

# *Emmanuel*



*Eucharistic Spirituality*

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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 123 Number 1



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## FROM THE EDITOR

As a boy growing up in a small town north of Milwaukee, my best friend was named Donny. While we were the same age and in the same grade, Donny and I didn't attend school together. His family was Lutheran; and unlike most of the kids in town, who went to the local Catholic school, Donny was enrolled in public school. We played softball and football after classes ended each day, or King of the Hill atop the mountains of snow that appeared in winter after the streets had been cleared.

Our families didn't make much of the fact that we were members of different Churches; it was just a fact of life in a state where immigrants from different parts of Europe settled and brought with them long-established patterns of religious affiliation and practice. Donny even took part in a fair number of "Masses" that my schoolmates and I performed at home.

Recently, my eyes fell upon the following headline online: "2017 — Catholics and Protestants to Commemorate Reformation Anniversary." The German city of Wittenberg is preparing to mark the occasion. Wittenberg is where Martin Luther famously nailed his 95 Theses to the door of All Saints Church 500 years ago and started a movement. The Catholic Church's response to Luther and the other protesters was the Counter-Reformation, the high point of which was the Council of Trent from 1545 to 1563, called to implement a program of internal reforms and undertake the re-evangelization of Europe.

Nikolaus Schneider, the chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, met last year with Pope Francis to invite him to the anniversary. During this meeting, the Holy Father "underlined how important it is for him that we, as Churches, walk together on the path of testifying [to] the faith in this world." Schneider said that the conversations with the pope and Vatican officials had contributed to

building a sense of openness and trust.

Bishop Gerhard Feige, the Catholic bishop of Magdeburg, commented afterward: "One could almost say that the Catholic Church has set out from the path of the Counter-Reformation on to that of the Co-Reformation."

In a joint statement which appears on the Vatican's website, we read: "The awareness is dawning on Lutherans and Catholics that the struggle of the sixteenth century is over. The reasons for mutually condemning each other's faith have fallen by the wayside. Thus, Lutherans and Catholics identify five imperatives as they commemorate 2017 together."

"In 2017, we must confess openly that we have been guilty before Christ of damaging the unity of the church. This commemorative year presents us with two challenges: the purification and healing of memories, and the restoration of Christian unity in accordance with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6)."

The fact is that the world today, perhaps more than ever before, needs the voice of a united Christianity. Enormous challenges face us. As believers and witnesses to Jesus Christ and the Gospel, we cannot afford "the luxury" of discord and alienation. Prayer, dialogue, fellowship, and sincere efforts at renewal on all sides have brought us to this point. Praise God!

### **In This Issue**

A team of biblical and pastoral theologians associated with Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, will write our scriptural reflections this year. We are deeply grateful to Dianne Bergant, CSA, the Carroll Stuhlmuehler, CP, Distinguished Professor Emerita of Old Testament Studies; John R. Barker, OFM, Assistant Professor of Old Testament Studies; and Barbara Shanahan, director of the Catholic Biblical Studies Program in the Diocese of Buffalo, New York, for taking on this project.

This is an especially good issue of *Emmanuel*. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I did editing it. A blessed 2017!



Anthony Schueller, SSS



## EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

# Pope Francis Explores the Priesthood: Ten Foundational Insights – Numbers 1-5

by James H. Kroeger, MM

*Pope Francis' thinking on the priesthood offers a clear and challenging vision for priestly life and ministry today.*

Father James H. Kroeger, MM, has served in Asia since 1970, ministering in parishes and in the formation of seminarians, catechists, and lay leaders. He currently teaches Christology, ecclesiology, missiology, and Asian theology at Loyola School of Theology, East Asian Pastoral Institute, and Mother of Life Catechetical Center in Manila, Philippines. His recent books include *Asia's Dynamic Local Churches*; *Becoming Missionary Disciples*; *A Vatican II Journey: Fifty Milestones*; *Walking in the Light of Faith*, and *The Gift of Mission*.

AS A "POPE OF THE PEOPLE," POPE FRANCIS CONNECTS AND INTERACTS WELL WITH people across a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, social strata, and walks of life. He is noted for a large number of "firsts": first Jesuit pope; first to take the name Francis; first non-European pope in more than 1,000 years; the first pope to be honored in 2013 by *Time* as "Person of the Year," the prestigious title given to the one who "has done the most to influence the events of the year."

Pope Francis, who has over ten million followers on Twitter, is often remembered for his sense of humor and memorable quotes. When he was elected pope in 2013, he told the other cardinals: "May God forgive you for what you have done." A child once asked him if he wanted to be pope and this was his response: "You have to be totally crazy to want to be pope." His quotes contain much profound wisdom, expressed succinctly and in a memorable manner. "A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just." "To be wise, use three languages: think well, feel well, and do well. And to be wise, allow yourselves to be surprised by the love of God!"

In addition to insights on a broad range of current topics, Pope Francis has spoken profoundly and insightfully on priests and the priesthood on a variety of occasions (e.g. Chrism Masses, ordination Masses, the Jubilee for Priests, etc.).

This modest presentation attempts to mine the rich treasures of Francis' insights on the priesthood, quoting extensively the very words spoken by the pope. It revolves around ten pivotal themes. Admittedly, this is only one author's attempt to "thematize" the thought of Pope *Franciscus* on the priesthood. Twenty-four of the most relevant documents

that contain “priesthood material” are cited (see the final page for bibliographic sources and the method of citation). One now turns directly to elucidating the “priestly thought” of Pope Francis.

## 1. Anchor Your Priesthood in Your Relationship with Christ

In his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (3), Francis directly invited everyone (priests, in particular) to daily engagement with Jesus. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. . . . I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her. . . . The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms” (CC). “Each of us is very dear to God, who loves us, chooses us, and calls us to serve. . . . We would do well each day to pray trustingly for this, asking to be healed by Jesus, to grow more like him who ‘no longer calls us servants but friends’ (Jn 15:15)” (SS). This is a clear challenge for priests: to live in conformity to Christ in the midst of the world of today. Expressed simply, all is anchored in one’s friendship with Jesus.

Pope Francis spoke about the priest’s “tiredness” in his 2015 Chrism Mass homily, noting how it can bring us closer to Christ. “The tiredness of priests! Do you know how often I think about this weariness which all of you experience? I think about it and I pray about it, often, especially when I am tired myself. . . . Whenever we feel weighed down by pastoral work, we can be tempted to rest however we please, as if rest were not itself a gift of God. . . . Our weariness is precious in the eyes of Jesus who embraces us and lifts us up. . . . Let us never forget that a key to fruitful priestly ministry lies in how we rest and in how we look at the way the Lord deals with our weariness. How difficult it is to learn how to rest! This says much about our trust and our ability to realize that we, too, are sheep; we need the help of the Shepherd” (KK). We need to learn to rest in the arms of the Good Shepherd.

During the 2016 Jubilee for Priests, Pope Francis, celebrating the Eucharist on the feast of the Sacred Heart, noted that we must always “contemplate two hearts: the heart of the Good Shepherd and our own heart as priests. The heart of the Good Shepherd is not only the heart that shows us mercy, but *is* itself mercy. . . . There I know I am welcomed and understood as I am; there, with all my sins and limitations, I know the certainty that I am chosen and loved. Contemplating that heart, I renew my first love; the memory of that time when the Lord touched my soul and called me to follow him, the memory of the joy of having





cast the nets of our life upon the sea of his word" (WW). "Never forget your first love. Never!" (GG).

Certainly, for priests, our relationship with Christ is intimately linked to the Eucharist. "Through your ministry, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect for it is united to the sacrifice of Christ, which through your hands in the name of the whole of the church is offered up in a bloodless way on the altar in the celebration of the holy mysteries. When you celebrate the Mass, understand, therefore, what you do. Do not do it in haste! Imitate what you celebrate – it is not an artificial rite, an artificial ritual – so that participating in the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection you may bear the death of Christ in your members and walk with him in the newness of life" (LL).

As priests, we "cannot live without a vital, personal, authentic, and solid relationship with Christ. . . . [One] who is not daily nourished by the Food will become a bureaucrat. . . . Daily prayer, assiduous reception of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and reconciliation, daily contact with the word of God, and a spirituality which translates into lived charity – these are vital nourishment for each of us. Let it be clear to all of us that apart from him we can do nothing (cf. Jn 15:8)" (HH).

## 2. As a Merciful Shepherd, Be Close to Your People

Pope Francis boldly stated: "People love their priests; they want and need their shepherds! The faithful never leave us without something to do, unless we hide in our offices or go out in our cars wearing sun glasses. There is a good and healthy tiredness. It is the exhaustion of the priest who wears the smell of the sheep, but also smiles the smile of a father rejoicing in his children or grandchildren. . . . If Jesus is shepherding the flock in our midst, we cannot be shepherds who are glum, plaintive or even worse bored. The smell of the sheep and the smile of a father" (KK).

"The joy of Jesus the Good Shepherd is not a joy *for himself* alone, but a joy *for others* and *with others*, the true joy of love. This is also the joy of the priest. He is changed by the mercy that he *freely* gives. . . . Dear priests, in the eucharistic celebration, we rediscover each day our identity as shepherds. In every Mass, may we truly make our own the words of Christ: 'This is my body, which is given up for you.' This is the meaning of our life; with these words, in a real way we can daily renew the promises we made at our priestly ordination. I thank all of you for



saying 'yes!'" (WW).

Speaking of the "priest-shepherd in his parish or in the mission entrusted to him," Francis noted that this mission "brings him joy whenever he is faithful to it, whenever he does all that he has to do and lets go of everything that he has to let go of, as long as he stands firm amid the flock which the Lord has entrusted to him: 'Feed my sheep' (cf. Jn 21:16-17). . . . All who are called should know that genuine and complete joy does exist in this world: it is the joy of being taken from the people we love and then being sent back to them as dispensers of the gifts and counsels of Jesus, the one Good Shepherd who, with deep compassion for all the little ones and the outcasts of this earth, wearied and oppressed like sheep without a shepherd, wants to associate many others to his ministry, so as himself to remain with us and to work, in the person of his priests, for the good of his people" (EE). "Have always in mind the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve; to seek and save that which was lost" (RR).

*To live in conformity to Christ in the midst of the world of today is a challenge for priests.*

Priests will share in the sufferings of their people. "In our prayer, we ask for the grace to 'feel and savor' the Gospel that it can make us more 'sensitive' in our lives. . . . We can ask for the grace to taste with the crucified Jesus the bitter gall of all those who share in his cross, and smell the stench of misery – in field hospitals [a favorite expression of Pope Francis], in trains and in boats crammed with people. The balm of mercy does not disguise this stench. Rather, by anointing it, it awakens new hope" (VV).

For Pope Francis, the work of priests does not consist of "purely mechanical jobs, like running an office, building a parish hall, or laying out a soccer field for the young of the parish. . . . The tasks of which Jesus speaks call for the ability to show compassion; our hearts are to be 'moved' and fully engaged in carrying them out. We are to rejoice with couples who marry; we are to laugh with the children brought to the baptismal font; we are to accompany young fiancés and families; we are to suffer with those who receive the anointing of the sick in their hospital beds; we are to mourn with those burying a loved one. . . . For us priests, what happens in the lives of our people is not like a



news bulletin: we know our people, we sense what is going on in their hearts. Our own heart, sharing in their suffering, feels ‘com-*passion*,’ is exhausted, broken into a thousand pieces, moved and even ‘consumed’ by the people” (KK).

The message for priests that Pope Francis frequently reiterates is expressed in his words spoken at the ordination of ten priests on Good Shepherd Sunday in 2013: “Today I ask you in the name of Christ and the Church: *never tire of being merciful*” (BB). When he ordained 13 priests on May 11, 2014, Francis said: “And here I want to pause to ask you: for the love of Jesus Christ, *never tire of being merciful! Please!*” (FF). At the 2016 Chrism Mass, Francis noted: “As priests, we are witnesses to and ministers of the ever-increasing abundance of the Father’s mercy; we have the rewarding and consoling task of *incarnating mercy, as Jesus did*” (QQ). *Misericordiae Vultus*, Francis’ 2015 Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, overflows with copious insights on the mercy of God. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis quotes Thomas Aquinas, asserting that “mercy is the greatest of all virtues” and “it is proper to God to have mercy” (EG 37).

### 3. Seek to Live a Modest Lifestyle; Be Available

Although diocesan priests do not take the vow of poverty like religious priests, *all priests* commit themselves to living and practicing a simple style of life. It is well known that during his years in Buenos Aires, Cardinal Bergoglio lived in a small apartment rather than in an episcopal residence; he used public transportation rather than have a car with a driver; he cooked for himself. As newly-elected pope, he rode with the other cardinals on the bus, paid his own hotel bill, and now he maintains a very modest car and lives in the Casa Santa Marta. Pope Francis knows the material needs necessary for the apostolate; however, he also challenges his fellow priests to examine their sincerity and authenticity in living their own spiritual poverty.

Francis admits: “In the Church, we have, and have always had, our sins and failings. . . . Our people forgive us priests many failings, except for that of attachment to money. This does not have so much to do with money itself, but the fact that money makes us lose the treasure of mercy. Our people can sniff out which sins are truly grave for the priest, the sins that kill his ministry. . . . Being merciful is not only ‘a way of life,’ but ‘*the way of life.*’ There is no other way of being a priest” (VV).

How do priests become “good and faithful servants” (cf. Mt 25:21)? For Francis, “we are asked to be *available*. . . . Each morning he trains himself to be generous with his life and to realize that the rest of the day will not be his own, but given over to others. . . . One who serves is open to surprises, to God’s constant surprises. . . . One who serves is not worried about the timetable. It deeply troubles me when I see a timetable in a parish: ‘From such a time to such a time.’ And then? There is no open door, no priest, no deacon, no layperson to receive people. This is not good. . . . If you show that you are available to others, your ministry will not be self-serving, but evangelically fruitful” (SS).

Francis has spoken frequently on the virtue of *availability* in priests. In his 2014 Chrism Mass, he noted: “The availability of her priests makes the Church a house with open doors, a refuge for sinners, a home for people living on the streets, a place of loving care for the sick, a camp for the young, a classroom for catechizing children about to make their First Communion. . . . Wherever God’s people have desires or needs, there is the priest, who knows how to listen (*ob-audire*) and feels a loving mandate from Christ who sends him to relieve that need with mercy or to encourage those good desires with resourceful charity” (EE).

*We cannot live and minister without a vital, personal, authentic, and solid relationship with Christ. This relationship is intimately linked to the Eucharist.*

Pope Francis’ commitment to simple living is concretely reflected in his choice of name: Francis. Many of the details of his “name-choice” are commonly known, since Francis himself narrated them. When it became clear that he was chosen, his friend, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, who was seated next to him, hugged him, gave him a kiss, and said: “Don’t forget the poor!” Francis said: “Those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi. For me, he is the man of poverty.” Francis added: “How I would like a church which is poor and for the poor.” In his *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis has a major section on the inclusion of the poor in the Church and society (EG, 186-216); he strongly reiterates his desire: “I want a church which is poor and for the poor” (EG, 198).

