

Emmanuel



Eucharistic Spirituality

November/December 2014



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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Kay Vincent
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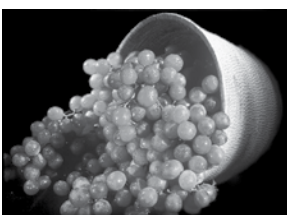
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Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 120 Number 6



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FROM THE EDITOR

The celebration of the Eucharist incorporates many elements, we are told in Chapter II of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, among which are the spoken and sung word, sacred gestures, and periods of silence. All of these “contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered” (42).

These same elements (word, gesture, and silence) constitute, I believe, the heart of the mystery of the incarnation which is central to Advent-Christmas.

Word

The opening verse of the Prologue of John’s Gospel is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1).

One way to understand humankind’s relationship to God is to see it as a conversation, a dialogue between God and us which continues to the present moment. Addressing the believer directly through revelation or through the mediation of patriarchs, prophets, and priests, God makes known his life, his love, his will, and especially his desire to enter into a deep and abiding relationship.

In *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts*, Sister Anne Marie Mongoven, OP, writes of the groundbreaking work of theologian Gabriel Moran in the late 1960s in this regard, moving from a revelation-as-concept model to revelation as God’s self-communication: “[Moran] stirred not only minds but hearts, reminding his readers that God is always immanently present, reaching out in love to all” (61).

God’s first word was *‘ehyeh*, “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14), and in the dialogue with Moses at the burning bush, God revealed his overwhelming concern for the Hebrews who were afflicted, saying, “I have come down

to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians” (Ex 3:7-8). Thus, God manifested compassion for them in their need. The words of the prophets in subsequent centuries would reveal God’s patience, forbearance, and eagerness to forgive and restore Israel.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews says: “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (1:1-2). God’s definitive word to us is Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, who tells us, “The Father and I love you unconditionally, forever, and faithfully.”

Gesture

Words without gestures can be empty, wholly unconvincing. Protestations of love and mercy without gestures of love and mercy mean little or nothing.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great, the illustrious reformer, liturgist, and pastor of the universal church, said as much when he wrote in the sixth century: “The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist.”

This is why Jesus chose to *show* love rather than to simply talk about it, to *practice* mercy and inclusiveness rather than to preach endlessly about them. “The Word *became flesh*” (Jn 1:14). Love emptied himself of divinity in the incarnation and took on our humanity. And his final act of love was to lay down that life for us on Calvary in order to reveal the perfection of God’s love.

Silence

Silence serves a vital purpose in liturgy and in life, allowing the word to be received and to resonate in the depths of our being, and creating space for the meaning and power of gestures to be grasped.

Amid the busyness of holiday preparations and ministerial demands, it can be difficult to create an atmosphere of silence and peace within. But it is necessary, for grace enters our world and our lives in silence and in emptiness.

We stand before mystery in this Advent-Christmas season: the mystery of the Word made flesh for the salvation of the world. We welcome Christ, the living Word, as Mary did long ago.



Father Anthony Schueller, SSS
Editor



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Where Can We Find New Hope in the Liturgy?

by Mark R. Francis, CSV

Father Mark R. Francis serves as the seventh president of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Illinois. After earning his doctorate in liturgy at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, he taught liturgy for 13 years and later served as the superior general of the Clerics of Saint Viator.

In June of last year, I was asked to speak to the Orlando Liturgy Conference on the topic “Where Can We Find New Hope in the Liturgy?” The title of this talk, given to me by the organizers of the conference, hints at the frustration many working in liturgical ministry have experienced over the past several years. The closing of diocesan worship offices around the country due to cost-cutting measures and the demise of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate reflect what some see as a general lack of interest in liturgy. The new translation of the Roman Missal has been met by a very mixed reception, even to the point of “widespread skepticism” according to a poll taken by the Diekmann Center at Collegeville, Minnesota. Coupled with the new translation, many have seen a resurgence of a rubrical mentality more concerned about following the liturgical rules than with a celebration truly expressive of the faith of those gathered for Mass.

Now that I have the reader suitably depressed (which was not supposed to be the point of this article), I don’t believe the situation is really that bad. But I do think it is legitimate to ask, “Where can we find new hope in the liturgy?” In fact, it is a very important question for those of us who, week in and week out, serve our brothers and sisters in the liturgical ministry of the church.

It has been my experience that, when dealing with a challenging situation, it is often helpful to review the journey we have already undertaken to get a better sense of where we are going. In order to do this, I’ll first describe the overall trajectory of liturgical reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL).

