

Emmanuel

Eucharistic Spirituality



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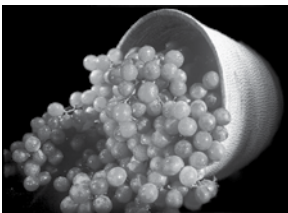
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Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 120 Number 3



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FROM THE EDITOR

Canonizations, like flowers, sometimes come in bunches. For example, groups of martyrs.

On December 9, 1963, the day after the close of the opening session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII canonized three saints, among them Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868), the Apostle of the Eucharist who founded two religious congregations dedicated to promoting knowledge and love of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Also canonized that day were two Italian saints: Antonio Maria Pucci (1819-1892), a devoted parish priest and Servite who had a special concern for the education of the young and the care of the sick, and Francis Mary of Camporosso (1804-1866), who collected donations to support the ministry of his Capuchin confreres while at the same time ministering among the workers and the poor of the port of Genoa. His final act was assisting victims of a cholera outbreak, of which he himself eventually died.

On Sunday, April 27, two popes of the twentieth century, John XXIII and John Paul II, were declared saints at Saint Peter's Basilica. The former is affectionately called "Good Pope John"; to the latter is applied the rarest of titles, "the Great." "Their lives," Cardinal Angelo Amato says, "completely dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel, shine in the church and reverberate in the history of the world as examples of hope and light." Heaven knows, our world needs hope and light!

Many have sought to answer the question "What is a saint?" A popular response that frequently shows up in homilies, particularly at Masses with children, is "Saints are like stained glass windows. They let the light of God shine through them."

In a blog released in late October of last year, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia offers this definition: "The saints were men and

women whom Jesus made his own." And he adds, "Sanctity is about being passionately in love with Jesus Christ." I like both of these statements because they emphasize that holiness results from staying close to the Lord Jesus and loving him deeply, passionately.

The bishops of Vatican II spoke of the universal call to holiness: "All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 40), and in the same number went on to say:

In order to reach this perfection, the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that . . . doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the people of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the church through the lives of so many saints.

Doing the will of God is the key to holiness of life. Saint Peter Julian Eymard described it as the "great law" of holiness. In a letter penned just two months prior to his death, he wrote the following words of encouragement to a woman he was guiding: "We find our special grace of sanctification in this present and personal divine will, and this special grace is attached to every hour, every action."

God gives each of us every necessary means to grow in holiness, especially the Eucharist. When we celebrate the eucharistic mystery in faith and receive the Lord's gift of love in joy and openness of heart, we are *transformed* and grow more and more to resemble Christ.

Saints John XXIII and John Paul II were deeply devoted to the Eucharist, both in their personal spirituality and in their public ministry. They believed in its power and in its necessity for anyone seriously committed to living a life of Christ-like goodness and holiness.

I invite you to read Father Paul Bernier's moving reflection on the Eucharist in the life and teachings of Pope John XXIII as well as an accompanying piece on Pope John Paul II. This issue also contains a meditation on Mary, the first disciple and the mother of compassion.



Father Anthony Schueller, SSS
Editor



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Pope John XXIII and the Eucharist

by Paul Bernier, SSS

Pope John XXIII will ever be known for his having convoked Vatican Council II. Most people alive today are hardly familiar with the 16 documents that came from that council; it is ancient history for them. All, however, are familiar with the most concrete result of that council: a eucharistic celebration that they can participate in actively because it is in the vernacular. The Sunday liturgy has also been enriched with a three-year cycle of readings and a structure that helps the faithful enter into the heart of the celebration. Its ritual pattern also makes it easier to recognize the inner reality of what we are celebrating.

John himself was well aware of the centrality of the liturgy in Christian life. His comments at the end of the first session bear this out: "It is no accident that the first *schema* to be considered was the one dealing with the sacred liturgy," he said. "The liturgy has to do with our relationship with God. This relationship is of the utmost importance. It must be based on the solid foundation of revelation and apostolic teaching, so as to contribute to man's spiritual good."

We can hardly claim that Good Pope John was responsible for all of the liturgical changes that followed the council, for they were elaborated by the commission tasked with the responsibility of putting flesh on the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which was voted on only after the pope had died. However, his love of the liturgy inspired him to appoint Annibale Bugnini—despite much opposition—to the commission that was to prepare the liturgical schema for the council as its secretary. Bugnini was an accomplished liturgist, and had served as secretary of Pope Pius XII's committee on liturgical reform. Bugnini's opponents did manage to get him removed from the Chair of Liturgy at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome because his liturgical ideas were seen as too progressive. Bugnini, however, was able to continue as secretary of the commission set up to implement the liturgical reform until he was exiled to Iran as pro-nuncio in 1976.

Pope John's approach to the Eucharist and the liturgy was not so much that of a theologian as that of a devoted parish priest. John himself said, when leaving his post at the nunciature in Paris, that for his own personal consolation he would hope every Frenchman would be able to say that he was a loyal and peaceful priest. That he surely was. Hence, his theology is primarily pastoral.

Only a month after being elected pope, he made the following remarks:¹

The picture of your bishop and your priest that we would like you to carry with you always is one of him standing at the altar, distributing the body and blood of our Lord; for this is the living substance of the religion that we profess—the *Nobiscum Deus*—God within us in the truths he has revealed that we contemplate, within us in the never-dying grace that makes men and families and the various forms of human society holy and teaches them to practice the loftiest of virtues. It is from the altar, from this holy mountain, that we must look down upon earthly things to judge them and make use of them. Even in the case of the most serious questions that torment human society at the present moment, the principles for a just solution must be found there.

He added:

In our many dealings with Christian people, there is a saying that comes from Bénigne Bossuet, one of the greatest modern geniuses in the field of religious studies, that we often find returning to our lips: "There is no perfection in Christian life or practice aside from participation in the eucharistic banquet." The catechetical teaching we spoke of before leads to it naturally, and all the zeal of the pastoral spirit is dedicated to it.

Reflecting on his more than 50 years of service in 1959, he did not dwell on what he accomplished as a teacher, or as a nuncio in various countries, his having been bishop and patriarch of Venice, nor on his having been elected pope. Rather, it was to the priesthood that was his, and his service to God's people from the altar and the Eucharist he celebrated there.

If you give careful consideration to all of the activity of a priest, what is the main point of his apostolate if not seeing to it that wherever the church lives, a people who are joined by the bonds of faith, regenerated by holy baptism and cleansed of their faults, will be gathered together around the sacred altar? It is then that the priest, using the sacred power he has received, offers the divine sacrifice



in which Jesus Christ renews the unique immolation which he completed on Calvary for the redemption of mankind and for the glory of his heavenly Father. It is then that the Christians who have gathered together, acting through the ministry of the priest, present the divine victim and offer themselves to the supreme and eternal God as a "sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God." There it is that the people of God are taught the doctrines and precepts of faith and are nourished with the body of Christ, and there it is that they find a means to gain supernatural life, to grow in it, and if need be, to regain unity. And there besides, the mystical body of Christ, which is the church, grows with spiritual increase throughout the world down to the end of time.

This was a point that he reinforced at the Roman synod he called shortly after his election as pope. In a reflection to priests in November of 1960, he told them:

The altar, the altar, beloved sons, is the focal point for eyes and heart. It evokes the picture that characterizes our life, and it is the starting-point for the full unfolding of the chief labors of a priest: confessions, spiritual direction, teaching catechism, caring for the sick, prompt and prudent and patient contact with the faithful of all ages and every social status in their doubts, their sorrows, their public calamities, their poverty.

In his sermons and reflections, while retaining traditional language in regard to the Eucharist such as calling it "the holy sacrifice of the Mass," he also used concepts that would become much more common after the council. The Mass might be called a sacrifice, but it was because it was a memorial of Christ's redemptive work. It was the means whereby the reality of the cross was applied to those participating in the celebration.

Perhaps because of his historical background, he often quoted from the fathers of the church. More than once, he referred to the Eucharistic Prayer of the *Didache* with its symbolism of many grains making up one bread and many grapes needed to make wine, to point to the unity that should be ours who share that bread and wine at Christ's table. He drove home the same point with John Chrysostom: "Our Lord taught us by means of the Lord's Prayer to pray to God on behalf of our brethren as well as ourselves. He wants us, in other words, to offer prayers to him to promote not only our own interests, but also those of our neighbor. He intends thereby to discourage enmities and arrogance. As our body is in fact joined to Christ, by the same token we also are united by means of this bread."

Our daily bread in its oneness is a symbol and cause of unity, says Pope John. Chrysostom continues: "As that body is in fact joined to Christ, by the same token we also are united by means of this bread." The pope adds that there can be no doubt of the fact that the eucharistic bread is a symbol and source of unity in the mystical body, whether through the minds which it illuminates and leads to a profession of the same divine truth or through the wills which it inflames with the same fire of love for God and neighbor. This fire does not remain concealed behind the walls of our homes and churches, but tends of its very nature to spread out and to enkindle. The pope here uses a symbol that Saint Peter Julian Eymard loved of the Eucharist setting us on fire with Christ's love.

Pope John's approach to the Eucharist and the liturgy was not so much that of a theologian as that of a devoted parish priest.

Again reflecting on the Our Father, the pope quotes Saint Thomas to say that the bread for which we pray to God should be not only temporal bread, but, first of all, *spiritual* bread, which is God himself, truth to be contemplated and goodness to be loved; it must also be *sacramental* bread, that is, the body of the Savior, sign and viaticum of eternal life.

Showing a deep appreciation for the word of God that was rare in those days, the pope quotes Saint Lawrence Justinian—one of his predecessors in the See of Venice—when speaking to seminarians in 1960 of the substantial nourishment that we can gain from the Scriptures:

The sacred book is indeed the mirror in which is reflected the knowledge of the word; it is the holy tabernacle of the Godhead. No one who approaches it in a spirit of purity, prudence, and humility will depart from it empty-handed. The book teaches the ways of righteous living; under the surface of its words, what a current of lofty truths and mysterious sacraments! In the book are the wonders of the divine omnipotence which created the world; in it is the cooperative role of the angels, as well as the instrumental function of man. Those holy pages exalt, first and foremost, the supreme goodness of the Creator, who by them wished to enlighten human ignorance, lead man to faith, sustain his hopes, and wean his spirit away from visible things, while nourishing it with things invisible and eternal.

Pope John voiced again his appreciation of the Scriptures when speaking to the Italian Biblical Association at the beginning of the council:



Prior to, and above and beyond any display of erudition, must come a hunger and thirst for the divine message because it is life for souls, light unto minds, a life-giving breath. Jesus proclaimed it and John reported to us the exact text: “The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” Is not the Gospel perhaps the good news that they (nations, families, communities) are awaiting? Is not it the “letter from God to men” that ought to free them from too many accretions that are sentimental, or coldly and merely scientific and technical? Is it not the revelation of the “new heavens and new earth” that will attract human hearts as a foretaste of heavenly happiness?

Interestingly, John quotes Saint Leo the Great to reinforce the notion of divinization through the Eucharist—a theology so appreciated in the Eastern Church. Leo says, “The reception of Christ’s body and blood does nothing less than transform us into that which we consume, and henceforth we bear in soul and body him in whose fellowship we died, were buried, and are risen again.” John adds, “Mark this well: unless the faithful remain bound together by the same ties of virtue, worship, and the sacraments, and all hold fast to the same belief, they cannot be perfectly united with the divine redeemer, the universal head, so as to form with him one visible and living body.”

The pope again quoted from Saint Leo when he canonized Father Eymard at the end of the first session of the council. “In the Eucharist is found the source and the nourishment of all holiness. So stated our predecessor Saint Leo the Great: ‘The one effect of sharing in the body and the blood of Christ is to make us become him whom we are receiving.’”

In conclusion, there is no doubt that John XXIII will be remembered mainly for his having had the courage to call for a council of the universal church, for his ecumenical outreach, and his deft human touch. As regards his teaching, more attention is given to his two social encyclicals.

His encyclical *Mater et Magistra* was issued in 1961 to commemorate the anniversary of Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*. It was considered too progressive by more conservative readers. William Buckley famously dismissed it with “Mater si, magister no.” In 1963, shortly before his death, he issued *Pacem in Terris*, advocating human freedom and dignity as the basis for world order and peace.


In many ways, however, these encyclicals flowed from his eucharistic piety. For John, the Eucharist was not simply a ritual expression of a privatized relationship with God. The imperative for unity that is essential

to the celebration had definite social consequences. His invitation to non-Catholics to attend the council was opposed by many in the curia, who were horrified at the thought of having heretics at the council. For John, they were not heretics, but separated brethren. His belief in the human dignity of every person flowed from his appreciation that Jesus lived and died for all people, not simply a select few.

It is striking that in a lesser-known encyclical issued in the first year of his pontificate he chose to propose Saint John Mary Vianney to the clergy as an outstanding model of priestly asceticism, of piety, especially in the form of devotion to the Eucharist, and, finally, of pastoral zeal. The devotion to prayer of this good pastor, the pope said, had one special characteristic—it was specially directed toward the Eucharist. In the pope's own words:

It is almost unbelievable how ardent his devotion to Christ hidden beneath the veils of the Eucharist really was. "He is the one"—he said—"who has loved us so much; why shouldn't we love him in return?" He was devoted to the adorable sacrament of the altar with a burning charity and his soul was drawn to the sacred tabernacle by a heavenly force that could not be resisted.