#### **4. Admit One’s Limitations; Become a Model of Integrity**

The Letter to the Hebrews (5:1) states that “every high priest has



been taken from among men and made their representative before God." *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Vatican II document on the Ministry and Life of Priests, asserts: "Priests, who are taken from among men and ordained for men in the things that belong to God in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins, nevertheless live on earth with other men as brothers" (PO, 3). Priests are truly to be "in this world, but not of this world"; they need to be deeply aware of both their "nothingness"/"humanness" as well as their "greatness"/"dignity." Even in their weaknesses, they are to manifest the overwhelming power and presence of the divine. The manifold workings of God's grace within our human limitations are indeed a profound mystery; we priests should allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by God's loving mercy – and shed tears of joyful gratitude!

Francis says: "That is how we [priests] have to see ourselves: poised between our utter shame and our sublime dignity. Dirty, impure, mean, and selfish, yet at the same time, with feet washed, called and chosen to distribute the Lord's multiplied loaves, blessed by our people, loved, and cared for. Only mercy makes this situation bearable. Without it, either we believe in our own righteousness like the Pharisees, or we shrink back like those who feel unworthy. . . . The important thing is that each of us feels that fruitful tension born of the Lord's mercy: we are at one and the same time sinners pardoned and sinners restored to dignity" (TT). "The mercy of God . . . is always 'greater' than our consciousness of our sinfulness" (UU).

*We are to know our people, sense what is going on in their hearts. Our own heart, sharing in their suffering, feels "com-passion."*

Pope Francis asserts that "a good priest, therefore, is first of all a man with his own humanity, who knows his own history, with its riches and its wounds, who has learned to make peace with this, achieving the fundamental serenity proper to one of the Lord's disciples. . . . Our humanity is the 'earthen vessel' in which we conserve God's treasure, a vessel we must take care of, so as to transmit well its precious contents. . . . He is the 'high priest,' at the same time close to God and close to man; he is the 'servant,' who washes the feet and makes himself close to the weakest; he is the 'good shepherd,' who always cares for his flock" (OO).

One can identify various faults and failures in priests which receive

harsh words from Pope Francis: the sin of careerism/authoritarianism/[and] “clericalism which is a distortion of religion” (DD). There is the sin of “existential schizophrenia . . . the disease of those who live a double life, the fruit of that hypocrisy typical of the mediocre” (HH). On several occasions, Pope Francis told priests to be much more merciful to divorced Catholics and to welcome remarried couples and their children to the Church (NN). “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. . . . Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community; nor should the doors of the sacraments [e.g. baptism, Eucharist] be closed for simply any reason” (EG, 47).

Therefore, priests need to constantly examine their conscience and style of life. Pope Francis offers a very brief examination of conscience for priests: “Where is my heart? Among the people, praying with and for the people, involved in their joys and sufferings, or rather among the things of the world, worldly affairs, my private space?” (OO). For another approach, Francis suggests the “hymn to charity” in the apostle Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians as a guide for an examination of conscience (JJ). In addition, do we priests realize that we are “useless servants” (Lk 17:10), “whom the Lord blesses with the fruitfulness of his grace, seats at his table, and serves us the Eucharist”? (VV). Priests – indeed the entire Church – must never become “self-referential!” (VV)

## **5. Exude Joy in Ministry; Receive and Give Affection**

The dominant theme for Pope Francis’ second Chrism Mass reflection (2014) was “priestly joy.” “We recall the happy day of the institution of the priesthood, as well as the day of our own priestly ordination. The Lord anointed us in Christ with the oil of gladness, and this anointing invites us to accept and appreciate this great gift: the gladness, the joy of being a priest. Priestly joy is a priceless treasure, not only for the priest himself, but for the entire faithful people of God: that faithful people from which he is called to be anointed and which he, in turn, is sent to anoint” (EE).

“Priestly joy has its source in the Father’s love, and the Lord wishes the joy of this love to be ‘ours’ and to be ‘complete’ (Jn 15:11). . . . There are three significant features of our priestly joy. It is a joy which anoints us. . . , it is a joy which is imperishable, and it is a missionary joy which spreads and attracts. . . . A joy which anoints us. In a word, it has penetrated deep within our hearts; it has shaped them and



strengthened them sacramentally. . . . We are anointed down to our very bones, and our joy, which wells up from deep within, is the echo of this anointing. An imperishable joy . . . which the Lord has promised no one can take from us (Jn 16:22). . . . A missionary joy: priestly joy is deeply bound up with God's holy and faithful people: for baptizing and confirming them, healing and sanctifying them, blessing, comforting, and evangelizing them" (EE).

Recall that the first major document issued by Pope Francis was *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel). For Francis, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. . . . With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. . . . I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy" (EG, 1).

*The joy of Jesus the Good Shepherd is not a joy for himself alone, but a joy for others and with others, the true joy of love.*


Hidden in this first apostolic exhortation by Francis are several creative expressions to remind us of the centrality of joy in our apostolate. "There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (EG, 6). "An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral" (EG, 10). We must be wary of a "tomb psychology" that "transforms Christians into mummies in a museum" (EG, 83). Francis quoted Saint John XXIII, asserting that "we feel we must disagree with those prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand" (EG, 84). Christians must avoid anything that "turns us into querulous and disillusioned pessimists, 'sourpusses'" (EG, 85). "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!" (EG, 83).

For Francis, a priest should be a true apostle, "a person who transmits joy everywhere he goes. A heart filled with God is a happy heart that radiates an infectious joy; it is immediately evident! So, let us not lose that joyful, humorous, and even self-deprecating spirit which makes people amiable even in difficult situations. How beneficial is a good dose of humor! We would do well to recite often the prayer of Saint Thomas More. I say it every day" (HH). The final line of More's prayer is: "Grant me, O Lord, a sense of good humor. Allow me the grace to be able to take a joke and to discover in life a bit of joy, and to be able to share it with others" (HH).

Pope Francis has fervently implored the Lord for the gift of joy for priests. “On this priestly Thursday, I ask the Lord Jesus to preserve the joy sparkling in the eyes of the recently ordained. . . . Preserve, Lord, in your young priests the joy of going forth, of doing everything as if for the first time, the joy of spending their lives fully for you. . . . I ask the Lord to confirm the priestly joy of those who have already ministered for some years . . . , those who bear the burden of the ministry. . . . I ask the Lord Jesus to make better known the joy of elderly priests, whether healthy or infirm. It is the joy of the cross. . . . May they know the joy of handing on the torch, the joy of seeing new generations of their spiritual children, and of hailing the promises from afar, smiling and at peace, in that hope which does not disappoint” (EE).

### **Pivotal Bibliographical Sources**

The material by Pope Francis on the priesthood is extremely rich and plentiful. It is available to readers in a variety of internet and printed sources; often the very same document is found in various digital and printed forms. To facilitate the documentation of the quotes of Pope Francis in this presentation, a simple reference system is employed. Each of the cited documents containing specific “priesthood material” from Pope Francis is identified with double letters of the alphabet; an interested researcher could easily locate the specific document, no matter in what format or language it appears. All one needs to do is to check this bibliography to find the date and description of a specific document of the pope.

In the text of this presentation, only the double letters appear at the end of a given quote. Hopefully, this simple approach avoids an overly complicated and cumbersome manner of documentation, while providing the source of the specific quote from Pope Francis. The material appearing below is presented in chronological order, beginning in 2013 and extending to 2016. 

- AA** March 28, 2013: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica
- BB** April 21, 2013: Ordination Homily of ten priests in Saint Peter’s Basilica
- CC** November 24, 2013: Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*
- DD** 2013: Book by Jorge Bergoglio and Abraham Scoria: *On Heaven and Earth*
- EE** April 17, 2014: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter’s Basilica
- FF** May 11, 2014: Ordination Homily of thirteen priests in Saint





- Peter's Basilica
- GG** June 6, 2014: Morning Mass Homily in Casa Santa Marta
- HH** December 22, 2014: Address to the Roman Curia
- II** January 16, 2015: Homily to the Clergy in the Manila Cathedral
- JJ** February 14, 2015: Address at Public Consistory for the Creation of New Cardinals
- KK** April 2, 2015: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter's Basilica
- LL** April 26, 2015: Ordination Homily of nineteen new priests in Saint Peter's Basilica
- MM** May 2, 2015: Homily at North American College in Rome to celebrate "Pope's Day"
- NN** August 6, 2015: Homily on the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord
- OO** November 20, 2015: Speech to Conference on "Priesthood" Documents of Vatican II
- PP** December 21, 2015: Address to the Roman Curia
- QQ** March 24, 2016: Chrism Mass Homily in Saint Peter's Basilica
- RR** April 17, 2016: Homily to Priests on World Day of Prayer for Vocations
- SS** May 29, 2016: Homily at Jubilee for Deacons
- TT** June 2, 2016: First Meditation at Jubilee for Priests
- UU** June 2, 2016: Second Meditation at Jubilee for Priests
- VV** June 2, 2016: Third Meditation at Jubilee for Priests
- WW** June 3, 2016: Homily at Mass for Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
- XX** June 4, 2016: Address to Assembly of the Pontifical Missionary Societies



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# “Deep Peace of Christ to You”

by Owen F. Cummings

*Wishes of “Peace!” abound at the start of a new year. What do we mean by peace? And what does the Eucharist tell us about what makes peace possible?*

“THE EUCCHARIST IS *CONVIVUM*, ‘LIVING TOGETHER’; IT MAKES US ‘COM-PANIONS,’ those who share one *panis*, one loaf of bread. . . . The Eucharist is the sacrament of peace” (Geoffrey Preston, OP<sup>1</sup>).

An old Gaelic blessing, put powerfully to music by composer John Rutter and sung by the Cambridge Singers, has very beautiful lyrics about peace:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the gentle night to you.  
Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.  
Deep peace of Christ, Light of the World, to you.  
Deep peace of Christ to you.

The Celts were gifted with a profound sense of God’s presence in Christ as being everywhere. The deep peace of this anthem is Christ himself. Since Christ gives himself to us in the Eucharist, then we may rightly claim with Geoffrey Preston in the opening citation that the Eucharist is indeed *the* sacrament of peace.

At the beginning of the bishop’s Mass, the bishop extends the greeting to the whole assembly, “Peace be with you.” This is an exact equivalent of the normal greeting between the celebrant and the congregation, “The Lord be with you.” The Lord himself is peace. During the Communion Rite of the Mass, the greeting of peace is made by the presider, and all are invited to offer the sign of peace by the deacon:

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“The peace of the Lord be with you always.” “Let us offer each other the sign of peace.” This is a lovely gesture in the celebration of the Mass before people go up to receive Holy Communion, especially appreciated by families – spouses together, parents with children, and so forth.

### **“Let Us Offer Each Other the Sign of Peace”**

What is the meaning of this gesture, the sign of peace? What is the peace being offered?

The form of this greeting of peace differs in the various liturgical traditions. In the Liturgy of Saint Basil, for example, the formula is “Christ is in our midst!” and the response is “He is and he will be always.”<sup>2</sup> The point of the Eucharist for Aquinas, what he calls the *res tantum*, is the unity of the church. *Res tantum* is scholastic theological shorthand which means literally “the reality alone,” and this becomes in sacramental theology the immediate effect of a sacrament, that is to say, grace.<sup>3</sup> And so the English Dominican and Thomist authority Geoffrey Preston can write, “Such unity of the body requires both the sharing of one loaf to make us all one body, and the mutual reconciliation symbolized and effected by the kiss of peace.”<sup>4</sup>

*God’s blessing is for me and for you, for the individual, but in reality there is no me without you, and so the blessing expands outward to become a corporate blessing.*

Obviously, then, the greeting of peace should not become mechanical, some kind of mechanistic ritual and empty gesture. Timothy Radcliffe, the former master of the Dominicans, lived for a year in the Dominican house in Paris, the house in which two of the fathers who contributed so much to the documents of Vatican II also lived, Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu. This is how Radcliffe describes them sharing the sign of peace: “Congar’s was a grave and formal gesture, whereas Chenu affectionately punched and hugged one and pulled one’s hair!”<sup>5</sup> We don’t have to imitate the style of Congar or Chenu in order to make sure that the exchange of the kiss of peace is authentic and heartfelt.

It should not become mechanical because the kiss of peace prepares

us for our deeper and ongoing communion with Jesus Christ, and so with all. To repeat, the Eucharist is *the* sacrament of peace, and in those precious moments leading up to the reception of the Eucharist, we ought to be readying ourselves intentionally to be pacified, to be made peaceful by the peace that is Christ.

### Looking at the Scriptures — Old Testament

A number of biblical passages come to mind when searching out the theological meaning of peace. The Hebrew word *shalom*, translated in English Bibles as “peace,” is a word, according to John L. McKenzie, “with such rich content that no single English word can render it.” In English, the word *peace* signifies such things as the end of tyranny and animosity, the end of division and divisiveness. “Peace” in English may be the equivalent of freedom, harmony, and security, but its biblical richness includes other dimensions, for example, completion and perfection, conditions in which nothing is lacking.<sup>6</sup> This more comprehensive understanding of peace brings to life that lovely blessing in Numbers 6:24-26:

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his face upon you  
and give you peace.

Peace here is understood as a gift of God. Paying careful attention to the six verbs here, attention that pays off in Hebrew but less so in English, one notices that they are all in the second person singular.<sup>7</sup> Theologically, this is intended to underscore the fact that God’s blessing is for me and for you, for the individual, but in reality we also know that there is no me without you, and so the blessing expands outward to become a corporate blessing. This blessing of God, ending with the gift of peace, is such that “when one possesses peace, one is in perfect and assured communion with God.”<sup>8</sup>

The prophet Jeremiah has much to say about peace, warning that false prophets prophesied peace when there was no peace: “They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jer 6:14). For Jeremiah, where there is no justice and righteousness, right relations with everyone throughout society, there can be no *shalom*.



Deutero-Isaiah has God speak to the people in the following words: “O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea” (Is 48:18). Like Jeremiah before him, the prophet intends us to understand that peace is a fabric of fantasy when it does not permeate and govern all sectors of society. Perhaps that is why in First Isaiah perfect peace will come only with the advent of the Messiah:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6)

In Isaiah’s historical context, the child spoken of here in such beautiful terms was probably the child of the Davidic monarch, in all probability Hezekiah. Isaiah was looking to Hezekiah as a king who would fulfill some of the deep hopes of the people. “The prophet was looking for a messianic king who would reverse the injustice and corruption of the kings of the past. He was looking, above all, for a king who would be God’s instrument in working out his will for his kingdom. Never did a prophecy have a more satisfying fulfillment than did Isaiah’s in Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus is the “filling-full” of the Isaianic hope.

### Looking at the Scriptures— New Testament

Moving on to the New Testament, the beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew tell us: “Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called sons of God” (5:9). To be a peacemaker is to be “blessed,” and to be blessed is to live as God lives and to be a son or daughter of God in the only Son Jesus.<sup>10</sup> In Matthew, Jesus is Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” promised and named through Mary (1:23) and promised to be with us always (27:20). Emmanuel’s *persona* is described for us in the beatitudes (5:3-10), and the “peacemakers” are there because Emmanuel is peace, “Prince of Peace.”

John’s Gospel, too, shows the reality of peace in the presence of Jesus. When sadness comes over the disciples who are going to be separated from the Master, Jesus reassures them, “My peace I leave you, my peace I give unto you” (Jn 14:27). One commentator helpfully writes: “The peace Jesus is leaving with the disciples extends God’s grace and love deep into the human heart,” especially as one recalls that this chapter 14 begins with the words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (14:1). As one thinks about it, the grace and love that is the extended peace is

really nothing other than Jesus himself, present through the Paraclete. The peace that Jesus leaves to the disciples is simply himself.

