

# *Emmanuel*



*Eucharistic Spirituality*

September/October 2020



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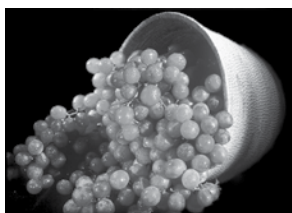
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# *Emmanuel Magazine*

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 126 Number 5



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## FROM THE EDITOR

The first known cases of the novel coronavirus in Italy were diagnosed on the last day of January this year. Within weeks, with the relentless spread of Covid-19 across Europe, Asia, and the Americas, Catholic churches curtailed public liturgies or closed entirely, and forced abstinence from the Eucharist — a “eucharistic fast” — became the lived reality of hundreds of millions of the faithful worldwide for months.

In *Behold the Pierced One* (originally published in 1986), Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) provides helpful historical and theological background on fasting from the Eucharist, something which we generally experience only on Good Friday and Holy Saturday prior to the Sacred Paschal Vigil, out of reverence for the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Benedict recounts the fact that the saintly Augustine of Hippo refrained from taking Communion in the days prior to his death to heighten his hunger for God. Sinners, too, were not allowed to approach the table of the Lord until they had shown sincere repentance.

“A fasting of this kind,” Benedict suggests, “. . . could lead to a deepening of relationship with the Lord in the sacrament. It could also be an act of solidarity with all those who yearn for the sacrament but cannot receive it” [the divorced, the remarried, those in mixed marriages, etc.] . . . “Voluntary spiritual fasting . . . would visibly express the fact that we all need that ‘healing of love’ which the Lord performed in the loneliness of the cross.”

Here I wish to share some of my own experience as a pastor and a confessor, and what others have told me about fasting from the Eucharist during the pandemic and stay at home orders. Universally, people missed being able to gather at the table of the Lord and to partake of Communion. Not being able to do this for so many weeks

made the hunger for fellowship, community, public prayer, and sacramental Communion all the more acute. Many made a spiritual Communion when they could not receive Christ in Holy Communion. Doing so comforted and reassured them.

A powerful insight — and, I believe, the grace of the moment through which we are living — has arisen from the experience of so many being unable to gather for the Sunday assembly and fasting from the Eucharist. It is the rediscovery of and the deepening of the bond of love, friendship, and faith, which unites us as the mystical body of Christ. We have, of necessity, sought new, creative ways of being present to one another and supporting each other on the journey, all the while longing for the day when the whole Church can again come together, the *plebs Dei*, to be strengthened by the gift of the Eucharist.



Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Senior Editor

## In This Issue

While going without Eucharist is a tremendous struggle for all Catholics, it likely struck the readers of Emmanuel in a unique way. Readers of Emmanuel are imbued with a eucharistic spirituality and seek, as our mission states, “to see all of reality in the light of the Eucharist.” Therefore this “eucharistic fast” requires of us a deeper theological engagement. In this issue we grapple with some of the challenging facets of this eucharistic fast: ecclesial, liturgical, ministerial and spiritual. What is impressive, amidst the difficulties faced by so many of the contributors to this issue, was their choice to *be Eucharist* for others, to serve as Jesus served.



## EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

### Stories of a Eucharistic Fast

by Emmanuel Contributors

*In the midst of our Lenten journey a deadly virus spread across the world. Covid-19 soon became all we spoke about as it dramatically reshaped our daily lives. Out of great concern for public health and safety, bishops around the world discontinued the public celebration of Masses in the hopes of curbing the spread of the virus. People were thrust into a “eucharistic fast.” Below are three unique personal experiences of this “fast” by people from around the US who are each imbued with a deep eucharistic spirituality. They share the challenges and the graces they found in the midst of this difficult time.*

*My tears have been my bread day and night, as they ask me every day, ‘Where is your God?’ (Ps 42:4). So much of my devotion has depended on and benefited from the frequent reception of holy Communion and attendance at daily Mass that the experience of “fasting” from them has been very disorienting. It is almost as if a magnetic field confused my inner compass as my soul searched for Christ’s presence in our midst. I know God is everywhere; I know God dwells in me, yet... what does it mean to be a eucharistic person when I don’t have access to the Eucharist? This has been the question in my heart.*

I remember clearly the last day I received Jesus in the sacrament. I knew it would be the last time, at least for a while, and I said goodbye. I thought of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, *I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father* (Mt 26:29), and I wept. I had the blessing of sitting in eucharistic adoration for an hour afterwards, and I begged for the graces I would need during our time apart. I knew Jesus would sustain me, yet I knew it would be hard. For a while I consoled myself in the knowledge that Jesus is always with me, and focused on praying with Scripture and watching live-streamed Mass. I joined in spiritual communion and I thought I was fine.

The knowledge that the Mass was still being celebrated by priests all around the world, and even in my own local parish, brought much solace. Yet the question continued to nag in my heart, "What does it mean to be a eucharistic person when I don't have access to the Eucharist?" What should be different for a Catholic during this time? I thought of Jesus hidden in the bread and wine, and I allowed myself to mourn for what I once had. As tears streamed down my face, I felt a longing I did not know I had. *My tears have been my bread day and night....*

The tears become my bread, the longing my life. It is this desire that, watered by the tears of my love, God allowed to grow inside me. I thought of the beautiful "O Antiphon" prayers we pray during Advent, and how God waited patiently for the people's desire for communion with God to grow. The longing in our hearts expands our capacity to receive God's love. Yet our longing is tempered by the knowledge that Jesus is already in our midst and that Jesus is alive in our hearts. So, with that joy we waited patiently, and allowed our hearts to be stretched a little more, knowing that the pain in itself is a sign of our love. And ultimately, this is what our call is and has always been, to love.

*The question continued to nag in my heart, "What does it mean to be a eucharistic person when I don't have access to the Eucharist?"*

May our hearts grow in that love as we ponder Christ's presence in the tabernacle, waiting and longing for us. May we quench Christ's thirst for souls by our prayers and service, by our acts of love. May the chalice of suffering we receive from Jesus' hands, mingled with our tears, become bread for others. And, *May the Heart of Jesus, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even until the end of time. Amen.*

Ivonne J. Hernandez  
Associate of the Blessed Sacrament  
Florida

The Lenten season of 2020 began as usual as a time of prayer, reflection, and preparation marked by 40 days of fasting from foods and/or festivities as we waited for Easter. This Lent was unexpectedly united with 40 days of social distancing, self-isolation or even quarantine. For Christians the number 40 reminds us of Biblical accounts of great change that happened in relation to 40 days or 40 years. It was always



a time of preparing a person, or people, for a fundamental change in their lives. This quarantine time away from most of our regular activities was really a gift of time for us to slow down our busy lives and purposefully reconnect with our Lord, our families, our self, and our lives. It gave us time to give thanks for the many blessings in our lives that we may have mislabeled as burdens in our usual busy lives. It gave us time to think, observe, and reevaluate what we do with all the time we have been given in each day. It gave us time to de-clutter areas in our homes and areas of unnecessary debris in our lives. It gave us time to consider how to better use our time, talents, and treasure to benefit others and make a purposeful plan to do so. It gave us time to remember Christ's great commission in Matthew 28:19 to "go and make disciples of all nations" – to be bold in talking about our faith in Christ in a welcoming way!

*Being denied access to the Eucharist gave many people a yearning to look for opportunities to be Eucharist to others in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us.*

As governments around the world limited gatherings of people, such as church services, a united fast from holy Eucharist became our new normal. Being denied access to the Eucharist gave many people a yearning to look for opportunities to be Eucharist to others in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for us. Our prayer became one of asking that we might be able to see others as God sees them, and to do what we can to be helpful to them. Becoming less self-centered and more God-centered made us more aware of situations, such as loneliness, hunger, financial struggles and other necessities that may not have been noticeable to us before. Reaching out to others with acts of kindness, comfort, service, and basic help for various needs enables us to be Eucharist to others.

Our worldwide time of quarantine was a preparation time for all of us to make some fundamental changes in our lives. Some changes have been better for our lives as we shed some time-wasting activities, stay energized with important activities that benefit others, and continue with activities that reveal our faith in Christ by our actions.

Lee Ann Costanzo  
Saint Paschal Baylon Helping Hands Ministry  
Ohio



I must confess that during the pandemic, there were times when I found myself contemplating my own sense of inner isolation. I have always been a melancholy man, often retreating like our Lord to those lonely places to pour out my heart before my heavenly Father. In those profound moments where I come face to face with my naked soul, Christ takes my fears and offers forgiveness as he nails my sinful past to the cross. In the beauty of this surrender, I discover the transformative power of grace.

In light of all I had been through over these many months, I realized that though I was unable to receive the Eucharist, the Eucharist was never separated from me. I considered Christ's call to "Do this in memory of me" and to go forth in joy to serve a weary world. I thought about all those times I was called to be broken bread and poured out wine to others, to be for them what I had received. Even when I struggled with fear or fought against false hope, I still sensed that the Eucharist embodied my very being and shaped my way of living.

I began to recall all the walks I had taken over the many days of the pandemic. I pictured the faces of my neighbors and the ways in which they responded to their period of isolation. I could hear again the sounds of bouncing balls, children's laughter, roaring lawnmowers, and the joyful noise of everyday activity from people who were forced to find new ways to cope. It was grace manifesting itself in the way so many rediscovered the joy in simple pleasures and wholesome family fun.

*Even when I struggled with fear or fought against false hope, I still sensed that the Eucharist embodied my very being and shaped my way of living.*

In all I encountered, I realized that I had become a better man, open to the Spirit's presence in the lives of ordinary people, and ready to pour out my life into theirs. I was waving to people I would have walked by so many months ago, holding meaningful conversations, and encouraging their spirits. My newfound appreciation for life's little miracles and my own actions of grace toward those who were struggling had taken on an even deeper meaning in how I was living out my call to be a follower of Christ. I was able to see just how beautiful humanity could be when faced with a challenge that could only be conquered by grace.



Despite the death and damage the pandemic brought about, I saw how God had poured goodness into all our lives. I witnessed how willing people were to sacrifice their time, talent, and treasure for the good of others. Where so many had predicted chaos and catastrophe, devastation and disaster, there were instead courage and community, service and civility. People were caught up in a deep sense of concern for their fellow human beings. Perseverance, fortitude, transparency, and love were the hallmarks of our interactions. This was nothing less than the overwhelming grace of God.

My short journey around my town became a parable of the brave journey we had all taken during the pandemic, and the way in which we had become broken and poured out for one another. Without realizing it, Christians of all denominations were living out what Catholics celebrate every Sunday as they receive the Eucharist and are sent forth into the world to save and to serve. Past struggles, present joys, and future hopes became one in an eternal moment of discovery of how God had worked to the good the outcomes of such a terrible and tragic time.

However, it is always easier to look back upon an event and pretend we had the proper perspective the entire time. I certainly did not. There were days when I was transfixed by the TV news, shouting my anger at the politicians and the experts who seemed to be playing so lightly with our lives. I looked for a glimmer of hope in every news report and shuddered when we were told that we would have to hunker down for just a little while longer. In the end, I saw my attitude for the sinful and selfish self-pitying it was.

But on my many walks around town and along the local hiking trails, I discovered the confessional of the wilderness and encountered the savior who was willing to accept my declaration of sin, offer forgiveness, and speak words of hope and new life into my weary soul. In the peace of such sacred signs I found the grace to once more take hold of the Eucharistic promises that had been given me by my Lord.

Our world will most likely never be the same again. We will all take a fresh look at the way we interact with one another, on a personal level, as communities of faith, and as nations of the world. In one sense, individuals may become more isolated and cautious, shaking hands less, and distancing more. We may see changes in how we socialize,

how we handle travel, and how we do business. But in another sense, we will have new opportunities to love and care for one another and to carry out the business of living, as well as a new appreciation for those who have shown themselves to be the true heroes in this story.

One of the most glorious aspects of this whole time has been our shift in perspective as to what is truly meaningful and worthwhile. Fathers and mothers who were home from their places of work found time just to play with their children. People took their faces away from their phones and began to go outdoors to walk in the warmth of the sun. Church and fellowship became more essential as we went online to worship and to share our lives. Families met for meals, spent more time praying, and shared their fears and hopes with one another with a greater urgency and love.

In a real sense, we all became Eucharist for one another, finding grace and glory in the daily rituals and routines, sharing our lives, living out the truth of God's eternal word, and learning what it means to sacrifice for one another through all the sorrows and the joys. We found laughter in the little things, as the little things took on an eternal weight that filled us to overflowing and carried us through.

I pray we will continue to weather the storms of life as we weathered the storms of this crisis. May we answer the call to be broken bread and poured out wine before the world, to be what we receive as we live out the extraordinary grace that flows into the ordinariness of our everyday lives. As we walk the path of salvation, may we embrace a eucharistic perspective and savor those little treasures God will store up for us in heaven, where all that is truly good and worthy is found.

Mark McCann  
Author and Ministry Consultant  
Connecticut





## *EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# Hospice: Walking a Sacred Journey

by Marybeth Muehle

*How can we be more eucharistic when facing end of life issues?*

Mary Muehle is a certified Pastoral Minister in the Diocese of Cleveland and an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament. She currently serves as a Chaplain for Grace Hospice in Mentor, Ohio.

"Do not go gentle into the good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

-Dylan Thomas

"Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven."

-from The Order of Christian Funerals

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS WE HAVE EXPERIENCED A DAILY COUNT IN THE MEDIA OF the number of people who have died in our world due to the pandemic. The number is staggering and to some degree we have become numb to the reality of just how much death has entered into our lives and our public discourse. Adding to this tragic situation is the knowledge that many of these individuals have been alone and not had the comfort of family accompanying them on this final journey. For family members the strict measures to prevent the spread of the virus has deprived them of the ability to grieve with the support of others.

As a chaplain for hospice I have shared in this experience with patients and family. I have heard their pain of not being able to be with their family member and their fear that their loved one would die alone. I have offered support as they expressed their pain of grieving alone without the support of others that a wake and funeral offers. My own heart ached as I was unable to bring the Eucharist to patients who found this to be one of the few moments of peace and hope in their week. And while we prayed together over the phone, being able to offer the comfort of a touch or blessing made the distance even more painful.

Over the years of working with hospice I have become aware of the

importance of the art of accompaniment which Pope Francis brought to our attention in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG, 169). We are encouraged to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. Walking the sacred ground of the final journey of an individual and their family is both challenging and humbling. The long-standing tradition of viaticum in the Church's practice speaks beautifully to the journey. Viaticum is a Latin word meaning "provision for a journey." The word of God and the bread of life bring not only comfort but nourishment while navigating this final spiritual journey.

Another insight that has emerged throughout my nearly nine years as a hospice chaplain is the lack of understanding of what hospice offers to patients and families as they gradually move to the acceptance of a terminal disease. This lack of understanding prevents families from experiencing companions on their journey who will help them navigate this very unfamiliar territory. A brief explanation of its history and practice will hopefully overcome this misunderstanding.

