Emmanuel

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COVER

Vesperbild (Pietà)
c. 1515-20
MASTER OF RABENDEN
Lindenwood, polychromed and gilded
Overall: 89.1 x 78.7 x 32.4 cm
Cleveland Museum of Art

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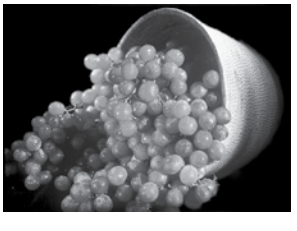
Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 127 Number 2



FROM THE EDITOR

On the feast of The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14, 2020), Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSpS, issued a pastoral letter to the people of the Archdiocese of San Antonio entitled *Transformed by Hope, Let Us Rebuild Our Tomorrow!* Its release came as the United States and much of the world was entering into a second and far deadlier wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw rates of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths surge to their highest levels. December would bring promising developments, especially the release and distribution of vaccines, but the long, dark winter predicted by many experts is just beginning to give way to spring. We are living the paschal mystery personally, collectively, and ecclesially.

Archbishop Gustavo writes: "People's faith and even their very idea of God may be challenged when their world seems to crumble. Fear blocks reason and prevents action, it makes people unable to acknowledge truth and appreciate beauty; it banishes love. Since ancient times, people have tried to make sense of suffering and chaos by creating their own images of gods. We are all tempted, one way or another, to create a god in our own image and likeness, not realizing that we cannot save ourselves" (16).

Questions arise: Are we being punished? Is it the end of the world? Where is God in this? Archbishop Gustavo in turn ask, "Discernment of the present situation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may pose more relevant inquiries: How does our faith truly relate to this, to help us find peace and recover joy? How do God's infinite mercy and unlimited power manifest themselves now? How can we allow ourselves to be encountered by God? How can we bring God's consolation to others? How can COVID-19 be turned into an opportunity for our world to be better than before?"

Archbishop Gustavo casts what we are living through in a paschal light. "Once we have encountered the Lord, we will realize that our suffering matters so much to Jesus that he 'participates in our pain to overcome

it,' and to draw good out of evil, which only he can do. Christ, more than anyone, cares about us" (18). The call of this moment is to open ourselves in solidarity and love to the dying and rising of the body of Christ, the Church, and that of all humanity, our brothers and sisters.

As Archbishop Gustavo says, "Giving his life for us, Jesus says to each one: 'Your life is worth so much to me, that to save it I give all of myself." As we are liberated by the Holy Spirit to participate in the mission of Christ, not only are we made collaborators, but we are transformed into members of Christ's family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, and each other's keepers.

The extraordinary goodness and self-giving of so many — first responders, healthcare workers, and families of the stricken and the dead — call forth generosity and solidarity from us. "The life that God's love begets in us is meant to be life-giving for those around us and for the whole world" (40).

The end result of living through such a challenging time need not be death and devastation. Archbishop Gustavo declares: "The world will never be the same, but that can be a good thing. Putting this time of trial to work can produce a harvest of more faith, hope, and love in our communities. In a way, the harm that the virus does is more than overturned by the good done by love. And along the path of love, all the other virtues are planted and bloom like a garden in spring." May Easter find us again in a garden, renewed!

Anthony Schueller, SSS
Senior Editor

In This Issue

Lent and Easter are times we often give to deeper prayer. In this issue we have a number of articles that will aid in one's prayer-life. Michael DeSanctis offers a timely reflection upon the death of Jesus as portrayed in *The Master of Rabenden's* marvelously sculpted *Vesperbild* (see front cover). John Zupez, SJ offers insights into why we call upon the intercession of the saints and Carlos X. Colorado gives us a model of prayer based upon the life of Saint Oscar Romero. At its heart prayer is about our relationship with God. To better understand this relationship Owen Cummings presents Ernest Skublics' Trinitarian Theology and Dennis Billy, C.Ss.R. continues his series exploring the Eucharistic theology of well-known literary figures. Here he explores the theology of Charles Williams who envisions a place for romantic love in our understanding of God. May these reflections aid your journey through these liturgical seasons.

Lenten Reflection on the Cleveland Museum of Art's *Master of Rabenden Vesperbild*

by Michael DeSanctis

What meaning do we make of images of suffering that portray Christ's passion and death?

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

I STILL REMEMBER THE INTERIOR CONFLICT THAT BEFELL ME AFTER SEEING STEVEN Spielberg's *Schindler's List* for the first time in a theater. As the credits rolled to the sound of John William's elegiac closing music, people as emotionally drained as I remained frozen in their seats, whimpering quietly behind wads of Kleenex or sobbing outright with little apparent compunction to stanch the flow of tears. What had we just experienced sitting captive in the darkness together for over three hours? More important, what were we supposed to do upon returning to the light of day with the images Spielberg had so masterfully imprinted on our consciences — images from which we all likely wanted to turn but *couldn't* for fear of missing even a single moment of the film's cinematic allure?

To this day, for example, I can't shake the memory of the much-discussed scene involving the little girl in the red coat whom the audience first sees wending through the streets of Krakow as the liquidation of that city's Jewish ghetto unfolds around her. She is the same little girl whose lifeless, rag-doll-of-a-body we spy a few scenes later atop a cartload of corpses on their way to mass-incineration. The sight is heartbreaking, yet so artful in its presentation as to entice us into staring transfixed at something from which we'd ordinarily avert our eyes. Through some technical slight-of-hand, and by assuming his audience's natural soft spot for the child, Spielberg succeeds in having us participate in a kind of voyeurism that is perfectly acceptable in its theatrical context. "Look here; you need to see this!" the director insists by electing to colorize the girl's outer attire in an otherwise black-and-white film: "This is the same little girl whose tiny form I helped you track a few minutes ago through the riotous streets of Krakow — but now she lies among the innocent dead for whom you should weep."

Art, especially that broadly bearing the label "Modern" produced since about 1800, has routinely invited its audience to confront head-on subjects that elicit discomfort. The point is to *change* viewers in some deep and lasting way, and nothing, the Modern artist believes, achieves this more effectively than to shake and shock them out of a state of complacency by means of imagery altogether foreign to their experience. In this vein one thinks, for example, of Francisco Goya's (1746-1828) famous *The Third of May 1808* (1814), a painting commemorating the execution of Spanish citizens by a firing squad comprised of soldiers from Napoleon's invading army; an etching like *Arbeitslosigkeit* (*Unemployment*) from 1909 by German printmaker Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), depicting a woman in childbed, her beleaguered husband and other children enwreathing her in a circle of despair; or any of the extraordinary images from the early twentieth century of social reformer Lewis Hine (1874-1940), whose photographs of tiny children standing half-blinded and limbless beside enormous machines helped expedite development of the nation's child labor laws.

Vesperbild (Pietà)
c. 1515-20
MASTER OF RABENDEN
Lindenwood, polychromed and gilded
Overall: 89.1 x 78.7 x 32.4 cm
Cleveland Museum of Art

In retrospect, Spielberg's gesture seems heavy-handed because it is. So close is he to the larger theme surrounding *Schindler's List*, the whole of the Jewish Holocaust, that he seemingly cannot help himself from being didactic about it, nor from approaching the story-telling requirements of his motion picture with such realism as to lend it the appearance of documentary filmmaking. The sheer black-and-whiteness that prevails throughout the film lulls viewers into forgetting that it is built of a sequence of *artifices* Spielberg has placed before them, not visual records of actual objects or events culled from history. As a consequence of its reliance on photography, the film is *inherently* "fictive" in the way that philosopher Susan Sontag (1933-2004) applied the term to the medium.[1] This is doubly so because of the way in which it not only substitutes the flickering vestiges of objects and events for the things themselves but parades before the audience dramatic situations that, in their own way, are mere substitutes for real ones. If the audience is unable to bear witness to the actual atrocities of the Holocaust, the director's rationale appears

to be, at least it can be made to respond to my carefully fabricated *reenactments* of such atrocities.

Witnessing the Crucified Christ

One might wonder whether similar intentions have guided the work of those artists over the centuries assisting the Church in it's re-telling of the gospel, a collection of stories punctuated by a holocaust of its own to which Christians exhibit an intriguing attachment. During one Holy Week when I was a boy, for example, my family encountered a woman crying alone in our church as she knelt before the crucifix. Seeing tears streaming down her cheeks as we neared her, my parents inquired as to whether she was alright. "I'm fine," she responded, as if surprised that the sight of tears in a Catholic place of worship should be cause for alarm. "It's just that the whole thing is *so beautiful*," she explained, nodding toward the figure of the crucified Christ to which she was directing her prayers, as succinct an expression of human barbarism on one level as one can imagine.

And yet, the cross and its victim mesmerize us. Historical distance and endless cultural adaptation buffer the pious today from the more repulsive circumstances surrounding Jesus' death. This has been the case for every generation of believers since about the early fifth century, when the subject first gained acceptance among Christian artists and their patrons. It's a testament to the claim the subject holds on the Christian imagination — along with the acquired tolerance Christians themselves have exhibited for its horror — that it has endured for centuries as a source of *aesthetic* delight. Piety and art would seem to be conjoined in the hands of those artists from every age whose aim has been to transport believers from their existing time and station to the foot of the cross (as director Spielberg does the streets of Krakow) and thereby ask them: "What if *you* had witnessed this event in the flesh?"

This is a matter posed to the mind by way of the senses, of course, which makes tricky business of discerning whether the artwork in question succeeds solely on its merits as an aid to prayer, as an object of sensual pleasure, or both. Like all art, that which is labelled "Christian" succeeds or fails on its ability to arrest the attention of its beholder. Should a particular example fail on aesthetic grounds, it may still bear some value as an object of religious contemplation. Should it achieve artistic virtue but nothing to elevate the spiritual state of its viewers, it risks categorization as "Christian" altogether.

The Master of Rabenden's *Vesperbild*

In the presence of the sixteenth century *Vesperbild*[2] (fig. 1) by the so-called Master of Rabenden in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art, such philosophical concerns fall away. From this polychromed carving in wood of the Virgin Mary cradling the body of her crucified son we draw instead feelings of such poignancy as to remove any doubt that it originates in both spirit and matter. Even in its museum context, unmoored as it is from the Bavarian chapel altar it once adorned, the piece invokes in viewers a state of silent reverence. At less than three feet high and only thirty-one inches across, however, this literal "visualizing" (Germ. *bild*) of the Church's vesper prayers for Good Friday remains entirely approachable on both physical and psychological levels, its diminutive size inviting us to draw close enough to examine its subtlest details. Indeed, the work benefits from its diminutive size and from not having been "rarified" in the way that, say Michelangelo's treatment of the same theme has in his universally-celebrated Vatican *Pietà* (1498-9). Few today would regard "intimacy" to be part of the viewing experience associated with the latter, which is roughly twice as tall and two-and-a-half times as wide as its Cleveland counterpart and displayed at such an exaggerated height within its special preserve at Saint Peter's Basilica as to hover above the heads of its viewers.[3]

"I'm fine," she responded, as if surprised that the sight of tears in a Catholic place of worship should be cause for alarm. "It's just that the whole thing is so beautiful," she explained, nodding toward the figure of the crucified Christ to which she was directing her prayers…

By way of contrast, the *Vesperbild* is fixed upon a table-height plinth approachable from three sides. Viewers may thus gaze directly upon Christ's contorted figure and slightly upward, into the face of the grief-stricken Virgin. There are other ways in which the piece differs from the fabled work by Michelangelo, which, rightly or wrongly, has become a common standard by which artistic treatment of the *vesperbild/pietà* motif is judged. Chief among these, perhaps, is the physical and emotional realism with which its subjects have been presented. One does not find here the sort of idealization of form

favored by the Florentine sculptor and his generation of like-minded Neoplatonists from Europe's southern states, which transforms the sight of the lifeless Christ and his emotionless mother into a source of spiritual-aesthetic bliss.

What the anonymous creator of the Cleveland *Vesterbild* achieves, instead, is a kind of forensic account of the bodily suffering Jesus' death would have entailed set against the mental anguish endured by his mother. The requisite components of the subject — a figure of the crucified Christ lying across the lap of his mother — are arranged in customary, pyramidal form, a rectangular dado resembling a sarcophagus/altar serving as a bench for the seated Madonna. Mary struggles to remain upright while embracing her son, her legs splayed and cocked to support his unwieldy mass, her arms forming a kind of sling by which she saves his body from tumbling earthward under its own weight. The rounded contours of the Virgin's multi-layered clothing, offset by selective gilding, dabs of blue-toned paint and red, are contrasted by the boney angularity of the Christ figure, his ashen skin the product of whitewashing liberally stippled in red to suggest droplets and streams of blood. Christ's head falls loosely down and backward from the neck and bears an expression of anguish frozen in death. The Virgin's face, half-concealed beneath a heavy veil, conveys by way of a slight frown, hooded eyes, and swollen eyelids a state of dejection legible to any viewer acquainted with deep loss. We grieve along with this woman whose crimeless son has suffered the indignity of a criminal's death.

we can appreciate this Vesperbuild not merely as an attempt to lend visual form to the timeless prayer-texts of the Church but as a lamentation in its own right

The Rabenden Master succeeds in binding mother and son together in an expression of supreme acquiescence. To the Christian viewer, this may likewise be taken as embodying trust in the power over life and death reserved for the Divine Father who implicitly judges the scene from afar. We are pressed by the appalling straightforwardness with which Jesus' remains are laid before us to participate in a kind of "sacred autopsy" that brings to mind not only *how* Jesus died but exactly *why*. "He . . . bore our sins in his body on the cross," the opening verse of the Church's Good Friday vespers declares, echoing 1 Peter

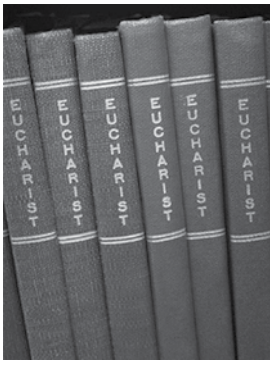
2:24, "so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness." The twin promptings of Scripture and sculpture borne of Christ's passion thus cause us to contemplate the perennial horror story that plays out in the human soul as much as they do Calvary's appalling realities. Something deeply attractive in a metaphysical way may be found in each, however, an intuition of the tomb-vacating promise of Easter and an inkling of the inexplicable beauty that lies just beneath the surface appearance of things. In the end, then, we can appreciate the Cleveland *Vesperbuild* not merely as an attempt to lend visual form to the timeless prayer-texts of the Church but as a lamentation *in its own right*, a prayer-object offered by its carver to the very Savior whose likeness he deems to render here in wood.

Notes

[1] Though, since its advent in the 1830s, generations of viewers have been led to believe that "photography never lies," Sontag famously argued that the medium was the most deceitful of any employed for visual expression. By recording so precisely the appearance of what lies before the camera lens, photography supplies its audience with two-dimensional surrogates for what it depicts — a phenomenon that affects even the language people use to describe the photographic experience. When asked, "What is this?" after being shown photograph of, say, a banana, the average viewer will respond simply that "it's a banana," not more accurately that "it's a *photograph* of a banana." This and other aspects of photography's unique properties are treated in Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux: New York) 1977.

