

# Emmanuel

*Eucharistic Spirituality*



March/April 2015



The Eucharistic Vision of Vatican II:  
Gaudium et Spes

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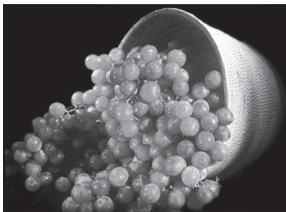
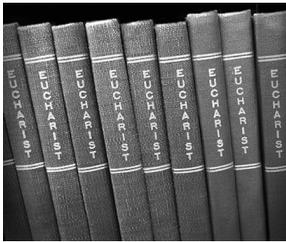
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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 121 Number 2



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## FROM THE EDITOR

Many Catholics say that they love *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, best of all the documents of the Second Vatican Council. No less than Pope John Paul II said in a 1995 address marking the 30th anniversary of its promulgation: "I must confess that *Gaudium et Spes* is particularly dear to me, not only because of the themes it develops, but also because of the direct participation that was allowed to me for its elaboration."

There is something unmistakably appealing about *Gaudium et Spes*: its expansive vision of the church, its reengagement with a world long viewed as hostile to authentic faith, its recognition of the good found in society, its openness to certain movements and "signs of the times" as indicators of divine guidance, etc.

In his address, the Holy Father commented on the many changes in the world since the pastoral constitution's appearance: "The cold war is ended, science and technology have made unprecedented progresses: from flight into space and the landing on the moon, from heart transplants to genetic engineering, from cybernetics to robotics, from telecommunications to the most advanced telematic technologies. To the factors of change connected to urbanization and industrialization, the incredible increase of the mass media has added to this, they will always have greater influence on the daily lives of people in every part of the world."

Other positive developments have occurred in the decades since Pope John Paul spoke: the rise of instantaneous communication and the internet, Smartphones, social media, microsurgery, and many others. But the world has also witnessed unsettling realities: cultural wars, tribalism, radical fundamentalism, terrorism, the loss of privacy, the erosion of human rights, and a growing divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots."

*Gaudium et Spes* acknowledged humanity's search for meaning and an experience of the divine in a world marked by constant change. The church offers the men and women of our age, and of every time and place, the enduring message of the Gospel and arms opened in friendship to all on the human journey. Moreover, the pastoral constitution tells us that we are not powerless before the currents of time, but possess the message of eternal life and salvation in Jesus Christ. That is something we need to hear again today.

### In this Issue

Paul J. Wadell is our guide to exploring *Gaudium et Spes*, the last of the conciliar documents to be promulgated at Vatican II on December 7, 1965. His article is so beautiful a summary of the decree's core ideas and teachings that you might want to read it slowly and savor it. Father Norman Pelletier looks at *Gaudium et Spes* through a very particular lens — that of religious life. He has spent many years in leadership of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament on the international and provincial levels.

The three short articles in the Eucharist: Living & Evangelizing section touch on a variety of topics: the origins of the Eucharist (Niranjan Rodrigo), its ongoing challenge and transforming power (Frank A. Squitteri), and the reverence which has been shown the *mysterium fidei* through the ages (David W. T. Brattston).

Victor M. Parachin suggests 24 very practical ways to enrich your Gospel living and spirituality this Lent. The church's great penitential season has always been about renewing the quality of our Christian discipleship by getting back to the basics. By doing so, and by God's patience and grace, we will arrive at the new life of Easter. The nourishment of word and sacrament sustain us on the way. 

Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Editor



## *EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# Insights on the Institution of the Eucharist

by Niranjan Rodrigo

*The Eucharist is spiritual food and drink for pilgrims and the medicine of immortality. It brings forgiveness of sins and makes us worthy to sit at the table of divine intimacy.*

Father Niranjan Rodrigo is the pastor of Saint Joan of Arc Church, Sloatsburg, New York. He previously taught at Saint Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, New York, and received his doctorate from Fordham University.

**E**VERY SUNDAY, WHEN WE RECEIVE THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST, DO WE experience something in ourselves that we cannot describe and feel grateful to God and united with one another? Perhaps we may not want to think deeper about the significance of what we receive. Some of us may simply fulfill an obligation and leave. Or some may slip in and out of church, giving the bare level of involvement and response at Mass. Maybe some wonder, "Why bother going to Mass at all if we can worship God anywhere?" And lastly, some people say: "I don't get anything out of it."

Amid these different feelings and reactions, the celebration of the Eucharist can become a more meaningful event if we grow in understanding the history, theology, and spirituality behind it.

From the earliest days of Christianity, the followers of Christ have brought their deepest needs and desires to the table of the Lord. They believed they could unite their daily lives and struggles to the great saving act of Jesus before the Father (Heb 7:25, 10:1-22). This is one of the reasons why we pray for the dead at Mass. We place our departed brothers and sisters before the God of mercy in the midst of reliving the work of our redemption in the Eucharist. We bring everything we are and have to the table of the Lord, confident that we will be heard.

The Eucharist has been the central act of worship of Christians, and the center of their lives, since the time of the apostles. Apart from the events of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, no scene is more enshrined in Christian memory than the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples. The core rituals of most Christian

denominations are centered in the memory of it.

Although the Eucharist is celebrated by most Christians, the ceremonies surrounding it and the rites and the forms in which it is celebrated vary. These have developed through the centuries from place to place. Different rites that arose in various Eastern churches are still in use today, for example, among Byzantine, Coptic, Armenian, Ukrainian, Maronite, East Syrian, and West Syrian Christians. These churches celebrate the Eucharist in rituals and styles using local languages and customs. Their rites are different from what is common in the Western church. While many rites have developed in the Western church in the past, the Roman Rite has gradually become the largest and the most widely used.

### **Biblical Roots of the Eucharist**

Different theologies of the Eucharist and understandings of its meaning exist among the churches of East and West, but at the heart of it is the scriptural teaching that the Eucharist was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper as the memorial of his death. Catholic and Orthodox Christians understand the presence of Christ in the Eucharist very immediately, as they take seriously the words of institution: "This is my body, which will be given up for you. . . . This is my blood which will be poured out for you." But most Orthodox Christians insist that while there is an actual transformation in the eucharistic species (the bread and the wine), the manner of the change remains a mystery that cannot be analyzed or explained rationally.

*From the earliest days of Christianity, the followers of Christ have brought their deepest needs and desires to the table of the Lord.*

There have been attempts in the history of theology to deny that Jesus himself instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and many questions regarding the Last Supper and the Eucharist have not been fully resolved. During the first century, and probably during the time of Jesus' ministry, the teaching on the bread of life in the Gospel of John proved to be a stumbling block to many of Jesus' disciples.

In the Bread of Life Discourse (John 6), Jesus presented one of his most difficult teachings for his followers to accept. Many went away angry and confused. They stopped journeying in his company since they could not understand what he was saying (Jn 6:35). Looking at the percentage of Catholics in our own time who say they believe



Jesus is really present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, we can see that it is still a struggle for many.

Some biblical scholars assert that the Eucharist derived from the understanding of the primitive church after the resurrection of Christ. Early followers of Jesus felt the need to gather and share a meal together in memory of the many meals they had enjoyed with him during his ministry.

For instance, Joachim Jeremias states in *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* that the eucharistic tradition belongs to the first decade after the death and resurrection of Jesus. He holds that at the beginning there was not much of an established liturgical tradition, only the historical account of the Last Supper. Furthermore, he notes that since the “words of interpretation (institution)” were the oldest, they would be closest to the time of Jesus.

Another eminent biblical scholar, Joseph Fitzmyer, states that the synoptic Gospels (Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:14-20) seek to root the Eucharist in the words and deeds of Jesus at his final meal with his followers. Therefore, this could indicate that the liturgical tradition of the Eucharist reaches back to the very early stages of Christianity.

Raymond E. Brown mentions that the phrase *instituted by Christ* does not necessarily mean that in his lifetime Jesus had carefully thought out a sacramental system. Nor does it mean that he foresaw the exact specifics of the different sacraments. What he did at the Last Supper was the *root*. Further, Brown offers a meaningful insight in noting that *institution by Christ* means that the actions we call sacraments are specifications of a power Christ entrusted to his church in and through his apostles during the time of his ministry and after his resurrection. Thus the sacraments are not inventions (even innovations) of the church, but part of the plan of Christ.

At the very beginning of Christianity, the celebration of the Eucharist (the breaking of bread) was simple and took place in the homes of believers where the local church gathered (Acts 2:46). The standardized forms and formulas of our eucharistic ritual developed later.

### **The Mystery of Faith**

When it comes to understanding the mystery of the Eucharist, we

believers are not called to grasp it perfectly or seek empirical evidence of its truth. Rather than trying to analyze it or explain it rationally, we are called to accept it and to believe in it, the *mysterium fidei*. Both Orthodox Christians and Catholics agree on an interpretation of the Eucharist as a renewed offering of Christ. While our Catholic tradition makes an effort to give intellectually satisfying explanations about the meaning of the Eucharist, Orthodox theology emphasizes the mysterious reality of it and insists on fidelity to the words of the liturgy itself.

*Rather than trying to analyze or explain the Eucharist rationally, we are called to accept it and to believe in it, the mysterium fidei.*

In the face of so great a mystery as the Eucharist, it is consoling to know that God comes to us in and through Holy Communion. Just as physical food nourishes and sustains our bodies and produces life and growth, Communion wonderfully achieves these in our spiritual life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1392). God becomes part of our lives when we consume the body and blood of Christ, and we are united with God in Christ. The Bread of Life Discourse clearly states that eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood is the way to a life of union with God and him.

Although the Gospel of John does not have the words of institution at the Last Supper, as the Synoptics and the First Letter to the Corinthians do, John 6 is eminently eucharistic in nature. It witnesses to the union of the believer with Jesus and the Father through partaking of his body and blood. The Eucharist presupposes that Jesus gave his life for others in his passion and his resurrection.

Jesus calls us to receive his life in the Eucharist. We come to him as we are. In establishing this beautiful sacrament, Christ reveals God's closeness to us. God comes to meet us in our human reality. Although none of us is worthy of this gift, we are nonetheless invited by Christ to be sustained in Holy Communion.

The church encourages us to believe in the mercy of God, whose perfect love overcomes our weaknesses, limitations, and sins, and creates a spirit of repentance in order to receive the Eucharist worthily. 



## EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

# Toward the Beloved Community

by Frank A. Squitteri

*The Eucharist is the source of our growth in holiness and of our capacity to love. It is the source of power for creating the Beloved Community.*

Frank A. Squitteri sent this article to *Emmanuel* several months before his death in late September 2014 following a courageous battle with cancer. Frank was a member of the Westchester, New York, Cursillo and was very active in the Contemplative Prayer Movement.

**W**HEN JESUS FOREVER TRANSFORMED PUBLIC WORSHIP BY INSTITUTING THE Eucharist — the love meal and memorial of the new covenant in his blood — he didn't tell his disciples that his objective was to create the Beloved Community. Nor did he impart exactly how it would come about. He left that to the human heart and to the Spirit who would inspire his followers through the ages.

Inspiration has come to me from participating in the eucharistic celebrations of the Monastic Order of Jerusalem in their churches in Europe. Whenever we are in Paris or Florence or Rome, we have made it a point to attend these liturgies. What makes them so inspiring? Dressed in white robes, the entire community — priests, brothers, and sisters — ascends the altar for Vespers, followed by Mass. At the kiss of peace, they mingle among the congregation to offer the peace of Christ with warm smiles and gracious handshakes.

Their kiss of peace is not just a ritual. It is intentional. Mind, heart, and will are embodied in the gesture. It says: "We are here to support you. We are here to anoint you. We are here to release the gifts of the Spirit in and for you." Their action can inspire all of us to see the vision of the Beloved Community. For the Beloved Community to come about, our sign of peace must first of all be intentional, not simply a ritual gesture.

### **A Wounded Community**

Our kiss of peace ought to be the outward expression of the awareness that the community of sisters and brothers whom we meet at the table of the Lord Jesus is a wounded community, and we are to be

moved by compassion for one another.

Compassion awakens us to the fact that the Mass is not a private devotion, but a love meal, a love meal where Jesus invites us to consume bread and wine, his body and blood, and so be formed as members of his living body, the church. He invites us into a mystical union with him and with all the redeemed. With this awareness, our kiss of peace becomes a sign of the Beloved Community Jesus intends.

Let us look for a moment at the reality of life. The fact is that everyone carries a cross. No one escapes suffering. In our midst as we come together for the Eucharist are those who are fighting cancer or some other dreaded disease, addiction, loneliness, or depression. There are some who are struggling with relationships, the loss of separation or divorce, with unresolved familial issues, with children who experience difficulties growing up and finding their place in the world. There are families with special needs.

*The kiss of peace says: "We are here to support you. We are here to anoint you. We are here to release the gifts of the Spirit in and for you."*

Apart from these, we are all born into the human condition of alienation from God, alienation from others, especially those who are different from us, and alienation from our inner self due to sin and the consequences of choices we have made. The list is endless, and it is real.

Our kiss of peace says, "Whatever your cross, we support you in your suffering." And the Beloved Community is in the process of becoming.

