

# Emmanuel



Eucharistic Spirituality

July/August 2017



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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 123 Number 4



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## FROM THE EDITOR

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, his November 2013 apostolic exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis sets forth a very clear vision of Christian service: “The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a *face-to-face encounter with others*, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.” The Holy Father concludes by saying, “The Son of God, by becoming flesh, *summoned us to the revolution of tenderness*” (88).

Two years ago, I was in Saint Peter’s Square in Rome along with other leaders of provinces and regions of my religious institute, the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, from around the world. It was a brilliant spring day and we were there with tens of thousands of pilgrims for the Wednesday papal audience. Our group was close to the front of the reserved section. A sense of anticipation built as we awaited Francis’ arrival. And suddenly, there he was!

He stood in a simple open vehicle, hands clutching a white bar to steady himself as the driver negotiated his way through the assembled mass of humanity several times. What struck me most that day — and still today as I look at the photo of the pope, his figure framed by the outstretched arms of a nun in gray habit — was his warm smile: broad and natural. I think every one of us there that day felt a strong sense of personal encounter and connection with him despite the sheer numbers.

The *encounter with Jesus Christ* is a powerful, life-altering event. The Gospels are filled with instances where people came to the rabbi from Nazareth, driven by need, desperation, or curiosity, and seeking a connection with God and with him. And they left changed by the

experience.

Those who serve others in the name of Christ are never simply technicians, moral theorists, or even practitioners of the human arts of communication. "Face-to-face encounter" is crucial, as Pope Francis underscores, if people are to feel understood, loved, have their humanity affirmed at the deepest level, and encounter God.

Elsewhere, Pope Francis speaks of "eucharistic tenderness," of the God who comes under signs of bread and wine to nourish, to renew, and to covenant himself to us with bonds of tenderness and love. Encounter, tenderness, compassion: these are the attributes of those who serve humanity as Christ in every age.

### **In This Issue**

Dorothy Day was a woman of complexity: an ideologue who in her youth underwent a powerful conversion and embraced the Gospel as the true path to liberation; a devoted mother and a public figure; a traditional Catholic and an activist who challenged both Church and society. You'll discover in Redemptorist Dennis Billy's essay how central the Eucharist was to Dorothy's faith and to her advocacy.

Begin there . . . and move on to other articles that witness as well to a Eucharist which can change lives and renew the world; and also Sister Dianne Bergant's reflections on the Sunday and solemnity readings for the months of July and August.



Anthony Schueller, SSS



*EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

## The Erasure of the Feminine in Early Church History

by Mary Grace Donohoe

*Scholars and Church authorities, including Pope Francis, are welcoming a renewed study of ancient texts and Church practices to better appreciate the role of women in the life and mission of the community of believers.*

Mary Grace Donohoe is a recent graduate of Stonehill College, Easton, Massachusetts. She studied political science and religious studies but focuses primarily on peacebuilding and conflict resolution, with special attention to the gendered-dynamics' impact on these disciplines. She can be reached at [donohoemarygrace@gmail.com](mailto:donohoemarygrace@gmail.com).

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARLY CHURCH IS OFTEN undervalued, or at a very minimum, not discussed as frequently as it ought to be. The influence and authority of Mary Magdalene have been undermined, if not completely thwarted, due to a gendered-biased interpretation of scriptural and pseudepigraphal texts during the foundational years of the church.

This bias has influenced our understanding of our Catholic tradition and history for centuries. Because of this, it is essential for scholars to reopen space for discussing what and whose histories are being told in the collection of ancient texts referred to as the canon of Sacred Scripture. While the value of canonical texts that most Catholics are familiar with should not be diminished, there is a need for a "gendered curiosity" in order to more fully understand how the narratives of women have been viewed and transmitted in Catholic tradition.

This refers to an inquiry into how historical understandings of gender have influenced the roles of men and women in the early church and how potentially these understandings have contributed to shaping our modern conception of the roles of women and men in the Church. There is a need to reevaluate the standards by which we understand why certain traditions and texts have been accepted into Church teaching and why others have been lost. In this gendered curiosity, important questions regarding whose stories are told in the accepted texts and traditions will be asked, and this curiosity will leave room for a better understanding of the silences in Church history.



## Sources

Canonical and noncanonical sources reveal a wealth of information regarding women's role in the development of the early church. It is clear from such texts that the authority of Mary Magdalene and that of Peter were often in conflict with each other. This is seen in how "Luke magnifies Peter and diminishes Mary, while John magnifies Mary and diminishes Peter."<sup>1</sup>

Feminist scholar Ann Graham Brock identifies that "texts with pro-Petrine tendencies significantly differ in their portrayals of Mary's status from those texts in which Peter holds a diminished position."<sup>2</sup> For example, the *Gospel of Peter* portrays Peter as witnessing Jesus' resurrection and narrating the entire text.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the four canonical Gospels, the text does not mention any women at the foot of the cross. Additionally, Mary Magdalene and the other women never receive a commission to deliver the Good News, as they do in most of the canonical Gospels. Also, according to the text, the women are not the first recipients of the resurrection news; the guards and the elders at the tomb are witnesses at Jesus' resurrection.

This reduces the women's role to a secondary, less essential one in the spreading of the Good News immediately after the resurrection. It also diminishes Mary Magdalene's role as an apostle to less than Paul's apostolic "requirements" of having known Jesus Christ and being given a specific mission on which to build a community of believers. In Paul's letters, apostleship is based on witnessing resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ and receiving a commission (1 Cor 15:5-9).<sup>4</sup>

Several noncanonical texts also portray this struggle for authority between Mary Magdalene and Peter. These include the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, and *Pistis Sophia*.<sup>5</sup> In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Peter attempts to have Mary leave the company of disciples because "women are not worthy of life" (*Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 114). If it is true that the church fathers composing the canon held a gender bias, it is possible to conclude that this text was not included in the canon, not because of Peter's diminishment of women, but because of Jesus' reaction to this dismissal from Peter. Jesus replies to Peter, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she, too, may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" (*Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 114).

Many feminist scholars have interpreted these passages as a conflict between Peter and Jesus over women's role in the Church, Peter



attempting to position women permanently beneath men and Jesus refuting this and stating that women can be positioned equally alongside men in the Church.<sup>6</sup> While there is much debate over what this meant, the essential takeaway is Jesus' denial of a request from Peter and Jesus' defense of Mary's position of authority among the disciples.

In the *Gospel of Thomas*, Mary is elevated in status while Peter only speaks twice. His status is portrayed as even less than that of Thomas, a clear diminishment of his authority when compared with other texts (*Gospel of Thomas*, Saying 113).

*A "gendered curiosity" can help to understand how the narratives of women have been viewed and transmitted in Catholic tradition.*

In the *Gospel of Mary*, there is a direct confrontation between Mary Magdalene and Peter. The text portrays Mary as the only recipient of an appearance of the risen Christ; she must then comfort the disciples and share her vision with them (*Gospel of Mary*, Chapters 5 and 9). This vision and proclamation of the Good News would have Mary categorized as an apostle, by Paul's standards as previously discussed. Scripture scholar Elaine Pagels interprets Peter in this text as someone "who not only fails to receive visions himself, but who also opposes and slanders the person gifted with visions."<sup>7</sup> Another disciple, Levi, challenges Peter's authority after his slandering of Mary. Peter's authority is undermined.

In *Pistis Sophia* 1, Peter directly challenges Mary again, saying, "My Lord, we are not able to suffer this woman who takes the opportunity from us, and does not allow anyone of us to speak." This indicates that Peter may feel threatened by the presence of a woman speaking, instead of him, and may interpret contributions from women as missed opportunities for men.

Later in the text, Peter says: "My Lord, let the women cease to question, that we may also question," indicating a similar feeling (*Pistis Sophia* 4.146). Jesus directly tells Mary: "Miriam, ... you are she whose heart is more directed to the kingdom of heaven than your brothers" (*Pistis Sophia* 1.17). Jesus' preference for Mary Magdalene, who Peter is arguably attempting to marginalize, aligns well with Jesus' preferential



option for the poor, since women were clearly on the margins of society in Jesus' culture and era.

### **Interpretation**

Segments of these texts reveal a gendered struggle for authority in the early Christian church. It is evident in the texts that Peter and Mary rarely, if ever, enjoy equal status in the same text. Texts where Mary is elevated often portray Peter as an antagonist who is humbled by the Lord or other disciples. Most of the texts where Mary is given a position of authority and Peter's weaknesses are revealed are not included in the canon, such as *Pistis Sophia*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Mary*.

Because these texts allude to a potential gender bias, both on the part of the authors (because of the struggle for authority between Peter and Mary) and on the part of the church fathers who determined what texts were to be considered "accurate" and thus included in the canon, it is essential for Catholics to acquire a "gendered curiosity" when questioning whose stories are being told in the canon and whose stories are neglected or undervalued. Many of the texts where Mary is in a position of authority are not included in the canon.

*The authority of Mary Magdalene and that of Peter were often in conflict with each other.*

The first text, *The Gospel of Peter*, may not have been included because of the rivalry between Peter and Mary, but it could have also not been included because of its failure to include some of the essential details reported in the canonical Gospels, particularly the presence of women at the cross. The other texts, including the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and *Pistis Sophia* could have been left out of the canon for several reasons, particularly because these texts were written after the four canonical Gospels.

However, when examining these texts in detail, Mary Magdalene's authority and special role with regard to Jesus is quite apparent, especially when that of the prominent apostle, Peter, is either reduced or diminished on Mary's behalf. These texts may have not been included partially because their portrayals of this woman in a position of influence.



Few theologians argue that these pseudepigraphal texts are not included in the canon due to a blatant dismissal of women. However, if texts such as Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (11:2-16; 14:33b-36) could be included in the canon, there is no reason for these texts to have been eliminated based on Peter's dismissal of women, since a similar dismissal appears in canonical letters from Paul. The argument that the Church fathers intentionally eliminated texts that undermined the status of women is void, due to the inclusion of such texts.

### *Study of Church history through a gendered lens is essential in developing a more accurate and complete history of the Catholic Church.*

The history of the Church for the past two millennia has already had its influence on the role and interpretation of women in the life and mission of the Church. Due to these long-standing traditions, there is no need to question and dissect every text and tradition with a new gendered lens.

However, there is a need for scholars of Catholic and religious studies to reevaluate the standards by which texts were considered canonical or noncanonical with a new gendered lens. This would not be with the intention of re-compiling the canon, but rather to shed a scholarly, critical light on the forgotten or intentionally-erased stories and the influence of women from early church history.

This influence is essential in understanding the formation of the church, and it is essential to study all of church history through a gendered lens in order to develop a more accurate and complete history of the Catholic Church.



#### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2003, 61.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, 65.
- <sup>3</sup> Peter Kirby, *The Gospel of Peter*, translated by Raymond Brown, (Early Christian Writings), <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter-brown.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Reading Real Women through the Undisputed Letters of Paul," in *Women and Christian Origins*, (London, Oxford University Press), 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, interpreted Harold Bloom, (New York, NY, and San Francisco, CA: Harper), 1992.

*Gospel of Mary*, Nag Hammadi Library, (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row), 1988. A translation of *Pistis Sophia* from a widely accepted academic source is challenging to find in English. Therefore, direct texts from *Pistis Sophia* are also found in Brock, *Mary Magdalene*.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books), 1981.

<sup>7</sup> Elaine Pagels, "Visions, Appearances, and Apostolic Authority: Gnostic and Orthodox Traditions," *Gnosis: Festschrift Für Hans Jonas*, (Ed. Barbara Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht), 1978, 424.

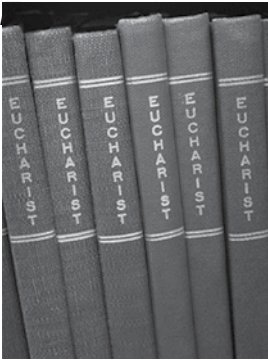
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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Rev Robert W. Gralapp  
Diocese of Sioux City

Msgr. Douglas W. Saunders  
Archdiocese of Los Angeles

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



## EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Christ Is All and In All

by John Zupez, SJ

*The Church's teaching on the universality of God's plan of salvation presents us as Catholics with a unique missionary challenge and a graced opening to the future.*

John Zupez, SJ, has most recently taught theology in seminaries in Nigeria and Zimbabwe for nine years before retiring to prison minister for the Diocese of Kansas City-Saint Joseph, Missouri. He has authored more than 50 articles in spiritual and theological journals.

"THERE IS NO LONGER GREEK AND JEW, CIRCUMCISED AND UNCIRCUMCISED, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Col 3:11).

This statement of the apostle Paul takes on deeper meaning when we reflect on the current moment in history and on developments in theology over the past century. The world is at a crossroads. Either all peoples learn to see the oneness they are called to by God or they will continue to die in the struggle to maintain their own turf and their own dominance.

With the Second Vatican Council came theological development, renewed emphasis on God's universal salvific will (1 Tm 2:4) and on the salvation of all those who are sincerely seeking the truth (Acts 10:34ff.).<sup>1</sup> Various theologians, among them Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, John Courtney Murray, and Teilhard de Chardin, came together to influence this emphasis in our time, as well as Karl Rahner with his notion of the "anonymous Christian." Avery Dulles has summarized the arduous path to this renewed teaching which he finds in popes and councils over the ages, but not without dissent.<sup>2</sup>

Pope Francis has advanced the teaching by his positive words and non-judgmental, mercy-filled attitude toward all people of good will. The last judgment scene beginning in Matthew 25:31 is emphatic in reinforcing the priority of charity, as does Paul in speaking of God's law in the dictates of each one's conscience (Rom 2:6-16).