[2] *Vesperbild* is the Germanic label for the sculptural motif depicting the grieving Mother of Christ cradling the crucified body of her Son known more familiarly in Western art as a *pietà*. The term makes clear that its purpose is to give visual expression (Germ. "*bild*") to the Church's vesper prayers for Good Friday.

[3] In effect, Michelangelo's masterpiece must be viewed obliquely, from *beneath*. It doesn't help that visitors to the basilica are not able to draw any closer to the work than the mouth of its Chapel of St. Petronilla setting, nor that since 1972, they've been required to view the work through a pane of protective glass.



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Ernest Skublics and the Sacraments, *In Piam Memoriam*

by Owen Cummings

What is the connection between the sacraments and the Trinity and why is it important?

Owen F. Cummings is the Regents' Professor of Theology at Mount Angel Seminary St. Benedict, OR

Ernest Skublics (1936-2019), Theologian

Ernest Skublics was a very fine liturgical and sacramental theologian. Just a few weeks after his death on April 9, 2019, his final book *Plunged into the Trinity: Our Sacramental Becoming, Essays in Sacramental Ecclesiology* was published.[1] He may not have been well known in the theological "hall of fame" but his theological contribution and commitment are second to none. Born in Hungary in 1936, he emigrated to Canada in 1957 and pursued his theological studies in various places: Sant' Anselmo in Rome, the University of Ottawa, the Liturgical Institute of the University of Trier in Germany, and the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He published many articles in various journals especially the *Canadian Catholic Review,* as well as two very substantial academic books in ecclesiology: *How Eastern Orthodoxy Can Contribute to Roman Catholic Renewal: A Theological and Pastoral Proposal* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), and *Aspects and Implications of Communion Ecclesiology* (Calgary: Theophania Publishing, 2001). Ernest was also a passionate ecumenist with a great love for the Orthodox tradition and the Anglican Communion.

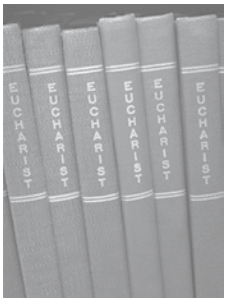
Synopsis of *Plunged into the Trinity*

There are very few really readable and accessible books that connect the sacraments with the Church and also with the doctrine of the Trinity that do not leave the reader wondering what the author is writing about! As well as his more academic works already noted, Ernest Skublics has written one such very fine book, *Plunged Into the Trinity: Our Sacramental Becoming: Essays in Sacramental Ecclesiology*,

and this essay is a detailed survey of the book hoping to demonstrate its value to clergy, teachers of theology, and catechists alike.

The very title of the book demonstrates the immediate connection between baptism — being plunged ritually into water — and the blessed Trinity, the Divine Communion into which we are inserted through this "being plunged." Skublics writes: "I have heard more than enough sermons on occasions like Trinity Sunday suggesting that the Mystery of the Trinity is something theologians worry about but is really not for ordinary faithful to try to understand" (1). Of course, he realizes that we can never fully comprehend or grasp God. What he wants to achieve, however, is a fundamental and permeative connection between the sacraments, the Church, and the Trinity, and a connection such that it will make the doctrine of the Trinity come more alive for ordinary believers. That is why his title is *Plunged into the Trinity,* "because, quite literally, that is where the whole story begins for us, when we are plunged — with the Greek word, '*baptized*'— into the Trinity" (2).

Baptism followed by all the other sacraments is simply part and parcel of common Christian experience, and Skublics wants us to explore in depth what these sacramental experiences mean. "… Digesting the liturgy in a reflective, contemplative silence, extending, cherishing, and savoring that encounter is the real, existential role of theology. So, we must not write off theology as some sort of rarefied hobby for odd-ball specialists who have nothing to do with real life. *Real* theology is *our life*, our prayer, our learning to understand who we are, what we are here for and where we are going: our intelligent cultivation of our relationship with God" (3). Put very simply but hopefully not simplistically, God wants to communicate with us, God wants to commune with us, that is to say, become one with us. The medium by means of which all of this happens is the Incarnation of the Word of God. This is how Skublics sums it up: "Jesus is the primary, Fundamental Sacrament, the sacrament of our encounter with God. In and through him we meet God himself in his humanity, hear God himself speaking like a man, receive God himself. And that is what all the sacraments do as extensions of the incarnate Jesus, who is present and acting in and through them. Think of this Fundamental Sacrament extending himself into bread and wine to enter into our very physical being to be united with us, and making us into himself!" (4). What a wonderful summary of what the sacraments, founded in the Fundamental Sacrament that is Jesus, are all about, and as Skublics remarks that requires "meditation for a lifetime" (7).



Before continuing I think it may be necessary to say something about Skublics's use of the term "Fundamental Sacrament." The term comes from Dr. Skublics's doctoral supervisor at the University of Nijmegen, the great Edward Schillebeeckx, OP. Schillebeeckx published in English in 1963 an outstanding book with the title *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, itself an abbreviated version of a much larger book published in Flemish on sacramental theology.[2] Undoubtedly, it was the influence of Schillebeeckx on Skublics that led to the latter's use of the term for Christ "Fundamental Sacrament."

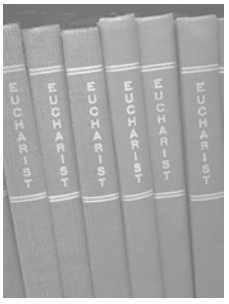
The very title of the book demonstrates the immediate connection between baptism – being plunged ritually into water – and the blessed Trinity, the Divine Communion into which we are inserted through this "being plunged."

Recognizing the paradigm for Christian initiation in the Easter Vigil — baptism, confirmation, Eucharist — we are first plunged into union with the Divine Communion in baptism, described by Saint Paul in Romans 6:3-11 as being immersed into the death of Christ and then raised with him. The meaning of baptism is clear, but what about the sacrament of confirmation? Skublics is aware that "it is difficult to ascribe a radically distinct function and grace to the sacrament of confirmation, as it was originally never separated from baptism, but was an integral part of it, and baptism itself confers a gift of the Holy Spirit" (14). In this respect he recognizes that East and West went their separate ways with regard to the post-baptismal anointing — with the East keeping the integrated rites of initiation, and the West separating out the post-baptismal anointing for the bishop at some later time after baptism. His instincts as a liturgical theologian would have been to restore the integrity of the rites — baptism, confirmation/chrismation as the East calls it, and Eucharist — but for whatever reason he does not advert to paragraph 1303 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. There we find at least an attempt to understand the necessary and integral relation between baptism and confirmation: "Confirmation brings an increase in deepening of baptismal grace: — it roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, 'Abba! Father!'; — it unites us more firmly to Christ; — it increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; — it renders our bond with the church more perfect; — it gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of

Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the cross."[3] The drafters of the catechism at this point clearly want to bridge the chasm of meaning with regard to the sacrament of confirmation, and an awareness of this paragraph might have helped Dr. Skublics in his brief presentation of confirmation.

What Skublics wants to achieve is a fundamental and permeative connection between the sacraments, the Church, and the Trinity, and a connection such that it will make the doctrine of the Trinity come more alive for ordinary believers.

The Eucharist lies at the heart of *Plunged into the Trinity*, and so Skublics goes on to say, "the Eucharist, as it is the heart of the Church, as, indeed, in a sense it is the Church itself in becoming" (17). When he comments on the Eucharist, he provides a synopsis of eucharistic theology with which all readers of *Emmanuel* will be well acquainted, so that there is little need to rehearse them here. However, it may be helpful to remark on one point, his very pertinent appreciation of *epiclesis*. Looking historically at the *epiclesis* in Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* and also at Eucharistic Prayer II of the Roman Rite, Skublics writes: "It is instructive to look at the very oldest extent Eucharistic prayer, the one of Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, from which Eucharistic Prayer II is derived: it has only one single *epiclesis*, which brings out the very thing that we are talking about, that *the Eucharist makes the Church*: that the consecration of the bread and wine has as its very purpose the consecration of the people who receive it into the Body of Christ" (26-27). The point is so well worth making because the Eucharist is about receiving the Body of Christ so as to become more deeply individually and corporately the Body of Christ, so as to give witness to that embodiment in our particular circumstances in everyday life. The connection, if you like, of "Receive, Become, Live," is the emphasis that Skublics wishes to communicate.[4] He then goes on to parse this emphasis at considerable length, referencing as he does the theological insights of Catholic theologians Henri de Lubac and Paul McPartlan, and Orthodox theologians John Zizioulas and Nicolas Afanassief. For these theologians and for Ernest Skublics himself "The Eucharist is the heart of the Church; indeed, in a sense, it is the Church itself in becoming," and this Church through the celebration of the Eucharist is mystagogically drawn "into the very being of God the Holy Trinity" (31-35). Really, Christians have always known this, but in the



style and elegant language of Skublics one is, to use his own words in his title, further "plunged into the Trinity."

Skublics now turns his attention to the downside, as it were, of our being plunged into the Trinity — our flawed moral performance, our sinfulness, and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Thus, Catholics ask such questions as "Can I go to communion today or should I go to confession first?" or "Do I need to go to confession at all?" This is what he writes: "These questions are the products of centuries of development in interpreting what communion, being in communion or being in effect excommunicated means, what the nature and proper use of sacramental reconciliation is, and how we distinguish between sins that result in effectively excluding us from communion and therefore require us to be sacramentally reconciled and those that are not as serious as that" (61). He offers clarification through a brief but very fine examination of the history of the sacrament, emphasizing the public or corporate nature of the sacrament. This is very helpful because in our current practice and experience Catholic children are expected to receive the sacrament of penance and reconciliation before first communion. This, of course, interrupts the sequence of Christian initiation and one could argue about how helpful that is. What is not up for argument or debate is the fact that young children are growing and developing in their appreciation of morality, and in their knowledge of when they have done wrong. Arguably, children are not capable of performing such immoral actions that they are effectively cut off from the communion of the Church, or in more common parlance, they are not capable of committing mortal sin. Skublics comments: "The sacraments, as liturgical acts, are, by definition, public and communal in nature, and reconciliation originally was a public act to remedy public offenses damaging the community. Its extended use for all sins is certainly a most valuable spiritual remedy, but may not be absolutely necessary in all cases of serious but private sins" (64). This last sentence in the quotation is particularly worthwhile. He is suggesting that the sacramental experience is spiritually most valuable but not always absolutely necessary.

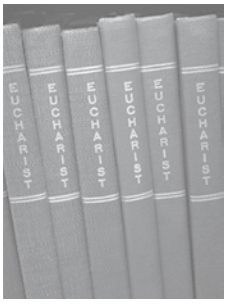
I wonder if we may take this just a little bit further. Perhaps we might say that the one sacrament of penance and reconciliation may function in two distinct ways. First, it may function as penance. "Penance" here means a comprehensive ongoing process, involving every feature and practice of Christian life, by which believers are more fully converted

and configured to Christ. No one is exempt from this process, even small children. When they do wrong, we require them to think about it, reflect on it, make what we used to call a firm purpose of amendment, have a timeout and so forth. All that is penance. Second, the sacrament may function as reconciliation. "Reconciliation" here means the formal restoration of baptized believers to the communion of the Church after serious sin. In other words, while not all Christians may require reconciliation, all certainly require penance, including small children.[5] I believe that Ernest Skublics would find himself in agreement with these brief considerations. His final words on the sacrament of penance and reconciliation are particularly noteworthy. He writes: "The confessional is a private, safe, confidential place, where we can share questions, explorations, reactions we have to the Word of God and his call to us, and, yes, of course it is an incredible privilege for the priest to be trusted, to be able to be, at the very least, a sounding board, and, perhaps more often someone who is himself prodded to move on and deepen, but also who can share and apply the wisdom of the church and his own experience to the life of another" (66). The final chapter of the book is given over to "The Church and Beyond in the Perspective of Trinitarian Communion," and there he provides some wonderful stimuli that help us bring together what theologians have called the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity.

the Eucharist is about receiving the Body of Christ so as to become more deeply individually and corporately the Body of Christ, so as to give witness to that embodiment in our particular circumstances in everyday life

Ecumenical Significance

It is my conviction that while this little volume is intended immediately for catechists preparing children for the sacraments, it is of real value to all Christians of any and every age. Ernest Skublics's book, *Plunged into the Trinity,* is an excellent resource for all involved in Christian religious education, and not just for the catechists following the catechetical methods of the Good Shepherd, with whom the chapters of this book originated as talks. Skublics is so well placed to provide such an outstanding instrument for catechesis. He has spent a lifetime studying and exploring liturgical and sacramental theology and, more importantly, actively participating in the liturgical assembly. His focus



on eucharistic ecclesiology, with the Eucharist as the beating heart of the Church drawing us into the life of the Trinity, affords him a richly creative integrating focus for his reflections. Any catechist, indeed, anyone interested in Christian theology, will benefit from this book, and not only from the well-informed historical and theological perspective provided by the author. They will benefit also from the lucidity with which the book is written (including its illustrative diagrams), as well as from its powerful ecumenical awareness. In respect of the latter Skublics draws insight and illustration from across the ecclesial spectrum — for example, from Metropolitan John Zizioulas, Nikolai Afanassief (the Orthodox tradition), Paul McPartlan (Roman Catholic), Martin Luther and his great commentator Paul Althaus, and Geoffrey Wainwright (Methodist), among others. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Notes

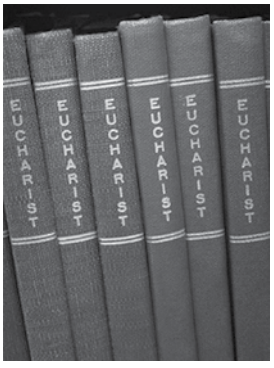
[1] Ernest Skublics, *Plunged into the Trinity: Our Sacramental Becoming, Essays in Sacramental Ecclesiology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock/Cascade Books, 2019).

[2] Edward Schillebeeckx, OP., *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

[3] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), 330.

[4] I owe this inspiring phrase to my colleague, Dr. Katy Leamy.

[5] See Owen F. Cummings, "Sacraments of Initiation and Reconciliation," in Anne Hession and Patricia Kieran, ed., *Exploring Theology, Making Sense of the Catholic Tradition* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 2007) 242-249.



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Charles Williams on the Eucharist

by Dennis J. Billy, C.Ss.R.

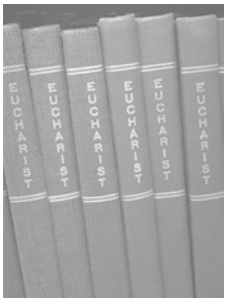
What might romantic love tell us about the Eucharist and our relationship with God?