This is how he taught his faithful to pray: "You do not need many words when you pray. We believe on faith that the good and gracious God is there in the tabernacle; we open our souls to him; and feel happy that he allows us to come before him; this is the best way to pray." He did everything that there was to be done to stir up the reverence and love of the faithful for Christ hidden in the sacrament of the Eucharist and to bring them to share in the riches of the divine synaxis; the example of his devotion was ever before them. "To be convinced of this—witnesses tell us—all that was necessary was to see him carrying out the sacred ceremonies or simply to see him genuflect when he passed the tabernacle."

It is safe to say that John proposed this ideal to himself as well. He may have risen in the church hierarchy, but he remained at heart a priest, a priest who centered his life on the Eucharist and saw this as the source of his zeal for others and the heart of his relationship with Christ. 

Note

¹ For most of the quotes found in this article, I am indebted to a collection found in the August 1963 issue of *Worship* magazine, 465-497.



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Pope John Paul II: Saint of the Saving Grace of God

by Anthony Schueller, SSS

The scene in Saint Peter's Square was remarkable, reminiscent of a time in Catholicism when saints sometimes achieved the designation through popular acclamation rather than the lengthy process of canonization, involving testimonials of heroic virtue and supporting miracles. As the cypress casket containing the body of the late Pope John Paul II was being carried by the Papal Gentlemen to the crypt beneath the basilica following his funeral Mass, the crowd in the square and the surrounding streets spontaneously erupted in applause and a cry arose and echoed across the sea of humanity, "*Santo subito!*" ("A saint now!").

The declaration of the sanctity of the pope many call John Paul the Great would not be accomplished for another nine years, but the affection for this humble servant of God and the church remains genuine and unmistakable even to our day, and his virtue undeniable.

John Paul II died on April 2, 2005, at age 84, having served the universal church as pontiff for 26 years, five months, and 17 days. His death felt like the passing of a father. My first thought was, "Will I remember *not to say his name* during the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer?" After all, he had been the pope during all but one year of my ministry as a priest. For younger Catholics, John Paul was the *only* pope they had known.

During the homily of the funeral Mass for his friend and mentor, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the dean of the College of Cardinals, drew on the risen Lord's last words to Peter, "Follow me" (Jn 21:19, 22), in reflecting on John Paul's life and legacy:

"Follow me.' As a young student, Karol Wojtyła was thrilled by literature, the theatre, and poetry. Working in a chemical plant, surrounded and threatened by the Nazi terror, he heard the voice of the Lord: 'Follow me!' In this extraordinary setting, he began to read books of philosophy and theology, and then entered the clandestine seminary established by Cardinal Sapieha. After the war, he was able to complete his studies in

the faculty of theology of the Jagiellonian University of Krakow.”

“How often, in his letters to priests and in his autobiographical books has he spoken to us about his priesthood, to which he was ordained on 1 November 1946? In these texts, he interprets his priesthood with particular reference to three sayings of the Lord. First: ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last’ (Jn 15:16). The second saying is: ‘The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’ (Jn 10:11). And then: ‘As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love’ (Jn 15:9). In these three sayings, we see the heart and soul of our Holy Father.”

“He really went everywhere, untiringly, in order to bear fruit, fruit that lasts. *Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way!* is the title of his next-to-last book. ‘Rise, let us be on our way!’ With these words, he roused us from a lethargic faith, from the sleep of the disciples of both yesterday and today. ‘Rise, let us be on our way!’ he continues to say to us even today.”

“The Holy Father was a priest to the last, for he offered his life to God for his flock and for the entire human family, in a daily self-oblation for the service of the church, especially amid the sufferings of his final months. And in this way, he became one with Christ, the Good Shepherd who loves his sheep. Finally, ‘abide in my love’: the pope who tried to meet everyone, who had an ability to forgive and to open his heart to all, tells us once again today, with these words of the Lord, that by abiding in the love of Christ we learn, at the school of Christ, the art of true love.”

The world first met Karol Józef Wojtyła as a youthful, energetic churchman from Poland, a land still under communist domination when he assumed the papacy in October 1978. We marveled at his warmth, charisma, and ease of communication, admired the greatness of his intellect, and listened as he spoke out forcefully on human rights and challenged the political underpinnings of communism and totalitarianism. We felt the strength of his character and his convictions during the years he guided the church. We knew him, too, and loved him in his last days when age and weakness overtook him. In all of this, we came to see and appreciate the goodness and beauty of his soul.

In this article, we will touch on just four aspects of his life and spirituality.

Witness to the Holiness of God

Pope John Paul II experienced godless political systems firsthand: in his youth, Nazism; throughout his career as a priest and bishop, communism.

Emmanuel



In later years, he understood as well the debilitating effects of unbridled capitalism and secularism.

His response to these realities was to emphasize the truth of God's existence and the holiness of God. He opened the encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) with the following words: "The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in the human person, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence, the psalmist prays: 'Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord' (Ps 4:6)." And he added, "Without the Creator, the creature disappears."

As the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 approached, John Paul, in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, cast the mystery of God in Trinitarian terms and spoke of God as the origin and end of human existence, emphasizing the encounter with God in the incarnation, Christ's "becoming one of us" (5). This encounter with the presence of God, he wrote, may be compared to a pilgrim's path "along the shores of the river of God—that is, of his presence and of his revelation in human history" (25).

In the face of contemporary challenges, Pope John Paul emphasized the truth of God's existence and the holiness of God.

He said at the weekly general audience of January 19, 2000: "The divine Trinity is the origin of both being and history, and is their ultimate goal. It constitutes the beginning and the end of salvation history. Between the two extremes of the garden of Eden (cf. Gn 2) and the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Rev 22) stretches a long series of ups and downs marked by shadows and light, sin and grace. Sin has distanced us from the splendor of God's paradise; redemption brings us back to the glory of a new heaven and a new earth, where 'death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more' (Rev 21:4)."

Belief in God, John Paul asserted, anchors personal existence and counters the relativism and cynicism so prevalent today.

Reflection of the Face of God

We live at a time when a new successor of Peter, bearing the name Francis and resolutely committed to renewing and reforming church structures

and life, has enthralled the world with his words and his warmth. In this springtime of the Catholic Church, it is good to recall that Pope John Paul, in his day, radiated a similar joy and peace to those around him, indeed to the whole world. He was a captivating figure. His smile was warm, broad; his touch comforting; his words hopeful and encouraging.

Trained in his youth in theater and communications, John Paul knew the power of words and gestures and silence when speaking. But his was more than effective communication skills and the mastering of style and technique; by his very person, he exuded goodness and an unshakable faith in Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II had an especially powerful bond with the young. One of the great initiatives of his papacy was the creation of World Youth Day in 1984, the close of the Year of Redemption. Eighteen years later, in Toronto, during the last World Youth Day he attended, the Holy Father told 800,000 young people gathered before him: "When . . . I wanted to start the World Youth Days . . . I imagined a powerful moment in which the young people of the world could meet Christ, who is eternally young, and could learn from him how to be bearers of the Gospel to other young people. This evening, together with you, I praise God and give thanks to him for the gift bestowed on the church through the World Youth Days. Millions of young people have taken part, and as a result have become better and more committed Christian witnesses."

I experienced this connection with the young personally in 1997 when I was privileged to participate in a Mass the pope celebrated in Saint Peter's Square. Weakened by the onset of Parkinson's and the lingering effects of the 1981 attempt on his life, he looked frail and spoke somewhat haltingly. However, his appearance changed completely when a small group of young people from the Philippines came forward to present the World Youth Day cross to a contingent of Parisian youth, hosts of the next World Youth Day. His visage was transformed, his posture straightened, and he spoke with the energy and confidence of one who has known the utter goodness of God and desired only to share it with others.

Prophet of Justice and Compassion

Pope John Paul II was a passionate defender of the dignity and rights of all people, especially the poor, the unborn, and those on the margins of society. In the homily of the final Mass of his first pastoral visit to the United States in 1979, the Holy Father said: "When we Christians make Jesus Christ the center of our feelings and thoughts, we do not turn away



from people and their needs. On the contrary, we are caught up in the eternal movement of God's love that comes to meet us; we are caught up in the movement of the Son, who came among us, who became one of us; we are caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit, who visits the poor, calms fevered hearts, binds up wounded hearts, warms cold hearts, and gives us the fullness of his gifts."

Then, using Luke's parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) and Matthew's account of the final judgment (25:31-46), he told the throng filling Yankee Stadium . . . and the world: "All of humanity must think of the parable of the rich man and the beggar. Humanity must translate it into contemporary terms, in terms of economy and politics, in terms of all human rights, in terms of relations between the 'First,' 'Second,' and 'Third World.' We cannot stand idly by when thousands of human beings are dying of hunger. Nor can we remain indifferent when the rights of the human spirit are trampled upon, when violence is done to the human conscience in matters of truth, religion, and cultural creativity."

"We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation. And so, in the name of the solidarity that binds us all together in a common humanity, I again proclaim the dignity of every human person: the rich man and Lazarus are both human beings, both of them equally created in the image and likeness of God, both of them equally redeemed by Christ, at a great price, the price of 'the precious blood of Christ' (1 Pt 1:19)."

Man of the Eucharist

Among the writings of John Paul II's pontificate are many on the Eucharist. Some are didactic, emphasizing the consistent teaching and rich eucharistic tradition of Roman Catholicism. Some deal with matters of discipline, addressing certain situations and circumstances which have crept into the church's liturgical practice. Still others underscore the link between the celebration of the Eucharist and eucharistic worship outside of Mass.

In "Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist," published in the January/February 2013 issue of *Emmanuel*, Father Dennis J. Billy, CSsR, offers a superb summary and analysis of John Paul's eucharistic teaching, as encapsulated in the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) and his apostolic letter for the Year of the Eucharist (October 2004-October 2005, *Mane Nobiscum*


Domine (2004). I encourage you to read Father's Billy's article.

I will, however, quote two paragraphs: "John Paul II begins his last encyclical with a simple and straightforward affirmation: 'The church draws her life from the Eucharist' and that it 'recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the church' (1). He quotes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life' (1) and that it 'contains the church's entire spiritual wealth' (1). This 'mystery of faith' anticipated the events of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, and carries on his redemptive mission wherever it is celebrated (4)."

Wherever he went, John Paul celebrated the Eucharist with the people of God, the source of their life, mission, and sanctification.

"It also reveals the mystery of the church, which was born by the gift of the Holy Spirit on the feast of Pentecost, and which took shape in a decisive way in the Upper Room when Jesus celebrated his Last Supper with his disciples (5). The pope affirms the centrality of the Eucharist for the church's life and mission and reaffirms the teaching of the councils and his predecessors on the sacrament (9)."

Against this background, it is highly significant that on his many pastoral journeys during the course of his papacy the Holy Father chose to place the Eucharist front and center at every turn. In teeming cities, in remote missionary dioceses and churches, on tropical islands and in desert kingdoms, John Paul II celebrated the Eucharist with the people of God—the sacrament which is the source of their life, their mission, and their sanctification in Christ.

The Eucharist was the center of his life and faith, the privileged place of the encounter with Christ through the ages until his return. It is the *mysterium fidei*, the great gift of the Lord in his love, to be celebrated reverently and witnessed to faithfully by lives that are transformed and renewed by the very mystery we touch. 



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Edward Schillebeeckx on the Eucharist

by Dennis Billy, CSsR

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Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, (1914-2009) was born in Antwerp, Belgium, received his early education at Turnhout, and entered the Dominican Order in 1934. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1941 and studied at various philosophical and theological faculties, including Louvain, Le Salchoir, the École des Hautes Études, and the Sorbonne (Paris). He served in the Belgian army in the early years of World War II and afterwards began a lengthy academic career, first at the theology faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain and later, beginning in 1958, at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He was a theological expert (*peritus*) at the Second Vatican Council and drafted many texts for the Dutch bishops during its four sessions.

Although trained and well versed in classical Thomism, he studied phenomenology and was deeply immersed in modern Protestant and Catholic theology. A prolific author, he dedicated his writing and research to extending the limits of Catholic theology and finding new ways of formulating the teachings of the church that would be more accessible to the mindset and sensitivities of the modern world. These efforts created tensions with church authorities and led to numerous criticisms by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the watchdog of the Catholic magisterium. His books include: *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1963), *God and Man* (1969), *Revelation and Theology* (1979), *Ministry* (1981), *God Among Us* (1983), *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (1985), and *I Am a Happy Theologian* (2004). His teaching on the Eucharist appears in many of his writings, especially in *The Eucharist* (1968, 2005), where he takes up the topic of “transsignification.”¹

Schillebeeckx’s Theological Outlook

Throughout his writings, Schillebeeckx emphasizes the importance of having a personal encounter with Christ, especially as it is mediated through the church and its sacraments. Reacting against the theology of the manuals of the pre-Vatican II era, he believes “the intimateness of

God's personal approach to man is often lost in a too severely objective examination of that which forms the living core and center of religion, the personal communion with the God who gives himself to men."² To counteract this tendency, he emphasizes the mode of being peculiar to human existence and seeks to present Christianity and religion, in general, as ". . . above all a saving dialogue between man and the living God."³ Christ, in his mind, is the means through which this dialogue takes place and brings about this personal encounter between the human and the divine.

