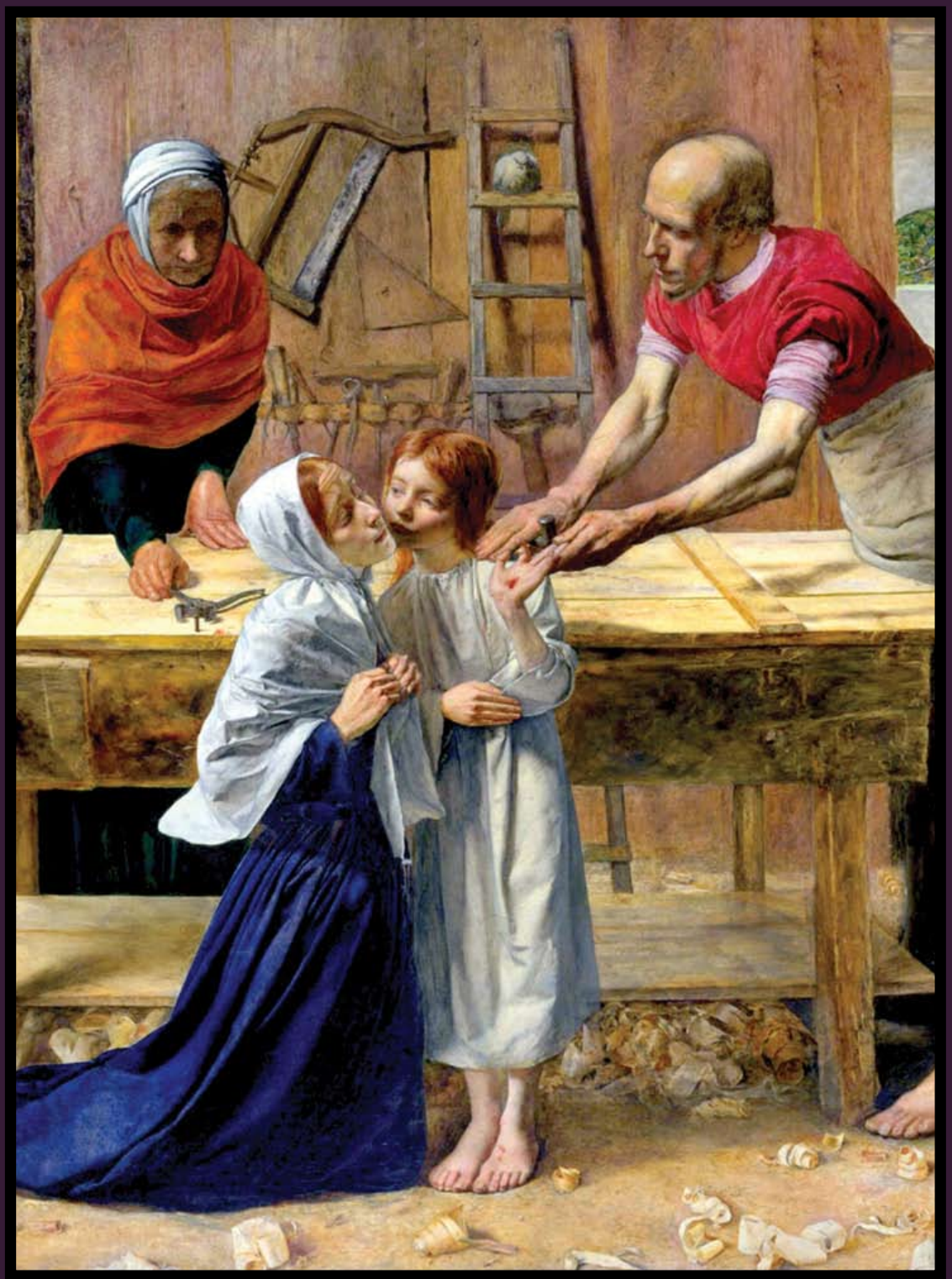
Emmanuel

Eucharistic Spirituality

November/December 2021



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FRONT COVER (detail) and BACK COVER: CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF HIS PARENTS OR THE CARPENTER'S SHOP
1849-1850, oil on canvas
Sir John Everett Millais

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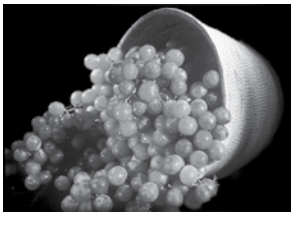
Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 127 Number 6



FROM THE EDITOR

Many of us who attend Mass regularly are familiar with the ebb and flow of church attendance throughout the year. There is often lower attendance during summer as people travel or go on vacation. Weekday Mass attendance increases during Lent and Advent as people utilize these seasons to attend to their spiritual life. Unique occasions such as Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday draw people to church for the tactile and symbolic aspects of those liturgies. Communal celebrations of First Communion and Confirmation can be large, especially if a parish is associated with a school. Depending upon the cultural context, unique feasts like Our Lady of Guadalupe can also draw many people. But the most well attended Masses throughout the year are generally Christmas and Easter.

For many of us it's a delight to see so many people at Christmas Mass. There's a sense that the entire community has come together. The mood is joyous and there's a sense of shared values. The church is festively decorated, and many people have dressed up for the occasion. We hear some of our favorite Christmas hymns and the story of Jesus' humble birth is told. We are both flooded with memories and filled with possibilities. I imagine this year all of those experiences will be heightened as people may feel more at ease returning to church compared to Christmas last year in the midst of the pandemic.

While there is much to be thankful for, many of us also suffered great difficulties and losses. Here at Emmanuel we lost Very Reverend Anthony Schueller, SSS. He was editor of Emmanuel from 1990-2002 and 2013-2019. More recently he had taken on the role of Senior Editor and continued his always concise and thoughtful reflections in the "From the Editor" column. His breadth of reading and knowledge were always on display in the numerous sources he would weave into his writing. But, for those of us who had the gift of knowing him personally, we will miss his gentle pastoral spirit. Never one to draw

attention to himself, Father Schueller would likely be embarrassed by these words. Instead, during this season especially, he would likely redirect our attention to Christ and the Eucharist.

One thing Father Schueller exuded was eucharistic hospitality. He delighted in inviting people to the table and sharing a meal with them. At Christmas this was all the more evident with the abundant meals and conversations he would share. For him Eucharist easily flowed into hospitality and a celebratory Christmas dinner. This, of course, is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

So, as we gather for Eucharist this Christmas, whatever challenges or losses we have experienced, let us in true eucharistic fashion "remember" and "look forward." *Remember* Jesus our savior who unites us all, born in Bethlehem. *Look forward* to being reunited with our loved ones seated with Christ at the heavenly banquet. And let us be lovingly present to one another this Christmas in gratitude, as Jesus is eucharistically present to us. Father Schueller would love that. 

John Christman, SSS
Editor

In This Issue

This November/December issue of Emmanuel offers a wide variety of articles. Patrick Riley culls the pandemic writings and statements of Pope Francis to help distill Francis' vision for "a post-pandemic world." In a related fashion Michael DeSanctis examines trends among differing Christian traditions in their use of technology, sometimes even to the extent of abandoning sacred architecture. In an appreciative vein, Patrick Dolan identifies a number of Celtic influences in the Mass and how they can be utilized to enhance liturgical prayer. As the "Year of Saint Joseph" draws to a close James Kroeger, MM offers a reflection on how this important saint models mission. And scripture scholar Maribeth Howell, OP guides us through the Advent readings into Christmas in our Breaking the Word column. We wish you all a Blessed Christmas!

EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Pope Francis' Post-Pandemic World

by Patrick Riley

What is Pope Francis' vision for the world after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Patrick. J. Riley, D. Min. After ministering in teaching and administration in Catholic high schools and colleges for 48 years, Dr. Riley recently retired. He is a Church historian and has been the book review editor for *Emmanuel Magazine* for over 25 years

When the former archbishop of Buenos Aires was elected, it was clear that he was going to be a different kind of pope. He was the first pope from the southern hemisphere and the first pope who is a Jesuit. He was also the first pope to take the name Francis in honor of the poor man of Assisi. He spoke using new images: "the Church should be a field hospital." "Priests and bishops should get out of their rectories and begin to smell like the sheep." "The Church should be at the peripheries where the Lord waits with the poor." "The Church is too self-referential." We soon learned that his focus was not on doctrine, but on pastoral concerns.

The greatest forced human migration to take place since the Second World War, has coincided with Francis' papacy. Extreme famine in Africa and the on-going genocidal wars in the Middle East, and violence in Central America which forced huge numbers of people to leave their homelands and seek survival and safety elsewhere moved Pope Francis to great empathy. Just two weeks after the inauguration of his papacy, he traveled to the island of Lampedusa, where hundreds, if not thousands, of refugees had perished on voyages to the small island. He pleaded with each parish in Europe to adopt a refugee family. In April 2016, Francis visited the Greek Island of Lesbos, which had received thousands of refugees. He called the tragedy of this forced migration a crisis of humanity which called forth compassion and solidarity. As he left Lesbos, the Vatican announced that they had selected three refugee families and were bringing them back to the Vatican.

He traveled to Mexico and near the American border he decried the violence and poverty which caused many people to flee Central America. He also expressed his nearness to the Palestinian people

who were "walled in" by the state of Israel as more and more of their land was taken.

Pope Francis drew energy through the enthusiastic crowds who filled St. Peter's Square as he drove through their midst in the pope mobile reaching out to them and hugging babies and young children. The same was true of the millions who lined the streets and filled the stadiums in the many countries to which he made pastoral visits. But, in early 2020, he was about to become imprisoned like the rest of the world.

In January of 2020, the world began to face a global crisis. The COVID-19 virus struck China, quickly spread to Europe, and gradually impacted the entire world. No walls, national boundaries or oceans could stop its spread. Nations began to close their borders to any foreigners. Then came the quarantine in one country after another. All but essential businesses were closed as were churches, museums, factories, cafes, restaurants and schools. In many countries the wearing of masks was mandatory. People were encouraged to socially distance themselves from one another.

On March 9, Italy was put on a two-month lockdown. The bishop of Rome was also on lockdown. While he would normally give his *urbi et orbi* blessing on Easter Sunday, the Pope could not wait that long to reach out to the people who needed to hear a message of consolation, hope, and love. On Friday, March 27, on a dark and rainy night, the Holy Father walked alone through an empty St. Peter's Square. After reading a selection from the Gospel where the apostles seem to lose trust, the pope spoke: "We have all raced together with breakneck speed ignoring the wars, injustice and cries of the poor and our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we could stay healthy in a world that was sick." Francis reminded us that faith begins when we recognize our need for salvation. We need each other and we need to invite Jesus into our boats. Only by giving our fears to Jesus can we conquer them. He encouraged all to embrace hope and through this hope to work for avenues of helping ourselves and others on the rough waters in which we found ourselves. He then gave his *urbi et orbi* blessing using the Eucharist in a monstrance.

While the virus continued to rage throughout the world, bringing sickness and death to so many, the Holy Father suffered with and prayed for God's people. He was also focused on what the world would be like on the other side of the virus. How would the world change? Will the poor continue to suffer while the rich get richer? Would the

poorer countries of the world continue to suffer from famine and disease? Will the developed countries offer to work with those still developing to achieve stability and thrive? Will wars continue? Will terrorism still instill fear? Will major progress be made on addressing climate change? These and other questions gnawed at the Holy Father and he knew that he needed to speak out.

Pope Francis' Post-Pandemic Vision

In his recent book, *The Pope and the Pandemic: Lessons in Leadership in a Time of Crisis,* theologian Agbonkhianmeghe E. Ororbator, SJ, describes the style of leadership which characterized Pope Francis during the pandemic. He highlights a number of characteristics of the Holy Father's life and ministry before the pandemic which were intensified during those dark months and which continue to characterize his ministry. These include compassion, mercy, and hope. He has consistently modeled personal closeness in his ministry. As the pandemic raged in Northern Italy, where 30 priests had succumbed to the virus, Pope Francis phoned Bishop Beschi of Bergamo to express his closeness to the suffering people. He phoned Cardinal Dolan and asked him to assure the people of New York of his closeness to them. Wherever the pandemic was out of control, the Holy Father made his closeness known personally.

Looking forward to a world after the pandemic, Pope Francis published two documents in which he painted a picture of what the world could look life if it embraced radical change in economics, the relationship of the northern hemisphere to that of the south, a greater sense of care for our environment and pretty much a complete re-orientation of the priorities which have guided the world since the Industrial Revolution.

On the feast of St. Francis in 2020, the Holy Father issued an encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti.* In it he focused upon the image in Jesus' parable of the stranger who tends to the man who was beaten, robbed, and left along the road. The good Samaritan didn't just hand him some money and keep on walking. He entered into a relationship with him to ensure his immediate and long-term growth.

In his letter Francis calls for a radical change in our relationships. He rejects the consumer throw-away society in which people are used and then discarded. He rejects the present relationship between those

who have and those who have not, those who control the economy and those the economy neglects or abandons. He calls for an end to war and terrorism in which the poor suffer the most and which causes the poor to become migrants and/or immigrants from their own homelands. He demands that all people be treated with the human dignity with which they have been endowed by the Creator. However, the Holy Father notes that people should not expect governments and those in power to effect these changes. It is the people, those on the periphery who are to effect change. The change he calls for is radical, reaching to the very roots of what constitutes human community.

During the pandemic Pope Francis also wrote a book entitled *Let Us Dream, A Path to a Better Future*. It was published on December 1, 2021. In it he expresses his often-spoken concerns for the pre-pandemic world and attempts to draw people to reflect on what can now be created. He believes that the destruction of the environment, COVID-19, and the hundreds of thousands of displaced people fleeing famine and persecution, and the impacts of the Me Too and Black Lives Matter movements, have created a new era filled with possibilities.

The reality of COVID, according to Francis, is that it has uncovered so much that was hidden from our eyes. Now with these new eyes we can become "agents of a new future."