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

Charles Williams (1886-1945), a prolific lecturer, poet, playwright, novelist, biographer, literary critic, and lay theologian was born in London and studied at Saint Albans School and University College, London. He joined the staff of Oxford University Press at the age of twenty-two, first as a proofreader and later as an editor, remaining there for the rest of his life. A strong adherent of the Catholic wing of the Church of England, he was friends with such literary figures as T. S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Dorothy Sayers. He was also a member of The Inklings, an informal literary club hosted by Lewis that met weekly on Tuesday mornings at The Eagle and the Child pub in Oxford. His rather extended literary corpus includes seven books of poetry, eighteen plays, seven novels, eight biographies, ten works of literary criticism, and six theological writings. His novels include: *War in Heaven* (1930), *Many Dimensions* (1930), *The Place of the Lion* (1931), *The Greater Trumps* (1932), *Shadows of Ecstasy* (1933), *Descent into Hell* (1937), and *All Hallows Eve* (1945). In his theological writings, he is best known for his work on the theology of romantic love and his theory of coinherence, both of which had a profound influence on his understanding of the Eucharist.[1]

Williams's Spiritual Outlook

Williams was a member of the High Anglican tradition, which is otherwise referred to as the Catholic wing of the Church of England. A traditionalist and conservative in his theological outlook, he is considered one of the great lay theologians of the twentieth century. Although his reputation somewhat waned after his death in 1945, it has undergone a resurgence in recent years, in part because of his association with C.S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and The Inklings, and also



because of recent biographies on him.[2] In his theological writings, he made two important contributions that deeply influenced his spiritual outlook: his development of the theology of romantic love and the notion of coinherence.

Williams developed his theology of romantic love from his musings on Dante's feminine muse, Beatrice, who led the poet through the stages of the spiritual journey in the *Divine Comedy*. "The basic principles of Romantic Theology," Williams states, "can be reduced to a single formula: which is, the identification of love with Jesus Christ, and of marriage with His life."[3] According to Grevel Lindop, from this basic principle Williams goes on "to find analogies or 'correspondences' between the experiences of love and marriage and the life of Christ."[4] The narrative of the life of Christ, for Williams, is the interpretative pattern for understanding marriage. Jesus' birth corresponds to the birth of love between husband and wife; his baptism, to the marriage ceremony; his temptation in the desert, to those that a couple undergoes when they are tempted to think that the sufferings of married life can be magically turned around. In time, love will also undergo a crucifixion, a resurrection, as well as an experience of the indwelling grace of the Spirit. Williams, in effect, was trying to establish a new branch of theology, one that gave erotic love its due as an authentic way to holiness rooted in the Gospels and the way of the Lord Jesus. Called to see the beloved through the eyes of God, each lover would see their relationship as patterned after the love of God, the Word-made-flesh.[5]

Williams's theory of coinherence, in turn, is a development of the patristic concept of *perichoresis* (or circumincession), a doctrine that explains the interpenetration of the relationships among the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, as well as that between the divine and human natures in Christ. It explains the unity of the one and the many by showing how, even though the various persons of the Trinity or natures of Christ penetrate one another, they still maintain their distinct and proper boundaries. Williams takes this concept and extends it to the Body of Christ and the New Creation. Jesus, he maintains, divinizes humanity, "not by conversion of Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God."[6] Faith in Christ, moreover, also immerses us in a web of relationships: with the Christ himself and, through him, with the Father and the Spirit, as well as with the communion of saints, and with all of creation. Our individual identities, while distinct and with clear boundaries, thus cannot be separated from

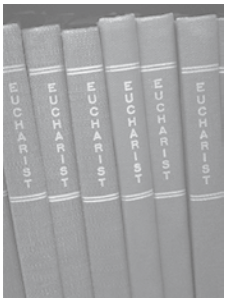
this intricate web of relationships, which thus highlights the social character of human existence. Salvation, when seen in this light, is not an isolated affair between the individual and God but a communal enterprise with ramifications for the human community as a whole and for each of us as individuals: "The principle is one of the open secrets of the saints; we might draw the smallest step nearer sanctity if we used it. Substitution in love, exchanges in love, are a part of it; 'oneself' and 'others' are only specialized terms of its technique."[7] We are saved primarily as a people and only secondarily as individuals. Williams's theology of romantic love and his concept of coinherence permeates his entire spiritual outlook and have great importance for his understanding of the sacraments of the Church.

Williams on the Eucharist

Williams's explanation of the Eucharist is a case in point. The theology of romantic love, he maintains, embodies the same love present in the sacrament through the conjugal love of husband and wife. The sacrament also represents the fullness of coinherence, since a union of separate ontological entities takes place with no confusion of substances. Jesus lives in us and we in him. These two concepts — the theology of romantic love and the principle of coinherence — work together to bring a very creative understanding of what takes place at the Eucharist.

If the Eucharist is the "Sacrament of Love," it follows that it finds itself wherever authentic love exists.

When applied to the Eucharist, for example, Williams's theology of romantic love draws a close connection between the sacrament and the marriage bed: "In that intercourse which is usually referred to as the consummation of marriage the presence of Love, that is, of Christ, is sacramentally imparted by each to the other. If this act is not capable of being a sacrament, then it is difficult to see in what way marriage itself is more sacramental than any other occupation; … the Christ of the Eucharist and the Love of the marriage-night are indeed not two but one."[8] In this instance, the marriage bed points to the sacrament of the Eucharist and even participates in the Love that Christ seeks to communicate to his Church. The work of sanctification takes place in the love of husband and wife, especially in the intimate



bodily and spiritual exchange that takes place in sexual intercourse. The body of the Risen Lord, who is present in the consecrated species "may already be shaped and nourished throughout the sacred bodies of the lovers."[9]

In a similar way, the principle of coinherence underscores how the Incarnation of Christ continues in and through the Eucharist. In the Incarnation, divinity weds itself to humanity in a way that unifies them while at the same time keeping them distinct. Whenever Mass is celebrated, the same union-in-separation takes place in the Eucharistic elements: Jesus body, blood, soul and divinity become one with the bread and wine, while remaining distinct. As Mary McDermott Shideler notes "…it is the sacrament [the Eucharist] that most directly involves the body: the communicant eats and drinks; the stomach digests the elements; the physical flesh is nourished and renewed. Man gave his flesh to Christ; and receives Christ's flesh back from him in a mystery of mutual exchange, so that the acts of exchange operate not only through minds, hearts, and wills, but also physically."[10] The coinherence of Jesus' glorified body with the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine facilitates a similar coinherence between him and the communicant: the two become one body yet remain distinct; the communicant also becomes one with the entire communion of saints, all of whom are distinct members of the one mystical Body of Christ.

For Williams, the theology of romantic love and the principle of coinherence shed new light upon the meaning of the Eucharist. In seeking to highlight the spiritual significance of erotic love, he shows that, because "Jesus Christ is Love," marital intercourse is an authentic manifestation of what takes place at the Eucharist: the love of God that is really present in the consecrated species is also present in the mutual love of husband and wife, and especially in the marriage bed. In like manner, the principle of coinherence, operating within the immanent Godhead of the Most Holy Trinity, extends itself to every level of God's actions in creation: in the mystery of the Incarnation, in the mystery of Christ's spousal relationship to the Church, in his presence through the sacraments, and especially in his presence in the Eucharist, the sacrament of sacraments.

Some Further Insights

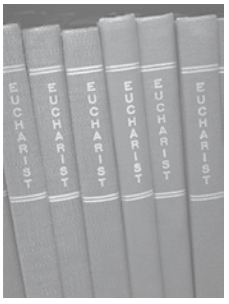
Although these examples of Williams's views on the Eucharist do not exhaust his understanding of what takes place in the sacrament, they

provide the general contours within which a fuller presentation of his beliefs can unfold. The remarks that follow seek to delve a bit more deeply into his attitude toward the Eucharist.

Although Williams's application of the principle of coinherence to the Eucharist may coincide with his Anglo-Catholic belief in that it affirms the corporeal presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, it would be difficult to reconcile it with the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which maintains that the substance of the bread and wine are transformed into (not merely penetrated by) the body and blood of Christ. Coinherence of the Christ body and blood with the bread and wine actually resembles more the doctrine of consubstantiation (held by some Anglicans), which maintains that that the substance of Christ's corporeal being exists alongside of the substance of bread and wine. The main difference between Williams's notion of coinherence and consubstantiation is that in the former the two substances interpenetrate one another while remaining distinct, while in the latter they merely coexist side-by-side. In any case, it would be difficult to reconcile coinherence with transubstantiation, since the latter says that the substance of the bread and wine no longer exist but are themselves not mere penetrated by but actually transformed into the body and blood of the risen Christ.

Coinherence, in other words, is an analogous concept that, despite the likeness and difference within the concept itself, offers us a way of seeing a unifying concept in all of reality, including both uncreated and created realms of existence.

When we understand that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the New Creation and that the Holy Spirit is invoked over the elements of bread and wine at the epiclesis of the Mass, it becomes clear that, for Williams, the interpenetration of Christ with the bread and wine also points to a similar coinherence with all of creation and therefore all of history. His book, *The Descent of the Dove* (1939), which was originally going to be entitled, *A History of Christendom*, is a reflection of the presence of the Spirit in the history of the Church. This coinherence of the Holy Spirit with the movement of history represents the next stage in God's providential plan for humanity. If God the Father, created the world, and God the Son, redeemed the world, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the world. God, in other words, not only created the world, but penetrated human nature



by virtue of the Incarnation and now penetrates the whole of creation and the movement of history by virtue of the sanctifying coinherence of the Holy Spirt. Williams also deals with this theme in his novel, *Descent into Hell* (1937), his theological work, *He Came Down from Heaven* (1938), and his book of poems, *Taliessin through Logres* (1938).

Williams bases his interpretation of the Eucharist on the premise that "Jesus Christ our Lord" is also *"Jesus Christ Our Love."*[11] If the Eucharist is the "Sacrament of Love," it follows that it finds itself wherever authentic love exists. Since the physical love between husband and wife represents the most intimate exchange of mutual love and sharing to be found on earth, it follows that their actual physical embrace, that is to say, their mutual coinherence of persons made visible and very concrete in their conjugal love for one another, reflects the coinherence of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the coinherence of the human and divine natures in Christ, and especially the coinherence of Jesus' body and blood with the eucharistic elements. When seen in this light, Williams's theology of romantic love is a precursor of John Paul II's Theology of the Body. The two approaches to marriage have very much in common, not the least of which is the understanding that the intimate sharing of authentic sexual love images Christ's spousal love for the Church and makes it present to the world in a very visible and concrete way.

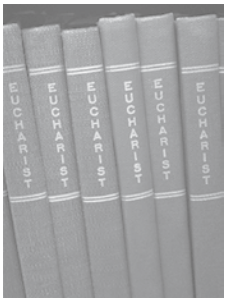
That said, Williams himself was aware that his theology of romantic love presented some dangers, among which number ingenuity and sentimentality. Closely related, each of these focuses more on the means toward arriving at the living principle rather than on the end. They differ in that the first is intellectual and the second emotional. Ingenuity arises from delight in the intellectualization of romantic love, looking to its symbolic meaning rather than its ultimate purpose. It substitutes appearances for reality and can easily lead the person into a dream world that is out of touch with daily life. Sentimentality, in turn, arises from the passions and allows them to blur one's vision of the actual status a loving relationship. These dangers, according to Williams, are offset by skepticism and devotion. Although they do not always work together very easily, when they do, these remedies provide important safeguards to a distortion of romantic love. Skepticism offsets an over intellectualization of romantic love; devotion, in turn, prevents the emotions from completely taking over one's senses in the way a person relates to others. When applied to the Eucharist, Jesus Our Love must be neither overly intellectualized

nor overly sentimentalized. As an expression of authentic eucharistic love, both husband and wife must look to the heavens but have both feet firmly planted on the ground.[12]

One of the strengths of Williams's concept of coinherence is the continuity it brings to every level of the reality. Coinherence, the interpenetration of separate entities, exists in the Holy Trinity, in the union of the human and divine in Christ, in the Church and her sacraments, and in all of creation. It is important to point out, however, that this interpenetration is not univocal, but takes place in varying degrees and intensities, depending on which level of reality we are dealing with. The *perichoresis* (or interpenetration) of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, for example, is qualitatively different from that which takes place between the divine and human natures in Christ, or between Christ and his Church, or between the communicant and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Coinherence, in other words, is an analogous concept that, despite the likeness and difference within the concept itself, offers us a way of seeing a unifying concept in all of reality, including both uncreated and created realms of existence. What is more, it makes sense that the unifying principle within the Godhead is that which holds together every other aspect of reality. When seen in this light, the principle of coinherence gives us another insight into how vestiges of God are present within his creation.

Williams's concept of coinherence also offers new insights into the meaning of the Neoplatonic notion of "participation," which theologians have adapted to explain how human beings can come to share in the divine nature. It does so by emphasizing the kind of sharing that takes place, a penetration of two separate entities that brings about a single ontological union while at the same time maintaining the distinctions among them. When seen in this light, human beings share in the divine nature in a way that is similar (although not identical) to the interpenetration of the Divine Persons themselves. In the former case, the distinction between the creator and creation remains, while in the latter the distinction makes no sense. The benefit of Williams's notion of coinherence is that it helps us to unpack a basic theological concept and gives us a clear indication of what it might mean. It also gives us a deeper understanding of Christian discipleship and Jesus's exhortation that his followers remain in him so that he might remain in them (Jn 15:4).

Finally, although Williams's theology of romantic love fills a lacuna in the



contemporary theological discourse of his day, it must be remembered that eros *(i.e., romantic love) must be complemented by the other loves of* storge *(natural affection),* philia *(friendship),* and agape (divine love).[13] As evidenced in the Bible, the phrase "God is Love" applies to all of these loves. Since we refer to God as "Father, Spouse, Friend, and Suffering Servant, it would be wrong to attribute God's love for humanity solely in terms of romantic love. If Williams elevated romantic love to a deserving place in theological discourse, we must remember that it too must be complemented by these other loves. While each of these loves exist separately in human experience and can, at times, interpenetrate one another (as in the case of a married couple who have become close, intimate friends), within the Godhead, they themselves coinhere, while at the same time remaining distinct. When seen in this light, the concept of coinherence enables us to appreciate the meaning of romantic love while also recognizing its distinct limitations.

Conclusion

Charles Williams was a creative and influential force in the literary world of his day and wrote across a wide range of literary genres. Along with C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and other well-known literary figures, he was a regular member of The Inklings literary club, a prolific writer, and probably best known for his imaginative novels that have the supernatural penetrating everyday life. Known for his ideas about the theology of romantic love and the principle of coinherence, he was a devout member of the Catholic wing of the Church of England and saw the purpose of his writing as bringing sound doctrine to others without them being aware of it.

