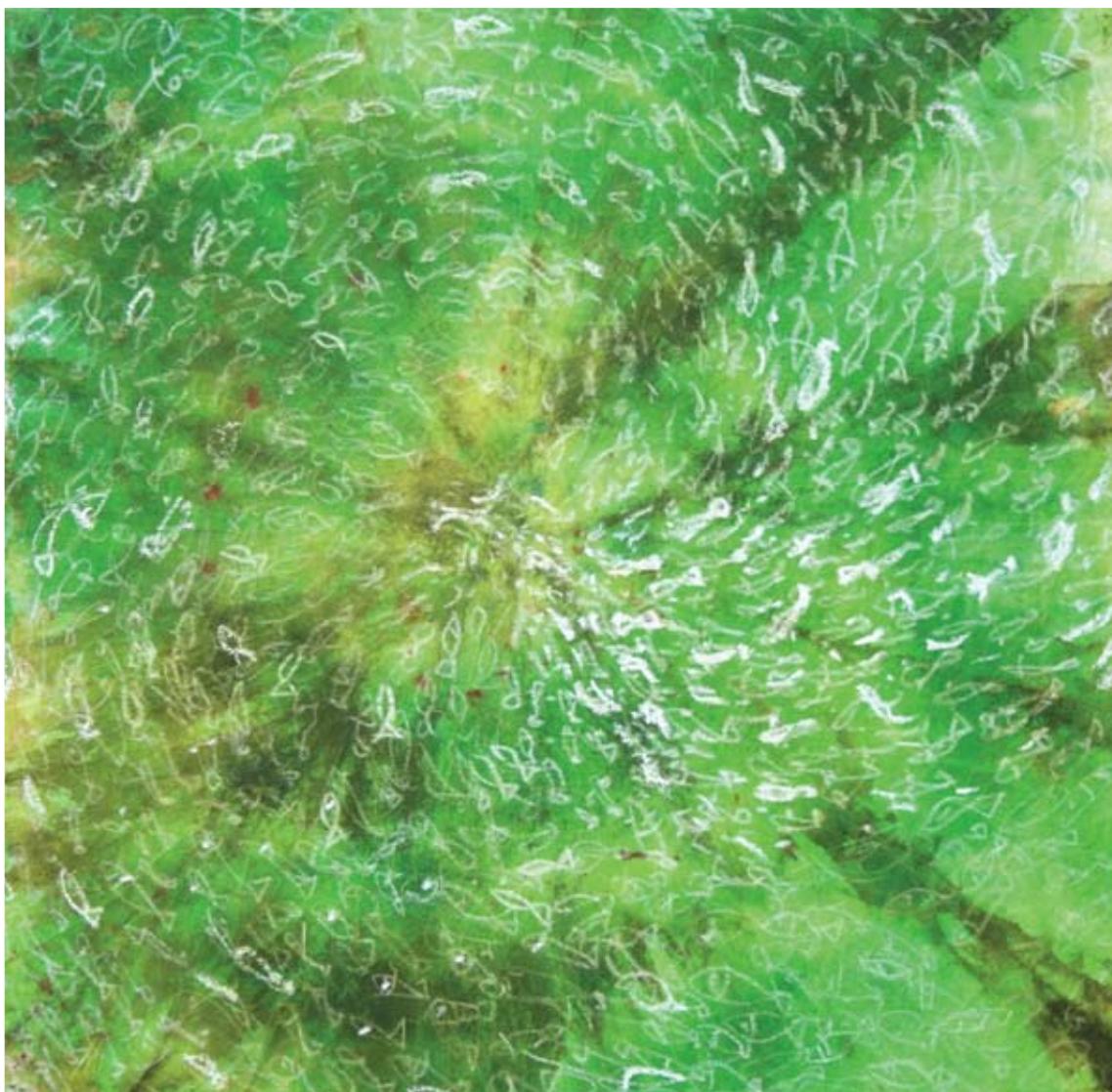


# *Emmanuel*



*Eucharistic Spirituality*

July/August 2021



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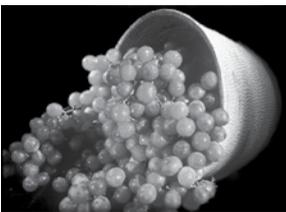
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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 127 Number 4



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## FROM THE EDITOR

“What happened to Father Eymard on that hill?” I imagine this must have been the question those closest to the recently ordained Peter Julian Eymard asked themselves. After all, what kind of experience could produce such a sea change in religious outlook? Though considered “holy” by his parishioners prior to this “hill-top” experience, he also carried with him certain Jansenist influences of his day, such as fear of divine judgment and damnation, and a general sense of unworthiness. Not only did he live with these thoughts, but he wove them into his homilies. He energetically strove after what he thought was Christian perfection, in austerity and self-abasement, but these combined with his fiery sermons likely made him a somewhat off-putting character.

Then, on a visit to a neighboring parish with his pastor, instead of socializing with the clergy, he decided to climb a nearby hill, “the rock of Saint Romans,” where there were stations of the cross, a chapel, and a trio of crosses at the summit. Alone in that beautiful natural setting, punctuated by images of Jesus’ passion, something happened within Father Eymard. There was a grace and a profound movement within his heart. He never described it in detail. Perhaps the experience transcended words, or silence was its fullest expression. Whatever the case, Father Eymard drew from this experience for years to come and utilized its inspiration to aid others along their spiritual journeys. Through the spiritual direction he gave others, as he referenced this powerful experience, we can surmise some important aspects of it.

Gone was the focus upon himself and his sense of unworthiness. In fact, in this experience he seemed to have set aside all thoughts about himself. Gone too was any semblance of God as harsh, demanding, or retributive. No, in this profound encounter, Father Eymard experienced only divine love and acceptance. Moreover, he seemed to realize on a deep personal level that God’s abundant love and peace are always

present. Without forcing the connection too much, perhaps this is also what he found in the Eucharist.

Popular speaker and best-selling author Richard Rohr observed, "if you examine the accounts of people's great moments of breakthrough, they usually are not referring to *what they see* as much as *how they see*" (*The Naked Now*, 61). This is certainly the case with Saint Eymard. He shifted from fear and unworthiness to "seeing things first of all under the aspect of God's goodness to us..." (Letter to Mms. Jordan, July 7, 1851). It was a change in his way of seeing God and himself, and it was truly life-giving. Impressively, it drew him deeper into contemplative prayer *and* it energized him for ministry!

Father Rohr speaks eloquently about the mystics, saying that one of their greatest traits is the ability to be "truly present" and in turn to recognize the divine presence in and all around them (*The Naked Now*, 60). Saint Eymard had this ability and interpreted it in a wholly sacramental manner. In fact, he came to see all things, more and more, through a eucharistic lens. This August, as we celebrate the feast of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, perhaps we could ask God to give us the grace to set aside the things that keep us from being "truly present." Because, if we become "really and truly present" to God and others, we do more than honor this "Apostle of the Eucharist," we become Eucharist for a world in need. 

John Christman, SSS  
Editor

### **In This Issue**

How do we share our faith? As theologian Stephen Bevens' wonderfully articulates in his article "Going to Mass Backwards: Eucharist, Mission and Parish" Eucharist is inherently mission oriented. So, how do we share faith in our own unique and personal way? In this issue we approach this topic from a number of angles. Christian radio personality and popular speaker Mark McCann shares his vocation in "a ministry of words." Darren Maslen, SSS offers creative insights into catechesis utilizing the imagination. While Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. opens up the religious and eucharistic dimensions of Walker Percy's literature. These, along with biblical scholar George Smiga's insightful scripture commentary, provide numerous ways we might creatively live and share our faith.



## *EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# A Ministry of Words and Our Eucharistic Call

by Mark McCann

*Christian radio personality and popular Catholic writer and presenter Mark McCann reflects upon the eucharistic dimension of evangelization through his own experience.*

Mark C. McCann is an author and Ministry Consultant. He has more than 30 years of writing and ministry experience. He has written for *St. Anthony Messenger*, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, and *Catholicstand.com*. He has recently published "To the Ends of the Earth," a 40-week study for men, with *Our Sunday Visitor* and the 2021 *Advent* and 2022 *Lenten* editions of the *Daybreaks devotionals* for *Liguori Publishing*. His ministry website is [www.wordsnvisions.com](http://www.wordsnvisions.com).

AS I HAVE WALKED THESE MANY YEARS ALONG THE NARROW ROAD OF SALVATION, my heavenly Father has impressed upon my soul the essence of my calling: to be a man of words. My unique approach to writing has shaped how I have touched others' lives through every ministry position I have held, from teaching to youth work, Christian radio to videography, freelance writing to book publication. In every position, I have used words to inspire and heal, evangelize the lost, and help believers lift their souls to a deeper understanding of the mysteries of our faith.

Living out this distinct vocation has also allowed our Savior to refine me through his incarnational presence in my life, and in particular, through the Eucharist, that blessed sign that celebrates my salvation and nourishes my writing. Above all the other blessings in my life, it is my deep love for the Eucharist that has most shaped the embodiment of this higher calling.

### **A Growing Conversionary Call**

My ministry of words was formed in me over a number of years. I began my career as a religion teacher and campus minister for a Catholic high school in Pennsylvania. Though I loved teaching theology, it was my relationships with these young people that awakened the Lord's sacramental grace in my soul. It prompted me to use a deeper language to reach into young people's lives, speaking peace to their brokenness, and drawing out from them the beauty they had in Christ. Like offering the Eucharist, I was showing the teens the wonder of incarnational love.

After meeting the love of my life, I moved to Connecticut and served as a parish youth minister, a children’s ministry director, and an associate director of youth ministry for the Diocese of Norwich. During those years, the more I worked directly with others on retreats, sacramental preparation, peer ministry training, and drama ministry, the more I saw a connection between my writing and the sacramental journey of salvation.

Every day I discovered unique opportunities to use words to reach out in a more incarnational way to those seeking to grow in Christ. I found new ways to teach the sacraments to children and adults alike, and new ways to empower believers to live with spiritual intentionality and biblical conviction.

Our Lord calls his followers to enter into the kingdom, where sacrificial love takes our brokenness and transforms us into a people whose relationships mirror the love among the members of the Trinity. The words I speak and write, whether in a weekend retreat plan, a sacramental program, or a deeper faith-filled essay, are like St. Paul’s letters of love, calling the followers of Jesus to embrace the mystery of our incarnational connection within the “body” as we live out God’s call to win the world for Christ.

### **Poetry, Apologetics, and Sacramental Surrender**

I have always considered myself more of a poet than an apologist. There is a power to poetic writing that allows the reader to grasp the truths of the faith on a level that speaks more to the soul than to the mind. When my thoughts spill out from my heart to the keyboard, I know I am making a connection to the heart of each reader, forming a bond that flows from the commonality of our shared faith in Christ. The Spirit that groans within my spirit speaks sacramentally to the other person in a way that goes beyond the words I write.

As this delicate dance of poetry and prose works itself out to become a teaching moment, a prayerful essay, or a powerful story to touch the lives of others, it is my own soul that is transformed in the give-and-take between the Holy Spirit and the haughty writer within me. Writing becomes a divine wrestling match. It is an inner battle that gives way to a sweet surrender allowing the finished product not to be an invention of my intellect, but a gentle outgrowth of sacramental grace. As the process of writing strips my soul of arrogance, it leaves behind the sign of God’s love.



### **A Passion for Production and a Sacramental Offering**

From 2000 to 2008 I worked as an on-air host and producer at a non-denominational Christian radio station in Connecticut, sharing my faith over the airwaves and creating a number of ongoing programs and audio dramas for regular air. It was wonderfully transformational to approach evangelical broadcasting from a Catholic vantage point, learning to appreciate the deep faith of our fellow Christians while adding my own unique Catholic perspective on salvation to the station's call to share the Gospel.

I remember one experience of putting together a radio passion play for Good Friday. I immersed myself in the project, infusing the narrative with a deeply incarnational character. I let the message of Christ's eucharistic love come to life through the Scriptures as the actors recorded their lines and I wove together the story on the canvas of the audio software. On the Wednesday before the drama was slated to air, the audio program crashed. I found that the only way I could salvage the drama was to play it on the computer and record it onto an audio disc in real time.

*There is a power to poetic writing that allows the reader to grasp the truths of the faith on a level that speaks more to the soul than to the mind.*

There in the studio at two o'clock in the morning, in my exhausted emotional state, I heard the culmination of my work play out before me. It suddenly struck me how sacramental the whole experience truly was. In this humble offering of words and sound, I felt Christ filling me with his presence and drawing me in spirit to the moment when he gave his life for the world on that cruel cross. Like receiving the Eucharist, I understood how salvation past could be made so completely present to me. As I sat in that tiny room, the drama playing out in full surround sound, Christ's new manna rained down upon me and I understood in a profound way what it means to share sacramentally in the gift of my redemption.

### **Profiles in Christ-like Character**

Over the years, as a radio producer and a ministry consultant, I have created many audio and video vignettes for talented believers —

musicians, ministry workers, speakers and authors — whose lives God has fashioned in God’s image. Most recently I served as a social media specialist for the Connecticut Catholic Men’s Conference (CCMC), putting together videos and online articles to promote the events and highlight these gifted Catholic speakers.

My work with the CCMC inspired me to publish a series of Catholic men’s devotionals focusing on the themes of *character, action, witness, and legacy*. In sharing this vision of the joys and struggles of Catholic manhood, I discovered how powerful the incarnational love of Christ can be. The relationships I formed with these faithful brothers taught me about the sacramental nature of a personal apostolate.

*I have discovered that to produce accurate snapshots of peoples’ lives and ministries, I have to immerse myself in their stories.*

I have discovered that to produce accurate snapshots of peoples’ lives and ministries, I have to immerse myself in their stories. I must take the time to get to know their words and their work, and through that to comprehend more deeply how God’s grace is demonstrated through them. This empathetic understanding shapes our conversations and the questions I ask as I paint a portrait in words of God’s glory revealing itself in their lives. In the simplest terms, I give them the freedom to share their true sacramental selves and become broken bread and poured out wine — a eucharistic offering — in their message to a waiting world.

Often when interviewing someone for an article or video, the person is surprised by my questions because they reveal a deep understanding of what causes their hearts to beat with passion for their ministries. Our conversations cut to the core of the inexpressible longings the Holy Spirit’s fire stirs within their hearts. My insight into their Christ-like character allows them to invite me into those hidden inner rooms; and in that intimate sharing, they find the courage to present themselves boldly and beautifully to an unseen audience eager to encounter Christ through a sacramental vision living itself out in their lives.

### **Family Ties and the Sacrament of the Ordinary**

The beauty of Christ’s sacramental love continually manifests itself



in my freelance writing through the day-to-day comings and goings of my ordinary family life: the trials that expose the limits of my strength, the moments of beauty unfolding in the lives of my children as they become whom God has called them to be, and the grace of the woman who loves me so much more than I could ever deserve. In these grace-filled moments, I experience profound insights into the way in which God works all things to the good. I witness the steps of growth taking place in our lives as we work out our salvation from faith to faith, one stumbling step at a time. Together we share in the thousand little triumphs that take place as we grow as a family. We hold each other through the tears when circumstances overwhelm us and drive us toward despair. And through it all, we continue to pour ourselves into each other's lives as the Holy Spirit reveals the signs of God's perfect love in Christ. Our walk along the narrow way reveals the sacramental nature of our relationship to the One who took on flesh and gave his life for us.