Those who allow for the continuing development of Church doctrine

over the course of history will likely find implications in Pauline theology that he could not have envisaged in his time. It helps, then, to consider the historic moment in which we live and theologize, that enlightens much biblical reflection today. These developments give new meaning to the missionary effort to make the face of Jesus Christ more evident in the world so that peoples may have a clearer understanding of God's purpose in their lives.

### **Historic Moment**

Many events have brought various tribes, peoples, and nations closer together in modern times. Colonialism, as in Africa and the Mideast, forced peoples to live together in states that proved to be artificial, with tensions between different ethnic or religious groups; for example, the Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe, Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, Christian and Moslem in Sudan, and in the Mideast Moslem and Christian and Jew, Shiite and Sunni Moslem. To the ethnic and religious struggles are added the struggle to secure land for crops and pasture and to obtain minerals that are sparsely distributed but essential to industrialization and to modern technologies.

*The missionary effort is to make the face of Jesus Christ more evident in the world so that peoples may have a clearer understanding of God's purpose in their lives.*

To those who claim no knowledge of God's plan, things may seem completely out of control. But to Christians this excruciating moment in history can be seen, in God's plan, as a crisis that will lead over time to growth in the realization of the oneness of all peoples under God.

Christian faith and Pauline theology shed light on the situation. It was God's plan from the start to bring all peoples and nations together in the kingdom, and to allow humans, sharing in God's freedom, to have a part in working toward that togetherness by free, human choices over a period of centuries and millennia.

### **Biblical Reflections**

Humans from early on found themselves in small groupings, alienated from the ground of their being (Gn 3:11) and from one another, brother against brother (Gn 4:8), with good amidst evil (the flood in Gn 7:1), and with human pride leading to further divisions among peoples (Babel, Gn 11:1-9). We learn from the Pauline epistles that God's



intention from the beginning was to send the Son in the fullness of time to reveal the divine plan and to give creation a more conscious thrust toward the vision of the final kingdom.

That kingdom would be finally realized only in heaven, but humans in their free choices share in fashioning its likeness on earth. As Paul says: "The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom 8:20-22). And again, in Christ "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (Col 1:20). "He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10).

*Oneness in Christ's body is fleshed out in statements on the universal call of all peoples to salvation.*

Christians, then, are in an especially graced position. Because of our knowledge of God's divine plan, we are called to be ambassadors conveying God's message of peace and reconciliation to the world, and nothing should discourage us from keeping up the effort. We achieve the dignity of persons created in the image of God when we freely collaborate with God's plan that over the course of history brings all things together to their intended oneness in Christ.

We read that in heaven God will see and love in us what he sees and loves in the Son (Jn 3:35). One needn't assume that it will be different for those who have not come to an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ during their lifetime, but knew him only implicitly through Christ's Spirit within them. The "body of Christ" has a hidden dimension, those with baptism of desire.<sup>3</sup> They are members of the redeemed people of God and will be seen as a part of Christ's body in heaven, sisters and brothers of Christ, all children of God.

### **The Problem of Evil**

For Christians, the question of how a good God can allow evil in the world has an answer, and it is in the distinction between material and

formal evil. Material evil encompasses all the suffering in the world. Jesus revealed the salutary value in suffering by showing how it leads to new and resurrected life, and he thus became the pioneer and forerunner of our salvation, nearer to us when we suffer (Heb 2:10ff.). Paul further explains this: "Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom 5:3f.). Where would we learn compassion and unselfishness if there were not those needier than we are, to draw us out of ourselves? It is from charity, that is more genuine to the extent that it is more universal, that we grow toward the perfection to which God calls each of us.

Even sudden deaths through catastrophes, natural or human made, remind us of a salutary truth, that "conservation in being is constant creation." We owe gratitude to God for every moment of our lives. Each moment is precious and to be used for the good of others. "You are not your own, you belong to Christ" (1 Cor 6:19; 3.23).

*Our faith is, beyond its benefit to us, a grace to be used for the spiritual enrichment of all.*

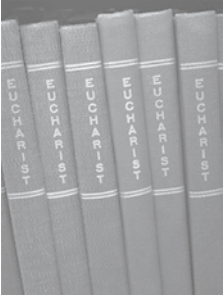
This consoling truth is at the center of the eucharistic banquet, when we celebrate our transformation into Christ, becoming his presence in the world, and share the gratitude that is fundamental to all Christian prayer (Col 3.16f.).

### **Still Making All Things New**

In the centuries after the Reformation, Catholic theology had a singular emphasis on what had been denied, the special nature of the Church's sacraments. Vatican II never questioned the graces made available to us through the sacraments, but it opened the way for fresh reflection on salvation outside the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup>

The present moment of history provokes new boldness in fleshing out our knowledge of God's plan in history, a plan that could not have been fully understood by the early Christians who expected that the end was imminent.<sup>5</sup> One might now see the eucharistic bread that makes us one as a sign of the oneness that unites all God's children, whether they are conscious of it or not, a oneness to be fully revealed in the heavenly kingdom.





If all those saved are brothers and sisters in Christ, part of his body forever, then the reality behind the Communion bread is richer than its primary meaning for those who believe in the sacrament or real “sign” of Christ’s presence. Oneness in Christ’s body is fleshed out in statements on the universal call of all peoples to salvation. The chief advantage, and responsibility, that baptized Christians have is their understanding of God’s plan that they have come to know and have been called to spread as the Good News of God’s love for the world.

Our faith is, beyond its benefit to us, a grace to be used for the spiritual enrichment of all. The magnanimity of Pope Francis’ outreach to peoples of all faiths, as well as to people claiming no religious belief, can point the way for all of us in bringing peace on earth and God’s merciful love to all.



### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 1:16; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1260.
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/02/001-who-can-be-saved-8>.
- <sup>3</sup> CCC, 1260.
- <sup>4</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22, and CCC, 847.
- <sup>5</sup> Mk 10:23, 13:30; 1 Cor 7:29. See also Raymond E. Brown, SS, et al., *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), 1990, 82.45.



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Dorothy Day on the Eucharist

by Dennis J. Billy, CSsR

*An activist and a prophet willing to challenge the Church and society to faithfulness to God's word and the demands of the Gospel, Dorothy Day was also deeply traditional, devoted to the Eucharist and to the rituals of daily life.*

DOROTHY DAY (1897-1980) WAS A PROMINENT TWENTIETH-CENTURY CATHOLIC social activist and a co-founder of The Catholic Worker Movement. The third of four children, she was born in Brooklyn, New York, to John Day, a sports journalist, and Grace Satterlee Day, a homemaker. The family moved to Berkeley, California, in 1904, and later to Chicago, where she spent the remainder of her youth. Even though her family was not very religious, she had a distinct memory of holding a Bible at an early age and having a sense of the sacred while reading it. Although baptized an Episcopalian as a child, her early interest in organized religion waned as she came to believe that she could honor God without having to go to church.<sup>1</sup>

Day graduated from high school in 1914 and attended the University of Illinois for a couple years before leaving school and traveling to New York City, where she became involved in the literary scene of Greenwich Village and befriended the playwright Eugene O'Neill. During that time, she wrote for several socialist and progressive publications and got involved in radical politics. She was jailed several times for taking part in social protests, was romantically involved with the writer Lionel Moise, with whom she conceived a child and at whose insistence she terminated the pregnancy. She later became involved with the activist and biologist Forster Batterham, with whom she had a child, Tamar Therese, in 1924. Neither relationship was long-lived.<sup>2</sup>

While immersed in the literary and art world of Greenwich Village and a growing sense of social activism, Day was quietly undergoing a religious conversion that would eventually lead her to a radical change of heart. Citing the famous poem by Francis Thompson, she

Redemptorist Father Dennis J. Billy, a regular contributor to *Emmanuel*, has authored or edited more than 30 books and 300 articles in a number of scholarly and popular journals and taught in Rome and at the archdiocesan seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



said she was haunted by “The Hound of Heaven” and eventually found her spiritual home in the Catholic faith. She had her infant daughter baptized in a local Catholic Church and finally converted to Catholicism herself in 1927.

In 1932, Day founded *The Catholic Worker* newspaper with Peter Maurin, a French immigrant and a former Christian Brother. The success of the paper spawned The Catholic Worker Movement, a community dedicated to service, prayer, and refectory, and which set Day on a course of social activism that was deeply rooted in her love for the Church and visibly expressed in her service to the poor. Her teaching on the Eucharist flows from this dedicated spirit of faithful giving.<sup>3</sup>

### Day’s Spiritual Outlook

Dorothy Day’s spirituality was marked by “a love of Scripture . . . solidarity with the poor . . . personalism . . . prophetic witness . . . peacemaking . . . a sacramental sense . . . and gratitude.”<sup>4</sup>

She describes her journey to Catholicism in her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* (1952), the title of which she received, at least in part, from her daughter, who once spoke to her of the loneliness of the human situation.<sup>5</sup>

In time, Day came to see only one constructive way of dealing with such isolation: “The only answer in this life, to the loneliness we are all bound to feel, is community. The living together, working together, sharing together, loving God and loving our brother, and living close to him in community so we can show our love for him.”<sup>6</sup>

Life in community was one of the underlying themes of The Catholic Worker Movement which she co-founded with Maurin: “Community — that was the social answer to the long loneliness. That was one of the attractions of religious life, and why couldn’t lay people share in it? Not just the basic community of the family, but also a community of families, with a combination of private and communal property.”<sup>7</sup> She dedicated the rest of her life to building community as a way of healing the loneliness of the human heart.

Day came to this vision by way of a long journey involving a continual search to fill the hole in her soul left by the loneliness of life and the dreariness of existence. Her childhood was mired in a dysfunctional

family life, with a demanding father who paid little attention to his children and a mother who put on a cheerful face for her children, but was living in denial about the lack of love present in her marriage and family life.

Although a bright, promising young student, Day left college before finishing her degree in order to experience for herself the intellectual and cultural melting pot of New York City, earn her keep as a journalist, and lose herself in social causes. Her search for identity led to a rejection of organized religion, a generally loose (even bohemian) lifestyle, and a dedication to the plight of the impoverished masses. At the same time, it heightened her sensitivity to her deep spiritual wounds, her love for life, and her continuing personal quest for God.<sup>8</sup>

*Dorothy Day believed that the only answer to the loneliness we all experience is community.*

Day's conversion to Catholicism enabled her to see the connection between her deep spiritual yearnings and her desire to serve the poor and marginalized in society. She saw in her newfound faith's emphasis on the communion of the faithful and Christ's mystical body, a vision that offered a remedy to "the long loneliness," one which offered a balance between the individual and the collective and which pointed out the inconsistencies of her intensely individualistic ways and her deep social consciousness.

With her identity firmly rooted in the person of Christ and his body, the Church, she began to see his presence in the lives of the people she served. She found in The Catholic Worker Movement a way of giving concrete expression to the unity of the community of the faithful and Christ's love for the poor.

The members of this movement did so by creating houses of hospitality and working farms where everyone was welcome and where the Eucharist provided food for the soul and the body of believers met the material needs of those in want. Christ's presence in the sacrament enabled Catholic workers to sense his presence in the ordinary affairs of daily life, especially life in community, and in the lives of the poor and marginalized.<sup>9</sup>



## Day's Teaching on the Eucharist

Day believed the Gospel was for all Christians, not for a spiritual elite or a select few. She was fond of quoting a saying of Saint John of the Cross: "Love is the measure by which we shall be judged."<sup>10</sup> She saw a close connection between the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and his presence in the faces of the poor. Through the Eucharist, the material world spoke to her of the love of God.<sup>11</sup> It was the "sacrament of love" which sought to bring about a revolution of the heart.

"The greatest challenge of the day," she once wrote, was "how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us? When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our brothers with that burning love, that passion which led to the cross, then we can truly say, 'Now I have begun.'"<sup>12</sup> To this end, she tried to start her day with Mass or at least some time before the Blessed Sacrament so that this revolution of the heart might take root in her.

Day also drew a connection between the Eucharist and the meals she shared with others: "Meals are so important," she once wrote. "The disciples knew Christ in the breaking of bread. We know Christ in each other in the breaking of bread. It is the closest we can ever come to each other, sitting down and eating together. It is unbelievably, poignantly intimate."<sup>13</sup>

The Eucharist, for her, was also a reminder of the importance of ritual in our lives: "Ritual, how could we do without it! . . . And just as a husband may embrace his wife casually as he leaves for work in the morning and kiss her absent-mindedly in his comings and goings, still that kiss on occasion turns to rapture, a burning fire of tenderness and love. . . . We have too little ritual in our lives."<sup>14</sup> The Eucharist, for her, was a celebration of the rituals of everyday life. It heightened her awareness of the sacred in the ordinary events of life: farming the land, watching a sunrise, sharing a meal with friends. It was a reminder to her of the presence of the sacred in the rituals of everyday life.

In addition to sustaining a sense of ritual, the Eucharist also had a strong penitential aspect to it. At the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in 1976, she spoke of her love for the Church and of the need to do penance and to make reparation for the sins of humanity. The Church, she says, "taught me the crowning love of the life of the

Spirit. But she also taught me that before we bring our gifts of service, of gratitude, to the altar — if our brother has anything against us, we must hesitate to approach the altar to receive the Eucharist.”<sup>15</sup> The Eucharist presupposed acts of penitence: “Otherwise we partake of the sacrament unworthily.”<sup>16</sup>

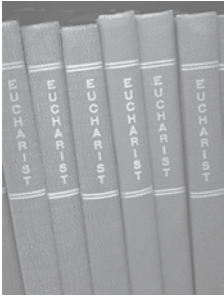
In a true prophetic vein, she sought to challenge people in their complacency and console them in their times of grief and sadness. Her love for God, for the community of the faithful, and for all humanity moved her at that same Eucharistic Congress to speak out against the sin of nuclear holocaust, calling on everyone to ask the Lord for forgiveness in reparation for the lives that were needlessly lost at Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. She was not afraid to identify the hidden prejudices woven into the fabric of our lives, even those lodged deep in the heart of the Church, especially if she perceived that they were terribly off-base and rooted in ill-conceived stereotypes and misunderstandings.<sup>17</sup>

*Day’s conversion to Catholicism enabled her to see the connection between her deep spiritual yearnings and her desire to serve the poor and the marginalized.*

Day’s love for the Eucharist was also very Marian. One of her daily rituals was to pray to Mary after receiving her Son in the sacrament: “I always say to the Blessed Mother after Communion — ‘Here he is in my heart; I believe, help thou mine unbelief; adore him, thank him, and love him for me. He is your Son; his honor is in your hands. Do not let me dishonor him.’”<sup>18</sup> She looked to Mary, the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church, for the courage and strength to give birth to Christ in and through her love for the poor. She fostered a Marian approach both to the sacrament and to the service of Christ in the world’s poor and marginalized, one rooted in humility, truth, and love of God and neighbor.