### **A Challenged Community**

Do you feel *challenged* by your presence at Mass? There is a great challenge in taking part in the Eucharist. It is, as one writer has said, a "dangerous memory." By it, we identify with Jesus in his complete self-giving and are called to imitate him in pouring out our lives in service to others.

It is good to recall Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper after he had washed their feet: "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow. . . ." (Jn



13:12-15). The love meal of the Eucharist is a challenge to create the Beloved Community.

Unfortunately, the church has taken the challenge out of our eucharistic celebrations. It has transformed Jesus' love meal into a church service. Just follow the ritual, and you are home free — no challenges. But Jesus' love meal challenges us to surrender ourselves intentionally to live in union with Jesus and with our sisters and brothers.

### *The love meal of the Eucharist is a challenge to create the Beloved Community.*

Look at how challenging the core actions of the Eucharist are. They are invitations to understand and to live what they represent. When we offer our gifts of bread and wine — symbols of our lives — together with the celebrant, we are called to offer ourselves to God as Jesus did. When the celebrant consecrates our gifts of bread and wine, we commit to being consecrated for sacrifice. In Communion, we receive Jesus and our sisters and brothers; we are one in the act of recognizing him in the sacrament of his body and blood and in each other. Thus the Beloved Community grows.

#### **An Empowered Community**

Our celebrations of the Eucharist are, lastly, occasions of empowerment. The same Spirit who transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ at the consecration anoints us, empowers us, and dwells in us. This is the *epiclesis*, the calling down of the Holy Spirit upon the community. No credentials are required; no skills are needed, just a heartfelt desire to allow the Spirit to fill you and to use you and to change you!

The Spirit anoints all who “fully and consciously” participate, as Vatican II said, in the love meal of the Eucharist to be Christ for one another and for the world. Christian communities cannot become the Beloved Community without each of us experiencing such a transformation. Again, we must intentionally seek it. When we offer the kiss of peace, we are saying, “We are anointed and we anoint you to serve. We share with you the Spirit’s gifts of love, hope, and faith and ask you to do the same.” Then our community is on its way to becoming the Beloved Community.

## Conclusion

Creating the Beloved Community will be the ultimate witness to Jesus' ongoing presence and power in the world. On our part, this requires both awareness and intentionality. Awareness that our Christian community is a wounded community, and our intentionality to be compassionate to each other. Awareness that our Christian community is a challenged community, and intentionality to surrender to union with Jesus and our sisters and brothers. Awareness that our Christian community is an empowered community, and intentionality to submit to the Spirit's power to transform us and our world. 

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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Father Arthur J. King, OMI  
Oblates of Mary Immaculate

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



## *EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# The Medicine of Immortality

by David W.T. Brattston

*From earliest times, Christians have shown the utmost respect for the Eucharist. The food and drink of the sacrament, the “medicine of immortality,” are to be received with reverence and care.*

Dr. David W.T. Brattston is a retired jurist and author. Among his published works are several volumes on traditional Christian ethics. He lives in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, Canada.

A PROMINENT CANADIAN POLITICIAN WAS ALLEGED TO HAVE RECEIVED A Communion wafer at a Roman Catholic Mass, put it into his pocket, and returned to his pew, to the horror of parishioners and media alike. Presumably he was a Calvinist, because the liturgical churches (Eastern Orthodox, Armenians, Ethiopians, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics) hold the bread and wine of the Eucharist in great reverence and maintain strict regulations as to how Communion elements are to be treated and to whom they may be distributed, if only to prevent disrespectful handling.

These regulations are not modern inventions nor did they originate with superstitious monks in the Dark Ages. This article looks at Christian regard for the Eucharist before the year 250 to show how the earliest believers shared the same practices as liturgical denominations today. The ancient writings are the common heritage of all Christians because they date from before the division into present-day denominations.

### **A Consistent Witness**

In the earliest Christian centuries, extremely respectful treatment was shown toward the bread and wine, which many denominations regard as the body and blood of Christ. The reason for this reverence appears in Justin, a Christian writer in the mid-second century who was later martyred for the faith: “Not as common bread and common drink do we receive these. . . . We have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of his word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.”

Half a century earlier, another martyr, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, described the Eucharist as “the medicine of immortality, and the antidote to prevent us from dying but which causes that we should live forever in Jesus Christ.” This was not the better-known Ignatius Loyola, but his namesake 15 centuries earlier, who legend has it was the little child whom Jesus said we must be like in order to see the kingdom of heaven.

In 217, Hippolytus, the presbyter of Rome, set out existing church practice as to how clergy were to continue to conduct worship services. He also intended it as a guide for laity to detect and complain when clergy departed from the liturgical heritage passed down from the time of the apostles. He wrote that the consecrated elements are not to be allowed to fall to the floor or be lost or treated carelessly; this is corroborated in the same era in Tunisia by the church father Tertullian. Nor were church mice and other animals permitted to consume them.

The bread and wine were to be consecrated only according to a prescribed rite, which must be in an orderly manner, without unnecessary talking or arguing, and such that Christians preserve their good reputation and their worship practices not be ridiculed by non-Christians. Shortly afterwards, Origen wrote that people are not to receive them “in haphazard fashion.” These, of course, are echoes of the apostle Paul that church services must be conducted “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40).

*“Not as common bread and common drink do we receive these. . . .”*

Origen illustrated better than anyone else the great reverence Christians in the 240s held the sacramental elements. Unlike Ignatius or Hippolytus, he was not urging his hearers to show respect but was using one existing church practice as the grounds or analogy for other spiritual exercises. Origen was taking the example of the treatment of the Eucharist as an entrenched standard practice on which to build his argument for adopting an additional soul-building activity. Both he and his congregations took high respect for the sacramental elements for granted and as well-established:

You who are accustomed to take part in divine mysteries know, when you receive the body of the Lord, how you protect it with all caution and veneration lest any small part fall from it, lest anything of the consecrated



gift be lost. For you believe, and correctly, that you are answerable if anything falls from there by neglect.

Because he traveled much throughout the eastern Mediterranean at the request of local bishops, and once to Rome, his statements probably described universal practice.

Partly because outsiders might not know how to demonstrate proper respect, it was forbidden to give Holy Communion to them — as witness the allegations about the Canadian politician. From the earliest times, it was considered sinful to consume the sacrament in any unworthy manner. According to Paul, “Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” and “He that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor 11: 27, 29). This thought was repeated almost two centuries later by Origen when he warned that Christians who partake unworthily will receive the Lord’s judgment, again as a proposition accepted as a given by all his hearers.

*“We have been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of his word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.”*

The *Didache*, a church manual and guide for the Christian life, was written in the late first century when some apostles were still living. It limited participation in the Eucharist to people who had been baptized, citing Jesus’ command that we must not give what is holy to the dogs. Half a century or more later, Justin similarly confined Communion to people who believe Christian doctrine, had been baptized, and live as Christ had taught. Another 60 years later, Hippolytus’ church manual would also admit to the Eucharist only people who had received Christian baptism. One of his charges against the leadership of a rival denomination within Christianity was that they accepted into membership people rejected by other sects and indiscriminately gave Communion to everybody.

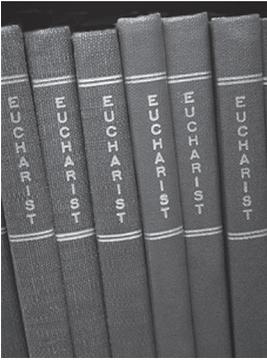
To further safeguard against disrespect of the sacrament and prevent people from eating and drinking unworthily, there were restrictions even on the baptized. In the first century, the apostle Paul required

searching one's conscience prior to receiving (1 Cor 11:28), while the *Didache* not long afterwards mandated confession of sins. It also required resolution of disputes with other people before participating.

Liturgical denominations have always provided further protection by requiring communicants to go to the front of the church and to receive the sacrament only from the hand of a duly authorized minister commissioned for this purpose. In 212, Tertullian referred to this procedure as already ancient and universally accepted. The sacrament is not put into trays and passed along the pews like a collection plate where anyone can serve themselves, even an unbaptized visitor who has never been in church before.

Considering the veneration accorded the eucharistic elements — as witness the protections surrounding them — Christians of all denominations should show great respect for the sacrament and due consideration for the sensitivities and consciences of their hosts when at a Communion service in a church other than their own. 

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## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Gaudium et Spes — An Unleashing of Hope

by Paul J. Wadell

*Gaudium et Spes, the longest of the documents produced at Vatican II, represents a sea-change in the way the church understands its relationship to the world and its mission among peoples. Open to the signs of the times and sensitive to the hurts, the hopes, and the aspirations of humanity, the church befriends all who are seeking meaning and offers them the light and truth of the Gospel.*

Paul J. Wadell  
is Professor of  
Theology and  
Religious Studies  
at Saint Norbert  
College in De  
Pere, Wisconsin.

**A**N UNLEASHING OF HOPE. IT'S A FITTING WAY TO DESCRIBE THE IMPACT OF THE Second Vatican Council on the church, and perhaps no document of the council unleashed more hope and energy and inspiration and new life in the church than *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. A sprawling, complex, and sometimes unwieldy document — by far the longest of the council — *Gaudium et Spes* addresses an expansive array of topics: the church's relationship to the world; a Christian understanding of the person; loss of belief in God; the nobility and purpose of human action; marriage and family life; a proper understanding of culture; a just economic order; cultivating peace in a world too often perilously inclined to war.

But what most memorably distinguishes *Gaudium et Spes* is neither its length nor its breadth, but its tone and perspective. Easily the most readable and engaging of the documents of Vatican II, in *Gaudium et Spes* the council found its voice; indeed, more than any other document, *Gaudium et Spes* captures vividly the passion, vision, spirit, and abiding energy of a gathering that can rightly be called the most important religious event of the twentieth century. Over the four years of the council, not only Catholics, but other Christians, persons of different faiths, and curious nonbelievers from around the world recognized that something new and important was happening to the Catholic Church.

A different church was coming to life. Gone was the defensive, reactionary, and often hostile church of previous centuries. Gone were

the threats, reprimands, stern warnings, and cavalcade of anathemas that characterized earlier councils. A church that judged the world was being replaced by a humbler church, a church wanting to listen and to learn, a church wanting to bless the world rather than spurn it, and a church wanting to encourage, support, affirm, and embrace in every way it can.

## A New Relationship with the World

That's the church of *Gaudium et Spes*. From its justifiably famous opening lines, this document that was approved on December 7, 1965, the last working day of the council, resoundingly signals how the church envisions its relationship with the world has dramatically changed. If in reaction to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the rise of democracy, the ascendance of science, expanding technologies, the beginning of secularism, and the understandable uneasiness spawned by communism and socialism, the church had become a fortress on a mountaintop, safely removed from the world but also somewhat out of touch with the world, with *Gaudium et Spes* the church comes down from the mountaintop and thrusts itself squarely amidst all the hopes and dreams, challenges and heartaches, uncertainties and fears of the modern world.

A triumphalist church becomes a pilgrim church, a fellow traveler standing shoulder-to-shoulder with believers and nonbelievers, friends, strangers, and enemies as together they make their way in the rough and tumble of life. And when the church moves from isolation to solidarity, fear, suspicion, hostility, and defensiveness are replaced by respect, openness, confidence, affection, trust, hope, and even joy. In language earlier councils would never have dared speaking, *Gaudium et Spes* unabashedly proclaims: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts" (1). That heartfelt identification of the church with the world is the background chorus of *Gaudium et Spes*.

Thus, with *Gaudium et Spes*, the church becomes a dialogue partner with the world. As with any dialogue, the church must listen as well as speak, learn as well as teach. It must be a church willing to grow, to be challenged and changed, and to risk the exquisite empathy that would enable it to enter into the world of the other. The church brings something of unsurpassable importance to that conversation, namely, the Gospel and its faith in Christ, but also acknowledges that



it does not have answers to every question people may be asking and, therefore, can learn from, as well as be enriched by, other Christians, by non-Christians, by agnostics and atheists, and by any human being who comes its way as long as it sees each one as a sister or brother, as a fellow child of God.

From beginning to end, *Gaudium et Spes* is a summons to the church to wholeheartedly commit to a dialogue that “excludes nobody,” even those “who oppose the church and persecute it in various ways” (92), and that dialogue of friendship is empowered by the recognition that “Christ our brother” is vibrantly present in all men and women (93).

It is hard to overestimate the impact *Gaudium et Spes* had on the church’s self-understanding. This is why to properly understand the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) must be read in partnership with *Gaudium et Spes*. If *Lumen Gentium* describes the church turning inward to reexamine its identity and mission as the people of God, with *Gaudium et Spes*, the church turns outward to the world and, as if awaking from its slumbers, sees the world with freshly baptized eyes and loves it. The church sees the world in all its richness, in all its complexity and variety, in all its hopes and possibilities, challenges and problems, and loves what it sees because God’s grace abounds not only in the church, but also throughout the world.