*I give them the freedom to share their true sacramental selves and become broken bread and poured out wine — a eucharistic offering — in their message to a waiting world.*

These moments of perfect mercy invariably become the subject of sacramental stories, essays that share the essence of what it means to be part of a people who are living signs of the grace given to us by our baptism and strengthened by the Eucharist. Because we have made our Exodus through the desert of sorrow and sin and come to the table to receive the Bread of Life, we become what we receive. In the journey that continually refines us and the food that truly satisfies us we are transformed into living signs of God's eternal love.

### **What a Joyful Burden It Is**

This journey I have taken to become a man of words mirrors so well the journey God's people have taken since the beginning. Each step along the way has laid bare my brokenness and the mercy that spoke itself into the world to call me home to heaven. I see that there is a divine price that has been paid for my redemption that makes the trials I face, though real, seem light indeed. I recognize how the grace that enables my writing can overwhelm me, even as it makes me into a better man

and flows out to evangelize others for the kingdom of God.

This is the reason I run the race with joy, singing a sweet song of salvation with the words that flow from the wellspring of God's grace within me. I understand that writing shapes not only my readers, but my own soul as well, as the revelations that flow into my life transform me like a seed dying in the soil to be raised up as a new creation, bearing fruit in the light of God's perfect love.

Writing has taught me just how precious the incarnation truly is. To be able to touch our Savior through the ordinary objects of this earth imprints upon my soul the ongoing story of my salvation. Each time I receive the Eucharist becomes a blessed encounter with the One who has placed the words in my mouth and taught me the humility that comes from seeing how God can use a sinner saved by grace to share a message of hope with a weary world.



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## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# From Frogs to Catechesis: The Role of the Imagination in Lifelong Catechesis for Eucharist

by Darren Maslen, SSS

*How can we use our imaginations to deepen our eucharistic catechesis?*

Darren Maslen began ordained ministry in the Anglican Church in the year 2000 after his formation at the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield, a monastic foundation in Yorkshire. Having served in two parishes in England for nearly ten years, he was received into full communion with the Catholic Church in November 2009, and undertook formation into the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He is currently the superior of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Dublin, Ireland.

### **Frog Inspiration**

*THE FROG PRINCE* WAS THE FIRST OF THE BROTHERS GRIMM FAIRY-TALES PUBLISHED in 1812. The meaning of the story revolves around an important life-lesson: sometimes what we don't want is precisely what we need. Under the curse of a witch, the frog plays the central role in the tale. It is because the frog can see everything that makes for the life of a spoiled princess whom he had befriended that the story gains momentum. Eventually he is magically transformed back into a handsome prince. In literature we are used to giving license to the imagination. The reason, in most part, is because while we honor the meaning of stories like this, we know that the story is a creation of the writer's imagination. In a cursory moment we might say "It's not real."

The adult western mind finds it very difficult to both recognize and accommodate the imaginations' claim to reality because educationally we tend to be hardwired for facts. As Sandra G. Shuman says, "Our first day of entering school was for many of us the last we spent in wonderland."<sup>1</sup> Yet behind everything that is exalted as certain knowledge lives the imagination. As Einstein famously reflected in his 1929 interview with George Sylvester Viereck, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas the imagination encircles the world." The person who invented the wheel while observing another person walking testifies to the imaginations' role in creatively perceiving what can be real.

Consider here the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus in the story of the Road to Emmaus. In this account we find a presentation of the risen Lord in light of the instituted Eucharist. Now the same Eucharist becomes the means to unlocking truths as to what this resurrection would mean.

As the evangelist states of the two Emmaus disciples, "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight" (Luke 24: 30- 31).

In that moment of recognition eucharistic faith was realized precisely because intimate communion with the risen Jesus rests on the paradox of seeing Christ through what is unseen. Here the power of the imagination is invited to take over and trace a path for faith. As Robert Sokolowski succinctly put it, "Faith and Christian understanding increased as perception ended."<sup>2</sup> This resurrection appearance awakens the human imagination both in how the story of the risen Jesus is told and how we can understand our own participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus who invites us today through the same eucharistic celebration.

Eugene LaVerdiere, SSS posed the awesome question: "Jesus' appearances were very mysterious, stretching human image-making possibilities to the limits, as did the appearances of God, the angel of the Lord and the glory of God in the Old Testament. How does one begin to describe an appearance of God?"<sup>3</sup>

To help us frame a response to that question we need to return to the frog, not the frog of our fairy tale, but of biology. George Burr Leonard drew from investigative experiments on the eyes of frogs to demonstrate how words alone stifle human transformation. The optic nerve of frogs prevents most of the beautiful world that we can see getting past the frog's retina. While a frog will be able to see a small dark object approaching its eye, it won't be able to detect if it is moving away in another direction. A stunning sunset leaves no imprint upon the consciousness of a frog. Just as the design of the frog's eye prevents it from enjoying a three-dimensional view of the world, likewise how we use and rely on language can restrict our capacity to view things from multidimensional perspectives. Any attempt to describe an appearance of God in scripture (or indeed in our own lives) entirely with words restricts the witness of the fullest potential of human transformation that God invites. As Leonard summarised in 1974, "For a long time, words have been used to block the way towards transformation... Perhaps our knowledge that transformation is possible comes from the realm of no-words. But we will need words to let that happen."<sup>4</sup>

Leonard's appeal to the imaginative realm beyond words becomes clearer when what he argues is revealed in practice. Undertaking a



eucharistic research-project in Texas, I asked participants the following question: *When you participate in the eucharistic liturgy, how are you most aware of God's self-gift to you? Describe what kinds of experiences I would be seeing in you.* What fascinated me was not only what the participants said but how they answered this question. Some immediately introduced mental images that revealed coherent accounts of shared lives with God through the Eucharist. Through images of an empty vessel, a castle, a crevice in Jesus' heart, and a chalice, participants shared their eucharistic faith stories. For others who relied on descriptive language, there was some grappling with words and frustration as they attempted to convey what they wanted to say of their eucharistic God. When images are given a voice they don't just speak, they contain the capacity to relate and reveal faith-stories.

### ***Tracing God***

One of the areas of research I undertook at Catholic Theological Union at Chicago was in the practice of imaginal catechesis. This research offered a theoretical basis for the use of the imagination in catechesis and adult religious education in light of ministry practice I simultaneously undertook with parents at St. Eulalia's parish, Maywood, IL. The research contributed to a dialogue involving theologians Robert Brancatelli and Richard McCaron with whom I was working. *Tracing God* eventually emerged as a simple and adaptable catechetical method that was designed to integrate the active use of the imagination into ongoing faith development and discipleship, with eucharistic catechesis and sacramental education particularly in mind.<sup>5</sup>

St. Eulalia's religious education program had been enhanced with the launch of ongoing parental catechesis, a group I facilitated with Maria Hernandez-Franco from 2014-2017 known as *Parents-Helping-Parents*. The concrete experience of Catholic parenting in twenty-first century mid-west America brought the cultures represented in the group together, as did participation in the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday morning.

How these parents responded to having their imaginations awakened confirmed the tripod upon which *Tracing God* was supported. Firstly, eucharistic catechesis in the USA sets out from the perspective that it is lifelong catechesis, not merely a one-time event, and from there twenty-seven specific teaching points are highlighted. It culminates in the twenty-eighth point: eucharistic catechesis which, "Instructs the

faithful that we are called to realize that we become what we receive — which has great implications for how we live and act.”<sup>6</sup> Secondly, perpetual catechesis presupposes that there exists a reservoir of faith and life experiences that can be called upon as adults open themselves to being further nurtured into communion with Christ. It is because the imagination is designed for what Maurice Bloch calls “time travel”<sup>7</sup> — having the ability to recall past encounters and vision future events — that it is the perfect tool for the enterprise of ongoing catechesis. Thirdly, because eucharistic catechesis brings together the varying dimensions that make up our one life of faith, mental imagery can serve as an organizing principle concretely and abstractly, which coherently gathers together our realities in a way which spoken language cannot.

*When images are given a voice they don’t just speak, they contain the capacity to relate and reveal faith-stories.*

### **Case Study: Discovering the Cenacle at Home**

The *Tracing God* method operates through six accumulative steps, the motivation of which is for groups to establish and implement renewed faith practices in light of imaginative discoveries that have emerged. The *Parents-Helping-Parents* group made use of this format for a variety of purposes, such as preparing for liturgical seasons of the Church year and rediscovering meanings within Jesus’ parables. However, its application to a program that was geared to living the sacraments at home proved to be a poignant moment for the group because what became evident was a tangible sense of cross-cultural peer identity as parents rooted within the Eucharist. Here is how the method facilitated that realization:

- Preparatory toolbox: Access to relevant scriptures in English and Spanish; each participant needed one card and a piece of tracing paper the same size; a good supply of paperclips, crayons, felt pens, and adhesive shapes, glyphs, and symbols that are obtained from any art store.
- *Step 1- Context:* The group assembled around a large candle, crucifix, and opened Bible marked at John 21. They prayed for each other as fellow parents. This was an opportunity for participants to express thanksgivings and seek support through current family challenges. As facilitator, I introduced



the overriding statement to the group: *You cannot expect to journey with Jesus in the Eucharist and not be changed. Jesus changes things. Often, we don't see that!*

- *Step 2- Reflection:* Participants spent time reading and highlighting what inspired them from the risen Jesus' fireside fellowship with the disciples on the beach (John 21: 1-19). I encouraged participants to identify the Eucharist in this encounter and name empathic words from the scripture passage that corresponded to previous events in their own lives.
- *Step 3- Imaging:* On the piece of card provided, I invited participants to visually image their response to the following question: *What do you see when you participate in the eucharistic liturgy?* A considerable amount of time was given to this step because for many in the group this would have been the first opportunity to have imaged and represented their eucharistic identity in such a way.

*Tracing God eventually emerged as a simple and adaptable catechetical method that was designed to integrate the active use of the imagination into ongoing faith development and discipleship, with eucharistic catechesis and sacramental education particularly in mind.*

- *Step 4- Tracing:* Attaching the tracing paper over the first image and affixing with paperclips, I then invited imaginary responses to the following question: *How do you see the Eucharist alive in your family home?*
- *Step 5- Closure:* The session concluded with group recitation of the Lord's Prayer in English and Spanish. I requested participants to take their two images home with them and to ask God during the ensuing month to bring discernment to what these images represented for their families and homes.
- *Step 6- Discerned outcomes:* The following session was entirely given to this decisive step. Having undertaken prolonged prayerful reflection, I asked the participants to share with each other in groups of three what God appears to be inviting through the imagery that they have created. How could the insights of these parents be further incarnated in practical ways?

In this particular instance the *Tracing God* method revealed a shared and deeply rooted appetite for a more intentional presence of family members one-to-another. Across African American, Asian, Caucasian

and Latino/a cultures that populated this parental group, the sense of simulating something of the Upper Room within the home became a primary response to the program. Household members were tired of living increasingly separate lives. The images that were created upon the tracing paper spoke poignantly and directly of the desire to live “the communion” amongst family members that they publicly celebrate in the eucharistic liturgy each week. They made this clear through imagery such as discarded cell phones, a switched off television, a full table with Christ at its center, and a family praying gathered around pictures of ancestors. In explaining their images, they highlighted their responsibility to be present to each other in table fellowship, while also recognizing Christ’s presence among them.

*In explaining their images, they highlighted their responsibility to be present to each other in table fellowship, while also recognizing Christ’s presence among them.*

The parents then made a year-long commitment to hosting a *cenacle evening* in their homes once a week. No cell-phones, video games, television, or take outs were allowed. In some cases, older children would shop and prepare the family meal. Before eating, the gathered family would sit with the scripture readings from the previous Sunday and be encouraged to foster a space for praying together. *Cenacle evening* would become the night of the week when intimate communion with Christ and to one another (that is celebrated through the Sunday Eucharist) is profoundly incarnated within the weekday family home.

### ***Open the door!***

In functional cultures, people increasingly know and understand themselves by what they do, not necessarily by who they are. What this case study highlighted was how *doing* had suffocated the *being* of family living. The imagination’s power to tell this story brought a connection between these realities and brought something of the Eucharist’s unfathomable depth directly into the domestic church. In eucharistic catechesis, *being* and *doing* needs an adhesive. The human imagination can make an effective connection between who God is, what God does, and our responses.

Indeed, there has been an acute awareness for some time that exploring appropriate and effective catechetical methods is necessary so that the nurturing of initiation into the fullness of Christian faith is



realized concretely. The creative challenge of catechesis will always be to move beyond conveying information and offering explanation to the opening of the door to communion and living intimacy with Jesus Christ, the very object of catechesis.<sup>8</sup> The first resource to meeting this challenge rests with Christ himself, “*the unique Teacher*”<sup>9</sup> precisely because his words evoke his presence-invitation to life in its fullness and not merely the idea of it.

To encounter and know this Christ in our midst demands of all seekers of God trust in a deeper avenue to knowledge drawn from the imagination. Christ the imaginative teacher educates the Church, and the Church responds. This reciprocity remains implicit in the character of how we liturgically celebrate our participation in God’s life through the Eucharist, and from there nurture, socialize, inspire, and mentor others into that celebration. The imagination’s unifying voice is able to speak to, and open the door to a transformed head, heart, and actions. This makes for a total response to Jesus Christ and contributes to the building of lasting bridges between our words, actions, and deeper perceptions of human life touched by our eucharistic God. Yes, listen imaginatively, and you may hear Christ’s invitation afresh to open the door to life in the Eucharist, echoing from the words of that frog who was destined to become a prince: “*Open the door, my princess dear; open the door to thy true love here!*”<sup>10</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sandra G. Shuman, *Source Imagery: Releasing the Power of Your Creativity* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1994), 211- 212.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 6.

<sup>4</sup> George Burr Leonard, “Language and Reality,” *Harper’s Magazine* (November 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Brancatelli, “Liberating Catechesis: A Call for Imagination and Renewal,” *America* (September 13, 2010), 17- 20; Richard McCaron, “Toward an Imaginal Catechesis,” *New Theology Review* 25: 1 (September, 2012), 1; Darren Maslen, “Tracing God: Considerations of Practice in Imaginal Catechesis,” (May, 2016), accessed January 25, 2021, (DOC) Tracing God: Considerations of Practice in Imaginal Catechesis | Darren Maslen, SSS - Academia.edu

<sup>6</sup> USCCB, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington D.C.: USCCB, 2005), 126.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Bloch, *Anthropology and the Cognitive Challenge* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 108.

<sup>8</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington D.C.: USCCB, 1997), par. 80.

<sup>9</sup> USCCB, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Brothers Grimm, “The Frog Prince,” accessed February 23, 2021: The Frog-Prince | Grimm’s Fairy Tales | Grimm Brothers | Lit2Go ETC (usf.edu)



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Walker Percy on the Eucharist

by Dennis J Billy, C.Ss.R.