### **The History and Practice of Hospice**

The term "hospice" (from the same linguistic root as "hospitality") can be traced back to medieval times when it referred to a place of shelter and rest for weary or ill travelers on a long journey. The name was first applied to the specialized care of dying patients by physician Cicely Saunders, who began her work with the terminally ill in 1948 and eventually went on to create the first modern hospice — Saint Christopher's Hospice — in a residential suburb of London. In 1972 Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross testified to the US Senate Special Commission on Aging. In that testimony she addressed our death-denying society. The reason she gave was that it reminds us of our own mortality and so we institutionalize people. Instead she called for hospice as a way to facilitate final care at home which would better provide spiritual, emotional, and financial help to patients and their families. In 1983 the Medicare hospice benefit was established.

Many people feel that hospice is giving up hope and saying to your loved one — it is over. In reality, hospice is about bringing hope at a time when all hope seems lost. Hospice accepts death as the final stage of life. It affirms life and neither hastens nor postpones death. Hospice care treats the person rather than the disease by working to manage symptoms so that a person's last days may be spent with dignity and quality surrounded by their loved ones. Hospice care is family centered.





Hospice brings hope to a patient and family when the disease is acknowledged. Realizing that health care as we experience it today means coming to the truth that there are diseases that we simply cannot cure. These are disease that, as they run their normal course, will result in the end of life. Hospice brings the hope that this end of life care can be filled with promise, with comfort, and with dignity.

The promise hospice brings is that both the patient and the family will not be left alone in this journey. That while a cure is not possible and treatment has ended, compassionate, expert medical care has not ended. This care has been transferred from hospital to home through the gentle care of a doctor, nurses, and other professionals whose main goal is to bring relief to symptoms and pain. The nurses of hospice in addition to providing the medical care are also skilled in providing families with the education needed to care for their loved one. This enables caregivers to have confidence that they are able and capable of providing the care their loved ones need.

The comfort that hospice brings is that a patient at this stage of their life journey will be surrounded by what is familiar to them — their home, their loved ones, and their life tasks. The disease does not end a person's life tasks. Supportive services such as chaplain, social worker, and volunteers bring hope that the tasks in this stage of life will be supported, encouraged, and guided with compassion. In this unfamiliar territory of dying with the help of others these tasks are not as frightening and unsurmountable.

*Instead of accepting death as a normal part of human life it is pushed into the closet and depersonalized.*

The dignity that hospice brings is the understanding that the focus is a person — not a disease. Each person has the right to receive care, to make their own decisions, and to live fully right up until the last moment of life. Helping the person to recognize and affirm that their life has meaning is a significant part of care. Chaplains and social workers walk the individual through a life review emphasizing the good they have done as well as helping them to work through any unfinished tasks they may have. For some this task may be finding reconciliation with others, with their God, and with themselves. A peaceful death is one of the primary goals of the hospice team.

## **Popular Misconceptions About Hospice**

Unfortunately, there are many myths that contribute to the lack of understanding of what hospice means. In addition to the myth we have already seen that hospice is about giving up hope and saying to your loved one “it is over,” one of the other most prevalent myths is that hospice is only for cancer patients. In reality, any life-threatening illness is an appropriate diagnosis for hospice care. This includes liver and renal disease, Alzheimer’s and dementia, respiratory and cardiac diseases, and any other illness that has limited life expectancy. Current medications and treatments are reviewed for efficacy by the hospice physician and nurse as well as by the patient and family. All medications and supplies related to the hospice diagnosis are covered while the patient is under hospice care.

*Hospice care treats the person rather than the disease by working to manage symptoms so that a person’s last days may be spent with dignity and quality surrounded by their loved ones.*

Many are under the impression that hospice care is designed only for the last hours of a patient’s life. In reality, it is better to begin end of life care as early as possible. The care offers relief from pain and distressing symptoms, brings psycho-social and spiritual support for both the patient and the family. For some, the discussion may begin when the individual says, “I have had enough.” When a cure is not possible, and treatments are not improving the quality of life, and the individual feels that they are being prevented from fully living the time that is left for them, that may be the right time to consider hospice.

Over and over again in my years as a hospice chaplain I have heard families say things such as, “we did not know where to start,” “we did not know what we would do,” and “with the help of your team we have been able to cherish and enjoy this final time together as a family.” For the individual, and for the family as well, there are end of life tasks that are a part of every human life. For an individual to be able to say, “I am ready to go,” and for family members to say, “you can go now — we will be okay,” is a sure sign that there is a sense of completion and peace.

End of life tasks are not the same for everyone and for every family.



And here is where walking the journey together takes on real meaning as a chaplain. Offering compassionate, non-judgmental listening is one of the greatest gifts I can offer. For so many they are dealing with years of feeling judged and condemned by others, by their failures, and even by the way they have perceived their God. Helping them to articulate the good they have accomplished, the love they have given, and the acceptance they have given others, enables them to see and appreciate their own goodness.

Helping another person find and experience reconciliation is both a gift and a challenge. Sometimes that reconciliation is with a family member or friend, sometimes it is with what has happened or not happened in their life and finding peace with who they are. This is hard work! I have learned that guided meditation is highly effective in enabling someone to enter deeply into their own heart where they can let go of hurts and find peace.


The command “be not afraid,” or a variation of the phrase occurs 365 times in the Bible. Exploring fear of dying, fear of what will happen to loved-ones, and fear of not having done enough is a common experience in my ministry. The words of Scripture offer comfort and hope that the Lord understands and waits with open arms. Even though an individual may stand firm in their belief in eternal life, it is the fear of the unknown, the fear of the transition from this life to the next which grips them. Many times, I have seen individuals comforted and encouraged by their experience of a relative or friend from the other side coming to lead them home. Life being changed, not ended, becomes more real and attainable.

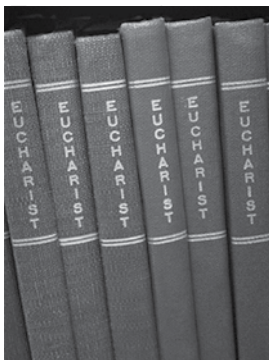
### **Being Eucharist for Others at the End of Life**

Through my ministry as a chaplain I have been initiated into the art of accompaniment where I have had the privilege of meeting people on very sacred ground. To do so, I have had to remove my sandals of preconceived expectations of how individuals experience God’s presence in their life. I’ve had to remove preconceived notions of people’s sufferings. I’ve had to broaden my understanding of how we experience being a eucharistic people. Celebrating Eucharist in the liturgy is just the beginning.

Being sent forth to bring the presence and love of God to others is at the heart of being a eucharistic person. I have learned that most of the

individuals I have been privileged to walk with were not interested in answers to theological questions. Instead, they want someone who will bring the presence of Christ to them. They want to know Jesus' compassionate care, his loving and healing touch, and the reassurances of God's love.

Rather than "raging against the dying of the light" we seem to be experiencing in this pandemic, perhaps we should walk gently and embrace the lessons we are learning. Hopefully, our time without weekend liturgies has enabled us to become more eucharistic in our homes, our ministries, our workplaces, and with our neighborhoods. The deprivations we have experienced may help us all to be more sensitive to the deprivations suffered by our ill and elderly brothers and sisters. And finally, as I have been blessed in this ministry, may we all be blessed with the gift of not limiting God's presence, but be open to the surprising ways God graciously reveals God's self to us. 



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Discovering the Dynamic Spiral of Ministry: Exploring Insights of Recent Popes

by James H. Kroeger, M.M.

*Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and Pope Francis all express that the Church must be missionary. How do they propose we live out this missionary calling?*

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

ENERGY, DYNAMISM, AND GROWTH ARE COMMON IMAGES EVOKED BY THE SIMPLE WORD “spiral.” A spiral connotes advancing action, increasing or developing movement. And yet, a spiral, even in its continuous dynamism, moves and advances around a fixed center.

To capture and express realities of a spirituality of ministry and mission always demands the creative use of dynamic, expansive language. Thus, approaching the topic of ministry and spirituality under the rubric of a “spiral” is an attempt to present an apostolic spirituality that encompasses and integrates many facets and riches. Several essential dimensions, all interacting and reinforcing each other, produce a holistic and living spirituality of missionary ministry, centered on an encounter with the living God.

Four pivotal Church documents on missionary evangelization contain key insights for a holistic apostolic spirituality.<sup>1</sup> Saint Paul VI's 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) (Evangelization in the Modern World) is filled with abundant wisdom for all Jesus' disciples. Saint John Paul II's 1990 mission encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (RM) (On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate) remains a pivotal source for developing an integral apostolic spirituality. Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) (The Joy of the Gospel), is a treasury of material for all Christians whom Pope Francis calls “missionary disciples” (EG 120).

Finally, to complement the insights of these three papal “missionary” documents and to situate them in a concrete pastoral context, helpful material is drawn from John Paul II's *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA) (The Church in Asia) released on November 6, 1999. Asia is this author's pastoral locus since 1970. The enthusiasm and dynamism of these four



documents are a rich thesaurus for elaborating important elements of a “spirituality spiral” for ministry and mission. Four key theological-pastoral themes expressed in words that all begin with the letter “M” mystery, meditation, ministry, and mission form the basis and structure of this presentation.

## Mystery

The origins of all mission and ministry are found in mystery (*mysterion*), understood in the Pauline sense as God’s universal loving plan of salvation for the entire world. God loves all peoples, desiring everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth (1 Tim 2:4). The goal of ministry, then, is to serve the unfolding of this wonderful design God has for all peoples. “Missionary activity is nothing other and nothing less than the manifestation or epiphany of God’s plan and its fulfillment in the world and in history” (RM 41). Indeed, evangelization will always contain “a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, who died and rose from the dead, salvation is offered to all men (and women), as a gift of God’s grace and mercy” (EN 27). At each Eucharist, the Church celebrates this marvelous “mystery of faith”!

Further exploration into the *mysterion*-theology of Saint Paul helps anchor the foundations of mission. Paul is absolutely certain that God has a wonderful, marvelous vision of salvation for the whole world. His letter to the Ephesians convincingly — almost mystically — explains how “God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery” (Eph 1:9). Paul personally speaks of “the depths that I see in the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4), because “it was by a revelation that I was given the knowledge of the mystery” (Eph 3:3).

Pauline reflection on God’s loving plan of salvation (*mysterion*) synthesizes his belief that this design has been fully revealed in Christ the savior and will be recapitulated in Christ at the end of time (RM 4, 5, 41, 44). This manifestation is focused on salvation, not condemnation or judgment, and is open to all peoples (RM 55). It unfolds in stages: God’s design through the Israelite people, the missions of Jesus and the Spirit, the Church’s presence in the world; humanity’s response is faith or personal appropriation of the *mysterion* (RM 6, 9, 11).

Paul is a true minister of the Good News, an evangelizer *par excellence*, because he believed, lived, prayed, labored, and suffered (cf. 2 Cor 11:23-28) so that God’s loving plan for the redemption of humanity would be known and graciously received. Obviously, Paul’s apostolic commitment had the “*mysterion*-encounter” as its central driving



force. All dedicated apostles must necessarily feel the same sense of “Pauline” urgency to spread the Gospel!

### Meditation

Because all mission and ministry flow from God’s loving plan of salvation, the evangelizer necessarily seeks to be deeply rooted in this mystery. There simply is no other foundation for all that one does. “Meditation” is a possible manner of expressing the “rooting-process” whereby the Christian apostle seeks to discover God’s constant loving presence in the depths of the soul. Early in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis writes: “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ; ... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’” (EG 3). In essence, the person in ministry must strive to develop a deep “*mysterion*-consciousness.”

Pope Paul VI, who said that *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is a “meditation on evangelization” (EN 5), invites the whole People of God assembled in the Church “to make the same mediation” so that they will receive a “fresh impulse,” and follow “a straight course;” thus, each person will more effectively “work as a preacher of the Gospel and acquit themselves perfectly of their ministry” (EN 3).

Pope Francis devotes his entire final chapter of *Evangelii Gaudium* to the theme of “Spirit-filled Evangelizers.” He notes that “Without prolonged moments of adoration, of prayerful encounter with the Word, of sincere conversation with the Lord [this is prayerful meditation], our work becomes meaningless, we lose energy as a result of weariness and difficulties, and our fervor dies out. The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer...” (EG 262).

In *Ecclesia in Asia* Saint John Paul II emphasizes that “*Mission is contemplative action and active contemplation*” (EA 23). Therefore, a minister who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success. For the Pope, “the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation” (EA 23). All evangelizers “need a true missionary spirituality of prayer and contemplation” (EA 23). In this context context, it is a fact that “a genuinely religious person readily wins

respect and a following in Asia" (EA 23).

This discussion focuses attention on the evangelizer's need of a spirituality. If the previous section outlined God's plan of salvation in Pauline categories, this section emphasizes the personal appropriation and integration of the *mysterion* into our lives and activities, our very consciousness. As Gospel ministers, "we are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word or deed*" (RM 23).

Proceeding to chapter eight of RM evangelizers will find several precious pearls for the apostolate. Spirituality demands "a life of complete docility to the Spirit" (RM 87), "intimate communion with Christ" (RM 88), and following Jesus "along the path of suffering and humiliation" (RM 87). The minister must be "a person of charity" who practices "love without exclusion or partiality" (RM 89). One must respond to "the universal call to holiness" and become "a person of the Beatitudes" (RM 90).

*A minister who has no deep experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or missionary success.*

The Second Vatican Council noted that the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life (*Lumen Gentium* 11). Therefore, Eucharist is eminently central for the minister. One clear purpose of ministry is "to bring people together in hearing the Gospel, in fraternal communion, in prayer and in the Eucharist" (RM 26). The early Church always sent forth its new ministers in the context of the Eucharist (Acts 13:1-4). The popular word that Catholics use today for Eucharist is "Mass." The words for both mission (*missio*) and Mass (*missa*) derive from the same source (*mittere*). Eucharist always empowers the disciple-apostle for ministry and mission.

## **Ministry**

Perceiving one's call to active ministry within the Church and to service of humanity is a gradual growth process. The call to become an evangelizer emerges into consciousness and seeks a definite commitment as one meditates on their personal role in the loving plan of God. It requires prayer and meditation. It is precisely in this process or continuous spiral that ministry becomes a personalized invitation for the mature Christian. In short: *meditation* on the *mystery*



is the only means to discern one's call to *ministry*.

For a deeper understanding of ministry as "faith-service," one can profitably open the pages of *Redemptoris Missio* by John Paul II. The encyclical straightforwardly asserts: "Mission is an issue of faith" (RM 11). Without faith nothing will progress. All those in Church ministry will accomplish little unless their lives and apostolates are rooted in living faith.

Ministry always connotes the concrete service of others. The Church's various ministries seek to reach the total person within community. *Ecclesia in Asia* pays tribute to Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She was "known all over the world for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor" (EA 7); thus, she remains "an icon of the service to life which the Church is offering in Asia" (EA 7). EA also calls upon "the great host of Asian martyrs, old and new, to teach the Church in Asia what it means to bear witness" (EA 49).

These four pertinent documents all offer helpful insights on apostolic commitment and involvement. Two words capture the comprehensive vision of ministry and mission in these beautiful documents: *integral evangelization*. Briefly, this means that evangelization and salvation are best viewed in a holistic fashion. In EN Paul VI asserts that "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN 18). In RM John Paul II notes that "Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person" (RM 11); "evangelical witness ... is directed towards integral human development" (RM 42). Pope Francis speaks of "a definite style of evangelization which I ask you to adopt *in every activity which you undertake*" (EG 18). *Ecclesia in Asia* affirms that ministry flows from a contemporary, holistic vision of evangelization, which is "a reality that is both rich and dynamic [and] has various aspects and elements" (EA 23). In short, contemporary ministry develops the whole person and society. It touches the social and cultural, political and economic, historical and religious dimensions of life — all from the perspective of faith. Indeed, it is an *integral, comprehensive, and holistic* vision of evangelization!