This is why the document consistently describes the church’s relationship to the world in the language of friendship and partnership, mutuality and cooperation, rather than enmity and suspicion. At the same time, in *Gaudium et Spes* the church that awakens to the goodness of the world also awakens to the preciousness of its faith in Christ and the Gospels, and thus discovers anew the gift that it distinctively has to offer the world. In short, as a pilgrim, the church comes to the journey not as someone lost and bewildered, but with definite convictions about what the journey involves and what it is called to witness and to offer anyone it meets along the way. This is why the church of *Gaudium et Spes* is always a church of mission, a church that knows the Gospel it has been entrusted with is meant to be shared.

### Reading the Signs of the Times

With *Gaudium et Spes*, the mission of the church doesn’t change, but it is definitely expanded. The primary calling of the church is to proclaim,

witness, and embody in its life the Gospel of salvation; its abiding mission is “to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served” (3).

But the church cannot effectively fulfill that task without first carefully discerning what is happening in the world. For what do people hope? With what do they struggle? What questions are they asking? What fears have hold of their hearts? In other words, echoing a theme stitched through virtually all the documents of Vatican II, the church cannot bring the hope of the Gospel to people’s lives without first being keenly attuned to what is going on in the world, and that requires “reading the signs of the times,” (4). In *Gaudium et Spes*, when the church “reads the signs of the times” it discovers a world characterized by *change, contradictions, and confusion*.

*Gaudium et Spes offers a voice of liberating truth and healing hope in a world where countless people not only search for meaning, but sometimes wonder if there is any at all.*

Those changes are neither isolated nor superficial, but are rapidly expanding, profoundly impacting every area of life, so much so that the council declares that the world has entered a “new age of history” (4). Family life, politics and economics, cultures and religions are all undergoing such deep transformations that they, alongside unparalleled advances in the sciences and technology, have resulted in a paradigm shift regarding how men and women understand both who they are and what it means to be in the world.

If in the past, human beings embraced a more static and unchanging worldview, at this pivotal point in history, the council forthrightly declares that that once unshakable worldview has been jettisoned by a more dynamic and evolving one. This shift in paradigms (what Bernard Lonergan described as moving from a “classicist” worldview that emphasized permanence and stability to a “historically conditioned” worldview that affirmed development, growth, and change) is the most striking characteristic of the modern world. Consequently, *Gaudium et Spes* acknowledges that the institutions, traditions, and ways of thinking of the past may no longer be adequate (7).

But those rapid and extensive changes have also resulted in a host of



contradictions and paradoxes, each of which reveals a serious problem. There is the ongoing contradiction between increased wealth and prosperity for some, but ravaging hunger and poverty for others. There is the troubling contradiction between, on the one hand, an increase of political freedom in many countries and, on the other hand, “new forms of social and psychological slavery” (4). There is the distressing contradiction between a growing sense of unity and solidarity and interdependence, and all the hatred and animosity whose harvest is violence and bloodshed; war is as much a threat as it has always been. Consequently, *Gaudium et Spes* describes people as stretched between hope and anxiety, wondering which way the world will go (4).

Moreover, when reading the signs of the times, the council fathers discover a world marked by confusion and uncertainty over the most basic questions of life. They note that once accepted values and beliefs are being challenged, especially by young people (7). They observe that increasing numbers of people are “falling away from religion,” not only repudiating God and religion but also seeing them as “incompatible with scientific progress and a new kind of humanism” (7). And in words that sound eerily prescient, they note that many people have replaced hope in eternal life with God for a “future earthly paradise where all the desires of their hearts will be fulfilled” (10).

Given all the change, contradictions, and confusion, one would not be shocked if the council summoned the church back up the mountaintop and safely behind the locked doors of the fortress. But that does not happen. Instead of once more turning away from the world in fear and dismay, the bishops reach out to it with a resilient hope and joy because they believe “that the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of human history” is found in Christ. It is this steadfast and unshakable conviction that shapes, guides, and inspires *Gaudium et Spes* and that makes it not, as some critics have maintained, a document of unfounded idealism and romantic escapism, but a voice of liberating truth and healing hope in a world where countless people not only search for meaning, but sometimes wonder if there is any at all.

### **A Christological Anthropology**

Chapter one of *Gaudium et Spes* provides an extended answer to the question, “What does the church think of humanity?” Realizing that “faith casts a new light on everything and makes known the full ideal which God has set for humanity” (11), the council probes the mystery of the

human person in light of its belief that Christ offers the fullest and most complete revelation of who we are. “In reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear,” the document proclaims. “Christ, the new Adam . . . fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling” (22).

Who then does Christ show us to be? First, *Gaudium et Spes* declares that every human being *without exception* is created in the image of God and is called to know and to love God (12). As a living, breathing image of God, the human person has a fundamental and undeniable dignity and sacredness that can never be taken away, should never be violated, and which others are obliged to respect. This is true regardless of a person’s physical, mental, social, or economic status. It is true at the beginning of life or the end of life. Our dignity as images of God — truly sacraments of God — is the most basic truth about us. To know and to love another is to see the image of God in him or her and revere it.

*The church of Gaudium et Spes is a church of mission, a church that knows the Gospel it has been entrusted with is meant to be shared.*

But as images of a God who is Trinity — a God who is most rightly understood as a communion of persons bonded together in unbreakable love — human beings are inherently social and relational beings who need others to live and grow and flourish. Contrary to the extreme individualism of our society, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts, “For by their innermost nature, men and women are social beings; and if they do not enter into relationship with others, they can neither live nor develop their gifts” (12). This is why we must learn the meaning of genuine intimacy, why we cannot thrive without friendships, and why healthy family and community life are absolutely essential.

We are called to and fulfilled in friendship and communion with God and others, but we often fear this truth about ourselves, and so instead of moving out in love to others, we turn in on ourselves in sin. *Gaudium et Spes* suggests that sin reflects a deep and often enduring refusal to be who we truly are. Instead of finding ourselves in knowing, loving, and glorifying God, we declare independence from God and try to find life and fulfillment apart from God (13). But every attempt to do so results not in life, but in diminishment and loss and estrangement from God, other persons, the natural world,



and ourselves. Despite the absurdity of sin, we continually flirt with it because we are creatures of divided hearts, who know we are fulfilled in goodness but who nevertheless are enticed by evil, and thus stand in need of a healing and redemption we cannot offer ourselves. With searing honesty, *Gaudium et Spes* declares: "People find that they are unable of themselves to overcome the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as if in chains" (13).

*Gaudium et Spes* also affirms that human beings are created to seek the true and the good (15). As images of a God who is perfect truth and goodness, we are moral creatures endowed with conscience, which, in one of the most beautiful phrases of *Gaudium et Spes*, is described as "people's most secret core, and their sanctuary" where "they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths" (16). Our conscience reminds us not only that freedom is a gift entrusted to us to do good, but also that we are responsible for our actions and will be held accountable for what we do with the gift of our lives (17). *Gaudium et Spes* challenges any view that sees freedom as an end in itself or maintains that freedom is the power to choose equally between good and evil; rather, freedom grows as we habitually choose the good.

### Special Issues

The second part of *Gaudium et Spes* considers a variety of issues such as the dignity of marriage and family life (the document famously dropped the traditional language about the "primary and secondary ends of marriage") and the proper development of culture. But it may most be remembered for what it said about a just economic order and the urgent responsibility to foster peace in a world that is sadly no stranger to war.

In their discussion of the economy, the bishops begin by noting another unsettling paradox: even though "increased efficiency in production and improved methods of distribution, of productivity and services have rendered the economy an instrument capable of meeting the increasing needs of the human family" (63), not only has the gap between the wealthy and the poor increased but, even more disturbingly, it has also resulted in a scandalous "contempt for the poor" (63).

In words that bring to mind the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16, the bishops observe, "Luxury and misery exist side by side" (63). Moreover, people in wealthier countries are increasingly

so obsessed with wealth and possessions that they have been taken over by an “economic mentality”(63) that claims that a good human life is not measured by love of God and our neighbors, but by the never-ending accumulation of money and material things.

To counter this grievous social sin and idolatrous philosophy of life, the council turns to two key principles of Catholic social teaching. First, a just economy is one in which the fundamental needs of all members of the community are met, not just a privileged few. As *Gaudium et Spes* attests, “People are the source, the focus, and the aim of all economic and social life” (63). Thus, a just economic order fiercely promotes the common good (64).

Second, because God intended the goods of the earth for all, what *Gaudium et Spes* calls “the universal destination of earthly goods” (69), the right of private property, far from being absolute, ceases whenever it becomes a source of injustice for someone else. In fact, the council, citing the ancient teaching of the church, boldly declares that people in extreme need “are entitled to take what they need from the riches of others” (69), words that surely both unsettle and challenge many of us today.

Much of what *Gaudium et Spes* says about the crucial importance of working for peace echoes Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and anticipates Pope Paul VI’s 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. Like those two letters, *Gaudium et Spes* upholds that peace, far from being merely the absence of war, both requires justice and is the fruit of justice (78). Too, the document warns that accumulating weapons, instead of deterring war, makes us much more prepared to resort to violence than to work for peace and, by devoting so many resources for war, further worsens the plight of the poor (81). For these and many other reasons, *Gaudium et Spes* challenges us “to undertake a completely fresh appraisal of war” (80).

### **The Legacy and Challenge of *Gaudium et Spes***

Almost 50 years have passed since this compelling and challenging document entered into the life of the church. How should it be remembered? What might be its relevance today?

*Gaudium et Spes* is not without shortcomings. As many have noted, the Second Vatican Council, while gathering bishops from around



the world, was dominated by the bishops and theologians of Western Europe and thus was marked by their concerns. *Gaudium et Spes* did not escape the effects of this more provincial perspective. For instance, the detailed and insightful analysis of atheism and loss of belief in God was highly relevant for European countries that had recently endured the scourge of two world wars and the moral horror of the holocaust; but it was hardly the most vexing issue for the church in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Moreover, for all the careful, astute attention the document gives to culture, the economic order, the arms race, and the dangers of war, it says scarcely a word about our moral responsibilities to other species, the natural world, and Earth.

Nonetheless, in so many respects, *Gaudium et Spes* matters as much today as it did almost 50 years ago. Its trenchant account of a just economic order needs to be proclaimed unceasingly in a world where the lack of distributive justice shortens the lives of millions of persons, making them seem expendable. Its warning about the idolatry of money and possessions hardly seems irrelevant in cultures of consumerism that teach us to find salvation in material things, nurture discontent, and warn us never to take a sabbath from producing and purchasing. And while the nature of wars may have changed, *Gaudium et Spes'* summons to create communities dedicated to educating in the ways of peace is one of the most important missions for the church today.

But perhaps the most significant legacy of *Gaudium et Spes* is that it calls the church to center itself on Christ. True, in this document the church becomes a pilgrim and a servant, but it also becomes a disciple, a church that commits itself to following in the way of Christ. It is because of this that it can engage the world in friendship, dialogue, and cooperation; because of this that it can celebrate all that is good in the world but also call the world to its true destiny in God. And it is because the church walks alongside Christ as it journeys through history that it is no longer a church of fear but a church of hope, confidence, and joy.

The abiding message of *Gaudium et Spes* is that a discipleship church, a church committed to learning, embodying, and witnessing Christ, will always have something promising to offer all those it encounters as it makes its way to the kingdom of God.

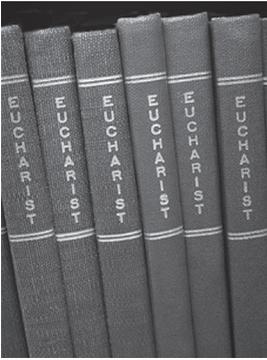
## **Gaudium et Spes and the Eucharist**

Finally, what might *Gaudium et Spes* mean for a church that places the Eucharist at the heart of its life and mission? At first glance, there may seem to be little connection between *Gaudium et Spes* and the Eucharist because the Eucharist is never the direct focus of the document. But one could reasonably argue that *Gaudium et Spes* would not have been possible without *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), the first document approved at Vatican II.

There the council proclaimed that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows” (10). In declaring the Eucharist the animating center of the church and the sacrament in light of which the church best understands its identity and its mission, the Second Vatican Council indicated that all of its subsequent documents would in some way be rooted in, formed, and inspired by the Eucharist.

*Gaudium et Spes* is no exception; in fact, if one reads the document through the lens of the Eucharist, its logic becomes both clearer and more compelling. Its constant refrain to build bonds of fellowship and community, and to overcome all that divides, is undeniably eucharistic. Its heartfelt summons to reach out to others, even our enemies, in love, generosity, understanding, and compassion, and to see everyone radiating the image of God, is exactly what the Eucharist commissions us to do and precisely the kind of moral vision it seeks to form in us.

Most of all, *Gaudium et Spes* brought life and energy and hope to the church because it reminds us of who we are, what we are about, and where we are going. We are pilgrims on a journey to God, blessed and beloved children of a God who wants what is best for us. Where are we going? We are headed to the great heavenly banquet that Jesus called the kingdom of God where with all our fellow pilgrims we will rejoice in the presence of God and love one another as we do so. What are we about? As we make this journey, we are to do whatever we can wherever we are to bring God’s love, justice, goodness, and peace to life in the world. That’s the lasting message of *Gaudium et Spes*, and it is something we rehearse every time we gather at the Eucharist. 