*A medical doctor, novelist, and convert to Catholicism, Walker Percy brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to his literature. How did all of this shape his understanding of the Eucharist?*

WALKER PERCY (1916-90), AN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHER, PHILOLOGIST, AND novelist was born in Birmingham, Alabama just before the start of the First World War. His father committed suicide when he was thirteen and his mother died of a suspected suicide some two years later. After their deaths, he and his two younger brothers went to live in Greenville, Mississippi with an older cousin, whom they called "Uncle Will." There, he received a classical Southern upbringing and was exposed to many of the fine literary and cultural tastes prominent in his day. After graduating from high school, he matriculated at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and graduated in 1937 with a major in chemistry. In 1941, he earned an M.D. from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, became an intern at Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan, and contracted tuberculosis there while performing an autopsy. Forced to delay his medical career, he spent the next two years in a sanitorium in the Adirondacks of upstate New York. When he was released, he taught pathology for a brief time at Columbia, but had a recurrence of the disease in 1945 and entered another sanitorium in Wallingford, Connecticut. After he regained his health, he married Mary Townsend in 1946 and both were received into the Catholic Church in 1947. His illness and newfound faith set him on a different career path, since his time in the sanitoriums gave him the opportunity to delve into many of the prominent philosophers and novelists of his time. His decision to turn novelist and essayist was encouraged by his lifelong friend, historian Shelby Foote, with whom he corresponded for many years right up until his death. His many works include *The Moviegoer* (1961), which won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1962, *The Last Gentleman* (1966), *Love in the Ruins* (1971), *Lancelot* (1977) *The Second Coming*

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1980), and *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987). A collection of his essays appeared in 1975 as *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has to Do with the Other*. He died of cancer in Covington, Louisiana in 1990 and is buried on the grounds of St. Joseph Benedictine Monastery in St. Benedict, Louisiana.<sup>1</sup>

### Percy's Spiritual Outlook

Although he had respect for the social relevance of religion and maintained some nominal ties with his hometown Presbyterian Church, Percy was an agnostic for much of his early life. His spiritual search became much more focused, however, when he was beset with tuberculosis and forced to isolate himself, slow down, undergo treatment, and gradually regain his strength. During his two years recovering from the disease at Trudeau Sanatorium in upstate New York, he devoted much of his time to reading the works of some of the great philosophers and novelists of his day.

Percy was particularly impressed by the works of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55), the father of existentialism, whose three modes of existence — the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious — provided him with an outlook on life that would permeate much of his fiction. The aesthetic person, for Kierkegaard, lives on the surface of life, judges by appearances, and is primarily concerned with satisfying various needs and pleasures of everyday life. The ethical person, by way of contrast, defines themselves according to a strict moral code of conduct. These principles give order to their world and enable a person to function in the world and navigate its turbulent waters. If this code is broken or compromised, however, the ethical person undergoes a crisis of identity. The religious person, in turn, deals with the ambiguities of life by taking a leap of faith into the absurd. Rather than trying to impose order on the world, the religious person simply accepts life as it comes and trusts that, despite the looming darkness, they will not be abandoned by God, but be given peace by God in the midst the surrounding turmoil.<sup>2</sup>

In his novels, Percy offers an interesting mix of characters: some are stuck in a particular mode of existence; others move from one to another, sometimes progressing and at other times regressing. In developing characters of the religious mode, he is careful to avoid having them talk explicitly about the faith, thereby avoiding the blunder of being "edifying."<sup>3</sup> Rather than having them reveal their

inwardness by explicitly verbalizing their faith, he has them acting rather humorously in their interactions with others and the world around them. His religious heroes, in other words, are not proselytizing bores, but gleamy-eyed misfits who stick out like a sore thumb by going against the current of the world around them.

Percy's conversion to Catholicism in 1947 was the result of a period of deep soul searching brought on by his two bouts with tuberculosis and his search for meaning in life. In reading the works of Thomas Aquinas, he became convinced of the sacramentality of human life and became disenchanted with Kierkegaard's extreme individualism, distaste for reason, and suspicion of science. Although he was still very much indebted to Kierkegaard for giving him a language with which to address some of the most fundamental questions of human existence, he was aware of the limitations of his thought and found in Catholicism a belief system that, at one and the same time, allowed him to reconcile faith and reason, the individual and community, the human person as object and as subject, good and evil, and ultimately life and death itself. His thinking on the Eucharist flows from his deep Catholic faith, which he understood was very much discounted by the intellectual elites of his day and under attack in the surrounding culture.<sup>4</sup>

### Walker Percy on the Eucharist

*Love in the Ruins* (1971) is the novel where Percy's views on the Eucharist come to the fore most clearly.<sup>5</sup> In it, Dr. Tom More, the story's protagonist, undergoes a gradual conversion of mind and heart that ultimately leads him to return to the Catholic faith of his childhood and embrace a sacramental understanding of life. The novel's subtitle, "The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End of the World," indicates the kind of conversion that More would undergo. Unlike his namesake, Sir Thomas More, the sixteenth century lawyer and martyr for the Catholic faith, Dr. More accepts the teachings of the Church but lives a life in direct contradiction to them. An alcoholic and notorious womanizer, he openly admits that in Paradise Estates where he lives he has "stopped eating Christ in Communion, stopped going to mass, and ... since fallen into a disorderly life."<sup>6</sup> While he says that "he believes in God and the whole business," he insists that he loves "women best, music and science next, whiskey next, God fourth, and my fellowman hardly at all."<sup>7</sup>

Dr. More believes that science can solve all the world's problems,



material as well as spiritual and has invented the Qualitative Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer (QQOL), which he believes can not only diagnose the spiritual ills of modern man, but actually heal them. A brilliant scientist, he sees himself as a modern-day messiah, who will cure humanity's wounds by bridging the divide between body and soul that has haunted the human race ever since the Cartesian *Cogito* introduced separation of mind and body some 300 years ago. Dr. More has fallen victim to what Percy calls "scientism," the mistaken belief common in much of Western culture that is blind to the limitations of science and has a magical (almost religious) faith in its ability to solve all of the world's problems.<sup>8</sup>

The novel takes place "in these dread days of the old violent beloved U.S.A. and of the Christ forgetting Christ-haunted death-dealing Western world."<sup>9</sup> This dystopic setting allows Percy to satirize the philosophy and cultural mindset that have left Western culture in ruins. The solipsism and exaggerated individualism, the subjectivism and relativism regarding truth, the lack of community and the lack of reverence for the common good, have all taken their toll. Dr. More's dilemma is that he thinks that science can heal these wounds when, due to his pervasive pride and lack of willingness to confront his own inner demons, he is blind to his own spiritual emptiness. The novel is about the gradual shift in his self-understanding that enables him to reject one world view (his belief in scientism) for another (the Catholic faith and its understanding of the sacramentality of life). By the novel's end, he has come to see that his Lapsometer cannot heal humanity's spiritual wounds and that the remedy for humanity's spiritual ills lies in the Church and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

The stark contrast between his life before and after his conversion can best be seen in two scenes from the novel: one before, the other after his conversion. A lapsed Catholic before his conversion, More led a hedonistic lifestyle dedicated to women, music, science, whiskey, and God in that order. One day, when stepping into the Little Napoleon Bar for a drink, he describes his surroundings using religious imagery: "I look at the mirror. Behind the bar towers a mahogany piece, a miniature cathedral, an altarpiece, an intricate business of shelves for bottles, cupboards, stained-glass windows, and a huge mirror whose silvering is blighted with an advancing pox, clusters of vacuoles, expanding naughts."<sup>10</sup> Not long afterwards, he sees his image reflected in the mirror behind the bar: "In the dark mirror there is a dim hollow-eyed Spanish Christ. The pox is spreading on his face. Vacuoles are opening in his chest. It is the

new Christ, the spotted Christ, the maculate Christ, the sinful Christ. The old Christ died for our sins and it didn't work, we were not reconciled. The new Christ shall reconcile man with his sins. The new Christ lies drunk in a ditch."<sup>11</sup> Before his conversion More pictures himself as a savior figure. The Lapsometer, he believes, will heal the world's wounds of the world by bridging the dualism of mind and body, what he refers to as the gap between angelism and bestiality. Early on in the novel, he claims: "I can save you America! I know something! I know what's wrong! I hit on something, made a breakthrough, came on a discovery! I can save the terrible God-blessed Americans from themselves! With my invention! Listen to me."<sup>12</sup> In this More has moved from being a nominal Christian to a self-proclaimed prophet of scientism. He fails to recognize he has fallen victim to a messianic complex that rather than healing the mind-body divide actually makes it worse.

More's journey back to the Church and the sacramental life is long and circuitous. Throughout much of the novel, he experiences a tension between cynicism and hope, spiritualism and sensuality, Gnosticism and hedonism, scientism and his heady, abstract, and half-hearted affirmation of the Catholic faith. The losses in his life, and his general disgust with his own hedonistic lifestyle (which served in isolating him from God, others, and himself) bring him to a deeper understanding of his faith and helps him to see that it offers a solution to the mind-body dualism that has haunted the Western soul ever since the time of Descartes. For him, the Incarnation with its sacramental outlook on life holds the key to healing the rift in the soul. Since the Eucharist flows from the mystery of Christ's incarnation and bridges the gap between mind and body, it initiates a process of healing of More's inner life that eventually brings him to an authentic remorse for his sins. That is not to say that More has resolved all of his problems; he is still very much a work in progress; he still very much wants his Lapsometer to heal the world. But his attitude has changed. He has been humbled. At the end of the novel he goes to confession to Fr. Renaldo Smith, the lackluster priest who heads the local Catholic community:

"You're sorry for your sins?"

"Yes. Ashamed rather."

"That will do. Now say the act of contrition and for your penance I'm going to give you this." Through the little window he hands me two articles, an envelope containing ashes and a sackcloth, which is a kind of sleeveless sweater made of black burlap. John XXIV



recently revived public penance, a practice of the early Church. While he absolves me, I say an act of contrition and pull the sackcloth over my sports coat. "Go in peace. I'll offer my mass. For you tonight."<sup>13</sup>

More embraces the Catholic faith with renewed vigor and in a very public way: "Father Smith says mass. I eat Christ, drink his blood."<sup>14</sup> He has regained what he had lost. Sinner though he may be, he is reunited with that feeble community of believers who continue to live in faith, hope, and love in the midst of the ruins around them. The novel ends with More barbecuing in his sackcloth, downing six drinks of Early Times in six minutes, and taking his wife, Ellen, to bed "for a long winter's nap," where they make love "not under a bush or in a car or on the floor or any such humbug as marked the past peculiar years of Christendom, but at home in bed where all good folk belong."<sup>15</sup>

### Some Further Insights

Although much more can be said about Percy's views on the Eucharist, his presentation of Dr. Tom More's conversion represents some of his deepest beliefs and intuitions about the sacrament. The following remarks seek to probe his presentation of Catholicism and the Eucharist in particular in more detail.

*To begin with, More's development during the course of the novel represents a clear movement from what Kierkegaard would call the "aesthetic" person to the "religious" person. This movement entails a fundamental change in attitude in the way the person perceives themselves and the world. After his conversion More is no longer the savior, no longer the center of his universe, no longer someone who dreams of winning the Nobel Prize. He still has his scientific interests (the Lapsometer), but they are clearly bowed to a deeper, and much wider, understanding of the meaning of life.*

*By having More get drunk after his conversion as he is barbecuing while wearing his sackcloth before taking his wife to bed, Percy highlights the sacramentality of life and the reality of God's mediating grace in the midst of human weakness and sinfulness. More's conversion does not mean an immediate change in his behavior, he escapes the tendency of presenting his hero in an "edifying" manner that would ultimately deflate the message he is trying to convey. Percy's hero deepens his faith, yet remains a sinner, someone in constant need of forgiveness*

and reconciliation with God, himself, and others.

*More's conversion represents a clear movement from scientism to faith.* At the end of the novel, what becomes clear is not More's loss of faith in science but his recognition of its limitations. By embracing his Catholic roots, he is able to see his obsession with diagnosing the world's ills through his Lapsometer in a different light. Instead of being the instrument that would save the world, it is a single diagnostic tool that might aid in the healing of the human soul that comes from God alone. More, in other words, sees things in their proper perspective. He is still a sinner (as we all are), but he recognizes his place in God's providential design.

*If More is a lapsed Catholic at the beginning of the novel, at its end he is anything but edifying.* Percy takes care not to portray him in a way that covers over his deep human flaws, which remain after his conversion and will take time to heal and ultimately be transformed. The Church is a community of saints and sinners (mostly sinners), and More clearly numbers himself among the latter. Although his cynicism remains, there is now a light, humorous air about it that enables him (and the reader) to sense the deeper issues at play in life.

*Percy's thinking on the Eucharist flows from his deep Catholic faith, which he understood was very much discounted by the intellectual elites of his day and under attack in the surrounding culture.*

*More's return to the faith also means his return to community.* The world of Paradise Estates where he lives has lost its center. Its members have all the trappings of prosperity but feel shallow and empty inside. The only ones who have not lost their bearings are the few remaining parishioners of the local Catholic parish led by Fr. Renaldo Smith. They are so few in number that they are hardly even noticed by the larger society. What is more, they are marginalized, even scorned, for holding on to beliefs that the sophisticated citizens of Paradise Estates have long since discarded. More's return to the Church begins a process of healing within his soul. His return to community enables him to find his center and go on with his life with a renewed sense of purpose.

*The sacramentality of the Incarnation continues to manifest itself through the Church and the sacraments.* The Eucharist, for More, bridges the mind-body divide and enables him to find his center. It accomplishes



what his Lapsometer could not: it not only diagnoses but also heals; it connects the material world with the world of spirit; it unites body and soul and does so in a way that transcends science and reveals a world beyond the empirical. More's return to the faith does not deflate his scientific ambitions (he still has hope for his Lapsometer) but gives it new purpose and direction. The inverted values that he lists at the beginning of the novel are now reversed. His discovery of love among the ruins gives him hope for the future of the world and his place in it.

*Finally, More finds happiness in the Church and the sacraments, something the decaying world around him so desperately desires.* He goes to confession to Fr. Smith, does public penance, and once again is able to eat Jesus and drink his blood. His wife looks on approvingly, but with her Presbyterian mistrust of externals like sackcloth and ashes that Catholics have so often allowed to get in the way of things. At the end of Mass, people confess their sins and pray for the unity of Christians and of the United States. Love, More understands, seeks communion, not isolation. It wishes to bring people together, not separate them according to religion, race, or social status. Despite his faults and failings, at the end of the novel he has come back to his faith, back to his community, and back to himself — as a happy man.

## Conclusion

Walker Percy was a devout Catholic whose novels dealt with some of the most basic questions of human existence. His love for science led him to appreciate its limitations, and he was deeply conscious of what it could and could not do. He converted to Catholicism because he found there an approach to human existence that addressed what it means to be fully human, thereby taking into account every aspect of our human makeup. At the same time, he was careful not to fall into the blunder of being “edifying.” He would leave that to hagiography, the main purpose of which was to edify. The novel, by way of contrast, was meant to depict reality (and especially human reality) with all its faults and failings, as well as its deepest hopes and aspirations.