Williams's spiritual outlook was deeply influenced by his ideas about the nature of romantic love and coinherence. In the former, he saw an intrinsic link between love and Jesus Christ and looked to his life to draw out the profound meaning of the marital bond. In the latter, he looked to the interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity as a way of understanding how the supernatural penetrated the created world. These two concepts are themselves intimately related, since the whole idea behind the theology of romantic love is that the life of Jesus has penetrated the marriage bed and that the love between husband and wife reveals in a very concrete and palpable way God's love for humanity and all the world. The same holds true for the Eucharist.

This sacrament is the fullest expression of Christ's love for the Church and humanity. In this most physical of the sacraments, the body of the risen Lord penetrates the bread and wine in such a way that they become totally one with him, while at the same time remaining distinct and separate entities. When consuming the consecrated bread and wine, the communicant receives the body and blood of Christ into himself or herself and the ongoing process of interpenetration continues. This coinwherence of the believer with Christ is a manifestation of God's committed and unbreakable spousal love for the Church, a reality which the marriage itself both points to and makes visible. When seen in this light, Williams's understanding of the sacrament, if not in complete compliance with Catholic doctrine, seeks to find a way of showing how vestiges of the Trinity are present on every level of the spectrum of creation. In doing so, it provides a very creative (albeit alternative) way of understanding how the actions of God, all of which are actions of love, flow from his very being and are hardwired into the very nature of the created world.

Notes

[1] For more on the life of Charles Williams, see "About Charles Williams," in *The Charles Williams Society,* https://www.charleswilliamssociety.org.uk/about/ .

[2] See, for example, Grevel Lindop, *Charles Williams: The Third Inkling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[3] Charles Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology* (Berkeley, CA: The Apocryphile Press, 2005), 14.

[4] Lindop, *Charles Williams*, 110.

[5] Ibid., 110-11.

[6] Charles Hefling, ed. *Charles Williams: Essential Writings in Spirituality and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993), 147.

[7] Charles Williams, *The Descent of the Dove: A Short History of the Holy Spirit in the Church* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 236.

[8] Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, 44-45; Lindop, *Charles Williams*, 111.

[9] Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, 45.

[10] Mary McDermott Shideler, *The Theology of Romantic Love: A Study in the Writings of Charles Williams* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 200-1.

[11] Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, 48; Lindop, *Charles Williams*, 111.

[12] Williams, *Outlines of Romantic Theology*, 49-54.

[13] For a treatment of these loves and how they interrelate, see C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1960).

EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

Understanding Intercession to the Saints at Mass

by John Zupez, SJ

We often pray for the intercession of the saints during Mass and our church sanctuaries are filled with images of saints. How can we deepen our understanding of our relationship to the saints?

Father John Zupez, SJ, has authored more than 65 journal articles and 400 Wikipedia articles. He has taught in major seminaries, served as a pastor, and at 84 is involved in parish work and prison ministry.

Intercessory prayer has a complex history in the Church. The post-Vatican II era has seen an effort to recapture a more biblical understanding of intercessory prayer, based on a century of biblical and historical studies. Drawing on this scholarship, this article will attempt to elucidate where we are in this effort and the best current understanding of intercession to the saints. The focus will be on intercession directed through the saints in the current Catholic sacramentary (Roman Missal) for the Mass. For as the Catholic bishops pointed out at Vatican II, all Catholic devotions "should be so drawn up that they ... accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13). The first and best place for Catholics to learn about prayer is in the Mass. From this they can be more easily led to a solidly founded devotion in private prayer.

Present Situation

The Catholic Eucharistic Celebration or Mass has its roots in the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples before he died, which was celebrated in the manner of the Jewish Passover. This meal was filled with remembrance of God's goodness and mighty works that culminated in Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection. At this meal Jesus told his disciples that they should repeat this celebration in remembrance of him. Following Jesus' command, we have as the central Catholic celebration a Mass with two main parts. Scriptural readings recall God's work in history and especially in Jesus Christ. Then we lift up our hearts in grateful remembrance of God's main gifts to us — the

gift of Jesus and of his Spirit in our hearts now, and the hope which Jesus brings that we will share in his resurrection forever. The other elements of the Mass can best be understood as embellishing the readings and remembrance.

Early on in the Church's history Saint Jerome mistakenly rendered the Greek word for sacrifice (*hilastérion*) as "propitiation" in his Latin Vulgate translation, in its three New Testament appearances. The Council of Trent, in a protective mode during the Counter-Reformation, described Jerome's Vulgate translation as "authentic," which some would interpret as fully authoritative, even infallible. But modern scholarly study has shown conclusively that Christ's sacrifice, and our remembrance of it, is meant to impact us, not to propitiate or appease God, or change God's attitude toward us.[1] In expiation we are the ones who are changed and made more receptive toward what God is constantly trying to effect in us. Jerome's mistranslation has left an impact on Christian prayer and on the Mass. The current Latin version of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, to which after 2003 all translations were required to conform, still retains the word "propitiation" in paragraph 2, thus justifying an interpretation of the Mass prayers in accord with Jerome's translation.

When we address the saints, it is more accurate to say that we pray not "to" them but "with" them.

Intercession is mentioned in the Collect prayer of many memorial Masses for saints, where we commonly pray that we might be "commended by their intercession and spurred on by their example." And in Eucharistic Prayer III we mention individual saints and "all the Saints, on whose constant intercession in your presence we rely for unfailing help." Here we will be presenting an interpretation of these prayers that will accord with the understanding of the Mass as expiatory of us, not as propitiation impacting God. This receives support from many verses in the New Testament, such as: Jesus' words that "Your Father knows what you need before you ask" (Mt 6:8); the sayings of Saint Paul that "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (Rom 8:32); and Saint Augustine's admonition, included in the Office of Readings, that we should not think that "we can instruct the Lord or prevail on him" but that in prayer we are "reminding ourselves" and "stirring up our desires" to be in accord with God's most salutary will for us (Sunday, Week 29).

Proper Meaning of Intercession

Synonyms given for "intercession" in the dictionary are "intervention, mediation, negotiation, arbitration, reconciliation," all of which suggest impacting someone else instead of being transformed ourselves. Careful instruction on this matter is necessary to assist Catholics to derive all the benefits intended from the Mass and to forestall any fixation of their prayer at an unfruitful level.

The dictionary meanings of "negotiation, arbitration, conciliation" are all misleading as descriptions of Christian prayer. But we need to take a closer look at intervention and mediation. The intervention of saints in response to prayers, including miraculous cures through their intercession, is a Catholic belief. But in calling on the saints, we must be careful not to bring God down, or to prefer our will to God's infinite benevolence. Even in the rare cases of miraculous help when we ask a saint to intercede for us, what is happening at a deeper level is that we are taking refuge in the all-enfolding community of the redeemed, approaching God through saintly symbols of Christ's victory and of our hope. Saints turn us in confidence toward God whose love for us is unbounded, allowing God's work to be more effective in us, and through us in others.[2] When we address the saints, it is more accurate to say that we pray not "to" them but "with" them. This "expresses the true relationship among Christ, the saints, and petitioners conscious of the inherent unity of all human persons in the body of Christ. ...Saints are in a perpetual attitude of prayer to which we consciously join ourselves when we invoke them, in this religious act responding to God's summons."[3] The Second Vatican Council adds: "Let them teach the faithful that our communion with those in heaven, provided that it is understood in the fuller light of faith according to its genuine nature, in no way weakens, but conversely, more thoroughly enriches the latreutic worship we give to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 51).

In the early centuries of the Church the belief grew that martyrs and saints in heaven pray with us and for us.

God the Father took the initiative of reconciling humankind and all of creation into oneness in Christ, by sending Jesus to save us from the

alienation which was a part of human existence from the beginning. It was God's plan from before creation that we should be drawn as free persons to choose to love God and to live in charity with one another, through divine grace and through the Spirit that God gives without measure. We read that "In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1 Jn 4:9). Jesus is the one mediator between God and humans, and even his mediation of graces was instigated by the Father's benevolent will toward us. It is to this will of the Father that we try to conform through all proper Christian prayer. A specific word for "intercede" occurs in the New Testament only at 1 Timothy 2:1-5 where it confirms the above understanding: "I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions (ἐντεύξεις), and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our saviour, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race."

Jesus is the one mediator between God and humans, and even his mediation of graces was instigated by the Father's benevolent will toward us.

In the early centuries of the Church the belief grew that martyrs and saints in heaven pray with us and for us. They desire only what is best for us, as does God. Such intercession is still reflected in the Collect prayers of Masses commemorating saints. In these we pray that God will help us to imitate their example and learn from their teaching. As often as not, we ask also that we might profit from the saint's "intercession." The English translation of 1973, in its loose rendering of the Latin, spoke in the Collect prayers of the saint's "prayers" for us, rather than their "intercession." The Latin original retains the word "intercession" which was restored (along with many other more precise translations) with the introduction of the new English ritual in 2011. Also, Eucharistic Prayer III mentions "all the Saints, on whose constant intercession in your presence we rely for unfailing help."

How then should we understand these "intercessions"? The Church canonizes saints as models of the Christian life, suitable for our encouragement and imitation. Praying to them reminds us of our membership in the all-encompassing community of saints. Karl Rahner

is among the recent theologians who have tried to place veneration of saints on a more solid foundation. Rahner reminds us "that every life lived in faith and love is of permanent value and significance for all, and that the redeemed man in the state of blessedness receives and lives this significance of his life."[4] By invocation of a saint "we take refuge in faith in the all-enfolding community of all the redeemed," where "each is responsible for all." They are "creative models of holiness."[5]

We find some confirmation of the above in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* where the emphasis has moved somewhat beyond the Council of Trent which referred to the saints as giving "powerful help in obtaining benefits from God through Jesus Christ" (Session 25). The *Catechism* of 1993 says that intercession "leads us to pray as Jesus did, ... (to) draw near to God through him" (2634). It is also "an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks 'not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others'" (2635). We pray this way conscious that "the first Christian communities lived this form of fellowship intensely" and that "the intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries," including everyone, as the Catechism specifically mentions those in high positions, persecutors, and the salvation of those who reject the Gospel (2636). From this description we might conclude that our intercessions at Mass have a purpose similar to the Eucharistic Prayer itself, to further our transformation into more Christlike persons, who love as Christ has loved. Saints mediate to us an understanding of what it means to practice a charity that is universal and they give us the encouragement to pursue this ideal, as we follow in their footsteps.

Notes

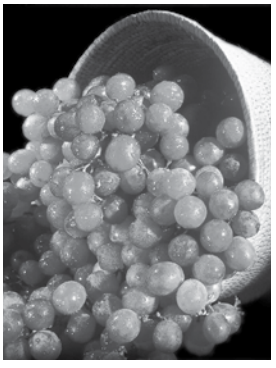
1 John Zupez, "Is the Mass a Propitiatory or Expiatory Sacrifice?" *Emmanuel,* 125 (Nov/Dec 2019), 378-381.

2 Patricia A. Sullivan, "A Reinterpretation of Invocation and Intercession of the Saints," *Theological Studies*, 66 (2005), 383, 393. http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/66/66.2/66.2.6.pdf

3 Sullivan, 398.

4 Karl Rahner, "Why and How Can We Venerate the Saints?" *Theological Investigations 8*, trans. David Bourke (New York, Seabury), 1977, 23.

5 Karl Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," *Theological Investigations 3*, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York, Seabury), 1974. 100.



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

The Eucharistic Chaplet of Saint Oscar Romero

by Carlos X. Colorado

"The saints," Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbor from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others" (Deus Caritas Est, 18). This Chaplet inspired by Saint Oscar Romero wonderfully illustrates Pope Benedict XVI's point.

Carlos X. Colorado is a Salvadoran-born American lawyer who, in his spare time, writes extensively about Saint Oscar Romero whom he met, when the author was a child in El Salvador.

Introduction

Saint Oscar Romero was Archbishop of San Salvador between 1977 and 1980. His ministry was marred by discontentment due to a gaping breach between rich and poor. The military ferociously defended the interests of the oligarchy. Romero, considered a conservative in the long-simmering conflict, reacted forcefully after the 1977 assassination of Father Rutilio Grande, which ushered in a period of Church persecution. After Romero himself was killed in 1980, a debate roiled as to whether his killers saw him as an opposition leader or a champion of the social doctrine of the Church. The argument was settled in 2015 when Romero was recognized as a martyr killed "*in odium fidei*" (out of hatred of the faith). He was canonized in 2018.

After Romero's beatification, the Salvadoran Church approved my Romero Chaplet, which seeks to show that Romero's ministry was inspired by profoundly spiritual considerations. In particular, the chaplet tracks Romero's march to his inevitable martyrdom through five Eucharistic moments:

1. Father Romero's First Solemn Mass;
2. Archbishop Romero's "Single Mass" for Father Grande;
3. The Reparation Mass to take back Grande's parish church after an occupation;
4. Romero Holy Hours at a cancer hospital;

5. Archbishop Romero's martyrdom while celebrating Mass.

Structure of the Romero Chaplet

A chaplet is typically a variation of the rosary and this chaplet is prayed almost exactly as a rosary with the following changes: the Mysteries are replaced by these "Eucharistic Marvels;" the auxiliary prayers are removed, leaving only the Apostles Creed, Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and Glory Be, in the traditional sequence. The concluding Hail Holy Queen is replaced with the Magnificat. Another Marian hymn may be sung in celebratory conclusion.

Eucharistic Marvel I. Unicity and Indivisibility

Father Romero's first Solemn Mass illustrates the Eucharist's unique role in cementing the Church's universal coherence. First, the backstory: Romero was selected for the priesthood after the elders in his remote native village of Ciudad Barrios identified him as a possible candidate. The local school only went through the fourth grade, but Romero was singled out as meriting further education. When the bishop came to town, they pointed out that little Oscar spent time every day in the village church, sweeping and praying. Romero entered the seminary at the tender age of thirteen, and he won a contest to be sent to Rome to study. He spent six years in the Eternal City, with a front-row view of towering war time pontiffs Pius XI and Pius XII. Years later, he would recall Pius XI's shrewd judgment and courage in standing up to Hitler and Mussolini and defending the Church: "When politics touches the altar," Romero would recall Pope Pius XI as saying, "the Church cares about politics." As for Pope Pius XII, Romero would recall his motto, *Pax Opus Justitiae*, which stated that peace is the product of justice.

Thus, when Father Romero returned to Ciudad Barrios and offered his First Solemn Mass for the protection of the Roman Pontiff, he was upholding the universality of the Church and the primacy of the Petrine ministry. In the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,

> the unicity and indivisibility of the eucharistic Body of the Lord implies the unicity of his mystical Body, which is the one and indivisible Church ... For this reason, too, the existence of the Petrine ministry, which is a foundation of the unity of the Episcopate and of the universal Church, bears a profound correspondence

to the eucharistic character of the Church.[1]

Young Father Romero exemplified this principle in his First Solemn Mass and its dedication for the protection of the Roman Pontiff. Romero also previewed what would be his episcopal motto, *Sentir Con La Iglesia* (To Think and Feel with the Church) by declaring from the outset his rigorous submission to the hierarchy.