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# A Major Superior Reflects on *Gaudium et Spes*

by Norman B. Pelletier, SSS

Father Norman B. Pelletier, a native of Maine, served as superior general of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in Rome from 1993-1999 and as provincial superior of the Province of Saint Ann from 2002-2014. He is the author of *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, a biography of the Apostle of the Eucharist, Saint Peter Julian Eymard.

I HAVE PUT TOGETHER SOME BRIEF THOUGHTS ON THE VATICAN COUNCIL DOCUMENT *Gaudium et Spes* at the request of *Emmanuel's* editor. I do so from the perspective of one who has been in leadership for many years as a major superior in my religious congregation, an international order. These reflections are brief and do not exhaust all of the wonderful insights one can cull from this rich pastoral document.

The fact that *Gaudium et Spes* was formulated with a clear pastoral perspective has had enormous implications for religious life. Of course, we are all aware that young people today who may show an interest in joining a religious community have had no experience of religious life prior to the council and, as a consequence, are not burdened with the pre-Vatican Council memories many of us elders have had to struggle with.

And so, whereas countless religious congregations shrugged off many of the former trappings of monastic life and boldly launched into more extensive apostolic (pastoral) activities, this change of direction is not an issue for the present generation. They have always understood the church along the opening lines of the document: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these, too, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

Such expressions and sentiments in a major church document were literally unheard of at the time; but when these words are your point of departure, as they are for post-Vatican II Catholics, the implications are enormous. Are they not equally refreshing and persuasive?

In addition to the obvious pastoral orientation of *Gaudium et Spes*, the church in this document enunciated a definite shift from its previous stance toward the world. This "reorientation" also greatly impacted

religious life. The world was the enemy to be avoided, to be shunned and to be overcome. Now the church acknowledged how great a contribution she is ready to make to establish a “more human” society (40), and that while helping the world in this endeavor, she is aware that she also is “receiving many benefits from it” (44). She claims her role in developing cultures and assures freedom of thought and expression to all (93). Her avowed stance is one of honest and open dialogue (92).

With this enormously positive outlook toward the world and the church’s willingness to partner for the welfare of all humanity, how could many elder religious not be shaken when, for some, their vocational call had been a flight from the world? Yet many more welcomed the new perspective as being more accurately biblical, pastorally engaging, and personally enriching. If the church wishes to dialogue with the world, should we religious not model that desired dialogue with the same honesty and openness the church is espousing?

This historic document was a landmark event at the time it was promulgated and offered individual religious and institutes a sound theological base for their own journeys toward the renewal of life, ministries, and structures the church envisioned and called for in *Perfectae Caritatis*, another foundational document of the council.

Today it remains a challenge for anyone in religious life desiring to live a positive spiritual life in dialogue with their brothers and sisters, society, culture, people of other faith traditions or of no religious affiliation whatever, and a world eager to share its joys and sorrows, its anxieties and its hopes.

Accordingly, in our common journey, we people of faith have “the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospels.” Religious men and women have taken this challenge to heart and faithfully join their voices and their talents to those who, moved by the Spirit of God, work at making this a better world. Religious are eager and generous partners in establishing the kingdom of God in the spirit of Vatican II’s pastoral approach expounded in *Gaudium et Spes*. 



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Twenty-four Ways to Make the Most of Lent

by Victor M. Parachin

*Lent can be filled with grand resolves about prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Often, however, the greatest growth comes through simple daily efforts at living the Gospel.*

Victor Parachin is a minister, journalist, and author of a dozen books on practical Christian spirituality.

LENT, THE “FORTY DAYS” PRECEDING EASTER, WAS ESTABLISHED TO GIVE CHRISTIANS an opportunity to renew their baptismal commitment, reflect on their lives, and respond to Jesus’ teaching to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22: 37, 39). Here are 24 ways to make the most of these days of grace.

### 1 — *Suspend judging others.*

“In a world that constantly asks us to make up our minds about other people, a nonjudgmental presence seems nearly impossible,” says the spiritual writer Henri Nouwen. “But it is one of the most beautiful fruits of a deep spiritual life and will be easily recognized by those who long for reconciliation.”

### 2 — *Control your anger.*

“Within each of us, oftentimes, there dwells a mighty and raging fury,” says the fictional character, the Incredible Hulk. One woman worked during Lent to change this emotion in her life saying, “I don’t consider myself an angry person. I wouldn’t dream of raising my voice at a rude salesperson, yet I realized there are three people I easily become angry with: my husband and my two children. For Lent, I vowed to reign in my anger toward the people I love most. It’s worked!”

### 3 — *Comfort a griever.*

Do what the prophet urged: “Comfort, comfort my people” (Is 40:1). We all know someone who is suffering from a loss due to death, divorce, separation, disability, layoff, etc. Visit with a griever, offering a listening ear and gentle words of encouragement.

4 — *Watch your mouth.*

Before beginning your day, reflect on this teaching of Jesus: "Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean'" (Mt 15:10). Remember that your words can heal or hurt, inspire or injure, bring peace or bring pain. Speak words of encouragement, kindness, and compassion.

5 — *Try to please God.*

Be guided by this prayer written by the seventeenth-century British clergyman Edward Lake: "Lord, as your mercies surround us, so grant that our return of duty may abound; and let this day manifest our gratitude by doing something well-pleasing unto you."

6 — *Drive compassionately.*

Let another driver and vehicle into your lane, be patient if the vehicle in front of you is moving slowly, allow a pedestrian to get across the street. Driving compassionately comes under this teaching of Jesus: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Lk 6:31).

7 — *See Christ in every person you meet.*

Whether your encounter with others today is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, see each person as Jesus himself. Allow this prayer of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to be your prayer for the day: "Grant me to recognize in other men, Lord God, the radiance of your own face."

8 — *Let go.*

Don't cling so tightly to things and people that are not good for you. Learn to let go . . . of a dysfunctional relationship, of a position in a toxic work environment, of a career which doesn't bring satisfaction, of unhappiness, of being in control.

9 — *Let God.*

Remember that life is sometimes unpredictable. When your life's journey hits a rough place and the way forward isn't clear, turn it over to God. This is what Jesus did in his time of crisis: "Father, not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). This is trusting submission to God based on the confidence that his wisdom and grace will support you and surround you.

10 — *Give up meat for Lent.*

Look for recipes that don't require meat; vegetarian cookbooks are an ideal source. Then commit to a meat-free season or, if that isn't possible for you and your family, consider meatless meals two or three



times a week. Catholicism has a long tradition of abstaining from meat on Fridays as a way of practicing self-denial and eating more simply.

11 — *Schedule kindness into your day.*

Beyond the “random acts of kindness” movement, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin recommends blocking off a time period each day when you will engage in acts of kindness. “Schedule kindness into your day, whether it means visiting one who is sick, making a call on behalf of someone who is searching for work, or conferring with a person who needs advice. If you don’t schedule in kindness (such as ‘Between two and two-thirty today, I’m devoting myself to helping others’), you are likely to forget to do it.”

12 — *Smile at everyone you meet.*

Your smile may be the only positive moment in someone’s life that day. Remember, too, that smiling is beneficial for both the recipient and for you. “Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy,” notes Vietnamese poet Thich Nhat Hanh.

*Try to please God. See Christ in everyone.*

13 — *Make a retreat at home.*

One couple sets aside a Friday evening in Lent for a retreat in their home. “It was just the two of us. We came home from work at 6 p.m., lit candles on a table, and began with a simple prayer,” they explain. “Then, we read Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, pausing at passages which especially triggered something in either one of us. We took time to reflect on them and write out our insights on those passages. Finally, we concluded with a time of silent meditation and ended with prayer. Our private retreat lasted until 9 p.m., three very worthwhile hours.”

14 — *Give up a vice.*

We all have habits that we’d like to change. Lent is an ideal time to identify a vice and work to rid yourself of it. This may have been in the mind of the apostle Paul when he wrote: “Put off your old self and put on the new self” (Eph 4:22-23).

15 — *Acquire a virtue.*

Adopt one of the “fruits” of the Spirit and do your best to live it out hour-by-hour and day-by-day: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23)

16 — *Reconcile with someone.*

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov was an influential eighteenth-century spiritual teacher who said: "If you believe that you can damage, then believe that you can fix. If you believe that you can harm, then believe that you can heal." Reach out and make up with someone where there's been fracture.

17 — *Practice persistence.*

Author Daphne Rose Kingma says: "Persistence is the spiritual grace that allows you to continue to act with optimism even when you feel trapped in the pit of hell. It is the steadfast, continual, simple . . . practice of trudging forward until the difficult present you're scared will go on forever is replaced by a future that has a new color scheme."

*Stop judging others. Control your anger.*

18 — *Give "alms."*

Think of someone you know who is struggling financially: a student, a single parent, a retiree, an unemployed person. Buy them a prepaid bank card and mail it to them. Do this anonymously in keeping with Jesus' teaching: "When you give, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret" (Mt 6:3).

19 — *Create sacred space in your home.*

Even if you live in the tiniest of apartments, set aside space, a chair, or a corner for prayer. Personalize it with a favorite icon or painting, a candle, your Bible. Spend time there every day.

20 — *Pray for an "enemy."*

This could be someone you find difficult to get along with or are not naturally drawn to. Pray for that person and, in prayer, for a way to overcome the situation (Mt 5:44).

21 — *Encourage someone who is discouraged.*

A few carefully chosen words of support can make an enormous difference in the life of someone who is struggling. When the apostle Paul was under house arrest, he was sustained by the support of his friends. "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement," he



wrote in his letter to Philemon (verse 7).

22 — *Read Bible prayers.*

Let the Bible be your prayer book during Lent, and every day. There are many notable prayers in the Scriptures. Research them, allowing them to saturate your mind and spirit. Here are some to get you started: to be shaped by God the potter (Is 64:8); Stephen's prayer at being persecuted (Acts 7:59-60); Hezekiah's prayer during illness (Is 38:2-8); Paul's prayer for spiritual growth (Eph 3:14-21).

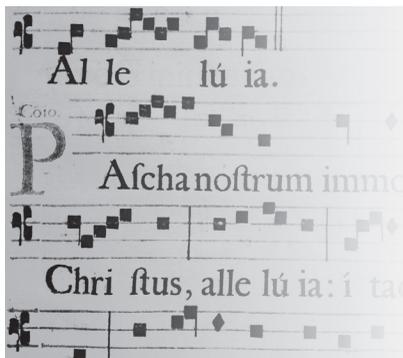
*Give up a vice. Acquire a virtue.*

23 — *Help a stranger.*

It's easy to reach out and help family and friends. Do the same for someone you don't know. One cold winter day, Laura, from Chicago, heard her front tire rupture when she drove over a board with nails. "I had no idea what to do," she says. At the next stoplight, a young man knocked on her window to say that if she pulled over, he would change the tire. "And he did, despite the bitter cold and the risk of getting tire grime all over his clothing." The woman thanked the young man and later sent him a coffee shop gift card.

24 — *Extend compassion to all of God's creatures.*

Saint Basil of Caesarea is famous for his prayer of blessing upon animals: "O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom you gave the earth as their home." One evening, a woman saw a homeless man tie his puppy to a pole outside a grocery store and head inside. Unhappy about being left alone, the puppy began to bark. The man turned around, shouted at the small creature, and kicked it viciously. Though the woman was allergic to dogs, she followed the man inside and offered him \$50 for the puppy. He accepted. She took the puppy home and within two weeks found him a permanent home with a loving family. 



## PASTORAL LITURGY

# Celebrating the Sacraments— Part 2: Confirmation

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

*We continue examining “best practices” for the sacraments — a fruit of the vision of Vatican II — by looking at the sacrament of confirmation, usually celebrated with those in eighth grade through high school.*

POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI WROTE A WONDERFUL POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (SacC), in 2007, whereby he exhorted the bishops of the world to follow the practices of the Orthodox Christians and Eastern Rite Catholics and restore the order of initiation, maintaining the connection of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist that was the ritual practice of the early church and these other Christian traditions (see SacC, 17-19, 79). It was interesting that he chose to highlight the importance of confirmation *before* First Communion:

Concretely, it needs to be seen which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the center, as the goal of the whole process of initiation (18).

While the issue of “restoring the order” in the Roman Rite is stalled for now, it may be helpful in consultation with diocesan liturgical commissions and bishops to review the practice in light of preparation for a second edition of the Rite of Confirmation (RC), as was done with the consultation on the RCIA. As the decree mentions, the rite of confirmation was revised in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (71) in order “to make the ‘intimate connection of this sacrament with the whole of Christian initiation’ clear.” This was a concern for Pope Paul VI, who wanted to devote “special attention to these sacraments of initiation” and renew them “to show the unity of Christian imitation in its true light.”

Just as the New Testament demonstrates how the Holy Spirit brought Christ’s mission to fulfillment, the renewed ritual of confirmation was intended to reveal the “perpetuating of the grace of Pentecost in the church.” Pope Paul notes that many Eastern rites do not clearly distinguish “chrismation” from baptism, as is done in the Roman Rite.

Father John Thomas Lane is the pastor of Saint Paschal Baylon Church, his home parish, in Highland Heights, Ohio, and a liturgical consultant and presenter. He is available for workshops and presentations on the liturgy.