Deeply influenced by the thought of existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard, and especially his presentation of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious modes of existence, Percy was put off by the philosopher's suspicion of reason, mistrust of science, and heightened individualism. He borrowed from Kierkegaard what he found to be helpful and integrated it with his Catholic vision of humanity where reason and faith, nature and

grace, science and religion, the individual and society complemented one another in a delicate balance that embraced life and death, order and disorder, time and eternity. He had a sacramental view of life that enabled him to embrace the present world and discern in a light and humorous way the divine presence in the midst of life's absurdities.

The character of Dr. Thomas More is nothing like his sixteenth-century namesake, who was beheaded by Henry VIII for his refusal to renounce his Catholic faith. He is much more akin to Walker Percy himself, who came to Catholicism after a struggle with his own human frailty, recognized his own flaws, saw the limitations of science, yet still had a lifelong fascination with the positive role it could play in building up human society. The Eucharist, for More (and for Percy) does for humanity what science cannot. It unites the material with the spiritual, heals body and soul, brings together the human and the divine — and makes humanity whole. It fills the empty void within the human heart with the peace and quiet assurance that it is not alone in the universe and that the looming darkness within the soul and in the world will dissipate and ultimately disappear.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more on Percy's life, see "A Walker Percy Primer" in *The Walker Percy Project*, <https://www.ibiblio.org/wpercy/about-percy/about-percy.html#>.

<sup>2</sup> See Linda Whitney Hobson, *Introducing Walker Percy* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 181-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> For the sacramentality of Percy's spiritual outlook, see Rhea Scott Rasnic, "Walker Percy and the Catholic Sacraments," (Ph.D dissertation, Baylor University, 2007), 1-26. For a critique of the centrality of Catholicism in Percy's life and works, see Kieran Quinlan, *Walker Percy: The Last Catholic Novelist* (Baton. Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1996), esp. 195-227.

<sup>5</sup> Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins: The Adventures of a Bad Catholic at a Time Near the End. Of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971). For a helpful treatment of the Eucharist in *Love in the Ruins*, see Rasnic, "Walker Percy and the Catholic Sacraments," 82-108.

<sup>6</sup> Percy, *Love in the Ruins*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> For more on Percy's understanding of the ideology of "scientism," see John F. Desmond, *Walker Percy's Search for Community* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Percy, *Love in the Ruins*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.



## EUCCHARISTIC LITURGY

# Going to Mass Backwards: Eucharist, Mission and Parish

by Stephen Bevans, SVD

*What do we need to remember when we “come back” to Mass?*

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

### **Introduction: “The Mass is Never Ended!”**

I DON'T KNOW IF THEY STILL DO IT, BUT SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN I ATTENDED Mass at Holy Family Parish in Inverness, Illinois, there was a marvelous moment at the end of the celebration. After communion, the presider offered the post-communion prayer, and then, as in Catholic parishes everywhere, there were a number of announcements about events going on in the parish in the coming week. Then — again, just like any parish — the presider said, “The Lord be with you,” the congregation responded, and he gave the blessing: “May almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” But then something different happened. Rather than the presider saying, “The Mass is ended, go in peace,” the entire congregation cried out strongly and powerfully: “The Mass is *never* ended, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord!”

Something similar happened every Sunday at the Anglican church of St. Mary's in Islington, a neighborhood in London, England, when my friend Graham Kings was pastor there. Right after the final blessing at the Eucharist, the congregation would sing the final hymn, and while they were singing Graham would walk down the center aisle of the church. As he walked, the congregation would turn around to face the large doors at the back of the church. When Graham reached them, he would throw the doors wide open. When the hymn was over, he gestured toward the doors and proclaimed to the people “The Mass is ended, go in peace!”

The people of Holy Family and St. Mary's were on to something. What they were acting out in a ritual or ceremonial way is really what the Eucharist is all about. It's *not* about going to church to make ourselves

more “holy.” It’s *not* about pleasing God (although God is certainly pleased!). It’s *not* about “tanking up” on grace so we can make it through the week. And it’s certainly *not* about just fulfilling our duty and avoiding sin. Sure, it *is* about all of these, of course, but these are not the real point. The point of celebrating Eucharist is much more than all of these reasons.

Over fifteen hundred years ago, St. Augustine said it in a way that probably has never been said better: “When you take communion, you will be told: ‘the body of Christ,’ and you will answer: ‘Amen.’ But you yourselves must form the body of Christ. It is therefore the mystery of yourselves that you are going to receive” (Sermon 272 [PL 38.1246]). We come to Eucharist to be renewed as who we are — God’s special people, the Body of Christ, called to *be* Christ in our world, *called to continue his mission!*

### **Going to Mass Backwards**

The best way to see what celebrating Eucharist is about is to realize that we really go to Mass backwards.<sup>1</sup> Believe it or not, the most important moment in the Mass is not the sermon or homily; it’s not when we receive communion, and it is not the moment of the consecration — or the “words of institution.” No, the most important moment of our Eucharist together is what the people of Holy Family or St. Mary’s are on to when they said, “The Mass is never ended!” or when Graham Kings threw open the church doors: it is the moment of dismissal, when the community that has been gathered around the table is sent forth into the world. That’s when the Mass is the Mass, “*ite, Missa est!*” in the Latin version. It’s untranslatable, really, but it means both “go, the Mass is!” and “go, we are sent forth!” This is when, as our brothers and sisters in the Orthodox Churches say, the “liturgy after the liturgy” begins.

### **The Mass “Backwards”**

Let’s take a look at the Eucharist from the perspective of its final words and try to understand the Mass “backwards.” If the words of dismissal could be in our minds all through the liturgy, our whole approach to celebrating Eucharist would change.

Actually, we don’t really *come* to the Eucharist or *attend Mass*. We’re actually already living the Eucharist in our daily lives. What we really do is *come back* to the Eucharist, after having been sent out the week, or day, or a few days before. It would be more appropriate, therefore,



if the ushers or the ministers of hospitality at the door of the church would say “welcome back!” rather than just “welcome” or “good morning.” We’re coming back to renew our identity as members of Christ’s body, to *remember* who we are and (a play on words) be *re-membered*. We have come back not just, as we said before, to fill up on grace so we can get through the day or the week. We’re coming back, as Augustine put it, to say “Amen” to who we are.

### **Lord have mercy!**

So, we gather together, we sing a hymn, and we right away confess our sinfulness. Since we’re coming back from mission we recognize that we have often failed to live the way our baptism has called us to, or to live out the charge we received at our last Eucharist to witness to the life of Jesus and live his vision of the reign of God. In fact, we have not only *failed*, we have positively done things that have kept selfishness, hate, jealousy and greed alive in our world. We confess “what we have done, and what we have failed to do,” and cry out “Lord, have mercy!”

And, of course, God does! We come together wounded, and God’s love heals our wounds. Our actions have made us unworthy to be God’s witnesses, but God’s action of love in our lives makes us whole again, and worthy *despite* ourselves. Amazing grace! And so (except in Advent and Lent) we sing a hymn of praise: “Glory to God in the highest . . .”

### **Let us pray!**

We conclude this first part of our celebration (the “Entrance Rite”) with a prayer, recited by the priest who is presiding. It is called the “Opening Prayer,” but originally it was called the “Collect,” because after the priest says “Let us pray,” there is a moment of silence when everyone in the assembly prays silently — and then the priest “collects” them together in his prayer said out loud. Many times this prayer is for ourselves, for deeper faith, for greater love and hope. Other times, though, it is about our mission, and anticipates what we will do when we are sent forth. On the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, for example, we pray that God will “direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works.” The current translation of the liturgy is a bit stiff, but the point is mission. In the light of the “sending forth” we are renewing ourselves to continue Jesus’ work in the world.

## **The Word of the Lord**

There's a hymn that starts out "We come to share our story . . ." <sup>2</sup>This is what we do in the next part of the Mass, the "Liturgy of the Word." We proclaim sections from our Scriptures and we listen to the homily that tries to break open those Scriptures and relate them to our lives. It's not always easy, but the Word that we proclaim during our celebration is *always* "bread for the journey" that we will make when we are sent forth at the end of Mass. The Word calls us out!

The Church has always spoken about the two tables from which we eat at Mass: the "table of the Word" and the "table of the Eucharist." Our Scriptures were all originally written to help Christians understand their mission. They can still speak to us this way if we listen well, and especially if we have a homilist who can break open the Word in a way that inspires us to live out our baptism.

*Actually, we don't really come to the Eucharist or attend Mass. We're actually already living the Eucharist in our daily lives. What we really do is come back to the Eucharist. . .*

We continue to "share our story" as we profess the creed after the homily. There are a lot of phrases in the creed that perhaps were more important to Christians of other ages (such as, Jesus is "God from God . . . consubstantial with the Father"). But perhaps more important than the individual words and phrases in the creed is the fact that it is our common faith, and we say it together to declare that we are all "on the same page" as we go forth. We say the creed so often that we forget that it really is the story of our salvation told in a very compressed way. We believe in a God who alone is responsible for our life; in Jesus Christ who "for us and for our salvation" became one of us, died for us, and still lives among us by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which carries out the Lord's mission.

The outward looking movement of our celebration is very much accented by the Prayers of the Faithful. We have come back to our community with many needs. We have seen the needs of our world, of our community, and of our Church. We listen to the needs of our sisters and brothers who have also come back. We go forth knowing these needs and knowing that God hears our prayer. We go forth with a deeper sensitivity to our world and to our sisters and brothers.



We pray, too, for the strength, grace, and courage to continue living God's mission in our world. In his wonderful book on the mission of lay persons in the world, Gregory Augustine Pierce (who has inspired a lot of what is written here) offers samples of Prayers of the Faithful that we might use at Mass in light of our sending forth at the Mass's end. Here are a few:

That we might help bring about your kingdom on our jobs by how we perform our work and the example we give to others, we pray to the Lord

That we might help bring about your kingdom in our homes and with our families by how we treat one another, and the generosity we show to our neighbors, and those less fortunate than we are, we pray to the Lord

That we might be sent forth from this Mass as if we had been shot from a cannon to carry out our mission in and to the world, we pray to the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

### **Through Your Goodness We Have Received This Bread ... This Wine to Offer**

We bring bread and wine to the altar, symbols of ourselves, of our hearts. They represent all that we are, all that we have done to witness to God's love in our world. The amazing thing is that God takes this "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" — ourselves in all our imperfections — and transforms it, and then gives it back to us! What we offer becomes the greatest offering that our human history has ever seen — the offering of Jesus himself on the cross, the offering transformed by God's Spirit and given new life.

### **Bread for the Journey**

Jesus then transforms us as we eat his body and drink his blood. Jesus is truly present in and through our gifts — *substantially present* as our official theology would say. But, as I once heard the famous theologian Robert Taft, SJ. say, what is even more amazing is that Jesus becomes

present in us: the Eucharist, he said, is not so much about *bread and wine* becoming the body and blood of Christ (which it certainly does!), but about *you and me* becoming the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist is, as the title of an important book speaks of it, *the feast of the world's redemption*.<sup>4</sup> It is not just about us; it is about what we become: the body of Christ for the sake of others.

### **One Voice, One Heart, One Body, One Mission**

We are one in our mission. We are one in *voice* as we pray the "Our Father," the prayer that Jesus taught us. This is a missionary prayer because we pray for the coming of the kingdom to which we witness. We are one in heart as we offer each other a sign of peace. Here we wish each other God's blessing for the coming journey and are reconciled to one another to be more credible witnesses to God's love and reconciliation. We are one body as we share the one bread and the one cup. What we are doing in the "Communion" part of our Eucharist is getting a glimpse, getting a taste of the world that we are sent forth to witness in our lives and words. We are almost ready for that most important moment: the sending forth!

### **"Thanks Be to God"? Or "Lord Have Mercy"?**

The Prayer after Communion usually consists in praying for our own eternal salvation, having been nourished by Christ's body and blood. Occasionally, however, it prays for what we should do as we leave our church and begin to live our daily lives once more. On the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, for example, the prayer states, "O God, who have willed that we be partakers in the one bread and the one chalice, grant us, we pray, so to live that, made one in Christ, we may joyfully bear fruit for the salvation of the world." Or on the twenty-second Sunday we pray: "renewed by this bread from the heavenly table, ... that, being the food of charity, it may confirm our hearts and stir us to serve you in our neighbor."

And then it happens. We are sent forth — in peace, to love and serve the Lord. In *God's peace*, the peace we have just experienced and received, to love and serve the Lord by continuing to do what Jesus did in his ministry: to preach, serve, and witness the Reign of God — that great fiesta of abundance, joy, justice, and inclusion. In the Revised Roman Missal which appeared in 2011 in English, the rite offers four options for the dismissal formula. In addition to "Go forth, the Mass is ended"



and “Go in peace,” the presider or deacon may choose to say, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” or “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.” One could wish that presiders and deacons would choose these last two formulae more often.

In his book on lay ministry, Gregory Augustine Pierce says a somewhat startling thing. In some ways, he says, it’s amazing that we all respond to the sending forth: “Thanks be to God!” It could almost sound like we’re glad the Mass is ended! (And in a way, that’s a good point, since what’s most important about the Mass is what we do *after* it). But Pierce says if we really understand what we have been called to do at this most important moment, maybe our best response might be “Lord, have mercy!” or even “No thanks, I’ve tried that, but it didn’t work!” In the end, though, “Thanks be to God!” is the right response, because, as Pierce says, we say it “not that the Mass is ended, but that it has just begun.”<sup>5</sup>

### How Do We Do It?

This is what really happens when we celebrate the Eucharist together. But how do we help the people of our parish to understand it this way? How do we get them to realize that when we celebrate Eucharist we are preparing for, being formed in, and living out the ministry that our baptism calls us to?

One way to do this is to make sure that our celebrations are prepared in such a way that the missionary nature of the Eucharist is always able to be seen and felt. If we work at it, we can get better and better at celebrating Mass through the lens of the dismissal, of “going to Mass backwards.”

### Outside-In<sup>6</sup>

We can work first of all at celebrating our liturgies “outside-in.” What this means is that, as we come back to Mass, we bring with us the world — the world in which we witness to the gospel. At the end of Mass, then, when we are sent forth, we have a clearer picture of the world that we continue to serve.

Could the presider begin the liturgy by calling to mind for us some of the reasons why we need to witness to the gospel in our lives? On the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday weekend, for instance, the presider might remind us that we are gathered together to be re-formed into

the Body of Christ, where there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male and female” (see Gal 3:28). On a weekend in August, for example, we might recall the bombing of Hiroshima or in September we could remember the September 11, 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. Sometimes our presider might suggest that we pray especially at this Mass for the complex issues around immigration that Congress might be going to debate in the coming week, or we might be reminded of a recent tragedy or natural disaster that has taken place. In these days of 2021 there is always the constant reminder of the Covid-19 pandemic and the heroic work of countless doctors, nurses, orderlies, grocery store personnel, sanitation workers, etc. This might lead naturally to a penitential litany that names specific social sins that all of us are guilty of: indifference to the homeless, being too passive in the face of violations of people’s right to life, being careless with the environment, not acting for the common good of our sisters and brothers.