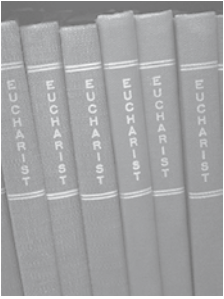
Staying with John’s Gospel, on the first Easter day, the risen Jesus speaks peace to his disciples. In point of fact, “peace” is “the first word of the risen Jesus to his disciples who had broken their peace with him by their disloyalty.”<sup>11</sup> Here is the verse: “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (Jn 20:19). The greeting “Peace be with you” is repeated again in verses 21 and 26, giving that peace very special emphasis in this chapter.

*Offering and accepting the gift of Jesus-peace from one another and to one another demands that we go inward and outward.*

The entire chapter, John 20, breathes that beautiful encounter of the disciples with the risen Jesus. Nonetheless, it does not flow perfectly smoothly. Notice the jarring nature of the phrase, “for fear of the Jews.” It seems in a rather crude way to interrupt the flow of the narrative, the contemplative nature of this post-resurrection encounter. Why insert into this narrative “for fear of the Jews”?

Timothy Radcliffe makes some helpful comments on this phrase, comments that are not only exegetical but in their own way deeply personal. “The disciples were locked in that small space, ‘for fear of the Jews.’ But they were themselves Jews. Often what we dislike or fear or cannot forgive in the other is some aspect of ourselves that we dare not face. Those who display their homophobia most ardently are usually those who fear homosexual tendencies in themselves. It is easier to hate in someone else some element of my own character that I dare not examine too closely. . . . So giving the kiss of peace to another requires that I look lovingly at myself in all my complexity, with the moral and intellectual tensions that pull in different ways, the desires that puzzle me, and the aspirations that I have never been allowed to fulfill. I must be at peace with these complexities, these unresolved tensions, these ambiguities, for they make me alive and growing, searching and puzzling, knocking at the door of heaven for understanding.”<sup>13</sup>

It undoubtedly is the case that John, writing probably in the last



decade of the first century AD, is reflecting in these words “for fear of the Jews” something of the antagonism between the nascent Christian community and the Jewish synagogue “across the street,” as it were. The parting of the ways between Jews and Christians may not yet be entirely complete, but hostility and polarization between the two communities is simply a matter of fact. Think of the ways in which Matthew’s Gospel reflects the same antagonism toward the Jews.<sup>14</sup>

Acknowledging these helpful contextual comments, however, the passage “for fear of the Jews” is there, and Radcliffe helps us see something of ourselves in it. We need to look at the elements of un-peace in our own Christian lives. So, we might say that both offering and accepting the gift of Jesus-peace from one another and to one another demands that we go inward and outward. We go inward, into our identity in Christ who is our peace, so that we may go outward to offer that peace, and indeed to be that peace to others.

*Participating in the Eucharist invites and challenges us to see our moral action and our action for peace in our world as flowing from the Eucharist.*

If we take seriously what Paul is talking about in Galatians 2:20, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” then quite simply, Jesus is the place of peace, the place of peace in which we meet as his body, and the sign of peace becomes the sign of our identity in him, which we offer to one another. Paul’s words in Colossians 3:15 now take on a much more profound meaning, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in the one body, and be thankful.”

The first clause, “the peace of Christ,” can certainly be understood as “the peace that is Christ,” in line with our theological thinking here. The final clause, “and be thankful,” is accurately translated, but there is another gloss which we might add. The Greek words for “be thankful” are in English transliteration *eucharistoi ginesthe*, giving us in a very literal translation “be Eucharists,” or even more literally “be eucharistic men,” since *eucharistoi* is a masculine form of the adjective. Now, of course, Paul does not mean that the Colossians (or ourselves) are literally Eucharists, but perhaps that sacramental layer of meaning may not be too far removed from his thinking. If we pick up from our opening quotation from theologian Geoffrey Preston the notion that “the Eucharist is the sacrament of peace,” then our very lives are eucharistically directed and



we become Eucharists. At the very least, this way of thinking both invites and challenges us to see our moral action and our action for peace in our world as flowing from the Eucharist.

There are other passages in Paul to which we might turn for this Christological and/or eucharistic theology of peace, for example, Romans 15:33, 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Each is worthy of our examination and close attention, but it is a verse from the Letter to the Ephesians that I want to draw attention to, Ephesians 2:14-17: “For (Christ) is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility . . . that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. . . .” Christ is our peace in bonding us more closely together in and through the Eucharist so that animosity becomes unnatural in his ecclesial, holy body, and hostility becomes a most vicious form of self-hatred.

Some words from the late New Testament scholar Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, OP, are helpful in this regard: “Christ is the new man who is the community. . . . In the concrete, the being of the Body of the New Man is constituted by an array of social virtues which are but facets of love. It is the creative force which binds the diversely gifted members into a complete unity.”<sup>14</sup> There is nothing here of course explicitly about the Eucharist but, since the Eucharist makes the church, a eucharistic backdrop to Murphy-O’Connor’s passage may be taken for granted.

## Conclusion

All these intensities of the theological and eucharistic meaning of peace come into play when we offer the sign of peace to one another at Mass. We are to leave behind us all that is not of peace, and since Christ is the peace, all that is not of Christ.

Our meditation opened with a Celtic prayer. Let us close with some words from a great Celtic theologian of the twentieth century and moreover one who could preach in Gaelic, John Macquarrie, from his book *The Concept of Peace*: “To pray for peace, Christians believe, is more than just to meditate on the meaning of peace with a view to becoming better servants of the course of peace. It is to bring into the human situation the very power of God’s peace, or, better expressed, to open up our human situation to that power. No doubt at any given time only a tiny minority of mankind is actively praying for peace in



this way. But no one can say what is being accomplished through the openings into the human situation which they provide.”<sup>15</sup>



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Preston, OP, *Faces of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 196.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.
- <sup>3</sup> See Kevin W. Irwin, *The Sacraments: Historical Foundations and Liturgical Theology* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2016), 106.
- <sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Preston, *op. cit.*, 198.
- <sup>5</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, OP, *Why Go to Church? The Drama of the Eucharist* (New York and London: Continuum, 2008), 162.
- <sup>6</sup> John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 651.
- <sup>7</sup> William T. Miller, SJ, *A Compact Study of Numbers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 29.
- <sup>8</sup> John L. McKenzie, *op. cit.*, 651.
- <sup>9</sup> Bruce Vawter, CM, *The Conscience of Israel* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 186.
- <sup>10</sup> Xavier Leon-Dufour, SJ, “Peace,” in Xavier Leon-Dufour, SJ, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: Desclee Company, 1967), 367.
- <sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Preston, OP, *op. cit.*, 197.
- <sup>12</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, OP, *op. cit.*, 171-172.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), and many ongoing studies that reflect this basic position articulated by Hare.
- <sup>14</sup> Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, OP, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of Saint Paul*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 185.
- <sup>15</sup> John Macquarrie, *The Concept of Peace* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 81.



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# The Eucharist and the Unity of the Church

by Ernest R. Falardeau, SSS

*The search for a personal spirituality can be enriched by the spirit of Vatican II, expressed in its major teachings and documents.*

THIS ARTICLE SEEKS TO RECONCILE THREE KEY TERMS THAT ARE INTIMATELY RELATED: Eucharist, ecumenism, and Christian unity. I suggest that these words constitute a vibrant spirituality for all Christians.

### **Eucharist as Spirituality**

Let me begin by saying that every Christian should develop a spirituality. Indeed, I would think that they might develop various spiritualities: Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, etc. They may give priority to one of the traditional spiritualities or simply prefer to follow the inspiration of the Holy Spirit where he leads. Readers of *Emmanuel* are familiar with the eucharistic spirituality developed by Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. Many lay persons are associate members of these orders through the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, which he established, and the Priests' Eucharistic League has similarly been an important means of developing a eucharistic spirituality for the clergy.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard's spirituality is centered on the abiding presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. In addition to focusing on the celebration of the Eucharist, this spirituality also promotes eucharistic adoration as an integral element. One of the writings attributed to Eymard is *Holy Communion*, largely taken from his personal notes during a 60-day retreat at the Redemptorist residence in Rome in 1865. Inner transformation of the recipient of the sacrament is key to his reflections. After Vatican II, the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament revised its *Rule of Life*<sup>1</sup> (definitively approved by the Holy See in 1984) to incorporate the insights of the council in

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its way of life and mission.

## Ecumenical Spirituality

Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) states that the movement for Christian unity involves a change of heart and mind that is "a spirituality," an important concept of this article. This does not mean that it is the only spirituality Christians should adopt to implement the desire of Christ that all his disciples seek the unity of all Christians.

As a student and a young priest, I attended many of the Liturgical Weeks that were held across the United States in the years before Vatican II to move forward the changes that were eventually incorporated into *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (On Ecumenism). Pius XII's *Mediator Dei*<sup>2</sup> was a great breakthrough giving theological foundations to the liturgical movement. It became the second approved text of Vatican II. This spirituality is not an option for Catholic Christians; it is part of the council's agenda for the Church of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The bishops simply tell us that it is a spirituality for one and all.

*The Decree on Ecumenism states that the movement for Christian unity involves a change of heart and mind that is "a spirituality."*

## The Church

In 1985, the Holy See announced a special Synod of Bishops to evaluate the post-conciliar work and impact of Vatican II on the Catholic Church, 20 years after its close. Among the points that were made is the theology of communion (*koinonia*) as key for an understanding of Vatican II. This was a breakthrough for ecclesiology, and a landmark for Catholic theology and a proper understanding of Vatican II. This theology recurs in the Church's understanding of Eucharist, ecumenism, and the Church. I believe that these key insights of the council are intimately related and constitute an important "spirituality" for our time. As time and space allow me, I would like to return to each of these points to draw some conclusions about how adopting a spirituality incorporating these insights and realities is most enriching for everyone.

## **Spirituality and Spiritualities**

A spirituality is essentially a focus of one's spiritual life on Christ or one of the saints, on a passage of Scripture, or on some other reality of the Christian life to find inspiration and God's assistance in following the teaching, actions, and values of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Scriptures. As the Second Vatican Council explains in the Decree on Ecumenism, the more we draw near to Christ and God, the more we draw closer in charity to our brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>3</sup>

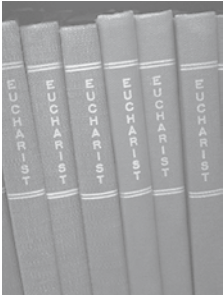
*The theology of communion (koinonia) is the key to understanding Vatican II and the movement for Christian unity.*

As indicated earlier, these spiritualities are not exclusive, but inclusive. We try to incorporate the best and as much as helps our growth in Christ and in openness to the Holy Spirit. In this way, we incorporate the best of each spirituality that we need. In other words, while we may choose one of the spiritualities of the Church, we can also have several others as resources for our spiritual life. We can incorporate the spirituality of Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, the Eymardian spirituality focused on the Eucharist, and the spirituality flowing from Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Church — Body of Christ**

At the heart of the theology of the Church in *Lumen Gentium* is the theology of communion (*koinonia*). This theology is also at the core of eucharistic theology and ecumenism. Being a Catholic Christian involves a lifestyle, a "putting on Christ" (Rom 13:14), as the apostle Paul said. The closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another and to God. The church is the body of Christ, head and members. By faith and our baptism, we are incorporated into this body and by God's grace we live in it. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 — Paul to the Areopagus) and "for me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21).

One of the great insights of Vatican II is that the Church is not an association. It is the people of God; it is the one fold of the one shepherd. The mission of the church is to save every human being, to unite us in the love of God and neighbor. The nature and mission of the church is to unite the scattered children of God and to heal



the wounds of division. Belonging to the Church is not so much a membership in an association as being incorporated in Jesus Christ.

### **The Eucharist — Sacrament of Unity**

The Eucharist makes the church, and the church makes the Eucharist. Thomas Aquinas indicated that the goal of the Eucharist (its *res*) is the unity of the church, the body of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Vatican II echoes this truth in the document on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). The first agreed statement of the Catholic-Orthodox International Dialogue states that the church is essentially eucharistic.<sup>6</sup> This is the long tradition and understanding of the millennial teaching of the church, East and West.

*The more we draw near to Christ and God, the more we draw closer in charity to our brothers and sisters in Christ.*

Vatican II indicated that sharing the Eucharist is both the goal and the means to Christian unity. It also states that full communion requires the removal of church-dividing obstacles that remain in the path to that goal. Fifty years of ecumenical dialogue and sharing by Christians have made some progress. The real but imperfect communion between the Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reformation has dramatized the desire for eucharistic sharing and the real communion that exists between the Catholic Church and baptized Christians. With some of the Ancient Orthodox Christians a degree of eucharistic sharing has been achieved under appropriate conditions. This progress will undoubtedly move forward in the years to come. More encouraging is the recognition that full communion remains a goal of the ecumenical movement and the Eucharist we share.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ecumenical Spirituality — Harvesting the Fruits**

Pope John XXIII indicated that one of the goals of the Second Vatican Council was to engage the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement, which he described as the work of the Holy Spirit. The council, in the Decree on Ecumenism, emphasized the way in which the Catholic Church would promote Christian unity.

After 50 years of prayer and study, the Church can look at a rich

harvest of fruit that already can be seen in the agreed statements at the international level. The Lutheran Federation-Roman Catholic Declaration on Justification<sup>8</sup> signed in October 1999 is one example of this kind of progress and recognition of unity and maturity of the dialogue. In 2002, the Methodist Word Alliance added its name to the Churches agreeing with the thrust of the justification document. Cardinal Walter Kasper's *Spiritual Ecumenism*<sup>9</sup> also points to the real progress achieved in the twentieth century by the agreed statement. One could also add the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America-Roman Catholic agreed statement which saw a wider consensus between the two churches in its document. The International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission document signed by the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity and the Anglican Church, though less formal, is also part of the literature harvesting some of the fruits of the ecumenical and world level dialogues of the Church of Rome and Canterbury.<sup>10</sup>

The Churches who have labored for so many years continue to pursue the goal of Christian unity. The World Council of Churches provides staff and theological expertise in the promotion of consensus between the Catholic Church and the members of the World Council. Much understanding, recognition, and agreement has blessed the work of this great organization.

*Spiritualities are not exclusive, but inclusive. We try to incorporate the best and as much as helps our growth in Christ and in openness to the Holy Spirit.*

Full communion is not necessarily "around the corner," but it is a pursuit that is continued by young and not so young enthusiasts in the name of the Churches of East and West: Catholic and Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical. The prayer of Jesus Christ continues to show its strength and power in the new millennium as it has in the twentieth century.

Two ideas and goals appear to be both achievable and desirable, namely, the recognition of the ecclesial nature of the Christian communions under Christ and the recognition of "full communion" by the removal of the remaining "obstacles" to that communion. The "defectus" — "what is lacking" to the Churches who are not under the shepherding of the Pontiff of Rome, is not without a remedy. The





nature and mission of the church and more recently the World Council of Church's ecclesial and Christological document raises the hope that *The Church: Together toward a Common Vision*<sup>11</sup> will be welcomed as warmly as *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* in the 1980s, and continue to bear fruit in our time.