Schillebeeckx seeks to root his reflections in the church's theological tradition, yet move it forward. He presents humanity's religious yearnings in terms of its search for a visible manifestation (or sacrament) of the divine. This holds true for pagan religion, as well as for Israel's search for God throughout salvation history. It is within this tradition that God gradually unveils himself through the law and the prophets and whose self-revelation reaches its fullness in Jesus Christ, the primordial sacrament, who represents the epitome of divine love for man and human love for God.⁴

According to Schillebeeckx, the redemptive mystery of Christ unfolds in his humiliation in the service of the Father and his heavenly exaltation as it takes place in his paschal mystery. Because of his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, he is able to impart his Spirit and begin the process of humanity's sanctification. In his mind, ". . . we can see sufficiently clearly that the mysteries of the Passover (death, resurrection, exaltation) and of Pentecost are the representation in human form, realized in the mystery of Christ, of the mystery of the redeeming Trinity."⁵

If Christ is the "sacrament of God" who embodies in his paschal mystery the redeeming action of the Trinity, then the church is the "sacrament of the risen Christ" that continues the saving action of Christ through time.⁶ With Saint Augustine, Schillebeeckx affirms that "Christ dies that the church might be born."⁷ "The earthly church, for him, "is the visible realization of this saving reality in history."⁸ As such, it is a visible and concrete union in grace: "This communion itself, consisting of members and a hierarchical leadership, is the earthly sign of the triumphant redeeming grace of Christ."⁹ He goes so far as to claim that the church is more than a mere means of salvation. "It is Christ's salvation itself, this salvation as visibly realized in the world. Thus it is, by a kind of identity, the body of the Lord."¹⁰

In light of the above, Schillebeeckx presents the individual sacraments as "the sevenfold ecclesial realization of the one mystery of redemption."¹¹ They are the church's celebration of the mysteries of Christ's life and the



means through which the personal encounter with Christ in the church becomes possible. As such, they represent “the ecclesial manifestation of Christ’s love for men . . . and of his human love for God.”¹² While valid when properly celebrated, they are fruitful in the lives of the faithful only when this love is reciprocated. Schillebeeckx concludes: “It is by the sacraments that we journey toward our final goal—the sacramental way is our hidden road to Emmaus, on which we are accompanied by our Lord. And even though we are not yet able to see him, we are conscious of his concealed presence near us, for when he addresses us through his sacraments, our hearts, intent upon his word, burn with longing.”¹³ He goes on to quote the words of Saint Ambrose, “You have shown yourself to me, Christ, face to face. It is in your sacraments that I meet you.”¹⁴ Schillebeeckx believes this statement is especially true when Christians gather around the table of the Lord and recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Schillebeeckx on the Eucharist

The Mass, for Schillebeeckx, is the point of contact where the mystery of Christ’s redemption touches people in their daily lives. This process of sanctification takes place in and through the church and does so in a way that both heals and sanctifies. For Jesus, the Last Supper represents “the unshaken assurance of salvation when face to face with death.”¹⁵ Since “there is no gap between Jesus’ self-understanding and the Christ proclaimed by the church,” Schillebeeckx concludes, “the memory of Jesus’ life and especially of the Last Supper must have played a vital role in the process of their conversion to faith in Jesus as the Christ, the one imbued to the full with God’s Spirit.”¹⁶

That memory touches the heart of the church’s nascent faith and lies behind the central role played by the Eucharist in its life and message. Schillebeeckx recognizes that the church has traditionally presented the sacrament as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, which immerses the faithful in the sacrifice of Calvary, and contains the real presence of the risen Christ. He understands that Eucharist has typically been described as a *banquet*, a *sacrifice*, and a *real presence*. The sacrament, in this respect, gives the faithful heavenly food, makes the sacrifice of Calvary present in an unbloody manner, and brings the risen Lord into their midst through the transubstantiated bread and wine. In his desire to move the tradition forward and to present the mystery of the Eucharist in a language that will speak to our present-day sensitivities, he eventually proposes an entirely new way of understanding Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. He does so by employing the term “transsignification.”¹⁷

Schillebeeckx claims that the church's doctrine of "transubstantiation," which teaches that, at the moment of consecration, the substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of Christ's body and blood, presupposes scholastic categories and distinctions that are foreign to the modern way of thinking and difficult to understand. Since the doctrine represents a new approach to the Eucharist in its day, he says it would be appropriate in our own day to find a new way of formulating the church's teaching on the Lord's presence in the sacrament. The challenge, he goes on to say, is to find a way so "that the new formulation does not contradict the original, inviolable datum of faith or minimize it"¹⁸ Drawing from the philosophy of phenomenology, Schillebeeckx draws the distinction between reality itself and reality as a phenomenal appearance: "The inadequacy of man's knowledge of reality accounts for a certain difference between reality and its appearance as a phenomenon."¹⁹

The Mass is the point of contact where the mystery of Christ's redemption touches people in their daily lives.

Schillebeeckx claims that the conflict between Aristotelian categories and modern physics calls for a new way of describing Christ's presence in the Eucharist, one that rediscovers the sacrament's symbolic activity and the meaning conveyed through it.²⁰ Transsignification, he says, expresses the change in meaning which the reality of Christ's paschal mystery impresses upon the phenomenal world as represented in the sacramental bread and wine: "... the usual secular significance of the bread and wine is withdrawn and these become bearers of Christ's gift of himself—'Take and eat, this is my body.'²¹ What takes place at the eucharistic celebration is therefore a change of meaning: "In this commemorative meal, bread and wine become the subject of a new *establishment of meaning*, not by men, but by the living Lord *in* the church, through which they become the *sign* of the real presence of Christ giving himself to us."²² Schillebeeckx concludes that this new approach of transsignification, although not identical with transubstantiation, is intimately connected with it.²³

Observations

This brief exposition of Schillebeeck's teaching on the Eucharist points out its strong emphasis on the sacramental nature of Christ and the church and underscores the important way in which the sacrament facilitates a personal encounter with God. It also shows how Schillebeeckx attempts to present the doctrine of the real presence in a way that is faithful to the



tradition, yet takes into account our present-day sensitivities and patterns of thought. The following remarks delve more deeply into Schillebeeckx's presentation and its relevance for today.

1. To begin with, Schillebeeckx roots his teaching on the Eucharist in the larger context of Christ and his body, the church. By calling Christ the "primordial sacrament" and the church, the "sacrament of the risen Christ," he emphasizes the element of personal encounter with God as the goal of the Christian life. In this respect, the sacraments in general, and the Eucharist in particular, were instituted by Christ either explicitly or implicitly through the apostolic institution as a means of promoting throughout history the possibility of this encounter between God and man, between the human and the divine. In doing so, he seeks to avoid the reified, mechanistic rendering of sacramental grace that the scholastic formulations have, at times, tended to convey.

By bringing the symbolic meaning of the sacraments to the fore and, in the case of the Eucharist, by showing how the very meaning of the elements of bread and wine have been changed to convey a sense of unshaken assurance of salvation in the face of death, he retrieves insights into the meaning of the sacrament from deep within the tradition and presents them in a way that is palatable to our present sensitivities and way of thinking. He does so, moreover, by preserving the "sign" value of the real presence itself, by focusing it not on the elements of bread and wine themselves, but on the intimate, personal encounter they sustain between God and man.²⁴

2. Schillebeeckx makes the point that any new formulations of the church's dogmatic teachings (in this case, its teaching on the Eucharist) must be faithful to the tradition, yet open to the experience of modern people. Although "transsignification" is not identical with "transubstantiation," he affirms the two are closely related and, in fact, complement each other. In his teaching on the Eucharist, Schillebeeckx is not trying to discard the church's teaching on transubstantiation, but simply find a new approach to the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist that will make sense to our modern sensibilities. His main difficulty with the doctrine of transubstantiation is that it is rooted in medieval categories that have largely lost their meaning in today's world. If the Catholic faith is to continue to be a living faith, then theologians must strive to find new ways of

understanding the mystery of the real presence. In this respect, he is attempting to do with “transsignification” what medieval scholastics like Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas did with “transubstantiation,” a teaching which in the thirteenth century was a relatively new theological concept, perceived as modernist, and which only entered gradually over time into the popular imagination of the Catholic faithful.²⁵

Schillebeeckx sought to present the mystery of the Eucharist in a language that speaks to our present-day sensitivities.

3. If medieval scholastic terms such as “substance,” “species,” and “accidents” upon which the church bases its teaching on “transubstantiation” are difficult to comprehend today, it is also true that any new formulation will have its own limitations and, in all likelihood, one day suffer a similar fate. The history of theology reflects the changing currents of human thought in its attempt to understand the mysteries of the Christian faith. While the church must always be open to new formulations that might better explain the mysteries of the faith and hence promote the development of doctrine, it also has the duty and responsibility of embracing those theological formulations that have served it well in elucidating the truths of the tradition. The doctrine of “transubstantiation” is one such formulation, for it stands out as the theological formulation which, to date, has best expressed the mystery of the real presence. Although it first appeared on the theological scene only in the twelfth century, it gained prominence in the thirteenth, was defined at the Council of Trent, was reaffirmed in Paul VI’s encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* and his *Credo of the People of God*.²⁶ It was taught, still later, by John Paul II and Benedict XVI and also listed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.²⁷ For all its strengths, “transsignification,” by way of contrast, has never had such success in making its way into the church’s theological imagination and official teaching.
4. The main difficulty with “transsignification” is that it focuses on a change in the meaning of the consecrated bread and wine rather than in their substances. In making this shift from the classical category of “substance” to the present-day concern for “meaning,” the argument against “transsignification” states that a deeper shift is taking place from objective to subjective reality. In



other words, the change that takes place is not in the bread and wine themselves, but in the meaning attached to them by those who receive it. Such an understanding expressly goes against the current teaching of the church. In the words of Paul VI: "Every theological explanation which seeks some understanding of this mystery [the Eucharist] must, in order to be in accord with the Catholic faith, maintain that in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine, as the Lord willed it, in order to give himself to us as food and to associate us with the unity of his mystical body."²⁸ In his encyclical letter *Mysterium Fidei*, moreover, Paul VI makes it clear that "transsignification" does not provide an adequate explanation of the transformation that takes place in the eucharistic elements.²⁹ Such an assessment of the limitations of "transsignification" would indicate that, for all its strengths, it ultimately can be used only to complement the church's teaching on transubstantiation in order to emphasize the element of personal encounter with God in the sacrament.

5. Finally, Schillebeeckx is to be commended for his attempt to find a new approach to the Catholic doctrine of the real presence that would address our present sensitivities and make them more accessible to our current modes of thought. In doing so, he represents the kind of theological thinking that seeks to delve more deeply into the mysteries of the faith and find new ways of expressing the truths they hold. It must be noted, however, that no theological formulation—be it "transubstantiation" or "transsignification"—will ever fully exhaust the mysteries they seek to express. For this reason, a more suitable approach to expressing our understanding of such mysteries as the Lord's real presence in the Eucharist would be to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the various models seeking to explain the mystery, admit that, while some are better than others, no single model will ever fully explain the mystery under consideration, and therefore use these various models in conjunction with one another. As far as "transubstantiation" and "transsignification" are concerned, it bears noting that Schillebeeckx himself remarked that, although not identical, they are closely connected. Up until this point, theologians and church authorities have largely focused on how these two approaches to the real presence differ from one another. It is

incumbent for future development of our understanding of the doctrine to explore how they are connected. The place to begin would be to emphasize that the change in meaning envisioned by “transsignification” occurs not merely in the human subject (i.e., those who receive the sacrament), but first and foremost in God himself (i.e., the sacrament’s objective and subjective source). Such an approach recognizes that God, for whom all things are possible, has the ability to change not only what the bread and wine *are* (transubstantiation), but also what they *mean* (transsignification). The objective reality and subjective meaning of the Eucharist, in other words, is determined primarily by God and only secondarily by the believing community.

Although these observations do not exhaust Schillebeeckx’s teaching on the Eucharist, they cover its major themes and demonstrate how a single theologian can cause a reexamination of the church’s traditional theological formulations in an attempt to deepen the church’s understanding of the mysteries of the faith and push the tradition forward. Among other things, they bring to the fore his deep desire to present the Eucharist as an occasion for a personal encounter with Christ and to assist people in their search for ultimate meaning.

Conclusion

Edward Schillebeeckx was a seminal thinker and one of the leading Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. Throughout his writings, he was not afraid to probe the various theological formulations embedded in the tradition and seek new ways of expressing the truths they conveyed. These efforts led him to many creative insights about the nature of the Christ event and its meaning for believers today. His experiments in Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology were an attempt to remain faithful to the tradition, while at the same time moving it forward. At times, these attempts led church authorities to question the validity of his insights and even his orthodoxy.