The importance given to the bishop as the ordinary minister of confirmation grew in the West and has led to emphasis on the minister rather than on the order of the sacraments of initiation. It might be helpful to revisit this practice, especially in the United States, in order to allow more time for pastoral visitations rather than attending to the administration of this sacrament. In the minds of many Catholics, the primary role of the bishop is to confirm, overlooking his role of pastoral leadership in the diocese and witnessing to the Gospel.

The introduction to the Rite of Confirmation emphasizes the importance of catechesis and the special responsibility of pastors to see that all the baptized receive careful preparation (see RC, 3). It does not, however, specify what this preparation is to be, sometimes lasting for two years. Pope Benedict stressed that the preparation for confirmation should not be more heavily weighted than that for First Communion, and yet that often happens in parishes. I think we would all agree that we are forming Christians for eucharistic living.

RC, 3 states that adult catechumens are to be confirmed immediately and that children under the age of reason or 7 years are to have separate "preparation periods for confirmation and Eucharist." It is worth noting that RC, 11 specifies that confirmation is to be administered about the seventh year or be delayed.

To highlight the connection between confirmation and baptism, RC, 5 indicates the "desirability" of having the godparent at baptism, if available, also be the sponsor at confirmation. This makes the function and responsibility of the sponsor more effective. Perhaps in the last part of this sentence, the word "godparent" should have been repeated, but it was not, encouraging the practice of choosing another person as a confirmation "sponsor."

Let us briefly review the decree and ritual for the sacrament of confirmation. Celebrations of confirmation within the Sunday Eucharist underscore the importance of baptism and are great reminders of the call to live this special covenant and fulfill our discipleship. Take some time to review your pastoral practices, the place for baptism, the ritual, and other items. Enlivening the rite will help your parishioners see that baptism is "not the private possession of the individual family, but is the common treasure of the whole church of Christ" (RBC, 4).

While the ordinary minister of confirmation is the bishop, those in danger of death are to be confirmed immediately (see RC, 7c).

RC, 61-65 notes that when the ritual Mass for confirmation is celebrated, certain days require specific readings. It is meaningful to involve the candidates. I suggest a planning class with the candidates, dividing them into groups to pick music and readings for the liturgy and write the Universal Prayers, with a note of gratitude to the bishop or celebrant and to catechists, families, and others:

Consider a sprinkling rite instead of the penitential act as part of the introductory rites. This better symbolizes the connection with the “waters of life” and the renewal of the candidates’ baptismal covenant.

RC, 21 mentions the calling of candidates by name, a worthy practice that in some locales has been discontinued. This is regrettable, for it is important, as the ritual says, to be called by name and see that the Lord continues to call us at different stages of our faith journey.

RC, 25 says the bishop “and the priests who will minister the sacrament with him lay hands upon all the candidates (by extending their hands over them).” This is a helpful pastoral note; many confirmations are lengthy because only one minister confirms. RC is clear that there may be assistance. RC, 32 highlights reception of Holy Communion under both kinds and is an important reminder of the “completion” of the rites of initiation:

Parishes have tried to improve the experience of preparation for confirmation, adding various requirements (see an entrance ritual attached to this column) such as service projects, retreats, and days of recollection. These no doubt deepen the impact on the candidates. They are not mandatory for the reception of the sacrament, however, and we need to be mindful of how we sometimes convey the impression that God’s grace is merited. Too often, we have made confirmation a “graduation” from Catholic education and life. As mentioned at the beginning of this column, recent popes have presented the sacrament of confirmation as necessary and vital to living a full eucharistic and missionary life as a committed disciple of Christ.

## **The Calendar for March and April**

### **Sunday, March 1 — Second Sunday of Lent**

RCIA Penitential Rite (459-472). This rite celebrates and acknowledges those who were already baptized, especially those preparing to celebrate the sacrament of penance for the first time, especially

those baptized in another Christian tradition. This may also be used as a preparatory rite for the sacrament of penance (see 461). It may also be celebrated at another suitable time before candidates are received into full communion in the Catholic Church or for baptized Catholics who were never catechized and need confirmation and First Communion.

### **Sunday, March 8 —Third Sunday of Lent**

First Scrutiny of the RCIA.

#### **Preparation for the Chrism Mass**

Invite your parishioners, especially those who will receive the holy oils in the coming days or the year ahead (i.e., candidate for adult baptism, confirmation, those needing the sacrament of the sick, etc.) to attend the diocesan celebration, representing the parish and then presenting the holy oil during the Holy Thursday liturgy.

### **Sunday, March 29 — Palm Sunday of the Lord’s Passion**

Notice the procession options, but consider that the first option revives the processional nature of the liturgy and communicates the theological richness of the journey.

### **Holy Thursday — April 2**

Invite your community to celebrate a potluck or “agape” meal before the beginning of the Holy Thursday liturgy, to promote a sense of unity and prayerfulness as we enter into the “three days” at the heart of our faith as Christians.

### **Easter Sunday, Resurrection of the Lord — April 5**

Celebrate the renewal of baptismal promises and the sprinkling rite with music and festivity. This expresses our joy in the new life and growth which have been occasioned by our Lenten journey and our faithfulness to the season’s disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

### **Fourth Sunday of Easter — April 26**

Good Shepherd Sunday and World Day for Vocations.

#### ***Rite of Commitment for a Confirmation Program***

*After the first information session, parents and students are invited to sign up with the materials and make a commitment to the preparation sessions for the sacrament of confirmation.*

*During a Sunday Mass, after the homily and before the Creed and the Universal Prayers, the following questions are asked of the candidates for the sacrament and their parents:*

### **Candidates' Commitment**

Pastor (or designate of the pastor):

Candidates, please stand.

The church highly values the preparation for sacraments. You have already made the commitment to be a Catholic Christian through baptism, the sacrament of reconciliation, and by the celebration of the Eucharist each Sunday. We as a faith community promise to pray for you regularly, to support you in your discernment for a saint's name, provide service opportunities, a sponsor, if necessary, and invite you into greater participation in the life of the parish community.

Please respond "I will" after each question.

- Will you worship and pray together in preparation for the monthly classes?
- Will you attend the confirmation preparation sessions?
- Will you make efforts to practice Christian service?
- Will you prayerfully consider a saint's name to guide you through the process and become your patron saint?
- Will you work with your godparent or sponsor to fully prepare for the sacrament?
- Will you participate in a retreat to deepen your holiness and grow in the wisdom of God's grace in your life?

The (name of parish) Catholic Community welcomes you with great joy into this process of sacramental preparation. We affirm and encourage you as you journey toward the sacrament of confirmation through this period of preparation. May you continue to choose to serve and worship God alone, the one God in Jesus Christ,

revealed through the Holy Spirit.

May God, who has begun this good work in you,  
bring it to completion  
through the grace and goodness of this program.  
Through Christ Our Lord.  
Amen.

You may be seated.

### **Parents' Commitment**

Pastor (or designate of the pastor):

Parents, please stand.

Dear parents,  
at your child's baptism,  
you promised to bring the light of faith to your child,  
to faithfully bring him or her up in the Catholic faith,  
and to offer support along the journey.

Please respond, "I will" to the following.

- Will you bring your child to Mass and the preparation classes?
- Will you support your child in their quest for the sacrament?
- Will you renew your efforts to learn about the sacrament of confirmation and the Eucharist by your attendance at and renewed participation in the Mass?
- Will you faithfully insure that your child attends service opportunities and the retreat?
- Will you assist them in the choosing of a saint's name and their sponsor?

May God's grace continue to support and assist you  
in your role as Christian parents.

We thank you for the gift of your children to our parish.

We look forward to the celebration of this sacrament with you  
on (date and time of confirmation)

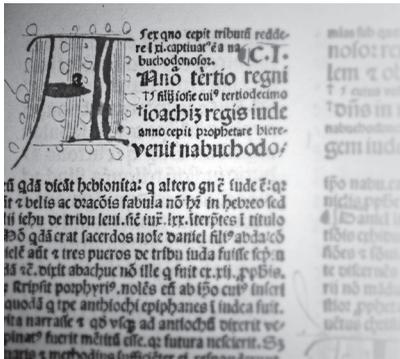
and to supporting you in your vocation as Christian parents.

May God, who has begun this good work in you,  
bring it to completion.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.





## BREAKING THE WORD

# HOMILETICS - Lent/Easter Season

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

### Eucharistic Joy

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT I FIND MYSELF REFERRING OFTEN TO THE WORDS of His Holiness Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. There is so much wisdom to unpack in his words, which are filled with a natural joy and missionary zeal that I can't help but pick up his text time and again and be both challenged and nourished by it.

For this Lent and Easter, allow me to offer one piece the Holy Father writes concerning the Eucharist for our reflection: "Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the church's daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance; it is a grace which we constantly need to implore" (Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 13).

During Lent, we strive to respond to Christ's call to conversion — *metanoia* — and so prepare to enter into the Easter mysteries with hearts set aflame by the Risen One, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Grateful remembrance, which, as Pope Francis reminds us, is at the heart of the Eucharist, empowers us to bear witness to Christ. It is why we heed Jesus' command, "Do this in memory of me." And this is what evangelization is about: bearing joyful witness to Jesus Christ!

As we listen to the words of the readings these months, ever mindful of the growth and natural "resurrection" taking place all about us in springtime, may we remember in gratitude the great gift of Christ's sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, and so be moved to proclaim that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again!

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 in New York City, Father Anthony presently serves the U.S. Province of his congregation as Vocation Director.

## Second Sunday of Lent March 1, 2015

### *God Did Not Spare His Own Son*

#### *Breaking the Word*

##### **Genesis 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18**

The reading relates the story of God asking Abraham to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. This extraordinary request, the sacred author notes, was a test to see how faithful Abraham was to God (see Gn 22:1, 12). Christian exegesis throughout the ages has noted the connection between this story and the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. In Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, Abraham's prescient words to his son Isaac that "God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust" (Gn 22:8) have found their fulfillment.

##### **Romans 8:31b-34**

Paul reminds the Roman Christians that God's merciful love manifested in Jesus Christ for our salvation is completely unmerited and without parallel. In Christ, we who have fallen in sin have received a pledge of future glory, for which "God did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all" (Rom 8:32).

##### **Mark 9:2-10**

The gospel passage for the Second Sunday of Lent traditionally depicts the transfiguration. The reference to "after six days" (Mk 9:2), which opens this pericope, likely refers to Jesus' first prediction of his passion on the cross (see Mk 8:21ff; cf. Mt 17:1-13; Lk 9:28-36). Moses and Elijah appear representing the Old Testament law and prophets, thereby placing Jesus in continuity with and the ultimate fulfillment of the faith of the ancestors. The heavenly voice declares Jesus to be his beloved Son and commands the disciples to listen to him (Mk 9:7; cf. Mk 1:11).

#### *Sharing the Word*

God's love is not something abstract or unreal. God indeed

spared Isaac, but did not spare his own Son Jesus Christ from death on the cross as a sacrificial offering for our sins. God's love reaches to the very depths of our humanity. How can we even begin to respond to this overwhelming gift of God's love? Let's look again at the story of Abraham and Isaac for a clue.

Abraham quickly responded to God's love by obeying his command, saying, "Here I am" (Gn 22:1). He responded like this because he trusted and loved God. And because Abraham obeyed God with complete trust, we're told that "in his descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing" (Gn 22:18). Therefore, our own response to God's love is through trust and obedience. Abundant blessings will result because we can never outdo God's graciousness. This is how much God loves us: he did not spare his only Son in order that we might find our salvation, and so receive his abundant blessings.

Lent is a time when we are challenged to remove from our hearts all that keeps us from truly loving God and from responding to God's love by trusting obedience. We do this so that, when Easter comes, we will listen to Christ our Savior and faithfully carry out God's will, just as Abraham did.

At every Mass, we celebrate the gift of Christ's sacrificial love on the wood of the cross. The Eucharist challenges us to discover how we can deepen our trust in God's will and respond in love. And like Peter, James, and John, we are able to affirm in our hearts that it is good for us to be gathered around the eucharistic table of our Lord, to offer God our Father the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for his love and tender-mercy, for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 9:5).

### *Praying the Word*

God our Father,  
every Sunday you summon us  
to the eucharistic table of your beloved Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ.  
We acknowledge that it is indeed good  
for us to gather as your people.  
Mercifully shower your Holy Spirit upon us  
so that we might listen intently to your Word  
and faithfully serve him,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## Third Sunday of Lent March 8, 2015

### *Life-Giving Law of the Lord*

#### *Breaking the Word*

##### **Exodus 20:1-17 or 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17**

The reading details Moses receiving the Ten Commandments atop Mount Sinai. The shorter version of the passage eliminates the elaboration on the commandment prohibiting false gods (4-6), as well as the explanation as to why there is a Sabbath rest (9-11). The fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex 20:12), is the first commandment that is attached to a promise for those who fulfill it, namely, longevity of life in the Promised Land.

##### **1 Corinthians 1:22-25**

Paul speaks of God's wisdom confounding the wisdom of the ages. The cross seems unreasonable to Jews and Greeks alike, but for Christians it stands at the center of apostolic preaching and the mystery of faith.