*What we are doing in the “Communion” part of our Eucharist is getting a glimpse, getting a taste of the world that we are sent forth to witness in our lives and words.*

The Prayers of the Faithful can be very helpful in this regard. They could also be an occasion to pray for strength and courage to live our Christian life worthily. One possibility is to have a kind of “open microphone” opportunity on a regular basis (e.g. once a month) when people can bring very special and personal intentions to the community for their prayer. If these prayers could be tied into the presentation of the gifts there would be a chance to connect what we do in the “Liturgy of the Word” to the “Liturgy of the Eucharist.”

Another way to make the liturgy more conscious of the world “outside” is in the liturgical environment. Customs from the cultures of the people in the parish could be incorporated, like the use of incense in Vietnamese culture, or the use of gestures like bowing instead of genuflecting. The presider could honor various cultures by wearing vestments that reflect them — Kinte cloth stoles, a chasuble emblazoned with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, or altar linens made from cloth woven in the Philippines. Language is always key: a community can learn responses in various languages and sing hymns in the languages of the people that make up the parish. “Misa del



Mundo” is a setting of the unchanging parts of the Mass (Lord Have Mercy, Gloria, Holy, Holy and Lamb of God) in which we sing in many different languages.

### **Inside-Out**

When you begin to “go to Mass backwards,” one of the things you see more and more clearly is that *the Eucharist itself* is a missionary act. First of all, and maybe this is simply obvious, all the components of the Mass are always that *we ourselves* are evangelized. It might be a phrase from the Collect that challenges or consoles or fortifies us; or it might be one of the readings. We might designate some part of the collection to help a particular cause or outreach ministry in the parish, and announce where that amount is going each week. Or it might be a deep experience of going to communion with everyone else and getting a glimpse of “the depth of the riches” that God has in store for all people (See Rom 11:33; 1Cor 2:9).

But besides our own evangelization, the Eucharist can be an occasion to evangelize others. At every one of our celebrations there are visitors. Practically everything we do at Mass can encourage or discourage these visitors: the way they are greeted when they enter the church; the way people around them make them feel welcome; the way the music is chosen, the choir performed, and the community sings; the way the homilist connects the readings to people’s lives; the sincerity of people as they pray together or are silent during the Eucharistic Prayer. The great twentieth century spiritual writer Thomas Merton wrote that part of his conversion process was seeing a young woman at prayer in a church that he once visited while he was searching for God. No one knows her name, and she probably didn’t know that she was being observed. But her sincerity was a major factor in Merton coming to God, and his conversion in turn affected tens of thousands of people during his lifetime. What we do *inside* the walls of the church can have a lot of impact on those who are or come from *outside*!

### **Is This Happening Anywhere?**

So, there are lots of things that can be done to help people see the connection between Eucharist and mission. But are there any examples where liturgy and mission are affecting each other on a regular basis? The answer is yes and there are many examples!

Several years ago, I read about Good Shepherd Parish in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.<sup>7</sup> Hanging in the church were seven banners that represent the basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching. One proclaimed the importance of the option for the poor; another called people to community; one emphasized the dignity of work; other banners called attention to the Church's position on the right of workers, and the care of creation. You could hardly attend Mass at Good Shepherd without seeing these banners, and, of course, this was deliberate! The parish website made the connection between liturgy and the Church's mission of social justice explicit: "We believe that a commitment to social justice is as much a part of being Catholic as the Eucharist is, and we think it's time to bring involvement in social justice back to the center of parish life."

In the Denver suburb of Arvada, I read, Spirit of Christ Catholic Community has identified itself as a "stewardship community" which contributed 14% of its collection every Sunday to the poor in various parts of the world: for digging wells in Nicaragua, for orphans with HIV AIDS in Africa, for the people who are homeless in the parish's nearby neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup> Members of the parish participated as well in a program that they call "Southern Exposure": groups of parishioners have traveled to Mexico and have built hundreds of homes for poor residents there. Much of this commitment to mission and social justice must have come from the fact that some 800 parishioners meet weekly to discuss the Sunday readings and draw their implications for daily life. Says former pastor Fr. Robert Kinkel: "everything we do is presented as flowing directly from the Eucharist; the connection is in the homilies, the intercessions, the music." Fr. Kinkel spoke of the Eucharist as "the Body of Christ celebrating the Body of Christ."

*If the words of dismissal could be in our minds all through the liturgy, our whole approach to celebrating Eucharist would change.*

In the St. Giles Family Mass Community in Oak Park, Illinois (where I regularly preside on Sundays), I remember a woman coming up to the "open microphone" at the prayers of the faithful one Sunday. She talked about how her own participation in the weekly Mass at St. Giles had changed her, calling her to commit herself to taking many trips to Tanzania to bring legal assistance to poor people there. "You can't be a part of this community," she said, "and remain unchanged."



In urban Chicago, St. Sabina parish is very clear about the connection between worship and mission. The parish defines itself as a “Word-based, Bible teaching African-American Catholic Church that believes in the power of praise and worship. ... a spiritual hospital where all are welcome and invited to ‘taste and see the goodness of the Lord.’”<sup>9</sup> While the music and worship style at St. Sabina’s is legendary around Chicago and, indeed, across the country, the parishioners’ aim is to take worship outside the walls of its beautiful church and live Christian life in neighborhoods polluted with liquor, cigarette ads, drug traffic, and violence. The parish has also developed housing for senior citizens in the area and provides loans for the development of small businesses. All of this flows from its vibrant liturgical celebrations.

In the largely Mexican-American parish of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the pews in the church are arranged in a horseshoe-shape around the altar, so everyone can see each other as the community celebrates Eucharist. Before Mass the eucharistic ministers act as ministers of hospitality, welcoming everyone who arrives with smiles and hearty handshakes. The prayers of the faithful consciously focus on needs and issues beyond the parish itself, and eucharistic worship spills over into the formation of a Pax Christi group (an organization devoted to promoting world peace) and membership in Albuquerque Interfaith (an organization which sponsors informal conversations among people of various faith traditions and gets people working together). There are many more examples.

### **Papal Teaching, the Eucharist and Mission**

In his Apostolic Letter at the beginning of the Year of the Eucharist in 2001, Pope John Paul II wrote forcefully that “the encounter with Christ, constantly intensified and deepened in the Eucharist, issues in the Church and in every Christian *an urgent summons to testimony and evangelization*” (Mane nobiscum Domine 24). To celebrate Eucharist, in other words, is to prepare for, be formed for, and be engaged in mission. Pope John Paul’s letter is an extended reflection on the gospel of Luke’s story of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, meeting the “stranger” Jesus, and finally recognizing him in the breaking of the bread (Lk 24:13-35). Having recognized him, however, they immediately and spontaneously hurried back to Jerusalem to tell their companions the good news.

In his own letter on the Eucharist, Pope Benedict XVI writes in a similar

way: "We cannot approach the eucharistic table without being drawn into the mission which, beginning in the very heart of God, is meant to reach all people (Sacramentum caritatis 84). On June 14, 2020, on the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, Pope Francis said that "The Eucharist satisfies our hunger for material things and kindles our desire to serve. It raises us from our comfortable and lazy lifestyle and reminds us that we are not only mouths to be fed, but also his hands, to be used to help feed others."

This is what happens in the Eucharist whenever we celebrate it, or at least this is what should happen in a community that has recognized itself as a witness to the "Fiesta of God's Reign" and to Christians who understand the reality of their baptism. For those who "go to Mass backwards," *the Mass is never ended!* We go forth to bring and witness to God's peace, God's *shalom*, in our world. 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For these reflections I am greatly indebted to the work of Gregory Augustine Pierce, *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007), especially pp. 37-62.

<sup>2</sup> Song of the Body of Christ/Canción del Cuerpo de Cristo, 1989 Gia Publications.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Augustine Pierce, *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007), pg 51.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption: Eucharistic Origins and Christian Mission* (Trinity Press International, 2000).

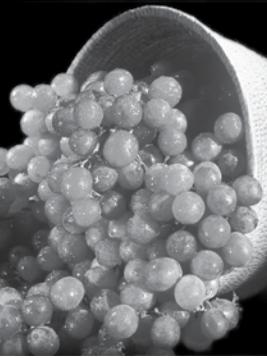
<sup>5</sup> Gregory Augustine Pierce, *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World*, pg 61.

<sup>6</sup> In these paragraphs I have been inspired by a book by Lutheran liturgists: *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission*, ed. Thomas H. Schattauer (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999). See also Roger Schroeder's and my development of these ideas in our *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 362-66.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the following examples appear in *Excellent Catholic Parishes: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* (New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.spiritofchrist.org/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> From the Saint Sabina website



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10)

by Bernard Camiré, SSS

Blessed Sacrament Father Bernard Camiré is the parochial vicar of Saint Jean Baptiste Church in New York City. His most recent book is entitled, *Praise God in His Holy Place: Psalms and Canticles of Scripture for Eucharistic Adoration*.

### The Narrative of the Parable

THE STRUCTURE AND MEANING OF THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN IS SIMILAR TO the parable that immediately precedes it, i.e., the Parable of the Lost Sheep, a parable found also in the Gospel of Matthew (18:12-14). In speaking of a woman's search for a lost coin as an image of God's search for the sinner, Jesus likely surprised his audience and even challenged their conventional idea of God. With this parable's striking metaphor for God's searching love, Jesus offers his hearers a new way of thinking about the manner in which God acts toward sinners and outcasts.

The coin that Jesus spoke of in this parable was a silver drachma, which represented a day's wage for the average worker. In the home of a poor person the loss of a coin might happen easily, and its recovery would be difficult. The house, consisting of a single room, would have been quite dark, with perhaps only one small window giving light to the interior. The floor would have been of beaten earth covered with rushes and reeds. Although searching for a coin in these conditions was like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack, finding the coin was of great importance, even *necessity*, to a person of very modest means. Hence, the woman's diligent search for the coin, which represented one-tenth of her meager savings.

We note how the woman's search is described in three actions: she lights a lamp; she sweeps the floor; and she searches carefully. Each step enhances the sense of urgency of the search. The importance of the search and the diligence with which it is carried out build to the discovery of the coin and the woman's consequent joy. Each element of the story is meant to convey something about the great truth of God's tremendous love and concern for the sinner.

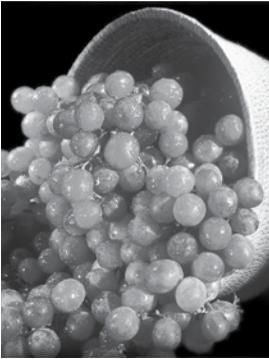
## The Meaning of the Parable

Deserving of some reflection is the parable's description of the woman's joy and extravagance. We are told that, having recovered the lost coin, the woman called together her friends and neighbors for a celebration, the cost of which may have been more than the value of the lost coin. But such things occur when there is great joy; joy is a prominent motif in chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel. When, following this parable, Luke has Jesus utter the strong statement, "There will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents," we are meant to hear a description of God's great joy over a person's being rescued from a life of sin.

Scripture scholars point out that, in both the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin, there is a certain tension between stressing the need for repentance and the description of God's joy over the sinner's repentance. They call attention to the fact that neither the sheep nor the coin "repents"; the dramatic action in the parable is focused on the one who seeks. In this way, the attentive listener hears the teaching of Jesus not simply as a call to repentance but as the very good news that God has come to seek out and save the lost. God, in Jesus Christ, has taken the initiative. The sinner's change of heart is not the condition for God's love but the consequence.

This, then, is the surprise and the challenge that the Parable of the Lost Coin sets before us: that God actually searches for us sinners. It is both surprise and challenge because we are often tempted to believe that we find God's love only if we go crawling home to God in self-abasement and beg for God's mercy. This parable invites us to believe in a divine love that searches us out; it also reinforces our belief in that love because we see it incarnate in Jesus Christ who came "to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk 19:10).





## *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.

## **July**

SAINT PETER JULIAN EYMARD'S DESIRE TO ESTABLISH A RELIGIOUS ORDER COMPLETELY dedicated to the Eucharist took many years to realize. Initially, he had to spend much time in prayer and discernment in order to understand his "eucharistic calling." He didn't know what form of life this eucharistic venture would take. Gradually he understood that he would have to leave the Society of Mary, which he loved, to give himself completely to this new mission. After many discussions with his religious superiors, in April of 1856 he took one last retreat to confirm the inspiration to establish the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He wrote to his founding companion Father Raymond de Cuers:

"My God what a consolation for us, if we could begin, as formally the Apostles and in union with them, by entering on retreat in the Cenacle on Ascension Day; receive the spirit and graces of our vocation on Pentecost day, and begin our Eucharistic ministry on the Holy Day of Corpus Christi."

(To Father Raymond de Cuers, April 22, 1856)

"My decision still holds to leave on the last day of April, and arrive on the beautiful day of Ascension, the first day of May! of Mary! The day the disciples went to the Cenacle. (To Father Raymond de Cuers, April 25, 1856).

## August

The Church celebrates Saint Peter Julian Eymard's feast day on August 2nd. August then provides a wonderful opportunity to share Father Eymard's tremendous joy as his dream to establish a religious order completely dedicated to the Eucharist came to fruition. After communicating his desires to establish the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament with the leadership of the archdiocese of Paris, Archbishop Marie Dominique Sibour granted Father Eymard approval to begin this new eucharistic community in his archdiocese on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1856.

"... the trial that lasted twelve days, or five years, is over. The divine Eucharist has triumphed; I am its happy servant. May heaven grant that I may become its zealous and devoted Apostle! The Archbishop approved the Work on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and he settled my issue last night. Three Bishops examined and judged it. The details will follow later." (To Mme. Bouraliere, May 15, 1856)

"Glory to Jesus Eucharistic !!!!! I am announcing a great event to you, perhaps the greatest in my life and yours. Three Bishops in Paris have received and approved the Work of the Most Blessed Sacrament. They blessed Father Eymard and Father de Cuers. I am overflowing with joy and experiencing a jubilation I cannot describe." (To Mme. Bouraliere, May 17, 1856)





## PASTORAL LITURGY

# The Revised *Order of Baptism of Children* – Final Thoughts

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

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

FOR A YEAR, THIS COLUMN HAS GIVEN A PASTORAL COMMENTARY ON THE SECOND edition of the *Order of Baptism of Children* [OBC]. The new “order” became mandatory Easter of 2020, but due to COVID, many leaders have not seen or used the new rite. Some may not even be familiar with it. Regular *Emmanuel* readers know a digital edition of this magazine is available on our website, as well as a pastoral liturgy blog that provides additional resources to complement this column. Additional resources for the OBC can be found there. Here, I’d like to offer some “final thoughts” about the OBC that explore some pastoral aspects of celebrating OBC.

First, our parishes need to underscore a common language about “baptisms outside of Mass.” Most parishes call these events “private baptisms,” because they are not celebrated within Mass or during a regular public liturgy. The *praenotanda* (introduction) and other parts of OBC make it clear that sacraments, and especially baptism, are Church events and that the Church, the *community of faith*, is to be present. This makes sacramental celebrations “public” and not private, even if the sacrament is celebrated on a Sunday afternoon with only the presider and the family. The cleric represents the Church, as does the gathered family “the People of God.” Our language should highlight this key aspect of the child coming into the Church — the community of faith. Call these baptisms: Baptisms Outside of Mass.