The totality of the ministry "cycle" will combine these many elements already mentioned. Together they form the Church's total program of holistic evangelization; they follow the example of Jesus who lived his ministry in silence and reflection, in action and service, in dialogue and outreach, in teaching and proclamation, as well as in prayer and

contemplation. This is *ministry*; this is *evangelization*; this is authentic “faith-service!” The creative involvement of all Christians in integral evangelization today is urgently needed and desired by the Church!

## **Mission**

A stark question must be posed: Is it possible to truly have an authentic program of ministry, catechesis, or evangelization without a concomitant vibrant sense of mission? Some may attempt to propose and defend such a possibility through rationalization. Yet, any apostolic ministry or program of evangelization without a missionary dynamism and perspective can quickly degenerate into parochialism or provincialism. Promoting mission awareness and commitment among all Catholics (lay, religious, ordained) is an urgent challenge facing all local churches today!

*The words for both mission (missio) and Mass (missa) derive from the same source (mittere). Eucharist always empowers the disciple-apostle for ministry and mission.*

The Second Vatican Council places mission and evangelization at the center of the Church: “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature” (*Ad Gentes* 2). Pope Paul VI spoke with deep conviction: “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all peoples constitutes the essential mission of the Church.... Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...” (EN 14). Pope Francis says that the very purpose of his *Evangelii Gaudium* is “to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy” (EG 1). He notes: “I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything” (EG 27). Francis quotes what John Paul II said to the Bishops of Oceania: “All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion” (EG 27).

What meaning does the imperative of evangelization have for Christ’s faithful? All Catholics must become a living proclamation of the *mysterion* — God’s loving design of universal salvation. Only in this way does the Church as the community of Jesus’ disciples realize her “deepest identity” and “her very nature.” The Church is called to be always and everywhere “the universal sacrament of salvation” (LG





48; AG 1). For the Church, to live is to evangelize! A non-missionary Church is impossible; it is self-contradictory. In the insightful words of Emil Brunner: "The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning."

*Redemptoris Missio* emerged from Pope John Paul II's deep concern about the "urgency of missionary activity" (RM 1). He notes that "missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' (*Ad Gentes*) appears to be waning." This fact "must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ [because] in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith" (RM 2). He sensed that "the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization" (RM 3).

Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium* overflows with missionary dynamism and wisdom. He quotes (EG 15) John Paul II, noting that "there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel ... because this is the first task of the Church" (RM 34). Indeed, "today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church" (RM 40). Francis asks: "What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is *paradigmatic for all the Church's activity*" (EG 15).

One finds copious insights into mission in *Ecclesia in Asia*; this is to be expected, since EA emerges directly from the lived experience of the Asian local churches. The very purpose of the 1998 "Asian Synod" was "to discern the principal areas of mission for the Church in Asia as she crosses the threshold of the new millennium" (EA 18). The Church in Asia has clear convictions about mission; "the question is not whether the Church has something essential to say to the men and women of our time, but how she can say it clearly and convincingly" (EA 29). In speaking of Asia, John Paul II says: "we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium *a great harvest of faith* will be reaped in this vast and vital continent" (EA 1).

Such renewed commitment to mission on the part of ordained and lay agents of evangelization is a key path for deepening the faith commitment and spirituality of local churches and missionaries everywhere. Mission awareness is both the goal and the crowning achievement of effective evangelization. It remains a paradoxical truth that the home parish or diocese is strengthened when it sends forth missionaries — even out of an insufficient supply of personnel. John Paul II in EA urges "the Church in Asia to send forth missionaries,

even though she herself needs laborers in the vineyard” (EA 44). God’s ways so often supersede our ways!

## **Revisiting the Spiral of Integral Ministry**

This brief essay has sought to capture and elucidate four key elements which are essential for a holistic mission spirituality and ministerial commitment, one truly adequate to mature Christians who are “missionary disciples” (EG 120). It could be termed the “4-M approach:” mystery, meditation, ministry and mission. Each element in the four-part spiral builds upon and reinforces the other; if any dimension is lost or under-emphasized, the Church’s entire mission of evangelization suffers.

As a spiral, this approach to ministry must be dynamic and progressive, moving forward the individual evangelizer as well as God’s holy people, the Church. At times, one dimension of the spiral may be more visible or more emphasized than another; yet, the spiral remains complete. This spiral must be an integral part of ministerial formation and practice throughout one’s life. All four *M*’s are essential for integral growth in a spirituality that serves the apostolate and the Church’s mission of evangelization. One does not then really have a spirituality “for” ministry; *living the totality of the ministry spiral is in itself already spirituality.*

While emphasizing four central elements of the spirituality spiral, one could propose additional supports for this paradigm. Two central items are the Mass (Eucharist celebrates the “mystery of faith”) and Mary (model of discipleship and ministry); both sources could be developed further, since they provide rich dimensions of spirituality and greatly enhance the spiritual life of effective evangelizers.

Genuine ministry of its nature stirs excitement; engages evangelizers, rekindles mission dynamism; the spiral moves forward and upward. All evangelizers are to be “on fire with the love of Christ and burning with zeal to make him known more widely, loved more deeply and followed more closely” (EA 23). Why? “A fire can only be lit by something that is itself on fire” (EA 23). This is an authentic spirituality for ministry and mission!



## **Note**

<sup>1</sup> Quotations from the Church documents cited in this article have been edited to reflect inclusive language



## EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

# What Have We Learned from the Eucharistic Fast?

by Patrick Riley

*As we were quickly thrust into a "eucharistic fast" it is important to reflect upon what transpired and why. What did we learn?*

Patrick J. Riley, D. Min is the book review editor for *Emmanuel*. He is also an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament.

THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH IS MOST FULLY REALIZED when the community gathers around the altar and makes real again the sacrifice of Christ. The priest in the name of Christ repeats the Lord's words, "This is my body broken for you" and "This is my blood poured out for you." The community then hears the words of Jesus, "Do this in memory of me." The "doing this" is a challenge to the members of the community to go forth and be "broken" and "poured out" in service to the world. A eucharistic people are people who give themselves in loving service to the broken Body of Christ: the poor, the hungry, the refugee, the homeless, the ignored, to those whose human dignity is attacked, those Pope Francis calls the people of the periphery. Our sharing at the eucharistic table of the broken and poured out Body and Blood of the resurrected Lord is what we carry into the world. We become that presence, in an image that Pope Francis calls "mobile monstrances." We are the real presence of Christ in the world when we serve God's people.

This "gathering" is what we Catholics did on a regular basis until a very contagious and deadly virus made its way through Asia, Europe and the United States. In order to slow the spread of the virus, the US bishops, in response to the recommendations of their governors, closed all churches and cancelled the public celebration of Mass and other rituals at least through Easter and then prolonged until Pentecost. It all happened so fast!

A Church which defined itself in terms of its sacramentality suddenly lost its ability to fully perform its sacramental rites with its people. The catechumens, who were to be initiated into the Church at the

Easter Vigil, had to wait for a later date. Many First Communions were postponed as were Confirmations. Planned marriages were also rescheduled. Funerals and wakes, if they were held at all, were done with families only, following social distancing guidelines. Sadly, many Catholics in hospitals, which had become overwhelmed with Covid-19 virus infected patients, died without the consolation of the sacraments as no visitors, including clergy, were permitted into the hospitals and nursing homes. Most striking was that churches were closed and the Catholic community in the United States experienced, for the first time, since the epidemic of 1918, an enforced fast from the Eucharist.

As we reflect on this availability and frequency of Mass and Communion, we need to keep in mind that millions of Catholics throughout the world do not have the possibility of daily or weekly Mass. Our present “eucharistic fast” can allow us to enter into solidarity with them. For some in Latin America, Mass might be offered in their village once a month or less. The Amazon Synod raised the fact that for some places, Eucharist is available once a year, if that. We also know that divorced and remarried Catholics who have not received an annulment are by Church law forbidden to fully participate in Eucharist.

### **The Response**

With churches closed and social distancing in place, pastors were rightly concerned about how they would continue to relate to their parishioners. How would they stay connected? They did what they did best. Very quickly pastors began to live-stream Masses or video-record themselves celebrating Mass in empty churches which their parishioners could watch and pray along at any time. In none of the above cases was Communion distributed. Rather “spiritual communion” became the norm. This was not the only form of contact between pastors and parishioners, especially as the pandemic persisted. Pastors made phone calls to check on the members of their parishes, especially those living alone or in nursing homes, ill or vulnerable. Others had parish staff members or parishioners also make phone calls. Parishes with greater technological capabilities used on-line skills to set up video-conferencing meetings. But for the most part, parish priests brought the celebration of the Mass into homes by way of live-streaming or recorded videos.

While the proliferation of video-recorded Masses on YouTube seems to demonstrate that many people have found this form of the Mass spiritually enriching, I also know that many individuals, including



myself, have become more and more uneasy with these virtual Masses and “spiritual communions.” I did not “watch” the Holy Thursday liturgy because I could not bring myself to virtually celebrate the institution of the Eucharist and not be able to receive the Eucharist.

### **A Question of Identity**

As our confinement and our eucharistic fast continued, a hunger for “real Communion” began to grow in intensity. Virtual is not physically real, but if virtual is all we have for months, including the rites of the holiest week of the year, what will this mean for our spirituality once we can return to our churches for Mass? We are an incarnational Church, a sacramental Church, a communal Church. Our sacraments all have “matter” (oil, water, bread, wine), they involve “touch.” They are meant to be celebrated together, not virtually. The very nature of our existence as Church rests in our belief that God became present among us, was incarnated, in the person of Jesus. It is his Body and his Blood that we take and eat and drink and it is in the context of a believing community present together that helps to create the Eucharist. It feeds us for our mission to be his presence in our world. This pandemic has turned so much of the world, our society and our Church upside down. This fast has become an ever-increasing pain for us all.

Our Holy Father himself expressed his own frustration with celebrating the Eucharist each day in the Casa Santa Marta with only six other people in attendance, all of them assisting in some way with the celebration. In his homily on April 17, reflecting on the familiarity which Jesus and his apostles experienced in their community, he noted that the familiarity of Christians with Jesus is “always of community. A familiarity without community, without Bread, without the people, without the Sacraments is dangerous. It could become — let’s say — a gnostic familiarity, familiarity only for myself, detached from the people of God. The apostles’ familiarity with the Lord was always that of community, it was always at table, sign of community; it was always with the Sacrament, with the Bread.”

I believe Pope Francis expressed what many Catholics feel (and I know many priests feel) in this virtual Church. People “watch” Mass at home on TV, computer, or a laptop. Priests celebrate what are essentially “private” Masses in empty churches. The priest receives the Body and Blood and invites the people who are “watching” to join him in a prayer asking that Jesus would come into their hearts in a



spiritual communion. No one knows how long this social distancing will last with its consequent restrictions on gatherings for Eucharist, or if it will resurface again due to a second wave if infections and rates of hospitalizations and deaths increase. How will we continue to address this?

*This virus has brought into public view that the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council has yet to be fully realized.*

Over fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council officially taught that the Church, the whole Church, all those baptized into Christ, is the People of God. It is baptism that initiates us all into this community. This community is shaped and grows through the proclamation of the Word of God, through prayer, through outreach beyond itself in service and is celebrated and enhanced through the liturgy which is the source and summit of all the activity of the Church. This liturgy is most fully realized when the People of God are gathered around the altar with their minister and together offer to the Father the memorial sacrifice of the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The unity of the community is celebrated and enhanced as together they partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) insists, "that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully" (SC #11) in the liturgy. This ecclesiology is not reflected in the Church's immediate response to the sheltering in place policy that we were called upon to practice. In fact, it is a counter sign to the theology of the Church as the People of God. It is not *the people*, it is the priest alone who is celebrating the Mass and he alone consumes the Body and Blood. This virus has brought into public view that the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council has yet to be fully realized. What has been made clear is that we are fundamentally a clerical Church. The priest can celebrate the Eucharist but, without him, the baptized non-ordained members of the People of God, cannot. If the current situation continues or reoccurs in the future the more pronounced this reality will be. Again, it must be noted, this is not a preferred method of celebrating the Eucharist. It was a response to public safety from this deadly and contagious virus.

### **Celebrating Eucharist and *Being* Eucharist**

In a real way during the virus Eucharist was celebrated as members



of the Body of Christ continued to selflessly serve the hurting Body of Christ. We saw doctors, nurses and health care workers being broken and poured out in the service of their very ill patients. Since no visitors were allowed in the hospitals, they were the last compassionate and caring faces many patients saw as they passed away. We saw teachers at every level having to learn new ways of teaching their students who were now remote. Parents, some of whom were also working from home, had the exhausting task of ensuring that their children kept up with their schoolwork. We saw those who risked being exposed to the virus keeping our grocery stores stocked and open. Other brave men and women insured that our garbage was collected. Always on the front lines, those who serve as police officers, fire safety officers, and emergency medical technicians met our emergency needs as they faced exposure to the virus. We need to add here those hard-working volunteers who help distribute food from the large and small food pantries throughout the country which have kept unemployed families fed. There are also parishes and dioceses which have continued their programs to the homeless and the poor. All were being broken and poured out in service of others. All were *being* Eucharist.

*It is time now for substantive reflection on how in a time in which we cannot all be really present to fully celebrate the Eucharist, what form can our worship take which is truly communal, incarnational, and eucharistic?*

This pandemic happened so fast and we have had little time for reflection and study. Now we need to take the time to reflect and develop ways in which we can pray together, honor the Eucharist, and live out its fruitfulness as the whole People of God. Moving forward, we must plan a way for these forms of prayer not to highlight the separation of the clergy from the rest of the People of God. Some examples might be praying together the Liturgy of the Hours (Morning and Evening Prayer) with the Blessed Sacrament virtually exposed and live-streamed, or eucharistic holy hours done virtually. Either of these two forms of prayer could include a brief reflection on the readings of the day done by the pastor or other members of the parish community. They could also include Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

In the rapid spread of this horrible pandemic we responded with the closing of churches and the cessation of gatherings for Mass in a way

that did not respect the theology expressed by the Second Vatican Council on the Church as the People of God. We unmasked the fact that our development of a real theology of the life and ministry of the non-ordained members of the Church, the laity, has been deficient. As we met this crisis, we responded in a way that kept priests in touch with their parishes and provided the people with a eucharistic liturgy which left the people without the ability to fully participate in the fulness of the celebration. It is time now for substantive reflection on how in a time in which we cannot all be really present to fully celebrate the Eucharist, what form can our worship take which is truly communal, incarnational, and eucharistic? It is now time for parish liturgy committees and parish councils to do some serious reflection and decision-making. They should also include members of their parish outreach committees in their discussions. If we, the broken and poured out, are to continue to be the presence of Jesus in the world, we need to be fed at the table of the Lord. As Pope Francis stated in a recent interview, "I am living this at a time of great uncertainty. It is a time for inventing, for creativity." It is our time also to be inventive and creative.