He reaffirms his often-repeated refrain, "You have to go to the edges of existence if you want to see the world as it is. I have always thought that the world looks clearer from the periphery, but in these last seven years, as Pope, it has really hit home."[1] And you can't go to the periphery in the abstract. Pope Francis brings it out of the abstract when he views the displaced Rohingas who live in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh. They suffer from displacement and what Francis calls "the virus of indifference" which is born of the myth of self-sufficiency.[2]

The reality of COVID, according to Francis, is that it has uncovered so much that was hidden from our eyes. Now with these new eyes we can become "agents of a new future."[3] He is quite firm in the fact that this new future is not a top-down model. "I mean that these people who are on the edges become the protagonists of social change."[4]

So much has happened and so much has been upended, the Pope

sees limitless possibilities for creating a new world in which equality and not dominance characterizes the human family. He reaffirms in his book the concepts and the urgency he explored in *Laudato si* for an integral ecology. As he explores the possibilities in this new era, he urges his readers to take action in their own lives and to encourage governments to take significant steps to reduce gases that continue to destroy our planet. He also emphasizes the relationship between the ecology of the planet with an ecology of community which ensures that "progress" leads not so much to a market economy.[5]

It is in the last chapter of *Let Us Dream* that Pope Francis begins to lay out his hopeful vision of a post-pandemic world. For him the foundation for this post-pandemic world rests on the idea of "a people."[6] He terms this a mythical category which draws on and expresses many sources, "historic, linguistic, culturally especially in music and dance but above all a collective wisdom and memory."[7] Those realities feed the life of the people. He also notes that the beginning of "a people" has its origins in a quest for dignity and freedom, a history of solidarity and struggle. No "people" is guaranteed a future. It must be worked on continuously. There is always competition for dominance, the belief that one can take continuously without giving back. "Indifference, egotism, a culture of complacent well-being and deep divisions in a society spilling out into violence — all these are signs that a people has lost awareness of its dignity. It has ceased to believe in itself." [8]

All may not be lost if the people in a new crisis recognize that they can return to their original vision. They could recover its memory which could call them to action, but this is not easy. As in our recent COVID crisis, our securities were eroded and the indifference that we have shown to the poor and marginalized was laid bare. Suddenly *survival* replaced profit and power as our organizing principle. The sense of being a people can be recovered in the same way it was originally forged, in hardship and struggle. It is only in a communal attempt to re-encounter ourselves and to regain our "soul," what Francis describes as the "living reality that is the fruit of a shared integrating principle."[9]

The depth of God's love for God's people is most fully manifested in Jesus. Jesus' words and actions are an on-going manifestation of God's love and devotion to this people. As the followers of Jesus, the Church is the incarnation in time and place of that revelation of God. The Christian belongs to the People of God which "has a particular role to play in times of crisis. It is precisely to remind the people of

its soul, of its need to respect the common good. That is what Jesus did."[10] The entire message of Jesus was that we strengthen our sense of belonging, reaching out especially to those with whom Jesus identified himself, the poor, the alienated, the suffering and those who are compelled to live on the periphery.

Francis urges us at this moment "to restore an ethic of fraternity and solidarity, regenerating the bonds of trust and belonging. For what saves us is not an idea but an encounter. Only the face of another is capable to awakening the best of ourselves. In serving people, we save ourselves."[11]

The Holy Father identifies three primary areas of concern that have risen out of the meetings of popular movements: land, lodging, and labor

Pope Francis comes down hard on the "market" because it has decoupled economics and ethics.[12] He decries the reality that there is much more concern over the market dropping two points than over the homeless woman who freezes to death in an alley. Where do social and environmental goals fit into the market agenda? While the market advances the coffers of a very few, most are left behind. When the accumulation of wealth becomes the goal, wealth becomes an idol which chains us. "Barely more than one percent of the world's population owns half of its wealth. A market ever more detached from morality, dazzled by its own complex engineering, which privileges profit and competition above all else, means not just spectacular wealth for a few but also poverty and deprivation for many. Millions are robbed of hope."[13] But, when you put human dignity rather than wealth at the center, you create a new logic of mercy and care. "Either a society is geared to a culture of sacrifice — the triumph of the fittest and the throwaway culture — or to mercy and care. People or bricks. It is time to choose."[14]

To seek a new vision for the world from Wall Street, from Washington, or from any international political or economic bloc would be fruitless. We would be going back on the same track that got us where we are today. It is on the peripheries that we must seek the agents of change and rebirth. In this Francis looks to the example of Jesus. Jesus' preaching evoked in the people of his time "the ancient promises they carried in their guts, in their blood: an ancestral awareness of

God's closeness and of their own dignity. By bringing to them that closeness in the way He spoke and touched and healed, Jesus showed that awareness is real."[15] They followed Jesus because he gave them dignity. His mission was to the outcasts, to adulterers, tax collectors, sinners, foreigners and not to the religious elite of his time. By accompanying, healing, and loving those rejected he broke down "the wall that prevented the Lord from coming close to his people, among his flock"[16]

Land, Lodging and Labor

The Holy Father identifies three primary areas of concern that have risen out of the meetings of popular movements: land, lodging, and labor.[17]

In regard to the *land* Pope Francis sees the disruption of the pandemic as a wonderful opportunity to change the destructive habits of our lifestyles and to discover new ways to produce, trade, and transport. Here also the Holy Father writes powerfully on the universal destination of goods and calls for the opening up of land for small farms to produce foods locally, using organic sustainable methods creating healthy soil and greater biodiversity. All on the earth are entitled to clean water, fresh air, and a balanced healthy diet.

The next focus, *lodging*, addresses not only our individual homes but more widely, our general habitat. Throughout his pontificate he has argued that the dignity of the human person is clearly enhanced when all persons have suitable housing. He has decried the growing number of refugee camps where thousands of men, women and children are crowded together. Francis also notes that most of the population of the world live in cities, observing how unhealthy many of what he calls "soulless city centers" which foster anonymity, solitude, and a sense of orphanhood, and which are chaotic, fragmented and saturated with noise and ugliness.[18] It is almost impossible to feel a sense of dignity in such surroundings. One issue on which he is quite clear is that the plans for the transformation of cities must not 'come from the top,' but rather must be attentive to the voices and actions of the people who actually reside in the city.[19]

The third component of the Pope's program is *labor*. He sees labor as a right and duty of all men and women. In the narrow sense, a people work in order to support their families and develop themselves. In its wider sense, it is the capacity given by God to contribute to God's

creative action. In working, people share in shaping creation and contributing to the common good.

The pandemic clearly unmasked the fact that those who were deemed "essential workers" were those who were often the least paid and the most vulnerable. They were often treated as the most expendable as compared to the shareholders who were only interested in maximizing profits.

The pope expands the scope of labor to include full-time mothers, volunteers in social projects who receive no wages, but they do important work. To meet the needs of the non-earners, Francis suggests that we explore concepts like the universal basic income (UBI), the "negative income tax," an unconditional flat payment to all citizens which could be dispersed through the tax system.[20]

Conclusion

Pope Francis acknowledges the enormity of the task ahead of us. What are we to do? The first step is to "decenter" and "transcend."[21] We need to get out of the "selfie" cultures and look into the eyes and faces, and lives of those around us. We need to share their experiences. The pope suggests that we go on a *pilgrimage*. We need to walk under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let ourselves be pulled along, shaken, challenged. Perhaps we will feel a pull to get involved in a home or center for the elderly, to work with troubled youth, a refugee center or an ecological regeneration project. When we feel a pull, Pope Francis' advice is simple, "stop and pray. Read the Gospel… create space inside yourself to listen. Open yourself… decenter… transcend."[22]

Probably the most succinct expression of Pope Francis' hope for a post-pandemic world is found in his prayer at the end of his message on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees given on September 27, 2020, which reads:

> We ask you to grant the followers of Jesus, and all people of good will, the grace to do your will on earth. Bless each act of welcome and outreach, that draws those in exile into the "we" of community and of the Church, so that our earth may truly become what you yourself created it to be: the common home of all our brothers and sisters. AMEN

Notes

[1] Pope Francis and Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020) pg 11.
[2] Ibid, 18.
[3] Ibid, 18.
[4] Ibid, 19.
[5] Ibid, 35.
[6] Ibid, 98.
[7] Ibid, 97.
[8] Ibid, 98.
[9] Ibid, 101.
[10] Ibid, 105.
[11] Ibid, 107.
[12] Ibid, 111.
[13] Ibid, 111.
[14] Ibid, 117.
[15] Ibid, 128.
[16] Ibid, 129.
[17] Ibid, 128-130.
[18] Ibid, 129.
[19] Ibid, 130.
[20] Ibid, 132.
[21] Ibid, 137.
[22] Ibid, 137.

Joseph: Our Missionary Guide

by James H. Kroeger, M.M.

How does Saint Joseph model mission?

Pope Pius IX declared Saint Joseph to be patron of the universal Church in 1870. Pope Francis has commemorated this event by declaring a year dedicated to Saint Joseph and gifting us with his apostolic letter, *Patris Corde*. Each year through the liturgy of the Church we celebrate two feasts in honor of Saint Joseph. The solemnity of Joseph, Husband of Mary, is commemorated on March 19; the feast of Joseph the Worker is on May 1.

Historical knowledge about Joseph is limited. In fact, his role is described in detail only in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. His name appears in a few other places, where Jesus is identified as "Joseph's son" and as "the carpenter's son." This lack of detailed biographical data reminds us that the Gospels are primarily "faith summaries," written to engender a faith commitment. In this context, one may ask: Is it valid to assert that Joseph is a model for mission?

Joseph, according to Gospel accounts, was a village carpenter; he was also a descendant of King David. Joseph's life in Nazareth was that of a quiet, humble, consistent worker. His village life-style was simple and settled. He was betrothed to Mary according to traditional Jewish custom. Joseph, like all evangelizers and missioners, sought to faithfully and humbly serve the Lord in the many daily routine tasks of life. Mission demands faith and humble service.

A tremendous crisis disrupts Joseph's life-plans: Mary is pregnant and he is not the father. Joseph faces a great dilemma: What does he do in this confusing situation? He formulates a simple plan: a "quiet divorce." This way of proceeding has Joseph faithful to the Jewish law and also protects Mary (by law she could be stoned to death). Joseph

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

plans a "middle course." He does the "right thing," assuring that no one will suffer; Joseph is truly the "just" man. Mission inevitably faces challenges and crises; thus, great discernment is demanded. Mission always seeks everyone's welfare; no one will be harmed by decisions or actions taken.

Just when Joseph seems to have everything in place, God intervenes in an unexpected way, in a dream. Joseph is commanded to change his personal plans: Take Mary as your wife! Alter your course of action. Place radical trust in God. *Do not be afraid!* Believe in God — in spite of everything to the contrary. Yes, all evangelizers need to have faith, to believe. *"Mission is an issue of faith"* (*Redemptoris Missio,* 11). Missioners believe that God *always* brings good out of difficult situations.

Just when Joseph seems to have everything in place, God intervenes in an unexpected way, in a dream. Joseph is commanded to change his personal plans: Take Mary as your wife! Alter your course of action. Place radical trust in God.

Joseph remained committed to Mary — even though it entailed living through many difficulties. There were suspicions and probably even gossip around Nazareth. Joseph took the pregnant Mary on the perilous, lengthy journey to Bethlehem. They faced rejection, and in a crude, dirty, foul-smelling stable Mary gave birth. They fled as refugees into Egypt and for years lived as foreigners in a strange land. Only later did they return to Nazareth. Mission demands fidelity to one's commitments — in the midst of trying, frustrating circumstances.

Joseph dutifully raised Jesus into manhood; however, he most probably died before Jesus began his public ministry. In short, one notes that Joseph did not see the full fruits of his labors, the adult ministry of Jesus. Joseph faithfully served and gave all to God; he did not seek for recognition. He allowed events to happen on "God's time." Mission demands the same humility and self-effacing service. When and how one's efforts in mission will bear fruit is to be left in God's hands.

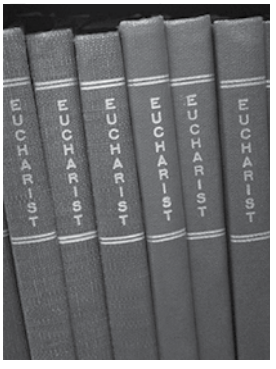
As one reflects on the birth of Jesus, one realizes that it was likely Joseph who *first* held the newly born child in his hands; he is the

first human to hold Jesus — even before giving him to Mary. What a unique privilege! However, Joseph also desired to share Jesus with others, the shepherds, the magi. Mission demands both "holding" and "sharing" Jesus. Like Joseph, evangelizers make their home with Jesus and Mary; from this intimacy they share Jesus with others.

The meaning of the name Joseph is "let God add." Joseph, a model for mission, allowed God to add and increase, to fill his life with marvelous and unexpected gifts. Through baptism we all are missionary; we look to Joseph as our model for engaging in mission. We see in Joseph a model for living as "missionary disciples" (EG 120) within our missionary Church.

In Christ's Peace
Deceased Members

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



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

J. F. Powers on the Eucharist

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

An astute observer of Catholicism in post-World War II America, what did author J.F. Powers see in the priesthood and the Eucharist?

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.

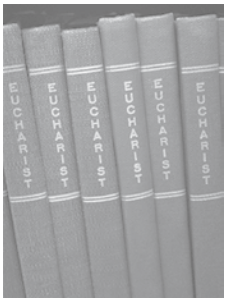
James Farl Powers (1917-99), an American novelist and short story writer, was born in Jacksonville, Illinois and studied English and philosophy first at Wright Junior College and later at Northwestern University in Chicago. He was a conscientious objector during World War II and spent thirteen months in jail for his convictions. Powers taught creative writing at several colleges and universities and from 1975-93 was Regents Professor of English and writer-in-residence at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict in Collegeville, Minnesota. His published works include: *Prince of Darkness* (1947), *Cross Country. St. Paul, Home of the Saints* (1949), *The Presence of Grace* (1956), *Morte D'Urban* (1962), *Lions, Harts, Leaping Does, and Other Stories* (1963), *Look How the Fish Live* (1975), *Wheat that Springeth Green* (1988), *The Old Bird, A Love Story* (1991), *The Stories of J. F. Powers* (1999), the posthumous, *Suitable Accommodations: An Autobiographical Story of Family Life: The Letters of J. F. Powers (1942-1963)*. He was awarded the O. Henry Prize in 1944 for his short story, *Lions, Harts, Leaping Does* and the National Book Award in 1963 for his novel, *Morte D'Urban*. His second novel, *Wheat that Springeth Green*, was nominated for the National Book Award for fiction in 1988. In 1989, he received an honorary doctorate from St. John's University and the Wethersfield Institute Award for outstanding literary achievement. His humorous, light satirical style focuses on the endearing qualities and foibles of Catholic priests in the period between the end of World War II and the Second Vatican Council. The way he depicts the Eucharist contributes in a particular way to the atmosphere and ambience he seeks to create in this period of post-War American Catholicism.[1]

Powers' Spiritual Outlook

Born into a devout Catholic family, Powers was a regular church goer and practicing Catholic throughout his life. In 1946, he married Betty Wahl and raised with her a family of five children, although he later rather dryly (and quite humorously) ruminated that he and his wife were not really equipped to raise such a large family. A traditional Catholic by his own reckoning, he held to the teachings of the Church yet was deeply dissatisfied with the liturgical changes that entered into the liturgy by the Second Vatican Council. When sometime after the Council someone asked why he sat in the same pew week after week, he quipped that it was the only place in the church where he couldn't hear anything![2]

Powers wrote during what many consider a high point in twentieth-century Catholic literature. His close friend, Jeffrey Meyers says this about him: "In the 1940s, when he [Powers] began to publish, Catholic literature flourished in America. Thomas Merton's mystical *The Seven Storey Mountain* was a bestseller; Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson brought out works on Thomist Scholasticism; the poets Allen Tate and Robert Lowell, who expressed his Baroque intensity in *Lord Weary's Castle*, were prominent converts; Flannery O'Connor produced Gothic tales of sin and redemption. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, a popular promoter of the faith, lectured the nation on television. Powers was not mystical, scholarly, poetical, redemptive, or popular. He lived in Minnesota and Ireland, far from the centers of cultural power, remained aloof from literary politics, and refused to promote himself through readings and interviews."[3] An introvert and recluse who steered clear of the literary limelight and was more comfortable living his life on the periphery, Powers unleashed his skill as a novelist and short story writer on a subject that humored him, fascinated him, and at times even troubled him: the Catholic priesthood. No other writer in American literature has captured what it was like to be a Catholic priest in the years after the end of the Second World War and leading up to the Second Vatican Council.