### Conclusion<sup>12</sup>

This article is an effort to explore Christian spirituality in the light of the teachings of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965). It has been inspired by the documents of the council and the theological and ecumenical reflection since the council, especially the key concepts of unity, communion, and church which develop what has been described as a "spirituality," i.e., a focus on the guiding light of the council as viewed by the International Synod of Bishops in 1985 and post-conciliar documents and the statements of ecumenical dialogues at the international and national levels.

My persuasion is that the search for personal "spirituality" can be enriched by the spirit of Vatican II, as expressed especially in *Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, Unitatis Redintegratio, Verbum Dei, and Sacrosanctum Concilium*. I have referred to the eucharistic spirituality of Saint Peter Julian Eymard as an example of particular spiritualities which have enriched the Church over the centuries from the very beginning and which can continue to do so in the light and grace of the Holy Spirit which guided the Second Vatican Council.

I believe that the Second Vatican Council seeks to enrich the life of Christians by the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the Scriptures and in the minds and hearts of the faithful through the Church and its sacraments. In the final analysis, it is by the witness of the Christian life and the power of the proclamation of the Gospel that the Church will speak to the human family and bring together all people in the praise, thanksgiving, and celebration of God's glory.



### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Rule of Life*, Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, official translation, Rome: Generalate, 1985.
- <sup>2</sup> Pius XII, Pope. *Mediator Dei*. (November 20, 1947) AAS.
- <sup>3</sup> Vatican II. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 7.

- <sup>4</sup> Theology and spirituality in Saint Thomas Aquinas. Cf. Bishop Robert Barron. *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*. Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2015, 17-30.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. III, q.73, a.3
- <sup>6</sup> Joint International Orthodox-Roman Catholic Theological Commission. "The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (1980-1982).
- <sup>7</sup> Reinhard Cardinal Marx. "Everything is Connected": On the Relevance of an Integral Understanding of Reality in *Laudato Si!* *Theological Studies*, 7 (2016), 295-307.
- <sup>8</sup> *Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (October 30, 1999).
- <sup>9</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper. *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission. *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* (2007).
- <sup>11</sup> World Council of Churches. *The Church: Together Toward a Common Vision*. Faith and Order Paper, 214, Geneva, WCCCK, 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> "Our celebration of the Eucharist, sign of the covenant between God and the human race, remains, in a sense incomplete as long as we who are baptized are divided by hate or separated from one another. . . . The celebration leads us to promote unity in all our activities within our Christian communities, among all confessions that share the same baptism and among all those who are working to unify the world." *Rule of Life*, Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, official translation, Rome: Generalate, 1985, 38, 72).

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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

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



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Spirituality of the Seasons — Winter and Spring

by Peter Schineller, SJ

*The turn of the seasons is ever with us. What can we learn from them to enrich our inner life and our spiritual journey?*

Father Peter Schineller, a native of New York City, has taught theology in Chicago, Illinois, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, and served in administrative and teaching posts at the Catholic Institute of West Africa in Abuja, Nigeria, and Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya. He is currently assigned to The Jesuit Center in Amman, Jordan.

THE JESUIT SAINT, PETER FAVRE, CANONIZED RECENTLY BY POPE FRANCIS, ONCE reflected on how the four seasons intersected with his life. His beautiful description gives us much to reflect on in our own lives. While preaching in Germany in 1543, he wrote in his diary or *Memoriale* on New Year's Day, January 1:

A holy desire led me to wish that my soul might have four spiritual seasons during this coming year; a winter, so that the seeds sown in the soil of my soul by God might be tended and so be enabled to put down roots; a spring, so that my piece of earth might germinate and grow its crop; a summer, so that the fruit might ripen into an abundant harvest; and an autumn, so that the ripe fruit might be picked and gathered into the divine barns for safekeeping lest any of it be lost.

What he experienced and shared with us in his diary is also at work in us, and thus provides the outline for these reflections. In many ways, Favre was echoing and putting into practice what his mentor and friend, Saint Ignatius Loyola, had written in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the fourth week of the *Exercises*, which focuses on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Ignatius writes that we should let the weather affect our prayer: "It might help us rejoice in our Creator and Redeemer to make use of the light and the pleasure of the seasons, for example, in summer of the refreshing coolness, in the winter of the sun and fire" (229).

The point is clear, simple, and obvious. External forces such as light and darkness, cold and heat, and thus the seasons of the year, can affect us, our spirituality, and our relationship with God. Thus, we should attend to them.

There is another link with Ignatius. Moving from the fourth week of the *Exercises* to the concluding “Contemplation to Attain the Love of God,” we see in the mind of Ignatius that everything (thus including the seasons and the weather) is a gift from a loving God. Our response is, first of all, gratitude, and then the effort to find, love, and serve God in all things – thus in the changing seasons of the year.

One clear example of how the seasons affect us is to think of a dark, cold, perhaps snow-filled winter day. We stay indoors if possible, try to keep warm, and perhaps dream of or imagine a warm, sunny, summer day. So too, in a similar way, the other seasons affect our moods, energy, and outlook.

Our purpose here is to examine how we might be a bit more aware, reflective, and conscious of this. In this way, too, we can follow the Ignatian vision of seeking and possibly finding God in all things. Clearly, the seasons affect our bodies – hot and cold, wet or dry. Do the seasons not also affect our interior, our soul, our life in the Spirit, our moods, our vision – in a word, our relationship to God, family, and neighbor?

The seasons are always with us. We cannot live without them or completely ignore them. The question is, do we try to live in opposition to or avoid them, or can we be more in tune with them and learn from them? There are various cycles, time periods, rhythms that touch us, for example, the lunar month, the seven day week, the 24 hour day. Our concern here is with the annual cycle of the four seasons – admitting it varies greatly from north to south. We note in passing, too, that we owe these changing seasons to the providential (God-created) axial tilt of the earth.

As Christians, we have several links with the seasons. In the Northern Hemisphere, Christmas snow and cold come in winter time. Easter time, the move from death to resurrection, is linked with spring when flowers begin to burst forth from the soil. Our task, then, following the lead of Peter Favre, is to situate and examine where we are in this movement, the rhythm of the annual turn of the seasons. Each season has something to offer, a tone, a mood, a virtue, perhaps an action.

To put it another way, we often hear or say that “the action is in the reaction.” The rhythm of the seasons surrounds and envelops us. How do we act and react in accord with it? The four seasons – like all gifts from God – are both gift and task. We are to enjoy and be grateful for the gift, but also to reap fruit from it.



We begin by recalling how Saint Peter Favre saw the four seasons and was challenged by them. Since he writes this reflection on New Year's Day, he begins with the season of winter. We follow that order.

**Winter: “. . . a winter, so that the seeds sown in the soil of my soul by God might be tended and so be enabled to put down roots”**

Like every season, winter has its good and its bad side, its lights and its shadows. It begins with the winter solstice around December 20, the shortest day of the year. This tells our minds that the days are getting longer. We are passing the shortest days, days with the least sunlight in the entire year. True enough. But that is deceiving, because the coldest weather and the heaviest winter snowstorms still lie ahead of us.

The long nights and darkness of winter may lead us to raise many questions and many concerns. It is a time of waiting and watching with the hope and conviction that spring will come, and resurrection will follow. True, it is that eventually “winter takes us all.” But, for Christians, it is not the end or the final taking, because we trust and believe in the spring of resurrection. The paschal mystery of death and resurrection has the final word.

Theologian Karl Rahner has even written of a “wintry spirituality” where one senses the distance or the absence of God, rather than the warm presence of the Spirit. This wintry spirituality is akin to atheism. It is a questioning and searching spirituality, with a sense more of the absence than the presence of God. Yet, there is also a certain magic about winter. Surely it is a phase to pass through on the journey to spring, but does it not have richness, value, even magic in itself? Instead of fighting and opposing it, can we not try to be in tune with it and learn from it? Darkness can reveal light and treasures. We know that in winter much more is going on in hidden ways in the world of nature, even if we cannot see it.

Winter offers the opportunity to slow down, simplify our lives, and return to the basics. It is a time to focus on the important issues, on the basics. Winter takes away the frills and enables us to focus. Winter provides time for solitude, sitting quietly alone or with family and friends around a fireplace.

True friends come out in winter. Winter friends are friends forever. It is

a time to catch up on reading, and, at the same time, wait and hope patiently for the coming of spring. Albert Camus spoke of this winter hope:

In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. And that makes me happy. For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me, within me, there's something stronger – something better – pushing right back.

*The seasons affect our bodies. Do the seasons not also affect our interior, our soul, our life in the Spirit, our moods, our vision, our relationship to God and others?*

Winter, too, is a time for fun. Not only is snow beautiful and amazing, it provides new ways to be creative with winter sports, snow fights, sledding, and ice skating. Winter is the time when Christmas comes. We find it hard to imagine Christmas any other time of year. How children enjoy winter! They love to slog through the snow and slush rather than walk on the clean sidewalk. Should we not enjoy it as children do? The familiar song *Winter Wonderland* points to some of the beauty of winter:

Sleigh bells ring,  
are you listening?  
In the lane  
snow is glistening,  
a beautiful sight,  
we're happy tonight  
walking in a winter wonderland.  
Gone away is the bluebird,  
here to stay is a new bird;  
he sings a love song  
as we go along,  
walking in a winter wonderland. . . .

*Reflection.* With Saint Peter Favre, we ask whether we have put down roots. What are my roots, the foundations on which my future will emerge? Have I taken quiet time to reflect, to come to know myself? Do I trust that even in the quiet of winter, many things are happening?



Do I trust that seeds that have been planted are alive, developing, waiting to come alive? Do I, too, have hidden treasures that are maturing, quietly, slowly, imperceptibly?

**Spring: “. . . a spring, so that my piece of earth might germinate and grow its crop”**

Spring is so easy and so positive to reflect on. New life and abundant growth. “Nothing is so beautiful as spring,” writes the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. The light is winning; daylight is clearly in the ascendancy.

*Each season has something to offer. How do we act and react in accord with it?*

On or around March 20, we celebrate the vernal, spring equinox – twelve hours of day and twelve hours of night. Life is bursting forth, with fragrance and color, above all with green. The poet George Herbert exclaims: “Who would have thought my shrivell’d heart could have recovered greenness.” We must recover greenness. How I recall the shades of light green when spring leaves burst forth along the Hudson River! Green is the color of hope, of growth.

Spring is a field day for poets. Thus, Emily Dickinson describes spring as “this whole experiment of green. . . .”

A little madness in the spring  
is wholesome even for the King,  
But God be with the clown,  
who ponders this tremendous scene –  
this whole experiment of green,  
as if it were his own!

Spring provides an annual lesson in resurrection. It brings joy and smiles with its sunny, warm weather. It calls us to spend more time outdoors. The very word *spring* is a verb meaning “to leap” or “to jump.” Something new and positive overtakes us. Spring also refers to a place where from cool, clear water flows.

The liturgical season of Lent in the Northern Hemisphere comes in springtime. Some say that originally the word *Lent* meant to spring or

“lengthen” – to stretch, as the days become longer.

Following Lent comes Easter. There is, of course, the evident link between Easter and spring. Both reveal and point to new life after waiting, planting, hoping, and watching. While autumn may seem more beautiful, we hear it said that as one gets older, one enjoys and appreciates spring even more than autumn. Spring points the way to new life. In spring, we are invited to go outdoors, to come to new life, and so be in accord with what is going on in nature around us. We have managed, survived, and even conquered the winter.

*Albert Camus spoke of winter hope: “In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.”*

The Bible urges us to enjoy spring, the new life and love it may bring  
We read in the Song of Songs 2:10-14:

My beloved spoke and said to me,  
“Arise, my darling,  
my beautiful one, come with me.  
See! The winter is past;  
the rains are over and gone.  
Flowers appear on the earth;  
the season of singing has come.  
The cooing of doves  
is heard in our land.  
The fig tree forms its early fruit;  
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.  
Arise, come, my darling;  
my beautiful one, come with me.”

In his poem entitled *Spring*, Gerard Manley Hopkins writes: “Nothing is so beautiful as spring – when weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush.” In another poem, *The May Magnificat*, he asks, “Why is May Mary’s month?” and answers:

Ask of her, the mighty mother.  
Her reply puts this other  
question: What is spring? –  
“Growth in every thing –



## Emmanuel



All things rising, all things sizing,  
Mary sees, sympathizing  
with that world of good,  
nature's motherhood."

*Reflection.* Am I allowing the gifts, the talents, the abilities that I have been given to germinate? Do I stand in the way or get out of the way so the Spirit can quietly, powerfully, work in and through me, so that I can grow and bear fruit? Am I allowing the movement from winter to summer to take place in me?

Spring affirms and confirms resurrection after the cold and slowness of winter. Spring is a test of our faith. Do we believe after the slowness of winter, after death and waiting, that new life will come in the Church and in the weary world? Do we believe, as Newman preached in his sermon "The Second Spring of English Catholicism – 1852," that there will be a new second spring in our Church and our world, and in ourselves?





## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# The Gift of Self in the Life of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, Part 1

by Catherine Marie Caron, SSS

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Remain in me as I remain in you; you will bear great fruit in me."*

"THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT: LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I LOVE YOU. NO ONE HAS greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." . . . "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." . . . "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." . . . "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life." . . . "Abide in my love."

These verses from the Gospel of John summarize all I need to say, because they touch on the high point of the spiritual life of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, an experience which we Blessed Sacrament religious refer to as Eymard's Gift of Self. I will elaborate on this mostly in the second part of this article in the March/April issue. For now, let us just keep these words of Jesus in our hearts: "I am the vine; you are the branches."

Contextualizing this reflection on the Gift of Self within the Year of Mercy presents something of a challenge. In doing so, however, I have ultimately come to realize how closely intertwined these topics – mercy and self-gift – are in Father Eymard's life and spirituality. They speak to two critical experiences in his life, what we refer to, first, as the Experience of Saint-Romans and, secondly, the Gift of Self in the Retreat of Rome.

Let me start with a few preliminary definitions which may be helpful.

### **Saint-Romans**

We begin with the story of Saint-Romans, a little village in France

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where young Father Eymard, then a priest of the Diocese of Grenoble, had an experience of God that radically changed his spirit.

Eymard lived at a time and place when God's mercy was left in the shadows by the strong emphasis placed on personal sin and a predominant awareness of God's justice. He also lived in a home where reparation for sin was perceived as the principal key to holiness, in a Church where people stayed away from Holy Communion out of a sense of unworthiness and where sermons were often characterized by fire and brimstone.

This is the background where young Father Eymard spent an afternoon on the hill of Saint-Romans. There, he could see the surrounding countryside, miles and miles of it as far as the horizon met the sky. This was unique in the French Alps where he was familiar with another kind of beauty, where mountains and mountain peaks were the customary, breathtaking view.

All of us can likely identify with Eymard's experience of contemplation in a beautiful setting, recalling an occasion when we were overwhelmed by the specter of natural beauty, of vastness, gentleness, and peace, perhaps near Lake Erie or the ocean, or on a mountaintop when the sun was shining, the breeze was gentle, the view was limitless and peaceful.

Father Eymard would write about it to a friend many years later, saying:

Meditate at the sight of nature's beauty amid the peace and quiet of the valleys and hills. Do not forget my rock, its chapel, its beautiful view. Oh, what a delightful hour I spent there a few years ago toward the close of a lovely day. I felt my soul enjoy a peace and meditation which are never forgotten.

Toward the end of his life, he wrote about it again: "How often I wish and desire that you may taste God in this way; it lasts a long time. It is my rock of Saint-Romans."