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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Rev Dominick Mammarella  
Diocese of Harrisburg

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 R, S, T, and U are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during September and October.



## EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

# Of What Use are Church Buildings in Times of Calamity?

by Michael DeSanctis

*Church Buildings have historically been considered as sanctuaries in difficult times. What meaning do they have when people are barred from entering them?*

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).

THOSE *EMMANUEL* READERS WITH A SPECIAL INTEREST IN ITALY, EVEN BEFORE THE tragic turn COVID-19 recently took through that overwhelmingly Catholic country, may have known it as a place where devotion to the parish-neighborhood of one's baptism claims a hold on the popular psyche. For all their apparent worldliness in the areas of, say, fashion, art, or literature, the Italians are a people of exceedingly local affections. Their self-identities are inherited, in part, like the keys to a family home or business that has occupied the same site for generations. Hence, their connection both to history and to place, a habit of the heart sometimes described as "*campanilismo*." Metaphorically, at least, the Italian man or woman never roams far from earshot of the bells in the belfry (*campanile*) of the parish church of their youth, which beckons them to the place they most regard as home.

I found myself thinking of this belfry-centered notion of personal geography on Easter morning this year, prompted by a TV news account of how Catholic parishes in my diocese were expected to ring their bells each Sunday at noontime for the length of the Easter season. The bishop himself had encouraged the bellringing, not only to announce the customary joy of the season, but to remind the quarter-million Catholics in his care of their solidarity with the entire People of God. In the trendy, fractured-screen fashion of a Zoom conference, the report captured the sights and sounds of churches throughout the diocese, which were bound to inspire those Catholic viewers who for weeks had been dutifully watching televised or live-streamed celebrations of the Mass.

The sound of the bells lifted my own spirits, until I remembered how much I missed the grounds and buildings of the parish in which my wife

and me are members, as much as the community that enfolds us when we worship. Surroundings considerably nobler than the makeshift place for “COVID liturgies” we had staked out in our living room.

In a terrible coincidence of history, of course, it was at Eastertime only a year prior that Paris’famed Notre-Dame Cathedral had been devastated by fire. What saddened Catholics and others as *that* tragedy unfolded was the realization that a building beloved for its sanctity, beauty and history — and trusted as a sign of the “permanence” of religious belief in our age of doubt — had been stolen from us, literally overnight, by a natural calamity we were powerless to stop.

“How could anything be worse?” we asked ourselves, never dreaming an answer would arrive as Lent began this year and it developed that not just *one* place of worship cherished by Catholics might be lost to us but *all of them*, at least temporarily. A second conflagration consumed our thoughts and threatened to ruin all our fine Easter rituals, sparked by an invisible microbe-of-an-enemy the medical experts said would “spread like wildfire.” Though never orphaned by reason of a Pentecost promise made long ago (John 14:18), the universal Church nevertheless found itself homeless for a time, atomized, unable to call its members together in their accustomed centers of ritual. This point was made most poignantly, perhaps, by those March 27<sup>th</sup> pictures of Pope Francis praying before a Saint Peter Square emptied of everything but rain.

### **Where Does a “Virtual Church” Dwell?**

My hunch is that Evangelicals in this country — and possibly many American Protestants in general — fared better through the church closings caused by the pandemic than did most Catholics in their circles of friends and relatives. Religious programming offering options to Sunday worship and accessible from the home has been a staple of Protestantism in the US since its emergence via radio in the 1920s. The automobile-friendly “drive-in churches” of the 1930s and 40s, mechanized twists on the classic tent revivals of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions, and the televangelism to emerge in the 1950s, likewise have offered Protestants opportunities for spending their Sabbath mornings someplace other than in the brick-and-mortar churches of their predecessors. The high-production spectacles proffered by today’s so-called “Electronic Church,” whose reach by means of the internet is vaster than ever, further advance mainline Protestantism’s conversion from an “Old Time” religion to one with an appetite for *screen* time.



To be sure, the value of Christian fellowship persists among Methodists, Presbyterians or Congregationalists reasonably convinced of the Savior's presence in the "two or three who gather in God's name" (Matthew 18:20). But many a Protestant imagination no longer conceives of corporate prayer in strictly *spatial* terms. Freed of the constraints of place, it has metamorphosed into something wholly ethereal, light enough, at least, to be borne on transmission waves.

A Baptist colleague, during my days of teaching courses on the theology and art of sacred worship at a Catholic university in northwestern Pennsylvania, liked insisting in sufficiently Calvinist style that there really were no places of special importance to the Bible-believing Christian — "no sacred spaces," in his words, "only a sacred people."

Not one to debate a matter that has divided Protestant and Catholic followers of Jesus for centuries, I'd routinely invite him to join me in a half-day's car ride to the battlefields of Gettysburg or, closer still, to the swath of nondescript farmland near Shanksville, Pennsylvania that now doubles as the National Flight 93 Memorial. At such sites one confronts the palpable residue of the sacrificial act, of blood's ability to hallow soil one would ordinarily tread underfoot — realities that make the people drawn to them behave more like religious pilgrims than tourists.

There is a hesitancy, nevertheless, among some Christians given to an exclusively Scripture-centered approach to revelation, and fundamentally suspicious of a world deformed by sin, to reverence any corner of their earthly surroundings. Inasmuch as they likewise eschew ceremony in preference for modes of worship built of preaching and hymn-singing, they may find value in a pulpit, some sturdy pews and an organ, but little else in the way of place-furnishings. For these, any adornment of person or place only encumbers the soul's progress toward salvation.

Whether such predilections amount to a kind of "Protestant aesthetic" as much as a more fundamental ideology of worship influenced still by this country's historic ties to Puritanism is a matter for considerable speculation. Nevertheless, one can easily conclude from the pandemic-related behaviors of US Christians belonging to "middle" and "low" liturgical traditions — or with no wit for formal worship at all — that a dematerialized form of worship was welcomed into the Protestant

household as receptively as were the cyber classrooms or video conference platforms on which other parts of its daily affairs came to rely. In the eyes of some Christians, in fact, the teams of “media ministry” experts or “worship AVL” technicians so crucial nowadays to the functioning of Evangelical churches deserved a measure of the hero status granted the nation’s front-line medical personnel. The website of ChurchTechToday, for example, which bills itself as the nation’s “#1 church technology [resource] for pastors, communicators, and leaders,” used the pandemic to elevate their importance to the modern Christian congregation, which it asserted must “[learn] how to host worship and fellowship online instead of in the sanctuary.” Along with such competitors as MinistryTech, eChurch and Disciplr, the site offered its visitors timely advice on everything from podcast preaching to the proper disinfection of microphones and other e-media tools necessary for the virtualization of the Sabbath experience.

*The liturgies we watched should have carried the disclaimer attached to motion pictures reconfigured for digital consumption: “This rite has been modified from its original version. It has been formatted to fit your TV.”*

By all accounts, the “virtual Church,” whose growth the pastors of mainstream Protestant congregations began to monitor with trepidation a decade or two ago, burst fully into bloom just as the national culture was coming to terms with a pandemic-sized threat of a different sort.

We Roman Catholics, too, turned to electronic media to maintain the rhythms of our faith as the COVID-19 event intruded on a Lenten season well underway. The bishops of our Church, individually and through no less an authoritative body than the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), had encouraged us to do so. Beyond this, however, our experience with electronic options to regular church-going bore little resemblance, I would argue, to what religious people of other traditions had embraced, including those who identify as Christians.

### **A Longing for the Tangible and Sacramental**

Shut out of the buildings where we restore our ecclesial identity most tangibly and encounter in action and object the really-present Christ





of the Eucharist, we Catholics became not only a people *displaced* for a time but one left hungering for a source of nourishment not even the techiest of TechyChurch resources could help us fabricate. My own wife, a family doctor by profession and recent convert to the faith, complained of suffering from something like stomach pangs, so serious was her withdrawal from the Eucharist. She lamented, too, not being able to celebrate the Easter Vigil — what she calls her “Cathoversary” — as fully as she would have liked. We were both disappointed by the shrunken versions of the Vigil livestreamed our way from a variety of sources, a rite that ordinarily utilizes more space in and around a Catholic church building than any other. We agreed that even the liturgies we watched from places as impressive as Saint Peter Basilica in Rome or the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception fell flat, shrink-wrapped as they were by necessity. They should have carried the disclaimer attached to motion pictures reconfigured for digital consumption: “This rite has been modified from its original version. It has been formatted to fit your TV.”

Nothing simulated by electronic means during our time of sequester could make up for the sensual-spatial character of worship in the parish to whose belfry the two of us answer in our nod to *campanilismo*. We longed not merely to “watch” Mass on the e-tablet atop the coffee table that doubled as our domestic altar but to *absorb* the unfolding of its parts in three-dimensions, to smell the flowers that adorned its celebration, the incense, to embrace our fellow worshipers and consume — as only the webcam clergy could for the moment — the salvific meal for which we longed.

The services livestreamed from our parish in which we did our best to “participate” inevitably felt like throwbacks to the Church’s way with the Mass prior to the Second Vatican Council. Its priests engrossed in actions all their own and its lay witnesses following along from a separate space entirely. The pandemic had confined the Catholic laity to another edifice altogether — to *countless* other edifices, in fact — effectively removing them in any substantive way from the altars that appeared on their TV and computer screens. The “spiritual communion” with Christ assured them by tradition and the pastoral instincts of their priests and bishops may have assuaged their desire for the real thing. Yet, they still missed the materiality of the Eucharist, the fleshiness even under sacramental appearance of the Paschal Lamb they would normally “behold” and *consume* at Mass — acts that implied a kind of savoring rendered impossible in a time of hygienic distancing.

### **What Use are Church Buildings During a Pandemic?**

Serious questions remained, however, concerning the buildings the laity were required to abandon for the sake of public health. Of what real use were *they*, in the end, sitting dark and silent during the pandemic while the outlets of a juggernaut cyber-Church, poised in some people's minds to render the whole of Church architecture obsolete, hummed along quite nicely? What value lay in *any* location deemed sacred by the Church of Rome, one could ask, while it stood empty on Easter morning itself?"

Too flippantly, perhaps, one could argue that the Catholic Church has made extraordinary use during its lifetime of a vacant tomb. It has found value in an approach to architecture that regards even the humblest of church buildings as providing not only containment for its rites but *confession* of their underlying meaning, as well. The Catholic church building is both symbol and stable, *signum et stabulum* for God's flock (1 Peter 5:2) in the world. In a sense, the pandemic forced Catholic places of worship to assume the role that concert halls, museums, and ball parks routinely play in our communities when closed to the public for more benign reasons. Though the primary purpose of such structures, always, is to provide sites where users might engage in rituals they consider life-giving, their secondary function as public monuments is to remind people of why the civic ritual matters in the first place.

*Though the primary purpose of many large public architectural structures is to provide sites where users might engage in rituals they consider life-giving, their secondary function as public monuments is to remind people of why the civic ritual matters in the first place.*

Even with their doors closed, landmarks like Lincoln Center in New York City, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or Yankee Stadium succeed literally in *monumentalizing* the cultural deposit they help preserve. So, likewise, a religious landmark like Saint Patrick Cathedral, which, to a Catholic, embodies a sacramental character that transcends even this.

It cannot be stated strongly enough that the *raison d'être* of every Catholic church building is its altar and the assembly gathered around it. The parish church or cathedral building exists primarily to house

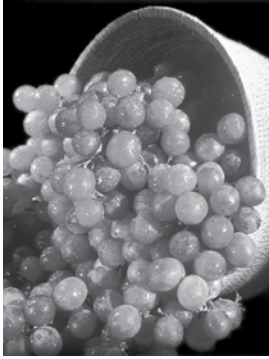


the sacrificial action by which Jesus Christ is rendered as present to his people as they are to each other. Herein lay a problem that pandemic-related social distancing posed to American Catholics from which most other Christian bodies were spared: Unable to gather at their altars, the Catholic faithful were barred from drawing close to the Christ they perceive in the elements of the sacrifice as much as they were from visiting other loved ones in their lives.

The practical effect this had on our churches was to push to the fore their historic role as places of divine enshrinement, true “Houses of God.” Absent users, they remained sites of safekeeping for the Blessed Sacrament entombed there for purposes beyond the celebration of the Mass. They could no longer be *entered into* by those wishing to embrace Christ’s extra-liturgical presence through some private or corporate act of adoration but only gazed upon from afar. As the faithful gradually took again to the streets, however, there emerged spontaneous forms of “drive-by piety,” as I labelled it, harkening back to an era when it was the habit of Catholic men in this country to remove their hats when passing a church or of believers of both sexes to cross themselves out of reverence for the sacramentalized Christ residing within.

As I write this essay, the USCCB is in the process of devising a post-pandemic plan for the reopening of churches. One can easily predict the practical challenges that large numbers of laypeople back into even a single place of worship will pose for pastors, who must balance the demands of liturgical propriety against the health of their parishioners. Initially, at least, the process of “going back to church” for Catholics is bound to be a clumsy, trial-and-error affair. Our skill at negotiating the postures, gestures and objects of ritual, perfected over centuries, will come in handy. Whether anything graceful and cohesive can be made of face masks and hand sanitizer — let alone the stand-apart likeness of anything resembling an “assembly” — remains to be seen. With Pentecost 2020 in sight, the bells of our churches are calling us home. It is good that the familiar presence of Christ awaits us there, unchanged by time or earthly tumult. We will need that to cling to, no doubt, as we adapt to a manner of worship whose style and setting may seem equally foreign.





## EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Soul of Christ: Reflections for After Communion

by John Zupez, SJ

*What do you pray after receiving the Eucharist and why?*

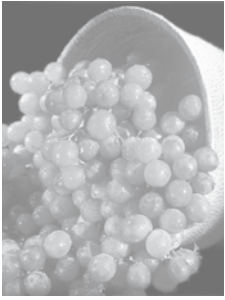
Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.  
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
O good Jesus, hear me.  
Within your wounds, hide me.  
Let me never be separated from you.  
From the malignant enemy, defend me.  
In the hour of my death, call me,  
And bid me come to you,  
That with your saints I may praise you  
Forever and ever. Amen.

John Zupez, SJ, has authored 60 journal articles and 400 Wikipedia articles. He has taught in major seminaries, served as a pastor, and at 83 is involved in prison ministry and parish work.

THE MINUTES AFTER WE RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION AT MASS CAN BE AN ESPECIALLY graced time, when we have a greater sense of Christ being present to us, within us, speaking to us, listening to us. One traditional way of focusing our thought after Communion has been by use of the prayer *Anima Christi*, from which we get the popular hymn *Soul of my Savior*.<sup>1</sup> I review here how some of the major themes of the New Testament and Christian life can be brought to mind by the lines of this prayer.

### *Soul of Christ, sanctify me*

In saying “Soul of Christ, sanctify me,” we can see a reference to the Holy Spirit. Christ has promised to give to us this Spirit always, as the Advocate (Jn 14:16-18), the source of our deep desires and the power behind our graced actions. This Spirit fosters in us the gifts which are the many ways we serve others (1 Cor 12), and the fruits that flow from these gifts: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity,



faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). In the first line of this prayer, then, we are praying that Christ's soul or Spirit might be the animating or sanctifying force in our life. Christ desires to do this. We have only to dispose ourselves, open our hearts to receive Christ's Spirit in greater measure.