I think that it is crucial for us to see something that we liturgical ministers haven’t emphasized enough: the connection between the liturgical reform and the renewal of the church desired by Vatican II. I will then identify particular signs of hope that I see emerging today in the liturgy. Some are there, but barely discernable. Others surround us.

Where We Have Been and Where We Are Today:

I think it is always instructive to look at the very first article of the very first document of the Second Vatican Council to understand the program of reform that the bishops proposed for the church.

As you know, the first document approved by the council was not on the nature and organization of the church or on divine revelation; it was the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). Because there had already been a broad consensus at the start of the council that the liturgy needed to be reformed, the document served as the point of departure for the entire revitalization of the church sought by Vatican II. It is instructive to list the overall aims of the council expressed in the CSL, 1:

- “to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian lives of the faithful;
- to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change;
- to encourage whatever can promote the union of all who believe in Christ;
- to strengthen whatever serves to call all of humanity into the church’s fold.”

The aims of the council were therefore revitalization of the church, updating its structures, ecumenism, and evangelization. In light of these aims, the council saw “particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.”

Let’s look briefly, then, at why there was a need for a liturgical reform. This is not to simply criticize the old liturgy, but it is important that we remind ourselves why the overwhelming majority of the bishops at Vatican II thought the liturgy needed to be reformed. Even more, how did they envision the reform of the liturgy to be a key way of reforming the entire church in such a way as to enable us to better respond to the needs of a world that, then as now, was in a process of profound transformation.

If I were to name the key element of the liturgical reform that the bishops of Vatican II wanted to promote in order to reform the church, it would center on the question “Who does the liturgy?” Prior to Vatican II, the answer to that question was obvious: the ordained minister—priest or bishop. He stood at the altar (with the servers) with his back to the assembly, who, until the liturgical reforms at the beginning of the twentieth century, could not even hear what he was saying.



It is a little known but interesting fact that before the end of the nineteenth century, translations of the Mass were discouraged. Some of us were brought up with the use of “hand missals” to follow the Mass. These were unavailable until the end of the pontificate of Pius IX in 1877. In fact, when some “progressive liturgy types” published translations of the Mass before that time, these personal missals were put on the Index of Prohibited Books by the Roman authorities. The sacred words of the Mass were not for lay people and were in Latin. For centuries, Catholics of the Latin Rite attended Mass—to use the words of Pius XI in his 1928 encyclical on the liturgy (*Divini Cultus*)—as “mute spectators.”

How the Council Rediscovered the Liturgical Assembly

The liturgical reform, in a real sense, rediscovered the liturgical assembly. . . and that lay people were part of it. This rediscovery was made possible by the intense historical and theological preparation in the years prior to Vatican II that was also reflected in papal encyclicals. Even before Pius XI's *Divini Cultus*, Pius X's *Tra Le Sollicitudini* encouraged participation in the Mass and Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* in 1947 reiterated this call even more strongly. “Full, conscious, and active participation” of all the faithful, then, did not drop from the sky in 1961; it became a principle of Vatican II's liturgical reform because it had been encouraged by popes, scholars, and pastors prior to the council.

Not everything about the liturgical reform brought about by Vatican II was perfect. At times, there were abuses, strange, idiosyncratic interpretations of the council documents and liturgical books, many of which scandalized those who had a very traditional notion of worship that emphasized the passivity of the assembly. Happily, I think we are beyond such things. Our celebrations of the “ordinary rite,” as it is now known, is usually much more careful and respectful of the basic liturgical norms that allow us to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in our midst, and the difference that presence makes in our lives.

God reaches out to us in the sacraments through “signs perceptible to the senses” (CSL, 7). God's grace is especially manifested in the incarnation of Jesus, whose “incarnation” continues today, not only in the Eucharist, but also in the flesh and blood believers who strive to be his real presence in the world. Through the liturgy, we are encouraged to treat God's creation with respect and reverence, and we are called to make our world more just, more peaceful, more in accord with the kingdom that Jesus preached.

In sum, the liturgy, by putting us into contact with Christ's presence—in the sacraments, in the biblical word read at every liturgy, through the assembly of sinners and saints we call the church, and the ordained minister who represents both Christ and the church—brings us into communion with God and with one another in order to follow Christ's example and give our lives for the life of the world.

The bishops of Vatican II envisioned the reform of the liturgy to be a key way of reforming the entire church.

In order for all of this to take place, liturgical ministry enters in. Far from simply admonishing people to follow rubrics, those who serve the liturgical assembly need to be conscious that the liturgy is our common way of finding the Christian response to the pain, suffering, and joy of human life. By remembering how Christ loved us—his suffering, death, and resurrection—we see in that pattern of the paschal mystery the model for our own life, both as individuals and as a community. In short, liturgical ministers help the assembly make this connection between our merciful God proclaimed by Christ and their own lives. This is done by caring for all the ways that the liturgy speaks and by being attentive to its symbolic expressions in words, gestures, music, and movement.

