from Saint Augustine, who said in



one of his sermons, “In order for us to see, we have to be seen; in order for us to love, we have to be loved.”¹⁹ In any case, good advice, I think, from an Argentine pope, a French peasant, and an African Father and Doctor of the Church!

Let me conclude these reflections on prayer with the amazing poem by the British poet George Herbert. Perhaps these images are not as down to earth as the rest of the images I have presented here, but they are some of the most beautiful images ever conceived or written. Let their beauty nourish us as we continue our quest as Christians to be people who “pray always” (1 Thess 5:16-18):

Prayer the church’s banquet, angel’s age,
God’s breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav’n and earth
Engine against th’ Almighty, sinner’s tow’r,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul’s blood,
The land of spices; something understood.²⁰



Notes

¹ Charles Elliott, “Just As I Am” (1835), https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Just_as_I_Am/.

² John Bell, “Take, O Take Me as I Am,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRpDeqmkYz8>.

³ Brainy Quotes, Woody Allen, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/woody_allen_145883.

⁴ Loretta Ross-Gotta, “Sacred Vulnerability,” *Give Us This Day* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2018), Thursday, February 13, 2018, 163.

⁵ Martin Thornton, *The Purple Headed Mountain*, Authorized Reissue (Riverside, IL: Akenside Press, 2015), 20.

⁶ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 5. The reference to T. S. Eliot is to section IV of “Burnt Norton.”

⁷ Wendell Berry, “Best of any song” (1997, I), *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 173.

⁸ George Niederauer, “A Ministerial Spirituality: Reflections on Priesthood,” in

ed. Karen Sue Smith, *Priesthood in the Modern World* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 71.

⁹ Margaret Whipp, *The Grace of Waiting: Learning Patience and Embracing Its Gifts* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2017), quoting Rowan Williams, *Pause for Thought*, BBC Radio 2, 18 October, 2005.

¹⁰ Esther de Waal, *Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 49.

¹¹ Sheila Cassidy, *Listener* (March 7, 1992), as part of a series “How I Pray,” quoted in de Waal, *Lost in Wonder*, 50.

¹² Quoted in de Waal, *Lost in Wonder*, 52.

¹³ Quoted in de Waal, *Lost in Wonder*, 54.

¹⁴ Robin Ryan, “The Foundations and Dynamics of Prayer,” in ed. Robin Ryan, *Catholics on Call: Discerning a Life of Service in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010), 51. See Karl Rahner, *On Prayer* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993).

¹⁵ De Waal, *Lost in Wonder*, 50.

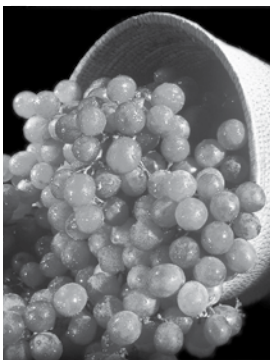
¹⁶ Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014), 16.

¹⁷ Antonio Spadaro, interviewer, *A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis* (New York: HarperOne/America Press, 2013), 8.

¹⁸ Whipp, *The Grace of Waiting*, 63-64.

¹⁹ Augustine, Sermon 174.4, in *Give Us This Day*, August 24, 2018, 254.

²⁰ George Herbert, “Prayer,” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44371/prayer-i>.



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Eymard Along the Journey: Eucharistic Reflections of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

by Michael Perez, SSS

Brother Michael Perez has been a formator for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for more than 30 years and is an expert in Eymardian spirituality.

March 2019

On March 15, 1860 Peter Julian Eymard wrote a letter to his sister Marianne and Nanette.¹ Marianne was the eldest sister and godmother of Peter Julian. Nanette Bernard was an orphan that was taken in by Mr. and Mrs. Eymard, whom Peter Julian loved as sister. Peter Julian's mother had died when he was only seventeen years old. So Marianne and Nanette took on even greater significance in Peter Julian's life after his mother's death.

Throughout Peter Julian's life we notice Marianne and Nanette's concern for their brother. Nursing him when he was ill and caring for him. In fact, in 1837, when he was appointed pastor of the parish in Monteynard, France both Marianne and Nannette left their home in La Mure, France to be housekeepers at the rectory. Here is an excerpt from one of his letters to them:

Paris: March 15, 1860

Very dear sisters,

If I wrote to you as often as I think of you, you would often receive letters from me, for you are my only family on earth, and I love La Mure because of you. So, if you should die before me, I would go to La Mure only to cry...

You must be suffering a lot from the extreme cold, so, dear sister, you must stay at home more when you are unsure of the weather or when you are not well. Though we all must do penance, nevertheless, you should spare yourself in regard to penance...

...And you good Nanette, like the heart, you never stop; that is fine. But

don't wear yourself out too quickly because each of you must live as long as the other. ... Goodbye, good sister...

*All yours in our Lord,
Eymard*

April 2019

Father Eymard was Spiritual Director of Mme. Josephine Gourd from 1848 until 1868. His correspondence, seventy-six letters in total, is a constant support of prayer and sacrifice for the conversion of her husband and her father. The conversion of her husband is the "desire" Fr. Eymard mentions in the letter that follows.²

The Gourd family was very wealthy and Mme. Gourd was very generous. At one home in Romaneche, she had permission to keep the Blessed Sacrament reserved in their family chapel. In 1874, she also donated a house in Lyon, France to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. Father Eymard shared with Mme. Gourd his concern for the faithlessness he saw in France and especially the indifference towards the Eucharist. Fr. Eymard wrote her a letter on Easter of 1849.³ Here are some excerpts of this letter:

Holy day of Easter, 1849

Madame,

I have a free moment and I am seizing it to wish you the grace of our Lord's Resurrection and tell you that today especially you and your family have been present to me, because your loved ones are dear to me, and I desire what you desire, and ask our good Master for it. I hope that all your desires will come true: have confidence! Our good Master lets us pray a long time because he wants to give us a great deal.

... I am tired, because today I preached the next to last Lenten sermon at the Charity. I preached on the love of our Lord which makes us holy and generous. Alas! If only I could be the first example of it! So now, I will leave this until tomorrow; it will have my first moment.