##### **John 2:13-25**

The evangelist recounts the story of Jesus driving out the merchants and moneychangers in the temple precincts during Passover. Jesus identifies himself with the temple and offers a mysterious prediction of his own passion and resurrection (19-22). John indicates that because of his signs (i.e., the wedding at Cana [2:1-12] and the temple cleansing [2:13-25]), "many began to believe in his name" (Jn 2:23).

#### *Sharing the Word*

There is a lot of talk in the media about people's rights. The U.S. Supreme Court is always being asked to adjudicate cases of groups and individuals who feel that their Constitutional rights have been violated. With every right comes a duty. For example, the right to free speech that we all enjoy comes with the duty to speak the truth. This means that we cannot lie and claim, for example, that a building is on fire when in fact it is not. Freedom of speech comes with the duty to

always speak the truth in charity for one's neighbor.

The Ten Commandments are oftentimes viewed in a negative fashion. There are a lot of "You shall not . . ." statements in the commandments. But if we think of them as ten rights and duties that we enjoy and for which we are responsible, then we can begin to appreciate the commandments as life-giving, as "more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey" (Ps 19:11).

Take the story of the Exodus. Prior to God giving Moses the Ten Commandments, the Hebrew people were slaves in Egypt. They cried out, and God heard their prayers. Through Moses, God liberated his people from slavery, they crossed dry-shod through the Red Sea (cf. Ex 14:22, 29; 15:19), and in our first reading we encounter Moses and the people in the Sinai Desert. While they were enslaved in Egypt, they were not free to exercise their religion, to worship God and to publicly practice their faith (see Ex 3:12, 18). Therefore, in the first three commandments God gave to his people, we find the right to what we refer to in modern times as freedom of religion. And along with that right comes the duty to worship God alone, to adore and to love God, and to practice one's faith.

Our right to freedom of religion comes with the duty to practice our faith. Yet, all too often, we see our fellow Christians, and perhaps even ourselves, not "practicing what we preach." We all know the church's teachings on various moral questions, yet studies indicate that many Roman Catholics choose to ignore their duties and go against the church's teaching. We all know the church's teachings about loving our neighbor, doing justice for the oppressed, and being people of charity. Yet we see people who are homeless, hungry, and still more who are without a decent job. There's the sad reality that immigrants are not welcomed as brothers and sisters but sometimes castigated as illegal aliens. Yes, along with rights come important, sacred duties to be fulfilled. This is our common vocation as Christians.

### *Praying the Word*

Eternal Father,  
in this sacred season of Lent,  
you invite us to conversion for the sake of the kingdom.  
Help us to recognize that in Christ Jesus  
the life-giving law of the Spirit  
has set us free  
from the law of sin and death.  
This we pray through the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Lent  
March 15, 2015

*God is Rich in Mercy*

*Breaking the Word*

**2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23**

The reading describes the state of affairs in the ancient Near East. From about the year 597 until roughly 538 B.C., God's people were exiled from the Promised Land to the land of Babylon, "where they became servants of the king of the Chaldeans" (2 Chr 36:20). The sacred author recounts that God — in mercy and compassion — sent prophets to the people, but "they mocked the messengers of God, despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets, until the anger of the Lord against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy" (2 Chr 36:16).

**Ephesians 2:4-10**

Paul describes for the Ephesians how God is rich in mercy and ever gracious in and through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is through Christ that we have been created "for the good works that God has prepared in advance" (Eph 2:10) for his beloved.

**John 3:14-21**

The gospel passage comes from the discussion of Jesus with the Pharisee Nicodemus. Jesus describes God's immense love for the world in sending his Son not to condemn it, "but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17). Living in the truth of Christ brings light into a darkened world.

*Sharing the Word*

In a sense, we can look at the Babylonian Exile as symbolic of our sinful past. Because of our sins, we found ourselves separated from God, like the exiles were from the temple and the Promised Land. We

were in unfamiliar territory, slaves of our bad habits, addictions, and vices, and not able to offer to God fitting worship and praise. Sin and evil can hold us captive in a land of exile, apart from God, if we do not place our trust in divine mercy.

But we are not without hope! We are no longer exiles. In Saint Paul's words, "God, who is rich in mercy, [and] because of the great love he had for us . . . brought us to life with Christ" (Eph 2:4, 5b). God loves us and cares for each one of us tenderly. But how do we know the Father's love? What "proof" do we have that God loves us?

The proof of God's love for us is found in the fact that, despite the countless sins of humanity which seemed to mock the God who created us out of love, God so loved the world that he bestowed upon us the abundance of his mercy in sending our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God's only-begotten Son is the proof of the Father's deep and abiding love and mercy.

In the everlasting sign of God's mercy and love, Jesus, innocent and without sin, stretched out his arms between heaven and earth. Christ gave himself up to death for our salvation and was nailed to a cross. Jesus came not only to forgive us our sins, but he came to give us life. This new life starts in the waters of baptism.

In the Eucharist, we remember Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, and we look for the coming of that day when he will return to give us the fullness of joy and peace. The Eucharist is the memorial of our liberation from sin and evil through Christ's blood, poured out on the cross. It is Christ who has restored us to the Promised Land of God's eternal kingdom. And he it is who gives us new life in communion with the Holy Trinity and all of humanity.

### *Praying the Word*

Almighty and ever living God,  
you so loved the world  
that in the fullness of time you sent your only-begotten Son  
and through him you have called us to share  
in your abundant life.  
May our every thought, word, and action  
redound to your glory  
and benefit the salvation of souls.  
This we ask in faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Lent  
March 22, 2015

*Christ the Source of Eternal Salvation*

*Breaking the Word*

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant God will make with his people following their exile in the land of the Babylonians. Christian exegesis has seen the fulfillment of God's promised covenant, revealed in this pericope, in Jesus Christ and in the new covenant sealed in his blood, for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Jer 31:34; Mt 26:27-28).

**Hebrews 5:7-9**

This passage is situated in the section of the letter where the author of Hebrews offers his theology of Christ the High Priest. The two verses comprising the reading note how Jesus' suffering was done out of obedience to the Father, and thus "he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb 5:9) and was constituted as eternal High Priest (5:10).

**John 12:20-33**

This passage comes shortly after Jesus entered Jerusalem five days before Passover (12:1, 12). Jesus indicated to the gathered crowd that "whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life" (Jn 12:25). Jesus calls upon the Father to glorify him, and a heavenly voice confirms his request, whereby Jesus notes that his death will draw everyone to himself (see Jn 12:32).

*Sharing the Word*

Like the people of Jeremiah's time, our nation and culture seek to remove from our midst any mention of God. Call it "political correctness" if you will, but it is neither political nor correct! As a result, our children grow up with a sense of fear — fear of being harmed in schools, fear of gangs and drugs, etc. — rather than a sense of love and community. Since God's law of love is removed from the public square, our families are destabilized and even destroyed. Sin and evil

flourish because, I believe, we have forgotten the law of love that God has inscribed in our hearts: to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Mt 22:34-40).

In the Gospel, however, we see a way out. Jesus declares that “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:33). The saving effects of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection are for everyone. No one is excluded from the realm of divine mercy and love.

God promised this to the people of Jeremiah’s time saying, “I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34). It is only in Jesus Christ that this promise of God finds its fulfillment. For the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the whole world to himself, and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of our sins.

Faith in Christ is the way forward. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was obedient to the Father’s will, and so “became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Heb 5:9). Our Christian faith requires from us the same obedience that Jesus had. Baptism makes many demands of us in our respective vocations as husbands and wives, parents and children, single lay people, widows and widowers, and as priests and religious. Whatever our vocation is, we are all called to obedience — to listen to God’s law of love, written in our hearts, and to act on it.

If we wish to see society change for the better, to see our culture move from violence to love, then we ourselves need to bear witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, both in public and in private. This is what our Lenten journey is all about: the conversion of the heart from sin to grace, from evil to salvation, from alienation to reconciliation in Jesus Christ. During this final week before we enter into Holy Week, let our hearts resound with the words of Jesus: “Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will” (cf. Heb 10:9).

### *Praying the Word*

Merciful Father,  
in obedience to your will,  
your Son offered his life  
for our eternal salvation  
by shedding his blood on the cross  
for the forgiveness of our sins.  
Hear our prayers for your mercy and peace,  
and grant us your salvation.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion March 29, 2015

### *Hosanna in the Highest*

#### *Breaking the Word*

##### **Isaiah 50:4-7**

Isaiah speaks of the sufferings God's servant will endure because of his fidelity. The prophet's words reverberate throughout the passion narratives in the Gospels. Exactly who the suffering servant is remains enigmatic for exegetes. It could refer to the prophet himself, or to Israel (see Is 49:3), or to another person. The church has precisely set the suffering servant canticle in conjunction with the passion narrative in order to draw attention to the true suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ.

##### **Philippians 2:6-11**

Paul sings a hymn in praise of Jesus Christ, who became human and was obedient to the Father's will, even death by crucifixion. The hymn embodies some of Paul's finest theology. According to Paul, Jesus did not consider it problematic, despite his being "in the form of God" (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ), to take on the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών) in human likeness (see Phil 2:6-7). He further abased himself to die a cruel death in obedience to the Father and for our salvation (see Phil 2:8-11). Paul conveys a true love story here, one that the church echoes in praise of her beloved spouse not only in the eucharistic liturgy but at every praying of Sunday First Vespers.

##### **Mark 14:1—15:47**

In his commentary on the passion narrative, biblical scholar Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, notes that "the Gospel of Mark has been described as a passion narrative with a long introduction" ("The Gospel According to Mark," [NJB], ed. R. E. Brown, et al., Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990] 625). (Thus it is important to prepare for today by a thorough reading of the preceding chapters.) From the very beginning of the gospel text, Mark has been concerned with revealing Jesus as the Son of God (see 1:1). While heavenly voices (1:11; 9:7) and unclean

spirits (1:24) identify Jesus as the divine Son, it is not until the passion narrative that we encounter a human being doing so. It comes at the foot of the cross on the lips of a centurion (15:39). The passion fully reveals Jesus' identity and mission as the one who gave his life in ransom for the many (see Mk 10:45).

### Sharing the Word

In ancient times, "Palm Sunday' was not a thing of the past. Just as the Lord entered the Holy City that day on a donkey, so, too, the church saw him coming again and again in the humble form of bread and wine. The church greets the Lord in the Holy Eucharist as the one who is coming now, the one who has entered into her midst. At the same time, she greets him as the one who continues to come, the one who leads us toward his coming" (Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth Part II: Holy Week — From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2011] 10-11.).

In our joy today, we devoutly recall Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem and his sacrificial death. With the gift of the Holy Spirit and in the grace of the Eucharist, we enter into Christ's passion as we wait in joyful hope for his return in glory.

Christ's love does not end with his death, but continues with his resurrection at Easter. It continues each time we break the bread of life and drink from the chalice of salvation. It continues each time we recognize the true Son of the Father and proclaim, "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father!" (Phil 2:11).

### Praying the Word

Lord Jesus,  
you loved us so much  
that in the fullness of time  
you became a man like us in all things except sin.  
In obedience to the Father's will,  
you endured your passion  
and gave us new life in your resurrection.  
As we enter this Holy Week,  
enlighten us with your grace  
so that we might worthily celebrate  
the saving mysteries of our redemption.  
For you live and reign, forever and ever.  
Amen.

Holy Thursday  
Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper  
April 2, 2015

*As I Have Done for You, You Should Also Do*

*Breaking the Word*

**Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14**

This pericope is the story of the Passover meal of the ancient Hebrews prior to their escape from slavery in Egypt. The two verses (9-10) that the lectionary drops in today's liturgy simply dictate how the people were to cook the meal and leave nothing to waste. An unblemished lamb was to be sacrificed, roasted, and eaten along with unleavened bread, and the lamb's blood was to be sprinkled on the doorposts of the Hebrews' domiciles. The feast of Unleavened Bread becomes a memorial to be kept by Israel in order to commemorate the Passover and their liberation from Egypt (see Ex 12:14-20).

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

Paul recalls the tradition of the institution of the Eucharist. His rendering of the institution narrative closely resembles that which is found in the Gospel of Luke (see 22:19-20). He adds the teaching, not found elsewhere in the Gospels, that whenever the Christian community gathers to eat and drink the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, his death is proclaimed until his glorious return (see 1 Cor 11:26).

**John 13:1-15**

Unique to the Fourth Gospel is the tradition of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, in place of the institution of the Eucharist found in the synoptic and Pauline traditions. Perhaps John wished to illustrate what the implications of the Eucharist are rather than simply recall the traditional rendering of its institution. The act of foot-washing was typically done by household slaves; hence Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet (see Jn 13:8). Jesus points to his symbolic gesture of washing the feet of his followers as a new paradigm of loving service, a gift of self similarly required of all disciples (see Jn 13:12-15). John has thereby interpreted "Do this in memory of me" to be actualized as "love one another" (Jn 15:12, 17) (see Anthony J. Marshall, "The Eucharist as Sacrament of Social Justice: John 15:12-17," *Emmanuel* 114/4 [2008] 292-304).