Particular Signs of New Hope

There are many signs of new hope in the liturgy, if we just learn where to look. While the new translation has been problematic for many, its implementation has provoked discussions regarding the more profound nature of participation. Full, conscious, and active participation does not mean that we are all constantly doing the same thing at the same time. Silence and moments of contemplation are necessary parts of our liturgical prayer together. The popularity of both eucharistic adoration and Taizé prayer has led to a rethinking about crucial moments of silence in our liturgies, which have at times been experienced as an unrelenting barrage of words.

Another source of hope in the liturgy is a growing interest in multicultural reality and popular religious practices that we may have abandoned. As we in the Catholic population become more used to different cultural groups in our communities and in our parishes, we see that to incarnate the paschal mystery today we need to be open to more than just our Euro-American roots.



Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Africans are all being brought to the table of the word and the Eucharist, and for that reason there is growing interest in reflecting more adequately the cultural richness that is now being shared among us. This gives me hope since the Catholic Church is perhaps the institution in our society best placed to bring together people of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Finally, I find new hope in the liturgy through those who understand that the secondary parts of the liturgy, even though spelled out in the rubrics, are also subject to change and interpretation, given the flesh and blood people with whom we live and work. Pope Francis gave a perfect example of this when, on his first Holy Thursday, he knelt to wash and kiss the feet of juvenile offenders at a detention facility outside of Rome. Eyebrows were raised by the Holy Father's action by those who interpret liturgical law as simply regulation that cannot be changed.

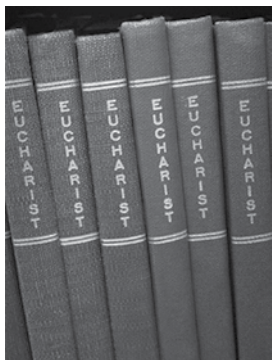
The liturgical reform, in a real sense, rediscovered the liturgical assembly . . . and that lay people were part of it.

His action provoked the deeper question, "What do we do when we wash feet on Holy Thursday?" Are we simply reenacting an event that took place 2,000 years ago in Palestine? Or are we empowered by what Jesus did, to, in turn, imitate his actions today in our world? It is here that we move beyond "play-acting" to real remembrance—or to use the liturgical term *anamnesis*—calling to mind and to heart in such a way that what Jesus did transforms us now and gives us the ability to do what he commanded us to do. After all, at the Last Supper, Jesus did not say, "Reenact this in my memory" but "As I have done, so you also should do."

This "doing" necessarily goes beyond the liturgical by reaching out to the poor, the marginalized, and those accounted of no importance in our world in the name of Jesus Christ, who came to save all humanity.

The Second Vatican Council's vision of renewing the church through the liturgy has only partially been realized. The new focus of Pope Francis on presenting the faith in a manner clear and accessible to all, his call for dialogue with Christians and people of other faiths (or no faith), and his desire to involve all the faithful in an important discussion on how to live as Christians will necessarily affect the liturgy, and help bring us to more fully implement the renewal announced by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy more than 50 years ago. It is here that I find the greatest sign of new hope in the liturgy.





EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Henri de Lubac on the Eucharist

by Dennis Billy, CSsR

Henri de Lubac, SJ (1896-1991) was born in Cambrai, in northern France, and spent his childhood in Bourg-en-Bresse and Lyons. He received his early education in Catholic schools and sought entrance into the Society of Jesus in October of 1913. He was drafted into the French army in 1914 and discharged in 1917 after receiving a serious head injury at Verdun. Following his release from the army, he continued his religious and priestly formation with the Jesuits, was ordained to the priesthood in 1927, began lecturing at the Catholic University of Lyons in 1929, and professed solemn vows in 1931.

De Lubac was appointed professor of fundamental theology at Lyons in 1938 and professor of the history of religion in 1939. From 1940-1944, he worked on an underground journal for the French resistance against the Nazi-controlled Vichy regime. In 1941, he founded with Jean Danielou the French series, *Sources Chrétiennes*, a collection of bilingual critical editions of early Christian texts. He resumed his teaching responsibilities after the war but was relieved of his post in 1952, transferred to the Jesuit house in Paris, and effectively “silenced” by his Jesuit superiors due to pressure emanating from suspicions in the Vatican concerning his involvement with the *Nouvelle Théologie* (New Theology). He became a member of the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in 1958 and was permitted to resume his teaching and publishing soon afterward.