### **Observations**

Although this brief presentation of Day’s approach to the Eucharist does not do justice to her love for the sacrament and the central role it played in her life, it highlights some of the major characteristics of her eucharistic outlook and points to the deep connection she saw between Jesus’ presence in the Blessed Sacrament and in the lives of the poor.



The following remarks seek to tease out some of the implications of her teaching and point out their relevance for today's believers.

1. To begin with, Day saw a close connection between the Eucharist and daily life. The sacrament was not an escape from life, but a free and open embrace of it, especially of the poor and the marginalized of society. She attended Mass not only to render God glory, honor, and praise, but also to be nourished by the bread of life so that she could serve those in need by seeking to meet their material and spiritual wants.

The Eucharist, in this respect, is the sacrament of the love of both God *and* neighbor. These two loves, while distinct, are also intimately related. We cannot say we love God if we ignore our brothers and sisters and fail to reach out to them in compassionate and loving ways. The presence of Christ in the Eucharist enabled Day to see his face more clearly in the ordinary events of life, especially in the faces of the poor. Believers today should heed her example and look upon the sacrament as a means of experiencing life on a deeper level of awareness. When the priest says at the end of the celebration, "Go forth, the Mass has ended," the liturgy of daily life continues.

2. Day's approach to the sacrament also heightens our awareness of the central role of ritual in daily life. We are creatures of habit and navigate our way through life by means of a constant repetition of structured ways of acting: prayers, meals, learning, work, recreation. Our lives are dotted with activities that are repeated day after day in very similar (if not identical) ways. "Ritual. How could we do without it!" says Day.

The Eucharist, for her, was the central ritual of life. It is the "ritual of rituals," for it places all the other rituals of life in their proper perspective and enables us to focus on the one thing that matters: our relationship with God. This relationship affects the way we relate to others. It shapes our character by conforming us more and more unto the heart and mind of Christ. As members of his body, we become Christ's eyes and ears, arms and hands in the particular corner of space and time in which we find ourselves. The Eucharist reminds us that the rituals of daily life have a sacred character, that they should reveal Christ's presence in our midst.

3. The Eucharist also reminds us of the importance of community.



Day believed deeply in the community of the faithful and saw a close, intimate connection between the body of Christ and the body of believers. The Eucharist was not a private affair between the believer and God, but a communal celebration of the power of love over hatred and life over death. For Day, life in community was the only remedy for the long loneliness that everyone experiences deep in their hearts. The Eucharist, moreover, was the remedy that heals our hearts and teaches us to relate to each other in compassionate and loving ways.

As a sacred meal, the sacrament draws us together and unites us in bonds of faith and fellowship rooted in Christ and his relationship to the Father. The Holy Spirit, the bond between the Father and the Son, is the bond that holds together the Christian community and, ultimately, the entire human family. The Eucharist turns loneliness into solitude and solitude into life in the Spirit, the fruits of which are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”<sup>19</sup>

*For Day, the Eucharist was the “sacrament of love” which sought to bring about a revolution of the heart.*

4. Because the Eucharist is a means for building community, Day also saw it as a catalyst for addressing the needs of society. As the sacrament of love, it challenges the community of the faithful to identify the various social ills that plague human society and to find constructive ways of healing them.

Day was an outspoken critic of the attitudes behind the vicious cycle of hunger, poverty, prejudice, and violence endemic to so many areas of modern society. She was not afraid to speak out against those who either knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate such ills. The Eucharist, in this respect, enables us to hear the word of God within our hearts and moves us to challenge those who ignore or are simply numb to or unaware of the social evils existing in their very midst. By nourishing our own relationship with God, it gives us the strength and courage to speak out in a prophetic way on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and the voiceless.

5. According to Day, “Love is the measure by which we shall be judged.” As the sacrament of Christ’s love, the Eucharist represents the measure of God’s love for us, the standard by which we are called to live and by which we shall be judged. The breaking of the bread



at the Eucharist is more than the sharing of a meal; it also points to the breaking of Jesus' body and the spilling of his blood on Calvary. Day was very much aware that the Eucharist was a sacrificial offering of Christ for the sins of humanity. She also knew that, as members of his body, believers were called to embody the mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection in their daily lives.

The Eucharist embodied every aspect of Christ's paschal mystery and was the means by which it lived on in the lives of the faithful. The sacrament allows the mystery of redemptive self-offering to take root in our hearts and empowers us to love as Christ loved through the presence of his Spirit living in us. We shall be judged according to the extent to which we allow the love of Christ to fill our lives and overflow to those in need.

6. The Eucharist also represented a call to penitence. To receive the sacrament worthily, we must make sure that we have asked God's pardon for our sins and sought to make appropriate reparation for them. The sacrament calls us to live in right relationship with both God and neighbor. Day was very much aware of our human tendency toward sin and saw the sacrament as a call to examine our consciences, take a good look at our willing participation in evil (be it personal, societal, or universal), seek God's forgiveness, and be resolved to make things right.

In her mind, penance and love were two sides of the same sacramental coin. We cannot love others if we do not know how to seek forgiveness. Saying we are sorry is the best (perhaps the only) way of making broken relationships right. When extended to the societal ills in which we all participate, we express our sorrow by committing ourselves to making things right. For this reason, the Eucharist calls us to work for justice on every level of human experience. The sacrament of love calls us to live for justice by giving everyone their due on both the personal and societal levels.

7. Finally, Day's love for Mary overflowed into her love for Christ in the Eucharist. Aware of the Blessed Mother's intimate relationship with her Son, she turned to her frequently to seek her help in remaining faithful to him and not dishonoring him in any way. Mary, for her, was not only the Mother of Christ, but also the Mother of the Church and, as such, someone who looked upon every believer (and every potential believer) with deep, motherly affection. Day turned to Mary as a loving mother and sought her help in remaining faithful

to her Son. She also saw her as a faithful disciple who followed Jesus from his birth in Bethlehem, to his death on Calvary, to the birth of the church in the Upper Room and the birth of the Christian community on Pentecost.

*Day looked to Mary, the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church, for the courage and strength to give birth to Christ in and through her love for the poor.*

Day's love for Mary deepened her love for the Eucharist — and vice versa. She prayed to her always after receiving Holy Communion because she wished to remain in communion with her Son and be faithful to him to the very end. Mary was a source of hope for Day and for all the members of The Catholic Worker Movement. She was the mother of the Church, the mother of all disciples, the mother of the poor.

### **Conclusion**


Dorothy Day was one of the most outspoken Catholic social activists of the twentieth century. A convert to Catholicism in her early 30s, she experienced in her heart a fundamental conversion that led her to leave a conflicted life of practical atheism and social activism to embrace a life of deeply spiritual longings and a capacity to see the face of Christ in the lives of the poor and the marginalized. Her Catholic spirit and desire led her to serve the poor of society and to found The Catholic Worker Movement with Peter Maurin.

Day's saw in this movement the possibility of building authentic Christian communities throughout the world. Community, for her, was the human and spiritual remedy to "the long loneliness" which has plagued the human from time eternal. She lived in community and sought to build community in all her actions, be it feeding the poor on bread lines, sharing supper with them in her Catholic Worker Home on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, or working with them on their Catholic Worker Farm in Upstate New York.

The Eucharist, for her, was a fundamentally communal action, one that gave her the strength to reach out to others and to find Christ in their broken, enfeebled lives. It embodied three things that formed the basis of the Catholic community of faith: a sacred meal, a sacrificial offering, and a divine presence. She understood that the awareness of these aspects



of authentic community varied from believer to believer, and she sought to remedy that situation by dedicating herself to The Catholic Worker Movement, a community that would embrace all of these eucharistic elements in a life of faith dedicated to service to the poor.

For Day, the body of Christ was physically and spiritually present in the Blessed Sacrament *and* in the faces of the masses. She dedicated her life to serving God at the altar of the poor. Like Christ, she emptied herself out of love for God and out of love for humanity. Like him, she gave herself to others without counting the cost. Like him, she put the needs of others before her own. She dedicated her life to living in holy communion with the Lord and with the poor and the marginalized. She sought to become eucharist for others, as Christ became Eucharist for her. 

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This biographical information comes from Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, *Meet Dorothy Day: Champion of the Poor* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2002), 13-16. For other biographies of Day, see Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1987); Jim Forest, *All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011). For her autobiography, see Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952; reprint, Chicago, IL: The Thomas More Press, 1989), 1ff. (Page references to *The Long Loneliness* are from the reprint edition).
- <sup>2</sup> Koenig-Bricker, *Meet Dorothy Day*, 17-54.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-75.
- <sup>4</sup> James Allaire and Rosemary Broughton, *Praying with Dorothy Day* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1995), 31-32.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>6</sup> Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 280; Allaire and Broughton, *Praying with Dorothy Day*, 111.
- <sup>7</sup> Day, *The Long Loneliness*, 261.
- <sup>8</sup> See Catherine Faver, "Identity, Community, and Crisis: The Conversion Narratives of Dorothy Day," in *Dorothy Day and The Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays*, Marquette Studies in Theology No. 32, eds. William Thorn, Phillip Runkel, and Susan Mountin (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 351-369.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 360-361.
- <sup>10</sup> Forest, *All Is Grace*, 174.
- <sup>11</sup> Forest, *Love Is the Measure*, 187.
- <sup>12</sup> Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes: The Inspiring Story of The Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963; reprint, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 215 (Page references are from the reprint edition).
- <sup>13</sup> Dorothy Day, *Writings from Commonweal*, ed. Patrick Jordan (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 81.
- <sup>14</sup> Koenig-Bricker, *Meet Dorothy Day*, 127-128.
- <sup>15</sup> Dorothy Day, "Bread for the Hungry," *The Catholic Worker* (September 1976), 1.5, <http://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/daytext.cfm?TextID=258&SearchTerm=bomb> (accessed January 5, 2015).
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Koenig-Bricker, *Meet Dorothy Day*, 135.
- <sup>19</sup> Galatians 5:22-23 (New Revised Standard Edition).



## EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

### When Guilt is Good

by Victor M. Parachin

*Guilt is generally experienced as an overwhelmingly negative feeling. There are times, however, when guilt can be beneficial in the spiritual life.*

THE JOURNALIST, AUTHOR, AND FORMER FIRST LADY OF CALIFORNIA, MARIA SHRIVER, has written, "None of us like to feel guilty, and certainly some of us feel it when we shouldn't. But it's not entirely without its purpose. Imagine a world in which no one felt guilty about anything."

In these three sentences, Shriver offers an important but often neglected insight into guilt: it is a vital component of a healthy conscience and a sign of spiritual sensitivity. Though guilt is most often characterized as a negative and destructive emotion, there is a positive and constructive aspect to guilt. This was something Benjamin Franklin was aware of when he said, "A good conscience is a continual Christmas." Here are seven occasions when guilt is good.

Victor M. Parachin writes extensively on matters of spirituality and has authored a dozen books. He is a regular contributor to *Emmanuel*.

#### **When It Moves Us to Accept Responsibility for Our Actions**

"Someone who cannot acknowledge responsibility and guilt cannot and will not change. And just as a disease cannot be treated until it is first diagnosed, a sin or an evil cannot be corrected until it is acknowledged and admitted," notes Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, the author of *The Book of Jewish Values*.

Telushkin provides an example of an acquaintance who seldom acknowledges his errors. Whenever an issue emerges in his life, the man inevitably blames others and refuses to identify his own complicity in the matter. "I once told him that of all the people I knew, he was the one for whom I felt least optimistic about the future. Since he was never to blame for any of the bad things that happened to him, there was nothing he could do to improve his increasingly unhappy life."



### When It Prods Us to Apologize

When we have wronged someone, the critical first step in repairing the relationship is a heartfelt apology. This was something done by the Reverend Jesse Jackson, the prominent civil rights activist, when news media reported an ethnic slur he made about Jews.

Aware that his language had caused harm, Reverend Jackson promptly offered this public apology: “If, in my low moments, in word, deed, or attitude, through some error of temper, taste, or tone, I have caused anyone discomfort, created pain, or revived someone’s fears, that was not my truest self. If there were occasions when my grape turned into a raisin and my joy bell lost its resonance, please forgive me. Charge it to my head and not to my heart. My head — so limited in its finitude; my heart — which is boundless in its love for the human family. I am not a perfect servant. I am a public servant doing my best against the odds. As I develop and serve, be patient: God is not finished with me yet.”

### When It Develops Humility

Two of the hardest words to say are “I’m sorry.” Generally, there are three main reasons why people find it difficult to apologize. The first is pride. Apologizing means admitting fault. It is pride that prevents us from simply saying: “I was wrong.” “I messed up.” “I shouldn’t have done or said that.”

The second is blame. Rather than apologize it’s often easier to blame someone or something else for what we have done. We justify ourselves by shifting the responsibility elsewhere.