The peace which swept over him left him overwhelmed with a sense of the great goodness of God. He referred to it as "tasting" God's goodness. From that point on, Father Eymard became the troubadour of God's infinite kindness. His tone changed. He was still conscious of

the majesty of God and of his own unworthiness, but this experience of God's goodness had a transforming effect upon him. It was a life-changing moment. As a prophet of God's goodness, he encouraged people to grow in their trust and confidence in God's care and tenderness.

In his reading of Scripture, he would list examples of God's mercy. In his homilies, he explored passages from the Old and New Testaments that spoke of God's great mercy. In daily life, he would exclaim spontaneously, "God is good!" We see this throughout his letters. Even under trial or duress, the conviction of God's goodness never left him. He loved Psalm 136, which itself is a canticle to God's great love. That psalm repeats in litany style 26 times: "His mercy endures forever." Eymard was so enthralled with this psalm that he said that the psalmist proclaimed God's mercy 50 times! Not so. I counted them: 26 times does it.

*The more his sense of God's goodness grew, the more Father Eymard felt challenged to respond in love, to give himself completely.*

It led him to heartfelt gratitude, which is celebrated in the Eucharist, the channel of divine love and mercy. Holy Communion became the key to receiving God's strength and mercy, and he recommended frequent Communion as the means of spiritual strength.

Saint Peter Julian wondered how he could best respond to such a loving, gracious, merciful God. The more his sense of God's goodness grew, the more he felt challenged to respond in love. His experience of God's overwhelming goodness impelled him to aim to give himself ever more completely to God, which brings us to our second point.

"What can I do for you, Lord?" became the cry of his heart. "How can I give myself totally to God?"

His biographers describe how he committed himself to work for the kingdom of God and the spiritual welfare of others. From being a parish priest, he became a Marist religious and, in spite of poor health, he founded the Society (Congregation) of the Blessed Sacrament in 1856 and then the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament as well as the lay associates, then called the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament, still its official title. He also preached many eucharistic retreats in



France, Belgium, and Rome. This external journey of dedication was the outward sign of his inner journey.

But it is *the inner journey* that we want to explore. In his pursuit of giving himself totally to God, his inner journey led him to seek for holiness through works of penance, austerity, and scrupulous self-examination. He wanted to live more fully in the spirit of love which flows from the Eucharist.

### The Cenacle

We leap forward now in the story of Father Eymard's life from the experience at Saint-Romans in his early priesthood – approximately at the age of 30 – to an event that would happen 25 years later, just three years before his death, when he was 54-55 years old. He had already achieved the most important accomplishments of his life: becoming a priest, a religious, and devoting his life to the Holy Eucharist by the foundation of two religious congregations.

This second story is known as the Gift of Self in the Retreat of Rome. We begin with some background. Three ideas merit explanation: *Cenacle*, *Retreat of Rome*, and *Gift of Self*.

Father Eymard's dream was that one day the Eucharist could again be honored in the Cenacle of Jerusalem, the upper room where the Last Supper had taken place. To make this happen, he and Father de Cuers, his first companion, undertook a daring project. They dealt with officials in France, Rome, and Jerusalem – both Church and civil – regarding the exclusive rights held by the Franciscans to Christian places in the Holy Land. It was not a simple matter. Add to that all of the social and political intrigues that surrounded the Holy Land, both then and now.

The Cenacle came to have three meanings in the life of Saint Peter Julian. It referred, first, to that specific place in Jerusalem where Jesus is said to have given us the Eucharist. Today we are more familiar with the expression, the "upper room." Actually, that building was destroyed over the centuries and a new edifice was built as close to the original location as can be calculated. This building was and is known as the Cenacle.

The second meaning of the Cenacle was a symbolic one, we could

say a paradigm, which the dictionary defines as “a comparison full of meaning which throws light upon a current reality.” In this sense, the Cenacle refers to the events which the New Testament describes as happening in the “upper room,” and the lessons we can learn from them. We can come up with five. These events carried meanings and values which Father Eymard wanted to see in the communities he established. He referred to our convents as cenacles rather than monasteries or convents. He also used the word to refer to the residences of his male religious. I am not sure whether the expression continues to this day. In this sense, a Cenacle is a place where the Eucharist is the center, the community gathers in prayer and in sharing, and is sent forth on mission by the Holy Spirit.

*The Cenacle came to have three meanings in the life of Saint Peter Julian Eymard: a place, a symbol, his heart.*

Finally, the Cenacle also came to symbolize the human heart. Saint Peter Julian Eymard desired *that his heart would be a Cenacle*, that is, “the place where Jesus dwells,” as he wrote to Natalie Jordan: “What New Year’s wishes can you offer me? Wish me the real Cenacle and then the interior Cenacle, then I shall be happy.” It is this meaning of the Cenacle that we will explore now.

### **Great Retreat of Rome**

Father Eymard went to Rome to negotiate permission to make the foundation in Jerusalem in the hope of eventually obtaining the Cenacle (first meaning). While waiting for his request to be discussed by the cardinals, he went on retreat, as delay followed upon delay. This retreat is what we Blessed Sacrament religious refer to as the Great Retreat of Rome. It was *great* for two reasons: first, because it lasted over 60 days, and second, because of the spiritual experience that marked this retreat, the experience that we refer to as his Gift of Self.

Because of the difficulty of obtaining the Cenacle, even in the best of situations, Father Eymard would have willingly accepted to purchase some other property in Jerusalem. I will not keep you in suspense, but simply tell you the end of the story now. He was refused permission to make a foundation in Jerusalem. He returned to Paris feeling that his greatest dream had been dashed, and, as he phrased it, he bore this



pain in union with the agony of Jesus.

What we focus on here, however, is his inner journey, composed of the spiritual movements that occurred within the 60 days of the retreat.

At the beginning of the retreat, he was taken up with the conversion of the apostle Paul and his spiritual encounter with the Lord. From this spiritual encounter, he was led to a spiritual identification with our Lord. Father Eymard began the retreat with two questions: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" and "How can I abide in our Lord?" Obviously, both of these focus on his inner journey.

Saint Peter Julian was struck by this thought from *The Imitation of Christ*: "I do not want your works, but you." He concluded: "Even if I gave God the whole world, if I do not give him my own heart, then it is worth nothing." This led to a new question: "How do I give myself to God?"

The first period of the retreat was a period of conversion, when he questioned his own motives and continually renewed his resolve to give himself more completely to the Lord. Throughout his notes, we find favorite scripture texts which enlightened and supported his search.

Do you like to read someone else's diary? Well, this one is not easy reading. These extensive retreat notes are full of details about his meditations, his hopes, his struggles, his dreams, and his prayers. Actually, this long retreat almost reads as a composite of successive retreats. It tells the story of his desire to work for the Lord, and includes an examination of his conscience and an analysis of his relationship with Jesus.

Like Francis Thompson in his poem "The Hound of Heaven," Father Eymard was beginning to understand that Jesus was in pursuit of his heart. By this is meant the inner gift of the heart to God. The expression to "give oneself" recurs constantly in these notes, 16 times to be exact.

One striking example early in the retreat finds him asserting that every gift of God is in fact a gift of divine mercy. He wrote:

Toward the end of my meditation, a beautiful thought came to me, assuredly from the mercy of our Lord. I was asking him just how he wanted me to serve him. And then it seemed to

me that I heard these words: "Be to me in my sacrament what I was to my Father in the incarnation and my mortal life." That thought made a vivid impression upon me. I thanked the good Master for it, and I gave myself anew to him to be entirely his.

Awareness that every gift of God is a gift of mercy led him to gratitude.

His retreat was also full of images. If you have a poetic bent, you find that images sometimes convey your feelings better than words. He wrote that he wanted "to become purified bread," an image used by Saint Ignatius of Antioch; "his heart to become a ciborium"; "to be a disciple, a servant"; "to climb the mountain of love"; "to be on fire in the presence of the burning bush."

Have you ever been haunted by a scripture text that lays hold of you and you think: Lord, what are you trying to tell me? That happened to me at one time. For several years, the same text kept surfacing in my mind and my prayer, and it bugged me. I wondered, what am I supposed to understand about this? Father Eymard's experience was something like that. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me as I abide in you." This passage surfaced repeatedly at various intervals. In the retreat, he kept asking himself, "How can I abide in our Lord?"

*In his pursuit of giving himself totally to God, Eymard wanted to live more fully in the spirit of love which flows from the Eucharist.*

I once asked Father Eugene LaVerdiere, SSS, the late biblical scholar, what was the better translation of this phrase: *abide in me, and I in you, or remain, or dwell, or make your home in me?* From the various translations, he preferred, "Make your home in me as I make my home in you."

Father Eymard turned to a lengthy meditation on Chapter 15 of the Gospel of John: "I am the vine, you are the branches." This meditation was the door that would lead to what he called the "great grace of his retreat," to understand that "the kingdom of God is within" and to see his own heart as the place where a "spiritual revolution" was to take place. Jesus would now become his reference point, the one who would be Master and Guide. "Our union with our Lord ought to be as





real as the vine with its trunk and roots," he said.

During several meditations, he set out to discover how to live this ideal: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me," says Paul. "Abide in my love" teaches the entire Gospel of John. He struggled with this concept for several days. He thought:

Isn't our Lord kind enough, loveable enough, great enough to possess my whole heart, and my whole self at adoration? The Eucharist is a fire which purifies or consumes, which brings happiness or crucifixion.

Why have I not loved enough or well enough? It is because I did not know how to or want to make a true adoration of love. *I meditated too much and did not love enough.* I did not love in our Lord, did not offer him personal love.

Some days later, he pursued the question in what I consider a poignant text:

What does "abiding in the love of Jesus Christ" mean? That we make his love the center of our life. Well then, this center must be the Eucharist – where Jesus dwells – our one center of consolation in the hour of trial, our one center in the hour of sorrow and disappointment, for that is when the heart surrenders itself more fully; our one center in time of happiness, for it is then that true love finds its joy in the Beloved, and not in self; our center in our desire to see and to please him . . . to surprise him with a gift. . . ."

Then he wondered:

Why do I turn to him in times of sorrow, but not in times of joy? That is a sad fact, all too sad. If Jesus is our friend, should we not be sharing our joys with him as well as our sorrows? If we work for him, should we not be as attentive to him as he was to God his Father?

Saint Peter Julian Eymard hoped to come to a habitual sense of the presence of God, and wanted what he called a "spiritual revolution" within himself. Jesus would become his center of life. Like John the

Baptist, his model, he said, "He must increase and I must decrease."<sup>1</sup>

Even while the Holy Spirit was drawing him to this spiritual conversion, he began to wonder, "How can I bring about this revolution in myself?" Notice the word *revolution*. He concluded, "That is the mission of the Holy Spirit in me."

He had run out of ways to express himself. Fortunately, when he tried to answer his own question, his worry gave way to simplicity and humor: "... How can I abide in God, dwell in God? Enter in, dwell there. Act in this center and for this divine center. Desire only that."

He concluded: "How do I do it? By doing it! That is the whole secret." He was setting aside a mental struggle to enter into his heart and to let himself be drawn by the heart to Christ alone.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> (GRR March 4, 1865).

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## PASTORAL LITURGY

# Making Connections – Communion to the Sick

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

*Part of the Communion Rite and dismissal at Mass is the missioning of Ministers of Communion to bring God's word and the body of Christ to the absent members of Christ's body.*

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).

THIS YEAR'S FOCUS WILL BE ON SOME FINER POINTS OF PASTORAL PRACTICE TAKING place in some parishes and exploring "best practices" that bring out both. Many times, new pastoral practices emerge to support the parish liturgy; in a few instances, perhaps, there needs to be a "rethink."

Our first topic is bringing Holy Communion to the elderly, the sick, and the infirm that are not able to physically attend Mass. In our aging population in North America, a pastoral practice, found in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass* (HCWEOM) and encouraged in some dioceses (i.e., the Diocese of Cleveland), assists in making the connection of the Mass and outreach. We share the practice, found already in apostolic times, of bringing Holy Communion to those not present for the Eucharist. In many situations, family members either purchase or are given a pyx to carry Communion to a homebound loved one. As a visiting priest and a new pastor, I have observed the following practices:

- A family member comes to the parish office and asks to have the pyx filled with a number of consecrated hosts, sometimes enough to last a week or a month;
- In the Communion procession, a family member will request hosts, showing the pyx to the Communion Minister and indicating, either audibly or with fingers, the number of hosts to be placed in the pyx. The pyx is then placed in a pocket or a purse;
- During the day (not the LORD'S Day), people make their way

to the church or chapel tabernacle, locate the key, and retrieve hosts on their own.

These are but a few circumstances. There are many others and alternates to the above that are examples of established local practices or priests' preferences.

The ideal practice is found in *Introduction to the Order of Mass: A Pastoral Resource of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy* (IOM), paragraph 16. After some catechesis in your parish bulletin, during a homily, and with meetings with pastoral ministers to the homebound, nursing homes, or other healthcare facilities, it is possible to instate the ancient and revered practice of taking Holy Communion directly from the Sunday or weekday Eucharist to those who are unable to attend. Canon Law says that Holy Communion should be brought to someone *from the church* (see 935).

Rather than looking like a "take-out line" during the Communion procession, some parishes are implementing an "improved practice" which also serves to make parishioners more aware of our sacramental outreach to the sick and homebound:

- At the end of the Communion procession, while the singing or chanting continues, the cantor makes an announcement inviting Communion Ministers going to the homebound to come forward to the sanctuary steps or altar. Here is a sample invitation: "At this time, we invite the Ministers of Holy Communion who are sharing the body of Christ with those unable to be here, to come forward."
- After placing the hosts in the pyxes of the Communion Ministers, the priest (or deacon) may say:

"Brothers and sisters,  
you are sent from this assembly  
to bring the word of God and the Bread of Life  
to the sick and homebound members of our parish family.  
Go to them with our love, our care, and our prayers  
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and gentle healer."

- The refrain of the Communion chant or song is then sung as the ministers leave to share the body of Christ.

Practical, parish-tested rituals can be found in other publications such

as the *Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays*, published by Liturgy Training Publications. The purpose of this ritual is to assist the assembly in seeing that this ministry is part of the Communion Rite: people come forward to serve and are sent to minister the body of Christ to the members of the body of Christ. It communicates that the community is larger than those present around the altar and it strengthens the bond of friendship, faith, and prayer we have with our absent brothers and sisters.

Some priests instruct parishioners to follow the practice of having the pyx(es) already placed on the altar before Mass, or in the sacristy, with the number of hosts already predetermined and placed on the altar. A clearer way of making the connection is to have these pyxes in the procession of the bread and the wine, offered and blessed along with the rest of the Communion bread. This takes place during the preparation of the gifts and the altar, not ahead of time. In communities where one is using a large pyx, due to the fact that Holy Communion is being taken to a nursing home or a hospital, having a special container or paten underscores that the ministry of care is part of the Mass: we offer our bread for the life of the world.

Another concern is nursing homes or hospitals that only wish to receive a Communion Minister at a time other than Mass. While it is not ideal in making the "outreach connection with Mass," it is helpful to have this minister commissioned. We do not "self-communicate"; we are always commissioned. We give and share not on our own, but when we are commissioned to minister. The *Roman Missal*, in its appendix on this ministry, envisions a regular commissioning or "deputing," as a sign of and a connection to the Eucharist and to the faith community which gathers at the table and is sent forth from it.