... The Lenten services were well attended in Lyons. There has been a return toward Religion, not phenomenal as far as the sacraments are concerned, but at least people are going to church. ...

... Be sure that our Lord's gracious Providence protects and leads you. It



is like the cloud of the desert for the Hebrews.

Your ever devoted,
Eymard



Notes

¹ Catherine Marie Carron, SSS, *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Volume Three: The Eucharistic Family 1858 - 1861.* (Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Waterville, Maine) Pg. 248

² Catherine Marie Caron, SSS. *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Volume One: The Early Years 1828 – 1856.* (Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Waterville, Maine) Pg. 175

³ Ibid.

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PASTORAL LITURGY

How to Pray the Liturgy of Hours – Part 2

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

IN THE LAST COLUMN WE GAVE A QUICK OVERVIEW OF HOW TO INITIATE THE REGULAR celebration of the Liturgy of Hours (LH) in your parish. Some people use the daily “app” on an electronic device (tablet or phone) to pray the LH. Many parishes offer books or a hymnal/music resource that have the LH in a print edition. The “breviary,” a one volume edition of the LH, is the most common resource, and it often confounds first time users. Let’s take some time to explain this resource and offer some tips:

Why is the LH book organized in this particular manner?

The “directions” for the LH are in the middle of the ritual books. Editions have a brief summary of the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours at the beginning, where one might expect the directions for use of the prayer. However, the basic instructions are in the middle because in the Church’s literary binding tradition the most common parts of any ritual texts were placed in center of a book in order to extend the book’s life. The *Order of Mass* or *Roman Missal* (RM) is another example of this design.

The most common edition of the LH is the one volume *Christian Prayer* (CP), published by Catholic Book in 1976. This same edition continues to be reprinted to this day. The “Ordinary” (a term meant to describe the regular parts of the ritual/prayer) is the basic instruction that begins at page 695. The psalms are the heart of the liturgical prayer, and the four-weeks of psalms are placed in the “heart” of the book, i.e., the middle, for easy use.

The front of CP features the “Proper of Seasons,” the readings and intercessions for the “high seasons,” that is, the special times of Advent, Lent, Christmas and Easter Time. These are the daily prayers during these holiest of seasons. Specific days and their accompanying saints are placed in the middle rear of the book and titled the “Proper of

Blessed
Sacrament
Father John
Thomas Lane,
SSS holds
degrees in
music, education
and liturgy.
He currently
serves as pastor
of his home
parish, Saint
Paschal Baylon
Roman Catholic
Church, Highland
Heights, Ohio
but has also
been a pastor
in Houston,
Albuquerque,
vocation minister,
and diocesan
director of
liturgy. For
questions, other
resources or
workshops he
could do for
your parish,
contact him at
jtlanesss@gmail.com
or (440)
442-3410.

Saints.” Currently the book is being revised to include the multitude of newly canonized saints. Between the “Proper of the Saints” and the psalms are almost one hundred pages of daytime and night prayers (divided into weeks).

At the back end of the book, in between the “commons” for prayers for the dedication of a church, the Blessed Mother, and other special commons, there is the hymnody. After the hymnody is a sample of texts from the Office of Readings and non-biblical readings for the special liturgical seasons.

How do you place the ribbons or divide up CP?

It is helpful to place one ribbon near the beginning of the book to mark the liturgical season or Sundays in Ordinary Time. This section gives assistance in knowing the week of the Church year being celebrating and the week of psalmody to be recited.

Another ribbon or bookmark can be placed in the “Ordinary” for the Canticle of Zechariah and Canticle of Mary, for quick and easy reference until memorized. A special card with these daily texts is generally included with the book when purchased, but after years of use, may go missing.

The third ribbon could mark the week of the psalmody. A fourth ribbon can be used for the Proper of Saints. Another ribbon can be used for the less frequent commons of the liturgical year. A holy card or ribbon is also helpful in the hymn section for easy access.

How do I find the extra feast days, such as the Sacred Heart?

Like the RM, these are liturgical solemnities in the midst of Ordinary Time and placed at the end of the “numbered” weeks. Therefore, Trinity Sunday begins after the prayer for the 34th week in Ordinary Time. The Body and Blood of Christ follows, then the Sacred Heart, and Christ the King.

What is the purpose of the Invitatory and having it before the Morning Prayer headings?

Because the book is a “breviary,” it still has hybrid moments where it encourages some of the other elements of the LH. In this area, the Invitatory is actually placed there as a reminder for the “Office

of Readings,” which are the first prayers of the day. Clerics have the tradition of using the Office of Readings as part of their morning routine, yet most of the readings for each day are not in CP. The entire selection of the Office of Readings, (and where I believe the title “Office” or “Divine Office” attests) is due to this liturgical norm to do this first in the day and is part of the 4-volume LH. Again, perhaps in future CP books, they will not publish this piece to avoid confusion, but also to remind people that the Invitatory is part of the Office of Readings. The Invitatory is for the “very beginning of each day’s prayer.” For some, when they wake from bed, they pray this piece of the LH. For most communal celebrations, the LH omits the Invitatory for Morning Prayer. The Invitatory serves as a prelude to the actual Morning Prayer and in formal settings is encouraged according to CP.

Why are there two versions of the LORD’S Prayer in certain editions of the LH?

In the retranslation of the LH, the liturgists and scripture scholars, in tandem with other ecumenical scholars, wished for a version of the LORD’S Prayer for Mass (from Matthew’s Gospel) and another from the Didache. The Didache and International Commission on English Texts (ICET), not the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) version of the prayer, were originally chosen for the LH. This is why the LORD’S Prayer is completely written out in the Canadian editions and Benedictine version (and other religious orders) with “For the kingdom and power and glory...” as part of the text, for this is in the Didache as an acclamation to the LORD’S Prayer.

Reminders for March/April 2020

The First Sunday of Lent, begins in March this year and the special rituals for the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). The RCIA (eventually to be called the *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*) has rituals for each Sunday of Lent, having been reviewed here in previous columns. Coordinate with your catechumenate team. The bishops of the United States hope to have the process of review completed by November 2020.