The third is embarrassment. We feel foolish, and it’s easier to pretend it didn’t happen or that no one noticed. Yet when we’ve spoken or acted in ways which have created a wound, the path to healing that relationship emerges from the humility to apologize.

For this reason, humility is a virtue highly valued in the Bible — “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Phil 2:3 NIV); “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2); “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (Jas 3:13); “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love

mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8).

### **When It Prompts Us to Make Amends**

The word *amend* originates in Latin and means "to correct, to rectify, or to free from fault." When we have blundered, causing another person discomfort or inconvenience, the remedy is to amend or correct the situation as quickly and completely as possible. It is the nudge of guilt that sends us in the direction of rectifying.

*When we have wronged someone, the critical first step in repairing the relationship is a heartfelt apology.*

Etiquette authority Letitia Baldrige tells of a time when a friend failed to pick her up at an airport. She waited an hour before arranging her own transportation. Baldrige explained what transpired after the man realized his mistake: "1. He sent me a long message of apology; 2. He sent me a dozen long-stemmed roses; 3. He took me to lunch the next time he came back into town; and 4. He ordered a car to pick me up at my office and take me back again after lunch." Of course, the apology was accepted, any lingering pain healed, and their friendship remained unaffected.

### **When It Heals Hurt and Anger**

When a sense of remorse moves us to act in remedial ways, the hurt and anger experienced by the wounded party is softened and even healed.

When Stacey Hylen checked into the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Tucson, Arizona, she requested a wake-up call for the following morning. It was very important. Her routine request was overlooked and when she woke up late, she was furious. Understandably, she called the front desk to complain. Within moments, however, her frustrations eased and her anger was transformed because the hotel agent promptly apologized and offered to send a complimentary breakfast to Stacey's room.

In a hurry, she necessarily declined the offer of the breakfast, but when she returned to her room later in the day she found fresh strawberries,





candy, dried fruit, and a handwritten note of apology from hotel management. The end result was this: instead of an angry complaint on the hotel's website, she advocated for the hotel and complimented its "5 Star Customer Service."

### **When It Causes a Person to Seek God's Forgiveness**

Recognizing that something isn't right about our behavior and seeking forgiveness is hard. This very problem appears in the Bible. When Adam and Eve made a wrong choice and were confronted by God, they refused to accept responsibility. Adam blamed Eve, saying, "The woman you put here with me. She gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Similarly, Eve blamed the snake: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gn 3:12-13). Later, when God demanded to know what happened to Abel — whom Cain had killed in a jealous rage — Cain deflected the issue by arrogantly asserting: "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gn 4:9).

Elsewhere in the Bible, another person acknowledged his fault and responded appropriately. This happened when the prophet Nathan confronted King David for engaging in a series of wrongful acts. David responded completely differently than Adam, Eve, and Cain did. He accepted responsibility and confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sm 12:13). Because of his honest confession, Nathan declared that David's punishment would be reduced.

### **When It Helps Us See a Character Defect**

We can be oblivious and blinded to our own faults and shortcomings. Often it's a sense of guilt that opens our eyes to see a personal defect. A man recently wrote to an advice columnist explaining his situation: "I had a girlfriend years ago that I loved but did not treat well. I learned that my time in this world is short, and I thought we might meet by chance and I could beg forgiveness. That seems unlikely now."

He wondered how he could try to make this right, asking if he should call the woman or write her a letter and have it mailed after his death. The columnist offered him this bit of wisdom: "Follow your heart now. Please pick up the phone or write a letter. Be completely transparent and honest. I assure you, you will feel better and she will feel touched. I hope she takes the opportunity to forgive you so that you can both close the loop and have a peaceful resolution to this relationship."

When guilt shows itself in our lives, it's a signal to take a second look at what is going on. Recognizing and responding to the source of guilt with wisdom, maturity, and compassion liberates us to live in healthy and loving relationships with others and with ourselves.

## Conclusion

Everett L. Worthington is a professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University who researches and studies forgiveness. He recommends this useful acronym for making an effective apology and asking for forgiveness: CONFESS.

*It is the nudge of guilt that often sends us in the direction of change in our lives.*

*Confess without excuse.* Do not offer any kind of excuse. Do not let the word *but* come out of your mouth. Be specific about what you are sorry for. "I'm sorry that I forgot our anniversary."

*Offer an apology.* A heartfelt apology conveys that you're sorry and that you don't want the offense to happen again. Be sincere and articulate.

*Note the other person's pain.* Acknowledge that your actions were hurtful and that you recognize that.

*Forever value.* Explain that you value your relationship and that you want to restore it more than you want to hang onto your pride.

*Equalize.* Offer to repair. Ask how you can make it up to the person.

*Say "Never again."* Promise that you won't repeat what happened . . . and mean it!

*Seek forgiveness.* Ask the other person directly and humbly, "Can you forgive me?"

It is helpful to think through the steps of the CONFESS acronym *before* you approach the other person. That way, when you're speaking with him or her, you will have planned what you intend to say and won't



be left struggling for the right words. The vital thing, however, is to connect at the level of honesty and shared humanity. God's grace can accomplish so much when we do.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "Deep within his conscience, [the human person] discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself, but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For . . . in his heart [there is] a law inscribed by God. . . . Conscience is [the person's] most secret core and his sanctuary. There, he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depth."

Guilt can bring us back to God to know forgiveness and to begin the process of change, helping us to be our best selves.



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## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Pondering the Parables: The Parable of the Seed Growing Slowly

by Bernard Camiré, SSS

*Parables were integral to Jesus' teaching ministry. His stories engaged the minds and hearts of his listeners and revealed the deeper meaning of their lives and God's power at work in and around them.*

HERE WE HAVE A PARABLE THAT IS FOUND ONLY IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK. THE Parable of the Seed Growing Slowly (Mk 4:26-29) is also the first parable that Mark explicitly calls a *kingdom* parable.

Like the Parable of the Sower (Mk 4:3-8), this parable, lacking a contextual clue, admits of several points of interest in its interpretation. There is an initial contrast between the *inactivity* of the farmer, who simply scatters the seed and then returns to the rhythm of his daily activities, and the *dynamic activity* of the seed. The description of the seed as sprouting, growing, and maturing without the farmer knowing how suggests that the central thrust here is the mystery of growth.

On the other hand, as verse eight states: the earth yields fruit "of its own accord" — which underscores the power of the earth and the seed. The final verse of the parable announces that the ripening of the grain is the signal for the harvest to begin so that no time should be lost: "he wields the sickle at once."

### Possible Interpretations

As has just been said, the text of the parable lends itself to a wide range of interpretative possibilities, and through the centuries Christians have articulated many possible interpretations.

Most presume that the seed is the word of God and that the parable conveys the fact that one cannot assess the inevitable growth of God's word in humans and in society as God's kingdom approaches fulfillment. Some commentators have placed the emphasis on

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the *harvest*, suggesting that the conclusion of time and history is realized in the coming of Jesus.

Others have stressed the contrast between the *inactivity* of the farmer and the *certainty* of the harvest. In other words, it is a parable of assurance that the final “end of time” realities (the appearance of Christ, the judgment, etc.), begun in the ministry of Jesus, are manifesting themselves and nothing can be done to hasten their arrival.

Still other commentators have suggested that the parable was meant to counter a Zealot-like impulse to hasten the arrival of God’s kingdom through the use of force; but patient waiting, and not violent activity, brings the harvest.

### God’s Time, God’s Activity

As in the Parable of the Sower, a lulling effect is conveyed by the picture of the farmer who follows the natural rhythms of life — sleep and rising, night and day — juxtaposed with the rhythms of the growth of vegetation: “first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.”

*The description of the seed . . . suggests that the thrust in the parable is on the mystery of growth.*

This rhythmic balancing recalls the rhythms of times in the Book of Ecclesiastes; “a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted” (3:2); there is *God’s* time and *human* time. In Jesus’ parable, these times intersect when the grain is ripe and the harvest has come, an image with strong end-of-time overtones. Now is the time for the rhythm of nature to cease and for the farmer to take action (a hint of the judgment).

With this parable, Jesus offers a simple proclamation of God’s coming reign. He invites his original hearers, and us, his present-day hearers, to connect with the images he sets before them — to see their daily lives mirrored in the parable.

God’s activity and power have their times and rhythms, and human activity cannot control or hasten their manifestation. On the other hand, we are summoned to think of a new time when God’s reign and season of grace may intersect with our lives and shake up their ordinary and tranquil rhythm. Then is the time for immediate and generous response on our part.



## *EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY*

### Counsels for Spiritual Life from Saint Peter Julian Eymard

#### **We Must Forget Ourselves in Real Love**

The Apostle of the Eucharist was also a guide to the interior life and to eucharistic spirituality for many people.

Here, Stephanie Gourd is looking after her nieces; it is “the holy will of God for now.” She must relinquish her peace in order to care for her family, “forget herself in real love” in the service of others.

“You are now at Thorins, to teach your nieces and have your nieces as companions. You must tell yourself: God wants it so.

“Charity will determine the external [details] of your life. It is the virtue of the present moment. See how our good Master knows how to place us on the path of self-denial.

“You could have hoped to live calmly and in solitude close to your dear mother, but see how our Lord is separating you and is surrounding you with noisy activity. May he be praised! The more you extend yourself exteriorly, the more you must cover and fill yourself interiorly with Jesus.

“Take my word for it, when you are with the Lord, don’t allow yourself to think of others; busy yourself with our Lord, with our Lord alone. Say little about yourself to Jesus, much about Jesus to yourself.

“In real love, we need to forget ourselves, achieve a life of union in our Lord by deep awareness of the heart. That is not tiring and can harmonize with everything else. Always maintain control over your external situation in order to guide it with the fine and straightforward helm of the holy will of God at each moment.

“I bless you, dear daughter, in our Lord.”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
to Stephanie Gourd  
August 27, 1867



## PASTORAL LITURGY

# Making Connections — Receiving the Precious Blood

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

*Consider how Holy Communion is conducted in your liturgical assemblies. Best practices lead to a deepened awareness of the power and meaning of the Eucharist.*

In his 25th year of priesthood, Father John Thomas J. Lane is the pastor of Saint Paschal Baylon Church in Highland Heights, Ohio. He is one of the authors of *Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays 2017* and also wrote *Guide for Celebrating Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, both published by Liturgy Training Publications. Questions or further materials may be obtained by contacting him at [jtlanesss@gmail.com](mailto:jtlanesss@gmail.com).

IN THIS YEAR'S COLUMNS, WE ARE EXPLORING VARIOUS PASTORAL PRACTICES IN THE eucharistic liturgy that vary from parish to parish. In this issue, our focus is "Communion under both kinds," more specifically, sharing the precious blood.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), 85 reminds us: "It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord's body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the instance when it is permitted, they partake of the chalice (cf. number 283) so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated."

And since it is mentioned in this paragraph, GIRM, 283 says: "The diocesan bishop may establish norms for Communion under both kinds for his own diocese, which are also to be observed in churches of religious and at celebrations with small groups. The diocesan bishop is also given the faculty to permit Communion under both kinds whenever it may seem appropriate to the priest to whom a community has been entrusted as its own shepherd, provided that the faithful have been well instructed and that there is no danger of profanation of the sacrament or of the rite's becoming difficult because of the large number of participants or for some other cause."

There are multiple theological and pastoral reasons to offer the chalice to the assembly. Here are some:

We are invited to receive the body *and the blood* of Christ by the

command of Christ, except for countries or areas of the world where it is cost-prohibitive to provide wine and therefore the blood of Christ, we should be offering the chalice to the people of God. We are inviting people to bring up the gifts of bread *and wine*; we should then offer the precious blood back to the people. Too often, though, excuses have ruled our liturgical practice rather than Christ's words or trying to assure that the chalice is offered. We know that many people, even in our own day, have shed their blood in witness to Christ. These martyrs have sown the seeds of the growth of the faith. By sharing the chalice, we recognize that we are *in communion* with the suffering and those who have died for the faith.

A very practical reason for always offering a Communion station with the chalice is the presence of those in our eucharistic assemblies who are not able to receive the bread, the body of Christ, due to celiac disease or allergy. This allows them to partake of one of the elements of the sacrament. Ideally, there should always be two chalices so that one, which contains the small portion of the consecrated host, is reserved to the celebrant and those who are not allergic to wheat, while the other remains free of wheat. Many people have wheat allergies; it is our pastoral duty to offer the sacrament of the Lord's body and blood in a manner that is not harmful to them.

As with other elements of the liturgy, it is critical to educate people on the importance of Communion under both kinds. As a regular practice, we assign Communion stations for both the body and blood of Christ at liturgies. I learned from an experience in my first pastorate how people appreciate it when I bring them Holy Communion. Most Catholics never rotate or change the pew or the seat where they sit. This procedure allows me to move each Sunday to a different section of the church, and it has also provided the opportunity to catechize then that both the body and blood are Communion. Too often, because of past practice, the language people use indicates that "the host is Communion" and "the other is just the blood." It's not just any blood, but the saving blood of the Lord!

Lastly, my offering the chalice is an opportunity to sing when I am not distributing the bread. It is important for pastoral leaders to model singing and to fulfill GIRM, 86: "While the priest is receiving the sacrament, the Communion chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the 'communitarian' character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the sacrament is



being administered to the faithful.”

When the liturgical calendar was revised in 1969, the two feasts of the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ were brought together in one solemnity: The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. I am not into segregating these elements of Communion into separate feasts again. I am proposing, instead, that we do more as liturgical leaders and pastors to promote the reception of the precious blood of Christ and allow for its rightful place in our liturgies and in our witness to the world, for which Christ’s blood was shed.

I have only scratched the surface here in reflecting on the importance of Holy Communion being offered under both species, so that all may know the power of “tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord” and be renewed in the blood of the Lamb.