Hopefully this column will awaken a sense of ways by which we can increase our parishioners' awareness of the ministry of healing and Communion to the sick from the table of the Eucharist, as we "go forth to serve the LORD."

### **Remember in January and February**

- The Christmas Season ends on Monday, January 9, 2017, with the feast of the Baptism of the LORD. On this instructional day for children, whether in a day school or afternoon evening catechism sessions, celebrate evening prayer or night prayer

to highlight the feast and to remind them of their own baptism.

- Monday, January 16, is Martin Luther King, Jr., Day. Celebrate a Mass for Peace and Justice or one of the other special votive Masses found in the *Roman Missal*.
- Friday, January 20, is Inauguration Day in the United States. We join in praying for those who will serve in public office and for our nation.
- The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity begins on Wednesday, January 18, and continues through the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul on January 25. Pope Francis and other Church leaders have asked us to pray for and work for greater understanding and unity among all who follow Christ, as a “witness of communion.”
- The Lunar New Year is observed on Saturday, January 28.
- Thursday, February 2, is the feast of the Presentation of the LORD. Bless candles and encourage the participation of day school or catechism classes in making, bringing, and blessing symbols of the Light of Christ.
- Friday, February 3, is the optional memorial of Saint Blase and the traditional day on which to bless throats.
- Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, March 1. During February, organize the catechesis, announcements, rice bowls, Stations of the Cross, etc., to prepare for a deep and meaningful observance of the Church’s season of penance and renewal.





## PASTORAL LITURGY

# On the Liturgy and Transformation

### Transforming and Healing

Hospital ministry is a unique calling. I have nothing but the most profound respect for those who choose to dedicate their lives to ministering in a hospital setting. It takes a well-trained ear, an attentive eye, and a special balance of fortitude, hope, and realism. As an ordained minister, I am often called to visit parishioners in hospital settings to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in emergency situations. And this liturgy can be truly transformative.

Interestingly, what can be most observably transformative in the celebration of this liturgy is not the demeanor of the one receiving the sacrament. Sadly, it's often the case that the person receiving the sacrament is struggling for survival and laden with life-sustaining medical equipment. Instead, it's the family and friends gathered with their loved one who are most visibly transformed by the liturgy.

To help bring about this cathartic experience among the family and friends, one of the most important aspects of the celebration of this liturgy can actually be the gathering of the people. Burdened by bad news, heavy thoughts, and often intimidated by the sight of blood and daunting medical equipment, friends and family find themselves often isolated, separate and removed from their ailing loved one. One of the most important moments in this ritual can then be gathering everyone together around their loved one. A gentle, warm invitation to gather together can transform the disparate group into a community. As everyone gathers and before the liturgical greeting, I like to remind everyone of God's presence among them, briefly quoting Matthew 20:18 assuring them of God's presence in our midst.

Another terribly important transformative aspect of the liturgy of anointing of the sick in hospital settings is the element of touch. I

often ask one of the closest relatives to help me when it comes time to anoint their loved one's hands. The person's hands are often covered by blankets and need to be anointed with oil. That's simply the ritual gesture. However, there's a tremendous opportunity to help those gathered to connect with their loved one in a deeper experiential and spiritual way. Too often the sick or dying person can become a type of object that people simply watch in fear and sadness.

Touch humanizes. It helps people reconnect and break through the sterile and sometimes intimidating hospital setting. Thus the gentle and deliberate and prayerful laying on of hands during the liturgy is important. Likewise, asking the family to help hold the hands of their loved one so the minister can anoint the person's hands is another way to reconnect.

As these experiential moments transpire, I often see the tears begin to roll down the faces of those gathered. I hear their voices cracking as we pray The Lord's Prayer together. All the bottled up emotions come to the surface as the liturgy helps transform fear, confusion, and isolation into communal love and support. It's truly a transforming liturgy.

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Art Director, Emmanuel

### **"And the Word Became Flesh"**

I love being a priest and daily offering the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. I have celebrated the Eucharist in a variety of settings: suburban parishes, urban shrines, federal prison, Latino communities, seminary chapels, etc. Each celebration is a moment of transformative grace for me personally, and I pray for the faithful, and that transformation begins at the table of the Word of God.

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: "Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from Scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the Scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 24).

The readings at Mass tell our family story: the history of God's self-revelation, culminating in Jesus Christ. They speak of Christ's abiding presence in his church, and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon



believers. What an awesome grace it is to be nourished at the Table of the Word! The transformation of our hearts begins at the feet of the Lord, present in his word.

Saint Jerome tells us that “the flesh of the Lord is true food and his blood true drink; this is the true good that is reserved for us in this present life, to nourish ourselves with his flesh and drink his blood, not only in the Eucharist but also in reading Sacred Scripture. Indeed, true food and true drink is the word of God which we derive from the Scriptures.”

Forever changed by our encounter with the risen Lord in word and sacrament at Mass, we hear the invitation, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” in a world where we radiate the light of mercy and truth, justice and peace because indeed we have been transformed into what we received at the banquet of the Eucharist.

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### **“Do This in Memory of Me. . .”**

The host was raised into the air as the sun crept over the horizon, illuminating the priest’s figure. On an April Sunday morning, the community of 17 gathered to conclude their three day retreat. The endless tide of the Pacific Ocean completed the picturesque scene at the small retreat center on the coast of Ecuador. Some Mass parts were in Spanish, others in English, creating a beautiful melding of culture. Chills rain down my spine as I reflected on the power of the Eucharist and the beauty of God’s creation.

After leading a retreat for three days for the volunteers of the *Rostró de Cristo* program, I now heard the challenge to “do this in memory” of Christ differently. Part of my role as retreat director was to listen to the volunteers, who had spent eight months of their twelve month commitment accompanying the poor in Ecuador. I was transformed by the narratives of the poor living on the margins of Duran, Ecuador. The hospitality of the neighbors, the corruption of the government officials, the abuse of women at the hands of their husbands, and the

agony of knowing that many of the children they loved would never escape the grinding poverty were all heavy on my heart.

But the eucharistic celebration took those stories and challenged me to action. I could not hold the images of the neighbor's pain and abused women guarded inside me. Saying "Amen" before receiving the Eucharist meant I had to share those stories with the world and work to stop injustice. I let the Eucharist transform me. Injustice can be overwhelming, but we must remember that we do not enter this work alone. Our strength comes through the transformative power of the Eucharist. Since that day, I have been transformed by the call for justice that is a dimension of eucharistic reception.

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## Being Changed

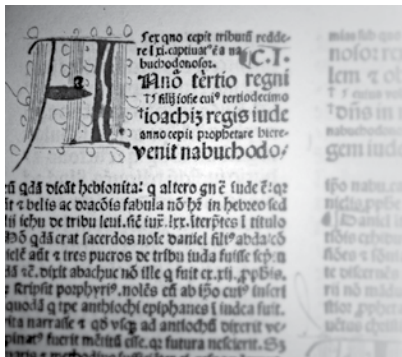
A key moment in the liturgy - resulting from the undying love of the Lord Jesus for us, the church; the invocation of the Holy Spirit; and the faith of the community - is the prayer of thanksgiving and consecration when the bread and wine are transformed into Christ's body and blood. An Australian Blessed Sacrament priest, Frank O'Dea, says of this: "We wonder and marvel at this extraordinary transformation which enables such intimacy with the risen Christ."

From childhood, and especially because of my years as an altar server, I have noticed the epiclesis at Mass, the calling-down of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of the priest's hands over the bread and cup. Long before I had any real theological awareness of the gesture, I understood intuitively that something significant was happening. The act itself and the accompanying words draw our attention. Only later did I realize that the transformation of the bread and the wine is to lead to *a transformation in me, and in all of us*, the church. This is effected by a second epiclesis later in the Eucharistic Prayer - over the assembly!

Being changed, even by God, isn't easy; and I know that in my own life I often resist it mightily. John Henry Newman once said, "To grow

is to change and to have become perfect is to have changed often.” When we surrender ourselves to God’s transforming power, we are made new, transformed. The Lord Jesus speaks to our hearts and changes us by his presence and his grace. The “rough edges” of human personality and formation (or malformation) and history are slowly transformed over time, and we come to resemble Christ more closely. And, by receiving the body of Christ in the Eucharist, we become what we receive — the living body and the presence of Christ in the world. I find this comforting, and challenging!

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Editor, *Emmanuel*



## BREAKING THE WORD

# HOMILETICS - Scriptural Reflections

by Dianne Bergant, CSA

## January 1, 2017 Mary, The Holy Mother of God

**Numbers 6:22-17; Psalm 67:2-3, 5-6, 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21**

Besides the solemnity of Mary, today is the octave of Christmas, the first day of the New Year, the day designated for prayers of world peace, and the former feast of the Circumcision. The readings offer us an assortment of themes for our reflection.

The gospel passage lends itself to a variety of reflections. The Christmas motif is evident in the Bethlehem scene with the shepherds and the child in the manger. However, this is not Christmas, but its octave ("When eight days were completed for his circumcision"). While the feast is the Holy Family, the focus is on Mary. It was to her that the angel appeared much earlier and announced the name the child was to bear; and it is Mary who reflected on these mysterious events in her heart.

The reading from Galatians picks up this theme: "God sent his Son, born of a woman. . . ." What must this young woman have been thinking? How could she ever understand what God was asking of her? But this is precisely the essence of Mary's greatness. She did not presume to understand; she did not demand that God explain, as so many of us often do. She reflected on these things in her heart.

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, we could not ask for a better guide to lead us into the unknown before us. Mary was an unassuming young woman, probably inconspicuous in her community – as are most of us. But she was extraordinarily open to God in her life. Few of us will probably meet mysterious heavenly beings along the way. However, there will be angels (the Greek word *ángelos* means messenger), people who may not even realize that God is speaking to

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us through them. The challenge for us is to be open to them, and then to reflect in our hearts on the events of our lives.

The second important theme for today is found in the passage from Numbers. There we find a well-known prayer for peace, delivered by God to Moses for Aaron and the other priests. It is an important prayer, because the text says that it was given by God, not composed by human beings. It indicates that God wanted to bless the people, to be gracious to them, to provide whatever they might need to live full and profitable lives, for that is the true essence of peace. This passage also highlights the sacredness and power of the personal name of God, YHWH. This name was so sacred that the people were forbidden to pronounce it. They were to use the word LORD in its place. They were told to call on this LORD for the blessings God wished to bestow upon them, and this magnanimous God would grant their prayer.

This same prayer for peace is found in the responsorial psalm, even though the word “peace” is not used. This prayer is prayed not only for the Israelite people, but also for the nations. As far back as the time of Moses and Aaron, the people of God have prayed for world peace. There is no reason to doubt that these were fervent prayers. However, history forces us to wonder to what extent they have *worked* for world peace. The prayer in both the first reading and this psalm response asks that God’s face shine upon us, that God look kindly on us so that we might follow God’s way. But what is God’s way? How are we to know what is expected of us? Mary can be our model in this as well. She did not know for certain, but she trusted that if she was open to the “angels” that God sent into her life, God would provide.

This is the message for us on this first day of the New Year. How will we hear it? How will we respond?

## January 8, 2017 The Epiphany of the Lord

**Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12**

Unlike the continuous reading that governs the selection of texts during most of the liturgical year, major themes associated with feasts determine the readings for that day. This is very clear for the feast of the Epiphany. The first reading speaks of a light for Jerusalem,

camels and dromedaries, gold and frankincense. The psalm response mentions kings who come from Arabia to worship God. The reading from Ephesians announces the inclusion of the Gentiles. Finally, the gospel passage recounts the visit of the magi. All the readings point to or support the Epiphany story. But what is the real meaning of the story?

The Epiphany is a feast of searching, of reading the signs of the times, and of finding the object of the search. An important theme in the first reading is light. The Isaian passage places us in the time after the Exile, when the people were trying to rebuild their city, their temple, and, more importantly, the infrastructure of their political and religious lives. The task appeared overwhelming. In the face of failure and disappointment, they experienced darkness and despondency. It is to this people that God promises light and direction. This light comes from God and is so brilliant that the people themselves become light to the foreign nations.

The responsorial psalm highlights this same theme, here emphasizing the role played by the king. Once again we see that prosperity was not accomplished through the exploits of political leaders, but through the graciousness of God who worked through those leaders. It was God who led foreign kings to the one king chosen by God. Finding this king, the foreigners then paid tribute.

Moving out of the context of ancient Israel into the teaching of Paul, we find again insistence that the graciousness of God is not the exclusive blessing of a privileged few. It is meant for all people, even those who at times appear to be enemies of the believers. Paul makes a bold claim calling the Gentiles "coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise. . ."

We cannot overestimate this universality, this openness to all people, regardless of their ethnic origin or religious tradition. It is an attitude that is not always popular. We might be open to people who are willing to join our group and become like us. But those who insist on retaining their ethnic distinction in language and custom or religious affiliation are often frowned upon, shunned, or openly oppressed. Universality does not mean uniformity. The Gospel tells us that the magi went back to their own country. There is no indication that they relinquished the life they knew before their journey. The feast of the Epiphany brings this very complicated issue of universality to our attention.

The feast itself requires more than a pious visit to the manger, there to discover that figurines have been added. Rather, this feast challenges us to read the signs of our times and to follow where they lead. This is not an easy task. It requires attentive living, patient discernment, and courageous response. We often need help in recognizing these signs and understanding what they might mean. But then, the magi needed help in following the star as well. When they first perceived it in the sky, they consulted learned writings (Mi 5:1) and then religious authorities (chief priests and scribes). Their honest search was rewarded; they found the child and paid him homage.

We live in a time of great ethnic and religious unrest. How open are we to “the other,” the one who is so different? How extensive is our embrace? Do we shine for them with the light of God’s goodness? Or do we use them for our own purposes, as Herod did? Is it possible that you or I might be a star leading someone to Christ Jesus?

## January 15, 2017 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

**Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalm 40:2, 7-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; John 1:29-34**

Moving into the liturgical period of Ordinary Time, we have continuous readings from 1 Corinthians and from the Gospel according to Matthew. This practice gives us a better grasp and deeper appreciation of the messages of these two biblical books. There is no such continuity with the first readings. Rather, they are usually somehow linked with the Gospel of the day.

The passage from Isaiah is one of the four Servant Songs (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). In it, this mysterious individual recounts his call by God to bring the people of Jacob (Israel) back to God, probably back from exile. However, the servant’s responsibility will not be limited to the Israelites. Rather, he will somehow proclaim God’s salvation to the ends of the earth. The primary theme here is the call of God to serve others.

The second reading is the beginning of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. It is an example of the greeting of a Greek letter. In it, Paul identifies both the senders (himself and Sosthenes) and the recipients (the church of God in Corinth). The passage ends with a well-known Pauline salutation, “grace and peace,” a combination of Greek and

Jewish greetings respectively. Because of the combination of today's readings, one element of this passage stands out boldly. That is Paul's statement that he was called to be an apostle of Christ. Once again we find one who was called by God to serve others.

The gospel passage is an account of the baptism of Jesus by John. As is always the case with John's Gospel, this passage is rich in theological themes. The beginning of Trinitarian theology is seen first in the mention of the one who sent John to baptize with water, then of Jesus, and finally of the Spirit who will come down upon him. Two Christological themes are found in these few verses: the Lamb of God, who brings to fulfillment the ritual practice of sacrificial atonement, and the Son of God, a royal theme that implies a share in divinity.