*Body of Christ, save me*

When we say, "Body of Christ, save me," we might reflect that we have just received the bread that would transform us if we accept our calling to be one body in Christ (Rom 12:5). This means living in compassionate concern for all God's children, for all are called to be members of Christ's body (Mt 28:19). By this people will know that we are Christians, when we love as Jesus has loved (Jn 13:34-35).

*Blood of Christ, inebriate me*

This line reminds us of the deep joy we should experience ourselves, and communicate to one another, when we celebrate the Eucharist together. Here we remember all God's gifts to us, especially the crowning gift of eternal life at the banquet of heaven (Mt 26:29). In receiving Christ's blood, we have a foretaste of our true calling and destiny. This was the "new wine" that Christians were filled with at Pentecost, the new wine of the kingdom (Acts 2:13). May we enter full-heartedly into the Eucharist by joining close together around the table of the Lord and singing out our praises of the Lord. In this way we lift up one another, and gratitude to God becomes the motivating force in our lives.

*Water from the side of Christ, wash me*

This line reminds us of the cleansing waters of baptism and of the sacrament of reconciliation, where our sins are, figuratively, washed away. Our God is all merciful, forgiving, and forgetting when we repent. Jesus has even said that past sins may lead to a greater grace: "So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love" (Lk 7:47). We pray that we might leave off our sense of defeatism, or of self-righteousness, and entrust ourselves to the saving graces of God in our lives, "for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them" (Eph 2:10).

*Passion of Christ, strengthen me*

When we pray “Passion of Christ, strengthen me,” we are reminded that we are not alone in our afflictions. Christ went before us and suffered more than we will ever be called to suffer. Christ is by our side accompanying us and strengthening us as we are transformed by all that we endure. For “affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:3-5). The paschal mystery is at the center of Christian revelation. This mystery, made manifest in Christ, is our transformation through suffering to resurrected life in Christ (Rom 8:17).

*O good Jesus, hear me*

When we pray “O good Jesus, hear me,” we should recall Saint Augustine’s words: “We need to use words so that we may remind ourselves to consider carefully what we are asking, not so that we may think we can instruct the Lord or prevail on him.”<sup>2</sup> Christ’s Spirit is ever present to us, and solicitous for our welfare. When we are moved by the Spirit and ask for what truly benefits us and others for eternal salvation, God always grants our prayer (Lk 11:10, 13). But it is important that our prayer become more and more a listening to the Spirit, so that we are ready to cooperate with all of God’s graces in our lives.

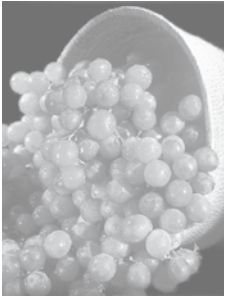
*Within your wounds, hide me. Let me never be separated from you*

These words remind us that attention to Christ’s Spirit in us shields us from the temptations of the flesh (Gal 5:16), of the world, and from the shallowness of this world’s pleasures (1 Jn 2:15-16). These cannot compare to union with Christ. Christ’s love is all-sufficient for us.

*From the malignant enemy, defend me*

I like to think of the good angels of my life as being my loved ones and friends who have preceded me to glory. I believe that they are prompting me with good incentives and warning me when I might diverge from the right path, or harm myself or others in any way. But I must also practice discernment, and not be misled by an evil spirit.<sup>3</sup>

*In the hour of my death, call me,*



*And bid me come to you,  
That with your saints I may praise you*

Death can be a scary moment, but not if we have lived in and for Christ. We can then say in confidence of being heard: “In the hour of my death, call me, and bid me come to you, that with your saints I may praise you.” Saint Paul tells us that we are all created for Christ (Col 1:16), to be in Christ and to reflect the face of Christ not only here but also in heaven, each according to our own personality and grace. As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins rightly envisaged, God will see Christ “in ten thousand places,” in the face of each of us.<sup>4</sup> To the extent that we have grown in the image of Christ we have the joy of reflecting Christ to others.

*forever and ever*

This accustomed ending of Christian prayer is itself well worth reflecting upon. Forever is a long time. The older we grow the more aware we become of the shortness of the time we have to grow in charity and become all that God meant us to be. Our purgatory is likely to be the regret we feel at death when we realize all the opportunities for growth that we neglected, and so failed to reach the full stature of blessedness that God intended for us. But, perhaps assisted by the prayers and the love shown to us by others, we will accept with gratitude all that we have become by God’s grace, and find joy in seeing God – Father, Son, and Spirit – in themselves, and of seeing the face of Christ in myriad images of Christ’s beauty and goodness in others, forever.<sup>5</sup>

Stop, then, at any line of the prayer that brings inspiration. Prayer is intended to raise the mind and heart to God, to assist us to live the Christian life.<sup>6</sup> Whenever we are touched by Christ’s Spirit we have arrived at the deepest fruit of vocal prayer. Stay with any inspiration, or insight, or consolation, for in these we have realized the purpose of the prayer.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Soul of my Savior.” [http://www.chantcd.com/lyrics/soul\\_of\\_my\\_savior.htm](http://www.chantcd.com/lyrics/soul_of_my_savior.htm)

<sup>2</sup> “Our Father, the Lord’s Prayer – Augustine.” <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/ourfatheronthelordsprayer>

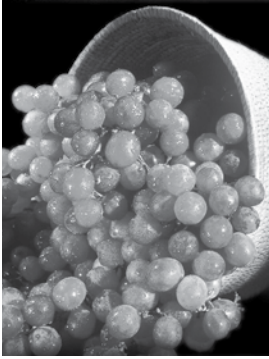
<sup>3</sup> “Discernment of Spirits.” <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/making-good-decisions/discernment-of-spirits>

<sup>4</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire.” <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44389/as-kingfishers-catch-fire>

<sup>5</sup> John Zupez, “Our Good Deeds Follow Us,” *Emmanuel*, 126 (Jan/Feb 2020), 4-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2559





## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# The Eucharist and the Dance of Death

by Mark McCann

*What might Camille Saint-Saëns symphony Dance Macabre inspire in a eucharistic imagination?*

IN JUNE OF 2019, MY FAMILY AND I ATTENDED THE LAST PERFORMANCE OF THE 2018-2019 Connecticut Valley Symphony Orchestra Concert Series, a journey through the theme of dance. One of my favorite pieces of the afternoon was the *Dance Macabre*, by Camille Saint-Saëns. I must confess I knew little about this orchestral version of the poem by the same name, other than it was featured in the movie *Tombstone* (Hollywood Pictures, 1993), as a bit of metaphorical foreshadowing for the characters who would soon be playing a dangerous game of life and death. Still, the call of the solo violin against the haunting refrain of the orchestra caused my soul to stir with eerie delight as I was carried away into a bizarre world where skeletons cavorted until the crow of the rooster at sunrise called them back to their tombs.

As I read about the song and the ghostly graveyard scene where the dead have risen at midnight to dance with the devil until dawn, I was reminded of another “dance of death” that took place 2000 years ago. It is the song of joy that will one day call the souls of all people to rise from their graves and dance with the savior into the dawn of the resurrection. It is an incredible mystery we recall each time we celebrate the Eucharist, as we come face to face with the death that has brought us salvation. Every Sunday when we come to the table, we are once more drawn into that profound poetic moment where our savior, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross and sacrificed himself for our sins.

### Beauty from Ugliness

The *Dance Macabre* was viewed as a grotesque piece of music at the time it was written. One London music critic called it, “horrible, hideous,

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and disgusting.” It was seen as a perversion of a beautiful art form, a waltz gone wrong, an unholy mingling of beauty and ugliness. To some, the worst part of the piece was not that the dead had risen from the grave, but that all forms of class had been eliminated by death, with nobles dancing freely with commoners. It was not until later that people began to appreciate the brilliant combination of graceful and haunting melodies, punctuated by the powerful interjections of the solo violin.

Our beloved savior’s dance of death was also seen as grotesque and violent, the meaningless ending of a life spent in controversy and upheaval. Here was the one who had claimed to be the Son of God, moving in agony through the streets, falling and rising to the sound of the jeering crowds and the weeping of those who cared for him, being raised up on the cruel cross in humiliation and despair. And yet, our Lord walked that road of death willingly, lovingly, in complete surrender to the divine purpose for which he had been sent. It was only after his resurrection, when Christ performed a pirouette upon the grave, that his followers recognized the incredible and perfect miracle of mercy that had taken place in the midst of that solemn surrender from the savior of the world.

### The Dancing Bones

The frightening image of skeletons dancing before the devil, compelled by an unholy power on All Hallows Eve, may fascinate us and stir our sinful sensuality, but its momentary pleasure is fragmented and fleeting, incomplete and destined to fade away like the darkness at the coming of dawn. I am certainly not a musical expert, only vaguely grasping the musical brilliance of the *Dies Irae* mingling with the *diabolus in musica* at the highpoint of the song, but it seems to me that this spiritual tension is what Saint-Saëns had in mind for the *Dance Macabre*. We are caught up in the mournful melody of the solo violin, captured by its power to draw us into the morbid moment where we sway to the rhythm of the instruments in a dark reverie of corporeal indulgence. The spell has been cast and we are compelled to rise up with the spirits of the night. But with the cock crow, we return to our senses as the dead are fated to return to their graves and we are reminded of the fate of all who reject Christ.

But there is another image of bones coming to life — an exceedingly vast host rising up to be clothed in sinew and skin, standing ready to receive the word of life that will bring them new hope. This is the image

in Ezekiel, chapter 37. Here, hopeless humanity lies in desolation, dried up and wasted away through sin and disobedience. When the holy word is spoken and the prophecy of resurrection sung out in the desert of despair, the bodies of the dead are revived, waiting upon the Spirit to breathe life into them once more. As the word of the son of man is revealed, the graves are opened, and the People of God are restored to the promised land. This is the powerful picture of the resurrection that awaits all who have put their hope in Christ.

### **Eucharist and Our Victory Over Death**

We may delight in the music of Saint-Saëns or the story of Ezekiel, but such visions only serve to point us to deeper realities. As we gather around the table of the Lord to celebrate Mass, the fleeting nature of Satan's spell cast upon humanity and the far-reaching oracle of the resurrection to come are given their truest meaning in the Eucharist. The prince of darkness called the savior to the dance of death, and the Son of God entered into the rhythm of our reality, willingly taking our sins upon himself. On Calvary's hill he laid down his life so that our flesh and our spirit could one day be reunited in the perfection of God's eternal kingdom.

*The dance from death to life will continue into eternity where we shall forever feast at the heavenly banquet table and answer the Savior's sweet song of love with our everlasting praise and undying gratitude.*

If we would only open our eyes to the wondrous mystery that unfolds before us in the celebration of the Eucharist! Here, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ is given for our nourishment. The very same one who surrendered to the dance of death becomes for us the source of our life and the hope of our resurrection to come. As we receive the bread of life and the chalice of salvation, we are caught up in the glorious resurrection won for us by Christ. Death's sting is rendered powerless in Christ's victory, as our sins are forgiven, and we are clothed with the imperishable nature of God.

### **Fascination and Futility, Surrender and Salvation**

As we move through life, dancing on the edge of our frail humanity, we come face to face with two distinct calls. One comes from the father of




lies, who summons us to move to the rhythms of sin's fleeting pleasures, walking in the futility of the temporary trappings of a life without God. The other comes from the Son of Man, who alone has the power to call us forth from the grave and offer us abundant life. Though the wide path of selfishness and sin may seem to satisfy our souls, in the end, we are left as lifeless as the corpses returning to their tombs in the light of day at the end of the *Dance Macabre*. Only as we receive Christ in his fullness can we experience the eternal dance of joy that is promised to those who are willing to surrender to salvation's call.

The celebration of the Eucharist is indeed a divine dance acted out upon the stage of the world that is passing away. We are overwhelmed by the words from the cross that speak of forgiveness for enemies and a thirst to bring about the salvation of souls. As we rise to offer praise and thanksgiving and kneel before the throne of grace to confess our unworthiness, we too enter into this dance from death to life, begun with our baptism and one day to be completed when Christ comes again. Rather than recoiling at the thought of death, we who believe can yield our lives to the one who has conquered the grave. We can go forth from this joyful celebration to dance before the world, offering the grace that can call forth the lost into the light of the resurrection.

### **The Solo Cry and the Body's Response**

In the *Dance Macabre*, it is the powerful cry of the solo violin that seems to carry the day, setting the tone for the scene and bearing the weight of both sorrow and delight as it draws the listener into its eerie world. Yet it is the other instruments that serve to bring balance and shape the character of the entire piece, helping us to envision the gracefulness that is juxtaposed against the backdrop of the gravestones and the moonlit sky. The Eucharist reveals another cry, the cry of victory from the savior that calls forth the solemn response from the body of Christ. We hear, "It is finished!" and we rejoice in our salvation, even as we take our place as followers of Jesus in a world torn by the darkness of sin and despair.

Freed from the prison of death, walking our way into the dawn of the resurrection, we respond to others with grace and eternal hope. The death we recall in the Eucharist bursts forth upon the world with this hope, because we have become caught up in that same dance of death and look forward to the day when our vision shall find its fullness in Christ. The call of Christ to come forth from the grave goes

out, drawing dead souls into the kingdom. We receive. We are sent. The weary world is called to join in the dance. In the end, we know that with the light of that glorious new day, the dance of life from death will continue into eternity where we shall forever feast at the heavenly banquet table and answer the savior's sweet song of love with our everlasting praise and undying gratitude. 

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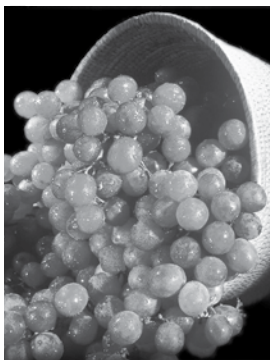
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## *EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY*

# 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.

### **Eucharistic Abstinence in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

WE WHO HAVE LIVED THROUGH AND HAVE SURVIVED THIS PANDEMIC OF 2020, HAVE suffered the loss of our beloved family members and faithful friends. We were further asked to walk through the desert of Lent and the glory of the resurrection, without the daily manna — the reception of the Lord's body and blood in the sacramental species (bread and wine).

In that moment I turned to Saint Peter Julian Eymard to seek understanding from the Apostle of the Eucharist and promoter of daily Communion. In his day and age, it was very uncommon to receive Eucharist frequently. Along his own faith journey, he came to see the great love and generosity of Christ who simply desired to share the gift of himself in the Eucharist to nourish the whole of humanity. His unique insight led him to promote frequent reception of Communion which was groundbreaking for the time. Therefore, seeking his spiritual guidance in this "eucharistic fast" posed challenges.

Turning the pages of his letters, I came across one that he had written Mme. Clotilde Tholin-Bost, a mother who was asking him for help, as she prepared a class in the study of Latin for her boys. She was home-schooling her sons due to a cholera outbreak. She thought he, being the headmaster of the Marist boarding school, was the perfect person to ask. He did help and offered to send teacher's aids of Latin made simple.