Thursday, March 19, Solemnity of Saint Joseph: A unique day to celebrate “Saint Joseph Table” and to review the ritual in the *Book of Blessings* (BB), chapter 53.

Saturday, March 21, Isra and Mi'raj begins at sundown: This term may need some explaining as we grow in inter-religious dialogue. It is helpful to note this Islam holy day of physical and spiritual journeying.

Wednesday, March 25, Solemnity of the Annunciation of Our LORD: While not a day of obligation, it is a special holy day, like Saint Joseph Day, that has a festiveness in the midst of Lent, with a Gloria and flowers permitted.

Holy Week: Note the Chrism Mass Day in your own local diocese.

- Palm Sunday, April 5
- Holy Thursday, April 9
- Good Friday, April 10
- Easter Vigil, April 11

Easter Sunday, April 12: The *Order of Baptism of Children* becomes mandatory on Easter Sunday in the diocese of the United States of America. There have been no advance texts or copies available to preview and share details, however, there are a few things to note before we do a prolonged commentary later this year:

- There is a delightful opening or introduction published to receive the family of the child, setting a tone of welcome and joy.
- There are bi-lingual editions for the Church of the United States.
- There will be musical notation for certain texts such as the blessing of the water.
- The child is directly addressed, **"N., you have become a new creation..."**

Also on Easter, consider the BB, chapter 54, blessing of food for the first meal of Easter. Perhaps an excerpt could be printed in your parish bulletin for families to pray at home.

Wednesday, April 22: Administrative Professionals Day.

Thursday, April 23: Ramadan Begins at sundown.

NB: There are no days when the Lectionary for Mass supplement for the USA is needed. However, it may be useful on Tuesday, March 3 for the celebration of Saint Katharine Drexel, virgin, founder, and great model of education for those in most need.





BREAKING THE WORD

Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Paul Bernier, SSS

March 1, 2020
First Sunday of Lent

**Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51:3-6, 12-13, 17; Romans; 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11**

The American ideal of fulfillment seems to be that of a person who can chart his or her own course without interference from anyone. As Frank Sinatra popularized it, "I did it my way." Yet, unbridled individualism of this sort has given us a world where war, injustice, poverty, drugs, crime, etc., are all around us. Is it possible to be perfectly fulfilled, self-actualized, and yet still put God first in our lives and do things God's way?

The temptation stories in the gospels are basically a theological reflection on Jesus' baptism and the vision of the Spirit that asserted that he was God's son. The same Spirit who descended on him at baptism now leads him into the wilderness precisely to allow him to be tested as our first parents were tested. The temptation of Adam and Eve was not so much the fruit on the tree as the push by the devil to "go ahead, eat it; you will become just like gods." In other words, they decided not to be bound by outside rules, to be able to decide for themselves how to lead their lives.

Jesus, unlike Eve and Adam in the first reading, overcame the temptation to usurp God's prerogatives. This is the parallel that Paul draws in the second reading. Jesus' own obedience became the means of reversing the pattern of sin set by Adam and Eve and became for us a source of our justification. As Jesus prepared to live out his messianic vocation, he also had to wrestle with what it meant to be a child of God. In his case, what it meant to live out his messianic vocation.

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The three temptation scenes are diverse examples of Jesus' determination to obey God in the face of the temptation to "do his own thing." In the first temptation, Jesus is being enticed to use his power for his own (rather than God's) ends. It also implies lack of trust that God would take care of his servant. The scene at the pinnacle of the Temple is not a temptation to demonstrate power (we are not told that anyone is present), but instead, to put God himself to the test: to do something foolish and expect to be bailed out because of a special relationship with God. The last temptation is one to power: to become a political messiah and restore the Davidic kingdom. In the first two, Jesus is tempted to bring God's power under his own control; in the latter to allow the lust for power and glory to blind him to God's true purpose.

The problem with using Jesus' temptations as a model of how to overcome our own is that, for most people, they do not correspond with our own experiences of temptation. What did Jesus know of the temptations faced by struggling parents, teenagers looking for peer acceptance, the lonely divorced, or striving business persons? We tend to see temptations as dishonesty, sensuality, etc., rather than as vocational: how to live our lives.

However, the basic underlying temptation that Jesus faced with us is to treat God as less than God. We might not be tempted to turn stones into bread, but we are constantly tempted to mistrust God's readiness to empower us to face our trials. And compromise with the ways of the world, with money and power, is always a seduction. Jesus shows us how to worship and serve God alone. He shows us how to be fully self-actualized precisely because we choose to do things God's way.

March 8, 2020 Second Sunday of Lent

**Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; 2 Timothy 1:8-10;
Matthew 17:1-9.**

The Transfiguration stories are always the focus for the second Sunday of Lent. As we approach Holy Week, we have to find some answer for the scandal of the cross. How does this fit into God's plan of salvation? Though the death of Jesus on the cross was a horrific event, surprisingly perhaps, it is not presented in the Scriptures as a tragedy. It may have been a problem for Jesus as it is for us; but it was especially so for the early converts. Nothing led the Jews to think that

the messiah would be rejected by his own people. Pagans would have had a hard time wrapping their minds around the idea of a divine person dying by state execution. And despite Jesus' predictions of the passion, even the disciples seem to have had little idea of what Jesus was talking about.

Having just predicted his passion, Jesus also told anyone who wished to follow him that they would have to take up their own crosses. Not only are these hard sayings, but they cast serious doubts as to whether Jesus could possibly be the hoped-for messiah. The transfiguration, therefore, is a Christophany, that is a manifestation of Jesus (for both his sake and that of the disciples). Jesus is presented not as someone divine, but as a human being who is able to transcend himself and become the pioneer and perfecter of the faith of all who share his life.