In one of his last books, Schillebeeckx describes himself as “a happy theologian.”³⁰ He depicts himself in this manner, because he believes he has remained faithful to his vocation as someone charged with exploring the Christian tradition and seeking out new ways through which it could remain a vital force in the lives of the faithful and present the Gospel message in a meaningful way to unbelievers. To do so, he believed it was necessary to adopt ways of thinking and categories of thought that convey the truths of the faith in a way that could be amenable to the



intellectual and spiritual sensitivities of his day. His emphasis on Christ as the sacrament of encounter with God, the church as the sacrament of the risen Christ, and the sacraments in general as the concrete realizations of the one mystery of redemption are but a few examples of his dogged attempt to present the mysteries of the faith in a coherent, insightful, and meaningful way for today's believers. The same holds true for his attempt to understand the Catholic doctrine of the real presence.

Schillebeeckx proposes his theory of "transsignification" in an attempt to reassess the Catholic belief that Jesus is really present in the consecrated bread and wine. He develops this approach mainly because he believes that "transubstantiation," the traditional way of explaining the doctrine, uses outmoded categories that conflict with modern physics and have little attraction for today's believers. Regardless of the truth of this assessment, Schillebeeckx works hard to present the mystery of the real presence in a way that is both understandable and palatable to the world today. For him, the two approaches—"transubstantiation" and "transsignification"—while not identical are nevertheless intimately related.

Church teaching clearly gives "transubstantiation" primacy of place, because it insists upon a real, objective change in the consecrated bread and wine, rather than a mere subjective change in the mind of the believer. At the same time, it is open to the possibility that new formulations might one day arise that express the mystery of the faith even more completely than its present formulations. Because "transsignification" does not do this sufficiently, it can only be used in a complementary and ancillary way with "transubstantiation." It would seem that the way to move the tradition forward would be to suggest that multiple models be used to express this mystery and to affirm that God, the source of all objective and subjective reality, has the power to change not only what the bread and wine *are*, but also what they *mean*.



Notes

- ¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett, Mark Schoof, and Laurence Bright (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963); *The Eucharist*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); *God and Man*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald and Peter Tomlinson (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969); *Revelation and Theology*, 2 vols., trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1979); *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1981); *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1983); *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: William Collins & Sons/Crossroad, 1979); *I Am a Happy Theologian: Conversations with Francesco Strazzari*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 2004). Note: The original Dutch editions of these works normally appeared two

- to five years prior to the appearance of their English translations]. For relevant biographical information, see Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 1-44; Edward Schillebeeckx and Johann-Baptist Metz, eds., *The Right of the Community to a Priest*, Concilium 133 (no. 3, 1980), 137; Peter Steinfels, "Edward Schillebeeckx, Catholic Theologian Dies at 95," *The New York Times* (January 16, 2010), A26. For the various church processes against Schillebeeckx, see *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 32-40.
- ² Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 3.
 - ³ *ibid.*
 - ⁴ *ibid.*, 13, 17.
 - ⁵ *ibid.*, 36.
 - ⁶ *ibid.*, 48.
 - ⁷ Augustine of Hippo, *In Evangelium Johannis*, tract 9, 10 [PL 35.1463]; Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 47.
 - ⁸ Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 47.
 - ⁹ *ibid.*, 47-48.
 - ¹⁰ *ibid.*, 48.
 - ¹¹ *ibid.*, 79.
 - ¹² *ibid.*, 63.
 - ¹³ *ibid.*, 222.
 - ¹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, *Apologia Prophetarum David*, 12, p. 58 [PL 14.875]; Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 222.
 - ¹⁵ Schillebeeckx, *Jesus*, 306.
 - ¹⁶ *ibid.*, 312.
 - ¹⁷ Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, 144-151.
 - ¹⁸ *ibid.*, 86.
 - ¹⁹ *ibid.*, 148.
 - ²⁰ *ibid.*, 94-96.
 - ²¹ *ibid.*, 137.
 - ²² *ibid.*
 - ²³ *ibid.*, 149.
 - ²⁴ See Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, esp. 197-222.
 - ²⁵ See Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*, esp. 11-21.
 - ²⁶ See The Council of Trent, *Decree on the Most Holy Eucharist*, chap. 4; Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, Encyclical Letter (September 3, 1965), no. 11; Idem, *The Credo of the People of God*, Apostolic Letter in the Form of *Motu Proprio* (June 30, 1968), 25-26.
 - ²⁷ See John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter (April 15, 2003), 15; Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (February 22, 2007), 6; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1373-77, 1413.
 - ²⁸ Paul VI, *The Credo of the People of God*, 13.
 - ²⁹ Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, Encyclical Letter (September 3, 1965), 11.
 - ³⁰ Schillebeeckx, *I Am a Happy Theologian*, 79-81.



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

The Marian Mystery: Faithful Disciple, Mother of Mercy

by J. Sheila Galligan, IHM

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Some people call her Refuge of Sinners. Others call her Queen of Peace, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, or simply Mary. The faithful woman with a listening heart and the valiant woman with a soul of steel has been the subject of veneration and loving devotion throughout the ages. Perhaps this is precisely why the church has invited the faithful to reflect on the foundational biblical image, Mary's biblical name: Disciple of the Lord.

Mary: Disciple and Cause of Our Joy

Indeed, Scripture proclaims that her discipleship provides the vantage point from which to view all other great truths (and all other names!) about Mary. Even more, Mary's special witness to the Spirit's gift of joy assumes texture and shape as she is seen making discipleship a lived reality.

Her joy is born of her knowledge and acceptance of God's presence in her life. As Mary was transformed by the Holy Spirit, so, too, are we. And surely, from the moment of the incarnation, the world was filled with a new and special joy. Thus, in the Litany of Loreto, Mary is invoked and honored as the Cause of Our Joy. Her life stands as testimony to the truth of what Jesus promised: "Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22).

Discipleship is at the heart of the gospel texts that focus on Mary. It is important to remember that Jesus teaches that true discipleship consists primarily in hearing the word of God and keeping it. For example, Luke's Gospel tells us of the beautiful testimony of an unknown woman who said to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you" (11:27). Thus, as Jesus' mother, Mary is the Cause of Our Joy, for she brought him to humankind. And Jesus responds: "Happy (blessed), rather, those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk 11:28).

Mary's joy (her blessedness, her happiness) flows from her motherhood, but even more it is based on the fact that she has heard, believed, pondered,

and obeyed God's word. In this gospel narrative, Jesus himself seems to point out Mary's greatness: her total, persevering fidelity to God's will. Mary's joy, a true disciple's joy, is not a sentimental or shallow emotion. It is, rather, the inner peace, the serenity, that flows from the Holy Spirit.

It is no surprise to find that our first meeting with Mary in Luke's Gospel presents us with tangible and concrete evidence of hearing, holding, and heralding God's word. Her response to the angel's revelation bears the fresh, distinctive, and indelible stamp of discipleship: "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38). This *Fiat* sums up her character as a faithful, faith-filled disciple. In this context, God speaks, and Mary hears, listens with her heart. Her response expresses a ready "obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26). She hears the word of God, realizes that all is grace, and obediently responds in joy and gratitude.

The trajectory of Mary's joyful discipleship is further exemplified in her meeting with Simeon (Lk 2:34-35) and the finding in the temple (Lk 2:41-52). Her loving, receptive response at the annunciation does not make her life crystal clear, nor devoid of any suffering. Her fidelity is costly. Therefore, Luke presents Mary making the journey every Christian must make, the pilgrimage into the inner sanctuary of the heart (2:19). Here we see that Mary's joy springs from her contemplative attitude. At the center of her heart is a silence, a surrender. Her inner space becomes filled with the presence and power of God.

Framed in a context of enthusiasm and joy, the Magnificat gives us a glimpse into the inscape of Mary's heart. The special intensity of Mary's spirit of joy is expressed in the opening lines: "My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit finds joy in God my Savior." Sometimes described as an explosion of happiness, this prayer is centered on God. As the faithful, faith-filled disciple, Mary realizes that her glory and joy is "in the Lord" and the best way to express this heart-knowledge is in praise, for praise is intimately bound up with joy. The psalmist captures Mary's inner disposition in exclaiming: "You are my God. My happiness lies in you alone" (Ps 16:2).

Mary's joy is rooted in her sense of security, in her conviction of being chosen, accepted, and loved. In fully abandoning herself to God's word, she has paradoxically acquired interior freedom. In the beginning verses of the Magnificat, she gives witness to the true disciple's freedom from the three sources of human self-sufficiency: pride (1:51), power (1:52), and riches (1:53). Mary's joyful praise is a sign of her humility. For "humility," writes Saint Teresa, "comes with peace, delight, and calm." Praying the Magnificat with Mary assists us in entering into the mind and heart of the first and most faithful disciple of Jesus.



Ultimately, Mary's pilgrimage of faith, her story, is our story. And so to come to know and love Mary as a joy-filled disciple is a cause for our own rejoicing. In Mary's joy-filled discipleship, we come to know that true joy is born from surrendering to the Lord, a surrendering that day after day commits itself anew to the Lord who is the source of all joy. The cause of Mary's joy is God's intervention in her life. Joy is experienced in our own pilgrimage of faith when we recognize God's dynamic presence and his ever surprising interventions in our lives.

Finally, let us remember that Mary's faithful, faith-filled discipleship made it possible for God to bring us the joy of his Son Jesus. *Mary, First Disciple, pray for us! Mary, Cause of Our Joy, pray for us!*

Mary: Mother of Mercy and Merciful Mother

Surely one of the most significant words in the lexicon of God's love is "mercy." Theologically speaking, God's preeminent attribute, his "claim to fame" as such, is mercy. The Hebrew word (*rahamim*), in its root meaning, denotes the love of a mother (*rehim*=mother's womb). "From the deep and original bond—indeed the unity—that links a mother to her child there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love" (Pope John Paul II, *Rich in Mercy*, footnote 52).

God's mercy is manifested most concretely in forgiveness and compassion. Of this love Pope John Paul II reminds us that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an "exigency of the heart." And, of course, the Latin form, *misericordia*, connotes a sad (*miser*) heart (*cor*). Remembrance of God's mercy sustains our hope that God knows our weakness, our woundedness, our sin. Yet we can trust in his saving power, understanding, and desire to heal, restore, and renew our lives. God's passionate preoccupation is mercy.

Mary pondered and joyfully acknowledged her experience of God's mercy in her song of praise, the Magnificat. "His mercy is from generation to generation to those who fear him" (Lk 1:50). As the one whose *Fiat* brought the divine mercy to the world, she intuitively understood her son's mission of mercy. In Jesus, born of Mary, God wipes away our tears of repentance with the hand of mercy. No surprise that Christians rejoice in calling her the Mother of Mercy.

Saint Odo, the abbot of Cluny, is believed to have been the first to refer to Mary as the Mother of Mercy. It is a fitting title because through her motherhood Mary blessed us with Jesus, the visible manifestation of

the mercy of the invisible God. In the Middle Ages, images of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, were carved or painted. They presented Mary with an open mantle under which those who knew their need of divine mercy gathered.

As the first and most faithful disciple, Mary also mirrors mercy in her own person. She fully obeys the gospel imperative, "Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). In the words of Saint Lawrence of Brindisi: "The Blessed Virgin is called 'mother of mercy,' that is, the most merciful, the most compassionate mother, the most tender mother, the most loving mother." Mary, as the merciful mother, can intercede and ask God to act on our behalf.

Mary makes the journey every Christian must make, the pilgrimage into the inner sanctuary of the heart.

The church also fittingly celebrates and honors Mary as the Queen of Mercy. This beautiful title captures the meaning and message of the famous eleventh-century prayer known as the *Salve Regina*. This beloved prayer invites us to come to Mary, who from her place in heaven points out the needs of the faithful to her son. What a splendid constellation of theological and pastoral themes shines forth in the twofold greeting: "Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy." Mary is acclaimed as queen.

As the biblical scholar Scott Hahn reminds us, the woman honored as queen in most Near Eastern cultures was not the wife of the king, but the mother of the king. The king relied on his mother for counsel. She often approached her son in order to speak on behalf of another. Thus, the powerful link between the Queen of Mercy and the Mother of Mercy. This is not a matter of sentiment; Mary, as our mother, helps us as we journey "in this valley of tears."

It is interesting to note that Pope John Paul II specifically refers to Mary's share in God's mercy in his encyclical *Rich in Mercy*. In Section 9 (Chapter V), entitled "Mother of Mercy," he writes: "No one has experienced, to the same degree, as the mother of the crucified one, the mystery of the cross, the overwhelming encounter of divine transcendent justice with love: that 'kiss' given by mercy to justice." Consequently, we can entrust our cares to Mary as the one who has the deepest experiential knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy. She knows its price.

Emmanuel



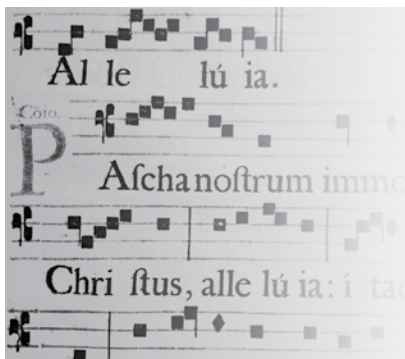
Mary also appears in the final section of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *The Splendor of Truth*, where Mary's mercy is presented within the context of morality and the new evangelization. The conclusion of the letter is an act of entrustment of the moral life of the people of God to Mary. She understands our weakness, our sinfulness, and loves us with a tender love.