Eucharistic Marvel II. "A Foretaste of the Heavenly Liturgy"

Romero's ground-breaking eucharistic innovation was the "Single Mass" after the martyrdom of Father Rutilio Grande, whereby the only Sunday Mass in the archdiocese a week after the assassination was Romero's cathedral Mass. The idea was controversial, but Romero wagered that it would focus attention on the national sacrilege. One hundred thousand turned out and a rapt national radio audience hung on Romero's every word, allowing him to preach to a historic gathering, establishing Archbishop Romero as the primate of the Salvadoran Church.

In similar celebrations when other priests were killed, Romero would say that a Eucharist with the bodies of murdered priests at the altar offers "a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy" because the bodies of the dead represent pilgrims "journeying to true life so that we, the community that is still on pilgrimage, might become more secure in the hope" of eternal life.[2]

Despite the controversy surrounding the Single Mass, this was an early example of what today we would call "synodality." The "single mass" form had arisen in the vicariates or pastoral regions of the San Salvador Archdiocese. Poignantly, the last "single mass" had been celebrated by Father Grande himself to protest persecution in his vicariate. Therefore, in taking up the format, Romero gave a vote of confidence to his priests. According to Pope Francis, "A synodal Church is a Church" in which "the faithful, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: [are] all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit."[3] Romero's "Single Mass," modeled that Church.

Eucharistic Marvel III. The "Double Chalice"

After Father Grande was killed, the military occupied his town and made his church their barracks. Soldiers hacked the tabernacle with

machetes and trampled strewn consecrated hosts underfoot. Romero traveled to Aguilares to offer a Mass of reparation, an episode dramatized in the 1989 movie "Romero." Raul Julia plays a timid archbishop who initially retreats but is emboldened by seeing the gathered peasants and resolves to retake the church. In real life, Romero organized a *Corpus Christi* procession with the Blessed Sacrament around the town square, which gave hope to the demoralized community. He told the gathered faithful: "I have come to gather up this church and convent that has been profaned, this tabernacle that has been destroyed and above all else to gather up this people that has been humiliated and unnecessarily sacrificed."[4]

The distinctive note in Romero's gesture is in recognizing the equivalence between honoring Christ and serving the poor. In a famous poem, the Brazilian Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga wrote that Romero "knew how to drink from the double chalice of the Altar and of the People, with one single hand devoted to service."[5] The "double chalice" of the Eucharist is not a novel concept. Saint John Chrysostom once asked,

> Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad ... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.[6]

Pope Benedict XVI confirmed: "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."[7] And Pope Francis: "The Eucharist is a sacrament of communion, which draws us out of our individualism in order to live together as disciples."[8]

Eucharistic Marvel IV. The Summit of the Spiritual Life

Like Saint Basil, who lived in an institution housing the poor, Romero lived in a little house on the grounds of a hospital for terminal cancer patients. His simplicity and frugality gave him great credibility to challenge society's meager commitment to the suffering. He hosted Holy Hours in the hospital chapel and invited the faithful to join him. "Together with the sick, we are able to make an act of faith before

the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist," he exhorted. "At the same time, we are able to perform an act of charity — one that is referred to in the Catechism as an act of mercy — namely, we are able to visit the sick."[9]

Romero's advice that we should bind our acts of charity to the act of faith in eucharistic adoration reflects the Church's teaching: "The other sacraments, and indeed *all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate*, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it."[10] Just as importantly, Romero did not reduce the hospital patients to objects of pity, but invited them to a communion of prayer, where they offered up their suffering for the Church and the nation. Romero would tell the patients, "You are the Suffering Christ and your bed is the Cross."

Eucharistic Marvel V. The Church's Sacrifice

Romero's greatest eucharistic teaching may have been his final gift. He laid down his life, in the words of Saint John Paul II, "while celebrating the sacrifice of forgiveness and reconciliation."[11] "His blood," said Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, "commingled with the redemptive Blood of Christ."[12] "Consequently," said Pope Benedict XVI, "his death was truly 'credible,' a witness of faith."[13]

Immediately before his martyrdom, Romero affixed a peroration to his homily to pivot to the Liturgy of the Eucharist:

> Through Christian faith we know that at this moment the wheaten Host is transformed into the Body of the Lord, who offered Himself for the redemption of the world, and in this chalice the wine is transformed into the Blood that was the price of salvation. May this Body immolated and this Blood sacrificed for mankind nourish us also, so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and to pain, like Christ, not for self, but to bring about a harvest of justice and peace for our people.

Seconds later, the shot shattered the sanctuary's quietude and entered the Archbishop's torso near his heart. Romero became one of three sainted bishops murdered at the altar (along with Saint Thomas

Becket and Saint Stanislaus of Krakow), fulfilling Pope Benedict XVI's words: "The Christian who offers his life in martyrdom enters into full communion with the Pasch of Jesus Christ and thus becomes Eucharist with him."[14]

Romero's death reminds us that "Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering."[15] Romero's death reinforces that point in that Romero's Mass was left unfinished.

The late Bishop Ricardo Ramirez expounded on that idea:

> Many see the "unfinished Eucharist" of Romero as symbolic of what yet needs to be done in El Salvador, in Central and South America, and in every place that people suffer in their struggle for liberation. *Who will finish the Eucharist?*[16]

Conclusion

Between Romero's 2015 beatification and 2018 canonization, this Chaplet was prayed every Sunday at his crypt tomb. Since last year, it is prayed at Saint Oscar Romero parish in Eastvale, California (via Zoom conference). The organizers told me they were surprised how much the attendees, many of them very devoted Romero followers, learned from the experience. What I find most surprising is how much I have learned about Romero's faith — and my own —from this modest little prayer.

Notes

1 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to Bishops, May 28, 1992.

2 Oscar Romero, Homily, January 21, 1979.

3 Pope Francis, Address on the 50th Anniversary of the Synod, October 17, 2015.

4 Oscar Romero, Homily, June 19, 1977.

5 *Saint Romero of America, Our Shepherd and Martyr*, translated by José María Valverde.

6 John Chrysostom, *In Evangelium S. Matthaei*, Homily 50:3–4, pp 58, 508–509.

7 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

8 Pope Francis, Mass at Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, July 9, 2015.

9 Oscar Romero, Homily, January 1, 1978.

10 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324—emphasis added.

[11] Pope John Paul II, Remarks at the San Salvador Cathedral, March 6, 1983.

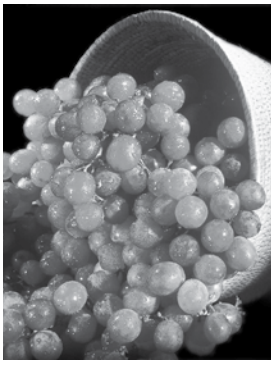
[12] Angelo Amato, Remarks at the San Salvador Cathedral, March 6, 1983.

[13] Pope Benedict XVI, Press conference during flight to Brazil, May 9, 2007.

[14] Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 85.

[15] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1368.

[16] Ricardo Ramirez, "The Unfinished Eucharist: The Spiritual Legacy of Archbishop Romero," *The Canadian Catholic Review*, January 1991—emphasis added.



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Good Samaritan

by Bernard Camieré, SSS

In every age we return to the ever-important question asked of Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

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. This reflection on the Parable of the Good Samaritan originally appeared in the Saint Jean Baptiste Church parish bulletin.

The Narrative of the Parable

LUKE ALONE, AMONG THE EVANGELISTS, RECORDS THIS PARABLE, WHOSE PROTAGONIST has been memorialized not only in the New Testament scripture but also in our everyday speech. To speak of a "good Samaritan" is to refer to a humane and compassionate individual who is helpful to those in trouble. This deeply moving story is a classic among the parables of the Gospels.

We should note, first of all, the occasion of the parable's narration. A scholar of the law, after hearing Jesus' response to his question regarding what must be done to inherit eternal life (Lk 10:25-28), wishes to justify himself, and asks, "And who is my neighbor?" Interestingly, Jesus does not answer the question directly but rather, by means of a parable, describes what it means to be a neighbor. The parable illustrates "neighbor" as subject rather than object.

Jericho was a very ancient city, located approximately twenty miles northeast of Jerusalem. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho descended more than thirty-four hundred feet through rocky and desolate terrain. Saint Jerome observed, in the late fourth century, that the road was still infested with robbers. The man who traveled alone on the road to Jericho — possibly he was a merchant — fell victim to bandits and was beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Lying naked by the side of the road, he was without signs of either nationality or social status; he was simply and starkly a person in need.

Chance travelers, a priest and a Levite, come upon the victim. As

members of the religious establishment, they, more than the ordinary person, would be expected to assist the injured man. Instead, they simply gazed upon him and passed by on the other side. This is the first shock in the narrative, and it is soon followed by the major shock. A Samaritan, a layman and someone Jesus' audience would have considered a member of a heretical and detested people, is the one who comes to the rescue of the victim in a spirit of true compassion. He pours oil and wine, curative agents in ancient times, over the man's wounds and bandages them. He lifts the man onto his animal, takes him to an inn, and cares for him.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan wonderfully illustrates the ideal of love of neighbor, a love that, far from being calculating and restrained, is ready to be lavish and extravagant.

It is at this point that the major shock of the parable's narrative reverberates repeatedly. The Samaritan could have stopped at this point and more than fulfilled his duty to an injured stranger; but his charity is extended to excess. He stays the night at the inn with the victim, and then pays the innkeeper two denarii (the equivalent of two days average pay). Further, the Samaritan enters into contract with the innkeeper to pay for other expenses that the injured man might incur. Important to point out here is the fact that since the injured person was robbed and stripped, and therefore deprived of all resources, he could have been at the mercy of the innkeeper. The Samaritan's excess of charity insured the victim's dignity, freedom, and independence.

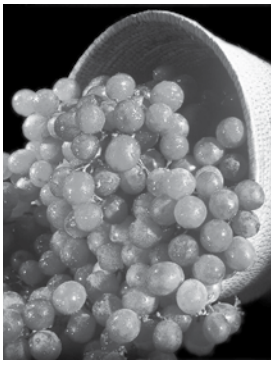
The Meaning of the Parable

Though the exemplary action of the Samaritan is at the center of the story, the parable invites us to identify also with the victim in the roadside ditch. Spiritually speaking, all of us have been robbed of our dignity, freedom, and independence by the Evil One. Several Fathers of the Church, in their commentaries on this parable, saw in the robbed and stripped victim in the ditch a humanity deprived of God's grace; and in the Good Samaritan the Savior whose love for humanity went to excess in his act of redemption.

Having concluded his parable, Jesus asks the scholar of the law with whom he was conversing: "Which of these three … was neighbor to

the robbers' victim?" The scholar is obliged to acknowledge that it was the despised and ritually impure Samaritan. It was the Samaritan who observed in full the great commandment of love of God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). It was he who saw in the robbed and thrashed Jew a neighbor in need of his compassion and active charity.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan wonderfully illustrates the ideal of love of neighbor, a love that, far from being calculating and restrained, is ready to be lavish and extravagant. Moreover, it is a love that knows no limits of race, ethnicity or beliefs. Whoever at a given time and place is in genuine need of my active love is my neighbor — and I am theirs.



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

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

by Jim Brown

Jim Brown is the former director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing in Cleveland, Ohio, and an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament. He has a Master of Arts degree in biblical studies.

March

Saint Peter Julian Eymard desired to have a religious order dedicated to the Eucharist which had professed religious as well as lay members. The lay members are known as Associates of the Blessed Sacrament (or Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament) and dedicate time in prayer to adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In 1866, there were 120 associates in Brussels, where Father Eymard had recently opened a new religious community. During Holy Week, Father Eymard gave a retreat to the adorers. In an earlier letter to his fellow religious Father Raymond de Cuers, SSS, Father Eymard had indicated that though there were many adorers in Brussels, "this life of adoration is so little understood." This line in a long letter provides a kind of a self-evaluation of the retreat he gave to this new group of associates.

> *Things must be done slowly here. I am beginning with the Aggregation as the core of the other branches of the Aggregation. They have been slow to understand it and come. Now they are coming: we have more than 120 Associates, at this moment from Brussels. The retreat I gave to the Associates during Passion Week shook up the sleepers a little.*
>
> Letter to Father Alexandre Leroyer, SSS, April 8, 1866

April

While he was working to set up a new community in Brussels, Father Eymard, was unable to be with his religious community during Holy Week. So, he wrote this message to his fellow religious and local superior Father Raymond de Cuers, SSS.

My fond regards to all the Fathers and Brothers. I'm praying and did pray much for you all on the great feast of the resurrection, as we all need to become stronger and more perfect in the risen life of our Lord. Believe me ever in our Lord! All yours, Eymard

Letter to Father Raymond de Cuers, SSS, April 2, 1866

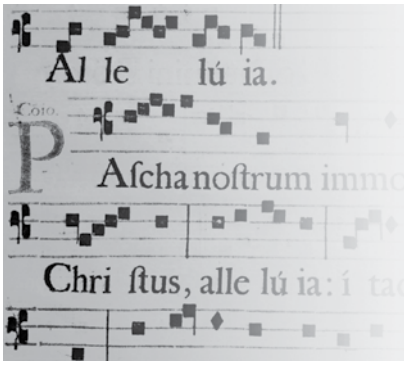
Father Eymard corresponded with a number of people over the course of his life, often offering spiritual advice. Mme. Camille Chanuet was the mother of one of the members of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, Father Michel Chanuet, SSS. After her husband died, she too felt called to enter a religious order founded by Saint Peter Julian Eymard. She took vows with the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament and chose the name of Sister Camille.

Easter is approaching, the beautiful day of love, the Eucharistic wedding, the entry into the paradise of Jesus.

Letter to Mme. Camille Chanuet, April 2, 1862

Note:

Quotations taken from Catherine Marie Carron, SSS, *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Volume Four: New Horizons 1862 - 1864.* (Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Waterville, Maine) and Catherine Marie Carron, SSS, *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Volume Five: New The Plowman 1865 - 1866.* (Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Waterville, Maine)



PASTORAL LITURGY

The Revised *Order of Baptism of Children* – Part 5

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

WE CONTINUE OUR PASTORAL COMMENTARY ON THE SECOND EDITION OF THE *ORDER of Baptism of Children* [OBC], implemented last year. We are now in Chapter VI of our review. We pick up from Chapter V which is the "order" used for when a child is in danger of death. Chapter VI is the follow up ritual, used if the child recovers and is able to be brought to a church to complete the ritual.

At OBC paragraph 167, the ritual begins with the "renaming" or acknowledgement the child was already "named" and received the sacrament of baptism with the emergency formula. This ritual envisions, especially in the explanation notes of OBC 166, that besides the parents and godparents, others were not able to be present for the emergency celebration of the sacrament. It also presupposes the child's return to health, or after a difficult delivery or other health incidents, the child is to be welcomed formally with a more elaborate ceremony. In many cases and cultures, a baptism party/celebration in the home is part of the ritual and a post-sacrament celebration. These rituals assist in the joyous moment of bringing the child into the faith and God's family.