Note that Jesus is totally passive in this gospel story, he says and does nothing. It is Moses and Elijah who seem to dominate by doing all the talking. Luke is more specific here and tells us that they were discussing his *exodus*, his departure from this world. Matthew only hints at this in the injunction that the disciples not discuss the vision until Jesus had risen from the dead. He emphasizes instead the voice from heaven that, as at Jesus' baptism, announces Jesus is God's son, and that they should listen to him. This confirms Jesus' role as the ultimate *teacher*, (including both his ethical teaching as well as the role of suffering in the plan of salvation). More important than the vision is the idea that God's will is communicated through Jesus' word. This will help Peter, James and John (the only three to appear alone with Jesus in Gethsemane) to understand that if we wish to share in Jesus' glory, we must also share his suffering.

It is more difficult, perhaps, to see how Abram is related to the gospel. While it is relatively easy for us to understand how he could be called to play a key role in salvation history, becoming by God's free choice, the father of the chosen people. He was not asked to die on the cross. Ultimately, however, what links him and Jesus is that both needed complete faith and trust in God to live out their lives with fidelity and become examples for all to follow. The lesson of the cross is not that suffering is necessary to further God's plan of salvation. It is rather that if suffering comes, it should not prevent us from being faithful to God and to our commitments.

Ultimately, the Transfiguration forces us to ask at a deeper level what

it means to be saved. Was it because of Jesus' death or his willingness to remain faithful to the mission given him by God? It also forces us to ask how we are to understand our relationship with Jesus wrought by baptism/confirmation and renewed at each Eucharist.

March 15, 2020 Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-9; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

We live in world that is sadly divided. In our own country foreigners are seen as threats and their entry severely restricted. Hispanics on the southern border are demonized as criminals and rapists. There is a rise of neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klanners. Bipartisanship seems to have gone out the window. In the UK, Brexit has managed to divide the country. The Middle East continues to experience upheaval. We also see divisions at the individual level. In many families, there are members who have not spoken to each other in years, and we have all witnessed the acrimony of many divorces. We need to heal apathies and old wounds.

Since Jesus is always the central figure in every Johannine story, we should not think so much of today's gospel as being about Jesus' encounter with the woman but of the Samaritan's (and our) encounter with Jesus. As the earlier Cana incident showed, the water of Jewish purification became the wine of the new kingdom brought by Jesus. Here the water of Jacob's well is contrasted with the living water given by Jesus. In the early Church this would have been read in light of the Church's own experience of baptism. Christians would have understood the living water as being the life mediated by the Spirit and made available by our crucified and risen Lord. Indeed, Jesus as Messiah is able to enliven us, enabling us to worship God in spirit and truth.

Important to the story is that it takes place at Jacob's well. That was enemy territory. The gift of God, Christ's living water, is being offered to alien heretics! Further, we are told that many Samaritans believed because of the *testimony* of one who was a woman and a polygamist. Because they were willing to come to Jesus on her testimony, they were then able to believe because of their own experience of Christ. Belief in Jesus by members of an ostracized group is what this passage is all about—a pointed reminder that God's blessings are not limited

to any one group.

A preacher can easily get caught up in the story of the Samaritan and devote their homily to a harangue against adultery. Coming as this gospel does during Lent, however, the emphasis is not on this woman's irregular life, or Jesus' encounter with a woman. Instead, it is about the living waters of baptism, which allow us to worship God in spirit and in truth, that is now being made available to all. The Jesus portrayed in today's gospel is opposed to prejudice and antagonism of any kind. All who are baptized become members of one new family, open to all.

Since the season of Lent and its readings are the final preparation of catechumens for baptism at the Easter Vigil, they also serve to remind us of God's actions on our behalf. Tied in with this is the fact that our own salvation is bound up with our sharing Christ's life with others. Christ's gifts are not to be hoarded, but offered to others. We were not created simply to avoid sin and be happy in heaven, but to make that same heaven available to others. Our joining at Christ's table signifies our willingness to pattern our own lives on that of Jesus. The Samaritan woman shows us the reaction that should be ours when our lives have been touched by Christ.

March 22, 2020 Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13a; Psalm 23:1-6; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

"Seeing is believing," we say. We often use sight metaphors to indicate understanding, or its lack, "You just don't see, do you?" Themes of light and darkness pervade our literature and our thought. The Scriptures make this an enduring theme. "For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). An especially beautiful passage is found in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." John is more judgmental, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (Jn 3:19).

This highlights the distinction between physical sight and true insight. The point of the gospel story today is to present Jesus as the one who brings light into a world that is, like the blind beggar, groping about in darkness. It is a narrative restatement of what we read in John's prologue that Jesus is "the true light enlightening everyone coming into the world" (1:9).

The previous chapter also stated, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness" (8:12). This passage has an interesting twist. Verse four reads, "We must do the works of the one who sent me." Disciples also have the responsibility of carrying out Christ's mission. This is exemplified in the courageous witness of the formerly blind man. The narrative embodies two closely woven motifs which are fundamental to this gospel, namely that of revelation and of judgment (*krisis*). The man enlightened by Jesus becomes a sign of revelation and this, in turn, precipitates a *krisis* which both divides those involved in the event and brings judgment on those who reject the sign.

The two features of judgment and revelation develop side by side, making it clear that the passage does not simply reveal Jesus as the light of the world, but exemplifies what happens when that light shines in the world: some accept and some reject it. The light transforms those who accept it; those who reject it are left to wallow in their self-chosen darkness. Faced with the fact that a man had been healed, the Pharisees choose to focus on the fact that it was done on a Sabbath. Hence, instead of perceiving that Jesus came from God, they reject him as a sinner, one who violated their understanding of the Law.

For John "seeing is not believing," rather "believing is seeing." Faith leads to insight. The rationalists among us demand hard proof before they believe. Many in the Western world doubt (or reject) the existence of God because it cannot be scientifically proven. In the gospel the Pharisees object to the notion that they are blind, believing that they "see" better than others. Jesus retorts that their insistence that they see clearly, while refusing to appreciate what has happened, is a sign that their minds are made up, and that no facts will change them. Thus they have sinned.

And what about us? We are challenged both to see and thereby to be light for others. In our world today, where there is so much polarization, where lying seems to be taken for granted, we are called to be sources of much-needed light in a world of darkness.