In 1960, de Lubac was invited to serve on the theological preparatory commission of the Second Vatican Council and was a theological expert (*peritus*) at the council from 1962-1965. A prolific author, his major works include: *Catholicism* (1938), *Corpus Mysticum* (1944), *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944), *Surnaturel* (1946), *The Splendor of the Church* (1953), *Exégèse Médiévale* (1956-1964), *Man in the Presence of God* (1963), *The Mystery of the Supernatural* (1967), *De Lubac: A Theologian Speaks* (1985), and *Theology in History* (1988). He was a member of the International Commission from 1969-1974, a founding member of the theological

Father Dennis Billy, formerly professor at the Alphonsianum in Rome, now teaches at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



journal *Communio* in 1972, and made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 1983. The Eucharist, for him, lies at the very heart of the church, is preeminently social, and contains within itself the source of ecclesial unity.¹

De Lubac's Theological Outlook

De Lubac reacted against the lack of historical awareness in the Catholic theology of his day by rooting his writings in the sources of Christian antiquity. One author describes his work as a theology of the Easter Vigil: "It situates itself in the resurrection event, but at the first moment of it, when the only light visible is the flame of the *lumen Christi* shining in the darkness of Holy Saturday night."² When seen in this light, "the church's mission is to carry the *lumen Christi*, while singing the Easter proclamation, into the darkness of a world waiting for Christ."³

De Lubac's theology ponders the Word of God in silence and leads all who are open to the Word of God into the heart of the Christian mystery.⁴ It immerses them in the baptismal womb of the church and divinizes them in the Spirit by making them anew in Christ.⁵ From there, his theology gathers the community of believers around the paschal table where, "as 'the church produces the Eucharist . . . the Eucharist produces the church,' forming it into one Catholic communion, the body of Christ, the '*vir perfectus*' and the '*totus Christus*.'"⁶

In his approach to theology, de Lubac makes four principal contributions. In the first place, he retrieves a richer and more balanced pre-Tridentine Catholicism. He does this by his emphasis on *ressourcement*, that is, putting Roman Catholic theology back in touch with the primary sources of the tradition. He founded the series *Sources Chrétiennes* with this specific goal in mind and roots his own theological research as much as possible in Scripture and the teaching of the church fathers.⁷

Secondly, de Lubac brings the Eucharist back into the center of the church's self-understanding. In his historical research, he documents in clear and no uncertain terms a marked shift in the church's self-identity that began in the second half of the twelfth century and was marked by a new eucharistic piety that had become more private and devotional. As a result of his research, he sought to bring the Eucharist back to the center of the study of ecclesiology.⁸

Thirdly, de Lubac defends the biblical exegesis of the pre-modern period

at a time when the historical critical method had displaced it as a primary approach to studying the sacred texts of Scripture. His *Exégèse Médiévale* has become a classic work in explaining the approach of medieval exegesis and the deep spiritual meanings it sought to uncover.⁹

Finally, de Lubac criticizes the strict nature/grace distinction of the post-Tridentine church, which he claims sought to safeguard nature against the Lutheran emphasis on *sola gratia* and grace against the onslaught on Enlightenment humanism, and which he further claims was itself the cause of deism and atheism.¹⁰ His book *Surnaturel* argues that the state of pure nature does not exist and that prior to the sixteenth century humanity was generally understood in terms of the image of God. From an historical perspective, in other words, there is no such thing as a “graceless nature” or a world where the movement of God’s grace is not in some way operative.¹¹

Because many of these insights were met with suspicion and perceived as destructive to the church’s authority and theological integrity, de Lubac was silenced by the church, removed from his teaching responsibilities, and forbidden to publish. His central and most controversial theological insight is that, although the vision of God (*visio Dei*) is a gratuitous gift, a yearning for it lies at the root of every human soul. All of his theology flows from this fundamental thesis, including his views on the Eucharist and its central place at the heart of the church.¹²

De Lubac on the Eucharist

The quotation most closely associated with de Lubac is “the church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the church.”¹³ For him, this key idea is not a new, ground-breaking insight, but merely a retrieval of an earlier patristic notion. The two realities—Eucharist and church—are intimately related and should not be considered separately. Flowing from this key insight is de Lubac’s understanding of the essential social character of each. In much of his writing, he emphasizes the communal character of the church and her sacraments to counteract an exaggerated individualism, which in his mind represents a departure from the intuitions of the early church.¹⁴

Beginning with *Catholicism*, and then with such works as *Corpus Mysticum* and *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac explores the eucharistic teaching of the patristic and medieval periods and notes an important shift in language and emphasis. Until the middle of the eleventh century, he says, the phrase *corpus mysticum* (mystical body) was used to describe



both the Eucharist and the church. After that time, the term *mysticum* (mystical) was dropped in reference to the Eucharist to counteract, at least in part, Berengar's heretical denial of the real presence. From the middle of the twelfth century onward, he asserts, the term *mysticum* was increasingly associated with the church alone and the term itself shifted in meaning from "sacramental" or "pertaining to the mystery" to "mysterious" or "mystical" in a more modern sense.