To acknowledge the emergency baptism, the celebrant asks the parents to make a statement that is relevant to the local custom. OBC 167 says:

> Celebrant: Since he (she) has already been baptized, what do you now ask of God's Church for (name of the child)?
>
> Parents: That in the presence of the community, it may be known that he (she) has been received into the Church.

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 or (440) 442-3410.

The celebrant continues with the similar words used in the "regular" ritual for infant baptism, changing the text a bit, but re-asking questions of the parents, godparents, as well as signing the child with the Sign of the Cross of Christ (170).

From then on, the ritual continues as in the other orders for either one child or multiple children welcomed into the Church, with the celebration of the Word of God, Prayer of the Faithful, and Litany of Saints. After this invocation, OBC 177 has a special prayer said to remind the family of the "provident care" God provided in the child's "peril." Although this could have been stated more emphatically, it does say that through these prayers to God:

> The Church gives thanks that you have brought your servant (name of the child) out of the kingdom of darkness into your wonderful light, … And so the Church prays that you will always help him (her) in the perils of this life, and continually fortify him (her) with the strength of Christ the Savior in the struggle to gain your kingdom.

OBC proceeds to the "Explanatory Rites" with the Anointing after Baptism, Clothing with a White Garment, and Handing on of a Lighted Candle, all using the words of the earlier parts of the OBC. The conclusion of the rite also has the same elements as in the previous chapters of OBC, with the LORD'S Prayer, blessing of the parents and those present, dismissal, and the custom in some parts of the world that the family goes to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the church and proclaims the "Magnificat." OBC 185 has a curious rubric worth sharing:

> The Order described above may also be used when other baptized children are brought to the church after other difficulties (e.g., persecution, disagreement between the parents, etc.), which prohibited the celebration of Baptism in church. In these cases, it is for the celebrant to adapt the instructions, readings, intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful, to the situation of the child.

Although not mentioned, an occurrence becoming more common is that of grandparents, worried "about the soul of the child," who

privately baptize their grandchild in their home, often while babysitting. In these circumstances, parents later find out and wish for the ritual to be completed. It is hoped that the celebrant will be pastorally sensitive to the difficult family dynamics that occur and adapt accordingly.

OBC Chapter VII lists the various texts for use in the celebration of Baptism for Children. All the readings are published for review and some publishers have the texts provided in Spanish and English. Besides the scriptures, the formulas for the Prayer of the Faithful are included (five examples), another litany of the Saints, not much different from the previous texts in OBC. Other items included in chapter VII are:

- Another prayer of exorcism
- Two additional blessings of water and invocation of God
- Acclamations, hymns and chants (especial from antiquity and from other liturgies)
- Three additional final blessings

Visit this columnist's blog, on our *Emmanuel* website (emmanuelpublishing.org), that has the lists of texts and a complete outline of the OBC for your assistance, with a brief comparison and statements of the differences of each chapter.

Organizing for March/April 2021

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

A few regular celebrations during these months:

Annual

- **Friday, March 5: World Day of Prayer** – First Friday of March each year; started by Church Women United

- **Note about the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA):** Many celebrants are using the other formulas for the Scrutinies, based on other cycles of readings, such as in this year, Cycle B, since the Sunday readings are rarely heard if one only proclaims cycle A. Many celebrants are alone and do not have additional time to prepare two Sunday homilies.

See the possibilities in each of the Scrutinies that allow for adaptation.

- **Sunday, March 7, Third Sunday of Lent**: First Scrutiny (RCIA) and later in the week, Presentation of the Creed (RCIA)

- **Sunday, March 14, Fourth Sunday of Lent**: Second Scrutiny (RCIA)

- **Sunday, March 21, Fifth Sunday of Lent**: Third Scrutiny (RCIA) and later in the week, Presentation of the LORD's Prayer (RCIA)

- **Diocesan Chrism Mass and reception of the Holy Oils:** See the USCCB 2011 text for reception of the Holy Oils in your own parish on the Evening Mass of the LORD'S Supper or at another time that seems more appropriate (*Roman Missal*, Chrism Mass, 15).

- **April 1 – 4, Sacred Paschal Triduum:**
  - Holy Thursday (CB 297-311)
  - Good Friday (CB 312 – 331)
  - Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil (CB 322-370)
    Blessing of Food for the First Meal of Easter (BB 1701-1723)
  - Easter Sunday
    Blessing of Homes during Eastertime (CHBP)
    Blessing on the Anniversary of Baptism (CHBP)

- **Sunday, April 11, Second Sunday of Easter:**
  - Celebrating with the Neophytes (CB 374, RCIA)
  - Infant Baptisms (continues throughout the Easter Season)

- **Sunday, April 25, Fourth Sunday of Easter:** World Day of Prayer for Vocations (Good Shepherd Sunday)

- **Sacramental Preparations:**
  - Parent Blessing before Confirmation (CHBP)
  - Parent Blessing before First Communion (CHBP)
  - Blessing of a Married Couple (BB 108-114)
  - Blessing of an Engaged Couple (BB 195 – 214)
  - Blessings related to Marriage (CHBP)

- **Wednesday, April 21:** Administrative Professionals Day
- **Thursday, April 22:** Earth Day
- **Sunday, April 25:** National Arbor Day (USA)

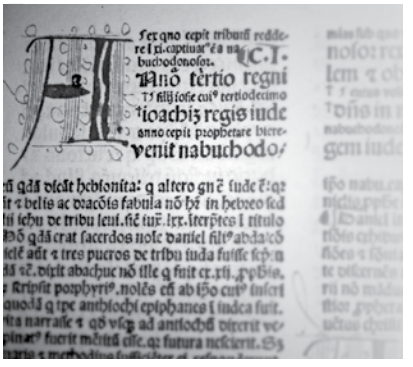
Other important dates these months:

- **Wednesday, March 3:** Optional Memorial of Saint Katharine Drexel, religious founder (USA)
- **Monday, March 8:** Optional Memorial of Saint John of God, religious founder. International Women's Day (annually)
- **Friday, March 19: Solemnity of Saint Joseph** (not a day of fasting) and Blessing of Saint Joseph's Table (BB 1679-1700)
- **Thursday, March 25:** Solemnity of the Annunciation of our LORD 

In Christ's Peace
Deceased Members

Msgr. Robert L Noon
Diocese of Columbus

Since its inception, *Emmanuel* has published a list of deceased members of the Priests' Eucharistic League, remembering those who have served the church generously and faithfully and have passed into the promised eternal life. Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with F, G, H, and I are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during March and April.



BREAKING THE WORD

Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Barbara Shanahan

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

March 7, 2021
Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

We are apt to miss the significance of the introduction to the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai. In the first verse we are given a context for hearing and appreciating the importance of the "Ten Words" (Decalogue). Listen! "Then God spoke these words: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." This reminder arouses the memory of Israel to never forget the story of their origin as God's people. To remember all God has done for them is to experience something that does not allow for complacency. Each of us could also name what God has done for us that has brought us to a place of gratitude.

Is this the basis of a lasting relationship that expects loyalty and fidelity in return? For Israel, the laws contained in the Decalogue are part of the covenant they have with God. Covenants are mutually binding agreements that place expectations on each of the partners. God is bound to Israel as Israel is to God. Woven throughout the Bible are these bonds that define the relationship between Israel and God. Covenants give stability and their laws make abundantly clear what is expected of both parties. "I will be your God *if* you walk in my ways and listen to my voice." This is perhaps the clearest summary statement of the Mosaic Covenant.

The content of the Ten Commandments was not new. Many of the laws are known to have existed among other nations. A simple glance will show that they are fundamental for maintaining order among people. But for Israel, they take on the added significance of a Covenant bond.

They are said to have been written on stone tablets as a record of the agreement. Israel promises to be responsive to *all* the words God speaks. The first command (depending on how you number them) instructs Israel never to craft an image of God. The only reminder they may carry forward from Sinai are the words given there.

What would you say about the demand made here? Does the black and white nature of the Decalogue necessarily encourage the sort of vital relationship religion tries to foster? For the most part, the laws speak of external actions to be avoided. Only the command to honor your parents is posed in the positive. The importance of faith is not mentioned, except for the introductory verse, and the heartfelt response that the memory of deliverance might summon. It becomes clear that the Decalogue plots the boundary points that preserve the community from chaos, though most of us would agree that we are seeking to live a fuller life in response to God's goodness. Amid the many reworkings of these laws found in the Bible, we are perhaps most familiar with the simple, yet demanding summary given by Jesus: "Love God and love your neighbor."

The gospel harkens back to Exodus with the reminder that Jesus is in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. We hear this at the beginning and end of the passage. In John's Gospel, this event occurs at the beginning of Jesus ministry. The Synoptic Gospels place this in the final days of Jesus' life. Jesus sees into the hearts of those engaged in activity surrounding the functioning of the temple. Perhaps with the insight of the prophets who noted that one could offer sacrifice without opening their heart to God. Jesus puts an end to the elements necessary for the running of the temple cult: animals for sacrifice and currency exchange for temple offerings (Roman coinage was not accepted). What does this say about the prescriptions of the law? Is proper worship more about encountering God? Is God's presence among humankind now to be experienced through faith in Christ, as once the temple was understood as the place of God's dwelling among humanity?

We might begin to consider the distinction between religion and faith as we look to the brief passage in Corinthians: "Christ crucified …the power and the wisdom of God." Faith in the unseen is needed to embrace this truth. From Exodus, to the gospel, to the belief of the Church, we are challenged to live by faith. Do the words on stone come to be lived in the heart? As psalm 19 says so eloquently, "Lord you have the words of everlasting life."

March 14, 2021
Fourth Sunday of Lent

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137:1-6; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

The readings this weekend overwhelm us with God's loving intentions toward God's beloved creation: humanity. The readings paint on a large canvas the variety of ways God had a plan for the people he loved from the very beginning of time.

God placed hope in Israel, that here would be a people who would listen to God's voice and walk in God's ways. Early and often God sent prophets who would speak God's word. They would remind the people when they forgot all God had done for them. They would also remind them of the great privilege and responsibility that was theirs. God's plan to dwell in the midst of this people was part of God's great hope. Still, their enemies burnt the house where God dwelt and tore down the walls that protected the city and the people within. They were carried off into Exile. However, lessons can be learned when we sit in silence. After 50 years of Exile, Cyrus sent them back with a blessing: "Go back and may your God be with you." God dwells with the humble of heart. Exile taught them to turn back to God. God's plan was never to destroy but to save. Some among the Exiles had learned this lesson.

God intends to give life and save. As we become more and more familiar with the words and patterns of biblical thought, we observe that although the script may change, fullness of life was God's plan from the very beginning. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son…." If I had the privilege of preaching this weekend, I think I would simply invite the community to sit in silence and ponder these words. What can anyone add? They do not need clarification or explanation. This is not to say we can exhaust the meaning of what they say. We just need to let them sink into the core of ourselves. We need to give time to take into ourselves what they mean, what was the cost of so great a gift. We need to own these words! God alone can give us understanding and touch our hearts with insight. But more words are not needed. Let God school each one of us in the depth of love! Let life teach us this and enable us to plumb the depth of these words.

And what more can we bring to the silence of our meditation? That God desires us to have eternal life through faith in the Son he sent to save and not condemn. "Light" and "truth" are two images dear to the evangelist John. There is indeed much darkness that can obscure our vision these days. Truth seems a casualty for sure. But what can stop us from choosing to live in the truth and so discover the light? Christ is the truth. What he taught and how he lived can show us the way. But there needs to be a concerted effort on our part to overcome worldly concerns and desires. Silence, prayer, and trust will let the lessons root and ground us.

On this Laetare Sunday, the mid-point of our Lenten observance, we are given cause to rejoice in what God says through the Scriptures. The Letter to the Ephesians speaks of the merciful God whose love raises us to life with Christ, seating us with him in the heavens. Do we ever think of all that we have which is sheer gift and grace? Grace is the gift of God! A share in his own life!

March 21, 2021
Fifth Sunday of Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (35-37); Psalm 51:3-4 ,12-15; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33

The Book of Jeremiah reflects a range of emotions due in part to the complex way the book was pieced together. Also, Jeremiah's life as a prophet spans nearly 50 years of what was a tumultuous period in Israel's life. He is given the task to "root up and tear down, to destroy and demolish and to build and to plant" (Jer 1:10). The text for today comes from a small but important part of his message that has to do with "building and planting!" Chapters 30-33 are called the "Book of Consolation." We empathize with Jeremiah's pain as we read his struggles in earlier chapters, particularly his laments. It is good to think that perhaps he had moments of consolation and hope.

Biblical authors speak of the relationship between God and Israel in terms of a covenant. In covenant, Israel promises to keep Torah. God, in turn, promises to be their God. However, things have not played out as planned. Israel was not fully committed to living up

to the demands of that sacred bond. They ignored the voice of the prophets who had been sent to instruct and guide them. It was not so much a case of external obedience, but something was missing in the heart. They were not wholly committed, so Jeremiah speaks of the covenant being scrapped and a new one re-written. Albeit this time, it will be inscribed on their heart, not on stone! How do you legislate fidelity and love, that people walk in God's ways? Is this not a problem in our world today? How do we make people love and respect one another? Something needs to happen in the heart! Perhaps it takes hearing repeatedly the stories of God's love and faithfulness or being reminded of the gift of salvation God offers to us? Awareness of the abundance of God's grace can fill our lives then gradually soften our hearts. Only love can make one willingly submit to another.

How often in John's Gospel do we hear the phrase "But his hour has not yet come"? Today our reading proclaims that it has come! And what does that "hour" announce? It is the time for the seed to fall to the ground and die, the paradox of loving life by giving it away. It is time for the disciples to learn from Jesus what being a servant demands. It is a time of handing over the course of life, a time of glory and of trial.

Scriptural mention of a voice from heaven here reminds us of the Transfiguration. The audience of Greeks present mistakes this voice for thunder. Such language is natural in the Bible when speaking of a manifestation of God. There is something luminous about the entire event as Jesus speaks of the meaning of his death. He speaks of being lifted up to draw all people to himself. There is the element of glory that shines through the trial.

Anyone who has visited the Church of All Nations located in the Kidron Valley opposite the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the traditional site of the Garden of Gethsemane, may have had their attention directed to the beautiful façade of the church. It depicts Jesus as mediator of humankind. The figure of Jesus is situated between people of prominence on the left and people of lowly means on the right. The words that appear here are taken from today's reading from Hebrews: "He offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears and he was heard because of his reverence." There is no account of the agony in the garden in John's Gospel. But in this gospel passage John tells us that Jesus was troubled at the specter of his suffering and death.

The hope of Jeremiah is fully realized in the willing sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Do the words soften our heart? If God's love can be written there, how can this change our life… our world?