### Reminders for July and August

**Saturday, July 1:** Canada Day; **Tuesday, July 4:** Independence Day (United States). The lectionary and *Roman Missal* for each country offer special prayers and readings for these national holidays.

**Wednesday, August 2:** Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the Apostle of the Eucharist. Consider a holy hour or a longer period of eucharistic exposition and invite individuals and families to spend time in intimate prayer in the presence of the Lord.

**Tuesday, August 15:** Solemnity of the Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary. The *Book of Blessings* suggests a harvest festival or a blessing of the harvest (chapter 28).

Other summer blessings to celebrate:

- Field for athletics (chapter 20)
- New cars or other means of transportation (chapter 21)
- Fishing gear and boats (chapter 22)
- Athletic events or facilities (chapter 29)
- Teachers and students returning to school (chapter 5)
- New pastoral year or ministries (chapters 60 and 65)
- Pastoral Council (chapter 64)
- New pastor (appendix 1)



## PASTORAL LITURGY

# On Liturgy and Transformation

### A Eucharist That Transforms Communities

WE OFTEN HEAR OF HOW THE EUCHARIST *TRANSFORMS INDIVIDUALS*: HEALING wounds of sin, bestowing peace and confidence in the face of personal difficulties, and drawing one to a deeper intimacy with God and a stronger faith through the encounter with Jesus in the sacrament of his love.

Several months ago, I had the experience of being in a parish where the Eucharist has *transformed a community*!

Our Lady of Peace Church sits in the Shaker Square neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. I asked Patrick Riley, the chair of the Parish Pastoral Council and the book review editor of *Emmanuel*, to describe the parish's origins. He began by setting the religious and social context of its establishment:

"A central feature of Catholicism in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the nationality parish. Immigrants coming to the United States were often met with anti-Catholic and anti-foreign attitudes and laws and social structures that attacked them. The institution they created as a safe haven was the nationality parish, where common language and customs forged them into a community in this strange land, and where their ethnic Catholic schools protected their children from a hostile culture. Catholicism in the United States at that time was insular and defensive.

"It was in this world that, in 1919, the bishop of Cleveland invited Father James Cummins, who was returning to the diocese after having served as an army chaplain in Europe during World War I, to form a new parish. Father Cummins accepted the position on the condition that it would be *a church for all peoples*. He told the bishop that he had spent

years watching Catholic and Christian countries battle each other over national interests. He saw too many deaths. The parish would be called Our Lady of Peace and it would be open to all.

“For almost 100 years, the parish has welcomed people from across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, and gathered them around the Eucharistic Table as one people.”

This is how the parish website speaks of the place of the Eucharist in the life of the community: “There is nothing more important, nothing more essential, nothing more rewarding we do than to follow the command of the Lord who celebrated the first Eucharist and then told us to do it in memory of him. Our celebration of the Mass strengthens us to do all that we do in the name of Jesus. Without it, our church would be nothing more than a pretty building.”

The latest chapter in the story of Our Lady of Peace unfolded recently. “In October 2015,” Riley says, “daily news reports were filled with images of people trying to make their way out of the war-torn Middle East to Greece, Turkey, and then into Europe, seeking asylum. Mothers and fathers held small children in their arms and clung to others. They carried few belongings. Terror and fear were etched on their faces.

“Pope Francis asked every parish in Europe to adopt a refugee family and, at the next Pastoral Council meeting at Our Lady of Peace, a motion was made that the parish respond to the pope’s invitation. This small parish, which had a history of welcoming strangers into the fabric of its life and around the Eucharistic Table, voted to adopt a refugee family. Father Gary Chmura, the pastor, urged, ‘Let’s go for it!’

“Refugee Services of Catholic Charities was contacted, and they helped lay out a plan. A few months later, the parish was notified that a Syrian refugee family, with three young children, would be arriving in a week. The agency had rented a house and in the ensuing week the people of Our Lady of Peace completely furnished it with everything this family could possibly need. One parishioner prepared a Halal meal which was waiting for the family late on the night of their arrival in the city when a group of parishioners brought them from the airport to their new home.


“It is close to a year since the Alali family came to Cleveland. A small

group of trained parishioners has worked and played regularly with the family, helping them to adapt to a new culture and life. In the spring, the family was invited to visit Our Lady of Peace Parish for the first time; the occasion was a baby shower for the newest member of the family.”

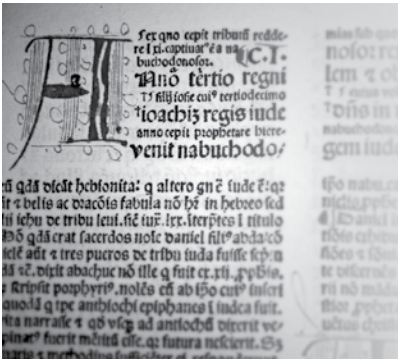
And here is the extraordinary thing. When the parish first learned that the Alali family was devout Muslims, some people voiced concern. Why not a Catholic or a Christian family? But, for almost a century, the parish had welcomed all who sought spiritual nourishment and a sense of belonging.

According to Riley, “The Eucharistic Table was the center. It was the nourishment of the Eucharist and the sense of community it fosters that allowed one more family to feel the effects of the Eucharist. It was not because the Syrians were Catholic that caused us to reach out. Rather, it was that the people of Our Lady of Peace Parish *are Catholic and eucharistic* that moved us to do so.”

Another aspect of the parish’s inclusivity and outreach is that, at Father Gary’s initiative and invitation, on different Sundays of the month the Northeast Ohio members of the Syro-Malabar Rite celebrate the Eucharist at Our Lady of Peace and African immigrants gather to celebrate Mass in their native Igbo and Swahili languages.

The parishioners of Our Lady of Peace would say that they are not exceptional. There are doubtless innumerable Catholic parishes across the country and the world that are similarly moved by the power of the Eucharist enabling them to reach out to others with open hands and hearts. I personally know many. In highlighting Our Lady of Peace, and them, we recall with awe and appreciation how the Eucharist transforms communities into living witnesses of God’s mercy and compassion. 

Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Patrick Riley



## BREAKING THE WORD

# Scriptural Reflections – Homiletics

by Dianne Bergant, CSA

## July 2, 2017 Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a; Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 8-19 (NABR); Romans 6:3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10:37-42**

The Liturgical Year consists of the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter; special solemnities such as the Most Holy Trinity, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and All Saints; feasts like the Transfiguration, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and All Souls; and Ordinary Time. The choice of lectionary readings for the seasons, solemnities, and feasts is usually determined by the theological meaning of the respective season, solemnity, or feast. The primary theme in the readings for Ordinary Time is discipleship.

Today's reading from Matthew sounds harsh and demanding; it may not sound like the "good news" we claim that it is. It calls us to put aside the most intimate human bonds of love, the bonds between parent and child, in favor of discipleship. This demands a radical realignment of fundamental priorities. Now, everything must be viewed and evaluated through the lens of discipleship.

We must be open to all, not merely our family, racial, ethnic, or political companions. We must welcome those who might be different from us and provide for their needs to the best of our ability. A cup of cold water is an excellent metaphor for this service, for it was a necessity in a wind-swept arid desert, as was much of the land of ancient Israel. The disciples of Jesus had to learn that they, their loved ones, and the people they served all belonged to a new family referred to as the people of God. The commitment and attention they willingly gave to their families of origin were now to be extended to all. This is what it means to die in Christ and rise in Christ as new people. This is the

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“newness of life” of which Paul speaks in the second reading.

The gospel reading’s mention of attentiveness to the needs of a prophet explains the choice of the first reading. The passage from 2 Kings is an example of caring for a prophet and then being rewarded. While reward generally is important, the specific character of the woman’s reward should not be overlooked. She had no son and her husband was old. This meant that she was facing possible widowhood, a great threat to security for a woman in a patriarchal society, for most women enjoyed the benefits of society through the agency of the men of their family. As a sonless widow, she would have no male advocate. This woman opened her house to Elisha, and in turn her future security was guaranteed through a son. This is the ultimate act of social commitment.

Both the first and the third readings provide insights into discipleship and the social action that it demands. While Pope Paul VI said: “If you want peace, work for justice” (World Day of Peace 1972), these readings call us deeper into the undergirding of justice, into the realm of love, the kind of love that binds us as a new creation. The psalm uses covenant language to speak of this binding love: *hesed* (mercy; a better translation is lovingkindness) and *’emûnah* (faithfulness). These are characteristics of God. In other words, we are bound to each other in covenant by God’s mercy (lovingkindness) and faithfulness, not our own. As disciples, we are a new creation through the new life of God that is in us. The psalm says: “Blessed the people . . . who walk in the radiance of *your* face, LORD. *You* are their majestic strength.”

It is clear that the call to discipleship is a call to a new reality and a new way of discipleship living that flows from that reality. It is a call to open oneself to the needs of others who are looked on as sisters and brothers all. It is a call to realize the mercy (lovingkindness) and faithfulness of God that binds us to each other in covenant.

It broadens and deepens Pope Paul’s injunction to say: *If you want peace, work for justice; if you want justice, live in love.*

July 9, 2017  
Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13-14; Romans 8:9, 11-13;**

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

If the readings for last Sunday appeared, at first glance, to be harsh and demanding, the passages for today seem to be just the opposite. They speak of gentleness and meekness, graciousness and mercy. However, a closer look will show the underlying commonality in the characterizations of God in both readings. Last week's psalm response spoke of God's mercy (lovingkindness) and faithfulness. This week, the first reading, the psalm response, and the gospel passage depict the same characteristics and add tenderness and peace to the list.

At the time of the prophet Zechariah, the people of Judah had returned from exile in Babylon. Though some of their dreams for a new life had materialized, what they now experienced was a far cry from what they had hoped. They finally had a new temple, but in no way did it compare with the spectacular temple of Solomon that had been desecrated and destroyed years earlier. They had a king, but he was a Persian puppet. Living in their own land, they were really an occupied people and relatively powerless.

It is for this people that the prophet paints a picture of a future king who will save them from their miserable plight. However, rather than appearing with military ostentation on a mighty stallion, this king will come to them on a lowly donkey. He will be humble, but not humiliated, for he will be powerful enough to banish all the trappings of war and violence. Furthermore, his peaceful reign will encompass the entire world.

This depiction of the humble king probably influenced Matthew's characterization of Jesus, who identifies himself as meek and humble. Like the humble king depicted in the first reading, Jesus exercises dominion over all things, because all things had been handed over to him by God. Furthermore, he calls God "Father," indicating the fundamental and intimate relationship he enjoys with God.

The psalm response characterizes God as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in mercy (lovingkindness)." This is the way God is depicted in Exodus (34:6) after the people's betrayal of God by worshipping the golden calf. There this identification of God is associated with God's personal name "the LORD" (a circumlocution that avoids pronouncing the mysterious personal name of God). This connection with the divine name implies that the identification

is more than an honorific description. Rather, it designates the very identity of God. “Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” is the very essence of God. The psalm goes on to describe God’s majestic and glorious reign. This reign unfolds as graciousness, mercy, lovingkindness, and faithfulness, not through brute force or intimidation.

This is the God whom Jesus calls Father. These are the attributes that, joined to the Father, are Jesus’ as well. These are the attributes to which he calls his disciples. These attributes might be natural to God, but they can be a burdensome yoke for women and men. However, Jesus insists that they take up this burden and learn from him how to carry it. It is really the only way that they will know the peace that is promised in the first reading.

Though Paul uses very different images in the second reading, he is talking about the same kind of Christian living. He contrasts living according to the flesh, or giving in to human limitations that sometimes incline us away from God, to living according to the spirit, or being attuned to God and following the example of Jesus. This is the yoke that Jesus says is easy; this is the burden that is light. It will be easy and light if we are joined to Jesus, who is joined to the Father, who is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Perhaps the messages of last Sunday and this Sunday are not so different after all.

July 16, 2017  
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 65:10-14; Romans 8:18-23; Matthew 13:1-23**

In the northern hemisphere, July is a time when spring planting begins to burgeon and flourish. The skeletal branches of trees are clothed in luxurious leafage; flowers embellish the land with brilliant colors and muted shades and perfume the air with their intoxicating scents; fruits and vegetables promise a robust harvest and a sumptuous table. It is no wonder that the lavishness of nature prompted the biblical writers to employ it as a metaphor for the inexhaustible potential of the word of God.



In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah compares the dynamism of the word of God to the refreshing and life-giving properties of rain. Rain is essential if vegetation is to grow and prosper. Acknowledgement of this fact is found as early as the creation narrative in Genesis: "There was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the LORD had sent no rain upon the earth" (Gn 2:5).

While vegetation can certainly grow without human assistance, both Isaiah and the author of Genesis comment on human agency for the cultivation of crops: "... giving seed to the one who sows" (Is 55:10); "... and there was no man to till the ground" (Gn 2:5b). It is this cooperative venture between God and human beings that is the subject of the parable in the gospel passage.

The gospel reading is frequently identified as the Parable of the Sower, when in reality it is more about the nature of the seed than it is about the sower. Unlike the passage from Isaiah which emphasizes the significance of the water rather than the land and the seed that is sown in it, this reading is more interested in the levels of receptivity of the land. Anyone who attempts to cultivate crops knows that not all soil possesses the nutrients necessary for growth. The people of Galilee who heard this story would have understood what Jesus was saying. However, Matthew indicates that Jesus was teaching in parables, stories that appear to deal with what is familiar, but which have far deeper meaning that is often startling.

Jesus states that not everyone will be able to grasp the deeper meaning of this parable. This theme is found throughout today's readings. Just as in the reading from Isaiah, the land must be open to receive the life-giving water, and in the gospel passage, the soil must be free of obstacles if the seed is to take root and thrive, so those hearing the parable must have open minds and open hearts if they are to grasp its deeper meaning.