It is consoling to remember, too, the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. When Mary addressed Juan Diego in 1531, she put him at ease, saying: "My little son, am I not your mother? Do not fear . . . do not be distressed. . . . Am I not here? Am I not your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection?" Mary asked that a sanctuary be built and said: "Here I will demonstrate, I will exhibit, I will give all my love, my compassion, my help, and my protection to the people. I am your merciful mother." She promised to "hear their laments and remedy and cure all their miseries, misfortunes, and sorrows."

Mary's joy is born of the knowledge of God's presence in her life.

The driving force which brings millions to Mary's feet is the deep conviction that she will hear and heed their pleas. Whatever the name or title, Mary brings mercy and hope to our world, and to each of us. *Mother of Mercy, pray for us! Merciful Mother, pray for us!*





PASTORAL LITURGY

Fruits of the Constitution: RCIA—Part 3

by John Thomas Lane, SSS

With this column, we continue our review of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). As mentioned in our review of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), the process to become a Catholic Christian is a tremendous “fruit” and gift of the Second Vatican Council. Let us turn to the process outlined in the RCIA that is to guide all persons seven or older in becoming a Catholic Christian.

First, it is helpful to remember why canon law chooses the age seven or the age of reason for the “cut off” from infant baptism into “adult” baptism. When do we know right from wrong? When do we remember our childhood? How often have we said to one another, we who have been lifelong Catholics, “My first memory is going to confession with Father O’Brien” or “Sister Kunegunda taught me my First Communion”? It is precisely for this reason that from the time of Pope Pius X the church has held high regard for the “age of reason” and placed it at seven. Our consciousness starts at that age.

One criticism of considering a seven-year-old to be an adult when it comes to the sacraments of initiation is that a child that age is not capable of an adult understanding of the significance of the sacraments of initiation. This is where our Eastern Catholic Rite and Orthodox brothers and sisters have much to teach us. In their view, sacraments are gifts from God, not rewards for catechetical instruction or intellectual acuity. The rituals of faith are part of the journey of self-discovery and becoming. This understanding is quite at odds with American culture, but one that we are slowly retrieving.

Secondly, the RCIA presents incorporation as a gradual process “that takes places within a community of the faithful” (RCIA, 4). We journey with the church.

The best model for this is to see how candidates to the consecrated life grow over time to become a sister, nun, brother, monk, or priest. We are familiar with this model in the Western church, and a parish should have a team of members formed in the steps of encouragement, catechesis,

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and sponsorship, in partnership with the pastor. This may be hard for smaller parishes, but creativity and assistance from the diocese or region can make it less overwhelming.

Third, it is important that sponsors and other members of the parish be present to support those who are becoming Catholic. Candidates often want their spouse to be their godparent or sponsor. The process is bigger than the family unit, however, and one growing into being Catholic must be formed in and with the community. It is not the best practice to have a spouse be the sponsor.

Fourthly, the inquiry stage is vitally important. There are many activities (Q&A sessions, BBQs, open houses, etc.) that can present the church as a welcoming community, eager to grow. This is important: as Christ invites, we are to also be inviting toward others.

Incorporation takes place within a community of the faithful. We journey with the church.

Fifth, remember that we are on God's time! Many come to our doors wanting to become Catholic by a certain date. The pressure of that expectation can be rough on pastoral ministers, especially when we say that it is God who calls and invites according to his will and purposes, and not our schedules. An initial interview and discernment with a candidate is crucial as well a spirit of patient accompaniment. During this time, matters like annulments and "irregular marriages" and other circumstances can also be addressed.

The key to having a successful first period of the catechumenate is found in RCIA, 7:

The steps lead to periods of inquiry and growth; alternatively the periods may also be seen as preparing for the ensuing step. 1. The first period consists of inquiry on the part of the candidates and of evangelization and the pre-catechumenate on the part of the church. [The first period of the catechumenate] ends with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens.

After all this, we accept candidates into the first step of the RCIA, the catechumenate, and celebrate the rite. The ritual emphasizes evangelization and the moments special to the pre-catechumenate. RCIA, 38 stresses the importance of priests, deacons, catechists, and other laypersons offering a suitable explanation of the Gospel and of the RCIA process to help candidates see if they want to go on the road to the

Easter sacraments.

If we rush the pre-catechumenate, like rushing a postulant or a seminarian through the stages of formation, we are not helping the candidate see the opportunities for grace that God is providing at each step along the way.

Lastly, we take a moment to review the liturgical rite of the acceptance into the order of catechumens. RCIA, 48 notes that the candidates, sponsors, and faithful are to gather “outside the church,” at the entrance or some other suitable place. This rite should be scheduled regularly. No date or time is established in the RCIA; however, I would not recommend the First Sunday of Advent, simply because it is the beginning of a new liturgical year. Another Sunday, perhaps Christ the King or when the theme of discipleship is a key element in the Sunday Scriptures is appropriate.

This ritual, starting with “the knocking of the doors”—as many have adapted though not in the ritual—helps the assembly be present to the experience and reminds them of the importance of their own Catholic faith. RCIA envisions the journey as a true coming to the altar; therefore, the moments and rituals preceding initiation can be celebrated elsewhere, at the entrance to the church or the entrance to the sanctuary. There is no sign of the cross. The opening dialogue is similar to the Rite of Baptism for Children, asking the names of the candidates and having the church and saints of God hear them echo for the first time.

Each stage in the process is to be respected. It is God who calls and invites according to his will and purposes, and not our schedules.

I recommend that once the names are proclaimed and the initial questions of the first acceptance of the Gospel take place, the candidates then move to another location, into the midst of the assembly, for all to see the signing of the candidates with the cross. In the center aisle of the church, the people of God support the candidates in the signing of the senses and their body with Christ. There are many musical pieces written to highlight and draw out the importance of this ritual.

After the signing of the body, there is the invitation to the celebration of the word of God. While the ritual says “come into the church to share with us at the table of God’s word,” again, for greater participation, I find it has been useful to invite the candidates to their seats within the assembly and have the Gloria or an entrance song at this point. The RCIA suggests Psalm 34 (see paragraph 60).

Lastly, the rite of acceptance may include an optional, but very meaningful gesture: the presentation of a Bible: “Receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (64).

In the next column, we will review the importance of the “dismissals” and other rituals in the process of becoming a Catholic.

Note: The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, the Bishops Committee on Divine Worship, and the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions are planning a major consultation on the RCIA from October 1-3, 2014, in Lombard, Illinois. Go to fdlc.org to register and receive more information.

The May and June Calendar

Thursday, May 1—National Day of Prayer

The first Thursday of May is the National Day of Prayer in the United States. Since George Washington was President, and formalized by Congress in 1952, the day is for all believers to gather at public buildings and houses of worship to pray for the nation and its leaders.

Sunday, May 11—Good Shepherd Sunday and Mother’s Day

The combination of the World Day for Vocations and Mother’s Day this year provides a unique opportunity for reflection and renewal. See the *Book of Blessings* for a special prayer for mothers and reflect on mother church that needs shepherds for her people.

Tuesday, May 13—Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament

While the general calendar of the church celebrates Our Lady of Fatima, there is the ancient liturgical tradition of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. See the Taizé prayer below for a suggested activity. Plan a May Crowning today or close the month of Mary with a celebration and May crowning on Saturday, May 31.

Thursday, May 15—Saint Isidore

Honor those who till the soil and reap the harvest by remembering Saint Isidore, the patron of farmers and rural communities. A humble plowman most of his life, he was a devoted husband and father. His wife, Maria de la Cabeza, is also a saint. See the *Book of Blessings* for ideas. More information can also be found through the Catholic Rural Life Conference.

Saturday, May 17—Saint Paschal Baylon

Through Spanish missionaries, the popularity of this saint—the patron

of cooks, chefs, and eucharistic congresses—spread. Learn more about this saint and honor your parishioners and volunteers who toil so that we may have great meals.

Ascension of the Lord—Thursday, May 29, or Sunday, June 1

Tuesday, June 3—Anniversary of the Death of Pope John XXIII

The memorial of Saint John XXIII will be celebrated on October 11. Remember today the death of the “pope of the people.”

Sunday, June 8—Pentecost

Renew your parish community with a retreat and perhaps an international potluck dinner to celebrate the birthday of the church and the universality of the gospel message.

Monday, June 9—Saint Ephrem

Acknowledge and thank your deacon(s) on this day remembering the fourth-century Syrian deacon Ephrem, who composed beautiful hymns and poems in honor of the Eucharist.

Sunday, June 15—Most Holy Trinity and Father’s Day

See the *Book of Blessings* for the ritual highlighting the importance of fathers who witness the Trinity to us and teach us how to pray.

Sunday, June 22—Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

See *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass* or the *United States Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist* for details on making this day memorable in your parish, via prayers and processions. Integrate your First Communion class to return to be part of the day’s activities.

Sunday, June 29—Saints Peter and Paul

This is a rare opportunity for the Sunday assembly to focus on these two great apostles whose missionary zeal gave life to the church in its youth.

Taizé Holy Hour
for Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament
or Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

From GIA Publications (800-442-1358) and its ecumenical guide book, this prayer is meant to unite Christians in prayer and praise. The service is modeled on the meditative prayer of the ecumenical community of Taizé, France. Gathered in the presence of Christ, around a special cross, uncomplicated,

Emmanuel

repetitive songs, with few words, allow the mystery of God to become palpable through the simplicity and beauty of the music. A few words, sung repetitively, form this mantra style of prayer, expressing a faith that moves from the head to the heart and penetrates the whole body. Below includes the ritual of exposition and benediction.

Gathering Song "In the Lord I'll be Ever Thankful" (Jacques Berthier)

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,
you chose Mary to be the mother of your Son
and she accepted her call and vocation to be your sacred vessel.

May we contemplate this mystery
and recognize you in our daily living.

May Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament,
model of the Eucharist,
help us to live our lives in service and thanksgiving,
grateful always for the gift of love.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Silent Meditation

Taizé Song "Confitemini Domino" (Jacques Berthier)
Add incense during this song.

Silent Meditation

Reading Zephaniah 3:14-18
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.

Silent Meditation

Taizé Song "Nada Te Turbe" (Jacques Berthier)

Silence

Reading Luke 1:39-56
Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord?

Silence

Explanation of Lighting Candles

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament
brought the light of Christ into the world
to dispel the darkness of sin and death.

The Eucharist lights our way of faith
and nourishes us for the journey of life.

Let us gather around the altar
to renew our presence with the Lord
and our own baptismal commitment to be Christ's true disciples.

*Please bring your candle and song sheets
and remain standing around the altar as we continue in prayer.*

*The presider goes to the altar candle(s) to assist the members in lighting
their candles. All gather and stand in a circle around the altar.*

Song "With You, O Lord" (Taizé)

*After all have gathered around the altar, pause for a couple minutes of
silence.*

Intercessions "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" (Jacques Berthier)
Sung as a response.

We turn to our God, confident that he hears our needs.

1. For an end to all wars and violence, we pray.
2. For favorable weather and bountiful crops this summer,
we pray.
3. For those who serve our country around the world, we pray.
4. For the safety of all this summer, we pray.
5. For the sick and those who care for them, we pray.
6. For those in need of healing, we pray.

For what else shall we pray?
Spontaneous petitions from the assembly, if possible.

And now we pray the perfect prayer of peace that our Savior
taught us.

The Lord's Prayer *Chanted*

Benediction "Jesus Christ, Yesterday, Today, and Forever" (Suzanne
Toolan)

Closing Prayer

God of hope and promise:
 enliven our hearts with your love and care
 that we make the presence of Christ known in all we do.
 May we allow Christ to mold us into his image
 and feed the hungers of the world with our gifts and love.

Mary was your faithful disciple from Bethlehem
 to the cross at Calvary and the Cenacle with your Spirit.

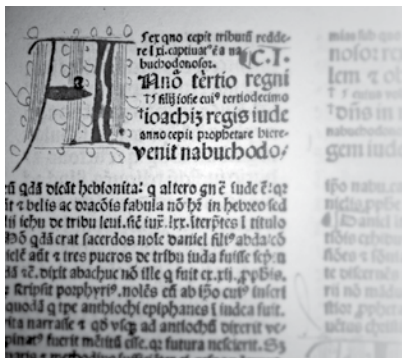
Help us to be your true disciples,
 caring for those in need and lifting up the lowly of spirit.
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Closing Song "Magnificat" (Taizé)

After the song is finished, extinguish candles and exchange the Sign of Peace.