In his correspondence with her he also offered an insight that may be helpful for our unique time. It expands upon the eucharistic image of nourishment, to speak of Jesus who promises to "abide within us" and sustain us. The language he uses is relational. It speaks of sharing life, love, and even hardship. I found this excerpt of his letter comforting:

*I am also writing to tell you my wishes and hopes at the feet of our Divine Master, the offering which I renew every day at 7:00, when it is my honor and happiness to serve as priest at the altar of love ... Therefore, I ask that Jesus may rule and live in you in the fullness of his spirit and love. Oh! How joyful Heaven must be, how pleased the Blessed Trinity must be to listen when a Christian soul cries out: "No, it is not I who lives within, it is Jesus who lives in me!" I abide in Jesus and Jesus abides in me ...now I want to suffer with You... oh devouring and consuming fire!*

Letter to Mme. Clotilde Tholin-Bost  
Feb.9,1853 (Doc.#0402)



**Prayer in honor of  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard**

Gracious God of our ancestors,  
you led Peter Julian Eymard,  
like Jacob in times past,  
on a journey of faith.  
Under the guidance of your gentle Spirit,  
Peter Julian discovered the gift of love  
in the Eucharist which your son Jesus  
offered for the hungers of humanity.  
Grant that we may  
celebrate this mystery worthily,  
adore it profoundly, and  
proclaim it prophetically  
for your greater glory. Amen.

*Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
Apostle of the Eucharist  
pray for us!*





## PASTORAL LITURGY

# The Revised *Order of Baptism of Children* – Part 2

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

Blessed  
Sacrament  
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WE CONTINUE OUR REVIEW OF THE SECOND EDITION OF THE *ORDER OF BAPTISM OF Children* [OBC] and the general introduction of the order.

Regularly, liturgists are wonderful about reading choices for solemnities, saints, and sacraments included in Eucharist. Paragraph 29 of the general introduction discusses the use of the particular Sunday Mass readings and an order of precedence. For instance, during the Sunday of Christmas Time and Ordinary Time, the “Mass for the Conferral of Baptism” is said (OBC 29). On these particular Sundays, the readings may be those of the day in the *Lectionary for Mass* or in this order. Additionally, the introduction continues by saying “one of the readings may be taken from the texts provided for the Baptism of children” for other Sundays of Christmas or Ordinary Time.

Here are the updated titles to the OBC, focusing upon its important parts:

### Rite of Receiving the Children

- Sacred Celebration of the Word of God
  - o Readings
  - o Homily
  - o No Creed
  - o Prayer of the Faithful
  - o Litany of Saints
- Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing Before Baptism (may be omitted “for serious reasons” in the US, OBC 51)
- Celebration of Baptism
  - o Blessing of Water and Invocation of God over the Water (if already blessed, see OBC 223 shorter prayer)
  - o Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith
  - o Baptism
- Explanatory Rites
  - o Anointing after Baptism

- o Clothing with a White Garment (OBC paragraph 63 states it must be white “unless demanded by local custom”)
  - o Handing On of a Lighted Candle
  - o “Ephphatha” (OBC paragraph 65 says it is at the “discretion of the celebrant”)
- Conclusion of the Rite
  - o LORD’S Prayer
  - o Blessing and Dismissal

In paragraph 29 of the introduction, part D mentions that during the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful), other petitions may be added for the universal Church and needs of the world. One could add those who have died, as we normally do at a Mass without a baptism.

If baptism is celebrated during a Mass, the “offertory” continues the next part. Also, special concluding blessings are celebrated at the end of Mass, including the formulas from the ritual. Baptisms outside of Mass continue with the LORD’S Prayer and blessings only.

For pastoral sensitivity, paragraph 31 of the OBC allows for parents to use their own words in the dialogue response. For instance, rather than replying they want “baptism” for their child, parents may say “faith” or “eternal life.”

The rite of receiving the baptismal child candidates is greatly expanded in the second edition of OBC. It now highlights the following:

- Baptism should be celebrated on a Sunday and with a large number of the faithful (beyond strictly family members) to represent the Church and the Paschal Mystery (OBC 3).
- If circumstance allow, sing a suitable psalm or hymn to begin (OBC 35).
- The doors of the church are the appropriate place to begin the ritual or the particular community’s gathering area
- There is no “Sign of the Cross” to begin the ritual, just a new paragraph to instruct and welcome those gathered for baptism (OBC 36). When this ritual is celebrated within the Mass, the regular greeting and penitential act are omitted (OBC 29.1).
- The “responsibility statement” in OBC paragraph 39 is clearer.
- The updated “signing statement” is also more instructional. The rubric says that “if it seems appropriate, the godparents” also sign the children on the forehead (OBC 41) which is an appropriate pastoral procedure to include them on behalf of

their important role in raising the child.

- A song accompanies the procession from the doors of the church to the place of the Word of God, the nave of the church. Psalm 85 is recommended (OBC 42).

We will complete the other instructional notes helpful to understand the second edition of the OBC in our next column.

### **Organizing for September/October 2020**

**Key:** *Book of Blessings* (BB), *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (CHBP), *Ceremonial of Bishops* (CB)

#### **Celebrations during these months:**

- Beginning of the School Year (BB 522- 550)
- Labor Day Prayer (CHBP, page 176)
- Grandparents Day – Second Sunday of September, September 13
- Jewish New Year 5781 (Rosh Hashanah) sundown of Friday, September 18/Yom Kippur September 27 at sundown
- Blessing of Catechists (BB 505-508) (usually the third Sunday of September, September 20, 2020 – Catechetical Sunday)
- Human Life Month/Sunday – First Sunday of the month (October 4)
- Blessing of Animals (BB 942-965; CHBP, page 154) First Sunday of October or October 4 Saint Francis Feast Day
- Columbus Day (USA) – Second Monday, October 12
- National Boss's Day (October 16)
- United Nations Day (October 24)
- Ordained Priesthood Sunday (Last Sunday of October, October 25)
- Reformation Day (October 31)

#### **Use the *Lectionary Supplement* for the readings on the following days:**

- Wednesday, September 9 – Saint Peter Claver
- Saturday, September 12 – The Most Holy Name of Mary
- Wednesday, September 23 – Saint Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)
- Monday, September 28 – Saint Lawrence Ruiz & Companions
- Monday, October 5 – Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos
- Sunday, October 11 - Saint John XXIII

- Thursday, October 22 – Saint John Paul II

**Other days:**

- **Tuesday, September 1 – World Day of Creation.** Last year, World Day of Creation fell on a Sunday, so more attention was given to this interfaith holiday. Continue to use the readings that were available from last year and the resources that are provided. Contact this author for more details and assistance.
- **Monday, September 7 – Labor Day.** A special section of prayers and readings are found in the *Lectionary (Volume IV)* and the *Roman Missal*.
- **Sunday, September 13 – Beginning of the 52<sup>nd</sup> International Eucharistic Congress.** Pray for the success of this week in Budapest, Hungary.
- **Monday, September 14 – Exaltation of the Holy Cross.** Because we were unable to celebrate the Sacred Triduum this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the instruction for this year's Holy Week recommended a day of prayer and remembrance on both this day and on **Tuesday, September 15, Our Lady of Sorrows**. Consider how you might honor the sacred sign of the cross and the sorrow that we shared this year.
- **Sunday, September 27 – Saint Vincent de Paul** and a day to bless, pray for, and highlight your social outreach ministry in your parish and those who serve in this ministry.
- **Sunday, October 18 – World Mission Sunday.** This Third Sunday of October mission focus helps us recognize the prime importance of our Church, and, as Pope Francis teaches, how we are to be "missioned to live the Eucharist."





## BREAKING THE WORD

# Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Barbara Shanahan

Barbara Shanahan is an alumna of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. She has led the Buffalo, New York, Catholic Bible Studies Program since 1992.

## September 6, 2020 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Ezekiel 33:7-9; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20**

In ancient times, the role of the sentinel or watchman brought with it a burden of responsibility. Today we employ early warning systems to alert us of any danger from an enemy or natural disaster. In Ezekiel's world, the watchman was called to warn people of impending danger. It was not the sentinel's responsibility to save the town any more than the early warning systems can force its hearers to seek safety. However, the dutiful sentinel could not shy away from the task. If he failed to announce the threat, he would be held responsible for the lives of the people. If he sounded the warning and the people chose to not heed his warning, it was their responsibility. We see the importance of the watchman, but also the limited burden of responsibility attached to the post. He does not have to drag the people to safety!

Ezekiel was a sentinel for Israel. This was a way of describing the role of the prophet. Their duty was to speak the word of God to the people, to warn and admonish. Whatever the people chose to do with this information was their responsibility and would not be held against the prophet. Was the message delivered? If so, he was off the hook. This line of thinking is consistent with Ezekiel's message of personal responsibility.

How do we understand this in light of the Gospel message? Again, it is about alerting another person to behavior or ways that are not consistent with the values of the community. Think of the two sides presented in the Gospel we hear today: the wronged and the

wrongdoer. How important is it for the individual who is to confront the “wrongdoer” to be certain they are in the right? Other voices from the community then affirm the position. The need to be transparent, humble, and open to scrutiny falls heavily on those who shed a light on the fault of the other. Don’t miss the beam in your eye while you focus on the speck in another’s (Mt 7:3)!

Today’s reading from Matthew is a portion from the community discourse, the fourth of five discourses that give a structure to the middle section of the Gospel of Matthew. Last week we listened to the very heart of this discourse: the parable of the lost sheep. In that passage we are brought to consider the value of each individual member of the community and the lengths we are to go to preserve the fragile, wavering faith of “the one.” A 99% approval rating is not the standard for the community’s outreach! That 1% is worth saving. Everything must be done to bring them back. Is this not consistent with Jesus’ outreach to any who held the least glimmer of faith: tax-collectors, sinners, or Gentiles? Who are these people today?

Do the words of the parable of the lost sheep shed light on the response to a recalcitrant member of the community? Are we supposed to wash our hands of them? Dismiss them? WWJD — “What would Jesus do?” Go back to the Gospel and see how Jesus treated Gentiles and tax collectors! He always keeps the door to discipleship open, offering the opportunity to become a believer. At times, their openness “amazed” him.

In the community of Matthew’s Gospel, there was a great need to emphasize reconciliation and forgiveness. We do not know the specifics of the situation that prompted this teaching. We do know that around the year 85 CE, the community that Matthew is writing for, had lived, or was living through a painful separation from Judaism. There were likely a variety of diverse and complex ideologies and beliefs held by various factions — not unlike our Church today!

Anyone involved in pastoral ministry and parish life today knows that each situation is unique and calls for carefully considered responses. One size does not fit all situations. Forming attitudes founded on the spirit of Jesus as we discover these in the Gospels are important for faith communities when shaping policies and defining mission goals. We need to be familiar with the Gospel message! As Pope Francis reminds us: “Keep the Gospel on your cell phone.”

*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another (Rom 13:8)*

## September 13, 2020 Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Sirach 27:30—28:7; Psalm 103: 1-4, 9-12; Romans 14:7-9;  
Matthew 18:21-35**

It has been said that if we are unable to forgive others, we are either forgetful or ungrateful. Forgetful of the times we have needed the forgiveness of another. Forgetful of “the beam in our own eye.” Forgetful of the shabby condition of our own life. Or we are ungrateful, ungrateful for the graciousness of others who have extended forgiveness to us. Ungrateful for the wideness of God’s mercy. Ungrateful for the generous and understanding acceptance and love of those closest to us who love us unconditionally. *Unforgiving, ungrateful, and forgetful* are three attitudes that should have no place in our lives.

How interconnected is this dynamic of giving and receiving forgiveness! It begins with God who by definition is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, rich in kindness and fidelity” (Ex 34:6; Ps 103: 8-9). God is always merciful and human beings will always stand in need of God’s gracious mercy and forgiveness. So too must each person be generous in forgiving because we will always be in need of another’s forgiveness. Does this not seem to be the simplest wisdom?

The reading from Sirach is timely for our world. It points out many undesirable attitudes we must avoid that are constantly on display, assaulting us: “wrath,” “anger,” and “vengeance” to name a few. As the passage continues, virtuous acts are set alongside as reward for such righteous behavior. “Does anyone nourish anger... and expect healing from the Lord?” “Can one refuse mercy to a sinner... yet seek pardon for their own sins?” Wisdom offers the way out of a world that is filled with negative behaviors and attitudes that have cast a web of darkness over our world, causing some to imagine that the best of times is something in the past.

We must not allow this web to thicken over our eyes, leaving us unable to see the light. Instead we have to create a world that counters the negative and invite others to share the peace we hold onto; a peace we build from our faith in Christ. Words create realities — what sort of world do the words of Psalm 103 create? “Bless the Lord and never



forget God's benefits." The following verses of the Psalm invite us to think about the sort of world God desires for us to experience. God who "forgives sin... heals our ills... redeems our life... crowns us with mercy and compassion... fills our life with good things... renews our youth... does justice to the oppressed." Ponder these words and let them create a better world for you! They are not just nice words. They are ideas that are expressive of the plans God has for each one of us.

Remembering all God's benefits makes us grateful for all that we have. Remembering God's mercy makes us gracious in extending mercy to others. When we are profoundly aware of this, out of humility, we do not hold grudges or harbor a vindictive spirit. In today's gospel Peter thinks he is being generous! Must I forgive as many as "seven times?"! If we have to count, do we have the right spirit?

The parable of the unforgiving servant concludes this section of Matthew's Gospel known as the "community discourse." It defines the spirit and attitude that should reside within each member in the new reality known as Church. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew emphasizes the need for reconciliation and forgiveness. Then as now, it takes great humility to be in a position to ask for and to extend forgiveness. It can also take heroic faith. Righteousness does not mean to "even the score." Righteousness means to be in right relationship with God, to be perfect as God is, and to do what God does... as many times as God does!

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all his benefits (Ps 103:2)*

## September 20, 2020 Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145: 2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Philemon 1:20c-24, 27a; Matthew 20: 1-16a**

The text from Isaiah is the concluding chapter of the middle section of the book of Isaiah (Ch 40 – 55). Sometimes this section is referred to as Second Isaiah or Isaiah of the Exile since the author of these chapters writes from Babylon toward the end of Israel's fifty-year exile there. Perhaps the exilic context explains why the prophet seems to suggest something of the elusive presence of God: "Seek the Lord while the Lord may be found." Was there some question about God's continuing

presence? In the past, Israel was confident of God's presence among them in tangible signs, like the temple that stood in the midst of Jerusalem, or the fact that the land God promised to them was secure and the king who ruled them was assured by covenantal decree. These no longer existed when Second Isaiah wrote. The temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the land was never again in their possession. Likewise, the Davidic line of kings had come to an end. Where then is God to be found? Life is like that at times. The reliable script changes and the manner of God's presence with us is not clear. Such times can also prove the truth of something else God says through Isaiah: "See I am doing something new! Do you not perceive it?"

Isaiah tells the exiles *and us* to "turn to the Lord to find mercy... to God who is generous in forgiving." There is a new normal, yet something essential remains: God's generous mercy and forgiveness. This description of God is not new. These are the covenant qualities God has always shown toward God's people. God is being God, and we are invited to enter into the magnanimous thought world of God whose ways are not like our ways.

It is hard to imagine how great is God's mercy when we know how very difficult it is to let go of the smallest offense or hurt that we experience. The difference between God and us shows up here: how much does God forgive and how greatly does God love sinners? And still we are supposed to strive to be perfect as God is perfect! God is God, and we are not. God's ways pose a genuine challenge to us. There will always be something out of our reach that keeps us on our quest to be perfect. God's ways elude us. When we think we have a grasp, the script changes and we have to pick our way as if from the beginning.