Not everyone at the time of Isaiah was open to his preaching; not everyone at the time of Jesus was open to his. The disciples were assured by Jesus that they were privileged, for he explained the meaning of the parable. Because of their closeness with him, they had open eyes to see and open ears to hear and understand. This challenges us to wonder about our own openness to the word of God.

The reading from Paul takes the theme of natural creation in an entirely

different direction. He broadens his teaching on eschatological transformation to include the entire natural world. Mention of labor pangs calls to mind the ancient Israelite belief that great suffering will precede the final eschatological transformation, just as labor pains precede natural birth. It is a metaphoric way of speaking of the struggle that often accompanies the radical change we undergo when we are open to the Spirit of God.

Paul might be speaking metaphorically when he describes the groaning of creation, but contemporary cosmologists insist that human beings are not separate from the rest of the natural world; we are part of it, and it is part of us. Therefore, when we groan as we are being transformed, the rest of nature groans as well; and when creation groans in labor pains, it is really our groaning. All of creation is interconnected.

July 23, 2017  
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43**

The readings for this Sunday offer us a variety of theological themes upon which to meditate. Perhaps the most apparent theme focuses our attention on the patience of God in the face of human infidelity. This is clearly seen in the first parable found in the gospel passage. We like to think of the reign of God as one of faithfulness, of acceptance and loving care of others, of generosity and forgiveness.

While such a description might point to the future world of fulfillment, in the real world in which we all live the reign of God includes women and men who struggle with inclinations to disloyalty, selfishness, and vindictiveness. At times, they are successful in this struggle; at other times, they falter and fail. The reign of God is comprised of real women and men.

Those who think that it is better to have a smaller but more faithful community of believers have not grasped the deeper message of this parable. The owner of the field which contains both sprouting wheat

and choking weeds is told: "Now is not the time. Separating now could cause undue uprooting. Wait until the harvest when everything will be uprooted. That will be the time for separation."

That means that until the time of harvest, there is a chance that the weeds will indeed choke some of the wheat. But it is also possible that the wheat will thrive and overcome the weeds. One never knows. What is obvious in this parable is God's magnanimous patience. Unlike many human beings, God is not quick to judge and punish. God is more than tolerant; God allows growth to happen at its own pace, even if sometimes this means one step forward and two steps back.

The second parable, though quite different from the first, does contain a common thread. The mustard seed is said to be the smallest of all seeds. This might also mean that it was the kind of seed that few people thought could amount to much — not unlike judgment on the mixed field in the first parable. However, give it time and it might surprise you.

This parable, too, points out how quick we sometimes are to judge the potential of others. The field might yield an outstanding harvest despite the weeds that it contains, and the mustard seed might produce a magnificent tree whose strong and ample branches will provide space for nesting. Be patient; give them time.

The first reading from Wisdom also highlights God's forbearance ("you have not unjustly condemned" [13]; you are "lenient to all" [16]). We must not be naive here. Divine lenience does not rule out divine justice. It simply means that God knows when strict justice might uproot tender seedlings and when it can be endured by a fully grown yield. In many ways, this is a question of timing. When is an action appropriate to a particular context and when is it not? The readings for today remind us that our timing is not always God's timing.

Juxtaposed with the first reading and the gospel passage for today, the verses from the Letter to the Romans speak to this reflection on divine graciousness in the face of human limitations. Paul credits the Spirit of God, the dynamic power of God active in the world, for any success human beings might accomplish. It is this Spirit who "comes to the aid of our weakness" (26). Paul claims that the Spirit intercedes for us because we really don't know how to pray.

Today that passage might also imply that, by ourselves, we really don't understand divine justice or divine patience. Then what are we to do? The answer might sound trite, but, following the movement of the Spirit of God that works within and through us, we do the best we can and leave the rest in the hands of God. Easier said than done!

## July 30, 2017 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-130, 129-130;  
Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52**

Following rules, as annoying and uncomfortable as this might be at times, is really the easy part. The challenge is to know which rules to follow and when to follow them. This requires wisdom. The readings for today offer examples of the need for wisdom.

The Bible looks at wisdom from three different perspectives. The first might be called experiential wisdom. It is the kind of wisdom or insight we acquire by reflecting on and learning from experience, the kind of wisdom we realize that we need in order to navigate the waters of life and come through them successfully. Its essence is captured in the proverb: "The beginning of wisdom is: get wisdom" (Prv 4:7).

This is the kind of wisdom depicted in the parables in the gospel passage. In the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price, someone recognizes true value and is willing to give up everything else to possess it. The parable of the net of fish underscores the person's ability to distinguish between what is good and what is not. In these instances, wisdom is gained from reflecting on experience and then making right judgments.

A second kind of wisdom might be considered religious wisdom. It lays out directions for behavior that conforms to the values and dictates of a specific religious tradition. This point of view is contained in the proverb: "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the LORD" (Prv 9:10). Fear here refers to a sense of respect and awe for God. Religious wisdom is not in conflict with experiential wisdom. Rather, it builds on it. Psalm 119 is a wisdom psalm. The verses chosen for today's response underscore

the importance of obedience to religious directives. They also indicate that such obedience will result in a secure and successful life.

As important as experiential and religious wisdom are for successful living, one reaches a point in life where one realizes that there are some questions that neither experience nor religion can adequately answer, some issues that they cannot resolve, some aspirations that they cannot fulfill. It was in response to such yearning that Augustine exclaimed: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." For want of a better designation, that which can fulfill such yearnings might be called divine wisdom. This is the wisdom or insight that comes only from God. It is the wisdom that is at the heart of the story of Solomon in the today's first reading. This story was probably largely responsible for the longstanding tradition regarding the remarkable wisdom of Solomon. The narrative contains several points that will help us understand how the Bible understands this kind of wisdom.

First, such wisdom comes from God, because it belongs to God. As shrewd or obedient as human beings might be, there is much about life, the universe, and God that humans will never be able to understand or control. (The Book of Job deals with just such human limitation.) This wisdom is only given to those who humbly acknowledge their limitations, as Solomon is depicted in this passage. Furthermore, this wisdom is not meant to be the property of one lone individual. If one receives it, it is given for the benefit of others. Solomon asked for it so that he might rule with a "listening heart."

These readings and the wisdom that they outline are certainly important for those who have been called to be disciples. First, there is the need for the common sense that comes from serious reflecting on life experience. Next is a commitment to the direction provided by the religious tradition. Finally, humble prayer and openness to God can dispose one for the enlightenment that can only come from God.

## August 6, 2017 The Transfiguration of the Lord

**Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9; 2 Peter 1:16-19;**

## Matthew 17:1-9

The lectionary readings for major feasts and solemnities are chosen because they in some way throw light on the theological meaning of the day. The Transfiguration of the Lord is a case in point. This event was an extraordinary occurrence, and so we look to the readings for the day to see how they might enlighten us.

The gospel passage which provides an account of this occurrence can be divided into two parts, the experience of Jesus (verses 1-3) and that of those who are with him (verses 4-9). It takes place on a mountain, the location where divine revelation often occurs, because it was believed that the gods lived in or often frequented high places. The change in Jesus is a metamorphosis (*metamorphóō*), a change into another form. In reality, it was not so much that Jesus was changed as that his inner reality normally hidden from sight now shone forth. Brilliant light usually accompanies a celestial revelation like this, as does the appearance of otherworldly beings. Appearing and conversing with Jesus are Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the law and the prophets respectively. Their presence and apparent exchange with Jesus affirm the legitimacy of his teaching. Most commentators believe that this event is less a vision of future resurrection glory than it is a revelation of Jesus' true identity.

The transfiguration is witnessed by Peter, James, and John, three disciples who feature prominently in the Gospels. (This is probably because they were significant leaders in the early church.) Overwhelmed by the splendor of the experience, Peter asks that something be done to preserve it. However, mere human beings cannot direct an experience of God to their own advantage. As is frequently the case with a theophany, a voice is heard from a cloud, a voice that both frightens the disciples and enlightens them. This voice reveals the true nature of Jesus. He is God's beloved Son.

Coupling the gospel passage with the first reading suggests that we understand the transfigured Jesus as the mysterious figure who appeared in the clouds of heaven in Daniel's vision. That figure is described as "one like a Son of Man," unlike the beasts that rule the other nations. In other words, he is human in appearance. Read on this feast, the passage allows us to relate God's acknowledgement of the glory of Jesus on the mountain with the dominion, splendor, and universal kingship bestowed on the one like a Son of Man. Like

that mysterious figure, Jesus might be human in appearance, but he is much more than that.

The psalm response supports the image of a divine king (LORD is the official substitute for the personal name of God), thus emphasizing the notion of Jesus as the Son of God. Like the one like a Son of Man, this king is enthroned in heaven and rules over the entire world. Clouds and darkness suggest a theophany, as is the occasion in the gospel reading.

The second reading is a passage from an early Christian letter, written around the end of the first century or beginning of the second. It claims the identity and authority of Peter in order to legitimate the teaching that it contains. It seems that belief in the second coming of Christ was being attacked and, in these verses, the author is defending it. He appeals to the honor and glory perceived at the time of the transfiguration to exemplify the power and glory that will be revealed at the time of the Parousia. He then repeats the words that identify Jesus as the Son of God.

On this feast, we celebrate the majesty and glory of Christ; a majesty and glory that is his as the Son of God; a majesty and glory that we will all experience when we finally behold him face-to-face.

## August 13, 2017 Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a; Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33**

What do we know about God? And how do we know it? But then, how do we know anything about anyone? The answer is, they reveal themselves to us, as we reveal ourselves to them. Sometimes this occurs through words spoken; sometimes people are revealed through their actions. The challenge rests in the ability to interpret what we hear and see. The same is true with regard to God. We know about God through God's self-revelation. This challenge rests in our ability to interpret it.

The first reading for this Sunday is an account of a story of theophany or divine revelation. The prophet Elijah is told to stand out on the mountain for the LORD was about to pass by. First came a mighty wind, like that through which God spoke to Job (Jb 38:1); next, an earthquake similar to the one that accompanied God's giving the law to Moses (Ex 19:18). Then a fire, like the burning bush (Ex 3:2). God was not in any of these familiar phenomena.

It was in the silence that followed these wondrous incidents that Elijah realized the presence of God. While it is true that the majesty of God is revealed in the power of the natural world, God is also present in the ordinary occurrences of everyday life, in silent moments, in the breezes and in the calmness, and in the flickers of light. These theophanies reveal a God who is mighty, fearsome, and mysterious, but also gentle and approachable. Do we have the ability to interpret what we hear and see?

The gospel passage is another account of divine self-revelation. There was a strong tradition in ancient Israel that only the mighty creator-God had power over the waters of chaos (Gn 9:11; Ex 15:8; Ps 33:7; 74:15; etc.). Lake Gennesaret, also known as the Sea of Galilee, is known even today for the sudden and violent storms that arise on it. This is the context for Jesus' self-revelation.

By walking calmly over the unruly waters, Jesus is doing what only the creator-God can do. Do the disciples in the boat realize this? Peter certainly was not sure, for he cried out: "If it is you. . ." At first, he started walking on the turbulent water. However, his faith in Jesus' creator-power was not strong enough to withstand his fear of chaos and possible destruction, and so he began to sink. We should not be too quick to judge these men. Do we have the ability to interpret what we hear and see?

Are we like Elijah, with our own expectations about what God will say to us and how God will act? Probably. So, while we should be open to extraordinary manifestations of divine presence, we cannot afford to miss what is ordinary in life — for that is where most of life unfolds. Are we like the disciples in the boat, afraid of the dangers present in so much of life, even though we profess faith in Jesus? Probably. Trust should not make us foolhardy, but genuine trust will bond us to our powerful Lord.



The basis of this trust is described in the psalm response. It speaks of lovingkindness, truth, justice, and peace, characteristics of God as the covenant partner of human beings. Lovingkindness refers to God's loyalty; truth is God's faithfulness; justice to God's righteousness. Finally, peace is the wholeness or harmony that results from the covenantal relationship. This is what our religious tradition tells us about God. Do we have the ability to interpret what we hear and see?

## August 15, 2017 The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**Revelation 11:19a, 12:1-6a, 10ab; Psalm 45:10, 11, 12, 16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56**

What is most important to remember about Mary is that all of her honor stems from her relationship with Jesus. She was chosen for his sake, made holy by his blessedness, assumed into heaven through his power. Mary is the prime example of the wonders God can accomplish in the life of a simple human being who is open to divine grace. Mary's assumption into heaven means more than that the body that brought forth the flesh and blood of Jesus did not undergo bodily decomposition. To limit Mary's privilege to the prevention of natural decay is to miss the deeper religious meaning of this tenet of our faith. Here again the readings can help us.

The gospel passage recounts a very touching meeting of two women. Neither of these women should be pregnant, for Mary is a virgin and Elizabeth is past child-bearing age. This wonder is the way the Bible tells us that both children will play significant roles in the religious history of the people. It is Mary's bold response to Elizabeth's momentous tribute that is truly extraordinary. In the song now known as the *Magnificat*, Mary first praises God for having chosen to accomplish great things through her, a very lowly person. She goes on to list many of the ways that God has always been on the side of those who are marginal or needy or seemingly unimportant. According to Mary, her greatness has nothing to do with herself and everything to do with God.

A pregnant woman also appears in the reading from Revelation. She is never explicitly identified. She is considered variously as the heavenly

Jerusalem, personified wisdom, or the church. Reading the passage on a Marian feast would have us see her as Mary.

The passage itself is bursting with mythological imagery. The woman is arrayed like an astral deity. The seven-headed dragon is a composite of various cosmic monsters. Thus, the conflict between them is cosmic, encompassing both heaven and earth. This woman is important because of the child she is carrying, a child who will exercise universal rule. When she gives birth, her son is "caught up to God and his throne," an indication of his divine nature. There is no mention that the cosmic conflict is over. What is over is the threat to the woman. Her importance lies in her having given birth to the child. Having accomplished that, she flees to the desert where, presumably, she will find safety.