If Bing Crosby depicts the quintessential American Catholic priest at or near the end of World War II in films like *Going My Way* (1944*)* and *The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945), then Father Urban Roche of *Morte D'Urban* represents the same kind of shrewd, committed, charismatic, worldly, and fun-loving priest in the years just prior to the Council. During the twenty-year period of post-war America (1945-65), Catholic priests were helping their flocks find their balance between loyalty to their country and to their Church, to having one foot in the City of God



and the other in the City of Man. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 as the first Catholic President of the United States pointed to the faithful's coming of age, even while most Catholics knew that many of their fellow countrymen continued to view them with suspicion for the strange kind of hocus-pocus worship they gathered for at each Sunday Mass. Powers lived during this changing period for American Catholicism and had a spiritual outlook that was, at one and the same time, both intensely loyal to the faith yet also willing to engage the wider American public on its own terms.

Powers on the Eucharist

In the prefatory remarks to his novel, *Morte D'Urban*, Powers states, "… all the characters in the book are fictitious, the views expressed by some of them are not necessarily those of the Catholic Church or the author, and any resemblance to actual living persons, living or dead, is coincidental."[4] In this way, he distances both himself and the Catholic Church from the way he presents the faith in the novel. His need for such a disclaimer, however, indicates that some of his characters (and the views they express) likely depict the views and attitudes of real-life individuals and institutions. This holds true for the way he presents the Eucharist in the novel. While it rarely (if ever) takes center stage in the plot's unfolding, it lies in the background and in many ways represents the underlying reason for Father Urban's priestly life and ministry.

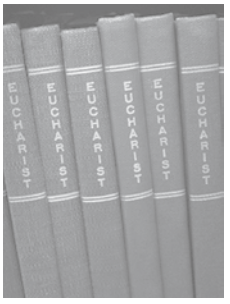
Harvey Roche (Father Urban) was born in a heavily Protestant area of Illinois and was very conscious, even as a young boy, that Catholics were looked upon with suspicion by their non-Catholic counterparts. He seemed to understand where they (the Protestants) were coming from and didn't blame them for it: "What troubled them was the hocus-pocus that went on in Catholic churches…. Wasn't it all very strange there, in that place, at that time, the fancy vestments, the Latin, the wine? What if Catholics were Protestants, and Protestants were Catholics, and they worshiped in such a manner? What would Catholics think?"[5] Since "hocus-pocus" is a derogatory form of the Latin, *Hoc est corpus meus* ("This is my body"), the young Harvey likely understood that the Protestant suspicion of Catholics had something to do with their understanding of Mass and Holy Communion. This accommodating perspective led Urban to embrace his Catholic identity deeply, yet also instilled in him a desire to be able to reach out to a wider public. He identifies very much with his Catholic priesthood yet does his best to sculpt his remarks to fit his audience, be it Catholic,

non-Catholic, or mixed. The same holds true for the way he deals with varying perspectives within his Catholic audiences.

An accomplished public speaker and mission preacher and a member of a dedicated (if undistinguished) religious congregation called the Clementines, Father Urban has spent much of his priestly life on the road, moving from one speaking engagement to the next and raking in huge profits for his order. He views himself as one of the stars of his religious order (a would-be Provincial) — one of their very best. One day, much to his surprise, he finds himself transferred to an obscure, out of the way retreat house (St. Clement's on the Hill) in rural northern Minnesota, where he finds few creaturely comforts and hardly any prospects for doing what he knows best. Out of the limelight, he feels like a fish out of water, while working with the other members this small four-man community to turn what was once a dilapidated poor house into a well-ordered, functioning retreat house. Although he does what is expected of him, he feels out of touch with the two priests and brother stationed with him and maneuvers things in such a way that he is allowed to fill-in for five weeks for the vacationing pastor, Father Phil Smith, of St. Monica's parish in a nearby town where he often helps out on weekends.

No other writer in American literature has captured what it was like to be a Catholic priest in the years after the end of the Second World War and leading up to the Second Vatican Council.

At St. Monica's parish, Father Urban energizes the parish, which the pastor had neglected for some time but had recently indicated (possibly under some pressure from the chancery) that he was going to build a new church for the parish. During the pastor's absence, Father Urban begins to turn the parish around. He wins over the housekeeper, Mrs. Burns by relieving her of her responsibility of answering the phone. He takes the curate, Father Johnny Chumley, under his wing, eases him out of church (and his latent Manicheism), and engages his help in having a parish census, taking an opinion survey of the feasibility of building a new Church, and creating new opportunities for every group in the parish to gather in groups as members of the parish community. In all of this, he is careful not to make participation in these events contingent on their coming back to Mass or an increased participation in the sacramental life of the



parish. Still, the results of his efforts are astounding. Near the end of his time at St. Monica's, he gives a week-long mission which, by all counts, was the most successful one ever held at the parish. As he looks back on his accomplishments in such a short time, he looks back on his record:

- Mrs. Burns, freed from the telephone, given a new lease on life.
- Johnny Chumley rehabilitated.
- People polled on a new church—and pollinated.
- Parish life now a reality.
- Attendance at daily mass up 150 percent (eight-ten people now make it).
- Mission—most successful in history of parish.
- All-around good work for the Order.
- Mrs. Thwaites.[6]

Mrs. Thwaites, a wealthy shut-in to whom he brought daily Communion, seems to take him into her confidence and is a possible donor for his order. As the plot unfolds, he soon discovers that this was not to be the case.

In all of this, the Eucharist is what distinguishes the Catholic community from the larger society and ties them together. As he is about to leave the parish, Father Urban looks back with gratitude at his time at St. Monica's: "…he was going to miss the deep satisfaction there was in doing the work of a parish priest — his daily Mass meant even more to him at St. Monica's. He had done well there in the last five weeks. Could he have done better? He did not think so. His record would speak for itself."[7] At his sermon during his closing mission, he has this to say to the parishioners in attendance: "Plant your gardens and orchards with the good seed and the green saplings of pious works, attendance at Holy Mass, regular confession, frequent reception of the Sacrament of Sacraments! Do these things, and leave the rest to God! Do these things, and the warm sun of God's merciful love will shine upon you and yours! Do these things, and the gentle rain of God's mercy will fall upon you and yours! Now and for all time! *Now! Forever! If!*"[8]

Father Urban does not hold a limited view of the priesthood that confined itself to the Church and the sacraments. Rather, he believes that a priest should engage his parishioners and the larger society in which they find themselves. He believes a priest could be both a

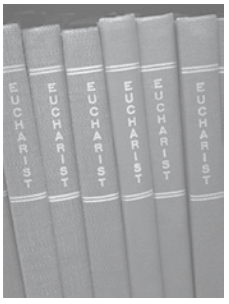
"priest-priest" and a "priest promoter," someone who is faithful to the Church's sacramental ministry yet also enters the lives of the people he served.[9] A good pastor, he believes, is able to strike a fine balance between active lay participation and strong priestly leadership: "The most successful parishes," according to Father Urban," "were those where more was going on that met the eye, where, behind the scenes, a gifted pastor or assistant pulled the strings. God, it seemed, ran those parishes, which was as it should be."[10] Although his main work as a priest has been that of a parish mission preacher, Father Urban's time at St. Monica's deepens his respect for the life of the parish priest, who lives behind the scenes (like the Blessed Sacrament itself) and feeds his flock daily with the Sacrament of Sacraments.

Some Further Insights

Although the above brief summary of Powers' presentation of the Eucharist in *Morte D'Urban* is by no means exhaustive, it offers an opportunity to delve a bit further into the novel's underlying religious outlook and stance toward the sacrament. What follows are some observations aimed at probing this presentation of the Eucharist in a little more depth.

Father Urban does not hold a limited view of the priesthood that confined itself to the Church and the sacraments. Rather, he believes that a priest should engage his parishioners and the larger society in which they find themselves.

To begin with, although Powers makes it clear that the views expressed by some of the characters in the novel are not necessarily those of the Catholic Church or even his own, he has a keen awareness of what American Catholic culture was like in the interim period between the end of the Second World War and the opening of the Second Vatican Council. During this time, the Church was in its ascendancy but still looked upon with suspicion by the wider society. For this reason, it maintained, at one and the same time, a desire to set itself apart from yet also to be accepted by American culture as a whole. In *Morte D'Urban*, Powers embodies in himself that unique blend of the parochial and patriotic that characterized American Catholicism of the period. It is clear throughout the novel that, while the Eucharist is rarely mentioned, it forms the backdrop against which Catholic life unfolds and, as the



Sacrament of Sacraments (as Father Urban aptly calls it) is the glue that holds the community together.

Powers' knowledge of Catholic culture extends to the relationship between the diocesan and religious priesthood. A member of the Clementines, a religious order dedicated to mission preaching, retreat work, and education, Father Urban has for most of his priesthood been involved in what the Church typically refers to as the *extraordinary care* of the faithful, as opposed to the *ordinary care* provided by the diocesan priesthood on a daily basis in the parishes. His time at St. Monica's parish, however, gives him a hefty taste of what ordinary parish life is like — and he thoroughly enjoys it! He realizes that specialized ministries can cause a priest to fall out of touch with what the priesthood is all about. He tells the story "about the old Clementine priest, too long a seminary professor, who had witnessed a street accident and cried out, "For God's sake—call a priest!"[11] Urban takes very well to the ordinary care of souls which focuses on entering people's lives, meeting them where they are, engaging them on their own ground and, of course, celebrating the sacraments.

For all the activities he organizes for the parishioners of St. Monica's — card parties for the seniors, square dancing for the young married, to rock-and-roll dances for the teens, sports films for the Men's Club, theater parties for the children (to name but a few) — Father Urban is careful not to use these activities as bait to lure his parishioners to the communion rail. He is dead set against the practice of Frs. Cox and Box at the cathedral parish, who were known to insert short films of a religious nature between the all-cartoon parties they hosted for children at the local theater. In Urban's mind, "…it wouldn't be fair to the kids or to the exhibitor, a Jew, who was already taking a loss on the deal."[12] The Eucharist, for Urban, stands on its own and has no need of perks or incentives to establish its importance or support its legitimacy. There is no need to lure parishioners with a carrot on a stick in order to get them to confess their sins and receive Holy Communion. Simply entering into people's lives and living in communion with them will, in time, bring them around and help them to understand precisely what it means to receive Holy Communion.

Powers has an uncanny ability of portraying in a light, humorous and even satirical way the many facets of what it meant to be a Catholic priest in the 50s and early 60s. Unlike his friend, Msgr. Renton, the pastor of the cathedral parish, who considers anything done outside

administering the sacraments a waste of a priest's time, Urban has a hand in everything that goes on in his religious community, the parish he helps out at, and the larger community. He even "rehabilitates" Father Johnny Chumley, the young curate at St. Monica's who was spending nearly all of his time in church and gets him to take a more active role in reaching out to the parishioners of St. Monica's by working on the parish census and working with the young people of the parish. A priest's work, for Urban, includes not only the celebration of the sacraments (as important as that is), but also reaching out to the people and sharing in their lives. He is also very conscious of the politics that goes on behind the scenes in the parish, diocese, and even within his own religious order. Rather than shying away from such entanglements, Urban tries to steer them to his own benefit and to the benefit of the Clementines.

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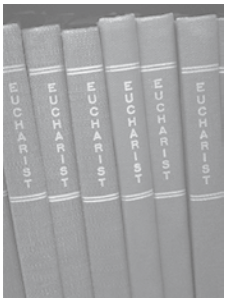
Finally, if Powers uses Catholicism and the priesthood as the narrative backdrop against which the plot and character development of his novels and short stories unfold, then the Eucharist can be thought as the backdrop against the backdrop. Although the sacrament rarely takes center stage in any of the scenes of his stories, it is always there in the background in both thought and action. Celebrating Mass is what Catholic priests do. Going to Sunday (and sometimes even daily) Mass is what Catholics do, at least those who are practicing their faith. It is what sets them apart, what gives them their identity as Catholics. The sacrament even lurks in the back of the minds of those who have stopped practicing the faith (and even those who have rejected it) as a symbol of what they have left behind and have forever forsaken. The Eucharist lies at the heart of American Catholic culture and identity. Powers has no need to focus on it or emphasize its importance. In post-World War II Catholic America, it was simply taken for granted.



Conclusion

One of the preeminent American authors of the twentieth century, J. F. Powers did not seek the limelight, nor did he promote himself and his work as was typical of most other novelists of his day. Although the focus of his fiction, the Catholic priesthood, did not naturally draw the attention of the wider reading public, he was awarded national honors for his clarity of style, subtle humor, character development, and satirical wit. A lifelong Catholic, he gave his readers an insider's view of 1950s and early 1960s Catholicism, the period between the end of the Second World War and the start of the Second Vatican Council.

In his novel, *Morte D'Urban*, Powers describes an insular American Catholic culture that seeks acceptance of the wider American society and, as a result, finds itself in danger of losing its religious bearings. Father Urban Roche, the novel's main character, is eloquent, suave, calculating, personable, self-promoting, political, and a staunchly Catholic individual — and a real operator! He considers himself a star of his religious order, the Clementines, and actively pursues its (and his own) well-being — or at least what he thinks it should be. Although Powers distances himself from the views of his characters, his knowledge of American Catholic culture in his day enables him to touch upon a number of relevant themes of universal significance.

As the novel unfolds, Urban undergoes a deep spiritual struggle between the life he has chosen and the possibilities of what might have been. He recognizes that his way of life has left him with many acquaintances but no true friends. His relationships are mostly transactional and generally fall apart. When he offends his benefactors or refuses to buy into their warped sense of values, they leave him high and dry, and he has nowhere to turn but to God and his undistinguished religious family, the Clementines. In subtle reference to baptism and his vocation to the priesthood and religious life, he twice finds himself wading into a lake and swimming away from power, possessions and pleasure to the safety of his religious community. In a subtle reference to Christ's crowing with thorns, he twice finds himself crowned on the head: once with a golf ball driven by the local bishop and once by the high heel spike of a shoe thrown at him by Sally Hopwood, a woman who failed to seduce him. At one point, he even loses his shoes (while swimming to safety), a subtle reference to Jesus' exhortation to his disciples to take off their shoes and shake the dust off their feet before

those who do not welcome them.

Knocked off his high horse and deeply humbled, Urban is a changed man. Although the members of his Province elect him as their Provincial (a kind of coronation, since it was what he had aspired to for most of his religious life), he proves largely ineffective at the helm and winds up leading sheepishly from behind rather than boldly from the front. He now feels much more at home at St. Clement's Hill in rural north Minnesota (an assignment on the periphery of the Province that he dreaded when he first received it), than at the Provincial headquarters in Chicago. He now sees that he has been living a lie and that he must now face the truth about himself. As the novel's title suggests, Father Urban Roche does indeed die, but it is the false, sophisticated, overly confident and self-absorbed Urban who passes away. The mask he wore, the false "persona" through which he lived most of his life as a priest and religious, has fractured, split apart, fragmented, and simply faded away. Like the bread that is broken and shared at Eucharist, Urban himself has become a broken yet much humbler, more authentic, and blessed human being. Being hit on the head (not once but twice!) has finally knocked some sense into him.