Second, the ritual includes a few repetitive items that could be simplified in a future edition of the OBC. The calling down of the saints in prayers over the child by singing/reciting the Litany of Saints *and* the Universal Prayers is a repetitive gesture of intercession. Asking the parents a few times “do you [really] want your child baptized in the faith?” after singing/reciting the creed together always seems to take the parents by surprise. They were asked the same thing at the beginning of the ritual.

Third, the anointing with the oil of the catechumenate should be placed in the “introductory rites.” Having the anointing so close to the anointing with sacred chrism, while optional, gives the impression that anointing is more important than other symbols of the ritual. Each symbol is important, but two anointings, almost back to back, give more credence to the use of oil. To remedy this, a future edition of the OBC could be more like the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA): once the child is welcomed, the child would be anointed before being brought into the nave of the church.

Fourth, note that the baptismal ritual calls for celebrating moments of the ritual in different areas of the church — a processional liturgy. The ritual outside of Mass and within Mass calls for pieces to be celebrated at the door of the church, at the ambo or the place of the Word, at the font, at the altar and even (though not a customary practice in the USA) at the image of the Blessed Mother. These are helpful considerations that ritually convey to the participants a “journey of faith.”

Fifth, the baptismal font and paschal candle should be visible symbols in our churches, and not stored away in a closet or the sacristy. The paschal candle especially should always be on full display. It is a symbol of Christ, the light of the world. (See *Built of Living Stones*, the United States document for art and environment, the building and renovating of churches, and the placement of key liturgical elements.)

Sixth, with the font always on display, (and consider an upgraded font that has regular circulating, filtered water) the holy water may be regularly blessed and distributed for parishioners (in a post COVID era, such as before COVID). Rather than having holy water stoops, the font should be the place, the source, where all retrieve their holy water for their homes and for other blessings. With the holy water always blessed and present, this part of the OBC could be omitted, for unless it is completely new water, it is already blessed.

Lastly, the ritual encourages music to accompany the ritual. One of the items to encourage participation would be to have an accompanist and cantor present to assist in the ritual’s celebration. Presiders are to be commended for singing an “Alleluia,” or the other parts of the ritual that are set to music. Music always strengthens the ritual celebration.

We have completed a brief overview and pastoral review of the second edition of the OBC with suggestions for celebration. Continue to enjoy this new ritual and the improved texts, especially the “welcoming remarks.” This text, as well as others, continues to highlight the

importance of this sacrament, bringing us into God's family.

### Organizing for July/August 2021

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

#### A few regular celebrations during these months:

- Look to the BB for many options for summer blessings
- Beginning of the School Year (BB 522- 550) (or in September)
- International Eucharistic Congress – to prepare for this in September 5 – 12 in Budapest, rescheduled due to COVID

#### Special days in the calendar:

- Thursday, July 1 – the Optional Memorial of Saint Junípero Serra, presbyter, religious and missionary (USA). Also Canada Day
- Saturday, July 3 – the Feast of Saint Thomas, apostle
- Sunday, July 4 – it is the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, but also a special time to remember Independence Day (USA votive) (CHBP)
- Tuesday, July 6 – with high school and young adult youth, celebrate the Optional Memorial of Saint Maria Goretti, martyr
- Wednesday, July 14 – the Memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Native American virgin and martyr
- Thursday, July 15 – the Memorial of Saint Bonaventure, bishop and doctor
- Sunday, July 18 – it is the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. However, when July 18 is not a Sunday, we celebrate the Optional Memorial of Saint Camillus de Lellis, presbyter (USA). Suggestion: celebrate the Anointing of the Sick after Mass on this day in his honor and through his intercession
- Thursday, July 22 – the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, apostle to the apostles
- Sunday, July 25 – *First World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly*, with future items developed at the local level. (At the time of this writing, other items had not been finalized.)
- Monday, July 26 – the Solemnity of Saint Ann (& Saint Joachim) parent(s) of Mary, grandparents of Jesus.
- Thursday, July 29 – the Memorial of Saint Martha
- Saturday, July 31 – the Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, presbyter and founder
- Tuesday, August 2 – the Feast of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, presbyter and founder. An important day for the readers of this

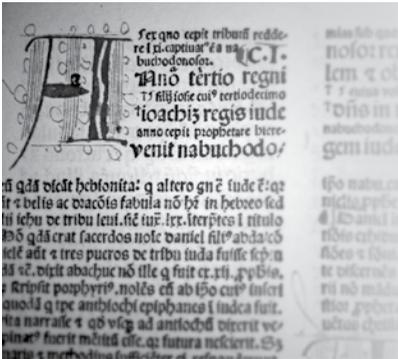
magazine and those devoted to this “apostle of the Eucharist.”

- Saturday, August 4 – the Memorial of Saint John Vianney, presbyter
- Monday, August 6 – the Feast of the Transfiguration of our LORD
- August 6-9 – Ember Days: Hiroshima/Nagasaki Remembrance
- Tuesday, August 10 – the Feast of Saint Lawrence, deacon and martyr and the Optional Memorial of Saint Mary MacKillop, religious and founder (Australia)
- Wednesday, August 11 – the Memorial of Saint Clare, virgin and founder
- Saturday, August 14 – the Memorial of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, presbyter, religious and martyr
- Sunday, August 15 – the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary  
- The Blessing for the First Fruits of the Harvest (BB 1007- 1022)  
- The Blessing of Produce (CHBP)
- Friday, August 20 – the Memorial of Saint Bernard, abbot and doctor
- Saturday, August 21 – the Memorial of Saint Pius X, pope
- Sunday, August 22 – it is the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, but remember the memorial of the Queenship of Mary through a special intercession
- Tuesday, August 24 – the Feast of Saint Bartholomew, apostle
- Friday, August 27 – the Memorial of Saint Monica, married woman, mother of Saint Augustine
- Saturday, August 28 – the Memorial of Saint Augustine, bishop and doctor

**Please note that the newer *Lectionary Supplement* has optional readings for the following days in July and August:**

- July 1 – Saint Junipero Serra
- July 5 – Saint Elizabeth of Portugal
- July 9 – Saint Augustine Zhao Rong
- July 14 – Saint Kateri Tekakwitha
- July 20 – Saint Apollinaris
- July 22 – Saint Mary Magdalene
- July 24 – Saint Sharbel Makhluf
- August 9 – Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
- August 12 – Saint Jane Frances de Chantal





## BREAKING THE WORD

# Scriptural Reflections – Homiletics

by George M. Smiga

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## July 4, 2021 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Ezekiel 2:2-5; Psalm 123:1-2,3-4; 2 Corinthians 12: 7-10;  
Mark 6:1-6**

Paul ends today's second reading with a paradox, a seeming contradiction. He says, "When I am weak, then I am strong." What sense can we make of such a statement? It is like saying, "When I am sad, then I am happy," or, "When I am short, then I am tall." Paul uses this paradox to seize our attention. He wants us to discover a spiritual advantage in our weakness.

We all have weaknesses. They embarrass us. We may be impatient or stubborn. We can overeat or overreact. We may find it difficult to admit we are wrong. Paul says we can boast in our weaknesses, because they can lead us to Christ. Our strengths lead us to ourselves. Our weaknesses lead us to the Lord who can save us. When we are tripped up by a part of ourselves that is fragile and limited, it becomes obvious that we need assistance. In that moment, a person of faith turns to Jesus and says, "Lord, you need to help me here, because I'm very poor at this. I hardly ever do it right." In that prayer our fear is bolstered by Christ's presence. Our weakness is replaced by Christ's strength.

Today's gospel points to a particular area in which weakness is often found. The passage from Mark is the only place in the gospels where Jesus is unable to act. Jesus' inability is connected to the place in which the scene occurs: his own hometown. Jesus has no problem doing deeds of power in Capernaum or at the Sea of Galilee. But when he comes to Nazareth, his ministry is without effect. He could wow the crowds in Jerusalem, but when he comes to his own town, he is too

local to be taken seriously. The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth points to a truth in our lives: sometimes we are at our weakest in the presence of our own family. How painful it is to have our gifts and talents accepted by many, but not acknowledged by those closest to us. How hurtful it is to wait for the approval of a mother, father, brother, or sister and never have those words of affirmation come. How debilitating it is when we find that those to whom we are related by blood or marriage are jealous, dismissive, or even manipulative towards us. Usually we are able to overcome the disapproval of a stranger. But when it comes to family, rejection cuts deep.

Today's readings insist that even when we encounter dysfunction in our closest relationships, we have reason to boast. Our hurt and lack of power remind us that we need Christ's love and fullness of power. Our faith assures us that when we ask for help, our plea will not be rejected.

None of this, of course, happens in a magical way. When we ask for help, our weaknesses will not suddenly evaporate, nor will the people we find troublesome miraculously become our best friends. Difficult people tend to remain difficult. The weaknesses in our life usually continue. But when we approach such challenges in faith, our limitations — instead of depressing and paralyzing us — can provide an opportunity for hope. Our faith allows us to let go of the things we cannot handle and hand them over to Christ. Then, even though our weaknesses may remain, they will not destroy us. They will provide an opportunity for us to trust in a higher strength. Through our weakness God's power is made manifest. Once we understand this connection, we like Paul will have reason to boast. Then it will no longer be a contradiction to say, "When I am weak, then I am strong."

July 11, 2021  
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85: 9-10, 11-12, 13-14;  
Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13**

There are four major prophets in the Hebrew Bible: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. There are twelve minor prophets whose writings are less extensive. Amos is one of these. He is the earliest prophet to be associated with a biblical book. His ministry took place in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of king Jeroboam II (786-

746 B.C.E.). Independent and fierce in his preaching, Amos is known for his uncompromising demand for social justice. His concern for the poor is evident in two of the three readings from Amos in the Sunday lectionary (6:1, 4-7; 8:4-7). Today's selection is different. Rather than conveying Amos' message, it recounts his call to be a prophet. It thereby provides us with precious details about his life.

We do not know much about the lives of the prophets whose writings have come down to us. We have their words, but who they were and how they lived is largely hidden. This is why the description of the call of Amos in today's first reading is so valuable. It tells us that he was not a prophet associated with the royal court or a company of prophets. He was called by God directly and given his own unique vision. The mention of his call also provides us with an interesting detail about his life. Amos tells us that when he was called, "I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores." That's two full-time jobs. Whatever we might want to know about the prophet Amos, it is clear that when God called him, he was a very busy man.

We too are busy. Some of us may have two jobs. But even if we have only one paid position, our plates can still be full: driving the kids to baseball games, keeping in touch with friends, caring for an aging parent, finding time for exercise, pursuing continuing education. Here is where Amos is an example to us, because when our lives are filled with things we have to do, it is harder to hear what God wants us to do. Amos, for all the activities in his life, was able to hear the call of the Lord. Somehow, he was able to recognize clues in the midst of a busy life that indicated what God desired. Even with all he had to do, he was able to know that a particular occurrence in his life was in fact the voice of God.

Unfortunately, the scriptures do not describe the particular circumstances that allowed Amos to discern God's call. But we are able to imagine how God's call might come to us. It might be through a failure or a mistake that we make. Instead of pushing on to the next responsibility in our busy schedule, that weakness may allow us to hear God speaking, "Stop. Change. Learn how to do this better." It might be in an expectation that we carry. The frustration that we feel over our unmet desires is not just an annoyance. It can be the way God asks us to reconsider what we want and so live in a more realistic way. It might be through an opportunity to love or to serve. We know that we should spend more time with our spouse, our child, or an aging

relative. When we see an empty space in our calendar, God may be inviting us: "Do this now. Seize this opportunity to be my minister."

We are busy people. So was the prophet Amos. But he was able to discern clues in his busy life and see them as the call of the Lord. We would be wise to do the same.

July 18, 2021  
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Jeremiah 23: 1-6; Psalm 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5, 6; Ephesians 2:13-18;  
Mark 6:30-34**

Today's gospel from Mark serves as a prelude to the feeding of the five thousand and the resulting dialogue on the bread of life. The lectionary will present these scenes to us over the next few weeks. Today's passage does not describe the multiplication of the loaves and fish. It shows us what happens before that miracle. It describes Jesus' attitude. When Jesus disembarks from a boat, he sees a vast crowd. The text tells us that, "his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd." The word "pity," in this passage, does not mean "looking at another with regret or disgrace" but "viewing another with sympathy." Jesus, then, sees the crowd "with compassion." He recognizes their need and their suffering. In time Jesus will feed the crowd with loaves and fish to address their physical hunger. But before that mighty deed, he sees their pain. Jesus begins with compassion.

We always try to follow Jesus' example. There is, of course, nothing more Christian than helping those in need. But helping those in need is not as simple as it might first appear. In the real world we must always decide whether giving people what they want, or need, will help or hurt them. When we encounter someone who is poor, unemployed, uneducated, or wounded, we must decide whether generosity on our part will improve their lives or make them reliant on further generosity from us or others. Whether our generosity is personal or comes through governmental programs addressing social ills, we must always determine whether our giving will lift others from their need or relegate them to a life of dependency.

Therefore, it is too simple to say we should help others. It is also

important to determine how and if we should provide assistance. Making such decisions is necessary and part of our responsibility as Christ's disciples. But here is where the example of Jesus is so important. Before Jesus decides whether he is going to give or not, before he decides how to help or not, he first has compassion for the vast crowd before him. Imagine what would have happened, if Jesus began not with compassion but with judgment. What if Jesus stepped off the boat and said, "Look at all these spiritually dead people. Why don't they take responsibility for their lives? Why don't they spend more time in the temple or studying God's law? How foolish for them to come to a deserted place without food. How do they expect to eat if they do not even have the sense to carry a lunch with them?" Jesus could have begun with judgment, but he began with sympathy. We must do the same. After reflection we may decide that helping another person may only add to their problems. But unless we begin with compassion, we will not recognize that we have an opportunity to help in the first place.

We can become people of compassion by realizing that our lives could be different. If we had different parents, if we had been born in another country, if we were less talented or healthy, we could easily find ourselves among the poor, the unemployed, the uneducated, or the wounded. When we understand that any person in need could be us, we are able to approach others in a more empathetic way.

Once Jesus saw the crowd with sympathy, he decided to feed them. Before we decide whether it is best to help or not, we, like Jesus, should begin with compassion.

July 25, 2021  
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 145: 10-11, 15-16, 17-18;  
Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15**

The miracle in today's gospel is called, "The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish." It was a very important story for the early Church. We know this because in the gospels there are two versions of Jesus' birth, four versions of Jesus' death, but six versions of this miracle. The evangelists really liked this story. They kept telling it over and

over again. And they told it in an unusual way. Normally, when the gospels present us with a miracle of Jesus, what Jesus does is clearly described. Jesus places his fingers in the ears of a deaf man, and the man hears. Jesus tells Peter to step out of the boat, and Peter walks on the water. Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and Lazarus comes. But in the miracle of the loaves and fish, we are never told how the loaves and the fish are multiplied. Did Jesus keep pulling loaves and fish out of the sack of the young boy? Did the food fall from the sky like manna? Did bread and fish suddenly appear before each person reclining on the grass? Instead of a description of the multiplication, all we have is the beginning and the end. In the beginning there are five thousand hungry people in the desert with only five loaves and two fish. In the end, all are satisfied and there are twelve baskets of fragments left over.