The dignity of the woman of this reflection is enhanced by the responsorial psalm. It describes a woman with royal imagery. Chosen by the king, she stands at his right hand, the place of particular distinction. She was not born into royalty, for she is told to forget her family of origin in favor of the king. In other words, his graciousness is the wellspring of her honor.

Finally, the reading from 1 Corinthians provides a theological explanation for the exceptional blessings that were afforded Mary, even though it makes no mention of her. Paul is discussing the scope and depth of the power of the resurrection of Christ. Though it might be perplexing to us, his manner of argument was certainly quite familiar to the people of his time. Employing the human solidarity between Adam, Christ, and all human beings, he argues that just as all those joined to Adam will suffer the death that he brought into the world, so all those joined to Christ will share in the resurrected life he achieved. Paul traces the progress of Christ's resurrection victory: Christ is the first fruits of this victory, then, in proper order, those who belong to Christ. Thus, just as during her life, the lowly Mary enjoyed special honor through the power of her Son, so after death she enjoys special blessings through the power of his resurrection.

August 20, 2017  
Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6-8; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28**

One of the most dangerous religious convictions that all too often rears its vicious head is the claim that God's blessings are available to some but not to others. This notion develops out of a distorted idea of being God's chosen people. While it is true that the idea of being chosen by God is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition, the important point is *why* some are chosen. Ancient Israel states this reason at the very beginning of the story of Abraham: "All the families of the earth will find blessing in you" (Gn 12:3). The responsibility of those chosen to bring the blessing of God to others is illustrated in all of today's readings.

The short reading from the prophet Isaiah is a beautiful testimony to the universalism of God's salvation. It states that foreigners, not simply resident aliens, will join the chosen people in their worship of the God of Israel. The temple, considered the most sacred place on earth, will be "a house of prayer for *all* peoples."

The psalm response offers a slightly different perspective on this theme of universalism. It is really a prayer of petition, asking for a bountiful harvest for Israel. The psalm goes on to suggest that the blessings that God bestows on Israel will cause other nations to turn to God. God's universal rule is then praised, as is the fairness with which God judges those other nations.

The account of the healing of the daughter of a Canaanite woman contains several interesting features. In it, Jesus crosses several significant cultural boundaries. First, he crosses an actual geographic boundary and enters into Gentile territory, something an observant Jew of the time would hesitate doing. Many readers are troubled by Jesus' interaction with the woman. At first, he ignores her, not ready to cross the boundaries of conversing with a Canaanite and doing so publically with a woman. When he does speak, he seems to uphold the rigid interpretation of "chosen" as being exclusive and superior. He then appears to insult her, referring to her people as "dogs," the Jewish term of contempt for Gentiles.

Not wanting to cast Jesus in a bad light, some readers claim that he is simply acting as an observant Jewish man. Others presume that he is testing the woman before he heals her daughter. Some feminists argue that Jesus is exhibiting traditional Jewish prejudice, and it is the persistence of this Canaanite mother who forces him to a more open perspective. Still others hold that the story is really reflects the early Matthean community's initial reluctance to launch a mission to the Gentiles. On the other hand, the woman recognizes Jesus as a messianic figure (Son of David), who has power over demons. Furthermore, she is persistent even in the face of rebuffs, as any desperate mother might be. In the end, Jesus praises her for her faith, and the door is open to the Gentiles to join the Christian movement.

Paul, of course, is the hero of the mission to the Gentiles and their membership in the community. However, in the reading from Romans, the tables have been turned. Previously, the question concerned the possibility of the Gentiles enjoying the blessings promised to the Jewish community. Now at issue is if and how the Jewish community might enjoy the blessings possessed by the Gentile Christian community, since they do not accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world. Paul reminds his Gentile converts that they owe their own entrance into the people of God to the Jews. Now, if the Jews' rejection brought the Gentiles reconciliation with God, think of what will be accomplished by the Jews' acceptance of Christ.

Perhaps Paul's most striking words pertain to the promises God made to the Jewish people through the patriarchs. He insists: ". . . the gifts and call of God are irrevocable." In other words, all are called, all are welcome.

## August 27, 2017 Twentieth-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 22:19-23; Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20**

The gospel passage for today consists of two parts. The first (verses 13-17) is a testimony of Peter's faith in Jesus as the Messiah; the second (verses 18-20) is Jesus' declaration of Peter's singular authority in the

future church. As the story is told, the second flows from the first.

At the time of Jesus, there were several different messianic traditions. They included: the well-known political tradition featuring a king from the family of David; the tradition that expected a great prophet; an apocalyptic expectation focusing on the eschatological Son of Man; and one that looked forward to an impressive high priest.


In this passage, Jesus identifies himself as the eschatological Son of Man, and he then asks what the people think of him. It seems that some thought he was the mysterious prophet; others suggested Elijah or John the Baptist back from the grave. These were all figures associated with the long-promised time of fulfillment. It is Simon Peter who identifies him as the Messiah and the Son of the living God. (Since there is question whether a Jew like Simon Peter would have used the Greek title "Son of God," it was probably added by a later Christian writer.)

Jesus responds to Simon Peter's profession of faith with an extraordinary appointment and commission. First, he states that Simon Peter would have gained such insight only through a revelation from God. This kind of faith is a gift. What follows is a literary play on his name. Simon Bar (son of) Jonah is Hebrew; Peter is Greek. While Matthew's Gospel generally refers to him as Peter, in this Gospel Jesus uses the Hebrew name (Mt 16:17; 17:25), thus making the change of name significant.

In the Bible, a change of name indicates a change in identity and purpose: Abram becomes Abraham (father of a multitude of people, Gn 17:5); Sarai becomes Sarah (mother of many nations, Gn 17:15); Jacob becomes Israel (contended with the divine and prevailed, Gn 32:29). Now Simon becomes Peter (*Pétros*), and on this rock (*pétra*) Jesus will build his church. The play on words is apparent. The image is clear; in order to be firm, a building must have a solid foundation. However, the meaning of the image is deeper than what seems obvious. *Pétros* is to be the *pétra* of Jesus' *ekklēsia* (assembly of believers).

The symbol of Peter's authority is the bestowal of the keys of the kingdom. The first reading throws light on the meaning of this feature. The passage from Isaiah is an account of the future replacement of the official Shebna with Eliakim, the son of the high priest Hilkiah who found the book of the law in the temple during the reform of King Josiah (2 Kgs 23:24). The office in question is master of the palace.

While this is certainly a civic office, in ancient Israel even civic offices had a religious character, for they served the people of God in the holy city Jerusalem. The passage seems to describe a ritual of investiture. Called “father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” implies that Eliakim will have jurisdiction over the entire southern kingdom. In this capacity, he will carry the key of the House (family) of David, a symbol of authority. Furthermore, he will function like a peg that holds all things in place. This reading throws light on the gospel passage’s description of the “investiture” of Peter.

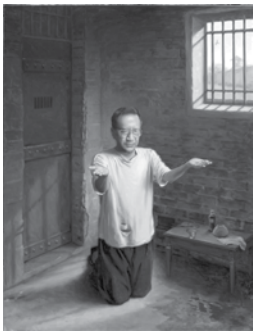
While Eliakim’s authority will be managerial, Peter’s will be judicial or disciplinary. In other words, he will interpret the law. In the Jewish tradition, he would be seen as the chief rabbi. Within the Christian tradition, particularly Roman Catholicism, this passage is considered the basis of papal authority in the Church. 



## EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •  
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### Art Review



**CARDINAL  
THUAN**  
Paul Newton  
2011, Oil on Linen

John Christman,  
SSS

Paul Newton is incontestably an accomplished and technically superior portrait artist. He has received international recognition for his portraiture and is highly recognized in his home country of Australia. Catholic audiences may be familiar with his portraiture through his immensely popular portrayal of the Blessed Virgin Mary. His portrait *Our Lady of the Southern Cross*, which is displayed in Saint Mary's Cathedral in Sydney and was blessed by Pope Benedict XVI, captures the image of Mary and the infant Jesus with delicacy, grace, and devotion without giving into the painterly temptation of becoming overly pious or robbing the subject of its humanity.

To date, one of Newton's greatest achievements is the body of paintings that fill the Domus Australia Chapel in Rome. Commissioned by Cardinal George Pell in 2010, Newton embarked upon the grand endeavor of painting 32 works for the sacred space. Drawing largely from the history of the Catholic Church in Australia, the paintings depict events and saints significant to that Catholic community.

Striking amidst the pageantry of saints and Church leaders depicted in rich liturgical vestments, amidst impressive ecclesial or idyllic pastoral settings, is the portrayal of Cardinal Thuan. Clad in a torn and tattered t-shirt, the imprisoned bishop kneels within his dreary cell, arms outstretched offering the sacrifice of the Mass in the most humble and forlorn circumstances.

Arrested and placed in prison for political reasons in 1976 during a particularly tumultuous period in Vietnamese history, Francis Xavier Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan spent 13 years in prison, nine of those in solitary confinement. Ever mindful of the people he was ordained to serve, then-Bishop Thuan wrote short sentences of encouragement which were smuggled out on scraps of paper and shared among the people. These messages were eventually compiled into a book entitled *The Road to Hope*. His was a message of hope to a people in need of

hope, and amazingly it came from the midst of a lonely prison cell.

What's so impressive was how he could transform the desperation of his circumstances into a beacon of hope. As he wrote on one of these scraps of paper, "If you are in some remote place or even if you find yourself in the darkness of prison: take heart. Turn towards the altars of the world where the Lord Jesus himself is offering sacrifice. Unite with the sacrifice of the Mass and make a spiritual Communion with him. Your heart will then be filled to overflowing with all the consolation and courage you need."<sup>1</sup>

Newton's painting of Cardinal Thuan catches him in just such a moment. Modest elements of bread and wine in his hands lifted up in offering to God. The soft light illuminating the bread and wine as well as the dignity and peace of Cardinal Thuan's expression. The Eucharist was an abundant source of strength and hope for Cardinal Thuan in his imprisonment.

Equally impressive in Newton's depiction of Cardinal Thuan's eucharistic offering is how starkly it contrasts not only with many of the other paintings in the chapel but also with the eucharistic celebrations that take place in the chapel itself, with gold chalices, marble altar, and finely crafted vestments.

These things are not problematic in themselves. Newton's depiction of Thuan celebrating the Eucharist, however, functions as a powerful witness to the deeper truth that sometimes gets swallowed up by all the liturgical accouterments. As a piece of sacred art in a liturgical space, the painting powerfully challenges those gathered for Mass not to get lost in the superficial, liturgically or theologically, but to recall instead who we are before God. That in the midst of despair, in the most harrowing of circumstances, when we are tempted to believe all is lost, Jesus does not abandon us. Instead, Jesus is with us still, in the most profound and abiding way.

As Cardinal Thuan wrote from that horrible prison cell, "If you lack everything or find yourself bereft of all possessions but still have the Eucharist, you should not be concerned. In fact, you still have everything, because you have the Lord of heaven here on earth with you."<sup>2</sup> Would that all of our liturgical spaces included such powerful reminders.

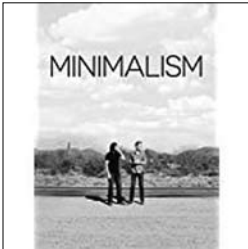
## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Francis Xavier Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, *The Road to Hope* (New York, NY: New City Press, 2013), 364.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.



## Film Review



**MINIMALISM: A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE IMPORTANT THINGS**  
Matt D'Avella  
United States,  
2016

John Christman,  
SSS

The vast majority of the members of Catholic religious orders take a vow of poverty. I recall hearing a religious sister speaking to a group of young religious about the vow of poverty. She said to them in a frank manner that religious sisters and brothers in the first world don't live or even really know actual poverty by any stretch of the imagination. They have a place to live. They don't have to worry about food. They have health insurance. They are well provided for by their religious orders.

Instead, she suggested, it was more appropriate to speak about simplicity. Religious are called to live a life of simplicity. And yet, religious, like most people, find that to be challenging. American religious women and men are bombarded by the same consumerist mentality and message as the rest of Americans. Things that were once thought luxuries, like televisions and cellphones, are now considered commonplace or perhaps even necessary for each religious. What is happening to the religious value of poverty and simplicity?

The Second Vatican Council stressed in its document *Gaudium et Spes* that the Church has something to offer to the world but, in an impressive acknowledgment, the world also has something to offer the Church (GS, § 44). The documentary *Minimalism: A Documentary about the Important Things* may just be such an instance.

*Minimalism* portrays the life choices of a disparate group of young Americans attempting to live their lives in simplicity. It is a decidedly counter-cultural choice and perspective. From an advertising executive who started an internet trend by reducing her entire wardrobe to 33 pieces (including shoes and jewelry) to a couple who reduced all of their possessions and moved into a "tiny house," all of the people in the film have in their own way discovered the truth to the old adage, "Less is more."

At the center of the film are Joshua Milburn and Ryan Nicodemus, two young, economically successful men who discovered that the more they earned and the more they possessed didn't actually bring them greater happiness or peace. In fact, in some instances these things surprisingly took them away from the more meaningful aspects of life. The two have authored books and essays on the topic of Minimalism, and their stories and reflections create the narrative arch of the film.

However, it's the inclusion of interviews with neuroscientists, sociologists, economists, and other experts that provides some of the most substantial and thought-provoking material. These shed light upon certain factors which drive the increasingly consumerist culture and, importantly, upon the effects this unbridled consumerism has upon the human person. While the subject is not handled with academic rigor, there's enough information shared and enough counter-cultural witness stories for the viewer to perceive a meaningful alternative to the prevailing cultural value that more money and more possessions bring happiness.