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BREAKING THE WORD

HOMILETICS - Easter/Ordinary Time

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

A Dialogue of Communion and Love

The last Sunday of June is the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, the twin pillars of the church. The Gospel text for that liturgy is taken from Matthew 16, where Peter declared Jesus to be the Son of God and in reply Jesus declared Peter to be the rock upon which the church would be built (see Mt 16:16, 18). In Greek, the word “church” is *ἐκκλησία* (*ekklēsia*) and it originally denoted a people who were called out of their homes into an assembly (cf. *BDAG*, s.v. *ἐκκλησία*, 303-304) long before it became associated with the Christian community itself. Church or *ekklēsia* is truly an appropriate term to describe the Christian community, since we were called out of darkness and into the marvelous light of faith in Jesus Christ.

I remember reading during my theological studies the first encyclical of Pope Paul VI from 1964. His vision of the church as a loving community of dialogue is still relevant some 50 years later. Allow me to quote just one point the pontiff made among many about the nature of the church. It concerns the importance of dialogue and obedience to the faith. Paul VI noted that authentic dialogue is obedient to the truth and does no injury to communion. “By contrast, a spirit of independence, bitter criticism, defiance, and arrogance is far removed from that charity which nourishes and preserves the spirit of fellowship, harmony, and peace in the church. It completely vitiates dialogue, turning it into argument, disagreement, and dissension” (*Ecclesiam Suam*, 115). Self-centeredness disconnects us from the communion of the church, especially since the very roots of *ekklēsia* are a calling into an assembly, a gathering of people.

As we conclude the Easter Season and transition back into Ordinary Time, we celebrate not only the feast of Saints Peter and Paul but also Corpus Christi, which immediately precedes it. The Eucharist builds the church, as John Paul II reminded us in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. The attitude of charitable dialogue called for by Paul VI is part and parcel of the eucharistic community we know as the church, a people called into communion with Christ and one another. May the Eucharist nourish our zeal for living the truth in dialogue.

Blessed Sacrament Father Anthony J. Marshall earned a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Theology from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He is an associate member of both the Catholic Biblical Association and the Canon Law Society of America. Based out of New York City, Father Anthony presently serves the U.S. Province of his congregation as Vocation Director.

Third Sunday of Easter
May 4, 2014

*With Burning Hearts,
We Recognize and Proclaim the Risen Lord*

Breaking the Word

Acts 2:14, 22-33

In this first reading, we glimpse some of the early apostolic preaching on the central mystery of Christianity, namely the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Peter assumes the leadership role following the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The apostles are witnesses to Christ's resurrection and are recipients of the gifts of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to send and subsequently poured out upon them (see Acts 2:32-33).

1 Peter 1:17-21

As a result of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those who claim to be his disciples are invited and challenged to live a life in conformity to the grace received by the preaching of the Gospel and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Pt 1:10-12). This passage reminds believers that although we must endure many temptations, we are challenged to endure in holiness until the end, confidently placing our hope in God's mercy through the risen Christ.

Luke 24:13-35

Today's Gospel passage is the beautiful story of the two disciples who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus downcast on that first Easter Sunday, only to return late in the day filled with divine fire, having recognized the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread, an early Christian expression referencing the Eucharist.

Sharing the Word

On this Third Sunday of Easter, the church invites us to recognize the many ways in which the risen Lord is in our midst, and to joyfully proclaim the Good News of our salvation. It is he who accompanies us on our life's journey from this side of eternity to life eternal. As the people

of God, we are privileged to not only recognize the face of the risen one in our midst, but we are also sent forth to be the living icons of Christ for our world. Recognizing Christ and bearing him witness are essential for authentic Christian discipleship.

Cleopas and his companion in today's gospel narrative came to recognize the risen Christ on their journey to Emmaus. Their hearts burned with love for Jesus as he broke open the Scriptures for them. In their gesture of hospitality, Jesus—who ended up becoming their host—revealed himself in the breaking of the bread. Their recognition of Christ sent them quickly back to Jerusalem where they both heard the Good News proclaimed and they gave testimony to their own encounter with the risen one along the way. Isn't this precisely what evangelization is all about?

Pope Francis recently challenged the members of the church to become "missionary disciples" who joyfully preach the Gospel, bearing witness to Christ in the circumstances of everyday life. "The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. . . . Each of us should find ways to communicate Jesus wherever we are" (Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, 120).

Praying the Word

Ever-faithful God,
at every moment of our lives you are present.
Help us to recognize your life-giving Spirit in our midst
and to joyfully proclaim the Good News
of our salvation in your Son, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns forever and ever.
Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 11, 2014

*I Came that They May Have Life,
and Have It Abundantly!*

Breaking the Word

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

In this first reading, we conclude Peter's first sermon following Pentecost. Although the lectionary skips two verses from last Sunday's reading (Acts 2:34-35), nevertheless we are presented with Peter's final and persuasive exhortation. Peter instructed the gathered crowd to "repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Thereafter, Luke described for his readers the effects that Peter's preaching and exhorting had on the assembly: about three thousand received the word of God and were subsequently baptized (see Acts 2:41). Peter's Spirit-filled sermon is exemplary for all who are engaged in evangelization and the RCIA.

1 Peter 2:20b-25

In this section of the epistle, Peter encourages his readers to reflect on the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. His life and the suffering he endured for the remission of our sins are paradigmatic for the suffering Christians must endure. This is appropriate, given that the readers of 1 Peter were likely Christians who were enduring much suffering and many trials for their faith (cf. 1 Pt 1:6-9). The reading ends by referring to Jesus as the "shepherd and guardian of our souls" (1 Pt 2:25).

John 10:1-10

The Gospel depicts for us the beginning of the Good Shepherd discourse. The first ten verses included in today's reading have Jesus describing himself as the gate for the sheep to enter through to the pastures of life eternal. Jesus contrasts himself to those who came before him, calling them thieves who seek only to destroy the sheep, whereas he came to offer them abundant life and salvation.

Sharing the Word

Traditionally, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is also called both Good Shepherd Sunday and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Accordingly, all three readings offer us an example of servant leadership. In the first reading from Acts, Peter is the servant leader who joyfully preached about Jesus Christ and invited his listeners to repentance, baptizing them in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter did not force the Gospel on them, but responded to a pastoral situation that developed as a result of his preaching the Good News (see Acts 2:37-38). Nobody was excluded from Peter's and the other apostles' ministry on that first Pentecost.

The second reading also offers us an example of servant leadership. The epistle's purpose was a pastoral outreach to suffering Christians who did not feel at home in the hostile environment they found themselves inhabiting (hence, the salutation in verse 1 to "exiles in the dispersion," etc.). The author's theology of Christian suffering being joined to that of Christ has endured to this day (e.g., see Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007, 40).

Finally, in today's Gospel, Jesus' solicitude for his disciples, the sheep of his flock, is on full display. He cares for us and defends us against would-be thieves who seek to rob us of eternal life. Here we see the duty of every bishop and priest to pastor the people of God to the riches of the abundant life offered us in Jesus Christ in and through his church.

I would be remiss as a Vocation Director if I did not note the importance of praying for more priestly and religious vocations, coupled with inviting young adults to consider priesthood and the consecrated life. We need healthy, happy, and holy priests and religious to serve our church. And today's readings offer all of us an example of the kind of pastoral leader we need: a good shepherd who opens the door for the sheep to enter into the joy and abundant life of Christ. May the Master of the harvest hear our prayer!

Praying the Word

O God, who willed to provide shepherds for your people,
 pour out in your church a spirit of piety and fortitude,
 to raise up worthy ministers for your altars
 and make them ardent yet gentle heralds of your Gospel.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever.
 Amen.

(From the Roman Missal, "For Vocations to Holy Orders")

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 18, 2014

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Breaking the Word

Acts 6:1-7

In this passage from Acts, we encounter the growing pains of the early Christian community. The newly reconstituted Twelve (see Acts 1:15-26) have become overburdened with the ministry of the word and charity due to the ever-increasing number of Christians. We see the division between Hebrew and Hellenist converts within the community, and the Twelve decide to appoint seven reputable men to serve at table so that the Twelve can focus on the ministry of preaching the word of God (see Acts 6:2, 5). Curiously enough, Acts depicts these first deacons as preaching the word of God rather than serving at table (e.g., Acts 6:9-15 concerning the ministry and arrest of Stephen).

1 Peter 2:4-9

This section of the epistle describes the glory of being a Christian. Christ's disciples are indeed chosen by God to be the foundation, the living stones of the kingdom. These comforting words were offered to a Christian community that was suffering a great deal for its faith in Jesus Christ. Peter offered them pastoral solicitude and encouragement in his reminder to them of their Christian dignity and vocation: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people God claims as his own possession" (1 Pt 2:9). We are the holy people of God!

John 14:1-12

Today's pericope is situated among the farewell discourses Jesus gives to his disciples following the Last Supper. Packed within this passage is a summary of John's Christology: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn 14:11). Jesus is the fullest revelation of God; the Johannine Jesus "comes to reveal the Father" (Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," *NJBC*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 949). In Jesus, we have come to know the saving love of God our Father. He is the gateway to eternal life (see Jn 10:7, 9-10).

Sharing the Word

Life is filled with many distractions. Many of us, I suspect, find it challenging to sit quietly for a half-hour to read a chapter from a book or even watch an episode of our favorite TV show, without being distracted to look at our smartphone, check out what's happening on Facebook, or do some other task simultaneously. I often compare our modern society with the Headline News programing, where a ticker is scrolling on the bottom 1/3 of the screen with news headlines, another graphic covers another 1/3 of the screen with facts about the story, and all we are left with is the 1/3 of the screen to view the anchor or news report. This is similar to how many of us experience life.

The Twelve found themselves busy with the demands of apostolic ministry in the early church; they were easily distracted. They needed trusted collaborators to assist them in order that they might get back to the basics of what later tradition would call teaching, governing, and sanctifying the people of God. Hence was born the order of deacons. But what about us in our everyday life as we strive to preach the kingdom of God?

Getting back to the basics of our Christian faith is what today's readings are all about. Removing the distractions and complexities of life and pointing to Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. By ridding ourselves, with God's grace, of the non-essentials of this life, we are in a better position to recognize our dignity as the holy people of God, claimed as his own possession. Benedict XVI summed this up beautifully: "The purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary" (inaugural homily at the start of his pontificate).

Praying the Word

God our Father,
you are ever faithful and merciful.
In Christ we have become a holy and chosen people
sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Help us to recognize your Spirit alive in the church
and to respond with complete fidelity and trust.
This we ask through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 25, 2014

Sanctify Christ as Lord in Your Hearts

Breaking the Word

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17

In today's first reading, we encounter the fruitful ministry of the deacon Philip (see Acts 6:5) in Samaria. The lectionary skips the story of Simon the Magician and how Philip managed to not only preach the Good News to the townspeople in Samaria, who had been captivated by Simon's magic, but also converted Simon and he, too, was baptized along with the rest of the people (see Acts 8:9-13). This is the amazing news that the apostles in Jerusalem heard about, and why Peter and John were sent to confer the Holy Spirit upon the people (Acts 8:14-17).

1 Peter 3:15-18

This small section of the epistle is rich in moral admonition and pastoral solicitude for a suffering people. One can imagine the early Christians being forced to recount their faith in Jesus Christ, but here Peter encourages them to "reverence Christ as Lord in your hearts" (1 Pt 3:15) and to endure hardship for Christ. They are to speak the truth charitably and completely. Earlier in the letter, the author reminds his readers that to suffer for the sake of righteousness is a blessing (see 1 Pt 3:12-14).

John 14:15-21

Today's Gospel passage comes from the farewell discourses in John's Gospel and continues last Sunday's reading. Jesus promises his disciples that he will not leave them, but that he "will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always" (Jn 14:16). Jesus, who had earlier identified himself as the way, the truth, and the life, will send from the Father the Spirit of truth to be with his disciples.

Sharing the Word

Being a Christian was never advertised as being easy, was it?

Throughout the Scriptures, we encounter individuals who had to suffer for their fidelity to the covenant, to the Gospel. We are no strangers to ridicule for our beliefs. From contraception, to the beauty of marriage as being between one man and one woman for a lifetime, to the dignity of every human person from conception to natural death, we Roman Catholics are derided as being “old-fashioned” and “out-of-touch” because of our faith and morals. And far too many of our sisters and brothers are killed or persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ and his church.

In the midst of the naysayers and persecutors around us, what are we supposed to do? We find the answer in the second reading. Peter reminded the suffering Christians of his day to keep their hearts and desires fixed on Jesus Christ. He alone was the source of meaning and joy in their lives, even in their sufferings. Reminding them of the importance of keeping a pure conscience, Peter says, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil” (1 Pt 3:17). We might be maligned for being true to who we are as God’s beloved people, but it is better to suffer calumny here in this life and so enter into eternal glory in the life to come than to succumb to the faithlessness of some in society. Importantly, we are to preach the truth with charity—not beating people up with our words or judging them—bearing witness to the love and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

With this Sunday, we begin to prepare more intensely for Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The first reading and the Gospel for today both direct our attention to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. We invoke the Holy Spirit upon the week ahead so that, in all things, Christ may be revered in our hearts.

Praying the Word

Heavenly Father,
you lavish upon us, your chosen people,
many gifts and blessings.
May no thought, word, or action of ours
hinder your Holy Spirit
from working within us and through us
so that we may truthfully bear witness to your Son,
Jesus Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.