March 29, 1999
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14; Psalm 130:1-8; Romans 8:8-11; John 11:1-45

The questions of life and death have always been a challenge. Many fear death. Even those who believe in the resurrection seldom look forward to death with joy and anticipation. And in this life, some people seem more dead than alive. Like T.S. Eliot's "hollow men," they seem drained of anything like real life, trapped in a meaningless existence.

The readings today all deal with new life, real life. The gospel tells of the raising of Lazarus; the last of the seven "signs" John has developed in his gospel. Ezekiel has God telling us, "O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live..." And Paul states, "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you."

In the gospel Jesus is revealed as Lord over death, able to give new life to others. Already in John's gospel we have been given advance notice of this. When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, his response to the complaining Pharisees says, "the hour will come... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25). Here Jesus is stating that he is the resurrection and the life. Further, the Lazarus miracle is also an anticipation of the death and resurrection of Jesus himself. It is the crucified and risen Lord who is the resurrection and the life. Those in union with him have new life even now, life that will reach its final consummation in the world to come. It is a principle of life *now*, life that even physical death cannot extinguish.

Note one detail, in v. 35, Jesus weeps. Why? Martha had responded to Jesus with real insight into him and his message, an insight born of deep faith. But Mary came to Jesus with a band of wailing mourners and, still crying, complained to him that if he had been there, Lazarus would not have died. Unlike Martha, who believed that Jesus is the Christ, she and "the Jews" are so consumed by their grieving that they are not open to the word of life that Jesus brings (v. 33). No wonder he cried! Not so much out of love for Lazarus, as the Jews mistakenly

presume, but out of sorrow for their indifference to the life present in their midst.

The gospel of Christ is a liberating message of good news, news that invites us to experience the life of the Spirit. Yet, many people treat religion as if it were a wet blanket thrown over whatever gives joy in life. It has been said that a Christian who is sad is a sad Christian indeed. The fact remains that a liberating gospel should make us a people of hope. Paul reminds us that we who have died and risen with Christ in baptism have become temples of the Spirit, a Spirit who is life itself. It is this life that we celebrate at each Eucharist.

Can we imagine ourselves like Lazarus in that tomb of darkness, hearing a familiar voice, muffled, but easy to recognize? Our dearest friend, Jesus, is calling us to come out. And so we inch our way toward the light. And then we must decide. Do we fall back into the tomb or step out into the unknown? *Because*, what lies ahead is completely new territory. We are being called to live a totally new life. But we know and trust that it is truly Jesus there, welcoming us back to the life that only he can bring.

April 5, 2020 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

Today we begin the most solemn week of the Church year. People are aware of this, at least dimly, hence the greater number of people at church these days. Though they may seldom darken the doors of the church otherwise. This should inspire us to proclaim the gospel message so as to touch their hearts. Matthew's passion narrative contains unique features of interest that can intrigue listeners. This is not the time for a generic telling of the passion story. There are various ways of presenting the story so as to prevent it from being simply a "suffered, died, and then rose for our salvation" trope.

The passion was and remains a scandal. Matthew, more than anyone else, reminds us that what happened was "so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." He treats the royalty of Christ in a paradoxical way, making it a royalty that is manifested in powerlessness and humility. Thus we

go from the royal entry into Jerusalem to the mocking of the soldiers, the ironic title on the cross, and the mockery of the bystanders. This is a far cry from the kingship of Christ we find depicted in John's gospel.

Matthew and the other Synoptics try to prepare us for understanding the passion by prefacing it with the account of the Last Supper, where Jesus announces that his blood is the blood of the (new) covenant, which Jeremiah had foretold. Matthew is the only one to state that this covenant is "for the forgiveness of sins." More than any other gospel, Matthew stresses that the passion is the end of the ancient era and the beginning of the new, the era of the Church. The rent veil of the Temple signifies the end of the old, and the conversion of the centurion the first fruits of the nations. The priests also give the body of Jesus to the disciples, abdicating their prerogatives and leaving the Church to be the sign of Christ to the world.

On a more intimate note, Matthew, (along with Mark) gives us the cry of Jesus from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" This cry powerfully expresses the human dimension and drama of the cross. The cross was no bed of roses, nor did Jesus look forward to it. It was something that Jesus accepted out of commitment and fidelity, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading. That passage has an implicit contrast between the disobedience of Adam and Eve who were created in the image and likeness of God, and the commitment of Jesus who, "though he was in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped," but was willing to accept even death on the cross for our sakes.

Hopefully, the homily will not be as long as the gospel, but it should focus on an element or two of the passion story that help to make its import felt today. Note that despite the realism of the gospel portrait, we do not have here a "poor Jesus" approach. Jesus is not presented as a victim, but as one who voluntarily accepted to play the key role in salvation history. It was on the cross that Jesus triumphed over death and over the powers of evil. He is not only a victor here, but also an exemplar of how each of us is called to live our lives: not for ourselves, but for others.

April 9, 2020 Holy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116:12-13, 15-18; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

One of the major blessings bequeathed us by the Second Vatican Council was a deeper appreciation for the place of the scriptures in our theology. Nowhere is this more evident than in the theology of the Eucharist. Rather than emphasizing only dogmatic statements, we have now been able to focus on any number of rich biblical themes that apply to this sacrament. The readings today give us four major ones: the Passover theme, the covenant theme, the theme of memorial, and the ethical dimension of the Eucharist. Any of them can provide matter for rich reflection. Let us focus on the latter theme.

People sometimes wonder why John's Gospel has no account of the institution of the Eucharist. Instead, he gives us the washing of the feet. At the supper, Jesus had a pointed command for his disciples, "If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Is this very different from his injunction at the institution that we should, "Do this in memory of me?" Jesus was not asking us to repeat his words; he was asking us to do everything that he did in his lifetime—a life that came to a climax at the Last Supper. There he did everything he could to make us appreciate what following him means.