What a strange miracle story. It has no middle. It never describes the miraculous action of Jesus. It is possible, however, that the omission is intentional. Perhaps the evangelists saw in this lack of description a definition of faith. Faith, after all, is believing that God knows our trouble and pain and will care for us — even if we have no idea how God will act. Faith is trusting that although we are in the desert without food, we will be satisfied, even though we cannot imagine how that satisfaction will come about. This is why the comments of Andrew and Philip are in the story. Neither of them can imagine how Jesus could feed five thousand people. Philip imagines buying food. But he knows that two hundred days' wages would not be enough. Andrew finds five barley loaves and two fish but realizes that they are useless: "What good are these among so many?" The futile attempts of these two disciples to envision the actions Jesus might perform remind us that faith is not about imagining how God will act. It is believing that God will.

When we are worried about a family member who is struggling with addiction, faith is believing that God knows that problem and will lead the person we love to a better place, even though we think the situation is hopeless. When we have a relationship that keeps hurting us, faith is trusting that God sees the cause of our pain and is working to remove it, even though we cannot imagine how it could take place. When we must recover from a divorce or face a long series of medical treatments, faith is believing that God knows our fear and will give us strength, even though courage seems impossible.

The story of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish has no middle.

It never tells us how the miracle took place. But such an omission is meant to assure us that faith is not about knowing how God will work. It is believing that God sees our hunger and will give us food — with twelve baskets left over.

August 1, 2021  
Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15; Psalm 78: 3-4, 23-24, 25, 54;  
Ephesians 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35**

In today's gospel the crowd comes to Jesus and asks for a sign: "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?" Such a question should stop us short. This is the same crowd that Jesus fed in the wilderness only the day before. If feeding five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish was not a sufficient sign, it is probable that the crowd will never accept Jesus. This failure to believe is a continuing theme throughout the Gospel of John. John's narrative revolves around seven great signs that Jesus performs in his ministry. Jesus' signs are intended to lead people to faith, but there is no guarantee that they will succeed. Often, as in the case of the crowd in today's gospel, people experience a mighty deed but do not go on to accept Jesus as the one God has sent. Jesus says as much when he tells the crowd, "You are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled." The crowd did not really understand the sign which would have led them to eternal life. They merely ate the miraculous loaves Jesus provided to assuage their hunger for a day.

John's use of signs points to a fundamental truth. Faith is a mystery. It is a gift that only God can give. There is no action or event that will necessarily lead to belief. There is no miracle that will demand the acceptance of God's love. People of faith do not believe on their own. They are not smarter or better than other people. They believe because they have received the gift of faith from God and responded to it. This is what Jesus means when he tells the crowd that "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven." Jesus and faith in him are the true gift that the Father gives to those who will accept it.

This truth about faith is both a comfort and a hope. It is a comfort

because many of us have people in our lives who do not practice their faith. It might be a son or daughter, a brother or sister, or a close friend. When we face a lack of faith it is natural to ask whether we are in some way responsible. Should I have been a different parent? A different sibling? Is there something I should have said or done that would have made someone I love believe? But as much as we want to give our faith to others, it is not ours to give. Only God can give that gift. We are not responsible when those we love do not believe. That issue must remain between them and God. Yet, we live in hope, because we know the God in whom we believe. We know that God cares for every person. We know that God is the one who searches out the lost and struggling. Therefore, we have hope that God loves the people in our lives even more than we love them. We trust that God will continue to care for them, even if they do not believe.

Faith is a gift only God can give. But we can be confident that God wants to give it. When we think about people we love who do not believe, we often say, "It is my prayer that someday they will find God." The good news is this is not necessary. The people we love do not need to find God. We have a God who will find them.

August 8, 2021  
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9;  
Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6:41-51**

Today's first reading is part of a larger story. Chapters 17-19 of the First Book of Kings narrate the interaction between King Ahab and the prophet Elijah. Chapter 17 recounts how God calls Elijah to proclaim a drought in Israel and how the prophet survives by staying with a widow in Zarephath. In chapter 18, Elijah ends the drought by defeating the prophets of the false god, Baal, and bringing the people back to the true worship of the Lord. The worship of Baal, however, is favored by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. In chapter 19, when Jezebel hears of Elijah's actions, she swears to kill him. Elijah flees for his life. Today's reading picks up at this point. Elijah travels a day's journey in the wilderness and then gives up. He prays for death. He feels he cannot go on. The purpose of this biblical story is to help us see that even in times of desolation we can find a way to continue.

In certain circumstances we may conclude that we cannot go on. In grieving the loss of a loved one in death or coping with a progressive disease, we can come to the point where our energy is depleted, and we feel all is lost. Consumed by depression because of some failure, rejection, or the challenges of advancing age, we may simply want to sit down and quit. When we find ourselves in such hopeless conditions, the story of Elijah is addressed to us. In it, the prophet does two things that we can imitate: he prays, and he eats.

In his despair Elijah prays to God. Elijah does not come before God with pretense or deference. He tells God exactly how he feels. He wants God to know that he is finished. He even asks God to end his life. God does not end his life. But Elijah's genuine expression of hopelessness is the beginning of his healing. It is only by voicing his total desperation that a new way forward is revealed. In the same way, when we feel we cannot go on, we have the freedom to speak to God from the depths of our despondency. Our prayer must come from our hearts without filter. The honest expression of our pain lessens our despair and allows hope to grow.

But Elijah does not only pray, he also eats. Two times he eats the food that the angel of God brings to him. When we feel that we cannot go on, we too must eat the food that God offers. There are two kinds of food that God provides. The first is the people in our life who love us. Family and friends who know our pain and help us carry it are God's sustenance. When we receive their love, it is nourishment for our soul. The second food that God offers is the ability to give. God has entrusted an important talent or ability to every one of us. It might be the talent of sewing, listening, teaching, or making other people laugh. When we give to others from the gifts we have received, that giving sustains us. It is food that allows our journey to continue.

When we lose hope, a choice is set before us. We can sit in our despair and insist that life is ended, or we can face the future. We can pray to God in the honesty of our pain. We can surround ourselves with the people who love us and use our gifts for the good of others. With such choices, by God's grace, we can go on.

August 15, 2021  
Solemnity of the Assumption of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary

**Revelations 11: 19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27;  
Luke 1:39-56**

Today's feast of the Assumption of Mary is perhaps the most glorious Marian feast. We celebrate our belief that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven, joining the risen Christ who rules in splendor at the right hand of the Father. It may come then as a surprise that the gospel for this feast is so humble. It recalls a simple event: Mary's visit to her cousin, Elizabeth. There are no angel choirs, trumpet blasts, or miracles. Just two pregnant women rejoicing in God's goodness. We might be inclined to dismiss this gospel as a poor choice by the lectionary, an ill-suited match for the drama of the Assumption. But to do so would discount its underlying message. For this account of the visitation is the Bible's way of stressing the importance of the ordinary.

Nothing is more consequential than the ordinary. The ordinary fills most of the days we are given. There are certainly dramatic moments in our lives. We recall the occasion we met our spouse or began our first job. The birth of a child or the death of a parent is impressed upon our memories. But most of our days are comprised of ordinary routines and the repetition of scheduled events. After we have lived them, they pass from our consciousness. We find it difficult to remember what we did last Tuesday. Today's gospel helps us to appreciate such ordinary time. Mary's visit to Elizabeth does not change the course of history. But it does bind these two women together in a relationship of friendship and love. It gives expression to a relationship of trust and faithfulness. That is no small matter.

Mary is our model for living ordinary time well. She provides a pattern to guide our day-to-day routine. The pattern is simple: ask and act. When Mary hears that Elizabeth is pregnant, she does not turn to her own concerns and needs. She asks, "What does my cousin need of me?" When the answer comes that a visit would be appropriate, Mary acts. She runs in haste to the hill country to attend to Elizabeth.

As we live our ordinary lives, Mary's pattern can be a guide for us.

Asking is not always easy. To ask what another person needs is to move beyond our own preoccupations and schedules. That is why it is important. It calls us to put others first and imagine what good thing would bless them. This is the best way to guide our lives from day to day, because it transforms us into giving people. When we ask, "What does my 8-year-old son need from me? How could I make my mother's life easier? How can I be present to a friend who just lost a parent?" A way will open for us to act. But we will not act unless we first make the space in our life to ask the question.

When our lives draw to a close and we look back over what we have experienced, it will likely be the dramatic highpoints we remember. But it will be the ordinary patterns that have determined who we are. It will be our day-to-day choices that shape our history. That is why Mary's pattern of living should become ours. And if we adopt it, it will provide us with even more. For when we ask what others need and then act on the answer we receive, we will discover that we have not only brought ourselves to others, we (like the pregnant Mary) will have also carried Christ who is within us to the people we have served. That is not ordinary. That is sublime.

August 22, 2021  
Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Psalm 34: 2-3, 16-17, 18-19,  
20-21; Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32; John 6: 60-69**

In today's gospel many of Jesus' disciples leave him because they consider his teaching too difficult. Jesus, then asks the Twelve whether they plan to leave as well. Peter responds, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." What is implied in Peter's response is that there is really no choice. You might find a way of living that asks less of you, but you could not find a way of living that offers more to you. The difficult things that Christ asks us to do are for our benefit. Avoiding them does not make sense. It is not in our own self-interest.

As disciples we do, of course, have an obligation to follow Christ. Christ is our master and Lord, and so the things that he teaches us we are obliged to obey. Yet, we would be seriously misled to imagine that the

teachings of Christ are some arbitrary set of rules set out to measure our fidelity. Christ's teachings are not some hurdle to jump over or some obstacle that we are meant to get around. There is a myth in our society that by-passing religious principles will make us happy. Our movies glorify criminals and those who make selfish choices. We fantasize that joy would come to us if we could indulge our every desire. But happiness is not attained when we act like schoolboys sneaking a beer behind the bleachers. Happiness is gained when we follow the truth, and that is what Jesus offers us. The teachings of Jesus are given to us for our own good.

Is it at times difficult to love others, to place their interest before our own, to be flexible and willing to compromise, to be generous with our time and resources? Of course, it is difficult. But being unkind, selfish, and stingy is not going to bring us joy. The deepest satisfaction in life is in knowing that we love and are loved in return. Such bonds are formed through the giving of self. Although giving costs us something, it is the price we pay for happiness. That is why Christ commands it. Is it difficult to forgive, to put hurts behind us and move on with life? Without a doubt it is. But refusing to forgive is not going to bring us freedom. It will only make us slaves to our anger, hurt, and resentment. Forgiving another is in our own self-interest, and that is why Christ commands it. Is it difficult to be a person of integrity, to be true to our word, fair to others, responsible to those who belong to us? Yes, it is. But bending the truth for our advantage, tipping the scales for our own enrichment, and vacillating when others depend upon us for their well-being is not the way to bliss. One of the greatest satisfactions in life is to know that we have the respect of others and are a person of character. That is an unshakable treasure. That is why Christ commands us to become such a person.

The things Christ commands us to do are for our own good. Ignoring the teachings of Jesus is not some clever way of avoiding an obligation. It is working against our own self-interest. So, if his demands seem too difficult, we can certainly walk away like some of the disciples in today's gospel. But we should not do so without first listening to Peter. There is no other way to happiness. Christ has the words of eternal life.

August 29, 2021  
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8; Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5;  
James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

Søren Kierkegaard, the famous Danish philosopher, was fond of saying that, "Reading the Bible is like looking into a mirror." The Bible does not only speak about the characters in its stories. It speaks about us. This is important to remember as we approach today's gospel. Jesus is arguing with the Pharisees. But if we keep Kierkegaard's admonition in mind, Jesus is not so much criticizing the Pharisees as he is criticizing us. We are the Pharisees.

When we see ourselves as the Pharisees, we are more likely to appreciate who they actually were. The gospels often place the Pharisees in a negative light. But the Pharisees were not bad people. They were serious religious reformers of Jesus' time. In fact, their teaching seems to have influenced Jesus' own message. The Pharisees taught other Jews to believe in the resurrection of the dead, seeing God as a loving Father, and the centrality of love for God and neighbor. Jesus' teaching was closer to that of the Pharisees than to any other group. So, the Pharisees in today's gospel are not "hard-hearted legalists." They are people of faith trying to do what is right. Like Jesus, they honor the law. Like Jesus, they reject all of the evil actions that are listed at the end of the gospel: unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, and deceit. The Pharisees are also concerned about handwashing. Handwashing is a good thing, and there is no reason to believe that Jesus was opposed to the practice. But to him it was not as important as other issues of the law. When Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and us, it is because we can confuse lesser things with more important things. At times we give too much attention to certain things and miss what truly matters.

We might want a spouse, child, or friend to be more organized, more prompt, or more responsible. Adopting such practices is valuable. But such improvements are not the most important things. If we become fixated on these lesser matters, it is possible that we will not recognize the deeper gifts that are also in the person we love. In our divisive political climate, it is easy to be drawn to or from a particular candidate because of his or her stand on a single issue. As crucial as

the issue might be, it is more important to consider the candidate's entire platform and integrity before making our choice. Personally, all of us have at times failed in our family relationships or career. We must take such mistakes seriously. But our flaws are not as important as the inherent dignity that God has placed in each one of us as a son or daughter. When we focus on our failures, we can miss God's invitation to forgiveness and a new beginning.

We are the Pharisees. We allow what is less important to cloud what is essential. We allow the lesser goods in our life to rule the greater. We are not bad people. But at times we let less important desires, ideas, and failures dictate what we believe and how we act. The good news is that when Jesus criticizes us in today's gospel, he does not do so to condemn us. He offers us an opportunity. There is still time to set things right and allow what is truly important to guide what is less important. With God's grace, we can put first things first. With God's guidance we can focus on what is essential and discern God's will for our lives.



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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Since its inception, *Emmanuel* has published a list of deceased members of the Priests' Eucharistic League, remembering those who have served the church generously and faithfully and have passed into the promised eternal life. Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with N, O, P, and Q are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during July and August.

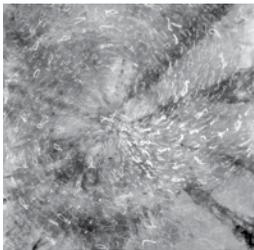


## *EUCHARIST & CULTURE*

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

### Art Review

To be alone with your thoughts in the midst of nature. It's such a simple occurrence. It requires very little but time and attentiveness, and yet it has perennially been the source of tremendous nourishment and inspiration. Whether Saint Francis of Assisi atop mount Alverno, Isaac Newton under an apple tree, or Mary Oliver on one of her many hikes, solitude in the wonders of nature has inspired saint, scientist, and poet alike.



#### I COME TO THE GARDEN ALONE (27)

Henna Kim, 2009  
Mixed media on  
Korean paper

John Christman,  
SSS

Artists of all kinds have likewise been drawn to the beauty of the natural world through the centuries. Across continents and cultures artists have beheld nature with awe and delight. And whether it was Fan K'uan gazing upon the misty mountaintops of China in the 11<sup>th</sup> century or Thomas Cole watching a storm rolling in over an oxbow in Connecticut in the 1830s, artists have sought to depict in art their deep spiritual experiences in nature.