As for being certain about the direction life takes, listen to what Paul says: "I long to depart this life to be with Christ... this is a better thing... but if I continue to labor, more souls will be brought to faith." Do we always know where the will of God is to be found? Is the "best thing" always clear and evident? It seems that life has to unfold, and we must labor and wait with patience.

A good example of "laboring to understand that and God's ways are not our ways" can be found in the parable of the vineyard laborers. Has this parable ever rankled you? The entire misunderstanding could have been averted if the first hired were paid first. But then

we wouldn't have the parable to question our assumptions about God. Particularly, how we deal with the topic of God's extravagant generosity. The first think they should be first, but God tips that logic on its head. Scholars suggest one interpretation of the parable is the workers hired last represent the Gentiles who are now on equal footing with the Jews, inheriting the prerogatives given to Israel. These did not labor as the Jews had. What have they done to deserve this privilege? In answer, what can anyone do to deserve the grace of God? It comes to whomever it will. Maybe it is good to be last in line! Be grateful the next time you find yourself in the last place.

*The Lord is faithful in all his words, and holy in all his deeds (Ps 145:13)*

## September 27, 2020 Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; Philemon 2:1-11;  
Matthew 21:28-32**

Readers of a certain age may recall the simple question and answer format of the Baltimore Catechism.

Q: Why did God make you?

A: God made me to know, love, and serve him in this world  
and be happy with him in the next.

A person seeking a deeper relationship with God would readily admit that this simple answer can leave one without a lot of direction and perhaps ill prepared to know how to fit the complexities of our adult lives into such a tiny box. Not that the answer is wrong. Can it just be too simplistic? Not allowing us to adapt to the varied ways God comes to be known, loved, and served as we mature in faith, understanding, and grace? Have we left too many people with that simple definition as they progress through life's challenges?

The readings for today also challenge familiar boundaries. They invite us to consider that being open to change is a critical element in our journey to being happy with God in this life and in the next. In simplest terms, having Christ's attitude of humility and obedience as our foundation, grounds us and prepares us to encounter the detours

and roadblocks of life. These attitudes make us willing servants of the Lord's will and place us at the service of others. Living with the mind of Christ is not something that unfolds with clarity. Instead, it often becomes part of us incrementally. It shapes us and it can be a costly shaping! This attitude is not something that we memorize at age seven, to remain a ready answer, lying dormant in our memory. We must allow ourselves to grow through our imitation of Christ. How important it is to make available solid programs of adult faith formation so such learning and encouragement can take place.

In the reading from the prophet Ezekiel, the people want to argue with the prophet who presents them with something new and challenging. He tells them that each person is answerable for their own relationship with God. Ezekiel says two things about this: 1) each person is responsible for their goodness or sinfulness and 2) a person can change. If they are good, they can turn to evil; if they are evil, they can turn to good. This may not sound new to us, but in Ezekiel's day, the idea of intergenerational guilt provided an explanation for all kinds of disasters that occurred. Ezekiel dismisses this way of thinking. In the midst of crisis, people want the old props, correct or not. It is what they know and enough has already been displaced, so they cry out to Ezekiel that the Lord's way is not fair.

Note here how biblical ideas evolve. Each generation is confronted with ideas and concepts about God that are ever changing. The people in exile believed that God was punishing them for the sins of their parents. Ezekiel tells them this is not the case. Do we canonize old ideas and theologies that can become like boulders needing to be moved? We search for God's truth in the unfolding revelation of God to us. Important in this search is our willingness (or lack thereof) to enter more and more deeply into what it means to "have the mind of Christ," not just our own ideas and attitudes.

The simple parable from the Gospel carries a message consistent with Jesus' teaching in Matthew: "It is not the one who says 'Lord, Lord' who will enter the kingdom, but the one who *does* the will of my Father" (Mt 7:21). And isn't this true in life? The son or daughter who gets to the right place does so in a tentative, faltering way at first. Do you see yourself in this story?

*Guide me in the way of your truth and teach me (Ps 25:5)*

October 4, 2020  
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80: 9, 12-16, 19-20; Philemon 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43**

As is often the case, the responsorial psalm points us prayerfully toward the heart of the message we are to discover in the Sunday Scripture readings. Psalm 80 speaks of Israel as the vine of God that God carefully plants and tends. God's plan was embodied in this people. With great hope God brought the vine out of Egypt to the land of Canaan, carefully preparing for a successful transplant, clearing the soil and preparing the ground. The vine became luxuriant, overtaking the land. But then the vine met with devastation. The precious vine was chopped down, plucked up, cut off. The one explanation available at the time for why these events took place was that God was punishing the people for something they had done, some failure on their part. The prayer of the people can be heard in verse 19, "And we shall never forsake you again. Give us life that we may call upon your name."

The Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah is introduced with these words: "Let me sing of my friend, my beloved's song about his vineyard." It is right to assume that the vineyard is Israel. The psalm informs us of this. And "my friend," "my beloved," the vineyard owner, is God. The prophet, inspired with empathy for the great love God bears for the people, summarizes all God has done to make God's vineyard productive and a source of pride in the land. But all the love poured into the venture produced nothing but rotten grapes. Ingratitude prompts the landowner to rip it all down and leave it to the elements. He then asks the question: "What more could I have done for my vineyard that I did not do?" Are these words of anger? Or do they sound like words of unrequited love? The prophet is inviting us to imagine that God experiences the human emotion of ingratitude and disappointment; of love not returned. Only if a person holds deep love can they feel such profound rejection. The prophet is inspired with an image that enables us to imagine the depths of God's love and devotion.

A text such as this helps us appreciate and think about the many attempts God makes to convince the people of God's love for them. Generation after generation God shows mercy and compassion but in return, experiences forgetfulness and lack of devotion. God's hopes for

Israel are met only with forgetfulness. The prophet Jeremiah speaks in a similar way: "But I had planted you a choice vine... How could you turn out so obnoxious to me, a spurious vine" (Jer. 2:21)? Likewise, Hosea states "She (Israel) did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil... Therefore... I will put an end to all her joy, ...I will lay waste her vines and fig trees" (Hos 2:10-14). Speaking in such intimate terms is fitting because Israel is the covenant partner of a faithful God and she has proven to be a faithless partner.

In the section of Matthew's Gospel that we read throughout these weeks Jesus engages in a series of encounters with the Jewish leaders. Last week we heard the parable of the two sons, words aimed at the leaders who say one thing but who fail to act on what they say. This week, addressing the chief priests and Pharisees, Jesus compares them to the tenants charged with making the vineyard productive, but failing miserably in the task given them. They fail in their responsibility to provide leadership and guidance, so the vineyard fails to produce its fruit! In response, others will be charged to tend the vineyard, tenants who will make it productive and fruitful. There is a turmoil that reveals great sadness. These words suggest the end of something old, but the promise of a new hope. Something must die before new hope can be birthed.

*Visit this vine and protect it, the vine your right hand has planted (Ps 80:16)*

## October 11, 2020 Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23: 1-6; Philemon 4:12-14, 19-20;  
Matthew 22:1-14**

Arranging a dinner party demands attention to many details: menu planning, shopping, cleaning, decorating, and most importantly, the guest list! Who will you honor with an invitation? Our attention is drawn this week to God making similar plans for a time of feasting. God prepares a bountiful feast. Who will be favored with an invitation? And will they accept? And what is expected of a guest?

There is a lot of feasting mentioned throughout the Bible. It seems a human thing to do, a natural response to celebrate events with a feast.

These moments of celebration in the Bible often convey the sense of some ideal future time when the faithful will recline at table in freedom, participating in joy at the eschatological banquet of plentiful food and overflowing wine. Recall the wedding at Cana and the miracle that provides an abundance of wine in place of water and feasting that exceeded expectations. Wedding feasts are often a reference to the banquet God will set for God's people at the end of time.

Who will be given a place at God's banquet? If we read a few verses that precede today's selection from Isaiah, we have some insight into who are God's favored ones. Who is likely to be on the guest list? We learn that God is inclined to favor and include *the poor* for whom God is a refuge, and *the needy* who are in distress. For these, God will be shelter and shade. The excluded would be the ruthless and the tyrant who would instead feel the pelting of winter rain and the blast of desert heat. This last group (the ruthless and the tyrants) have no place at the table, while consistently in the Bible, those whom God favors and protects are the poor and the needy. Recall Jesus' parable of the rich man who dined sumptuously but would not give a crumb to poor Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Upon his death, Lazarus is taken to heaven with Abraham (likely to a banquet!) and the rich man dies and is in torment, asking only a drop of cool water from Lazarus.

Considering our world today, we all feel overwhelmed in our capacity to hold the needs of all who suffer in our thoughts and prayers. We ask: "How does God remember?" But we know God does and there awaits abundance for those who seem to have nothing of the blessings of this world. God will provide for those who, despite the generous efforts of so many, remain poor and needy. There will be a feast for them, for all of us!

The Gospel presents us with a different scenario: the wedding feast for the king's son and invited guests who were too busy or preoccupied to dress for the occasion or even attend. Clearly the guests did not value their relationship with the king. The king therefore orders his servants to fill the hall with people from the highways and byways. Ready or not here they come! As with all parables, they question us and have the potential to yield a variety of meanings. Jesus has a pointed message aimed at the leaders of the people who reject the invitation, unwilling to dress for the occasion (change their ways and be receptive). The second wave of those gathered for the feast cannot be just another set of guests, unwilling to make changes to their lives. They must be guests

who accept the hospitality of their host and all that entails, taking on the attitude of Christ, the demands of a new response.

*For you are a refuge for the poor and the needy in distress; shelter from the rain and shade from the heat (Isa 25:4)*

## October 18, 2020 Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6; Psalm 96: 1, 3-5, 7-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b; Matthew 22: 15-21**

When Abraham and Sarah went forth to Canaan, they carried with them the promises their God made to them, to give them descendants, a homeland, and assurance that their many descendants would be a channel of blessing to the nations. As a resident alien in the land of Canaan, Abraham encountered the deities worshipped by the people in whose land he was living. The biblical writers tell us that Abraham invoked the differing names of the God of the people and places where he journeyed: *El Elyon* (God Most High) the God of Melchizedek and *El Olam* (God Eternal) the God of Abimelech. One is given the sense that Abraham did not consider these to be “other gods” but the same God who had intervened in his life with a promise and a covenant.

What is in a name and can just one name reveal the enormous mystery of God? Israel preserves the name “Yahweh” as the name of its God. Rendered “I AM.” Israel’s God is the source of life and being. Israel understands the Lord God to be the God of all the nations, enfolding all the names of other gods in God’s unutterable name! What the biblical authors imply about Abraham’s relationship with the gods of the peoples he encountered is true in these narratives, although there are other places in the Bible where Israel is faulted for turning away from the Lord and choosing “other gods” instead. This is a warning that we need to read the Bible carefully and with understanding.

From their beginnings, Israel’s relationship with the nations was not one of separation. Instead, they were to bring the blessing of light and salvation to the nations. This perspective helps us appreciate the words of Isaiah, spoken to Cyrus, the king of Persia, language once reserved for Davidic descendants: “My anointed” (Messiah in Hebrew).



It is also said of Cyrus that he was “given a name and a title” (as Israel’s prophets were). All this, though Cyrus called his god by the name Marduk! Yet, the Lord, the God of Israel, the God of heaven, charged Cyrus with the task of liberating captive peoples, including the Jews, even though “he knew him not.”

We might ask “What’s in a name?” How do we speak of God? Do many people possess some understanding of God without sharing the same name for that Supreme Being? Turning to *Nostra Aetate* — the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christians from the Second Vatican Council, we read: “From ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples, a certain perception of that hidden power that hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life indeed, recognition can be found of a Supreme Divinity and of a Supreme Father too” (NA 2). This is the sense we have in the ancestral stories and here in Isaiah.

The success of the Persian army in the defeat of Babylon was welcomed by all. World history documents how Cyrus returned conquered peoples to their homeland, rebuilt their sanctuaries, and restored national treasures. A biblical reference attesting to this can be found in Ezra 1:1-4. The world looked kindly on Cyrus! What he accomplished transcended all expectation! Isaiah compares it to the mighty work of God during the Exodus. The God of Israel was the one who accomplished this for all peoples! We sing of this inclusive vision in today’s psalm, designated as a Psalm of the Kingship of the Lord. God accomplishes the salvation of all peoples even though, in the case of Cyrus, “you knew me not!”

Seeming to shift gears, the Gospel continues with the bitter debate between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The Pharisees (likely to be anti-Roman) send their disciples along with the Herodians (inclined to be pro-Roman) hoping to back Jesus into a corner. They pose their question “Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not?” A simple question calling for an “either/or” answer. However, Jesus counters their trickery with a “both/and” response! Jesus tells his opponents to give what is due to God and to Caesar. He indicates no priority or importance in giving his response, this is left to the hearer. How much do we owe to Caesar and how much do we owe to God? This is our question to answer!

*Give the Lord, you families of peoples, give the Lord the glory of his name*  
(Ps 96:7)

October 25, 2020  
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Exodus 22:20-26; Psalm 18: 2-4, 47, 51; 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10;  
Matthew 22:34-40**

Given the many things that cross our minds these days, we often like it when thoughts and ideas can be put into “a nut-shell.” Summaries are a pocket size version of the unabridged volume of information. They just give us the essentials. When we are dealing with the mountain of ideas and concepts encountered in Scripture, it is good to have such a brief encapsulated version. The prophet Micah’s summary statement may be familiar. It is sometimes called “The Little Torah:” “You have been told O my people what is good and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice, to love goodness and to walk humbly with your God” (Mi 6:8). Six hundred and thirteen commands of Torah are reduced to this simple statement! But getting inside these words is to discover a lifetime challenge! This is anything but simple! Is it possible to miss this? In the Gospel text, Jesus sets out an even more condensed rule of life, sifting out the essentials of the Law, settling on two points: love God, love your neighbor.

Summaries are generally the result of a deep, ponderous investigation of information or the hard-won result of reflecting on lived experience. They are the fruit of looking at the subject (or living through it) from all angles, refracting information or experience through many prisms, taking note of variations and nuances to appreciate fully what you are now able to put into a few, well chosen, weighted words. We do the same with life experiences; we do not tell the whole story (we lived that!) but we extract what can prove beneficial to others or helpful to ourselves. However, to know the whole story, or as much as we can possibly relate to, gives us a fuller appreciation and understanding.

The story of God’s people is a story of a long-term relationship between themselves and God. There are lessons to be learned from its varied moments. Law and covenant are sure pegs that define this bond. The more familiar we are, the better we appreciate the nuances. Law was the way Israel knew they were right with God. Knowing the details of the story can give us a deeper appreciation of summary statements. In other words, what do we learn from the longer story that can help

us to know better how to “do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with our God?” Or how we should love our neighbor?