De Lubac points out that this shift in language had the unfortunate consequence of moving the Eucharist from the center of the church's self-understanding to its periphery. This shift in emphasis also brought about an individualistic (as opposed to communal) eucharistic piety that focused on the real presence of Christ in the consecrated host, when the real purpose of the sacrament was to bring the fullness of Christ's presence to the body of believers.¹⁵

De Lubac sought to bring the Eucharist back into the center of the church's self-understanding.

The locus of the true body of Christ (*verum corpus*), in other words, was transferred from the church to the Eucharist. What is more, one could now speak of the church without referring to the Eucharist when, as de Lubac discovered from his study of the sources, "the Eucharist is related to the church as the cause to the effect, as the means to the end, at the same time as the sign to the reality."¹⁶ The intimate relationship between the Eucharist and the church, in his mind, preserves the latter's true identity and prevents it from being treated as a mere juridical entity. The Eucharist, in other words, roots the church in its founding sacramental mystery and enables it to embrace that mystery and proclaim it in its apostolic *missio*.

For de Lubac, the Eucharist conveys the fullness of Christ and is the effective sign that both makes the church and is made by it: "Thus everything points to a study of the relation between the church and the Eucharist, which we may describe as standing as cause to each other. Each has been entrusted to the other, so to speak, by Christ; the church produces the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also produces the church."¹⁷ This line of thinking represents a retrieval of the patristic understanding of the "symbolic inclusion" as opposed to the scholastic emphasis on "dialectical antitheses."¹⁸ It also means that the Eucharist lies at the very heart of the church's self-identity as the "sacrament of sacraments" and the "sacrament of church unity."¹⁹

Observations

This brief presentation of de Lubac's teaching on the Eucharist demonstrates how the church's self-understanding has evolved over time and how the Eucharist, while always present to it, has moved first from the center, then to the periphery, and finally back to the center of its ecclesiological identity. It also shows how de Lubac's persistent examination of the sources of the church's living tradition enabled him to bring such insights to the fore and challenge many of the theological presuppositions of his day. He attempts to present the doctrine of the real presence in a way that is faithful to the tradition, yet also takes into account our present-day sensitivities and patterns of thought. The following remarks examine de Lubac's teaching on the Eucharist more deeply, with special emphasis on its relevance for today.

1. To begin with, de Lubac does not purport to add anything new to the church's understanding of its relationship to the Eucharist, but only to retrieve something that had been relegated to the sidelines of its theological awareness and bring it back into focus. He does so through a critical examination of the texts of the tradition pertaining to church and Eucharist, with particular emphasis on the teachings of the church fathers and their commentaries on Scripture. His careful reading of ancient Christian sources enables him to see the question of the church's relationship to the Eucharist from an entirely different vantage point, one that leads him to question the highly individualistic eucharistic piety of his day and nudge it in a different direction.

In this respect, de Lubac's contribution is his strong emphasis on recuperating a deeper sense of the church's theological tradition and using this *ressourcement* as the basis for further theological reflection and development. Through his study of the texts of the church's theological tradition, he conveys a deep historical awareness of the changing contours of the church's self-understanding and places the insights gained from such study at the service of the church.

2. De Lubac emphasizes the fundamentally social character of the Eucharist and places it at the very heart of the church's identity. He does so, while also recognizing the dignity and worth of each human individual by virtue of his or her being created in the image and likeness of God. The social dimension of the Eucharist, in his mind, does not suppress the dignity of the individual, but



elicits his or her true worth. When seen in this light, the individual believer and the community of the faithful need and cannot do without each other. The church's unity preserves the identity of its members and enables them to live in harmony.

He reacts against the individualistic eucharistic piety of his day because it had become detached from the deeper awareness of the church's communal and social identity. In this respect, he seeks not to suppress individual eucharistic piety but redirect it to its true source. Seen in this light, eucharistic piety should flow from the church's self-understanding and flow back to it.

De Lubac's teaching on the Eucharist emphasizes the communal character of the church and her sacraments to counteract an exaggerated individualism.

3. The connection between de Lubac's retrieval of the central role of the Eucharist in the church's self-identity should also be seen in relation to his defense of the various senses of Scripture in the church's pre-modern hermeneutics.²⁰ To see the close relationship between the Eucharist and the church requires the same interpretative stance of "symbolic inclusion" required for uncovering the various spiritual senses of Scripture. Rather than focusing on a single meaning of a text, the interpreter recognizes that the text of Scripture possesses various dimensions of meaning conveyed to the text ultimately by God himself. As Scripture reveals the face of God, so the Eucharist reveals the face of the church.