## Sharing the Word

As we enter into the Sacred Triduum, it is helpful to recall the nature of a memorial. The reading from Exodus describes both Israel's memory of the Passover as well as the institution of its memorial to be celebrated from one generation to the next. Paul describes the apostolic tradition of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. Both of these events are memorials. In the Judeo-Christian understanding, memorials not only commemorate past events, they invite us into the mystery being celebrated. In other words, the Passover celebration for Jews and the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, along with the liturgical celebrations of the Triduum, are not history lessons. They bring about for us the historical reality that is commemorated.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, making reference to the Council of Trent, sums up the nature of the Eucharist as memorial. While lengthy, it is nevertheless worth quoting: "The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (i.e., makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit: [Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper 'on the night when he was betrayed,' [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse, the church, a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit" (1366).

May we live the grace of these holy days, aware that we are simultaneously recalling sacred history and entering into the saving mystery of the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection.

## Praying the Word

Almighty and ever living God,  
you once freed the ancient Hebrews  
from the chains of slavery  
to the bond of love,  
and you formed them into your chosen people Israel.  
May the Eucharist we celebrate  
free us from our own iniquities  
and enable us to live in freedom  
as your beloved daughters and sons.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Good Friday of the Lord's Passion April 18, 2014

*Jesus Became the Source of Eternal Life  
for All Who Obey Him*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Isaiah 52:13—53:12**

As was the case on Palm Sunday, the lectionary proposes for our first reading today another canticle of the suffering servant of the Lord from so-called Deutero-Isaiah. It is a moving pericope, filled with vivid imagery describing an altruistic servant who, on behalf of the people, “makes himself an offering for sin” (Is 53:10). It is impossible for Christians to not see in these words the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who having taken upon himself our sins, suffered on the cross for our eternal salvation.

#### **Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9**

The author of Hebrews was writing to a community that had endured much adversity and suffering and was in need of encouragement in the faith (see Heb 2:1; 3:12; 4:14; 11:1-3; 12:1-29). It is a marvelous piece of Christian exhortation which has homiletic overtones, albeit situated in a letter. The passage is very comforting, describing Jesus as a compassionate High Priest who is able to sympathize with our plight (14-15). In the context of Good Friday, the description of priestly sacrifice lends itself to John's passion narrative where Jesus is revealed as willingly offering himself on the cross.

#### **John 18:1—19:42**

In John's Gospel, Jesus is fully aware of the course of events from the moment of the Last Supper (see 13:1-3), to his betrayal in the garden (see 18:4), to his discourse with Caiaphas and trial before Pilate. Jesus is in charge. His death was truly a sacrifice: his life was not taken from him, like that of a passive victim, but rather he willingly offered his life on the cross. This detail of John's account — Jesus' knowledge of his fate and his willingness to suffer and die — should not be overlooked.

## *Sharing the Word*

I had the privilege of studying Scripture in the Holy Land during a semester while in seminary. One of the most moving moments for me was when our instructor took us on a “biblical way of the cross,” which meant that we would be walking in the footsteps of Jesus from the Upper Room, to the garden, to the praetorium, and finally to Calvary.

The one thing that struck me while standing in Gethsemane was the view Jesus had of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that he would have seen Judas and the soldiers coming for him, “burning torches and weapons” (Jn 18:3) in hand. Our professor pointed out that the garden’s location lends itself to easy escape through the Kidron valley, and Jesus could have fled under cover of darkness and avoided the passion. But he did not; he stayed and endured all that followed, ending with an agonizing death. Why? One word: love! “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13). How wondrous to be considered the friends of Jesus!

## *Praying the Word*

Righteous Father,  
out of love for us,  
your Son, Jesus Christ,  
willingly chose to endure his passion  
so as to break the chains of sin and evil  
that kept us from you and one another,  
and he transferred us into the kingdom.  
May we spend this holy day  
in the light of Christ’s passion  
and in the hope of his resurrection.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Resurrection of the Lord  
Easter Sunday  
April 5, 2015

*Christ is Risen, Alleluia!*

*Breaking the Word*

**Acts 10:34a, 37-43**

Peter's words to Cornelius and the Gentiles at Caesarea form the context of the reading. Cornelius, at the bidding of an angel (see Acts 10:3ff), asked Peter to come to his house so that they might hear the proclamation of the Good News (see Acts 10:33). In our Easter liturgy, we hear the kerygma, or apostolic preaching, of Jesus Christ who was "hanged on a tree" but raised by God on the third day (Acts 10:39b-40).

**1 Corinthians 5:6b-8**

The reading connects with the Holy Thursday readings, where the story of the Passover was recounted. Here Paul declares: "Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).

**John 20:1-9**

Today's Gospel recounts the story of Mary Magdalene being the first to see the empty tomb and Simon Peter and the beloved disciple verifying her report. The Gospels do not describe how the resurrection occurred; they simply report the fact that his tomb was empty. Matthew's account is the only one to note that guards were placed at the tomb's entrance in order to prevent the disciples from removing his body and claiming he had risen (see Mt 27:62-66).

*Sharing the Word*

There is something peculiar about our Christian faith. We believe that not only did God send his Son, born of the Virgin Mary, one like us in all things except sin, but that he also willingly gave his life for our salvation. And this is the clincher: he rose from the dead three

days after his crucifixion! It is too fantastic a story to be made up. It is Jesus' resurrection that probably prevents many from accepting the faith (see Acts 17:32-33). It is so incredible that none of the evangelists dared to even describe how the resurrection occurred, except for Matthew who offers some external signs but does not describe the event (see Mt 28:1-8).

The point is that our faith rests on the confession of Mary Magdalene, the apostles Simon Peter and Paul, Cornelius who believed Peter's words, the early church which preserved Paul's epistles, and countless others who bore witness to Christ with their lives down through the centuries to our own day. It is up to us, therefore, to continue to tell the Good News of salvation: Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again as judge of the living and the dead.

### *Praying the Word*

Our hearts rejoice,  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
for you conquered sin and death  
by rising from the dead,  
and you opened for us  
the gates to life eternal.  
May we spend this Easter  
offering you grateful praise,  
for you are Lord, forever and ever.  
Amen.

Second Sunday of Easter  
Sunday of Divine Mercy  
April 12, 2015

*Faith Conquers Sin and Evil*

*Breaking the Word*

**Acts 4:32-35**

The evangelist Luke describes an ideal Christian community: all are of “one heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). In their unity, the apostles bear witness in power to the resurrection of the Lord and build up the community of believers.

**1 John 5:1-6**

Having defined God as love (see 1 Jn 4:16), John illustrates for his readers that faith in Jesus Christ conquers sin and evil in our world. By faithfully obeying God’s commandments (see Jn 13:34-35; cf. Heb 5:9), God’s love is made manifest and the baptized are revealed as God’s children.

**John 20:19-31**

The Gospel is situated both in the evening of that first Easter and one week later. The risen Christ appears to his disciples, who are huddled in fear in the Upper Room. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them and commissions them to be agents of mercy and forgiveness. It is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1-2, where the Spirit, the breath of God, hovers over the chaos and creation is brought forth. A new creation has now dawned because of the resurrection. It is the age of mercy and grace. Unfortunately, Thomas is missing and doubts the others’ reports of having seen the Lord. A week later, he is reconciled with Christ, who shows him his wounds, the signs of divine mercy.

*Sharing the Word*

Today, on Divine Mercy Sunday, we remember the tender

mercies of God celebrated in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. It is this mystery we proclaim this day and into which we enter more deeply every time we celebrate the Eucharist.

Pope Francis has regularly called the church to rediscover the mercy of God and to witness to it in a fresh and convincing manner. At an Angelus address, Pope Francis said: “There is no limit to the divine mercy, which is offered to everyone. . . . The Lord is always ready to roll away the tombstone of our sins, which separate us from him, the light of the living” (April 6, 2014).

The readings and orations for this Second Sunday of Easter draw the church’s attention to the love and mercy of our God. Christ is waiting, to borrow the Holy Father’s expression, “to roll away the tombstone of our sins” and to reconcile us with him and one another, just as he reconciled doubting Thomas. We ask God to give us the courage to not only welcome divine mercy into our own homes and hearts and communities, but to be instruments of reconciliation and peace for others. By our proclamation of the Gospel, we hope that countless others will come to believe in Jesus, and that through this faith all might have a life in his name (see Jn 20:31).

### *Praying the Word*

Father of mercies,  
through the death and resurrection of your Son,  
you reconciled the world to yourself  
and you sent the Holy Spirit among us  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
Through the church’s ministry,  
and by living holy lives,  
may we experience and spread your mercy each day.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Third Sunday of Easter April 19, 2015

*Peace Be with You!*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Acts 3:13-15, 17-19**

Having cured a crippled man who was begging at the temple area around the time Peter and John went for mid-afternoon prayer, Peter delivers a speech exhorting his listeners to “repent . . . and be converted, that [their] sins may be wiped away” (Acts 3:19).

#### **1 John 2:1-5a**

John proclaims Christ to be the expiation of the sins of the world. As we keep his commandments, God’s love is perfectly manifested in the hearts and lives of all believers.

#### **Luke 24:35-48**

The Gospel concludes the story of Cleopas and his companion’s return from Emmaus where they encounter the risen Lord in the “breaking of the bread” (35). Christ appears to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem and offers them the gift of peace. The text provides a fitting conclusion to Luke’s Gospel and a preview of his second volume, Acts. Jerusalem serves as both the starting-point in Luke’s Gospel, as seen in the infancy narratives, and the point of departure for the early Christian witness to the risen Christ (Lk 24:48).

### *Sharing the Word*

In many of the post-resurrection appearances to the disciples, the evangelists Luke and John show Christ saying to his disciples, “Peace be with you” (see Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 21, 26). Peace seems to be the hallmark of the risen Christ. His offer of peace to the fearful disciples becomes a source of comfort and reconciliation for them. What about us today?

Our world is troubled by terrorism, violence, civil unrest, and manifestations of sin and evil. The gift of peace offered us by the risen Christ is seemingly absent from this wondrous world of ours. Or is it?

Christians are called to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. Luke makes this clear at the end of today's gospel passage. We are commissioned by Christ to reveal his mercy, love, and peace. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit — given us by the risen Christ — to bring the peace of Christ to all around us. At every Eucharist, the church prays for the gift of Christ's peace, asking the Lord Jesus to look not on our sins but on our faith. Resurrection peace does not mean a lack of tension or strife. On the contrary, it comes from a life of fidelity and is rooted in persevering faith, hope, and love.

### *Praying the Word*

God our Father,  
you bathed our world  
with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit  
and the peace of the risen Christ.  
May we bear witness to your mercy and peace  
at every moment of our lives.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Good Shepherd Sunday  
April 26, 2015

*Christ the Good Shepherd*

*Breaking the Word*

**Acts 4:8-12**

Peter continues his apostolic preaching, this time before the Sanhedrin. He courageously bears witness to the risen Christ, declaring him to be the sole source of eternal salvation.

**1 John 3:1-2**

John declares the love of God for each one of us as his beloved children. Although we are aware of this mysterious grace throughout our lives, much will be revealed when we see him as he truly is.

**John 10:11-18**

Jesus tells us that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He then compares hired hands, who run when confronted with danger, to the true shepherd who is not afraid to defend and to sacrifice himself for the flock. It is important to note the emphasis on Jesus as the shepherd who gathers and protects the one flock of God.

*Sharing the Word*

“I am the Good Shepherd,” says the Lord, “and I know mine and mine know me” (Jn 10:14). Jesus knows us and recognizes us, and God our Father claims us as his own children (see 1 Jn 3:1-2). Jesus doesn’t simply recognize us as if we were famous. There’s no “Dancing with the Stars” in the spiritual life! The Good News is that despite our sins, Jesus personally knows and loves each one of us. He loves us beyond our wildest imagining. We can simply be ourselves with the Lord Jesus. We have no need to act or put on a false front, for God knows our hearts even better than we know ourselves.

Because God knows us, he knows what we need in order to grow in holiness and truth. Through prayer, the Scriptures, and the sacraments, we come to experience God's love. We come to know how to live as God's beloved sons and daughters. Through the sacraments especially, God gives us grace in order to avoid sin and evil and so enter into the safety and life of the kingdom. Young and old, we are brought into God's family and are bathed with the light of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is sustaining food for our journey to the Promised Land!

Through penance and the anointing of the sick, we come to know God's tender mercy and healing touch. God forgives our sins, heals us of our infirmities, and strengthens us to daily take up the cross and follow Jesus. Through the gift of matrimony, a man and a woman come to experience the awesome power of God's sanctifying love. Husbands and wives become co-creators with God in creating homes and families through an intimate, life-long communion.

Because Christ knows us, he has gifted us with his church, a community of friendship and faith. But who will provide the blessings of word and sacrament to the next generation of Catholics? On Good Shepherd Sunday, we invoke the Master of the harvest to send out laborers — priests and consecrated religious and dedicated laity to teach, to serve, and to accompany his holy people.