Notes

[1] For more on Powers' life and work, see "J. F. Powers," *Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Authors, https://collections.mnhs.org/mnauthors/10001413* ; John Rosengren, "The Gospel according to J. F. Powers," https://www.johnrosengren.net/powers .

[2] See Jon Hassler, "J. F. Powers: R. I. P." *America* (July 17, 1999), https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/100/j-f-powers-rip .

[3] Jeffrey Meyers, "His Bleak Materials: J. F. Powers at One Hundred," *Commonweal* (July 18, 2017), https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/his-bleak-materials .

[4] F. Powers, *Morte D'Urban* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1962), viii.

[5] Ibid., 75.

[6] Ibid., 176-77.

[7] Ibid., 176.

[8] Ibid., 171

[9] Ibid., 154-55.

[10] Ibid., 165.

[11] Ibid., 158.

[12] Ibid., 166.

Celtic Influences in Eucharistic Liturgy

by Patrick Dolan

What are some of the Celtic influences in our eucharistic liturgy and how can they be utilized to enhance our liturgical prayer?

Retired Chaplain (Brigadier General) Patrick Dolan was senior chaplain in the US National Guard, responsible for all the states and territories including 1500 clergy and 365,000 soldiers. He holds a PhD in Chemistry and an STD in theology. He is current chair of the Louisville section of the American Chemical Society and "visiting scholar" at Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. He has recently authored the fiction series Traces of Magic (available on Amazon).

Because our heritage of revelation, prayers, and rituals is intensely Judaic, and the Eastern Mediterranean environment into which it came and blossomed was Greek, one might be tempted to think that the only Celtic influence in eucharistic liturgy is the Irish Wake. Even when Christianity spread to the Western Mediterranean, the influence there was intensely Roman — who had done everything they could to extinguish any Celtic influence in their cultural sphere. Indeed, the structure of the Mass (in both our Eastern and Western Catholic churches) is often described as the synagogue service of psalms, scripture reading, prayers and a commentary followed by the temple offerings and followed in turn by the Passover ritual — all augmented by the action of the Holy Spirit and the direct words of Jesus. Is it any wonder that the search for any Celtic influence in the eucharistic liturgy might be as elusive as the proverbial search for the needle in the haystack?

If, however, one looks carefully at Celtic spirituality, one can notice traces of Celtic influence that added flavor to our eucharistic rituals and practices over the centuries. These influences come via two pathways. Some Celtic practices were so similar to the Greco-Judean rituals that they integrated unnoticed and added only subtle influences on these established practices. Some other Celtic practices were so deeply rooted in human longings that their addition was accepted without clear cognizance of their non-Greco-Judean origin. In this article we will examine the four characteristics of Celtic Spirituality as they were inserted into the structure of the Greco-Judean liturgy, and some implications/possibilities for further development in contemporary and future worship practices. We do this as we seek to integrate worship of God more interiorly into any western culture steeped in

Celtic spirituality at its instinctive core.

Preliminary Distinction

A crucial distinction between *spiritual* and *sacred* needs to be pointed out as we look at this interaction. For most Christians, because of the centrality of Jesus Christ who is absolutely both divine and human, our understanding of the *spiritual* has automatically moved into the *sacred* or to a connection with God directly — through the centrality of Jesus Christ in all Christian prayer and worship. This logical jump built upon the Jewish idea of God's direct interaction with that community and revealing both God's name [YHWH] and tender yet almighty characteristics.[1] Yet, for other cultures, the idea of spiritual meant only a connection with the world of the spirits. This perspective included a participation with spirits in nature (connecting to animals or places) or to a realm beyond the ordinary human struggle to survive. Humans buried and mourned their dead — but remained connected to them in a variety of ways.[2] Being *spiritual* included practices that enhanced that connection to those who had moved from the physical world into the spiritual world. These rituals were considered by the Israelites either as somehow magical, or the worship of false gods; and they have routinely been looked upon that way through the centuries when Christian missionaries penetrated other cultures. Practices like "New Age" spirituality and other studies of personal self-enhancement, even including critical references to a "higher power" in the 12-step programs for addiction recovery[3] have clarified the distinction between *spiritual* and *sacred* that can and does exist. It may indeed be possible to see such actions in ancient cultures, which expressed a longing for the spiritual and attempts to connect to it, not necessarily as worship of false deities — but simply as an aching longing to fill the emptiness in each human soul with whatever they could reach. Studies of St. Patrick and subsequent Irish missionaries show that, to the Celts, the message of Christ and the gift of Christ's sacraments took them from their pre-existing connection to the *spiritual* into the *sacred* wonderfully and well.

Major Characteristics of Celtic Spirituality

Four aspects of Celtic spirituality stand out: (1) Immanence of the spirit world or divine; (2) Community connectedness; (3) Art and music as ways of entering the spiritual; (4) Life as a pilgrimage seeking "thin places" for greater connection with that spiritual world.[4]

1. The sense of immanence of the divine was a particular struggle

for Christianity's insertion into the Celtic culture. Contrary to the Canaanite pagan perspective of fertility gods close to them on every hilltop, or the Greek sense of gods exemplifying human characteristics like wisdom or courage, the Jewish emphasis was on the transcendence of (one and only one) God and God's intense holiness.[5] This approach, compared with our sinfulness, found its echoes in the Platonic description of the world of forms as distinct from our natural world and was taken up by early spiritual writers. Importantly it was taken up by St. Augustine in his eloquent descriptions of original sin and concupiscence and its effects on our human nature and particularly on the body.[6] His significant influence on the theology and spirituality of the west during the Middle Ages, reduced the effect of charismatic figures like St. Francis of Assisi and the entire Franciscan intellectual tradition in the 1200s down to present times.[7] Their attempts to recapture and use properly any sense of imminence of the divine in nature has remained a bit suspect. Yet with the advance of medical science leading to a greater understanding of the Theology of the Body,[8] this Franciscan-inspired flavor, including a greater motivation to care for animals and all of creation, may again become acceptable enough to serve a very useful purpose in today's world.

2. One can easily see the connection between the Celtic emphasis on community (clan membership) and the tribal connections in ancient Israel.[9] Worshipping as family groups, led by one's parents or elders, fit within the Jewish and early Christian styles of worship so well that the Celtic practice of worshiping as a family may have actually eased their transition into Christianity. This flavor resulted in the development of "house monasteries" where whole families became miniature monastic communities at the time of St. Patrick, and it has reemerged beautifully in the present-day emphasis on the family as the "domestic church."

3. Art and music were not as great of a part of ancient Jewish and early Christian activities as they were for Celtic cultures. Though the psalms were chanted in the temple and by pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem,[10] and although there are a number of early Christian hymns that have come down to us and continue to be prayed during vespers regularly,[11] music seemed to play a larger part in non-Jewish worship.[12] Yet, art and music are a wonderful "nest" in which the spiritual naturally develops, and to

which the sacred naturally connects — which may be why they were used so often in the non-Jewish cults referenced above.

Celtic music, to an even greater degree, pervades Celtic life experiences with its "lilting" quality that uplifts us still today. Moreover, because in Ireland at the time of St. Patrick their entire history was put into verse and memorized, could not this poetry have been accompanied by melody to assist with its retention — as the history of Irish and Scottish balladeers seems to support? The development of Gregorian Chant is consistent with both the Celtic and Judeo/proto-Christian tradition of using music in liturgy; and it often accompanied movement either in processions or simply when incensing sacred items or places. Although there is sparse evidence of anything as exciting as King David's dancing before the arc of the covenant in early Christian activity, the Celtic hornpipe melodies that have come to us seem to have a similar effect on dancers in more secular settings — especially when inhibitions might have been lowered by the medicinal effects of Celtic brews. The beauties of liturgical dance as practiced in the Zairian Rite and other African celebrations would resonate well with the Celtic tradition — which considered music and dance a way to connect with the spiritual.[13]

Studies of St. Patrick and subsequent Irish missionaries show that, to the Celts, the message of Christ and the gift of Christ's sacraments took them from their pre-existing connection to the spiritual into the sacred wonderfully and well.

Graphic arts likewise were minimal in the original Jewish Tent-Temple design but increased under Solomon;[14] and early Christian sacred art included both frescoes and mosaics.[15] Likewise among Celts one can find an abundance of stone crosses embellished with intertwined designs of great intricacy. That same intricate design has been used to indicate the interweaving of the persons within the Blessed Trinity and can be found on sacred objects of every kind including chalice bases. Yet, graphic art seemed to be used only as an embellishment of sacred objects, rather than implying any deeper issues such as those faced in the Eastern Mediterranean dioceses during the iconoclast controversy.[16] As a result, both musical and graphic arts, even though both of these

areas were viewed as pathways to the spiritual among the Celts, found that their use in liturgical design and performance remained only an augmentation, fitting — sometimes naturally, sometimes only tangentially — into the service or liturgical activity. Whereas in frontier evangelical settings, from tent revivals to ordinary weekly worship, music (and today also videos) appear to hold a status almost equal to preaching.

4. It is with the view of life as a pilgrimage, augmented by the connection to "thin places", that we find a slightly controversial influence, harkening back to the idea of immanence, but which also reveals itself within art and music. Though there are lilting melodies which found their way into hymns like the Breastplate of St. Patrick,[17] and though the soaring designs of Gothic cathedrals seem to guide life's pilgrimage into the heavens the way the ancient round towers all over Ireland have done over the centuries,[18] and though the practice of even short pilgrimages found minimal difficulty being incorporated into Christian practice, there have been greater struggles with incorporation in this area than in others.

   Much like the unbroken intertwining of lines in Celtic art, the fact that pre-Christian Celtic religious narratives did not include an account of creation lent itself to an idea that our lives were all part of an intertwined but (never-beginning and never-ending) ongoing process. This concept had overtones in descriptions of parts of (or all of) creation as being as eternal as their gods and spirits.[19] Additionally, the idea of "thin places" where the physical world we normally experience somehow comes very close to (is almost in tune with) the spiritual realm has some but very few counterparts in the Judeo-Greek understanding on which Christianity is built.[20]

   Yet we find this sense of the "human actions somehow penetrating into or passing through the barrier to the spiritual realm" and into the sacred realm present still in the Roman Canon or First Eucharistic Prayer.[21] This sense of penetration does not seem significantly different than, indeed somehow seems to build upon, the sense of penetration into the sacred when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the temple once a year or the priest in the Byzantine family of rites passes through the doors in the iconostasis. In some ways, the entire sense of *anamnesis* or

"entering into the mystery of a remembered sacred event" seems almost to create a "thin place" in every Eucharistic celebration — and the eucharistic presence in the tabernacle perpetuates this. Thus, there may indeed be ways to incorporate this Celtic sense properly and well into our contemporary liturgical celebrations.

Implications and Applications

One may legitimately ask why anyone should be concerned with such esoteric issues as these? It is no secret that English has become the present-day international language; nor is it a surprise to anyone that Celtic peoples (Irish, Scott, Welsh and even English to some extent) have migrated to — and also taught in — nearly every part of the world.[22] The music, the style of art, and even the melancholy longing of these peoples have pervaded the settlements they established and have left their Celtic longings embedded in the (often subconscious) aspects of contemporary society nearly everywhere. Therefore, connecting to these elements of Celtic spirituality should naturally deepen the liturgical experience in subtle but very helpful ways.

Understanding these Celtic longings hidden in our instincts can help western cultures focus liturgical decisions toward actions that reach the deepest parts of parishioners' personalities.

Some of the implications may seem passé, such as the addition of a creation narrative and eschatological goal to Celtic history or trying to place monasteries in *thin places* such as a specific sacred glen or garden spot; yet the suggestions here may be more useful than originally imagined.

1. With process theology underlying much of our contemporary culture, by adding instead a sense of real origin that connects with the scientifically established big bang theory (with a divine hand at work for our purpose and destiny) may help as much in our present culture (particularly with many Millennials who describe their lives as rootless or drifting) as it did for the ancient Celts. Recapturing history becomes a gift to them.

2. Finding the right spot for a new parish church may mean more

than just good access for parking or cheap real estate. Acquiring a "feel" for each optional location may help a committee decide between alternate locations. Moreover, enhancing the location with the right landscaping or establishing a prayer garden spot will enable the creation of a nature-enhanced *thin place* for that new sacred edifice.

3. Although church architecture in the first 1,000 years followed the desire to simply house or gather the congregation and was often of a low-squat or organizational style, the Gothic architecture of churches and colleges that emerged all throughout western Europe testify to a soaring or "lilting" flavor to the buildings and buoyed their occupants' spirits. Is it any wonder that the New York faithful chose a Gothic cathedral rather than the progressive and efficient styles of the buildings around them?

4. The sense of the immanence of the divine in nature around us is often described by spiritual writers as "seeing the fingerprints of God" in the things God has made, particularly in animals. Thus, the blessing of animals, homes, cars, etc., transforms this connection of creature to creature with the explicit grace of Jesus Christ — and resonates with Celtic instincts in each of us, particularly in children.

5. The use of processions, parallel to pilgrimages or the "calling of the clans," lets the faithful participate through whole-body movement in ways we are beginning to re-appreciate. These include some familiar activities that still are processions/pilgrimages:

- Coming up for Communion at Mass and for ashes on Ash Wednesday;
- Corpus Christi processions with the monstrance around church property, or Marian devotions where individuals each bring a flower at the end of the Mass to the statue of the Blessed Mother, or even larger processions such as the candlelight wheelchair processions each night at Lourdes;
- Palm Sunday (with blessed palms) and Holy Saturday (with individual candles) that gather the community or "call the clans" into the house of God;
- Processing as a group from spot to spot while doing Stations of the Cross outside (rather than simply staying put in church and watching the priest and servers move from station to station), or

even more intensely going to each of the stational churches in Rome on Good Friday.

Yet they can also include some less-readily recognized or practiced processions:

- The procession with newly-blessed candles into the church (completing the Christmas season) on February 2, or processions of grieving families (individually when called forth) to light a remembrance candle for a lost loved one on November 2
- The long-practiced lighting of wedding candles by the mother of the groom and mother of the bride as part of the pre-entrance procession (calling clans together);
- The individual bringing up of gifts like canned goods on Thanksgiving as part of the offertory, or a parallel bringing up of a matchstick (as a symbol of the portion of Christ's cross we carried that year) to a tiny fire in front of the altar (surrounded by sacred earth and holy water) on Sylvestertag (Dec 31st) to which the priest adds incense to "change our burdens into prayers" that we offer back to God as we conclude that year;

All of these involve the whole community of faithful in that procession/pilgrimage that is a gift of the whole self back to God in worship.