The Ascension of the Lord June 1, 2014

Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth

Breaking the Word

Acts 1:1-11

The evangelist Luke ends his first volume—the Gospel according to Luke—with a brief mention of Jesus’ ascension (see Lk 24:50-52). The final chapter of his Gospel relates the stories of the empty tomb, the road to Emmaus, and Jesus’ appearance to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem. As Luke transitions to Acts, we again encounter the curious addressee—Theophilus, “lover of God”—to whom Luke had also addressed his gospel text. This passage describes for us in greater detail Jesus’ ascension and the bewilderment of the disciples who were gazing into the heavens. Within this passage is the reminder of the promised Holy Spirit who will empower the disciples to bear witness to Jesus (see Acts 1:8).

Ephesians 1:17-23

While no description of Jesus’ ascension is offered, as in the first reading, Paul mentions that the Father raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in glory (cf. Eph 1:20). The genre of this passage, within the wider context of the epistle, is that of a thanksgiving prayer offered by Paul on behalf of the Ephesians for their steadfast faith in Christ and charity toward their neighbors (verses 15-16).

Matthew 28:16-20

These final verses of Matthew’s Gospel do not offer us a description of the ascension as such. Rather, Matthew portrays the risen Christ commissioning the apostles to evangelize and baptize all nations, revealing clearly a Trinitarian formula to be used in the ritual. “This triadic formula may have its Old Testament roots in the apocalyptic triad of God, Son of Man, or elect one, and angel found in Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1, (cf. 1 Enoch 14)” (Benedict T. Viviano, *OP*, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” *NJBC*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990, 674). The risen Christ promises to remain with his own until the end of time, thereby fulfilling what the angel foretold to Joseph when he declared Jesus to be Emmanuel (cf. Mt 1:23).

Sharing the Word

What a massive task the risen Lord has entrusted to the apostles and to all of us: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20a). Pope Francis has asked that every believer in Jesus Christ consider himself or herself to be a “missionary disciple” (see *Evangelii Gaudium*, 119-121). He puts it this way: “All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word, and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart, you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you also need to communicate to others” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 121).

In today’s first reading, Luke describes for us how we are to carry out the task of bearing witness to the risen Lord. Luke tells us that Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, and through them the Christian community, in order that they might be his witnesses “in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us in the task of evangelization. And Jesus himself promised to remain with his disciples “until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20b). Christ is present in the community of the church, his mystical body, as Paul reminded the Ephesians, noting that in the church “the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way” (Eph 1:23) is manifested.

Bearing witness to Jesus Christ is the task of every Christian, called as we are to be missionary disciples. We can only do this by remaining close to Jesus, within his church. Again, as Pope Francis so aptly reminds us, “If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light, and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). May this Ascension Sunday be our recommitment to evangelization!

Praying the Word

Merciful Father,
 May we be so inspired by the Holy Spirit this day
 that we may courageously undertake the task
 of being missionary disciples of Jesus Christ,
 bearing witness to him in all that we say and do.
 This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.
 Amen.

Pentecost Sunday: Mass During the Day
June 8, 2014

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

Breaking the Word

Acts 2:1-11

In this pericope, Luke describes for his readers the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the newly reconstituted Twelve (see Acts 1:12-26) and all were together in Jerusalem. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, each is emboldened to preach to the diverse assembly of people gathered in the holy city for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which commemorated the arranging of the covenant some fifty days after the Passover—hence the name Pentecost (see Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd ed., Frederick, MD: Word Among Us Press, 1988, 414-415).

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13

Paul speaks of the variety of gifts that the Spirit bestows upon Christians, noting that such diversity of gifts is meant “for the common good” of the church (1 Cor 12:7). There is, to adapt a modern cliché, a certain unity amid the diversity of the spiritual gifts one finds within the Christian community. Paul compares such unified diversity to that of a body, which is made up of many parts and yet forms one body.

John 20:19-23

In contrast with the chronology of Luke, the evangelist John describes the coming of the Holy Spirit as taking place “on the evening of that day, the first day of the week” or Easter Sunday (see Jn 20:19, 22). The gift of the Holy Spirit is preceded by the gift of peace (Jn 20:19) and the reminder of the Lord’s passion (verse 20). After breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, the risen Christ empowers them to forgive sins (verse 23).

Sharing the Word

Many have described today as the church’s birthday, based in part upon Luke’s description of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the

early Christian community and the subsequent apostolic preaching and mission. Luke does indeed describe a new beginning, and so “birthday” is appropriate nomenclature to use for this festival day.

We have seen the effects of the Holy Spirit at work in the early church during the course of the Easter Season as we read from the Acts of the Apostles. Paul, in the second reading, noted that we Christians are a diverse people with varied gifts and talents—and in our day, a variety of cultures, languages, and races—who are united by the power of the Holy Spirit and our faith in Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit—sent among us for the forgiveness of sins (see “Formula of Absolution” in the *Rite of Penance*; cf. Jn 20:23)—that enables us to say with conviction that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor 12:3b). As a result of our confession of faith, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we become a new people, the church. Furthermore, the “communion of the Holy Spirit in the church restores to the baptized the divine likeness lost through sin” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 734).

We join our prayer this Sunday with that of the ancient author of the Pentecost Sequence, inviting the Spirit to enliven our hearts, our homes, our communities, our world saying, “Come, Holy Spirit, come!”

Praying the Word

God the Father of mercies,
through the death and resurrection of your Son,
you have reconciled the whole world to yourself.
You sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.
By that same Spirit, sanctify us that we might
forever sing of your merciful love
celebrated in the Eucharist of your Son, Jesus Christ,
who is Lord forever and ever.
Amen.

The Most Holy Trinity
June 15, 2014

Praise the Holy Trinity!

Breaking the Word

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9

The lectionary truncates a beautiful scene from the Book of Exodus in which Moses encountered God atop Mount Sinai, had the covenant renewed following the episode of the golden calf and the breaking of the original Decalogue tablets, and finally descended the mountain with his face aglow following his vision of God. In the pericope offered today in the liturgy, we find an exquisite description of who God is, "a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity (Ex 34:6). Moses' response to such revelation is paradigmatic for us who have been privileged to receive the fullness of God's self-disclosure in his Son, Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Paul concludes this epistle to the Corinthians by exhorting the community to mutual respect and fraternal charity. The final verse is the most direct reference to the Holy Trinity outside Matthew 28:19, the great commission.

John 3:16-18

This text offers us a most profound statement of divine revelation: because of God's love for humanity, he sent his Son in order that we who believe in him might have life eternal in him. This revelation of God's merciful love is initially proclaimed in today's first reading from Exodus. Jesus reveals the fullness of God's love and fidelity.

Sharing the Word

The eminent preacher and theologian, the late Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, titled an essay on Trinity Sunday as follows: "Trinity: Toy for Theologians or Joy for Believers." His point was that this festival day need not be a day on which homilists tremble, but rather one which invites

the hearers of God's word to rejoice. In his own words, Burghardt notes, "The Trinity is surely the most profound of Christian mysteries. Perhaps for that very reason the Trinity must be preached. It is not primarily a toy for theologians to play with; it should be a joy for believers to live with. For the Trinity is a reality that touches Christian living. Not vaguely; not at the edges of our existence; right at its heart!" (*The Living Pulpit*, April-June 1999, 8).

This "joy for believers to live with" is found in today's readings. Paul himself urges the Corinthians to "rejoice" and stop living a divided life. Rejoice in the blessing of being a Christian, we might say. Moses surely rejoiced to hear God's self-disclosure atop Mount Sinai, for on hearing such awesome words, we are told that "Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship" (Ex 34:8).

Worshiping God is a sign of living joyfully, because when we give God thanks and praise, we are recognizing the God from whom all blessings flow. This is why, at the very beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer, after the presider invites the assembly to "give thanks to the Lord our God," he continues, "It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you [God] thanks."

Joyfully raising our hearts to God in praise of and thanksgiving for his revelation, for the mystery that is the Most Holy Trinity—one God, three divine persons—is what we recommit ourselves to this Trinity Sunday. The Eucharist we offer and celebrate is truly a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Every time we gather around the table of the Lord, we offer thankful praise to the Father, through, with, and in Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit for God's glory and honor. And such thankful praise is what we not only render to God here on earth, but it is our goal in the eternal life in heaven to come, when we will be fully in communion with the Trinity and take our place among the saints and angels.

Praying the Word

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever.
Amen.

The Most Holy Body and
Blood of Christ—Corpus Christi
June 22, 2014

In Memory of Me

Breaking the Word

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

Moses exhorts the Hebrews to remember the mercies God showed them while they wandered in the desert. God did not abandon his people; rather, he freed them from Pharaoh's servitude and accompanied them on their journey to the Promised Land upon which they now stand ready to enter. Moses recalled for the people that God had provided food (manna) for them in order to satisfy their hunger and slaked their thirst with water from the rock.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Eucharist that they share binds them in fraternal communion. Invoking the image of the one loaf of bread that is shared among all, so, too, are Christians called to be one since all have shared the one bread, which is the body of Christ.

John 6:51-58

This passage forms part of the bread of life discourse, which is unique to John's Gospel. Earlier in the discourse, discussion ensued between Jesus and his interlocutors regarding his performing a sign, even though he had just fed 5,000 the day before, as Moses did in the wilderness with the manna. The people further "murmured [about Jesus] because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'" (Jn 6:41). Our pericope is situated at the conclusion of Jesus' bread of life discourse. After this scene, the evangelist says that some of Jesus' disciples left his company because they found his teachings difficult (cf. Jn 6:60). Simon Peter, however, with the other apostles, remains with Jesus, and professes the apostolic faith in Jesus as the "Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69).

Sharing the Word

Today's readings bespeak the Eucharist as the memorial sacrifice. Indeed, we profess that Jesus Christ gave us the Eucharist as the memorial of his suffering and death and the promise of future resurrection. The Sequence sums it up nicely: "What he did at supper seated, Christ ordained to be repeated, his memorial ne'er to cease." We celebrate the Eucharist in his memory, in obedience to his command.

The Eucharist, the memorial of his sacrificial love offered for humankind on the cross, also includes a remembrance of all creation, of peoples of every time and place. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once wrote that in the offertory of Mass, as people bring forward the gifts of bread and wine to the altar, included in those gifts are memories of seeds sown, farmers' labors, grapes harvested, wheat threshed and baked, marketplace and commerce, rich and poor people, living and deceased relatives and friends. These memories and more are placed on the paten and in the chalice and are thereby taken into the eucharistic memorial of Christ, who transforms them into his body and blood, soul and divinity (cf. *The Priest is Not His Own*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005, 42-46). We bring to the altar our lives, and Christ accepts them as his own and offers the Father the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

The Second Vatican Council reminded the church of this important eucharistic teaching, and it is worth quoting the pertinent text in full:

The church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ's faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration. They should be instructed by God's word and be nourished at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the Immaculate Victim, not only through the hands of the priest, but also with him, they should learn also to offer themselves; through Christ the mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48)

Praying the Word

Almighty and ever living God,
you never cease to astound us with your presence and love.
As we remember your mercy and faithfulness,
so may we offer you all our lives
through the Eucharist we celebrate.
This we pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles
Mass During the Day
June 29, 2014

Tu es Petrus

Breaking the Word

Acts 12:1-11

This passage recounts the arrest of Peter following the death of James, the brother of John, by King Herod. The church earnestly prays on behalf of Peter while he is imprisoned. And in answer to the church's prayers and supplications, an angel is sent to release him so that the word of God might continue to be preached and the faith community grow (cf. Acts 12:24).

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

Paul is depicted as writing to his young protégé Timothy while in a desperate situation, perhaps in Rome (cf. 2 Tm 1:16-17). The author suggests that although at present those who were considered colleagues had abandoned him, the Lord did not and sustained him during his mission to the Gentiles.

Matthew 16:13-19

The passage follows upon the miraculous feeding of the four thousand and the demand for a sign from Jesus attesting to his identity (see Mt 16:1-14). While traveling through the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, and Simon Peter testified that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). In response, Jesus declares Peter to be the rock upon which the church will be built. Incidentally, while the word "church" (*ἐκκλησία*) is used throughout the New Testament, Matthew is the only evangelist to make use of the term. It is used once at Matthew 16:18 and twice at Matthew 18:17. In Greek, *ἐκκλησία* denotes an assembly or congregation of people.

Sharing the Word

Some time ago, I met a Protestant minister who had left his Christian denomination and became a Roman Catholic. In the course of our conversation, I asked him why he left his former denomination. "Because of the pope" was his short answer. He freely elaborated further, telling me that in his former Christian community, decisions concerning doctrine were put up to a vote and the majority ruled. If the majority, for example, voted to continue believing in the sanctity of matrimony, they would adhere by the approved doctrine; if not, things changed. "In the Catholic Church," he said, "the magisterium prevents such foolish up-down voting on important matters of faith. This is why I became a Roman Catholic."

Today's festival of the martyrdom of the two pillars of our church, Peter and Paul, reminds us of the gift that we have as Christians. Our faith is not a form of philosophy nor is it a social club. Our doctrines are not up for popular votes. Rather, the church is built upon the sweat, blood, and tears of Peter and Paul, their successors, and countless Christians from ages past and present who have faithfully transmitted the catholic, apostolic faith. The saints and martyrs have given testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ through living holy lives in fidelity to Christ's teachings. They have given their testimony to Christ. Now it is up to us to continue handing on the precious gift of faith to future generations.