Nature itself can become an inspiration, a catalyst, a means, or even a language for conveying the spiritual. Buddhist and Taoist paintings are filled with mountains, streams, waterfalls and bamboo trees, all imbued with deeper spiritual significance. Christian art, especially that drawn from a sacramental tradition, is similarly replete with images of creation that speak of their creator. Water is not just water but a multivalent symbol of birth, life, death and even new life in baptism. Animals, like birds and fish, can evoke feelings of freedom or stir symbolic awareness of God's presence. All of this is no further than a few steps away, in a garden, park, back yard or nature path — where God so eloquently speaks in the wonders of creation.

Contemporary artist Henna Kim is deeply attuned to this reality. Her art is filled with subtle evocations of the natural world: the contours of blooming flowers, a vast flock of birds undulating in the breeze, a school of fish swirling into the depths, water and its many personalities. It is important to re-iterate that she “evokes” these natural wonders. She

does not depict them representationally. Rather, her imagery attests to time spent in nature, attuned to the subtleties of light and color surrounding her. The resulting paintings are quite abstract: fields of color, simple shapes, occasional sparse symbolic representations. Yet to these abstract visual evocations she brings spiritual insight. Titles such as “Soli Deo Gloria,” “The Voice in the Desert,” and “I Come to the Garden Alone” gently steer the viewer into a religious, often Christian frame.

Consider her lovely series entitled “I Come to the Garden Alone” (see front cover). Viewed from a distance our eyes are welcomed into the various warm yellows, greens and browns one might encounter on a summer afternoon stroll through a forest. As one encounters the painting more closely a swirl of simply drawn ichthus-like fish team upon its surface. The colors, the fish, and the angle of the brushstrokes all then coalesce and create a type of pond one might happen upon with unexpected delight; the flourishing of life and light in a vision as much internal as it is external. Tellingly, this “solitary walk in the garden” reveals not solitude but connectedness. Alone in this garden one discovers a “school” of fish teaching by their very symbolic shapes a message of belonging: belonging within creation and belonging within the body of Christ.

In speaking of her attempt to convey her own spiritual experiences while enrapt in the process of painting Kim writes, “At that exact moment, my spiritual senses become so alive, so vivid, that I can ultimately encounter the way, the truth and the life. It sometimes feels as if I’m walking through a secret garden in a dewy morning or lying on the surface of a serene sea under a warm sun. I tried to express these feelings through a series of works called *I Come to the Garden Alone*” (2009).

Such confluence of nature, abstraction, spirituality, and symbol is difficult to name. In the late 1940s and early 1950s when art critics in the United States coined the term “abstract expressionism” some French art critics described a similar trend in French art “abstract lyricism.”<sup>1</sup> ‘Lyricism’ seemed a more accurate term for some of the artwork of the time that relied less upon emphatic gesture and paint splatter. Drawing from this observation, perhaps we could describe Henna Kim’s artwork as a type of sacramental lyricism. With its poetic weaving of natural imagery and sacred encounter, and its subtle use of symbol and abstraction, sacramental lyricism might just open the door to what Henna Kim is exploring in paper and paint. Whatever we might name it, its message is a promising one: in this God given

garden, being alone is not being lonely, and beauty is an invitation to belonging.

Note

<sup>1</sup> Éric de Chassey in *Joan Mitchell*, Ed. Sarah Roberts and Katy Siegel (London, Yale University Press, 2021) pg 90.

## Poetry

### A Hint of a Mischievous Smile

I was not doing anything in particular.  
Just nothing.

But to my right and upward field of vision  
I suddenly half-beheld a peal of laughter,  
gray eyes, a smile hinting of irony ...

This is not funny!  
What do you mean by this?

I am sad  
So sad that you have died,  
and you had a virtual viewed funeral!

What is this mischievous small smile at my side, just almost there, like  
a word I forgot?

Hesitant, I wrote your sister about it,  
since I had never met you in this life.

Her sister later informed me  
that, while in coma, she was able to kiss her goodbye;  
Catherine died in peace,  
in the hands of Mary, her sister felt sure,  
passing into eternal life  
on the vigil of the celebration day  
of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

So despite my sadness knowing  
of hospitals, strokes she suffered and inability to move limbs and  
slowness to speak,

I seem to have seen her gray eyes sparkling with hilarity ...  
a humorous essence  
lifted beyond the veil.

Yes, Catherine had a wicked sense of humor,  
her sister affirmed, and felt she'd laugh at the absurdity  
of a virtual, online-only funeral service!

Your sister related an escapade ....  
After newly installed in the assisted living facility as was necessary  
due to medical conditions, though not elderly, one sunny afternoon,  
you summoned a ride:  
Take me to the pizza joint,  
you directed.

You returned, having had your pizza and shopping,  
gone for an hour or so,  
safe and content.  
What was not deemed safe  
turned out happily.

One needs to reclaim a bit of an appetite  
for life,  
for pizza and shopping.

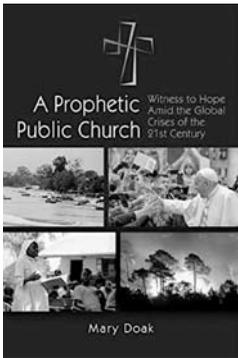
Too much is virtual,  
too much has been taken away;  
tell me another story  
of walking along as you wanted to do,  
despite orders to stay in your room.

For us, this endless time  
of only virtual reality ....  
I am angry for all those who are bereft  
of any real human contact and solace.

I tell myself funny stories  
of pizza and laughter,  
waiting  
for the doors  
to fling open.

Joan Lerman  
January, 2021

## Book Reviews



**A PROPHETIC  
PUBLIC CHURCH:  
WITNESS TO  
HOPE AMID THE  
GLOBAL CRISES  
OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY**  
Mary Doak,  
Liturgical Press  
Academic,  
Collegeville, MN.  
2020

We live in a time when political, ethnic, and racial divisions critically threaten the stability of our nation in ways not seen by most of us previously. The defense of individual rights and the pursuit of personal goals appears to replace the pursuit of the common good as a national value. In light of these realities, Mary Doak's book, *A Prophetic Public Church*, comes at a critically important time. One cannot help but hear the soundtrack of current social struggles playing in the background as this book concerning the mission of the Church is read. It succeeds in making the case for the relevance of the Church in today's world as both a sign of and an agent for unity, justice, and peace in the human family.

At the heart of this book is the importance of praxis for the Church's approach to ecclesiology. Noting the sacramental nature of this ecclesiology, Doak observes that the sign of unity, justice, and peace which the Church is called to be, is also the reality which the Church is called to both construct through political and social engagement and to live. The Church is to be both sign and instrument of unity-in-diversity. The author builds her description of the Church's mission firmly on the teachings of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, while acknowledging the authority of the Church's prior teachings and its teachers subsequent to the Council. Her theological research is sound and thorough, while at the same time readable and accessible to those outside the academic theological community.

The author notes that the Church's mission when it comes to promoting unity-in-diversity is in some cases at odds with its performance. Specifically, she devotes two chapters to what she identifies as "two of the church's signal failures to maintain unity-in-diversity," namely anti-Semitism and misogyny (*A Prophetic Public Church*, xix). These are offered as two areas where the Church of the future must learn to be Church differently than in its past and present.

Doak moves on to identify three issues with global impact that threaten the stability of unity and justice in the human family: the global economy with its many inequities, global climate change with its potential dangers to human survival, and the reality of widespread immigration which depletes the places of origin of immigrants and taxes the resources of the lands that receive them. In each case, the

author reflects on the prophetic responsibility of the Church to be both sign and instrument of redemptive change. Her challenge to the Church to live up to her mission is a source of hope for the reader, even amid the honest appraisal of the current state of affairs in the world.

The proclamation of this book's truth is haunted throughout by the reality of sin in the Church. The work begs reflection on how a sinful Church can maintain its credibility in pursuing a mission to call others to holiness. Doak does not shy away from this question but confronts it with faith in the power of grace to transform and in the necessity of the Church's honesty in confronting its failures.

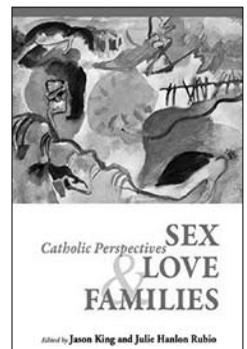
If there is a shortcoming in this book, it is the absence of racism in the list of "signal failures" of the Church in maintaining unity-in-diversity. Certainly, the events of the past year and a half have underscored the immensity of the problem of racism in the human family, not just in North America, but throughout the world. The Church's track record on slavery, colonial aggression, and racism has been shameful and yet is still often ignored. In all, *A Prophetic Public Church* is a good read. For Christians who have been concerned about the relevance of the Church for the future, this work is a source of hope.

Rev. J. Mark Hobson, DMin  
Pastor, St. Aloysius Church,  
Cleveland, Ohio

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This book addresses some of the most compelling subjects in Catholic and even in human history. Twenty-five articles on sex, love, and family take seriously the admonition of the Second Vatican Council to pay attention to the "signs of the times." Unlike dogma, human moral thinking evolves. New realities call us to consider new conclusions. What might Catholic teaching look like today on a topic as explosive and mutating as sex? What new might be said about tired topics like love and families? With respect to past and present Catholic thinking and documents, this book explores these questions with data and creativity.

The first section looks at sex, evolving relational and marital models, and gender. Drawing on sociology, statistics, and theology, the articles challenge the reader to reflect on the mores of the modern world. It is no secret that casual sex is happening today in what might be termed



**SEX, LOVE,  
AND FAMILIES:  
CATHOLIC  
PERSPECTIVES**  
Jason King and Julie  
Hanlon Rubio, eds.  
Liturgical Press  
Academic,  
Collegetown, MN.  
2020

the secular society, but any college professor can profess that it exists within the hallowed halls and dorm rooms of Catholic universities. Likewise, today's women are not merely silent and submissive — and sometimes uncomfortable — partners in sexual activity and in all aspects of marriage. Often, they join the prevailing party by choice.

Contemporary understanding of biology and psychology raises questions that past narratives either did not understand, avoided, or even censured. Today's relationships do not always fit models of what sexuality looked like in cultures of former times. Such novelty offers a fertile (you should pardon the expression) field to grow new paradigms of sex, marriage, and even of gender. This is true not only of the culture itself but of the incorporation of Catholic values, virtues, and voice. It is time for Catholic theology to take modern reality seriously.

The second section considers love as a call to holiness in traditional marriage. Committed love helps human beings develop virtues of friendship and fidelity and become a witnessing sacrament beyond the household. Sometimes the marital bed is the occasion for a wake-up call, as one author notes, "to get over yourself."

The articles do not stop there. They suggest an expanded notion of the mom, dad, and loving children model. Disparate family situations like widowhood, divorce, and the single state (with or without children), too, should be loci for love and the occasion for seeing and spreading the presence of Christ. The community has a responsibility to support and encourage this growth in all models. Picking up on the work of Lawler and Salzman, cohabitation as a journey toward marriage is discussed.

The third section digs deeper into how the notion of "family" has evolved. Marriages of today are much less homogeneous than those of the past. Love expands beyond a classic nuclear couple to economic realities, care, and involvement in the outside world.

Several articles raise the questions of "mixed" marriages. Families struggle with different religious affiliation or even no religion at all. There are marital pairs where one is incarcerated or does not have citizenship, causing separation for extended times.

As a go-to-meeting old Catholic theologian with almost sixty years of wedded experience, I found the book to be a rich potpourri of

thought. Some selections are “comfortable,” relying heavily on past and current Church teaching as their starting place. Others lean to sociological data and creative Catholic responses to today’s complex cultural reality (hooking up, feminism and other reshaping of gender roles, and gender itself). New paradigms: new questions.

The hegemony of traditional celibate commentators on marriage is past. Many of the authors represented here are themselves married theologians. Perhaps that accounts for the “real feel” of the work. Some articles chronicle the sociological reality. Others strive to apply Catholic thinking to these insights. Some pieces derive from personal experience. Others are more “heady.”

Bottom line: the book does not shy away from serious issues, covering everything from the hooking up and serial relationship culture of today to the challenge of modern-day marriage, such as family spirituality, play, and celebration, even during times of stress. The selections address the influence of privilege and feminism, and even put a positive spin on the seduction of technology.

This reviewer found the whole book exciting and challenging: a think-outside-the-box read. In addition to potential use in the classroom I recommend it strongly for partners, parents, pastors, and college professors. As Lisa Cahill notes in her back-cover comments about its classroom possibilities, “[no] student would skip the readings and the discussions would run themselves.” Some will be shocked and put it aside. That is regrettable. Others will take seriously the real changes in today’s culture and give the book a serious second thought. There is a lot to ponder here and a basket of hope for new ways of thinking.

Dolores Christi, Ph.D.  
Retired Executive Director of the Catholic Theological Society of  
America  
Shaker Heights, OH





## *EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS*

Nancy MacRoberts

Houston, Texas

Saint Peter Julian Eymard's life was quite different from mine! Many of us know the story where he embraced the tabernacle to get closer to Jesus at a very early age. Growing up in my family, Sunday School and Sunday Mass were a high priority. I remember very well my first confession and my very first holy communion. My confirmation was a highlight as I neared my teenage years. After a special weekend retreat, I remember meditating, strolling off alone to think about my relationship with God. From that first reception of holy communion, I always truly believed I was receiving the body of Christ. Even as a young girl awkwardly becoming an adult, I knew that God and I were growing closer and closer. This developing relationship continues and I still hold it close to my heart.

When the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament began its ministry at my parish, we heard of Peter Julian Eymard, but we knew nothing about his life. Thanks to these wonderfully spiritual priests, we began to understand how important Eucharist was to Saint Eymard and through him, to us as well. We gained a new appreciation that God the Father sent his only Son, Jesus, to share our humanity and that Jesus would become the bread of life for our very souls. His sacrifice, his gift of himself would gain eternal life for us. This is the celebration of Eucharist!

In 1989, some of our parishioners attended a "Life In The Eucharist" program (LITE) organized by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. Afterward, we were invited to learn more about what we had heard. We agreed to become the first group of lay people to lead this program ourselves. At our first meeting, we all said we didn't think we could do it. We didn't consider ourselves worthy or knowledgeable enough. But with urging and the gentle persuasion of the Holy Spirit, we decided to try. It wasn't until we developed our own presentations concerning the many aspects of Eucharist that we finally got it. There's nothing like putting words down in black and white to help you understand. We prayed together, we met and talked a lot, and slowly a cohesive group was formed that then shared the LITE programs with many others. Importantly, we grew in the love of God and one another. As Saint Peter Julian Eymard often stressed, we were learning to give a "gift of ourselves." We opened ourselves to a real connection with God in the Eucharist, a growth in our eucharistic spirituality that continues to this day!





**Prayer in honor of  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard**  
(Feast Day: August 2)

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

Solitude carries the pure and simple soul toward God. . . . The silence in the countryside recollects the soul naturally, and when we know how to read in every pure creature the good which God has placed in it for human beings and for God's own glory. Oh! What beautiful aspirations we can send back to God, the author of every good!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Eymard" on the top line and "S. P. J." on the bottom line. The signature is written in white ink on a dark background.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
(To Mrs. Natalie Jordan, July 9, 1866)