Conclusion

Understanding these Celtic longings hidden in our instincts can help western cultures focus liturgical decisions toward actions that reach the deepest parts of parishioners' personalities. Employing some of these suggestions can touch deeply any faithful who are starved for these Celtic aspects in our digital culture — and may entice them to return to church rather than simply remain on-line.

Notes

[1] Cf: Ex 3:4-18, Hos 11:1-11, etc.

[2] Mexican "Day of the Dead" celebrations, Hindu and Buddhist sense of reincarnation, mourning rituals among the Jews and their pagan neighbors, burying of useful materials with deceased, etc.

[3] This treatment, developed in the 1930s, references a "higher power" and though it comes from a Christian perspective it is useful in alcohol, narcotic or any addiction, even by atheists. See any of their training pamphlets, or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve-step_program

[4] Davies, Oliver, *Celtic Spirituality,* Paulist Press, 1999, ISBN 08091-38948, p 7, 14, 20ff.

[5] "As far as the heavens are above the earth are my ways above yours…" Is 55:8-9

[6] Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who was trained as a rhetorician. He could explain both his ideas and those of others very well. For his ideas on the body see (De nupt. et concup., II, xxvi, 43) and other passages.

[7] Alexander of Hales (1185-1245), Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) and John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) to the contemporary blessing of animals on St. Francis' feast day Oct 4th.

[8] St. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body,* Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, 129 lectures delivered in the general audiences between September 5, 1979 and November 28, 1984

[9] St. Paul reminds his Jewish hearers that he is from the tribe of Benjamin: Rom 11:1, Phil 3:5.

[10] Psalms 120-134 were pilgrim psalms chanted by ordinary folks, though the Levites chanted psalms in the temple.

[11] Col 1:12-20, Eph 1:3-10, Phil 2:6-11, 1 Peter 2:21-24, Rev 4:11, 5:9-12, 11:17-18, 12:10-12, 15:3-4, 19:1-7

[12] Daniel 3:5,15, for example, as well as the word "incantation" coming from the root "chant" or sing.

[13] Fleming, F. et al., *Heroes of the Dawn,* Barnes & Noble, 2003, ISBN 0-7607-3929-3, p 37ff.

[14] 1 Kings 6:18-33

[15] Frescoes in the substructure of San Clemente in Rome, Mosaics of Ravenna and Constantinople, etc.

[16] Eberhardt, Newman C., *A Summary of Catholic History,* Herder Book Co., St. Louis, 1961, vol I, p 390-7.

[17] *Worship*, GIA Pub, Chicago, 1975, p 127, and other similar tunes.

[18] Though Gothic design did not originate in Celtic lands, it did develop only after Irish monks had re-evangelized Europe after the fall of the Roman empire. See McManus, Seumas, *The Story of the Irish Race,* Devon Adair co., New York, 1973 p 232 ff or Eberhardt, op. cit., p348

[19] Breastplate of St. Patrick, op. cit., p 127, Stanza 2 refers to "eternal rocks."

[20] Acts 16:13, St. Paul meets Lydia at what the Celts would describe as a *thin place* "a spot by the river that seemed like it might be a place of prayer."

[21] Roman Missal # 94: "*Supplices te rogamus, omnipotens Deus: jube haec perferri per manus sancti Angeli tui in sublime altare tuum*…"

[22] McManus, op. cit. Irish monks re-evangelized France, Germany and Scandinavia in the middle ages, p 232, and Irish soldiers or "Wild Geese" have fought around the globe in service of many powers, p 454 and Irish missionaries have assisted in evangelization everywhere the English language went in the 18th through 20th centuries, p 723.

EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

In Its Rush to "Leave the Building" What's Christianity Leaving Behind?

by Michael DeSanctis

What happens to Christian worship when sacred architecture is no longer deemed revelant?

Introduction: A Most Bemusing Church Tour

Not long ago I was offered a personal tour of an Episcopal church by a pastor seeking advice on how to update its interior. The Depression-era structure was attractive in a quasi-high church, Episcopalian sort of way. By this I mean it had the order and orderliness one traditionally associates with places of worship maintained by communities within the Anglican Communion and a decorative treatment, too, as high-collared as any portion of the Book of Common Prayer. Its well-appointed nave, which seemed always to carry the scent of the beeswax candles squared with Murphy's Oil Soap, was a setting in which any Christian given to a more formal style of worship would feel at home. An abundance of natural light streamed through its Gothic-styled windows during most hours of the day, and it retained a measure of the perennial "stillness" shared by sacred places, even when occupied by the respectable numbers of worshipers drawn there on Sunday mornings.

Its chancel, though, was a different story. Repeated changes to this space had diminished its original beauty and spawned confusion among the church's leadership over how exactly it was supposed to be used. At some point, its handsome pulpit of carved wood had been abandoned as the place from which the Gospel was proclaimed and replaced by a common lectern my guide described as "less stuffy-looking." Likewise, its altar had been separated from the reredos it previously abutted at the room's interior-most wall, moved to a spot less removed from the nave and spun around to assume a *versus populum* orientation. One unexpected blessing of the latter, the priest eagerly pointed out, was that the object could now serve as both stage

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and storage bin for the "puppet ministry" he performed for the benefit of children as a regular feature of weekend services. Lifting the altar's heavy paraments from the side normally visible only to himself and an acolyte or two, in fact, he revealed a jumble of hand puppets, props and miniature stage settings hidden within the altar's hollow body. "I crouch down here, where the kids can't see me, and let the figures dance across the Lord's Table," he explained before pointing out with equal enthusiasm the enormous "WWJD" banner now hanging from the chancel's dominant wall where there had once been a cross. Other parts of the room had been dispatched to darker corners of the building, as well, somehow stripped of their sanctity and waiting to be carried to the curb.

"The Church has left the building!" Drawn from a book of the same name, whose humorous title-reference to Elvis Presley now emblazons everything from travel mugs to kitchen aprons, this ideology holds that the Church has outgrown brick-and-mortar accommodations altogether — "de-pitched" its tent, so to speak — by gaining telecommunications savvy enough to use social media exclusively to conduct its ministry.

At the chancel banner's prompting I secretly asked myself, "What *would* Jesus do, should he discover this place of prayer erected in his name now reduced to a kind of "religious theater"? " Theatricality was precisely what the pastor was after, I began to realize, along with enough "relevance," as he put it, to prevent even the youngest members of his flock from fidgeting in their pews when his congregation worshiped. The "relevant" church, he intimated, was one whose message was immediately intelligible to its users. It makes few demands of them in the way of historical knowledge, appreciation for the grammar of ritual, or the demands of high art, but relies instead on symbols and slogans culled from popular culture. It is not something to be "interpreted," in fact, like some intellectual riddle or work of poetry but exists mostly to keep the Body of Christ out of the weather. In this, it's as functional a product of the builder's art as any social hall, gymnasium or kitchen a Christian community might erect for itself, and should it fulfill its members' appetites for light entertainment, so much the better. Solemnity and the elements of awe and mystery are not what people want to see in a place of worship today, the pastor

assured me, but instead something upbeat, cheery, and as user-friendly as an electronic carwash.

Liturgy and Stage Drama: Their Similarities and Differences

To be sure, Christian worship may be compared to theatre in the sense that it is normally staged in a way that renders its outward features beautiful to behold. Like a dramatic performance, too, liturgy may employ special vesture, postures, and narrative formulas spelled out in the script-like canonical books guiding the actions of those ministers charged with its "enactment." The purpose of Christian worship, however, no matter how dependent on external spectacle, has never been merely to entertain — a point reinforced by the fact that even the earliest structures of any consequence built to its specifications by those churches dotting the cities of Imperial Rome bore little resemblance to the theaters and music halls with which they rubbed shoulders. Likewise, the Mass of the Middle Ages, no matter how resplendent, was never something to be confused with the so-called "mystery plays" and other religious dramas staged in the courtyards and streets surrounding people's churches. The dramatic arts offered their medieval audience moving re-presentations of the ministry, trial, and death of Jesus Christ in the same way that any stage play of the time might embody an artful retelling of a story drawn from myth or history. In stark contrast, the rite of sacrifice offed in perpetuity at the Christian altar was believed to offer worshipers a way of entering into the *actuality* of Christ's death in the here-and-now of their own experience. Even during the mid-16th to 18th centuries, when the prescriptions for worship in the Roman Church formulated by the Council of Trent (1545-63) and a turn in popular tastes across Europe toward "the baroque" lent the style and setting of the Roman Mass an element of the operatic, believers are not recorded as having confused the heaven-directed prayer of the Church rising from its sanctuaries from the often bawdy, audience-directed attractions of the dramatic stage.

Those Northern reformers of the 16th century seeking nevertheless to rid the setting of Christian prayer of "popish" excess turned in part to the Jewish synagogue for inspiration as they converted existing structures into *hallenkirchen* — literally, "hall-churches" — or erected entirely new ones supportive of preaching and the unity of the assembly. These were by no means unattractive places or intended to be mistaken for utilitarian buildings, however, as is verified, for example, by the handsome features preserved in a church like the *Thomaskirche* in

Strasbourg, France, originally a Catholic edifice adapted for Lutheran use in 1524 (fig. 1). Neither were they particularly original or "Protestant" solutions to the challenge of providing favorable accommodations for sermonizing on the Word, which had been addressed handily enough before the Reformation (1517-c.1650) by buildings under episcopal authority or maintained by such religious orders as the Dominicans and Franciscans. Single-nave churches with unbroken ceiling planes and free of load-bearing columns,[1] like the 7th-century *Santi Apostoli* in Venice, Italy, prefigure by a considerable stretch the so-called "preaching halls" that found favor in the 16th century with Lutheran, Calvinist and even Anglican congregations. The wide intercolumniation[2] and acoustical refinements found in buildings like the Franciscan basilica of *Santa Croce* in Florence, Italy, whose canopied pulpit sits well within the space reserved for lay worshipers, similarly predate their appearance in Protestant sites and later appear as standard features in Catholic churches as separated by history and geography as the 17th-century parish church of *Saint-Jacques du Haut Pas* in Paris (fig. 2), and the *Jesuitenkirche* in Heidelberg, Germany, erected a century later.

Fig. 1 *Thomaskirche*, interior from chancel Strasbourg, France (modified 1524)

Fig. 2 *Saint-Jacques du Haut Pas*, nave Paris, France (17th c.)

In the centuries since the tumult of the Reformation, of course, both Catholic and Protestant strains of Western Christianity have embraced models of sacred architecture more unified/communal in plan than compartmentalized/hieratic, the international Liturgical Movement so

influential over the last two centuries having led to much agreement concerning the way to best house the ecclesial Body of Christ assembled for prayer. Thus, Roman Catholics in the United States have come to feel largely at home in the "centralized" or "fan-shaped" church buildings once associated primarily with mainline Protestantism, just as Methodist or Presbyterian worshipers now have had little problem finding their bearings in many Catholic churches rising from similar floorplans built after the 1930s but more frequently since Vatican II. Moreover, all of them would likely agree that the very act of providing a literal dwelling-place for the Church remains a praiseworthy thing, even should this mean continually "re-pitching the tent," as Anglican priest and author Rev. Richard Giles has put it,[3] in response to the changing needs of each Christian age. To rest there routinely is even better (Psalm 84) and not to be confused with worshiping at the twin altars of electronic media and popular culture from which so many in this country now seem to draw their salvation.

De-Pitching the Tent of God

In the last two decades, as part of the proliferation of evangelical and independent churches domestically, whose members find little of worth in the liturgical-artistic traditions of mainline Christianity, two theories have gained popularity that call into question the very nature of liturgy and its architectural setting as we've known them. One, of course, is that the Christian place of assembly need not be unique among building types nor especially fancy looking, as followers of Jesus, the humble carpenter from Nazareth, should have matured long ago beyond their attachment to temple worship. Neither need involve music, words, and actions any fancier than those modern Christians confront in their workaday lives. What such thinking calls into question, of course, is the Church's long-standing habit of declaring certain places, times, and actions worthy of sacred service and others not. On the surface, it appears to enjoy popularity largely among younger believers, say, twenty to forty-years-of-age, with a deep-seated aversion to history and to the hard work of theological/aesthetic discernment that undergirds the Church's pronouncements on the sanctity or profanity of a thing. In fact, rather than extending from a sturdy and well-reasoned "Incarnationalism," which might argue that the commonness of Jesus' earthly form renders all such distinctions moot, the ideology seems to flow from the breezy, "I'm OK, You're OK" egalitarianism of the day, which can make even Christians reluctant to render qualitative distinctions of *any* kind between one thing and

another. A material consequence of this has been the proliferation of what might be called "arena churches," Christianized counterparts to the civic arenas used as venues of popular entertainment, whose interior forms and décor are considerably less refined than even those exhibited by the auditorium-like megachurches to emerge in the 1980s and 90s. Absent from these facilities, in fact, is anything resembling a "chancel" or "sanctuary" with permanent fixtures for ritual word or meal. Instead, action typically flows from elevated platforms known simply as "stages" equipped with large-scale projection screens, theatrical lighting and an array of musical instruments required of heavily-amplified groups of "praise leaders."

The second and more troubling line of thinking to gain currency in some Christian circles recently is that sloganized through the phrase, "The Church has left the building!" Drawn from a book of the same name, whose humorous title-reference to Elvis Presley now emblazons everything from travel mugs to kitchen aprons, this ideology holds that the Church has outgrown brick-and-mortar accommodations altogether — "*de*-pitched" its tent, so to speak — by gaining telecommunications savvy enough to use social media exclusively to conduct its ministry. According to this view, the pervasive hum of the "Electronic Church" is what awaits Christians as they wade further into the 21st century, which will emit to the faithful a Hi-Def semblance of fellowship accessible from the privacy of their home computers. No provision is made in this picture, it should be said, for members of those denominational bodies still bound not only to sacramental rites best served by physical settings of beauty and permanence but to belief that church buildings *themselves* can serve as "sacraments" to a people whose encounters with God pertain to the realm of "heavenly realities."[4]

The coronavirus pandemic to have overtaken this country in 2020, which emptied Christian churches across the board of their congregations, only hastened the emergence of a Christianity untethered from place and any Sabbath-day behavior incapable of electronic simulation.

Conclusions

Christianity's struggle to devise a proper setting for worship has been a perennial one. Never has the breadth of forms exhibited by places of Christian prayer been greater than today, however, as the definition of

what constitutes that act has tremendously broadened. Many of the "revolutionary" changes in liturgical-architectural practice to result in reforms and revivals witnessed within mainstream denominations during the 1960s and 70s, in fact, strike one as quaint today and relatively innocuous, compared to the call arising from independent churches with brand-names like "Elevate," "Potential," "Forward" or "Life" for a type of fellowship less dependent on buildings than on bandwidth.