### *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")*





## EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

### Film Review



**SON OF MAN**  
Mark Domford-  
May,  
South Africa, 2006

John Christman,  
SSS

A group of women gather on a busy street in a large South African city to protest the disappearance of the children of their country. Weeping and shouting, "Stop killing our children!" they place their infants on the street to demonstrate their sense of heartbreak and abandonment. Unexpectedly, a man walks down the street, sits down with the crying children and takes one of them in his arms, and simply holds the child in an act of loving solidarity. The man's name is Jesus, and the film's name is *Son of Man*.

Set in contemporary South Africa in a time of social and political unrest, *Son of Man* re-imagines the story of Jesus in a South African context; altering course from so many Jesus films that slavishly represent the gospel narrative, often with a lack of imagination. *Son of Man* liberates itself from historicism, while invigorating the story by thoroughly inculcating the gospel narrative.

This is done in a myriad of compelling ways. It pictures the Blessed Virgin Mary as a strong matriarchal woman who not only stands up to political authorities with her own moral authority, but also teaches her young son the harsh realities of the world. The apostles are a ragtag group of men and women seeking some way out of poverty and political strife through various and contentious means. Impressively, even the political dimension of the Gospels, so emphasized in current biblical scholarship in relation to the effects of Roman occupation, is revitalized and brought to the fore through the complex machinations of power struggles in a South African context.

And into this violent milieu, a child is born; and it could be said, incidentally, the massacre of the innocents has never been so powerfully portrayed. Yet into this context, a child is miraculously born, a child of hope, a child named Jesus, who in his adulthood wishes to preach non-violence, solidarity, and the right to free determination from foreign powers. The results of all of this are not only stunning but terribly thought provoking. Never has the gospel story seemed so

immediate and true. The film is as much a contemporary contextual theology as it is a scripture story.

*Son of Man* is a perfect film for Lent. It tunnels through all the accretions of time and tradition that too often make the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ a pious bedtime story. Instead, *Son of Man* gives a glimpse into the personal, familial, and societal stakes of Jesus' times and actions. As such, it stands as a high-water mark for all Jesus films that follow.

## Art Review

"The Church in the Modern World," even the phrase is so filled with possibilities. When the Second Vatican Council promulgated the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), it presented a document not only in step with the social, cultural, political, and religious currents of its day, but it also articulated a vision of the relationship between the "church" and the "world" that remains exceedingly relevant 50 years later.

This came as a big surprise to me. As a young seminarian, the prospect of reading church documents, let alone a document written in the 1960s, seemed a rather dull and laborious exercise. So, it was likely with a strong cup of coffee that I begrudgingly sat down to studiously slog my way through yet another lengthy document. However, what I found contained in its pages not only engaged me, but also positively expanded my perception of the church and its mission in our world. Moreover, as my theological studies deepened, I found that so many exciting current trends in theology could be traced back to that inspiring vision presented in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Having been trained as an artist, my natural inclination was to pick up a brush and begin to visualize these compelling ideas with paint and canvas. My hope was to present images of an inculturated church, yet one that was nevertheless touched by numerous global influences. As the document itself states, ". . . the church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life, recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the church herself" (GS, 58).

In a contemporary context, I believe this means the uneasy tension of existing within the currents of modern, post-modern, pre-modern, and even post-colonial realities. The great philosopher and sociologist

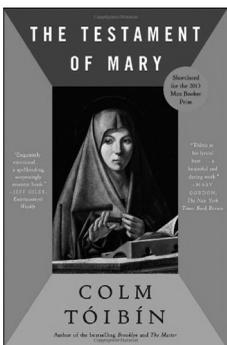
THE CHURCH  
IN THE  
MODERN  
WORLD-  
A Series of  
Paintings  
(Front cover  
and inside back  
cover)  
John Christman,  
SSS

Charles Taylor calls this a “crossed-pressured” existence, and I find that an apt phrase to describe the experience of the church in the modern world today.<sup>1</sup> And yet, despite, or perhaps even through, these overlapping and contending worldviews, grace continues to shine through our uniquely human experience.

Visually, I tried to evoke this complex reality through the juxtaposition colors, shapes, patterns, and styles from differing art historical periods and cultural traditions. The results are often lively if a bit disorienting. In many of the paintings, I also tried to depict a person attempting to navigate this multifaceted reality. This is certainly the case with *The Church in the Modern World — Saint Joseph Cathedral, Beijing, China* (cover image). Here this noble man struggles to make a living recycling discarded cardboard that he has collected and piled atop his bicycle. By placing this figure front and center, I hoped to call to mind the centrality of the human person in the church’s perception and that inspiring phrase which begins *Gaudium et Spes*, “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men (and women) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts” (GS, 1). If these paintings “raise an echo in the hearts” of viewers, than I feel I’ve accomplished something.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) pg. 594 see Part V: 16 pgs 594-618.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Christman, “The Church in the Modern World” <http://newtheologyreview.com/index.php/ntr/article/view/36/254> accessed January 21, 2015. In this article for New Theology Review I touch on many of the same themes as to the inspiration and theological underpinnings of my painting series: *The Church in the Modern World*.



**THE TESTAMENT  
OF MARY**  
Colm Tóibín,  
New York, NY:  
Scribner 2012  
(Reprint 2014), 96 pp.

## Book Review

Each of the four Gospels provides its readers with a passion narrative. Not surprisingly, the three synoptic authors agree substantially on the details of the narrative. Also not surprisingly, the Gospel according to John tells the story of Jesus’ passion and death from a different theological perspective. Christian tradition has accepted the inspired nature of these four accounts of Jesus’ last days. How to understand and interpret these accounts has been an ongoing challenge for biblical scholars as well as for all Christian believers.

By contrast, the Gospels are relatively silent when it comes to the person of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is a prominent character in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. She makes cameo

appearances in the ministry sections of the synoptics and a more well-known appearance in John's Gospel in the story of the wedding feast at Cana (2:1-11). Perhaps surprising to many Christians is that Mary is not mentioned by any of the three synoptic writers as being present at Jesus' crucifixion. It is the Johannine account that has so deeply influenced the Christian imagination. Mary is said to be at the foot of the cross with the Beloved Disciple: "Woman, behold your son. . . Behold your mother" (19:25-27).

In his novel *The Testament of Mary*, Colm Tóibín provides an imagined account of the last days of Jesus' life from the perspective of his mother. As the story begins, Mary is now growing old and is being visited by two men whom we may infer are two of the evangelists. They visit Mary because they are interested in coaxing her to tell them stories about Jesus. We learn that she is weary of their questioning. Unlike the portrait of the gentle, long-suffering Mary that we have been given by artists and spiritual writers of the two millennia of the Christian tradition, Tóibín's Mary is an aging, self-willed woman, who at this point in her life would prefer to be left alone. She tolerates the intrusions of her two visitors.

It is from this perspective of a Mary who is nearing the end of her life that we hear her account of the weeks and days leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Mary recalls the events of the wedding at Cana, the calming of the storm at sea, and the raising of Lazarus. These events brought Jesus under the watchful eyes of informers for the authorities. Mary is told that Jesus is in danger, but she is unable to convince him to come home with her and stop his public actions. Subsequently, she gets the news of his arrest and the decision that he is to be crucified.

The heart of Tóibín's book is his Ignatian-like meditation on the events of the passion from Mary's imagined perspective. Tóibín takes us inside Mary's memory as she relives her witnessing of the choice of Barabbas over her son, their painful meeting on the road to Calvary, and the crucifixion itself. I found Tóibín's text to offer a poignant reflection on the passion from a unique perspective. Here we feel the day's searing heat, experience Mary's helplessness to do anything to stop the events from happening, and take seriously the possibility of her being arrested and killed.

It is during Mary's retelling of the scene of the crucifixion that we are jolted by an unsuspected twist in her story. Perhaps with one eye on the synoptic accounts of the crucifixion where Mary is not mentioned as being present, and the other eye on the Johannine account where

Mary is stationed at the foot of the cross, Tóibín's Mary is there, but almost secretively. A main line of Tóibín's reflection on the passion is that the authorities were not only seeking to arrest and kill Jesus, but also anyone connected to him, including his disciples and even his mother. Perhaps the absence of Mary at Calvary in the synoptics bears witness to this tradition. In Tóibín's story, Mary is there, but cannot go close to the cross for fear of being arrested. In the Synoptics, we read that there were women present at the crucifixion of Jesus, but that they were "looking on from afar" (Mk 15:40-41 and par.).

In Tóibín's reflection, Mary is fearful for her life and follows the advice of her companions to quietly leave the scene of the crucifixion before Jesus' death, undetected by those watching her. This she does. Subsequently, she is spirited away from Jerusalem and its perceived dangers. In this imagined account, Mary is not there to witness Jesus' death or to receive the corpse of her son after it was taken down from the cross. Instead, Tóibín's Mary later regrets her decision to leave before her son's death in order to save her own life. As she lives with the loss of her husband and her son, she wishes things had been different. She dreams of holding the dead body of her son. She dreams *The Pietà*.

I found *The Testament of Mary* to be a spiritually enriching as well as challenging book: enriching in its offering of new insights into what must have been an excruciatingly painful experience for Mary; challenging in offering a non-traditional approach to my appreciation and understanding of the figure of Mary. This short book has become for me a powerful and insightful form of the Stations of the Cross. Christians, especially Catholics with a long-standing devotion to Mary, will find in this book a Mary that struggled to understand and accept the loss of husband and son. Aging mothers (and fathers) who must deal with the loss of spouse and/or child can find in Mary someone who understands their pain, their confusion, their depression. Here we find not a Christmas-Mary who celebrates with joy the birth of her son, but a Calvary-Mary who mourns his death for the rest of her life. Mourners can find in Mary a rich source of spiritual support in the dark moments of personal loss which seem to be so overwhelming. Mary is not only the sorrowful mother at the foot of the cross, but the mournful mother who continued to live her life with the sadness of her great personal losses.

George S. Matejka, PhD  
Ursuline College  
Pepper Pike, Ohio

## Poetry

### Lifts Her Like A Chalice

The weekday Mass at 6 a.m.  
brings the old folks out  
from bungalows  
around the church.  
They move like caterpillars  
down sidewalks,  
some with canes,  
some on walkers.

Father Doyle says the Mass  
and then goes back to the rectory  
to care for his mother  
who cannot move or speak  
because of a stroke.

And every Sunday at noon  
when the church is full,  
Father Doyle, in full vestments,  
wheels his mother  
in a lump  
down the middle aisle  
and lifts her like a chalice  
and places her in the front pew  
before he ascends to the altar.

Sometimes at night,  
when his mother's asleep,  
Father Doyle comes back to the church  
and rehearses in the dark  
three hymns she long ago  
asked him to sing at her funeral.

He practices the hymns  
because the doctor said  
she could go at any time.  
When that time comes,  
he doesn't want to miss a note.  
The last thing she ever said was  
"Son, I'll be listening."

Donal Mahoney



## *EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS*

James Nagle

One day, I walked the mile from my home to church, Saint Paschal Baylon in Highland Heights, Ohio. Father Paul Bernier, SSS, was the celebrant of the weekday liturgy. The Gospel was about how it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into heaven. In his excellent homily, Father Paul said that in some cases — not all — wealth can give a person a false sense of identity, a false sense of security, causing the individual to think he or she doesn't need to rely on God because the person believes life can be "bought."

Over the years, I have attempted to live a simple life in the spirit of Saint Francis. Never having learned to drive, I have never owned a car. In 2001, I turned off my TV and never looked back. I never possessed a computer. And there was a nine-year stretch when I didn't have any phone services. Early each October, I renew my private vow of simplicity before a Franciscan priest on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.

When I got home from Saint Paschal's, I opened up my refrigerator. I saw that I had very little food. Not that I was going to starve, but as a diabetic I do have to be careful of my diet. At 3:00, I prayed, "Lord, please send me someone with some food." I said, "Please and Thank You" in advance and asked in the name of Jesus. At 5:00, walking out my front door I spotted a blue bag tied to the door handle. My neighbor, a wonderful Lutheran lady named Margaret, decided to share some vegetables from her summer garden: green beans, broccoli, and yellow beans. I prepared and ate some, saving the rest for later. I said, "Thank you, Lord. You and Margaret answered my prayer."

I then walked to the corner, where I sat in the shelter and waited for my bus. A middle-aged woman approached carrying a medium-sized brown bag from the bakery. She spoke, "It is approaching the dinner hour; may I offer you some bread?" My response, "No thank you. I'm diabetic. I'm not supposed to be eating white bread." She said, "It's pumpernickel!" We exchanged smiles. She reached into the bakery bag and brought forth a plastic bag of the brown bread. "Take as much as you want," she said. I just took three small slices from the top. "You know, lady," I said, "I find this most interesting. I prayed today that the Lord would send someone with food. My neighbor shared from her garden, and now you are offering me bread, the symbol of the Eucharist. You are offering me the bread of life." Her bus came before mine. She got up, smiled, and said, "God be with you."

As her bus pulled away, I said, "Lord, you are always teaching me. You have said that if ever I need anything to truly ask in the name of Jesus."





The Church in the Modern World - Notre Dame Paris, France  
Watercolor, acrylic paint, wax crayon, pencil



The Church in the Modern World - Santa Cruz Church, Manila, The Phillipines  
Oil on canvas

**“... the church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary way of life, recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the church herself.”**

*Gaudium et Spes 58*