The universality seen in the first reading is found here as well in the Lamb's atonement for the sin of the world (*kósmos*). Just as the Isaian servant was called to make God known to the ends of the earth, so John states that he was called to make this Lamb of God known to Israel. Overwhelmed by the extraordinary character of the baptism event, John acknowledges that his baptism with water cannot be compared with Jesus' baptism with the Spirit. Here, too, the theme of call by God to serve is prominent.

While all three readings direct our attention to the call of God, the responsorial psalm offers an ideal way of responding to that call: ". . . To do your will, O my God, is my delight." The teaching in this psalm is quite explicit. As important as religious observance and public worship are, a much deeper commitment to God is required, a commitment of the heart.

As we leave the excitement of the Christmas season behind us and move into Ordinary Time, we might find the ordinariness uninteresting, even humdrum. However, most of life is lived in ordinariness, and it is there that the Sunday readings help us to find meaning in life. This Sunday begins our journey through Ordinary Time, and the readings remind us that the journey begins with a call from God.

We are all called to some form of ministry or service of others. This ministry will be performed in schools or hospitals, in banks or markets, in rectories or courtrooms. Those who perform that ministry will be bus drivers or professors, mechanics or bishops, parents or presidents, servants, baptizers, or apostles. We are all called to witness to others in some way the graciousness of God. Will we have the courage to respond?



January 22, 2017  
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 8:23-9:3; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 17; Matthew 4:12-23**

Last Sunday, we reflected on the theme of call from God for service together. We considered the call of John the Baptizer and the call of Jesus. Today's Gospel continues that same theme as it reports the call of the first followers of Jesus, namely, Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John. Today, rather than consider the call itself, we look briefly at the reason for the call. Just what is the task ahead for which we have been called?

It is clear that the reading from Isaiah was chosen for today because it contains the passage quoted in the Gospel. We read that the arrest of John prompted Jesus to return to Galilee, to the area assigned to the northern tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. The gospel reference serves to inaugurate Jesus' ministry in Galilee. On the other hand, the meaning of the Isaian passage is significantly different. It focuses on the reversal of fortunes of those earlier Israelite tribes. The first part of the reading addresses the suffering of the people; the second part speaks of the reversal. The Assyrian armies had attacked from the north, along the territory known as the Way of the Sea, the trade route from Mesopotamia to Egypt. The northern tribes in the way of this advance were devastated (anguish, darkness, gloom, and distress).

Just as the suffering was seen as God's punishment for the people's failure to keep their covenant promises, so their good fortune was also seen as coming from God. We read that it was God who brought them out of darkness, who removed the yoke of Assyrian servitude from around their necks, who released them from the oppression of cruel taskmasters. It was God who delivered them. There is no indication that the people deserved this reprieve, that they had earned exoneration. Rather, it was a blessing simply bestowed by a gracious God who did not want the people to suffer any longer.

Though mention of this passage serves a different purpose in the gospel account, the meaning of the Isaian reference would have been remembered by those who first heard the gospel story. They would have hoped that the promise of reversal of fortunes made to the earlier inhabitants of their northern land might also revert to them.

At the time of Jesus, the people were once again subject to a foreign rule, that of the Roman Empire. Besides this, there was great social and religious unrest caused by various factions within the community itself. Could it be that referring to this Isaian prophecy, Jesus was taking upon himself a cause dear to their own hearts? It is no wonder that many who followed Jesus, even some of his closest companions, looked to him for a political revolution. However, such was not to be the case.

We know that the reversal that Jesus sought originated in a conversion of heart, not simply in an improvement of social or political circumstances. Like the earlier prophet, he relied on the power of God to accomplish this, not on political, social, or even religious forces. He preached the reign of heaven, not some purely human state of affairs, as beneficial as that might have been.

The readings for today tell us that we, like the early followers of Jesus, have been called to proclaim the reign of heaven, to continue the ministry that Jesus began. This means that wherever we live and work we must help people out of darkness; we must be a light in their lives so that they will recognize the blessings that they have been given by God. We must release them from the unfair burdens they bear and the rod of oppression under which they live. We now become the means through which God reverses the fortunes of the suffering people of our world.

January 29, 2017  
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13; Psalm 146: 6-10; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 5:1-12a**

Today we continue reflecting on what it means to have been called by God to further the reign of God, what it means to be a follower of Jesus, what it means to be a disciple. We become disciples by choice, not by compulsion. Though called by God, we freely make the choice to respond or not.

This freedom is also seen in the character of the program for discipleship laid out by Jesus in today's Gospel. Part of the Sermon on the Mount, this program is known as the beatitudes. They are not laws; they are counsels, advice, instruction. Like much Wisdom teaching, a beatitude describes a situation and the consequences derived from

living in a certain way. The person is free to decide whether or not to pursue that way of living. The most striking feature of the beatitude is its first word: *blessed* or *happy*. This leaves one in no doubt as to the benefit derived from choosing this way of living. The disciple will be blest; they will be happy.

The beatitudes, as unassuming as they might appear to be, really advocate an unconventional style of living, a way that challenges many of the values of contemporary culture. Today's society seems interested in a never-ending pursuit of wealth, avoidance of pain, the exercise of power over others, privilege even at the expense of others, retaliation over wrongs, underhandedness for the sake of success, vindictiveness, and cowardice. The beatitudes confront such attitudes with poverty of spirit, acceptance of misfortune, meekness, righteousness, mercy, openness to God, peacefulness, and moral courage. Finally, those who practice such virtues often place themselves at risk in a society challenged by them. Jesus was rejected and persecuted for what he taught and the way he lived. His disciples must be willing to face the same fate.

The beatitudes appear to be a development of some of the themes found in the passage from Zephaniah. The second part of that passage is an oracle of salvation in which the prophet sketches the profile of a people who have survived terrible suffering, and are now promised a future of peace and prosperity. These people are lowly, poor of spirit; they are humble and meek. They have suffered, and now know God's mercy. They do no wrong, are clean of heart; they are honest, committed to righteousness. Using slightly different words, the psalm response describes the same vision of blessing or beatitude.

Even the passage from Paul's letter carries this theme. He reminds the Corinthians that most of them came from rather humble beginnings. They were already poor and lacking influence, according to the standards of society. However, this in itself did not make them righteous. They had to see that God chose them precisely because they were of little account, so that whatever they might achieve would be seen as the fruits of God's power, not their own ingenuity. Paul insists that, if they allow God to work through them, they will accomplish great things. The prophet envisioned such a life; the beatitudes sketch such a life. It is up to us to decide whether or not we will live such a life.

What might this mean for us today? Ecological responsibility could be today's poverty of spirit, for the resources of Earth do not belong to us alone. There are many people among us who mourn the loss of loved

ones, of employment, of their homes. Many people are overlooked because they are not demanding. We can no longer claim "It's none on my business" when others are exploited; nor, in a world of such violence, can we justify revenge. We can all be honest in dealing with others and live in peace with those closest to us. Finally, we may have to accept the scorn of others for choosing to advance the reign of God. The beatitudes still challenge us today.

## February 5, 2017 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 58:7-10; Psalm 112:4-9; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Matthew 3:13-16**

Light is an elemental cosmic reality, cherished by all peoples. In many cultures, it is also a symbol of divine presence and a characterization of divine blessing. It is with this latter meaning that the image of light is employed in today's readings. The psalm response states the specific focus of this theme in a very straightforward manner: "The just one is a light in darkness to the upright." One might ask: Just how do they do this? That answer is found in the first reading.

The prophet known as Second-Isaiah outlines a program of service. It advocates providing food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, and clothing for the naked. In other words, it is in caring for others that "your light shall break forth like the dawn." This light flows from one's generosity and compassion, and it acts as deliverance from darkness. Light illumines the path ahead and enables us to move forward with confidence. The one who is a light for others is certainly a blessing from God.

In the gospel passage, Jesus develops this same theme. However, he surprises his disciples, who must have known the Isaian passage, telling them that *they* are this light for others. He emphasizes that they are a light for others, not for themselves. This is why they should not hide the light, but should let it shine. For the light that they are will give glory to God, not to themselves. Light is a perfect symbol for this unselfish giving to others, for one never really sees the light itself; one only sees what the light illumines. In fact, one forgets about the light when objects are seen.

Jesus uses another symbol to emphasize this point. Salt is necessary for seasoning. When salt seasons something, as it is meant to do, it

loses something of itself. What is tasted, then, is whatever has been salted. Salt is important to us in order that we might enjoy the meat, or the soup, or the popcorn. So, Jesus tells his disciples that they are important to the extent that they serve the needs of others.

Paul is a perfect example of one who has understood this. He never minimizes the importance of his ministry. After all, he is proclaiming the mystery of God. Nonetheless, he consistently undervalues his own importance in that ministry. Here he admits that he is weak, full of fear and much trembling, lacking in sublime words or wisdom. But this did not matter. In fact, he believed that it was better that his own limitations be acknowledged so that the marvel of what he was preaching might be recognized as the mystery of God. Like the light, Paul highlights another.

In the gospel passage, Jesus might be speaking to his disciples, but his message is as real for us today as it was for them in their day. You and I have been called to be a light that enlightens the lives of others; a dash of salt that provides flavor for others. This is a noble calling, a weighty responsibility. And how are we to accomplish this? Second Isaiah sketched out a plan: care for those in need. First, care for those of our own household, family, neighborhood. But care for the broader society as well.

Our society takes great pleasure in various forms of malicious speech, false accusation, gossip, or ridicule. It is a popular form of humor, and it permeates our political discourse. We must not only avoid it ourselves, but we cannot allow others to think that we support such forms of speech. Furthermore, we cannot abide any form of oppression, whether ethnic, religious, sexual, economic, or political. Our acceptance and respect of others must be a beacon of light, dispelling such darkness. Jesus did not say that we might be a light. He declared: "You *are* the light of the world."

February 12, 2017  
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Sirach 15:15-20; Psalm 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Matthew 5:17-37**

Some people wrongly think that the New Testament contains teaching about love, while the Old Testament is primarily concerned with law.

Actually, law is found in both Testaments, and it can only be accurately understood as a component of covenant.

In the ancient world, covenants were considered serious legal agreements. Those made between people and their god or people and their king followed a formal pattern. First, they were always initiated by the god or the king, who first identified himself (in patriarchal societies they were male), and then stated many of the favors that he had bestowed on the people. Only then were the people's freely accepted reciprocal responsibilities listed. A passage from Exodus illustrates this: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me. You shall not . . ." (Ex 20:2-17). Clearly, biblical law was not considered a burden.

The reading from Sirach underscores the free acceptance of the commandments. Believers are directed to choose between life and death, good and evil. Sirach (also known as Ecclesiastes) belongs to Israel's Wisdom tradition, a tradition that consists of advice or counsel. In it, contrasting life situations are described along with the respective outcomes of each circumstance, and the individual is instructed to choose. The wise person will make a choice for righteousness; a fool will choose the opposite. Having made a choice, one is in no position to complain when the consequences of a foolish choice unfold.

How is one to know which is a wise choice and which a foolish one? The values and teaching of the religious tradition provide such a program. However, it is up to the individual to discern what behavior is applicable in each situation. Here is where discernment and choice enter the picture.

While Sirach focuses on freedom of choice in following the commandments, Jesus in the Gospel provides a deeper understanding of law itself. He insists that external conformity to law is not enough for his followers. Obedience to the law, or fidelity to covenant responsibilities, is an interior matter, just as the love that he preaches is an interior matter. It is only in this way that the law is fulfilled. He then opens up the true meaning of four of the commandments. Why he commented on these and not on others is not clear. Perhaps they touched on some of the more perplexing issues of that time. They certainly are pressing issues of our time.

Some commentators distinguish between killing and murdering. However, Jesus seems to move us away from that argument, pointing

to the deep-seated anger that often precipitates killing. It is this anger that we must control. In fact, he maintains that it is more important to be reconciled with those whose lives touch our own than it is to offer sacrifice.

In like manner, Jesus condemns the interior lust that results in adultery. Amorous behavior might include lascivious glances and passionate fondling, but the adulterous desire really comes from within the heart. Jesus condemned divorce because it was often granted to men for trivial reasons, and it left divorced women socially vulnerable. As a result, many of them turned to prostitution in order to survive.

Oaths were often taken when someone's word was not reliable. Here, Jesus advocates trustworthiness. In each of these examples, Jesus calls for a deeper commitment to the values preserved in the commandments.

Every verse of the psalm response contains the word *law* or a synonym for it. The entire psalm upholds the graciousness of the law and the good fortune that will flow from fidelity to its stipulations. Paul speaks about this good fortune as well. He rhapsodizes its mystery and boundlessness, claiming that we cannot even imagine what awaits those who have been faithful to their covenant commitment.

## February 19, 2017 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18; Psalm 103:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; Matthew 5:38-48**

The gospel instruction for today continues Jesus' reinterpretation of the law. His pattern of speech testifies to this reinterpretation: "You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say to you. . . ." Today's teaching focuses on our attitude toward other people.

The passage from Leviticus is the source of the second part of Jesus' teaching on love of God and love of neighbor. In it, we discover the essence of Israel's understanding of love of other members of the Israelite community. Such love requires more than good acts. It flows from an inner disposition of compassion and forgiveness, so necessary for those who live close together. This message is for us as well.

We are told to treat others as we would like to be treated, with respect and understanding, with love. This teaching is introduced by the well-known injunction: "Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy." To what does this call us? Its placement at the beginning of this instruction implies that loving and forgiving and caring for people in our lives is part of what it means to be holy, because this is how God would treat them. It is as simple as that; and as difficult.

The adage "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," as violent and unforgiving as it might sound, is really an advance in understanding justice. It mandates exact retribution, or one for one; not revenge, or two for one.

Even in the face of this tempering stipulation, Jesus expects more of his followers. While the adage calls for retribution instead of revenge, he tells his disciples that there should be no reprisal at all. Rather, an offense should be repaid with kindness and good deeds. They should not retaliate when someone insults them by slapping their right cheek with the back of the hand. Instead, they should be willing to endure injury as well by the full force of a slap on the left cheek with the palm of the aggressor's hand. When forced to help another, they should be prepared to "go the extra mile." Such teaching is a far cry from the kind of "pay back" that seems to be so deeply rooted in many human relationships today.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, a neighbor was someone who belonged to one's tribe, clan, or nation. Within such groups, one had the right to expect mutual respect, support, trust, and commitment. Anyone outside these groups was considered an enemy until they proved otherwise. One was always suspicious of an outsider.

Such a code of justice was in force at the time of Jesus. Consequently, his repudiation of it must have startled his audience. He declared that the respect, support, trust, and commitment normally reserved for those of one's ethnic, religious, or social group were to be accorded the outsider or foreigner as well. This is how God would act, and Jesus' followers were to "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus' teaching on love of neighbor really does not differ much from that of Leviticus. What is different is the scope of that love. Leviticus draws a well-defined, exclusive circle, and one's relational obligations are confined to people within that circle. Jesus did away with any sign that might differentiate insider from outsider, "us" from "them."

This is a very hard teaching, especially for people who struggle with



issues of terrorism and armed conflict, ethnic tensions and religious biases, political pandering and economic exploitation. It is very hard to envision those in an opposing camp as children of the same heavenly Father, upon whom the same sun rises and the same rain falls. And yet we must. This does not mean that we have to agree with them, but we owe them the respect and support that flows from the inner disposition of compassion and forgiveness.