The coronavirus pandemic to have overtaken this country in 2020, which emptied Christian churches across the board of their congregations, only hastened the emergence of a Christianity untethered from place and any Sabbath-day behavior incapable of electronic simulation. It remains to be seen, in fact, whether irregular churchgoers of any stripe, having been instructed in the name of public health to refrain from participating in Sunday services, will return to the houses of worship with which they officially identify as the crisis abates or exit the Christian fold forever. Biological pandemics aside, one assumes that the divide within the Western Church between that segment committed to the alliance of sacrament and art and that with little wit for either will only widen. In some ways, this is a natural consequence of the fracturing of the Body of Christ that began with the Reformation and has accelerated over the last five centuries to the point of producing in our time a dizzying array of autonomous congregations, each maintaining its own approach to public piety. If, in fact, the state of worship and church-building in the United States as I have presented here is any indication, one might conclude that the bifurcation of Western Christianity generally into Catholic and Protestant camps may now be giving way to *trifurcation* on the order of modern Judaism, its newest camp interested in preserving little of the liturgical-aesthetic deposit of either of its predecessors.

A utilitarian view of worship's architectural dimension characterizes this "Third-Camp" Christianity, which is not to be confused with the attitude of exquisitely understated craftsmanship embodied in the no-frills buildings erected, say, since the 17th century by the Shakers, Society of Friends (Quakers), or Mennonite communities of New England. The snow-white, Congregationalist church set with an equally frosty, New England landscape that graces countless Christmas cards will likely never be replaced as an icon of sacred architecture nationally by the average Third Camp building, which satisfies an itch for the prosaic of the of 21st century "seekers" but elevates their sensibilities

no further. Pediments cribbed from Greek and Roman temple facades or floorplans perfected over centuries are as negotiable as pulpits or puppets to the latest breed of Christian, whose impulse is to reinvent the liturgical-architectural wheel for lack of familiarity with its lineage. Negotiable for some modern Christians, too, apparently, is the physical house of God and God's people that has literally stood for centuries as a concrete token of the Church's presence in the world. In their rush to "leave the building" for some Digital Age, cyber-chimera of sacred space, however, these latter-day followers of Jesus Christ may well be cheating themselves.

Notes

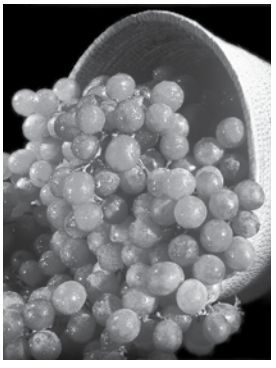
[1] Flat ceilings in churches, or those conceived more or less as a single, unbroken planes, were found to prevent sound from dissipating into the reaches above worshipers' heads. Those whose naves were relatively free of load-bearing members of any kind succeeded in not obscuring the assembly's view of itself as well as chancel or other area of clerical action.

[2] "Intercolumniation" refers to the width of space between two adjacent columns, piers or other weight-bearing members. The wider the intercolumniation within a nave space, Christian church-builders long ago determined, the more capable worshipers are by means of their peripheral vision to take in large portions of their own assembly.

[3] See Giles, Richard. *Re-Pitching the Tent*. Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press, 1996. In this publication and its companion text, *Creating Uncommon Worship* (Liturgical Press, 2004), Giles characterizes the followers of Jesus as a nomadic people, Abrahamic in origin, routinely picking up and moving as necessary the tents in which we dwell in God's presence (Genesis 13:18).

[4] Guidelines for the arrangement and ornamentation of places for liturgy today within the Roman Catholic Church, for example, note that they should be "truly worthy and beautiful and be signs and symbols of heavenly realities" (107). See Chapter V of the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (2010), https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/general-instruction-of-the-roman-missal/girm-chapter-5.

All photos: Michael E. DeSanctis



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

by Bernard Camiré, SSS

What does this intriguing parable tell us about God and prayer?

THIS PARABLE STANDS IN UNMISTAKABLE COMPARISON TO *THE PARABLE OF THE FRIEND at Midnight* (Luke 11:5-8). The two are set in a context of instruction on prayer, and in both the main characters are determined not to give up in the face of resistance.

This parable offers an interesting description of the two players in the drama. The *judge* in question was perhaps a paid magistrate appointed by Herod or by the Romans. Such judges had a notorious reputation for being venal or corrupt. Unless plaintiffs had influence and money to bribe their way to a verdict, they had little hope of getting their case settled. The judge in the parable is evidently blinded by his power; we are informed that he had no fear of God, nor had he regard for his fellow men and women.

With the parable's introduction of the *widow*, a stark confrontation is set up. In the ancient Near East, the widow was the symbol of powerlessness, the frequent victim of injustice and exploitation. The parable's description of the widow and the judge's reaction to her importunity would lead us to picture a woman of perhaps relatively young age; certainly, she was physically vigorous and of a feisty disposition. We are told that the judge not only grew weary of her constant pestering but also feared that she would do him physical violence.

The reflections of scripture scholars on this parable are quite insightful. They point out that in the cultural context of ancient Israel a woman who claimed her rights publicly, persistently, and vociferously would have been the exception. What's more, the implication here is that this widow refused to resort to bribery, which was a common recourse in desperate situations. Also, scholars speculate that the issue over which the widow is in dispute with an adversary could have been that portion that remained to her after her husband's death. This woman's situation

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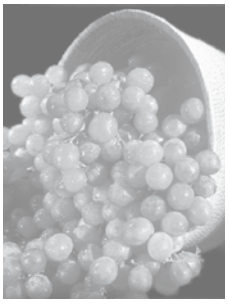
This reflection originally appeared in the Saint Jean Baptiste Church parish bulletin.



could have been one of life or death. If justice were not rendered to her, she could be faced with a situation of devastating poverty.

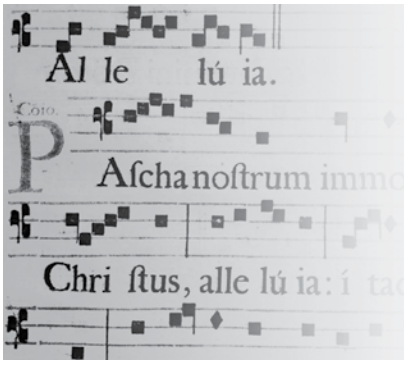
The parable then moves from narrative to soliloquy. Here, in the judge's private reflections, we learn that this man, who fears neither God nor fellow human beings, is afraid of being physically assaulted by this woman. The original Greek words, translated as "strike me," mean "to strike me under the eye," though they may also be understood in the weaker sense of "wearing someone out." In any case, the judge finally gives in to the widow's persistence and gives her a just decision in the matter.

The parable concludes with Jesus summoning his hearers to attend to the judge's interior reflection, i.e., his resolve to render a just decision. We must be careful to note that the parable does not liken God to an unjust judge; rather, it *contrasts* God to such a person. In other words, if a corrupt judge will finish by giving justice in response to someone's persistent pleading, how much more will God, a loving Father, hear the persevering prayers of his children.

The final verses of the parable are of particular interest. They are appended sayings of Jesus that have the character of an application. Jesus asks rhetorically, "Will not God secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night?" – and the response follows: "I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily." Interpreters of scripture see these words as applying the parable to the "delay" of Christ's second coming and allegorically identifying the judge with God and the widow with the community of Christians, the elect, who are eager for vindication in the face of evil. Despite the "delay," vindication is assured.

The second part of the final verse, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" takes us back to the parable's introduction about the necessity of praying always without becoming weary. It may be that, here, the evangelist Luke uses an isolated saying of Jesus and adapts the parable to the situation of his community; it is experiencing trial and the Lord Jesus is long in returning, but persistent prayer will assure constancy in the faith.

The Parable of the Widow and the Judge, like *The Parable of the Friend at Midnight*, is a pictorial lesson about the effectiveness of persevering and confident prayer. Such prayer is called for in view of the fact that God alone knows what is for our true good; what is good for us in the long run. If our prayers to God always include the resolve that *God's* will be done, our prayer will never grow weary and our faith will never falter.



PASTORAL LITURGY

Roman Missal 3 at 10

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

WE HAVE NOW COMPLETED THE TENTH YEAR OF USING THE THIRD EDITION OF THE *Roman Missal* (RM3). While it may not be a priority for many Church leaders or others to review it with an evaluative process and make revisions, I would like to suggest otherwise. The text of RM3 suffered many battles through a thirty-year process. While others have documented this struggle, (see Gerald Collins' *Lost in Translation* for a history of the original 1997 *Sacramentary* and how it got shelved to create the current *Roman Missal),* this columnist joins with other priests and lay faithful who find the current translation wanting. It's wise to take some time for evaluation, self-reflection, and compiling notes so that future generations may improve the texts for worship. In this column, I'll list a few items which come to mind that have been a regular aggravation for many presbyters as well as members of the congregation who have been confused by our prayers.

Exact translation? Prior to 2011, many linguists critiqued the language used at Mass, arguing that we needed a new translation from the Latin into English that was exact. The previous editions of the RM were not deemed poetic or sacred enough. With RM3 we still did not end up with an exact translation. One recent change from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) removed the word "one" (as in "one God") from the closing line of the collects due to a mistranslation. Many other discrepancies abound, while still others demonstrate errors from Latin into English.

Theological concepts? While using certain metaphors may be traditional in eucharistic storytelling, such as having the Holy Spirit come upon the bread and wine like the "dewfall," do we clearly understand that this image is not theologically helpful or accurate? Dew evaporates, while some does sink into the grass. But do we now believe that the Holy Spirit does not completely change the eucharistic elements? Is this phrase comparable to what we have found wrong

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with other Christian eucharistic theology? May we also drink from the "cup" (and not a chalice) that Jesus asked the Father if he could pass by? Are we also so evil and sinful that many of the prayers have to be guilt-written? Blessings should strengthen, uplift, and encourage. Isn't that why we are asking God to bless us? (The Fifth Tuesday of Lent is an example – "that your faithful may weep, as they should…")

Consistency in placement? An effort was made to place Prefaces for particular feast days with that day, usually most solemnities. However, there are several still scattered throughout the book or not placed accurately. Furthermore, all the Eucharistic Prayers should be placed together, including the addition of the Eucharistic Prayers for Children.

Directory for Masses with Children **(DMC)?** An honest conversation needs to take place. Do we want this liturgical document to still be implemented and used or not? Has it been dropped? Several key aspects of it have become part of many parish's life in the United States (i.e., Children's Liturgy of the Word and *Lectionary*, the Gloria beginning the children's Mass, lay preaching, etc.). Yet, the *Eucharistic Prayers for Children* were not included in RM3, but in a separate supplement published by USCCB with inconsistency in the texts. All Eucharistic Prayers need to be together in one book and in the same area.

Too much in the Appendices and difficult to find. No special tabs are used for the Appendices. The Sprinkling Rite has been regulated to the "back of the book," as if this is not a viable ritual, when recommended for Easter Time. The Universal Prayers are a valuable resource, again in the appendix. Other chants for certain feasts (Christmas Roman Martyrology and Announcement of Easter) are placed in this section. Why not have them with the liturgical feast days as we do for the Presentation of the Lord or Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion? The Announcement of Easter does not say it is "optional" but a practice for the Epiphany of the Lord, so let's place it with the collects and preface of the day.

Dismissals to be acknowledged and placed? With many new priests in the English-speaking world, for whom English is a second language, official texts in the RM should be available. While other publishers provide them, many priests want "official texts." A regular formula needs to be placed for the "Dismissal of the Children" for their Liturgy

of the Word (if DMC is still allowed), "Dismissal of the Catechumens" (and not just in the current RCIA) and a "Dismissal of Communion Ministers to the Homebound and Sick." There also needs to be an agreement on how communion ministers are sent off to minister with Holy Communion. There are too many pastoral practices that were not helpful before the pandemic. Should the pyxes be on the altar with preplacement, stifling the fraction rite? Should ministers complete the Communion Rite? Pastoral leaders and bishops need to gather to come up with a consistent practice for parishes.

What are you trying to say? The biggest complaint about the RM3 is that it is rambling. Latin has certain principles that when translated into another language are to be followed. But in doing this do we make English sound nonsensical? After 10 years, we have learned words like "oblation," "conciliation" and "prevenient." But what do they really mean? How can we help people listen and absorb a prayer and not make them feel lost and befuddled? When I have been a person in the pew on vacation, trying to listen and understand without the text in front of me, I'm very perplexed and wondering what was just communicated. Plus, on certain solemnities or holidays, the prayers are too long, and if meant to be chanted, need special attention. Finally, is it necessary to say, "we pray," in the middle of every prayer? Yes, it may be in the Latin text – but we know we are praying, and if we have to tell one another we are, then there is a bigger issue for us.

It's time for a "heart-to-heart" with the new secretary in the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and our USCCB liturgical leaders. Pastoral sensitivity and ease of the RM4 are worthy goals to pursue for the next generation, especially as more presiders in the English-speaking world need assistance in leading God's people in our prayer. Let us work on a RM4 that supports our worship and helps us understand it better, with the ease of use of the Roman Rite model: noble with simplicity, a hallmark of previous liturgical books.

Organizing for November/December 2021

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

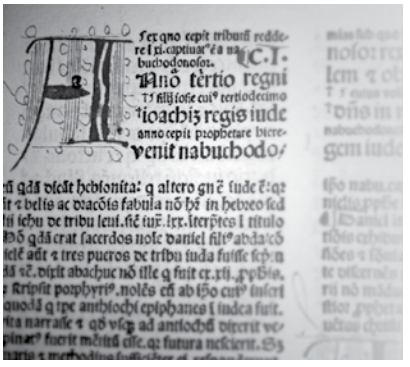
A few regular celebrations during these months:

- Monday, November 1: Solemnity of All Saints – A holy day, but

not of obligation. Consider saying a "Holy Day of Celebration" to encourage attendance and worship in your parish.

- Tuesday, November 2: Commemoration of the Faithful Departed (All Souls)
  - Visiting a Cemetery (BB 1734- 1754)
  - Visiting a Grave (CHBP)

  Election Day (USA) with special prayers for our local elections
- Sunday, November 21: Last Sunday of the Liturgical Year: Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe
- Thursday, November 25: Thanksgiving (votive Mass)
  - Blessing of Food (BB 1755-1780)
  - Prayer for Thanksgiving Day (CHBP)
- Preparation for Advent – Beginning a new Church liturgical year – Sunday, November 28
  - Blessing of an Advent Wreath (BB 1509 – 1540; CHBP)
- Wednesday, December 1: World Aids Day
- Friday, December 3: Migration Day
- Thursday, December 9: Note in the *Lectionary Supplement* the special readings for those communities wishing to celebrate Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin
- Sunday, December 12 - 3rd Sunday of Advent
  - Bambinelli Sunday Blessing (contact this columnist for the text)
- Sunday, December 19 - 4th Sunday of Advent
  - Blessing of Parents Before Childbirth (BB 225-228)
  - Blessing during Pregnancy (CHBP)
- Saturday, December 25 - Solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord
  - chant for The Nativity of our LORD Jesus Christ from the *Roman Martyrology*, page 1293 *Roman Missal*, third edition
  - Blessing of a Christmas Manager or Nativity Scene (BB 1541 – 1569)
- Sunday, December 26 – Feast of the Holy Family: Blessing of the Family (BB 40-61)
- Monday, December 27 - Feast of Saint John, apostle and evangelist
  - Blessing of Wine (BB 1781 – 1804)



BREAKING THE WORD

Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Maribeth Howell, OP

November 7, 2021
Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146:7-10; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

Today's readings draw our attention to several interesting characters: Elijah, two nameless widows, and of course, Jesus. Elijah, the well-known prophet, though he appears in only six chapters of the Hebrew Scriptures, is often associated with the greatest of prophets, Moses. And it is Elijah, whom the New Testament perceives as the precursor of the Messiah.