This is why the washing of the feet is so important. It spells out in graphic detail the service that we should be eager to render to one another. If Jesus could humble himself to wash the feet of his disciples how much more should we look for opportunities to wash one another's feet, to be aware of our neighbors' needs, to give the cup of cool water in Jesus' name, to love one another as he has loved us—even to the extent of giving his life for us.

Receiving the bread of Christ at communion enables us to become what we are there called to be: the body of Christ here below. St. Augustine put the matter beautifully many years ago. "The priest says, 'body of Christ,' and you answer Amen. It is your own mystery that you place on the altar. You say amen to what you are. Be, therefore, the

body of Christ, so that your amen may be true" (Augustine, Sermon 272, my translation).

But Jesus did not only ask us to eat his body, he asked us also to drink his blood. We are privileged to be allowed once again to drink from the cup, to do what Jesus asked of us. This is no redundant action. Receiving from the cup reminds us *how* we become the body of Christ: by making whatever sacrifices it takes to be faithful; by attending to our neighbors' needs; by allowing the need and pain of others to touch our hearts as they did the heart of Christ; in other words, by washing one another's feet.

St Paul reminds us, "for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." Our proclamation is not that Jesus died a gruesome death on the cross. That is bad news. Our proclamation is the good news of a life lived for others, of blood poured out on our behalf, and that because of the Eucharist he empowers us to imbibe his spirit and continue his work and his presence in the world.

Jesus died for love of us. John begins his account by telling us that, "knowing that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father, he loved his own in the world, and loved them to the end. Our sharing in the Eucharist week after week should deepen our experience of Jesus' love—that persistent, stubborn, faithful love of his that will accept no defeat. He loved us to the end.

April 12, 2020 Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4 (or I Corinthians 5:6b-8); John 20:1-9

The gospel today speaks of the empty tomb. That this was not considered as proof of the resurrection can be seen in the fact that it causes Mary to think that the body had been stolen. Peter also entered the tomb and had no idea what had happened. Any prior teaching of Jesus was either forgotten or not understood to begin with. We can easily sympathize with them. When someone we love dies a tragic death, when one's hopes have been dashed as completely as were the hopes of the disciples at the death of Jesus, how does one become

convinced that he has risen to a new life? What could be powerful enough to transform a group of cowardly and frightened men into committed and fearless proclaimers that Jesus had, indeed, risen from the dead, as we see in the first reading?

Today's gospel reading does not actually answer these questions. John gives us a clue, perhaps, by telling us that the unknown character known as the Beloved Disciple entered the tomb and believed. What enabled his belief without any actual appearance of the risen Lord? Here, commentators have no real answer. Perhaps it was the way the wrappings were left, or more probably, that his belief was mediated more by the special love that he had for Jesus. It was surely this love that gave him the courage to stand at the foot of Jesus' cross, and that gave him the edge over Peter in this incident.

A more important question is how we come to Easter faith. As Raymond Brown points out in his commentary on John's Gospel in The Anchor Bible commentary series, John's scenario is such that it reminds us that there are different degrees of readiness and different factors that cause one to come to faith. John begins the story by telling us that it was still dark. For him darkness lasts until a person believes in the risen Jesus. John hints that not even the Scriptures are sufficient to bring one to faith unless we have the heart needed to understand them.

The seeing and believing in the empty tomb is akin to seeing and believing in the seven "signs" Jesus performed in John's Gospel (cf. 4:48 and 10:25-26). Faith does not depend on scientific proof; everything that we believe requires that we have understanding hearts for God's action in our lives. The reading from Colossians tells us that if we were raised with Christ, we should seek what is above, not of what is of earth. It is our ability to be attuned to the voice of the Holy Spirit that enables us to penetrate the mind and heart of God and God's action in our lives.

April 19, 2020 Second Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Many Christians are troubled by the fact that they have doubts

regarding faith. They often confess this. Yet, faith is such that unless it grows deeper day by day, unless we can re-appropriate it at deeper levels, it shrivels and dies. We cannot engage well in Christian mission unless we can wrestle with our faith like Jacob with the angel.

There is a richness in all three readings today. Acts shows us the classic summary of the signs of the Christian community: teaching, fellowship (even to the extent of sharing possessions), Eucharist, and prayer. Note that there is only one active verb governing these four signs. Thus to say that “they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles” should not be taken to mean that they believed everything the apostles taught, but that they preached and taught with the same fearlessness as they did.

1 Peter is a song of hope in the midst of trials, buoyed as we should be by the faith that is ours. The gospel, which was the original ending of John’s gospel, offers us three distinct messages: the commissioning of the disciples to carry on the Lord’s work, the duty to forgive, and the doubts and faith of Thomas. This commissioning is the constitution of the community of believers, believers who are sent to convert the world. Further, the accomplishment of mission is the work of the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us and enables us to forgive one another.

Forgiveness is meant to be one of the chief characteristics of the Christian community. Only in this way will those who see us be enabled to also see Jesus in us. Representing Jesus to this degree will force people to make a decision in their lives, to accept or reject grace. In regard to Thomas, the story addresses the question of how we can come to faith today without any personal appearances of the risen Lord. This is not only because of the witness of others, but because we ourselves have had a personal experience of Jesus in our own lives.

This gospel passage has led Thomas to be known as “doubting Thomas.” Only John gives us such a vivid example of doubt. Asking for proofs reflects an attitude condemned by Jesus, “Unless you see signs and wonders you never believe!” (4:48). The irony of the story is that the one who doubted most is able to make the highest profession of faith found in any gospel, “My Lord and my God!” This enables him to hear Jesus’ words, “You have believed!”

Thomas’ exclamation of faith goes beyond expressing faith in the resurrection; it expresses its ultimate meaning. That is, it reveals to us

who Jesus really is. Not an abstract definition! The personal pronoun makes it clear that it is a question of *my* Lord and *my* God. What really matters is who Jesus is for each of us. How we maintain faith in Jesus in our day and age will be possible only if he is Jesus-for-us. That implies a personal relationship, and not simply an intellectual conviction. Perhaps the first reading is important in this context. Belief in Christ implies that we *act* as Christians. Professing God with our lips means little if it is not accompanied by the four signs of the true Church noted in Acts.