"A broken, humble heart, O God, you will not spurn" (Ps 51:17)

March 28, 2021
Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Mark 11:1-10; Isiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24; Philippians 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

As we enter this most sacred time, a solemn invitation is extended to us for quiet reflection: "Have this same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus." We take note of this "attitude" in each of the readings. There is more to consider than can be included in this short reflection!

We encounter Jesus entering Jerusalem. Some editions of the Bible describe the event as "The Triumphal Entry of Jesus." If we read closely and attend to the context, it is clear the whole city of Jerusalem did not turn out to laud Jesus. Mark simply says, "those who followed him and those who preceeded him." Perhaps the entourage included those who attached themselves to Jesus as he made his way from Galilee to Jerusalem. They might have included those who had been healed or forgiven or who found hope in the words he spoke. These might have been inspired to see in Jesus a spark that kindled the ancient promises that "the blind will see; the deaf will hear." The blind man, Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52) is one such individual. His story is told just before the account of Jesus' entry into the Holy City. "Was Jesus the one to restore the kingdom and bring fullness of life as the ancient promises had claimed?" they might have asked themselves. As Jerusalem came into view, did their hope and enthusiasm overflow into praise as they proclaimed the promised one who was to come: "Hosannah to the Son of David"?

The irony in calling this event a "triumphal entry" is that what these enthusiastic followers may have hoped for would only be achieved at a great cost, while the effects would far exceed their expectations. Did they forget other words Jesus had spoken to them? "The Son of man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes and they will

condemn him to death… the Gentiles will mock and scourge him and put him to death but after three days he will rise"? This is a triumph only if we can understand that doing the will of God brings us to glory, albeit often along a difficult path. It's important to recall these words from scripture. Can we identify with many who today are searching for a spark of hope? And what hope can we give them?

Jesus acts knowingly as he instructs the disciples. It is as if the script had already been written. Jesus took his seat on the colt, the mount of royalty, enters Jerusalem and the temple area, observes what was taking place and departs in silence. In Mark's story, Jesus will spend the next several days returning daily to the city. Mark describes tension filled encounters, prophetic actions, denunciations and bitter controversies between Jesus and the leaders. This all converges toward a climax over the final days of Jesus' life.

The liturgy sets before us the image of the servant. The servant is one who silently listens, heart and soul, to God. The servant does God's will faithfully, speaking what has been heard from God in order to awaken those who seem to be closed-off or unresponsive. The servant is faithful to the task "morning after morning" steady and constant. The servant is nameless, allowing us to identify with the silent one who was faithful to the end as was Jesus.

The servant is like the ideal disciple who has put on the mind of Christ as described in the passage from Philippians. Patterned after the incarnate Son of God, we are called to empty ourselves and take on the form of the humble servant. This one who claims nothing but accepts the will of God and is faithful to a triumphal end. How does the Church fill it's role as this servant? Pope Francis is constant in challenging us to this task! It is an attitude formed in us that directs our actions and responses. How do we as members of the body of Christ seek to do this here and now?

April 4, 2021
Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

Throughout the land of Israel, certain caves were identified by the early Christians as caves of enlightenment. These where places where the mysteries of Jesus' life or ministry were remembered and celebrated and where the faithful hoped to enter and experience a deeper understanding and greater "enlightenment." The caves at Nazareth, Bethlehem and in Jerusalem were among these sacred places. So, we might focus on the words "who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb." We might make this our prayer: Risen Lord, enlighten us to enter into the mystery and meaning of your resurrection. Let us too be bewildered not with fear but with profound reverence at the proclamation: "He is not here; he has been raised!" Roll back the stone so we might enter the cave of understanding!

The speech of Peter gathers what the early Church came to believe was the good news of Easter:

- that Jesus truly died, and God raised him to life,
- that he was seen by those chosen as witnesses
- that they were commissioned to preach and testify to him
- that the hope of salvation promised by God through the prophets had dawned.

The words proclaimed this Easter Sunday were written in the light of Easter faith. Luke mentions stages in the development of understanding concerning the meaning of the resurrection. First, something did happen. The event of Christ's resurrection is something we accept with lively faith though wrapped as it is in mystery. Second, those who bore witness to this truth, articulated its meaning in light of Old Testament hopes and expectations, finding continuity with the past. Third, Luke states in the introduction to his Gospel that he set out to write an orderly sequence so that "you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received" (Luke 1:4).

What we hear proclaimed is not simply a retelling of something that happened long ago. It is a story that divides human history: the time before Christ and the time after Christ. What difference does this

story make to you? What *is* the good news of Easter? We each need to answer this for ourselves, to own it, not simply wait for someone to tell us why this is so. There are many important questions, enough to fill the fifty days of Easter with prayer and thought. How does this shape the way you embrace the life God has given you? How do we face the challenges of life, defined by many complex issues and concerns?

The Apostles Creed professes that "he died, descended into hell (the abode of the dead) and rose again." His was not simply a personal resurrection, but with him the flawed world was restored and transformed at its center, establishing a divine order there. Paraphrasing an Easter homily by Karl Rahner, we realize we live in a world that is marked by wickedness, greed and sin, a fragile planet subject to natural disasters and change. Mother earth "groans" (Cf. Romans 8:18-25). However, Christ has left his divine life at the heart of this earth. He has borne human suffering and transformed it. We remain earthlings destined for heaven, children of earth and children of God.

As wise inheritors of the good news of Easter, we will seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We will think about what is above and not be consumed by what is of the earth. Let Alleluia be our song!

April 11, 2021
Second Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35; Psalm 118: 2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 John 5:1-6; John 20:19-31

The Church gives us a week of weeks to bask in the mysteries of Easter. Each year finds us in some different place spiritually and from the experience of life as it constantly changes, we are invited to reflect on the good news of Easter. Through the liturgies we celebrate, the biblical texts proclaimed in our hearing, the Church's celebration of the Easter Sacraments, and the great feasts that occur at this time, we are helped to perceive new ways our life and world are touched by the good news of Easter.

What is this good news of Easter? How do you receive it and what difference does it make? For the unbelieving Thomas, it meant the

story that others told him that seemed impossible, but turned out to be true, and his unbelief was transformed into faith. For the disciples gathered in fear, the risen Lord imparted peace and breathed his spirit on them. Christ gave them the power to forgive sin as he had forgiven his enemies from the cross, and they were sent forth to tell the good news. For the Jerusalem community it meant a new way of life, perceived as an ideal to be admired and pursued, where a bond of charity left no one an outsider.

The readings today focus our attention not only on what God accomplished by raising Christ to life, but also on what this means for us and our world. The language invites us to consider the resurrection of the Lord as a new beginning, a new creation. God breathes forth life-giving breath and individuals are transformed, communities become selflessly concerned for the well-being and good of all. In our culture, where people guard their investments, provide only for their own futures, while others suffer want and insecurity, this seems too good to be true! The good news that was alive in this early Christian community was that generosity and simplicity of life bring the peace and contentment we all seek.

In the Letter of John, we read that all who believe that Jesus is the Christ are begotten by God and whoever loves the Father also loves the one begotten by God. So, we are reminded of the command to love God and one another. This characterizes the Christian community. A community begotten by God, united in faith in the risen Christ, and faithful to God's word can change the world but more importantly can change the human heart! Isn't this also part of the good news of Easter?

We read these accounts of the effects of the resurrection on the early Christian community. All had been touched or renewed in some way by the good news of Easter. The gift has been poured out and the Spirit lives among us! It is the gift given to the Church. Life is changed forever. Blessed are we who have not seen yet who hold onto this belief and allow it to take root so we might change the face of the earth!

April 18, 2021
Third Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 3:13-15, 17-19; Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9; 1 John 2:1-5a; Luke 24:35-48

Let us continue to consider the question: What is the good news of Easter? "He is risen" was the earliest Christian creed. Try to imagine what life was like for the first followers of Christ. Was everything crystal clear? Did they struggle to understand? Even the writings we hear at this liturgy were written at least 50 years after the events they describe! What our earliest brothers and sisters had was proximity to the events and the conviction of first or secondhand accounts. We have the benefit of 2000 years of forming a tradition and teachings and study that shed more light. Each situation has its advantages.

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, Luke composed speeches that he placed on the lips of important people. The text we hear today is purportedly delivered by Peter after he healed a crippled beggar at the temple. The context of the account would suggest the timing was soon after the Pentecost event. Speaking to the astonished crowd, Peter addressed them as "Israelites." He told them it was not by his power that the man was healed, but through faith in the risen Lord who had been glorified by "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors."

So, the good news of Easter here is that there is a power released into this world that can heal and restore people to wholeness. Could it be that the once crippled beggar, through his encounter with the risen Lord, was embraced by the Christian community and found acceptance, safety, and care with nothing to fear?

Luke often refers to Israel's past. In today's gospel he mentions "Moses, the Prophets and Psalms" and in Acts, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob…." The early followers of Jesus were Jewish and in seeking to understand who Jesus was, Luke makes use of their history, giving names and titles to Jesus that recall his roots in their Scriptures. Titles like "servant," "the holy and righteous one," reference to "the messiah who would suffer," make a connection between Jesus and the suffering servant in the writings of Isaiah. Luke also recalls the promises and covenants, their history and future expectation, which provide an

interpretive clue as to Christ's role in the unfolding of salvation history. Jesus was the one to keep all God's promises to the ancestors. In Christ all the covenants and promises were brought to completion and the broken relationship between God and God's people would finally be restored, not through an imperfect cult, but through Jesus faithfully doing the Father's will. This connection helped them to understand who Jesus was.

Unless we have some familiarity with the Old Testament, the good news of Jesus keeping God's promises might be passed over. We miss something essential in the life of Jesus if we are not able to link that life with the long and circuitous story of Israel's relationship with God. The references the gospel writers make are subtle and easily missed. However, if we are aware of these, they make for a deeper understanding and appreciation of this age-old love story.

Do you hear in today's gospel echoes from what we heard last week? There is a greeting of peace, instruction that repentance and forgiveness be preached to the nations. Similarly, Jesus offers an invitation to the startled disciples, as to Thomas, to touch his hands and feet. (By contrast, it's intriguing that in John's resurrection stories Jesus says "do not touch me.") "Startled, terrified, amazed" were responses found in most of the resurrection accounts, reminding us of the proximity of God to us. This too, is the good news of Easter!

April 25, 2021
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 4:8-12; Psalm 118: 1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28-29; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

In the text from Acts of the Apostles, we find Peter offer another of the speeches that set forth the basic truths that are essential to Christian belief. His message is this: Jesus suffered death, was actually raised from the dead by God, was seen by witnesses who testified to his appearance, and forgiveness of sin is offered. We find these same beliefs affirmed in other speeches (see Acts 5:29ff, 10:34ff and 13:26ff). These seemed to have been necessary clarifications against some who might have challenged the truth of what happened.

One simply must shake their heads at leaders who would question a good deed done by Peter to a human being in need! These would seem to be the same crowd of elders, chief priests, and leaders that Jesus encountered in the Gospels, especially in Matthew chapters 21-23. There he tells a series of parables aimed at their failure to care for and tend to the people, announcing that their time is up. How are the people to produce good fruit if those sent to teach and lead by example fail in that duty, or actively choose against it? Perhaps Peter's boldness in declaring that he healed in the name of Jesus gave rise to fear or jealousy among those leaders who thought they had already dealt with the problem. In Peter's words and actions do we see yet another bit of the good news of Easter: that boundaries begin to be extended and rigid structures begin to be dismantled? However, we can observe that pushing in such a manner has consequences. It is often followed by push back by those with something to lose.

One tends to admire a leader who never asks someone under their care to do what they are unwilling to take on themselves. We read in the Book of Sirach: "Conduct your affairs with humility and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find mercy in the sight of God" (Sir 3:17-18). This is the manner of the shepherd, the pattern set by Jesus.

Another piece of the good news of Easter is that we are among the flock that is tended by the Good Shepherd. We have a shepherd who has cast his lot with us. We read in the Scriptures that he rose from the dead, but he did not leave behind his earthly experiences. These were transformed. In fact, Jesus bears in his glorified body, the marks that testify to the love he bears for his flock. Jesus has walked this earth and is familiar with the struggles of life. He leads us by a pathway that is not of servitude but one of gentle kindness. That is a comforting thought!

To be born is to enter a journey of life. To be called Christian is to make that a journey marked by the sign and reality of the cross as well as the glory of resurrection. Our greatest glory is the cross. We await what is to be revealed to us. The good news of Easter does not end in this life but in the unimaginable promise of eternity.

Film Review

Death comes to us all. Just how it will come is a mystery. Will I die in a car accident? Will I die from cancer or some other illness? Will I slowly diminish and die in my old age? Most of us likely avoid these questions, preferring not to delve too deeply into the specifics. We are people of faith and we trust in God's promised gift of resurrection, but the stark reality of our own death may be something we wish to avoid pondering.

DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD
Kirsten Johnson
USA, 2020
Netflix

By John Christman, SSS

No so for Richard Johnson and his daughter Kirsten Johnson. Their film, "Dick Johnson is Dead" is a documentary of sorts that explores the death and dying process. However, it does not do so in an abstract or distant manner. Instead, it follows the real life of clinical psychiatrist Richard Johnson as he experiences the increasing effects of dementia. Kirsten, a successful and critically acclaimed documentary filmmaker, proposed this film project to her father, and he accepted. What ensues is an intimate and creative engagement personalizing the death and dying process that is completely their own.

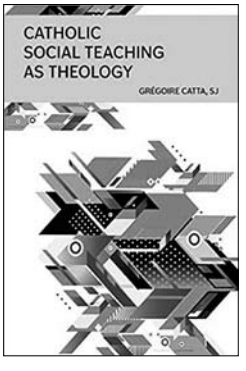
Many adults embrace caring for an elderly parent. This can be entered into in a number of ways: as a responsibility, a task, an opportunity for deepening a relationship. Kirsten Johnson embraces this not just as an opportunity for deeper relationship but as a creative project for her and her father to explore some of life's great mysteries together. The specificity of death and its related fears are part of this. So, Kirsten and Dick record multiple death scenes in which they imagine ways he might die. Some are almost cartoon like, with an air-conditioner falling from the sky and landing on his head. Others are more anxiety filled, like slipping and falling down a staircase alone in one's home. These sequences bring death more into the present, where it can't be swept under the rug. And yet, they take some of the fear away, and offer little moments of humor as father, daughter, and film crew meticulously and self-reflectively enact these scenes.

Also helpful in lifting the weight of Dick Johnson's dementia and decline are images of hope and encouragement. Dick is a Christian and faithful member of his religious tradition. This allows Kirsten and Dick to creatively imagine some of the heavenly joys to come after his death, such as being reunited with his beloved wife. Kirsten likewise gives her father the gift of attending his own funeral through the magic of cinema, which is cathartic not only for father and daughter, but for the entire community of family, friends, and church members.

Yet, even with all of her directorial creativity, Kirsten can't avoid some of the most challenging moments in the relationship between adults and their elderly parents. One poignant scene captures the conversation where Kirsten tells her father that he can't drive anymore. Dick, often jovial and good-natured, breaks into tears at the news. He knows the bigger meaning of the conversation and it's heartbreaking to watch. It's moments such as these, more than the fictional enactments, that reveal the challenging truth of the journey father and daughter are on.