Elijah appears for the first time in the Scriptures quite suddenly in the verses immediately preceding our first reading. This mysterious figure, whose name means "my God is the Lord," follows God's instruction to deliver a message to King Ahab: "As the Lord the God of Israel lives… there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah is then told to flee to a ravine where he will be nourished with water and be fed by ravens. Just as suddenly, the scene shifts, and Elijah is told to go to the home of a widow, where he will again be fed. This widow, like the widow in today's Gospel, is poor. Such was the common plight of widows, which is why we often hear the Scriptures commanding that God's people attend to the needs of "the poor, the widow, and the orphan." Without a husband, adult sons, or a generous father-in-law, widows were dependent upon the kindness of others. Thus, when Elijah asks that the widow feed him, it might strike us as rather amazing that she agrees to his request, particularly because she had informed him that the small amount of flour she had was going to be the last meal that she and her son would consume. And yet it is helpful, for those of us living in the twenty-first

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century, to know that this widow is practicing "hospitality" in a manner that would have been perfectly common during this time. As a result of the widow's generosity, as Elijah had promised, her food supplies did not run out. This entire chapter of 1 Kings seems to emphasize two things: 1) God is the author and sustainer of life, and 2) God's word is powerful. It does what it says it will do.

In our Gospel text, Jesus draws attention to those who draw attention to themselves. Hypocrisy is hardly a characteristic that Jesus encourages his followers to emulate! While observing the behaviors of people as they made their contributions to the temple treasury, Jesus called "his disciples to himself" and instructs them on what it means to be generous, of what it means to give of oneself. This widow's few coins were "…all she had, her whole livelihood." What the widow gave can also be rendered "she gave her whole self."

It is interesting to note that the next section of Mark's Gospel is the passion narrative. What might be the intent of Jesus's instruction to his disciples? Could he be pointing to this widow who gave her entire self, who symbolically emptied herself for the life of "the temple?" Might this episode pave the way for us to better understand the self-emptying of Jesus?

What do these readings invite us to reflect upon? We hear of Elijah, a servant of God, who obeys God's commands and speaks God's words. We also meet two nameless women, both widows. Each share what little she has, one a little food, the other a little money. Both demonstrate what Jesus will do with the greatest of intensity, the complete handing over of self.

November 14, 2021
Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16:5, 8-11; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32

Today's Scripture readings are not the easiest to comprehend. As we move toward the end of the liturgical year, which will be next Sunday, with the celebration of Christ the King, our texts focus on what is sometimes referred to as "the end times." Today's passage from the

Book of Daniel, as well as the Gospel, belong to a literary genre known as "apocalyptic." This type of literature is both revelatory and heavily symbolic, and should not be understood literally.

So, what are we to make of these readings? How does all of this fit together? Let us consider the liturgical year. Two weeks from now we will be in a new year. The liturgical calendar does not follow the calendar to which we are accustomed to following. Instead, the liturgical calendar begins with the first Sunday in Advent and concludes with the feast of Christ the King. As the end of the year approaches, the readings focus on the end times.

This week and next, the Scriptures direct our attention to the coming of the Son of Man. This expression has been studied by countless theologians and biblical scholars without consensus as to how it should always be understood. While we do not hear this expression in today's reading from the Book of Daniel, several chapters previous to today's reading contains one of the most well-known pericopes with this expression. It will be our first Scripture reading next Sunday. "Son of Man" in chapter seven of Daniel, refers to the one (understood as "Israel") who will triumph over the dominating powers that were oppressive to God's people. The ability to overpower these evil forces is understood as being given directly by God.

Today's passage from Daniel speaks of a time of tribulation, a time that will usher in the end times: "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book" (Dn 12:1). The text goes on to state "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace" (Dn 12:2). What we have here are words that speak more clearly of resurrection from the dead and of judgment than anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Turning to today's Gospel, Jesus also refers both to tribulation and the "'Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory" (Mk 13:24-26). When will all of these things take place? Only God knows. What will take place? The Gospel suggests that we observe and learn from nature. What has nature taught you about life and death? Of dying and being reborn? What does it mean when Jesus states that his words "will not pass away" (Mk 13:31)?

These Scripture readings invite us to ponder our relationship with our loving God. They invite us to consider how we live our lives. Tribulation, suffering, and fear are all part of human life. While we do not welcome experiences of pain, of loss, of loneliness, they can invite us to become more dependent upon, more aware of our need to be in relationship with our God, who has promised to be with us in these difficult times. These experiences might also invite us to respond tenderly to others when they experience deep pain. How do you deal with life's tragedies?

November 21, 2021
The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 93:1-2, 5; Revelation 1:5-8; John 18:33-37

On this Solemnity of Christ the King, we are confronted with language that celebrates an authority completely foreign to our culture. While we may be fascinated with royals of other countries and of their lavish lifestyles, we know that this is not a world with which we are intimately familiar. In the Hebrew Scriptures the responsibilities of the king were enormous. Israel and Judah's kings were expected to deliver justice to the people and to be especially attentive to the needs of the most vulnerable of society, the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. According to the historical books of Scripture, the vast majority of these kings failed miserably in their responsibility. The one king that was held up as a role model for all others was King David. Yet interestingly, he too, was a flawed, human character.

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, our first reading from Daniel refers to one like a Son of Man receiving "dominion, glory, and kingship," with all peoples serving him, while the passage from Revelation depicts Jesus as the one to whom all earthly kings owe authority. The language in both readings is reminiscent of what we referred to last week as apocalyptic.

Meanwhile, today's psalm is identified as a "psalm of God's kingship," a particular and small category of psalms that praise God as king/ruler over all of the universe. Unlike the category of psalms that praise the earthly king, known as "royal psalms," psalms of God's kingship make

clear that God's reign is not limited to the earthly domain.

Turning to the Gospel passage from John, we find Pilate questioning Jesus about his identity: "Are you the King of the Jews?" From the very first chapter of John's Gospel, we know that Jesus is king. Though not in the manner that Pilate understands the term. In that first chapter, Nathaniel states "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel" (Jn 1:49). While Jesus' identity is known to us, if he were to give a straight answer to Pilate it would be considered blasphemous. The two men speak of kingship with completely different understandings. Pilate refers to an earthly, geopolitical realm; Jesus speaks of an entirely different reality. He is the one who has begun to usher into this world the reign of God, not of humans.

When you reflect upon Jesus as "king," what does this mean? How do you or do you not perceive Jesus as Christ the King? How does this manner of kingship have meaning in the twenty-first century?

As Christians, we believe that Jesus has ushered in the realm of God. He has taught by word and action what it means for us to "love one another." The self-gift of Jesus, his self-emptying for the life of the world, for the lives of all people, has shown us how we can continue to build the kin(g)dom of God. As we complete this liturgical year, let us together, anticipate and re-commit ourselves to helping to bring about a world where peace, justice, compassion, and love are promoted and celebrated.

November 28, 2021
First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14;
1 Thessalonians 3:12 – 4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Blessed Advent! Blessed New Year!

For most of us, this is a greatly anticipated season, as well as a season of great anticipation. While the Easter Triduum is the highlight of our liturgical year, the season of Advent is likely the best loved. It is a time of lights, and colors, and sweet aromas, and thoughtfulness. It is a time when we look forward to getting together with so many loved ones!

And this Advent is likely to be even more exciting, as we plan to see friends and family that we may not have seen for almost two years!

While all of these aspects of Advent are worthy of celebration, it is especially important that we ponder the mystery of the Incarnation during this time of the liturgical year. The Roman Calendar states that "Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time."

The readings for this Sunday invite us to consider the lasting promises of our God. As Jeremiah states "I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah" (Jer 33:14). The text then speaks of a future leader, from the line of David. This one "shall do what is right and just in the land." How Israel longed for a ruler who would bring about justice and peace! How we too long for a world of justice and peace!

In the Gospel from Luke reference is made to the coming of the Son of Man, the figure we referred to last week. While the description of the coming is quite frightening, the disciples of Jesus are assured that their "redemption is at hand." At the same time, they are warned to be alert and ready for the coming of the Son of Man. For those who have remained faithful to their call of discipleship there is nothing to fear. All that has and all that will happen are part of the divine plan.

In today's second reading Paul expresses his desire that the Thessalonians continue to grow in love. Love is essential. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, "without love, we are nothing." During this season of Advent our hearts do focus on love. While we may first think of family members and friends, most of our parish communities invite us to broaden our perspective, stretch open our hearts, to attend to our sisters and brothers whose lives are so different than our own.

Meanwhile, Psalm 25 would seem to be a wonderful prayer for each of us to attend to throughout this Advent season. "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul." Read and pray over the words of this psalm. For what does the psalmist ask? For what does the psalmist long? With the author of today's psalm, ask that God instruct you, that God guide you and teach you, and trust that "all the paths of the Lord are kindness and constancy toward those who keep covenant and follow God's decrees."

December 5, 2021
Second Sunday of Advent

Baruch 5:1-9; Psalm 126:1-6; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

What uplifting Scripture texts we hear this Second Sunday of Advent!

The reading from Baruch takes place within the context of a grieving community. The people addressed are the dwellers of Jerusalem or the personified city itself. The city had been ransacked and many of its inhabitants had been taken into exile in Babylon. The devastation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, the seizing of the royal family, and the deportation of many of the city's leading citizens would certainly be reason to mourn. Yet Baruch's words are of strong encouragement.

Today's beautiful psalm underscores the message of Baruch. It sings of the unbelievable joy of those who are returning from captivity – "we were like people dreaming!" Who would have imagined that the exile had come to an end? What were the dreams and hopes of the descendants of those who had seen their holy city devasted? Would, *could* the city, the *people* be restored? What did God have in store for them? According to the text of Baruch, Israel would be "secure in the glory of God" (Baruch 5:8).

Turning to Paul's letter to the Philippians, we can easily be moved with tender gratitude for this apostle, who sometimes communicates his displeasure with the community to whom he is writing. But here, Paul's words are loving and affirming. While very aware that he is an instrument of God, and that he nurtured this community, he is even more aware that it is God who has and is active within the Philippians when he writes "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6). The "day" of which Paul speaks is that day to come when God would again enter human history, a day of salvation and of punishment. Thus, once again our readings remind us of the second coming of Jesus, a natural theme of this Advent season. In addition to praising this community, Paul also prays for the church of Philippi. He prays much as we heard in last week's letter to the Thessalonians, that their love increases. What a beautiful way to pray for those whom we care for most deeply!

What if throughout this Advent season we were to pray for our Church and government leaders with the words of Paul: "And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God" (Phil 1:10-11)? Might our own choices for food, entertainment and gifts, be different if we were to take this prayer of Paul to heart?

Finally, turning to our Gospel from Luke, we are introduced to the preaching of John the Baptist. The opening verses of today's passage follow a literary pattern commonly used to introduce a prophetic book in the Old Testament, stating clearly the time and place of the prophet's appearance. Immediately we are told that "John went throughout [the] whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:4). John then quotes the magnificent words of the prophet Isaiah that begin with "prepare the way of the Lord…" While the opening verses of Mark's Gospel also include words from chapter 40 of Isaiah, Luke extends the quote by two verses, with the concluding words being "…*all flesh* shall see the salvation of God." With this brief extension of the Isaiah text, Luke makes clear that God's *good news* is for all people. During this holy season, may we recognize God's everlasting love for all people.

December 12, 2021
Third Sunday of Advent

Zephaniah 3:14-18; Isaiah 12: 2-6; Philippians 4: 4-7; Luke 3:10-18

Historically, the third Sunday of Advent has been referred to as *Gaudete* Sunday, taking its name from the entrance antiphon "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." The antiphon is actually a paraphrase of the first verse from today's reading from Philippians! While the first two Sundays of Advent have focused on the coming of the Lord, the mood shifts to joyous anticipation. Those who celebrate the Advent season with an Advent wreath are especially conscious that something is "different" about this day because they light a pink, rather than a purple or blue candle on their wreath.

Our reading from Zephaniah is filled with vocabulary that invites us to anticipate the wondrous works of God: *shout for joy, sing joyfully, be glad and exult with all your heart!* The words were addressed to a community in Judah, who had remained faithful to the covenant. This community was believed to have been a "remnant," a small segment of a larger community that had not kept covenant. While the opening verse contains these beautiful imperatives to the people, the text then moves to speak about what God has done and will do on behalf of God's loved ones. The expressions are loving and tender, and make clear that God will also rejoice, precisely because God loves this people so very deeply.

For a second week in a row, the epistle is a reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, a community which Paul loved dearly. And like our text from Zephaniah, this passage exhorts the people to rejoice, and to rejoice *always*! Like Zephaniah, the text is encouraging, and uplifting: "The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." The words are both compassionate and encouraging, reminding the community that "the Lord is near." Clearly, this tone is appropriate on this third Sunday of Advent, as we draw nearer to the celebration of the Incarnation.

Today's Gospel from Luke might require a bit of background. While this text, like last week's Gospel is from chapter three of Luke, the few verses between last week and this week's readings provide us with some helpful context for what we hear today. The interceding verses contain a reprimand to the crowds. As a result, the crowds ask John "What shall we do?" Not a bad question! What shall we do? How are we to behave?

Looking more closely, we see that this question is asked by three groups: the crowds, the tax collectors, and the soldiers. In each instance, John's response is sensitive. In each instance, John draws attention to the other, the neighbor. His responses are not complicated. They are, in some respects, quite simple. "What shall we do?" Share with your neighbor, do not abuse your position, act justly. John's response is reminiscent of Micah 6:8 – "This is what the Lord asks of you, only this: to act justly, love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God." Simple, but challenging. How much clearer an answer could there be to the question: "What shall we do?"!

In the second portion of today's Gospel, we hear that the people were wondering if John was the promised one. He makes it clear that he is *not* the Christ, the awaited messiah. The baptism of the one to come is far different from the baptism of repentance that John preached. John preached the good news that the promised one was coming. He instructed his followers that the way to prepare for the one to come was to love one's neighbor in the events of everyday life. Nothing more.

December 19, 2021
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:1-4; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

Our anticipation grows as we celebrate this fourth Sunday of Advent. Soon, very soon, we will celebrate the feast of the Nativity, the day this entire liturgical season has been awaiting. Today's Gospel, from the first chapter of Luke, recounts the story that we commonly refer to as "The Visitation." It begins immediately after "The Annunciation" and is followed by Mary's Magnificat. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth is joyous! As Mary greets Elizabeth, John leaps within Elizabeth's womb, she is "filled with the Holy Spirit," and she begins to prophesy. The words of Gabriel, spoken to Zechariah earlier in this chapter are fulfilled: "…he (John) will be filled with the Holy Spirit even in his mother's womb."