April 26, 2020 Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-23; Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

If any gospel story speaks to our human condition, today's gospel does. We have two disciples who are searching for meaning on life's journey. They had placed their hopes in Jesus, and were shaken to the core with what had occurred just three days earlier. So depressed were they about everything that had happened, that they were quitting the Christian community and going back home. Their friend had been killed, their hopes dashed, and they couldn't make sense of it all. Despite their familiarity with scripture, they could find no consolation there, so they were leaving it all behind to try to pick up the broken pieces of their lives elsewhere. They were going back home.

Luke's resurrection stories answer the question of how we can find the risen Lord in our lives today. The women who had gone to the tomb earlier on Easter were told that if they were looking for one who was alive, they should not be looking in a cemetery ("Why do you search for the living among the dead?"). Resurrection is not simply the reanimation of a corpse. The story about the two quitters on the road to Emmaus that follows, tells us where to look for the risen Lord. In a story framed very liturgically (we have a Liturgy of the Word on the road and a Liturgy of the Eucharist in the house), Luke strives to impress upon us that the most intense experience any of us can have of the risen Lord is in the celebration of the Eucharist.

This is a Eucharist, however, that enters into the heart of what we are celebrating: the actualization of the Lord's sacrifice in our midst today. We are asked to recognize Christ present in the stranger in our

midst ("Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him"), in the proclamation of the Scriptures ("Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"), in acts of charity ("Stay with us."), and in the supper itself. Christ's supper, however, is one where he wrestled with the same questions that bedevil us. Despite the temptation to escape ["Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" (Lk 22:42)] he remained faithful to his mission, faithful to God, and faithful to his commitment to his poor. Coming at last to their senses, the Emmaus pilgrims once again become disciples, returning to Jerusalem and the community gathered there, proclaiming that they had come to know Christ in the breaking of the bread.

If our Eucharists are to be places of real encounter with the risen Lord, it will be because we once again turn to the Scriptures to enlighten us at every turn of life's journey, learning to recognize Christ in "the least of his brethren," and opening our hearts to them in charity. And if we put all of life's questions, doubts and incomprehension on the paten at each Mass, measuring them against what we learn from Jesus: that it is only by being faithful, by having complete trust in God, that we discover life's meaning.





EUCCHARIST & CULTURE

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Art Review



Fra Angelico
CHRIST
CROWNED WITH
THORNS
Tempera and Gold
on Panel
circa 1430

I don't like this painting. I don't care for works of art that stridently emphasize Jesus' suffering. Whether it's Matthias Grünewald's famous crucifixion scene from the Isenheim altarpiece or this renaissance masterpiece by Fra Angelico, I react negatively towards works of art that seem to confront the viewer with a singular vision of Jesus' suffering. I often find these artworks problematic because the complex reality of salvation through Christ tends to be reduced to an act of suffering and death in these images.

The theologian Stephen Bevans when articulating his contextual models of theology observed two broadly different theological trajectories: a "creation-centered" perspective and a "redemption-centered" perspective.¹ The "creation-centered" perspective emphasizes more the importance of the Incarnation, a sacramental worldview and the goodness of creation.² A "redemption-centered" perspective emphasizes the reality of sin and "corruption" recognizing the need for God's intervention.³ Naturally, any integrated theological viewpoint has to hold both together.⁴ But often, I observe, many Christians tend to be drawn more to one of these two perspectives. I fall more into a "creation-centered" perspective, and so I struggle in particular with works of art from a "redemption-centered" perspective that seem to present the viewer with the notion that Jesus' suffering and death were the fundamental point of the Incarnation.

John Christman,
SSS

In this painting, by perhaps one of the greatest artists in the Christian tradition, Jesus' suffering is emphatically portrayed. Sharp thorns pierce his skin and blood splashes out, giving a sense of the brutal force in which this "crown" was thrust upon his head. Rivulets of blood pour down Jesus' face like tears. His face is contorted into an incredulous expression, perhaps wondering how humanity can be so cruel. Fra Angelico further manipulates the viewer's emotions by restricting his color palette. The scene is washed in red. Even the halo glows red.

Has suffering touched the divine? It's the red eyes in this painting in particular that have always struck me as excessive. There's little room for theological nuance with blood red eyes confronting you.

But then, upon a recent visit to a hospital, I was confronted with that very reality. I found myself standing with a family in a hospital room praying for their daughter. She was in ICU. She had been intubated and was unable to communicate. She was also clearly exhausted in her fight for recovery. When this young woman opened her eyes I saw something I was not expecting to see. The blood vessels in her eyes had burst and the whites of her eyes were now completely red. It was disarming and heartbreaking all at once. Here was Fra Angelico's suffering Christ. Here was the body of Christ present in a young woman struggling to survive. Also present in that moment, however, was the hope and faith of family and friends gathered to support this young woman. Christ was present in numerous ways.

And with all of that being said, I still don't like this painting. I wish it said more. I wish suffering of this sort did not exist. But Jesus' eyes in this painting are now forever linked in my mind with that young woman's eyes. Their suffering is entwined. And if Fra Angelico's image of Jesus suffering helps people who tragically experience the depths of pain and suffering to know that God is with them in that horrendous experience, then I can appreciate its value.

Notes

¹ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology (Revised and Expanded)*. (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) Pg. 21-22.

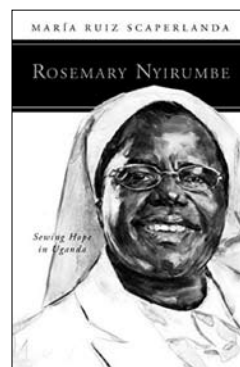
² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Book Review

This is another gem of a biography in the Liturgical Press' series, *People of God: Remarkable Lives, Heroes of Faith*. Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe was born in 1956 in Northern Uganda into a family of eight children. There was a strong practicing Catholic family and the seeds of a religious life vocation developed in Rosemary from a young age. When one of her older sisters bore a child, Rosemary moved out of her parents' hut to her sister's to help her care for her niece. At this early age, Rosemary learned the skills and attitudes of mothering,



ROSEMARY
NYIRUMBE:
SEWING HOPE
IN UGANDA
Maria Ruiz
Scaperlanda
Liturgical Press,
Collegeville, MN.
2019

which would later prove to be the foundational virtue of her life-long ministry.