De Lubac's analysis of a subtle linguistic shift in eucharistic language leads him to uncover the theological shift in the location of Christ's real presence from the church to the consecrated species. It is not an accident that this shift in meaning coincides historically with a similar shift in theological method that moves away from the patristic and monastic sensitivity to symbolism to a scholastic emphasis on dialectics.

4. De Lubac was criticized by some for introducing a misplaced naturalism into the church's self-understanding when, in point of fact, his was merely pointing out that the real presence and the ecclesial body of believers are constituted together. While it is true that the Eucharist and the church are not the body of Christ in precisely the same sense, it is also true that they are intimately related to and cannot exist without each other. In this sense, the

real presence exists for the ecclesial body of believers—and vice versa. For precisely this reason, de Lubac affirms that the church makes the Eucharist, but the Eucharist also makes the church. So deeply intertwined are these two realities that they cannot be separated without doing damage to a proper understanding and appreciation of each. This insight lies behind the church's self-understanding as presented in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially in the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, "The Church as Mystery," and in its affirmation that the Eucharist represents the "source and summit of the Christian life."²¹

5. De Lubac sees the Eucharist not only as the "sacrament of sacraments," but also as the "sacrament of church unity." It is the first, because it brings the fullness of Christ into our midst in a consecrated host as well as in the ecclesial body of the faithful. In this respect, all other sacraments point to it and flow from it. It is the second, because of the intimate connection between the sacrament and the body of believers, both of which are authentic manifestations of the *corpus mysticum*.

De Lubac's theology has been described as a "theology of the Easter Vigil" precisely because it is rooted in the resurrection event and calls the church to carry forth the *lumen Christi* in its mission to cast out darkness from the world. For de Lubac, the risen Christ himself constitutes the Eucharist and the ecclesial body of believers, holds them together, and preserves their unity. The Eucharist mediates the risen Christ to the body of believers, and the risen Christ in the body of believers constitutes the sacrament. The two, while not identical, are so closely united, that it would be a serious distortion of their meaning and purpose to separate them.

Although these observations do not exhaust de Lubac's teaching on the Eucharist, they cover its main contours and show how a single, persistent, probing theological voice can effect a change in the church's historical self-awareness with the hope of deepening its understanding of the mysteries of the faith and pushing the tradition forward.

Conclusion

Henri de Lubac was one of the major proponents of the twentieth-century Roman Catholic movement known as the *Nouvelle Théologie*, the purpose of which was to reform Catholic theology from within by means of a *ressourcement* or return to the sources of the tradition. De Lubac excelled at combing through some of the overlooked and, in many cases,



forgotten patristic and medieval sources in order to retrieve and bring them to light for the church. To promote that end, he founded *Sources Chrétiennes*, a bilingual series of critical patristic and medieval texts, and published a number of his own ground-breaking studies on a variety of topics relevant to the church of his day.

De Lubac's interest in the renewal of Catholic theology did not come without a price. It is widely believed that Pius XII directed his encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), at least in part, against some of the views expressed in *Surnaturel* (1946). With instructions from Rome, he was transferred by his Jesuit superiors from Lyons to Paris and from 1952-1958 was forbidden to teach or publish. He was viewed with suspicion by Catholic conservatives and even by some of his fellow Jesuits.

The Eucharist conveys the fullness of Christ and is the effective sign that both makes the church and is made by it.

In the end, de Lubac's reputation was rehabilitated and his views vindicated, especially at the Second Vatican Council where he served on the theological preparatory commission, was invited as a theological expert (*peritus*), played a significant role in shaping the theological outcome of the council, and was eventually made a cardinal in recognition for his contribution to the church. What is more, along with Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, his founding of the theological *Communio* guaranteed that the voices of *ressourcement* would continue to play an important role in interpreting the meaning of the council.

De Lubac's teaching on the Eucharist highlights the social character of the sacrament and moves it from the periphery to the center of the church's theological self-awareness. This shift had important ramifications for ecclesiology, many of which are enshrined in the documents of Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium* (1963).

The Eucharist, for de Lubac, is intimately related to the church and must be considered together with it. In his mind, this sacrament both makes the church and is itself made by it. If this insight seems obvious to today's believers, it is only because of the tireless research and dogged persistence of theologians like de Lubac, who placed their theological acumen at the service of the church and suffered silently until the time was ripe for their views to be heard and ultimately embraced as part of the church's rich theological tradition.