The significance of this scene is impossible to capture, especially for women in the Church. The paintings of this story, like other artistic representations of biblical events, cannot be numbered. Depictions of the encounter can be found in various cultures over hundreds and hundreds of years. Like the story of Ruth and Naomi, women can delight in this story, recognizing that there are "named" women in the Scriptures, who are remembered for their faithful response to God and their loving support and fidelity to one another.

Like the great prophets before her, Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit," proclaims several oracles (utterances of God). She declares that Mary is "blessed" among women, identifies Mary's child as "blessed" and refers to Mary as the mother of her Lord, and then announces that

Mary is "blessed" because she has *believed* God's word! In response to the prophetic words of Elizabeth, Mary proclaims the goodness of God in the words of the Magnificat.

Today's first reading is from the book of Micah, an eighth-century prophet whose work is believed to have been edited during the Babylonian exile. This would have been a time when the people were in great need of hope. The words we hear today were first heard by a displaced community. The city of Bethlehem in Judah was the birthplace of the beloved King David. So, when the text reads "from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel… and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel," we can only imagine how uplifting and challenging these words must have been. The passage then refers to this king as a shepherd who will "be peace."

While the tenor of the readings from Luke and Micah reflect the anticipation of the season, the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that the one whose entry into human history that we celebrate has also suffered on our behalf. Jesus has offered himself, has become the perfect offering. Hebrews reminds us that God does not require the sacrifices of animals. Words that Hebrews associates with Jesus are "Behold, I come to do your will." What did this mean for Jesus? What does it mean for us? Jesus became incarnate. He entered into human history and gave himself completely. While the ultimate sacrifice was his complete surrender to the desires of his father, throughout his life Jesus healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He gave himself completely that others might live.

Today's readings remind us that while we wait in hope for the celebration of the feast of the Nativity, we remember that the kin(g)dom of God is already in our midst. While we celebrate what God has done for us, we attempt with all our being to help bring that kin(g)dom about by saying "yes" to God's invitation to hear and to act on God's word.

December 25, 2021
Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) Mass during the Day

Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

Today we celebrate the joy and the mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus, born of Mary, enters into human history as one like us. A child, born to sojourners who find refuge in simple quarters, holds the hope of humankind and is the fulfillment of God's eternal Word. As the prologue of John's Gospel for today reminds us "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw this glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

What wonder, what awe, what questions must have been in the hearts of Mary and Joseph as they held this child! What wonder, awe, and questions fill the hearts of every parent at the birth of their child! Who can imagine the potential that each beautiful newborn holds within them? What hopes and dreams have parents of every generation imagined when they first held their tiny infant?

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's Word. The Word promised in ages past. And yet, we ask: is this it? Is this all there is? After the celebration of this Word made flesh, whether that be with elaborate gatherings of family and friends who break bread and delight in one another's company, or whether it be isolated individuals who recall that this day once held special meaning to them, what is the significance of these celebrations and memories?

Do we recognize that we too are bearers of God's Word? That we too are entrusted with bearing and bringing this Word to life? That God's desire for all people to live in freedom as children of God is the heritage that we have received?

Today's words from Isaiah remind us that the messenger who brings tidings of peace, who bears good news to God's people, are indeed beautiful! God comforts those who mourn, who are lonely, who are hungry and broken, through us! While Psalm 98 reminds us that "all the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God" (Psalm 98:3c), we often forget that while God has done wondrous deeds, we

are now entrusted with the responsibility of bringing hope, justice, and peace to "the ends of the earth."

Pope Francis captures the essence of Isaiah's messenger when he writes in *The Joy of the Gospel,* # 178:

> To believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love means realizing that "he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity." To believe that the Son of God assumed our human flesh means that each human person has been taken up into the very heart of God. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennobles each human being. Our redemption has a social dimension because "God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men (sic)."

Francis continues in #274:

> Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself (sic) is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person *is immensely holy and deserves our love*. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!

So, let us celebrate the mystery of the Incarnation today and every day. Let us recognize the face of God in all people and proclaim with the psalmist "All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God."

December 26, 2021
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52

On this feast of the Holy Family, we are invited to reflect upon the meaning of intimate relationships. While the focus of the Gospel and the passage from Sirach draw our attention to familial relationships, the other readings of the day expand our attention to the broader human family.

Our view of the world is first shaped by our early experience of family. At an early age, many of us may have been surprised to learn that all families did not share the same experiences that we had within our homes. The Smiths never sat at the table for dinner. The O'Malleys only saw their father early in the morning or late at night because of his job. The Rizzis always said the Rosary after dinner. The Kabiris never wore outdoor shoes in the house. Etc, etc. So many differences between families probably struck us as very strange when we were young.

As we developed close friendships, we may have become aware of more significant differences or similarities with our friends. Not everyone had a loving father who had pet names for each of his children. Not all mothers enjoyed spending time with their daughters. Some friends had abusive family members. So many secrets comprise the history that has shaped every person. Though we will never know many of these secrets, their impact on individuals is long-lasting, for better or for worse.

Today's Scripture reading from Sirach provides instruction for how adult children should provide for their parents. This text from the "Wisdom" tradition offers thoughtful insight into familial relationships. While the practice of such behavior is strong in many cultures, these words of "wisdom" are beautiful reminders of how we are all called to be with and for one another.

The text from Colossians offers additional words of wisdom. It instructs us on how we should be "clothed." Several years ago, while I

served as my Congregation's director of formation, one of our newer members renewed her vows. This lovely young woman had been a fashion designer before she entered the community. For her renewal ceremony that took place within a vespers service, she selected this reading to be the focus of the preaching that evening. What a beautiful way to be reminded that there are many ways in which we are clothed. What does it mean to put on "heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience"? The desires of this woman had changed from the external to the internal. The virtues identified in this reading are virtues that each of us can choose, much like the way we choose what we drape over our body each day. If each member of the human family consciously chose to clothe herself or himself with these virtues, how differently might our world be!

Today's Gospel brings us "down to earth." While we might have idyllic notions of this small "holy family," our reading from Matthew, reminds us that Jesus, like all children, was not completely understood by his parents. And like most parents, Mary and Joseph must have wondered about the future of their young child. What would become of him? The Gospel makes clear that Mary and Joseph "did not understand what he said to them" and that "Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man" (Lk 2:50, 52).

On this feast of the Holy Family, let us ask God to bless the entire human family. Let us pray that each of us might develop deep respect for the gift and mystery of every person in our troubled world.

Art Review

How do you envision the Holy Family? There are so many idyllic Renaissance paintings of the nativity we see this time of the year that it may be difficult to imagine the Holy Family otherwise. And we might be excused for our penchant for the sentimental at Christmas time. But how often do you picture the Holy Family beyond the context of Christmas? What was their life like after that momentous birth?

CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF HIS PARENTS OR THE CARPENTER'S SHOP
1849-1850,
oil on canvas
Sir John Everett Millais

The journey from sentimentality to everyday reality was something that captivated John Everett Millais. He observed the finest details of the world around him and sought to represent them on his canvases. Rather than paint a scene of the Holy Family bathed in the soft glow of moonlight as they cradled their newborn child, he painted a scene of everyday life in a carpenter's shop. Here we encounter Joseph at work at his carpenter's table, wood shavings strewn across the floor. The whole family is engaged in this work. We see Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Saint Ann, a young John the Baptist and even another young carpenter. Millais depicts a moment when the work has temporarily come to a halt. The young Jesus, still learning his way as a carpenter, has injured his hand. All eyes converge upon him as he lifts his hand to show his wound. Mary and Joseph both lovingly attend to their son. Joseph carefully assesses the injury, while Mary kneels to comfort Jesus. For his part, Jesus looks pensive.

John Christman, SSS

In its day this painting created quite a stir, as it broke with classical depictions of the Holy Family and instead attempted to portray them as everyday people of the time who supported themselves by physical labor. This realism and attentiveness to exacting detail was jarring for many art critics who preferred more idealistic representations of religious subjects. This may come as a surprise to our sensibilities, for despite its realism, the painting appears quite reverential and symbolic

to modern eyes. Mary dressed in blue with her head covered, Saint Ann in red, and John the Baptist already in camel hair and carrying water, all situate the scene within a traditional symbolic framework. Of course, the central symbol of the painting is Jesus' wounded hand. This is clearly a foreshadowing of his crucifixion, with Joseph's nearly held tool evoking a large nail, and the blood from the wound falling upon Jesus' foot. The lovely verdant fields and trees soaked in sunlight contrasts with this somber reminder. What are we to make of all this?

"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men (and women) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (GS 1). These famous words began that monumental document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*. What do these words point to in relation to Millais' impressive painting? First, they resonate well with Millais' choice to depict the Holy Family as everyday people like you and me. He didn't portray this family using classical Greek ideas of human perfection, but rather used real models in all their uniqueness. Therefore, he makes a connection between "the people of his age" and not only "the followers of Christ" but Jesus and his family as well.

The second point is equally important. Millais' painting and these words from *Gaudium et spes* draw attention to the reality that we often have to hold differing thoughts, emotions, and experiences together. Rarely do we experience something in a clear and one-dimensional way, such as pure joy or unencumbered grief. Instead, within most of our experiences, there are multiple thoughts and emotions, sometimes even contradictory ones. In a great moment of joy there may be some sadness, knowing that it will pass. In an experience of loss there may be some relief that a difficulty has ended. These are not judgements of right or wrong. Instead, simply an acknowledgment that our experiences are often complex, and we hold many things together. Sometimes we allow something we perceive as negative to overshadow an entire experience, when it's just one part. Millais' painting reminds us not to be so categorical, to hold things together. It's not just the two poles of the joy of the nativity and the suffering of Jesus' passion and death. There's a lot in the middle, and it's often a mixture. In this image, though Jesus is wounded, he is surrounded by love and concern. Perhaps he has a flash of awareness of his possible future, but also has much to learn and experience, not the least of which is carpentry. All will unfold in due time. But in this instance, woundedness, love, and healing are all happening at once, as is so often the case.

Poetry

Miracle Unseen
By Mary Ann McGill Muller

Divine breath blown over primordial land,
Creator stooped down to man
Oh, how ages past cried for relief
From selfish, vain belief
Of mankind's sinful ways

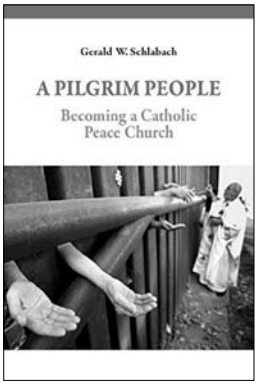
And how man wept and bled and fought
One to another for naught
Millenniums past stand aghast
Of what Eden became from Adam's fall.

So, God waited
Till that perfect night
He filled with light
From a tiny cave,
Twin being grew
To renew
The face of what God made.

Who would have thought
That manna from the desert would be used
Again, as miracle
This time unseen
In unleavened bread
Glimpse of heaven
Raised above our head
Behold! He stands
As we knock on heaven's door.

Long coming
Reason, faith collide
At last — that is what abides,
His body hidden
Salvation restored.

Book Review



A PILGRIM PEOPLE: BECOMING A CATHOLIC PEACE CHURCH
Gerald W. Schlabach, Liturgical Press Academic, Collegeville, MN. 2019

Schlabach's thesis is that if the Catholic Church were to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, it would be a peace, *shalom*, Church. Schlabach comes from a Mennonite background. While studying at Notre Dame and working with many Catholic peace groups, he became a Catholic. He states that he used to think of himself as a Catholic Mennonite, he now considers himself a Mennonite Catholic. He has worked with peace groups in different parts of the world for over thirty-five years. His whole life has been a study and work for peace. Because of this, his active nonviolence, and his clear explanations, it is a powerful book.

The chapters are organized around the themes in the title. "Pilgrim" is a very important concept. He says that "too often we are looking backwards rather than forward." As a global Church, we are living in a diaspora; we are never at home; we are never finished; we are never going to get it exactly right. This is a great point to ponder and live with, though we may not be accustomed to it. Think how often the institutional Church or segments within the Church think they are the *in group*, while the rest are the *out group*. The first part of this book challenges us to "Become Catholic again for the first time."

The author describes "becoming" as social transformation. At some level "Church" means working together for peace. He explains that *shalom* includes health, wholeness, true prosperity, right social relationships, and interdependent human relationship. He quotes Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, that the new word for peace is development, "If you want peace, work for justice." He then adds that "in that sense peace is entirely compatible with conflict."

The most important aspect of working for peace involves more than nonviolence. It involves "active nonviolence." This is the high point of the book. Nonviolence has not gotten us very far. Nonviolence is more than "don't do this, don't do that." *Active* nonviolence is going to involve many types of suffering. Schlabach writes that "Jesus Christ has shown that non-violent suffering love is the strongest power of the universe." Schlabach quotes often from the Vatican and Mennonite Conference final report, "Called Together to be Peacemakers" (1998-2003), 2004. "Active non-violence is morally normative for all Christians." Today, the Just War theory is going the way of Capital Punishment. They were needed at one time (maybe) but are in their last throes.

Marie Vianney Bilgrien, SSND
El Paso, TX

EUCHARISTIC WITNESS

Very Reverend Anthony Schueller, SSS

(1950-2021)

Some years ago, while preparing to preach on the Sunday Scriptures, I was struck by this verse in the Book of Wisdom: ". . . . And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets" (7:27).

The passage, of course, is about Wisdom, the highest attribute of God and the supreme gift of God to souls that seek him. But, as I reflected on it then and through the ensuing years, I have come to see that this is also a beautiful description of the Eucharist as I experience it, celebrate it, and pray it.

As a religious of the Blessed Sacrament and a priest, the Eucharist is the center of my life and ministry, and the privileged place of entry into the mystery of God. Certainly as a priest, my ministry is public in nature. But the Eucharist is also my prayer as a member of the community of believers, all of us together offering our praise and worship to God.

"And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God. . . ." Wisdom brings about intimacy with God. The Eucharist also does.

The intimacy of the Eucharist is not of our making, but of God's desiring and effecting. As we sit at table with the Lord, as for his first followers on the night of the Last Supper and in subsequent meals and encounters with the Lord after his resurrection, Christ draws us close to himself, to his heart and to the Father's. He teaches us, forgives us, strengthens us with the gift of his very life, and then sends us out in his name.

The first moment of eucharistic intimacy is the liturgy, but it is deepened and intensified in times of quiet prayer in his presence. How amazing it is to know the overwhelming love of God for us in Christ!

". . . and prophets." The Eucharist is meant to change us and empower us for our mission in the world. Weak and sinful and wholly dependent on God's grace, we are nonetheless transformed over time to boldly proclaim God's truth, justice, and compassion to others. Thus, the Eucharist brings us to the heart of God in loving intimacy and then outward in mission to those around us.

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John Christman, SSS

(Signed) John Christman, SSS, Editor, Emmanuel.

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Mary lived from the Eucharistic life of Jesus. Love desires community of living. She had shared the life of all his mysteries, the poverty of Bethlehem, hidden in Nazareth, persecuted during his evangelical life, and his crucified life. Mary then, for all the more reason, had to live the Eucharistic life of Jesus, the goal and crowning of all his other mysteries, this final triumph of his love on earth. The Eucharist was the life of Mary.

Eymard
sp S.S.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard
(Regulations for the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament 26,7)