Rosemary, convinced of her vocation as a religious sister, left her family at a very young age and lied about her age to the Comboni Missionary Sisters in order to join that community at the age of 15. This community is one of several religious communities founded by Bishop Daniel Comboni to encourage native African vocations. Their charism is to serve the poor, which was very attractive to the young Rosemary. At the time she entered the Comboni community, the leaders were still all Italian and Rosemary had a difficult time adjusting to community life. Relief came when, after her religious profession, the African Comboni Sisters withdrew from the mother community and founded their own community, the Sacred Heart of Jesus Sisters. The first superior of this community was the kind and motherly Sister Annetta who saw much promise in Sister Rosemary and sent her away for further education in medicine so that she could better assist the community in its ministry.

Africa had entered a new and painful period. The kidnapping of over 250 young girls from a Christian school in 2014 by the Boko Haram horrified the whole world, but this was not an isolated incident. With the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, the Ugandan government went through a series of upheavals that led to the emergence of a number of revolutionary armies. The people suffered greatly as they were caught between the government soldiers and the militia of the revolution. The outlawed armies attacked villages. The girls and boys were taken away, and the adults were killed. Schools were closed in fear. Traveling became dangerous. Sister Rosemary and her sisters were often in danger with their students as raids were regularly conducted in the villages where the sisters had schools. The sisters hid the children in various rooms and kept them quiet until the raiders took the food they wanted and left. It was clear that the sisters would have to leave and bring the young children out of the beleaguered villages.

Once the violence and the raids had ended the sisters could go back to running schools and dispensaries. It was then that Sister Rosemary discovered her life's calling. She noticed that young girls who had been captives of the rebels and might have returned with children were withdrawn and non-communicative. When she began to engage them in conversation, the motherly skills she had learned throughout her life helped to bring the girls out of the trauma that

had so impacted them. She began a sewing school in which these girls could learn a trade and then earn a living for themselves and their children. She helped to bring new life into these young women. Because of this many more young women began to show up out of the forests seeking Sister Rosemary's help.

The impact of her work spread beyond Africa. A lawyer from Oklahoma visited her and was enthralled with what she was doing. He "took her on" as a personal mission. He began bringing professional athletes to meet her and to engage with the children. A good deal of money was invested and tremendous improvements were made in her village. Later she became a "CNN Hero."

Hers is an incredible story of love, courage, motherly devotion, faith and a great openness to God's calling.



Patrick J. Riley, D.Min.
Book Review Editor



EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Nicole Mlakar

Mandeville, Jamaica

Last August I began a year of service in the spirit of accompaniment in rural Mandeville, Jamaica with Passionist Volunteers International. As part of that service I minister at St. Elizabeth Public Infirmary. It was there that I met Mr. Williams.

Mr. Williams is a little old man who is paralyzed so he is always in his bed. Our conversations typically go a little something like this: "Hi Mr. Williams! How are you today?" "Not as good as you," he says, but I persist, "How are you feeling today?" "In pain" he says, "I can't move. My back hurts." And then Mr. Williams will proceed to talk about whatever he wants to share that day.

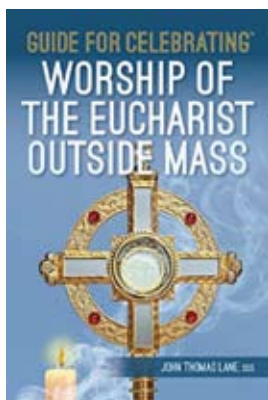
One day in particular while feeding him, I had the most beautiful, yet humbling experience. It made me think of this African proverb that says, "A person becomes a person through other people." Feeding Mr. Williams helped me derive a new self-understanding. We didn't speak, and he never broke eye contact. His eyes were filled with pain. His eyes were filled with shame of not being able to move. But his eyes were also filled with gratitude. He had to humble himself enough to allow me to feed him. He saw me, and I saw him, person to person.

After taking his last sip of water, he grabbed my arms and said these two simple words to me with more intent and conviction than I have ever heard these words have, "thank you." *Thank you.* Two words we hear so frequently throughout our days quite literally sent shivers down my spine and called for a change within my own perspective. These two words challenged me to see with a new lens and to recognize the beauty around me regardless of the harsh realities and challenges I am learning about here each and everyday.

Mr. Williams reminded me of the power of "thank you," the meaning behind it, and the conviction that can and should be felt by those that touch you.



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By John Thomas Lane, SSS
Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL, 2015

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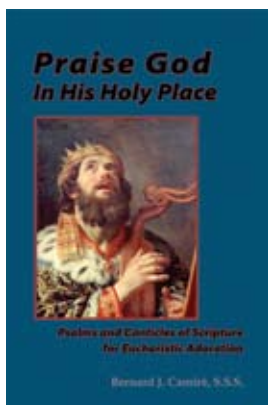
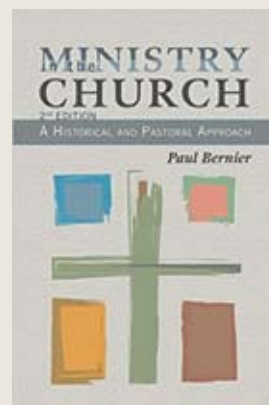
-Msgr. Joseph DeGrocco, Pastor
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church
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By Paul Bernier, SSS
Orbis Books, New York, 2015

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By Bernard J. Camiré, SSS
Emmanuel Publications, Cleveland, OH, 2019

"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."

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

Contact us at emmanuel@blessedsacrament.com
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“Do meditate on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, not as a model of expiation and penance, but rather, as a proof of his love for you and for us all. In order to remove the bitterness and horrors of the cross which are intertwined with this life, Jesus in his love made this cross blossom with the flowers of Paradise.”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard

October 10, 1867