Notes

- ¹ For a detailed chronology of de Lubac's life, see Rudolf Voderholzer, *Meet Henri de Lubac: His Life and Work*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 11-13. For the biographical context of his scholarly writings, see Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).
- ² Christopher Walsh, "Henri de Lubac and the Ecclesiology of the Postconciliar Church: An Analysis of His Later Writings" (1995-1991)" (Ph.D. diss.: The Catholic University of America, 1993), 4.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Fergus Kerr, "French Theology: Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 111.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 109
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 111, 113.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 108.
- ¹³ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), 104. For a critical study of de Lubac's views on the Eucharist, see Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 3-120. See also Lam T. Le, "The Eucharist and the Church in the Thought of Henri de Lubac," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71 (nn. 3-4, 2006): 339; Ferr, "French Theology," 110.
- ¹⁴ Le, "The Eucharist and the Church," 340-46; Ferr, "French Theology," 110-11.
- ¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism* (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), 48. See also Le, "The Eucharist and the Church," 342; Ferr, "French Theology," 110.
- ¹⁶ De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 23. See also Le, "The Eucharist and the Church," 344.
- ¹⁷ See Ferr, French Theology," 110.
- ¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 133. See also Le, "The Eucharist and the Church," 340.
- ¹⁹ De Lubac, *Catholicism*, 88-89. See also Le, "The Eucharist and the Church," 340.
- ²⁰ For the categories and principles of the spiritual senses of Scripture as the key to understanding de Lubac's theology, see Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Grand Rapids, MI/Edinburgh: William B. Eerdmans/T&T Clark, 1998), 140-54.
- ²¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with U,V,W,X,Y and Z are asked to celebrate the Eucharist for deceased priests during November and December.

You are invited to send the names of recently deceased priests (Eucharistic League members and non-members) to emmanuel@blessedsacrament.com to be included in this remembrance. Thank you.



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

The Coming of the Lord

by Peter J. Riga

Peter J. Riga, of Houston, Texas, is an attorney, author, and novelist.

Life as we experience it today is marked by an attitude of the immediate, “right now.” In Advent, we are called to return to and ponder the notion of time and history in order to recover the virtue of patient waiting and endurance. Enduring is the condition or possibility of maturity, desire, and fidelity.

The waiting of accomplishment has always been one of the foundational dimensions of Christian faith. In this, Christianity is enlightening. From the days of the early church, Christians were animated by the hope of the final coming of Christ, the *parousia*. They were directed to the future and awaited the eschatological manifestation of the kingdom to come.

The Greek word *parousia* means coming, presence. In its original secular meaning, it referred to the solemn entrance of a Hellenistic sovereign into a conquered city, as a display of power over its people. The first Christians applied the term to the glorious coming of Christ at the end of time (Mt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thes 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8; 15:23; 2 Pt 3:4, 12).

Beginning in the second century, Christians began to speak of two *parousias* of Christ: the first, marked by humility and suffering, consisted in his coming in the flesh; the second, yet to come, will be marked by majesty and glory. This theme was taken up by the church fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, *Contra Hereses* IV, 22, 1-2; Tertullian, *Contra Marcion* III, 7; Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 56; II, 29).

Bernard of Clairvaux, in the twelfth century, even spoke of a third coming of the Lord (*adventus triplex*) between his first coming and the final coming, an intermediary coming uniquely perceived with the eyes of faith. The Lord does not cease coming to us in his word and sacraments. By his Spirit, he comes to make his abode in our hearts (Jn 14:22). In this sense, the *parousia* of the Lord is permanent. The Lord is he who comes (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8).

If, in the first Christian communities, the parousia of the Lord was awaited with ardent fervor, today it seems but a distant echo. However, the Creed invites us to be attentive to him who “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,” and “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” The Eucharistic Liturgy is filled with the desire for the coming of the Lord: we await his coming in glory.

The season of Advent proclaims that history has a meaning, that it is oriented to an end, a fulfillment. The time of the church—the period of history that runs from the resurrection to Christ’s glorious coming—is a great advent. History is not closed in upon itself; it opens us to a future which comes to us and toward which we journey inexorably. For Christians, the future has a personal fulfillment: Christ who is luminous, the resurrected one who offers us the hope of blessed communion with God and with all who have loved God.

Jewish Messianic Expectation

Through the long history of the people of God, there slowly arose the idea that God would raise up a Messiah at the end of time. The Messiah will inaugurate the age of salvation and bring about the definitive establishment of the kingdom of God. Israel will no longer be dominated by its enemies, the poor will be filled, the sick will be healed, those who do evil will be rejected, and the just will live in peace according to the law of the one God, whose authority will be recognized by all and who will be adored by the nations.