These stories and reflections, coupled with images of people physically fighting in department stores for the most coveted consumer products, certainly persuade the viewer to at least pause and reflect upon that deeper personal question, "How much is enough?" And, "What do I really need to be happy?"

There's a difficult moment in the film where an audience member confronts Millburn and Nicodemus about their chosen way of life. Frustrated with the excesses of capitalism, the audience member challenges the two, commenting that they are retreating from the world like a "hermit or a monk" when, because of their care and concern for humanity, they should be actively challenging "the wolves of Wall Street." The two stumble a bit in their response.

And perhaps this is where the Church and religious life can aid the argument. The simplicity they choose is a witness to another way of being. It not only can lead to greater peace and happiness, but is also a powerful act of solidarity with those who live simply not out of choice but out of necessity. Moreover, in publically proclaiming their simplicity and advocating for minimalism, they actually are challenging the prevailing economic values. When people hear their message and spend less on unnecessary consumer items, that has a real impact.

Interestingly, many monasteries and religious orders have thrived through the centuries with their commitment to simplicity. In fact, their commitment to a Christian spirituality of simplicity has brought them unexpected economic prosperity. This has afforded them the opportunity to financially help those who are actually poor and struggling.

This is a good question to put back to the minimalists. If your simplicity brings unexpected financial gain, how will you use that money? Will you use it for the benefit of society? Will you use it to help the poor and the marginalized find greater peace and happiness? The possibilities of simplicity are great.

## Poetry

### The Quality of Mercy

Everybody's talking  
about mercy.  
Just let everybody alone; that's  
mercy. Let them do  
their thing: mercy. Let them  
have their opinion: mercy.  
Let them kill themselves, for  
God's sake: mercy. Who

are we to tell other people  
what to do? And if we  
accommodate them, perhaps  
they'll do the same for us.  
Then we'll all be happy.

That's mercy.

So, in conclusion,  
(if I may say so):

Lord, have mercy  
on our conception  
of mercy.  
Amen.

Jared Barkan

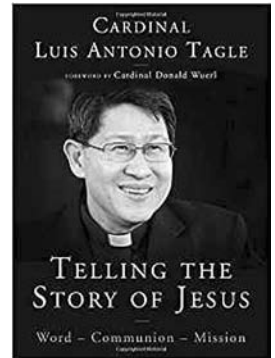
## Book Reviews

The Metropolitan Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, a theologian and shepherd close to the people, especially the poor, put together in a small volume two catecheses he delivered at the International Eucharistic Congresses in Dublin (2012) — *Communion in the Word through Mary* — and in Quebec (2008) — *The Eucharist, the Life of Christ in Our Lives* — and a conference at the Asian Mission Congress in Chiang Mai, Thailand (2006) — *Telling the Story of Jesus*.

Cardinal Tagle proposes a reflection on the mission of the Church in the world in three aspects: the primacy of the word of God, starting from the person of Mary, the centrality of the Eucharist as Jesus' gift of life for us, the role of Christians in the Asian context, where, as a small minority (3%), they are often persecuted.

With the wisdom of a theologian and the passion of a shepherd, Tagle tackles the connection between believers and the contemporary world starting from the "leasts," the first recipients of the proclamation of Christ: "The poor, the girl-child, women, refugees, migrants, the minorities, the indigenous peoples, the victims of different types of domestic, political, ethnic violence, and the environment are but few of those whose stories are suppressed. . . . The Church tells the story of Jesus, whose words often fell on deaf ears and who was executed so that he could be prevented from telling his story. So, in Asia, the Church pays tribute to him by allowing itself to be the storyteller of the voiceless so that Jesus' voice may be heard in their suppressed stories" (71-72).

Cardinal Tagle strongly points out the violence and cruelty often present and the Church's mission to unearth these false gods worshipped by the world: "How many people have exchanged the true God for idols like profit, prestige, pleasure, and control? . . . In reality, these gods are self-interests. . . . It is sad that those who worship idols sacrifice other people while preserving themselves and their interests. How many factory workers are being denied just wages for the god of profit? How many women are being sacrificed to the god of domination? How many children are being sacrificed to the god of lust? How many trees, rivers, hills are being sacrificed to the god of 'progress'? How many poor people are being sacrificed to the god of greed? How many defenseless people are being sacrificed to the god



**TELLING THE  
STORY OF JESUS:  
WORD-  
COMMUNION-  
MISSION**

Luis Antonio Tagle  
Collegetown,  
Minnesota:  
Liturgical Press,  
2015  
76 pp., \$7.99

of national security?" (44-45).

The book, notwithstanding, also relates numerous episodes rich in humanity, and Cardinal Tagle notes that it is necessary to meet the many gestures that show goodness: "In eucharistic adoration, let us join the centurion in watching over Jesus and see what he has seen. Let us cringe in horror at the sight of destructive evil. Let us marvel at the reality of spotless love, of pure sacrifice and worship. I wish that eucharistic adoration would lead us to know Jesus more as the compassionate companion of many crucified peoples of today. Let us spend time, too, with the multitudes of innocent victims of our time. We might be able to touch Jesus who knows their tears and pain, for he has made them his own and has changed them into hope and love. Watching over our neighbors, we could be changed, like the centurion, into discerners of truth and heralds of faith" (52).

If the story of Jesus becomes a piece in the museum, it cannot breathe life, the cardinal maintains. The memory of Jesus is conserved when persons appropriate it and share it. Telling the story of Jesus in Asia requires the Church's living encounter with Jesus in prayer, worship, interaction with people, especially the poor, and events that constitute the signs of the times.

Telling the story of Jesus is more effective if it springs from the experience of the storyteller. "The earliest apostles, who were Asians, spoke of their experience — what they have heard, seen with their eyes, looked upon, and touched with their hands concerning the Word of Life" (1 Jn 1:1-4) (64). Tagle maintains that the Church's *Missio ad Gentes* must be carried out *inter gentes* since an authentic mission to the people is not possible if it is not at the same time mission "with" the people. And the genuine mission "with" the people encourages the mission "to" the people.

Cardinal Tagle concludes the book with the invitation to turn to Jesus, master storyteller of the reign of God. He invites us to behold him, to listen to him, to learn from him, opening ourselves to his story and his storytelling. "His story is about the Abba he has experienced and the fullness of life Abba offers. His life and identity were rooted in this constant union with Abba. Yet he lived like an ordinary Jew, an ordinary Asian, with family, friends, women, children, foreigners, temple officials, the teachers of the law, the poor, the sick, the friendless, the sinners, and enemies. They were all part of who he was.

“He gathered a community, a new family of those who would listen to God’s word and act on it. He told them stories of Abba and life in Abba. He used their language. His parables were simple yet disarming. He told them about Abba through his meals, healing, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and critique of false religiosity. His story leads him to a supper where he was food and where he washed the feet of his friends. Nothing could stop him from telling his story, even on the cross. His humiliating death should have been the end of his story. But Abba had something more to say: ‘My Son — he is truly risen.’ Pouring his gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, Jesus entrusts his story to us. Go and tell my story again and again where it all began — in my home, in my beloved Asia!” (73).

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General Curia  
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Rome, Italy

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Organized into four chapters based on the quote from Micah 6:6-8, “Only this, act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly,” John Neafsey, a clinical psychologist, suggests that the call to be just, loving, and humble applies to everyone regardless of one’s own faith tradition or no tradition. To illustrate his thesis, Neafsey explores the vocation stories of exemplary people in the contemporary world who reflect three dimensions of faithfulness, each of which is interrelated.

Kathy Kelly is a peace activist from Chicago, who has been imprisoned over 60 times for her activities, including with the Voices in the Wilderness group she co-founded, which brings medicine, food, toys and clothing to children in Iraq. Although Neafsey concedes that many might disagree with her methods, and most are not called to her path of resistance as a way of life, few would doubt the sincerity of her convictions. We need people like Kathy Kelly to urge our consciences off the beaten track.

The chapter focusing on “Love Tenderly” offers examples to which most of us can relate, such as parenthood or being a son or daughter. Neafsey’s own experience in adopting first a son from Guatemala and then a daughter; his experience with his father’s growing dementia, all are experiences that can call us to demonstrate tender love.



**ACT JUSTLY, LOVE  
TENDERLY:  
LIFELONG  
LESSONS IN  
CONSCIENCE  
AND CALLING**  
John Neafsey  
Maryknoll, New  
York: Orbis Books,  
2016  
160 pp., \$22.00

Within the chapter on “Walk Humbly,” Neafsey first offers a reflection on the word *humility* and the image of a ladder that rests on the ground but rises up. He then draws on the letters and writings of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish girl who died at Auschwitz.

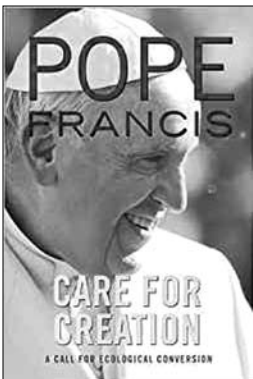
Etty called herself “a girl who could not kneel and a girl who could not pray.” However, Etty heroically learned to do both before her short life was ended. Ultimately, her parents and brother were also rounded up and sent to the same camp she was in. She found herself writing letters and accounts of the Jewish people awaiting the final trip to execution. In listening to and writing these accounts, she felt she did learn “to kneel and to pray,” a profound expression of humility.

One of the paradoxes of seeking humility is that it often becomes a source of pride. The best advice is in Neafsey’s final paragraph: “As long as we are honest with ourselves, humility tends to take care of itself. We can concentrate on being useful, on putting one foot in front of the other, and remember that God is walking with us every step of the way.”

The book would lend itself not only to personal reading and reflection, especially during Lent, but also to a prayer group or a book discussion group anytime.

Much of Neafsey’s professional work as a clinical psychologist is with people who are immigrant survivors of torture. A list of Suggested Readings concludes the book.

Mary Denis Maher, CSA  
Archivist, Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine  
Professor Emerita, Ursuline College  
Richfield, Ohio



**CARE FOR  
CREATION:  
A CALL FOR  
ECOLOGICAL  
CONVERSION**  
Pope Francis.  
Giuliano Vigini, Ed.  
Maryknoll, New  
York: Orbis Books,  
2016  
128 pp., \$18.00

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The editor, Giuliano Vigini, read every document, speech, letter, etc., of Pope Francis’ first three years and gleaned insights into the mind and heart of Pope Francis. It was genius-like to do it after three years. If he had waited for the first six years, the task would have been daunting.

The book contains ten chapters: “Care for Creation,” “Toward a Culture of Integral Ecology,” and “The Spiritual Dimension of Life,” etc. The chapters illustrate 75 themes from the thought, theology, and spirituality of Pope Francis, including taking care of creation, the

climate under threat, unacceptable waste, an honest economy, the cry of the earth, looking for progress in a new way, and others. The book could be used as a mini-encyclopedia on the thought of Pope Francis. Pick a theme about creation, check the short entry, and if you want to go more expansive, look up the document from which the excerpt is taken.

Using 32 primary resources, Vigni quotes letters to individuals, speeches to the United Nations and the European Union, addresses to popular movements, general addresses to different groups, and universities. Most quoted is the second address to the popular movements that took place in Bolivia in 2015. You might want to look that one up.

Pope Francis talks a lot about human rights, but he especially likes to speak of the “sacred rights” of land, lodging, and labor. Some theologians call that “on the ground theology.”

Pope Francis often uses the term “solidarity.” It’s another phrase that is batted around and can mean almost anything. Pope Francis is very specific: “It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all take priority over the appropriation of goods by a few” (Address to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, Rome, 2014).

The book is invaluable if one want to trace the course of Pope Francis’ thought and theology. It moves from what we owe to creation and to how we have degraded and wasted creation (four chapters) to proposing practical changes (four chapters), ending with a lifelong spirituality of commitment and relationship to Mother Earth.

One of the best things about the words of Pope Francis is that they are not wordy. Each word counts!



Marie Vianney Bilgrien, SSND  
El Paso, Texas





## EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Jared Barkan

### **When Someone Says, “I Don’t Get Anything Out of the Mass,” I Answer**

To begin with, I’m a convert.

It’s often said that converts have a special understanding of the sacraments since they know what it is to be without them; and I think that generally this is true.

When I joined the Catholic Church almost 30 years ago, I think I didn’t really know or understand what I was getting into. I felt I needed to do it, but why, exactly, I had no clear conception.

Then, on an April day in 1987, I was baptized, confirmed, and received my First Communion. I can’t honestly say that it entailed any profound feeling. And yet, reflecting on it afterwards, I realized that something really had changed.

Since that time, I have come to depend more and more on the experience of the reception of the Eucharist. Frequently, I come to Mass with the various emotional, practical, and spiritual burdens of a typical life, only to find them lifted and lightened by Communion to the point of being virtually negligible.

And now, especially in more recent years, I have learned to expect and receive a peace and a joy which, in my former life, I had absolutely no idea could actually exist.

This is my experience of the Eucharist.

So now, when I hear people say they get nothing out of it, I don’t doubt that they feel this way, but am nevertheless convinced that if they would only patiently persevere, the Lord would begin to come to them in a completely unexpected way.



*Editor’s Note: Jared Barkan is a widely-published poet on religious and social themes. His poem “The Quality of Mercy” appears in the Eucharist & Culture section of this issue.*



“A saint is like a constellation which shines for all and communicates its gentle influence. A saint belongs to his brothers, and to the Church rather than to himself. He is an extraordinary grace from heaven and gives glory to his own.”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
Feast Day August 2nd

“St. Peter Julian Eymard: A Thought for Every Day,” page 91,  
selected texts chosen by Sister Suzanne Aylwin, SSS,  
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