With descriptions such as these, one might be hesitant to watch this film as one is likely hesitant to ponder such realities. But that would be a loss, because art can be a truly life-giving and transformative gift. Dick Johnson is Dead offers this gift not only to the viewer but to father and daughter. It not only sheds light on the death and dying process but illuminates the love and joy still to be had while sharing the journey of life together.

Book Reviews



AWESOME GLORY: RESURRECTION IN SCRIPTURE, LITURGY, AND THEOLOGY
By Jeremy Driscoll, OSB
Collegeville: Liturgical Press
2019
US $19.95
144 pages

The repetition of celebrating the Paschal Triduum and Easter season can become so familiar it's too familiar. These many months of the COVID pandemic made us realize the importance and value of communal celebrations of the Sacred Triduum. A fresh perspective upon the readings of these sacred liturgies can be found in Benedictine Abbot Jeremy Driscoll of Mount Angel Abbey (Saint Benedict, Oregon). Abbot Driscoll does justice to this topic in a concise and masterful 144 page book that explores these sacred liturgies (see page 34).

Six chapters organize this liturgical exegesis, from Holy Thursday through Pentecost. Driscoll's reflections aid our reading of the words of paschal mystery celebration and Easter (see page 4). They are a welcome

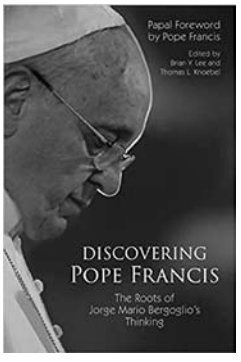
overview to awaken us to the meaning of these events. Driscoll focuses on important aspects, such as "baptism means plunged," and how we should truly take the rituals quite seriously as we celebrate them, allowing their symbolism to give meaning to our lives.

A second edition would give the opportunity for further explanation of key terms and concepts in English, (Passover/pasch and death/new life). Missing from Holy Thursday celebrations are the presentation of the holy oils and mention of the Elect of God and their dismissal. This absence might be attributed to the fact that these rituals are not done at monasteries, but are part of regular parish life. Editing titles to match the *Roman Missal* would help with clarity as well. Also missing from the Good Friday liturgy is the "prayer after communion" and "simple blessing/prayer over the people." The book omits the Easter Day Mass Sequence which is a wonderful poetic piece that would have given Abbot Driscoll some time to reflect, since he's done a poetic job with other pieces of the liturgy. He also does not comment on the Pentecost Sequence.

These foibles do not detract from Driscoll's reflections on each of the gospel narratives, which are priceless. See page 110 for the "dance" with scripture that he writes. It is also the first book that I've encountered from the modern era that gives reflections on the Easter octave. This adds to the unfolding of the mystery of the Easter season.

On page 139 Driscoll says, "Throughout this book I have claimed that the proclamation of sacred scripture in any given liturgy is a revelation of the event of that liturgy in the concrete community that is celebrating it. It is a revelation of the feast." Driscoll's wisdom and liturgical knowledge are worth experiencing. Sadly, his work ends abruptly, with just a brief comment about the communion antiphon for Pentecost. This text could be strengthened by having a liturgical prayer, an appendix, and bibliography to give further illustrations to the meaning of why we celebrate with renewed vigor these holy days.

John Thomas Lane, SSS, Pastor and Liturgical Consultant
Saint Paschal Baylon Parish
Highland Heights, OH



DISCOVERING POPE FRANCIS: THE ROOTS OF JORGE MARIO BERGOGLIO'S THINKING
Brian Y. Lee and Thomas L. Knoebel (eds.)
Liturgical Press
Collegeville, MN.
2019

At a time where the evangelical logos is most needed, God set as leader of the Catholic Church an ordinary man deeply concerned with the value of humanity in all its realities and ongoing challenges. This edited version of Brian Lee and Thomas Knoebel's *Discovering Pope Francis* designates the figure of a pope unlike any other before, in bringing forth not an age of change but rather a change of age, in and through an ongoing encounter with Christ.

This work contains the contributions of many intellectuals and theologians, all called together in a spirit of dialogue to share about Pope Francis. The book is structured in a way so as to give gradual knowledge and insight into the personality of Pope Francis, from his Latin American roots to his encounter with the Western reality and culture. It also stands as a vital contribution in the understanding of the theological roots of his Pontificate.

In fact, this symposium does not consist merely of biographical data, but rather of a vast study of his roots, thinking patterns and views on matters theological and ecclesial. It also illuminates his dynamic pastoral care and missionary spirit. We cannot get the flow of Pope Francis' thought if we do not perceive him as a pastoral-minded servant of the Lord working in the challenges of the here and now. It is noted that the *"sensus fidei"* and the *"sensus fidelium"* come to the scene in Francis' pastoral theology to respond to the needs of the entire faith community.

The nine chapters of this book draw close attention to Pope Francis' desire for a dynamic living and witnessing Church that gets out of it's safe zone and sets out to minister to the most vulnerable in every society, race, culture, and nation. For being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but an encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Therefore "Discovering Pope Francis" whom we really do not know in the way that we think we do, gives us new insights into his theological, pastoral and spiritual perspectives.

From a critical point of view, the book will certainly provide prudence in interpreting the media's presentation of Francis, often without much knowledge of his roots, both Latin American and Ignatian. Instead one finds in his perspective a considerable positive and effective influence of great theologians such as Hans Urs Von Balthasar or Luigi Guissani.

This displays the rich vision of Pope Francis' journey and the profound heritage of catholicity in rediscovering Christ through Pope Francis'

humility and love for the Church and the entire faith community around the globe.

Rev. Louis Demba, SSS
Sri Lanka

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AS THEOLOGY
Gregoire Catta SJ, Paulist Press
Mahwah, NJ
2019

The title of the book is very interesting and thought-provoking. In what sense is Catholic social teaching theological? Guided by a research question of this sort, this book, rich in its content, tries to investigate the path from social ethics to theology and shows how the relationship between the two can be envisioned. The study clearly demonstrates how the former contributes to the latter, and not merely how the latter is a source for the former.

In this scholarly work, Gregoire Catta focuses on a few post-Vatican II papal social encyclicals, namely Paul VI's *Populorum progressio*, John Paul II's *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Benedict XVI's *Caritas in veritate,* and Francis *Laudato Si*. Obviously, particular historical challenges and specific world views adopted by the popes shaped their ethical reasoning and political priorities for action. This book does not merely address social, political, and economical issues, but points to the mystery of the saving God, demonstrating how we can encounter and understand God through social issues. The author states that "Catholic Social Teaching is not merely a matter of reversing a logical deductive movement but rather of making a case in favor of a solid hermeneutical spiral. When considering theological expressions of faith, ethical discernment and practices, there are constant interactions among the three." Therefore, the book gives an ethical guideline to express our beliefs and becomes a source for Christian ethics.

Catta addresses various social, political, and economical issues and tries to offer Christian ethics a theological flavor from the point of view of "the mystery of God for us." He then gathers theological insights collected from these encyclicals and uses them to reflect on broad theological questions such as: How do we understand the role and the centrality of historicity for theology? How do we articulate within a theological anthropology the individual and social dimensions of the human person or the call for personal conversion and for structural changes? How do we balance different approaches to the mystery of Jesus Christ from above and from below? These questions are addressed through the three theological themes: methodology and style as theologically significant, theological anthropology, and Christology.

In my eyes, this book tries to build a bridge between social ethics and theology rather than emphasizing one aspect at the detriment of the other and in this way Catta opens multiple ways to encounter the "mystery of God for us." It would be a wonderful reading and learning experience especially for students of theology in their study on social doctrines, offering newer perspectives.

Thilina Lakshan, SSS
Sri Lanka

Poetry

The Adoration Chapel

The Chapel is locked--
after midnight you must press
the code *Star 333* to enter.

God's home tonight on the altar:
blue candles for his mercy;
red for his suffering.

He is here to listen
to your hurts, your doubts,
to soften stinging memories,
to bind up your wounds.

He is also here to speak
words so special, so understanding
that only your heart
and your soul can hear them.

He is preparing you for a journey,
but don't worry about clocks or
mileage; your destination is before you.

He has brought a flight of angels
to keep you company in his chapel.
They are your prayer partners tonight.

Philip Kolin

adoration time during covid-19 time
advice to a spiritual directee

the church is closed

and i miss the face to Face, he said

then he added,

it is my most intimate time with Him . . .

i told him, *this Absence is a gift*

so why not offer this gift

for someone who has no faith

to see the Face you long to see

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S.

lent: the prophet

we will try again this year to hear you
clothed as you are
in purple, ashes and the penance of letting go
for forty days you roar
at the dry rivers of our lives
so we will try to truly hear the stories:
a prodigal son, a woman at a well, a blind man who sees
the ones that long for us to hear
one simple thing
come back to such extravagant tenderness called home

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S.

EUCHARISTIC WITNESS

Ernest Falardeau, SSS

Highland Heights, Ohio

The Sign of Unity

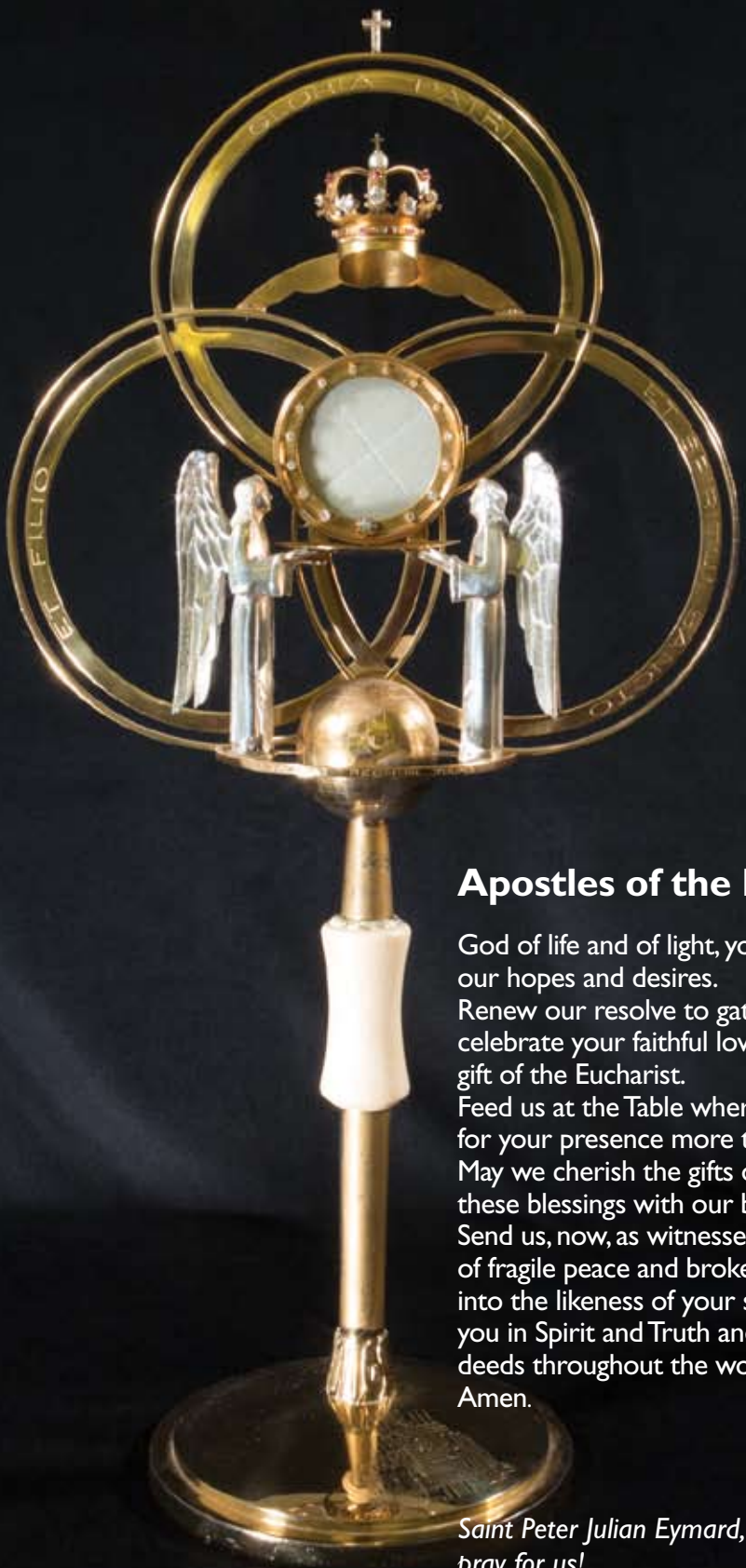
"Our celebration of the Eucharist, sign of the covenant between God and the human race, remains, in a sense incomplete as long as we who are baptized are divided by hate or separated from one another… (Rule of Life 38, Mission of Unity)."

This number of our SSS Rule of Life was approved by the Catholic Church in 1984. The Catholic Church joined Christian churches in the ecumenical movement when it approved the document on Christian unity, *Unitatis Redintegratio* in 1965. I was teaching theology at our seminary in Cleveland at that time, and I began to attend the local ministers' gathering in Highland Heights, a suburb of Cleveland. I was very pleased with the warm welcome I received by the ministers. The friendship that began with those ministers of other Christian traditions continued to grow for many years.

But the reason I continued to find myself engaged in this ministry in the pursuit of Christian unity and interfaith collaboration is because Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist and in his memory the Eucharist is celebrated, received and is the center of Christian prayer and contemplation (UR, 10).

I continue to work for Christian unity because the goal of the ecumenical movement is not so much to have one Church. The goal of the ecumenical movement is for Christians to recognize the unity they have from baptism and it is nurtured by Christ himself who tells us that whoever eats and drinks the Eucharist becomes more and more one with Jesus Christ himself. As Saint Augustine put it, we become what we eat: the body of Christ, the Church, whose head is Jesus Christ.

In this regard, I love the last part of our Rule of Life number 38. It says, "The celebration leads us to promote unity in all our activities: within our Christian communities, among all confessions that share the same baptism and among all those who are working to unify the world."



Apostles of the Eucharist Prayer

God of life and of light, your love for us surpasses all our hopes and desires.
Renew our resolve to gather as your people and to celebrate your faithful love for us manifested in Jesus' gift of the Eucharist.
Feed us at the Table where we long
for your presence more than for life itself.
May we cherish the gifts of bread and wine and share these blessings with our brothers and sisters.
Send us, now, as witnesses of your gospel into a world of fragile peace and broken promises, so that, formed into the likeness of your son, Jesus, we may worship you in Spirit and Truth and proclaim your mighty deeds throughout the world.
Amen.

Adapted from the liturgical prayers for Sundays.

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

"Though he was in the form of God,
Jesus did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross."

Philippians 2: 6-9