The passage from Exodus offers an important perspective for how Israel should move forward in their relations with others. What is the lesson learned from the time of Exodus? “Remember you were once aliens...” Israel was never to forget where they came from and who it was who brought them from slavery to freedom. This is guidance for every generation. When fortunes were reversed and they became prosperous and free, still they should remember “you were once aliens.” God’s care for them was the standard they should apply to others. The words of Exodus cast a light on God and how God favors the poor and those without a voice. What the biblical writer communicates is that those without a voice, the powerless, will be defended by God! We read incorrectly if we are riveted on God’s anger. It is more about God’s compassion and God’s awareness of the cries of the poor. Was this covenant obligation formative of Jesus’ attitudes exercised toward the poor of his day and summarized in the Gospel passage for this week?

It is important to know these ideals and hopes that are the foundation of God’s relationship with God’s people if we are to understand so much of the Bible. And indeed, if we are to grasp the implications of these well-known words of Jesus, this brief summary captures in the simplest way how we are called to live. How do we love God with our heart, soul, and strength? Think of the work of the *heart*. The heart is the center of our being — where we hold devotion and committed love. Consider the work of the *mind*. Do we use our mind to learn, to grow, and develop understanding of our great God? Think also of *strength* or life energy. How much effort do we employ in the pursuit of our relationship with God? We may find the command to love our neighbor an easier challenge. We are generous in giving and supporting humanitarian efforts. But what about seeing the needy over the face of the earth and those treated unjustly, those who are different from us, and recognizing that these are also my neighbors?

*I love you Lord, my strength, my fortress, my rock where I take refuge, my saving God... (Ps 18:2-3)*





## *EUCCHARIST & CULTURE*

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

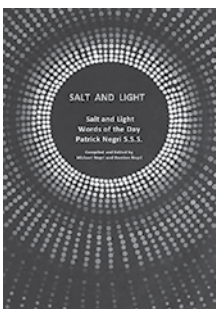
### Art Review



**WILD FUCHSIA**  
Patrick Negri, SSS  
Oil on Canvas  
2012

I admire Patrick Negri in the same way I admire the Italian Renaissance master Fra Angelico or the great Northern Sung landscape artist Fan K'uan. My admiration does not stem from their artistic achievement. Though both created awe inspiring art. Instead, it stems from each artist's ability to harmonize their religious life and worldview with their particular mode of artistic expression. Fra Angelico was a Dominican monk who painted his faith into the frescoed walls of his monastery. Fan K'uan was a Buddhist monk who lived in nature and perfected the monumental ink paintings that exemplified the Neo-Confucian worldview. Each found a visual language to express their faith and found a deep union between art and religion in their lives. This harmony bears witness to an integrated life that makes their artwork all the more intriguing.

### Book Review



**SALT AND LIGHT:  
WORDS OF THE  
DAY**

Patrick Negri, SSS  
Adelaide, Australia  
ATF Theology  
2020

Patrick Negri was a Catholic priest in the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament from Australia who used abstract expressionist style to convey a spiritual message. Negri's visual language was abstraction. He spoke beautifully about this when discussing the relationship between art and spirituality at a conference on the same subject held in Minneapolis. Negri had been commissioned to create four large paintings for a hospital chapel. They were to be inspired by the themes: absence, emptiness, presence, and fullness. He said, "abstraction is the way in which I tap into those challenging pockets of the human psyche that I dare to call religious, or, as the planners of this project put it, that 'brush with the primal mysteries of life.'"<sup>1</sup>

Always one to be sensitive to the challenges that abstract imagery holds for many viewers, Negri wrote about abstraction at length, trying to open up its meanings to a wider audience. As he wrote in the introduction to his retrospective catalogue, "The meaning of a work of art is always discovered in the aesthetic encounter. That is where you come in. Enjoy the lines, the shapes, the colors. Float around in them.

John Christman,  
SSS

Grow angry, sing with joy, remember lost loves bask in the warmth of the new and, above all, laugh. For the world is a sorry place without a chuckle.”<sup>2</sup>

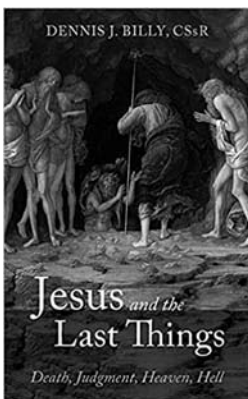
Consider his beautiful painting *Wild Fuchsia* (front cover and inside back cover). The brightly colored shapes seem to dance and swirl about the surface of the canvas. The earthy browns and dark purples slowly lift into an array of glimmering Spring-like yellows and greens. There is a celebratory atmosphere and an organic unfolding both in his process and in the finished image. You sense his delight in creativity and discovery. Nature never seems too far away from Negri’s imagery, as the painting and its title “*Wild Fuchsia*” would indicate. Negri himself observed of his work, “Often there are references to the created universe, the world of nature familiar to the viewer, but, like all abstract painters I regard each painting as a new creation worthy of acceptance in its own right.”<sup>3</sup>

The individual person’s unique response to God and creation, whether in paint, words, or ministry, this seems to undergird Negri’s theological work. In this he draws much from the Abstract Expressionist movement that inspired him. These artists were very concerned with artistic expression as the manifestation of the individual human being acting in response to the world around them. Some of them understood this in existentialist terms, painting as a heroic act in the face of the unknown and possibly absurd. Others saw it more as an expression of the human spirit open to the transcendent. Negri certainly saw it as an opening to the God of Jesus Christ. And in that he is unique, for his work takes on a decidedly more incarnational and communal dimension.

Take for example his painting “*Teaching the Children*.” This piece, like *Wild Fuchsia* was inspired by Negri’s visit to Uluru, a World Heritage site in the center of Australia. Uluru is considered a sacred place by the native people of Australia and besides the grandeur of its appearance contains numerous ancient paintings upon the rock formations. Negri wrote of his time there, “I found Alice Springs and Uluru especially places of deep spirituality. This was truly God’s country and everywhere I looked something, even the smallest grasses, announced the presence of a Great Spirit, a Creator God, who looked at our human struggle with compassion and love.”<sup>4</sup> Visually, one recognizes Negri’s connection to a people, culture, and place, as he draws inspiration from the style and content of the art of this sacred place. In fact, much of his art incorporates the traditional “dot painting” one sees in Australian petroglyphs and folk art. In doing this,

as well as painting overtly Christian subjects, Negri creates a much wider communal context to his abstractions. Here he expands beyond the traditional Abstract Expressionist tendency to focus in primarily upon the self and a sense of belonging emerges.

This communal dimension comes to the fore in his writing. A recent book, *Salt and Light: Words of the Day*, collects some of Negri's exceptional homilies from throughout the three-year liturgical cycle. Interspersed among the homilies are photographs of his paintings, bringing together word and image. Negri's homilies, like his paintings, are direct, creative and insightful. As a former provincial of the Australian province of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and the recipient of a Doctor of Ministry degree from the University of California, Berkley, Negri was a well-read theologian and an inspiring Church leader. This makes his concise homilies enjoyable to read. Each is peppered with theological and cultural references that enrich the reader but also draws them deeper into the message and mission of Jesus. The liturgical and social justice emphases of the Second Vatican Council shine forth in his preaching. In these homilies Negri is always knee deep in the task of applying the message of the day's readings to the current circumstances of those he is preaching to. In this endeavor he is anything but abstract, and therein lies the charm. Patrick Negri found a way of life to harmonize the many facets of his life and faith, and in doing so not only nourished others, but found fulfillment himself. An admirable accomplishment indeed.



JESUS AND  
THE LAST  
THINGS: DEATH,  
JUDGEMENT,  
HEAVEN, HELL  
Dennis Billy CSsR  
WIPF & STOCK  
Eugene, Oregon  
2019

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> P. Negri – A Retrospective, compiled and edited by Justin Emery and Randall Lindstrom, (Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, Australia, 2008) pg 56.
- <sup>2</sup> P. Negri – A Retrospective, title page quotation.
- <sup>3</sup> P. Negri – A Retrospective, pg. 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Patrick Negri, SSS, Artist's Statement from the Painting Exhibit *At the Centre: Memories of a Visit to Uluru*. 2012.

## Book Reviews

Father Billy writes in his introduction that meditating on the “last things” has always been a part of Catholic spirituality. I remember in religious life that “meditation on preparation for death” was a part of our annual retreat. Billy also correctly remarks that in the pre-Vatican II Church these meditations were highly focused on our own sinfulness and failures and

God's judgement (not always in the most merciful terms).

The author believes that meditations on the last things is still a beneficial spiritual exercise. We all know that at some point in time we will each die. Then we shall face an accounting of how we have lived our lives: toward God and our fellow beings, with love or in self-centered repudiation of God.

Billy's five chapters, in this short book (60 pages), take a close look at various aspects of our redemption: the death of Christ, the descent of Christ, the judgement of Christ, the destiny of Christ, and the four last things. As is obvious from these chapter titles, the book is clearly Christo-centric, which is critically important when we are dealing with our redemption.

In each chapter Billy takes a brief look at how each of these dimensions was viewed in the pre-Vatican II Church and how they might be better viewed today in terms of the theological shifts of the council. In one chapter he critiques the somewhat fearsome view of Christ as judge in the pre-Vatican II period, but he also takes some valid "jabs" at some of the excesses of the post-Vatican II period in which Jesus is "stripped" of all his juridical power and becomes our "friend."

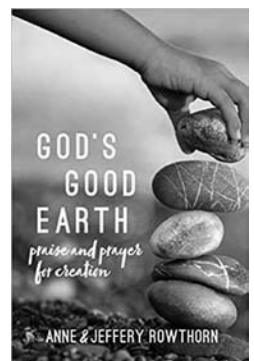
I believe that I am part of the 99% of Catholics in the pews who recite the line from the Apostles Creed, "he descended into hell," with no understanding of the theological meaning behind that creedal statement. That chapter in Billy's work is worth the price of the book.

I have recommended this book as the text of our parish's Lenten Book Club. I look forward to the discussions that Billy's insights will generate. I'm glad I picked it up and read it.

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

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Anne and Jeffery Rowthorn have compiled an inspiring and challenging collection of fifty-three liturgies as they seek to recall the ecological basis of our faith tradition, redefine humanity's relationship with the rest of creation, and engage the liturgical resources of Christianity to address planetary problems. The ecumenical liturgies, which marry science, religion and other fields of inquiry, are adaptable to numerous



**GOD'S GOOD  
EARTH: PRAISE  
AND PRAYER  
FOR CREATION,**  
compiled and  
edited by Anne and  
Jeffery Rowthorn,  
Liturgical Press  
Collegeville, MN.  
2018

liturgical settings. They may be used individually or as a series.

Each liturgy follows a format of prayers of praise and thanksgiving, scripture, litany, reflections – drawn from scientists, theologians, prophets, sages, environmental activists, scholars, and nature writers – prayers of confession and intercession, and a final hymn. The reflections highlight the writings of Rachel Carson, Thomas Berry, Wendell Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Brian Swimme and a host of other prominent figures who help us understand our present environmental crisis and find a viable way forward. The sources used to create the liturgies are drawn from a wide spectrum of international and interfaith voices and the indexes of scripture passages, reflections, and hymns are a treasure in themselves for any liturgist.

The organization of the book itself is theologically rich as it moves from the gift and sacramentality of God's creation, to the fall, through the abuse and destruction of nature, consumerism, climate change, poverty, hunger, migration, violence and war, to the prospect of hope and restoration. The Pascal Mystery unfolds through a progression of consequences, judgement and mercy, death and resurrection, and engenders hope that leads to action.

In *The Universe Story* (1992), eco-theologian Thomas Berry described the 'liturgy of the cosmos' as the universe celebrating itself. In *God's Good Earth*, the universe also grieves its losses. Berry proposed that the historic challenges of the times call forth particular religious personalities in response. He suggested that the shaman — one who can mediate the revelation of the natural world — is the religious personality needed to lead us to a viable future. The Rowthorns have gathered many such voices, as well as their own, in this their deep and moving work. A rich treasure of liturgical resources, *God's Good Earth* offers replenishment for those who are being called forth to provide spiritual leadership at this decisive moment in the universe story.

Emily DeMoor, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor: Theology  
Director: Living & Leading in Love" Youth Theology Institute  
Brescia University  
Owensboro, KY



## Poetry

### SOUL TRIP

It was a day like any other day;

No special feast to set the time apart.

The Mass he said like any other Mass;

The words too often spoken to be heard.

And I was there like any other time; half-listening, half-absorbed in  
fleeting thoughts.

"This is my body," then he said, while looking at the bread;

"Oh take and drink; this is my blood," he whispered to the wine.

And suddenly the words came shimmering alive, to draw me deep  
and high to the sacred side of

Love

It's sweeping me away; I can't resist its waves; I'm carried from the  
shore I could not pass,

And I'm whole, and I'm real;

Oh don't stop me now, for I've waited so long;

And I'm sure, and I'm free, Oh any time now the web's gonna break

And I'm sure and I'm free.

Please don't stop me now, for I've waited so long

To be; to

Be

One.

Sister Kay Kay, SSS





## EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Sister Maria Huong, SSS

“Hello, how are you?” “Do you have a headache?” I was surprised by this greeting from my brother’s friend, a Blessed Sacrament Brother who had seen me waiting at his parish. “Yes,” I replied, “how do you know?” He went on to explain, the characteristics of the Blessed Sacrament Congregations are: *Observe, Care, and Help*. And that was what he was doing. He then offered, “Would you like to meet the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament?”

My vocation originated that day. Since then I have observed the truth of his words in the community’s way of life. I also experienced it personally. As I came to adore Jesus every day, I learned this way of life from the Eucharist itself. Jesus cares for us, foresees our future and is aware of our needs. In spite of my shyness, I became able to help others in small and larger ways, to see their needs, to lend a hand and give help. This became a formula for daily living. As Jesus in the Eucharist has given to me, so now I have learned to give to others throughout the day.

When I took on a mission in the U.S and saw my deficiencies in language and local culture, I felt my weaknesses, my fear of being misunderstood. I paused to realize I was turning in on myself. I thought “what is happening?” In the chapel kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, I thought of the words: observe, care, help. It brought me to tears and I asked Jesus’ forgiveness for it recalled the words I had embraced on the day of my final vows: “*Genuine love does not consider what it gives, but what the Beloved deserves.*” Yes, eucharistic Lord, you always love, always give yourself for others. It did not and does not matter who they are; the poor, the rich? The boss, the slave? The learned, the ignorant? Jesus doesn’t care about any of that. He only loves. God’s love in the Eucharist endures forever. My love is changeable because of my weaknesses, selfishness, and human nature. Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist is the fulcrum, the strength, and the resource that helps me to begin again and again.

God’s loving presence is more wonderful in the current uncertainties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic when we are surrounded by so many beautiful gestures of love. So many people are making personal sacrifices for the good of others. Eucharistic presence is not only a silent presence but also a vivid presence amidst the cries of humanity.

Thank you, Lord, for your sacrificial love for me and the world. The very presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is the only anchor on which to hold firm when my boat was hit by waves. In this way, I am able to *observe, to care, and to help* wherever, whenever needed.





WILD FUCHSIA  
Patrick Negri, SSS  
Oil on Canvas  
2012



TEACHING THE  
CHILDREN  
Patrick Negri, SSS  
Oil on Canvas  
2012

***God gives us neither years, nor days.  
We have at our disposal only the present moment.***

A handwritten signature in white ink on a dark green background. The signature is written in a cursive style, with the word "Eymard" clearly visible. Below it, there is a flourish and the initials "Sp. J. J.".

*Saint Peter Julian Eymard*