Praying the Word

Generous and faithful God,
in every age you raise up worthy leaders for your people.
As we commemorate the memory of Saints Peter and Paul,
may we share in their apostolic courage and zeal,
bearing witness to your Son, Jesus Christ,
who is Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.





THE EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •
Poetry • Books

Film Review



THE DECALOGUE I
Krzysztof Kieslowski,
1988, Poland

by John Christman,
SSS

In 1995, the Vatican released a list of what it considered to be the greatest achievements in film. Among these titles was the 1988 Polish film *The Decalogue*, directed by the master filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski. The film is comprised of ten episodes exploring the themes of the Ten Commandments as they intersect the lives of people living in a contemporary Polish apartment complex. The series elevated Kieslowski's status as one of the great filmmakers of our times, and it also sparked considerable critical and theological discussion. Even the late film critic Roger Ebert offered a special class on these extraordinary films at The University of Chicago.

As we celebrate in this issue the lives of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II, the first film in the series, *Decalogue I*, is worth revisiting. It merits attention because the story delves into the question of the existence of God and the persistence of faith in an increasingly secularized Polish context, a subject close to Pope John Paul II's heart. Moreover, a photograph of Pope John Paul II acts as a catalyst in the film to raise just such questions.

Decalogue I visualizes the story of a young, precocious boy named Pawel. His innocent world is shaken when he discovers a dead dog frozen in the snow outside the apartment complex where he lives. This leads him to ponder in greater depth questions about life, death, science, and faith. In this inquiry, he seeks the counsel of his father and his aunt. His father, a university professor interested in science and linguistics, guides him in a more secular direction where life is seen in mostly materialistic terms. His aunt, a devout Catholic, wishes to lead him in the direction of faith and a world open to God's presence.

The film offers no simplistic answers. Each character's worldview is both respected and challenged as it presses up against unfathomable mystery. What is perhaps most impressive, however, is how Kieslowski creates a world open to vastly different interpretations. Haunting music, a

mysterious stranger, spilled ink, each could be interpreted as ordinary or coincidental occurrences, or they could be seen as thoughtful symbols. For Catholics, these subtle moments are easily seen through a sacramental worldview where objects and actions take on deeper significance.

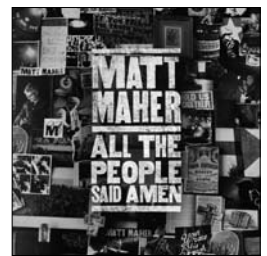
Whatever one's views on life's most challenging questions, Pawel's innocent question asked of his aunt, "Where is God?," receives one of the most compelling answers recorded on film. Cinema was made for moments like these; thus, it is no wonder the Vatican praised it so highly.

Music Review

Imagine for a moment that you find yourself on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for World Youth Day 2013. Our Lord is present before you in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Surrounding you is His Holiness Pope Francis, thousands of priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and some three million believers from around the world. The massive sea of worshipers is on their knees in reverent silence when all of a sudden, a young man, also on his knees with guitar in hand, begins to play. His rich, soulful voice rings out as he gently leads the faithful in adoration with the words, "Lord, I need you. Every hour I need you. Where you are, Lord, I am free. Holiness is Christ in me. Lord, I need you."

This is the heartfelt, soul-stirring music of Matt Maher. Born and raised in Newfoundland, Canada, he later moved to the Phoenix area to study jazz piano. After graduating college, he moved to Mesa, Arizona, where he accepted a full-time position as a music minister and youth pastor at Saint Timothy Catholic Church. He released his first independent album, *The End and the Beginning*, in 2002, and since then his musical career has continued to flourish. He has written and produced seven solo albums to date, and three of his albums along with four of his singles have soared to the tops of the Billboard Christian Music charts. A two-time Grammy nominated artist who has become one of the most highly acclaimed Christian composers and performers in the world, Maher is a contemporary Catholic artist whose music transcends denominational barriers while remaining faithful to his eucharistic roots.

In his newest album, *All the People Said Amen*, Maher displays his giftedness and diversity of musical styles by seamlessly bending from gentle praise to blurred blues, and from contemporary Christian rock to quiet adoration. The album includes numerous live recordings that span his career and enliven the music while drawing us into the worship experience. From the title track, a hopeful upbeat call for the unity of all



ALL THE PEOPLE
SAID AMEN
Matt Maher;
Provident, 2013

by Julie M.
Parrotta

God's children, to the combination of his chart topping worship tune "Your Grace is Enough" with the popular hymn "Here I Am, Lord," it is hard to listen to these songs and not sing along. His simple, prayerful melodies compel the listener to sing of God's faithfulness and mercy, while his driving, contemporary rhythms draw us into an uplifting experience of praise and thanksgiving. With all of this and the inclusion of the traditional benediction hymn "Down in Adoration Falling," Matt Maher's music truly offers something for everyone.

Poetry

Song of Songs

eden's echo is delight
when lover and beloved sing their pleasure
with all things living and lovely
their song echoes echoes still
through the garden of love's night

Sister Lou Ella Hickman, IWBS

Book Reviews

This is the third volume of four. The fourth volume will be an exploration of Oscar Romero and Dorothy Day. In all four volumes, the author intends to show connections between hope and the Eucharist.

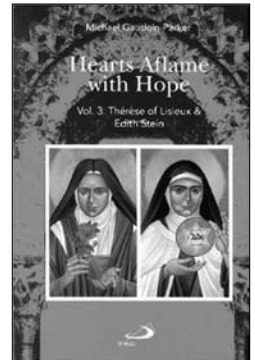
Gaudoin-Parker warrants that we can learn from the saints; they can be models for us, especially in their love of the Eucharist, connecting it with the virtue of hope. He reminds us that the 50th International Eucharistic Congress took as its theme, “Communion with Christ and with One Another.” The Eucharist reminds us that we are the body of Christ and are fed and strengthened as a community by praying and eating together.

He explains Thérèse of Lisieux’s spirituality of the “Little Way” in depth and with clarity. She died at 26. Ronald Rolheiser makes an important point regarding Thérèse, that she grew into such holiness at an early age because she was loved deeply by her family, but she also suffered the death of three mothers. That combination—love and suffering—opened her up to sanctity, and it can do the same for us.

Thérèse’s reflection, contemplation, and missionary zeal resulted in her being designated a doctor of the church. In the document naming her a doctor of the church, Pope John Paul II recalls how often her example and doctrine were quoted during Vatican II. Pope Paul VI spoke of her “as a teacher of prayer and the theological virtue of hope and a model of communion with the church.” As a model, we can imitate her actions and her words, “I want it all!” and “My vocation is love!”

Edith Stein’s conversion and call to religious life is explained in Chapter 6. She received the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. She was drawn to the love and suffering of Christ and his death on the cross. Pope John Paul stated that because of her roots, Jewish and Christian, as a mystic and a thinker she could build a kind of bridge through philosophy and theology between the two world religions. Part of her mission was to be a sign of reconciliation between all people.

The author mentions that not enough attention has been paid to her liturgical spirituality. In the 2008 Eucharistic Congress, Pope Benedict XVI quoted her words: “The prayers and rites of the eucharistic sacrifice revive the whole history of salvation. . . . We are called to enter into this mystery of a covenant by conforming our lives ever more closely . . . to the gift received in the Eucharist.”

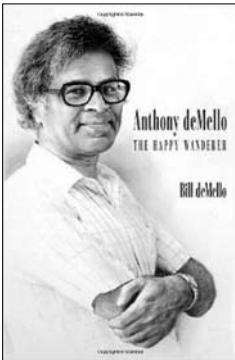


HEARTS AFLAME
WITH HOPE:
Thérèse of Lisieux
and Edith Stein
(Volume 3).
Michael Gaudoin-
Parker, Saint Paul's,
New York, 2012

An interesting aside. The author mentions that Stein in German means stone, rock, flint. Thérèse of Lisieux and Benedicta of the Cross, each in her own way, serve as models for all of us and especially important for young adults. The “Little Way” of Thérèse and Benedicta as another rock in the church’s history encourage us to reflect, to contemplate, and to act in hope and through the Eucharist.

The author includes a Postlude examining hope as a virtue at work in the lives of Saint John Paul II and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta.

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ANTHONY
DE MELLO: The
Happy Wanderer.
Bill de Mello.
Maryknoll, NY:
Orbis Books,
2013,

This biography, “a tribute to Tony, who was such a wonderful, kind, sensitive, and humble human being,” was written by his younger brother, who really began to know his older brother as an adult through others who knew him personally and professionally.

According to those who knew him, Tony’s journey was “the kind of hard but fulfilling life he envisaged, bringing hope to the downtrodden, denying self to reach out to others, all for the greater glory of God” (87). This biography was what Bill writes as “the truth and an accurate account of Tony’s life” (xxii).

As a priest, Tony “was inclusive of everyone . . . , followed Jesus Christ’s teachings, and lived his life as a true follower of Christ” (12-13). Bill de Mello did not always understand his brother’s experiences after Tony joined the Jesuits; however, anyone who experienced formation in a religious congregation, especially before Vatican II, can relate to his brother’s early years in the Society of Jesus.

Part I: “The Journey to Sadhana” is written from the author’s knowledge of Tony as his big brother and from interviews and letters sent to him by those who knew him personally and through his Sadhana—a ten-course program developed to assist others in knowing themselves. “He was more interested in ‘man fully human, fully alive . . . ,’” following Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (132).

In Part II: “The Singer and His Song,” Tony is presented as a controversial and humble human being whose books and other writings “were not intended by the author as manuals of instruction of the Catholic faithful in Christian doctrine or dogma,” as stated by church authorities after his death (188).

However, even today, “the Happy Wandering Sage continues, even in death, to sing his song and dance his dance to audiences from all over the world” (232).

As one who was impressed by Anthony de Mello’s videos and writings, I was interested in learning about his background and life experience that, as one Spanish Jesuit stated, made him “like a flowing mountain torrent—fresh, lively, powerful, and changing” (222).

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In Christ’s Peace Deceased Members

Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with D, E, F, G, H, I, and J are asked to celebrate the Eucharist for deceased priests during May and June. You are invited to send the names of recently deceased priests (Eucharistic League members and non-members) to emmanuel@blessedsacrament.com to be included in this remembrance. Thank you.



EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Rudsend Paragas, SSS

In December of 2005, I was invited to say Mass at Manila City Jail in the Philippines. As a newly ordained priest, my aspiration was to proclaim Jesus in the Eucharist so that human life might be transformed and poverty, selfishness, hatred, and division might vanish, and peace, unity, otherness, and love might flourish. After accepting the invitation and hearing the simple orientation, I was filled with joy and excitement. Looking back, my joy and excitement were coming from the opportunity to transform the lives of the prisoners. I remember how animated and enthused I was during and after the Mass. However, after celebrating the Eucharist, I was taken to the hospital. I got a virus from the prison center. Manila City Jail was over-populated, and sanitation was poor. I learned how prisoners suffer during the hottest months of the year as well as during the rainy season. Many of them have skin diseases for lack of vitamins C and D.

My doctor required that I have a vaccine if I intended to continue my apostolate at Manila City Jail and advised me to be very cautious because my immune system was weak. Similarly, my parents and some of the members of my religious order recommended that I should not accept an invitation from the center for a while. However, when a Manila City Jail administrator called and asked if I was available to celebrate the Eucharist with them, I was surprised that I responded, "Yes" right away. I accepted the invitation because I remembered the faces of the prisoners who longed to experience God's love in the Eucharist. I remembered their joy despite their difficult situation behind steel bars. I remembered the sound of hope that echoed in their active participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. I remembered their desire for healing and forgiveness when they received Jesus in the Holy Communion. And I said "Yes" because I remembered the dedication and persistence of Jesus Christ during his ministerial life.

I thought that the invitation to minister at the prison center was an opportunity to transform the lives of many prisoners. I never realized that the many occasions I spent with them were instruments of my own transformation: a transformation of discovering that my ultimate and ideal call is to become a witness of Christ's love. Now I know that my mission is to make the love of Jesus in the Eucharist viral.





This celebratory banner was held aloft under the magnificent dome of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on December 9, 1962, when Pope John XXIII proclaimed Peter Julian Eymard a saint. In his homily the pope happily reminisced about a personal visit he once made to the house where Saint Peter Julian Eymard died in the small town of La Mure d'Isère, France. And so it was with great sentiment that the pope pronounced the following acclamation, "Besides Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint John Eudes, the Curé of Ars, Peter Julian Eymard takes his place in the ranks of these shining stars that are the incomparable glory and honor of the country that witnessed their birth, but whose beneficial influence extends far beyond, namely, to the whole church. His characteristic distinction, the guiding thought of all his priestly activities, one may say, was the Eucharist: eucharistic worship and apostolate."



“In the Blessed Sacrament a heavenly school is open to you
with the best teacher one can possibly imagine,
Jesus Christ himself.”

Saint John XXIII