## February 26, 2017 Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Isaiah 49:14-15; Psalm 62:2-3, 6-9; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34**

The first Sundays of Ordinary Time challenged us with lessons about call and discipleship, service and acceptance of others. Today we turn our gaze away from ourselves and our responsibilities, and look gratefully toward God.

Once again, the postexilic prophet Second Isaiah offers us a very touching image of God's love and care. This divine compassion far outstrips the tenderness of a mother for the child of her womb. The intimacy symbolized by this female characterization of God is noteworthy. It suggests that it is precisely human vulnerability, not reliability, that elicits divine compassion. It also underscores what is perhaps the most intimate human relationship, that of mother and the child that was formed within her body and from her body. This image of God prompts us to trust completely the divine love that brought us forth and that continues to care for us.

It is this theme of trust in God that Jesus develops in the Gospel. Using two examples from the natural world, he demonstrates how God cares for animals and plants and, therefore, will surely care for human beings.

While Jesus is certainly speaking about divine providence, he explains that this providence unfolds through the operations of the laws of nature. Following their instincts, birds find food and survive. Furthermore, flowers are beautiful by their very nature, and so they have no need of enhancing their attractiveness. Jesus is really saying that creatures attain their full potential by following the natural laws that govern them.

The same is true with human beings. However, they possess more than natural instinct; they also have reason and free will, which enables them to gain insight and make choices. This means that they can make mistakes; they can be ill-informed and can choose what is not in their best interests.

To trust in God, then, does not mean that God will step in, disregard our natural powers of reason and choice, and accomplish what we have set out as our agenda. It means that we must employ these powers to the best of our ability and trust that, through them, God will direct us on the right path. The birds and the flowers are vulnerable and have their natural limitations; the same can be said about human beings. Nonetheless, if God cares for them as they instinctively follow the laws of their nature, surely God will care for us as we faithfully follow ours. Our trust in God is not based on our own strengths, but on the fact that we are important to God.

This way of thinking is exemplified in the passage from Paul. He acknowledges the supreme dignity that is ours as “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,” a characterization that captures many of the themes found in these first eight Sundays of Ordinary Time. It is also a characterization that augments the importance of those who trust in God as suggested in today’s Gospel.

Paul is not naïve; he realizes that even the most dedicated follower of Jesus can be mistaken (“I do not thereby stand acquitted”). He has done what he could do, and he leaves the rest in God’s hands. He looks to the judgment of the Lord, but he is not frightened by it, for he knows that the one who will bring all things to light loves him as a mother loves the child of her womb.

The psalm response offers us a prayer of great tenderness and confidence. It invited us to rest in God, to trust in the one who loves us with a love that we cannot even begin to fathom. If we can root ourselves in this kind of confidence, we will be able to do great things for the reign of God, for those others who are also loved so completely by this God.

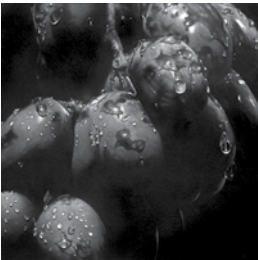




## EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

### Art Review



**BIG GRAPES NO. 2**  
James Neil  
Hollingsworth  
Oil on Canvas,  
2012

John Christman,  
SSS

To the average museum visitor strolling through a collection of contemporary art, the discovery of a photo realist painting amid a cacophony of abstract, conceptual, or video art can seem like a startling but welcome discovery. So often I have accompanied guests to art museums and when they happen upon an early Chuck Close photo realist portrait or a Richard Estes photo realist cityscape, they are instantly drawn in and captivated. Certainly the technical skill of rendering in oil on canvas an image that replicates the clarity of a photograph is a marvel worth appreciating. And amid self-referential and highly conceptual pieces of contemporary art, there is something comforting about a work of art whose subject is immediately recognizable. Perhaps another important difference in appreciating a photo realist work as opposed to much of today's more conceptual contemporary art is more philosophical. Perhaps part of the difference is a greater emphasis upon observation and attentiveness to the world we see around us. And to this James Neil Hollingsworth excels.

James Neil Hollingsworth entitles the style of his painting "contemporary realism." It carries the same stunning visual impact as photo realism, yet emphasizes even more what is naturally observable. Thus, there's a more overt sense of continuity with the art historical past. Gazing upon his images of freshly rinsed grapes or mouthwatering peanut butter and jelly sandwiches easily evokes the trompe l'oeil and gluttonous wonders of seventeenth century Dutch still life paintings with their solemnly illuminated ripe fruits and plenteous wine. But Hollingsworth's art is both less morally inclined and more reverential than its Dutch predecessors.

Hollingsworth's amazingly attentive and observant paintings illuminate in a profound way the beautiful things of everyday life: the mechanical wonder of an old Remington typewriter, the nostalgic shimmer of an old Pepsi bottle, a perfectly sliced loaf of bread seen through cellophane. In a cultural milieu where everything seems

disposable, Hollingsworth seems to not only rescue everyday items of the not-too-distant past, but positively reverence them. The delicate light, the loving brushstroke, the timeless air of the paintings all contribute to creating this reverential atmosphere.

The influential theologian Leonardo Boff once observed how everyday objects can become imbued with meaning through their use and through the relationships they take part in.<sup>1</sup> He tells a lovely story of a coffee mug that everyone in his family has used through the years and how it connects them and reveals their shared story. Such a coffee mug deserves the kind of attentive eye and painterly treatment that James Neil Hollingsworth gives all of his subjects. His paintings of wooden toy blocks and vibrant slightly worn Crayola crayons evoke collective fond memories of childhood. His sumptuous grapes stir memories of shared meals, and perhaps good wine and conversation. If it is the gift of memory to make things present once again, then Hollingsworth's great talent is to lovingly set before our eyes the objects that carry those memories, drawing our minds and hearts to life's simple joys, lest we forget.

<sup>1</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*. (Portland, Oregon: Pastoral Press, 1987).

## Poetry

### Feeding the Five Thousand in the Gospel of Luke

*have them sit down in groups of about fifty  
if my math is correct – a hundred groups  
just getting them to listen to the instructions  
was a miracle in itself  
after all, the apostles didn't have megaphones  
or loud speakers with mikes  
(testing, one, two, three, testing)*

however it happened  
they sat down  
like tired, cranky children  
as the sun was setting  
with bread set before them  
eating until they were satisfied

Lou Ella Hickman, IWBS



## Book Reviews

A relatively new series of biographies, *People of God*, provides readable narratives of twentieth and twenty-first century Catholics who have been credible witnesses to their faith and love of God in their daily lives. The most recent in the series is *Elizabeth Johnson: Questing for God*.

### ELIZABETH JOHNSON: QUESTING FOR GOD

Heidi Schlumpf  
Collegeville,  
Minnesota:  
Liturgical Press,  
2016  
156 pp., \$14.95

This short biography provides highlights in the life of this remarkable woman. Without a doubt, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, has been one of the most influential theologians of the twenty-first century. Johnson's lifelong quest has been to try to understand the mystery that is God and how that mystery is understood in the context of life experiences of Catholics in our own time. This quest has brought her worldwide recognition and numerous honors for some of her writings, as well as pain while defending others.

The book begins with an introduction to her early childhood and moves

quickly to her early years as a Sister of Saint Joseph of Brentwood, New York. Johnson entered religious life prior to Vatican II and, like most religious congregations of that time, had to deal with rigidity and limited experiences outside of study and the convent. Once Vatican II was completed and Johnson had the opportunity to read some of the documents from the council, she asked her congregational leaders if she could switch her proposed master's work in science to theology. This was the true beginning of her ministry of education and theology.

The subsequent chapters profile her life under the chapter headings of "Budding Scholar: Teaching and Learning"; "Awakened Feminist: Finding a Voice at CUA"; "Disciplined Writer: Sharing the Word"; "Caring Teacher: Mentoring Students at Fordham"; and "Public Intellectual: Handling Controversy." Each chapter shows her growth in self-understanding, her heartfelt love for teaching and her students, and her extraordinary writing ability. At the same time, she remains faithful to her religious life and the Church.

The last chapter is enlightening as she faced criticism for her book *Quest for the Living God*. The criticism came from the United States Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine. The ensuing "dialogue" with the committee and the abundance of support that came from her congregation, fellow faculty members and students, professional theology community, and from many in the general audience of lay readers provides interesting reading.

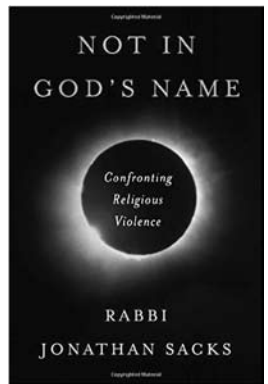
For anyone who is a fan of Elizabeth Johnson's writing, this brief biography is worth your time.

Maureen McCarthy, OSU, DMin  
Professor of Theology Emerita  
Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland  
Pepper Pike, Ohio

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Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, an award-winning author of more than 25 books, has produced a very timely study that engages Judaism with Christianity and Islam to help find a way to the peaceful coexistence of all three religions. Initially, he offers reflections on man's "groupishness" that tends to simplify the world into dualistic terms of good and evil. Monotheistic faiths ought to show a facility for viewing good and evil as elements within each person, not as separate warring parts of the universe.

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**NOT IN GOD'S  
NAME:  
CONFRONTING  
RELIGIOUS  
VIOLENCE**  
Jonathan Sacks  
New York, New  
York: Schocken  
Books, 2015  
320 pp., \$28.95

He then illustrates how Christians and Muslims might interpret their Scriptures by showing how relentlessly he traces down reconciliation in his exegesis of Genesis. Most readers remember stories of rivalries: Isaac and Ishmael, Hagar and Sarah, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, and Jacob and Laban. Fewer people recall the reconciliations.

Sacks focuses on how rivalries become resolved in both Genesis and in related Jewish literature. Sometimes, it is obvious as when Jacob returns the birthright he bought for a pot of stew (Gn 32:14 ff.). He not only offers flocks and herds to Esau, but also bows seven times to his older brother. Jacob thus returns both the wealth and dominion that he received from the blessing of their father. Jacob finally becomes content to be himself and not his brother. Sacks prefers to see the wrestling match of Jacob as Jacob's own struggle to accept who he is meant to be: the carrier of the covenant, not the bearer of the blessings of the firstborn. In fact, the firstborn Ishmael is too strong to be the vehicle of the covenant. It should go to the weaker, more dependent Jacob, a pattern that sets the standard for future covenant-bearers.

Sacks also has a sharp eye for more subtle signs of reconciliation. After Sarah banishes Ishmael along with Hagar, not much is heard from either one. Abraham continues to love Ishmael, and God promises to make Ishmael's descendants innumerable, even a great nation (Gn 16:9-10; 17:20). We also see Ishmael alongside his brother, Isaac, burying Abraham in the cave of Machpelah (Gn 25:9). Sacks follows the Talmud in considering this event as a reconciliation scene. In a further surprising development, Abraham has six more children after Sarah dies. Who might the mother of those children be? Rabbinic speculation settles on Hagar! Clearly, Judaism wants to read stories of rivalries as eventually reconciled.

Sacks offers these interpretive gems as examples of how Christianity and Islam might interpret their own Scriptures. At least some Christian theologians have offered vigorous nonviolent interpretations of their Scriptures ever since the beginning. This has especially been true since the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Islam faces greater challenges in this regard. More modern interpretations of the Qur'an have given priority to its peaceful passages, while developing strategies to negate the passages that urge violent responses to the non-Islamic world. Sacks is impressed with the approaches of Prince El Hassan bin Talal and Professor Akbar

Ahmed who promote this more humane version of Islam.

The author elaborates a program that features multiple covenants that God has established with various peoples. After acknowledging universal covenants with all people (consider God's promises to Adam and Noah, for example), Sacks maintains that God establishes particular covenants with particular peoples (such as God's promises to Abraham, which are different from God's dealings with the Cushites or the Egyptians, for example). The dual covenants can be seen as parallel to man's need for justice (which is impartial and universal) and for love (which is partial and particular).

We are not called to love all people, but to be fair to all people. Love is associated with a particular ethical stance (what it means for a Jew to be holy should not be imposed on others, nor should the Frenchman's idea of fraternity be expected of Italians). Justice, on the other hand, is associated with universal moral imperatives ("Do to no one what you yourself dislike" applies equally to everyone).

Sacks urges that attempts to convert the world to one faith miss the mark. Let each people discover its own covenant with God, and refrain from interfering with the covenants of others. Apologetical arguments are of no avail because ultimately faith depends on revelation. A person's faith cannot be refuted; it can only be subverted.

Sacks has produced a rich, provocative text that can both enlighten and stimulate good conversation. Elegantly written, the book can furnish material for discussion groups, although I would recommend the guidance of a trained theologian. Some of the author's arguments appeal on the surface, but may not stand up to scrutiny. Does the stranger have no claim on me aside from justice? Might love be more challenging than the partial and particular infatuation with a concrete person? Might it also require a person to leave his familiar surroundings long enough to explore what makes a foreigner also worthy of love? Does Christianity have the flexibility to accommodate various styles – Jewish, Orthodox, even Islamic – as long as they implement the brand of reconciliation the Lord expects? These and other issues can lead to intriguing conversations for those interested in the peaceful coexistence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

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## *EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS*

Mary Ann Trask  
Associate of the Blessed Sacrament

None of us are prophets in the tradition of the Old Testament, but all of us can try our best.

I am a wife, mom, grandma, great grandma. I am an associate and a member of a Life in the Eucharist Team, a ministry of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. I strive each day to put the Eucharist at the center of my life.

We who desire to be disciples of Jesus and followers of Saint Peter Julian Eymard are called to be people of action, not words. We are called to be “prophets,” to do works of mercy. Pope Francis dedicated this past year as the Year of Mercy, challenging us to reach out to others. Easier said than done!

How do we do that? The answer for me is *Eucharist!* At Mass, we are nourished to go forth and nourish others. We are called to be active in our faith in the ordinary experiences of daily life.

Our faith journey never ends. I strive to listen and hear God in my heart, to respond to God’s call. And yet, in all honesty, the response is often a reluctant one on my part to be there for another.

There are those ordinary experiences in our lives that prompt us to bring God’s love and understanding to others, daily challenges that can pull us apart.

“Mom, we’re going to live together. . . .” “Dad, we’re not going to get the baby baptized. . . .” “Mom, dad, I stopped going to church. . . .” “Can you visit the sick today?” My/our response: “Yes, Lord, I love you. I’ll go where you take me.”

We need to listen to the call of the prophets, the ones who walked before us and also the ones who walk among us today.

What is it that compels me to reach out, to respond with a compassionate heart? It surely isn’t *my* prompt. It’s God’s push that gets me through. How? One word: *Eucharist*. “Take and eat; go forth. Go and do to others as I have done for you.” At Mass, we come together as *one*. We receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and we are filled, filled with his courage, his strength, and his gifts.

Blessed Oscar Romero once said: “Each of you must be a microphone of God. Each one of you must be a messenger, a prophet.” Call me a reluctant prophet, but with the Lord’s help, I do my best.



*“Always be the apostle of the God of the Eucharist, it is a mission of fire...”*

*Eymard*  
*Sp. J. S.*

January 1864  
Saint Peter Julian Eymard