The prophet Isaiah describes this messianic era of justice and peace in the following words:

In days to come, the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it. Many peoples shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the Lord’s mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.” For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and set terms for many peoples. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war (Is 2:2-4).

The figure of the Savior-Messiah takes on different contours in Judaism: a royal Messiah in the line of David who will be sacerdotal and prophetic. Generally seen as a human being of earthly origins, he is at times

Emmanuel



presented as a heavenly figure, transcendent (the Son of Man in Daniel 7). Jewish literature does not convey a single, well defined concept of the Messiah. Common to all Jews, however, was the expectation of his coming. The proliferation of prayers of benediction wherein this hope is mentioned witnesses to this.

In the first century, Jewish messianic pluralism was especially evident. The Zealots expected a political Messiah who would liberate God's people from Roman bondage by force and violence. The Qumran community awaited a Messiah who would be at one and the same time a high priest and a destroyer of evil, in view of building up a community of holiness for the last days. Messianic impatience echoes through the literature of the intertestamental period (e.g., the Psalms of Solomon XVII, 24-26, 27, 32, 45).

A Crucified Messiah

It is in this context that Jesus of Nazareth appears. His way of being Messiah and inaugurating the time of salvation is surprising because it is so original. From the testimony in the desert to the cross, Jesus consistently refuses every form of temporal messianism or triumphalism. Instead, he presents himself as "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29), as one who does not extinguish the smoldering wick (Mt 12:20), who sits at table with sinners to offer them the Father's mercy (Lk 5:29), who does not impose himself but appeals to the hearts of all, who washes the feet of his disciples and loves them to the very end (Jn 13:1-12), and who pardons his tormentors (Lk 23:34).

Jesus' brand of messianism is disturbing and even scandalous (Mt 11:6). It does not correspond to popular expectations or to prevailing concepts of human greatness. Thus, from prison, John the Baptist sends Christ the message, "Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?" Jesus answers with the signs of the messianic age described in Isaiah and adds the mysterious phrase "And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me" (Lk 7:23). To many, the inauguration of the kingdom in Jesus is not clear. Thus, Paul preached "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23).

What, then, becomes of messianic waiting? In Jesus, waiting acquires a whole new meaning: in him, dead and resurrected, the prophetic hopes are fulfilled.

Awaiting the Parousia

By the incarnation and paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, the eschatological kingdom of God has erupted in human history. The messianic age of grace and salvation has begun. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). With the coming of Jesus, *kairos*, the favorable time of redemption, is accomplished and becomes the atmosphere within which the church, the community of disciples, exists and operates. A new reality has come; the victory over sin and death is assured; the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts. In a word, we are *in* the last days.

At the same time, we must affirm that the kingdom of God remains a future reality in that it is not yet fully manifested. Evil, both physical and moral, continues to disfigure our existence and our world. The church must therefore combat evil, suffering, and sin, and work to bring about justice and holiness. The full glory of God and of his beloved children remains veiled and will only be revealed on the day of Christ's return in glory.

Advent's waiting opens us to a future which comes to us and toward which we journey inexorably.

Christian eschatology is characterized by tension. Salvation is a reality both present and future; the kingdom is already here but not yet. The day of final victory has not come even if the decisive battle was won in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul illustrates the paradox that characterizes the "between time" of the church, comparing it to the process of giving birth (Rom 8:22). If we already possess the Spirit, we have only the beginning (1 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). The perfection of salvation is awaited; its seeds have been sown in our hearts. "Your kingdom come," we pray, and add, "Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!" Maranatha is both an imperative in Aramaic and a past indicative—"The Lord has come."

Questions arise: Why did Christ choose to redeem the world in this way? Why not a completed act as in Jewish messianic belief? Why the delay in its eschatological fulfillment? What is the theological significance of the interval of the church? In a word, since salvation has been accomplished in Christ, why the necessity of waiting for 20 centuries and more, especially in the face of so much suffering and evil? What of God's silence before evil?

The difference between Jesus' messianic path and political messianism is

Emmanuel



that he is a humble Messiah who refuses to act coercively. He conquers sin not by violence and force, but by mercy and forgiveness. During his passion, his silence allows evildoers to mock him. He conquers by a love capable of going to death itself.

This is the new way by which God acts in the world. To violence, he opposes love to the very end, to the cross. It is slow, but the only true way to overcome it. We participate in that divine way by our patience and love. God sent his Son among us to save the world by the power of persuasion, not force, because there is no violence in God (see Cyprian of Carthage, *The Virtue of Patience*, 6).

The time of the church (between the resurrection and the parousia) finds the community of believers acting as God does. It takes time to persuade all humanity. Just as God waits patiently for all of humanity to be converted, the church hopes for the conversion of the hearts of sinful humanity, for their “yes.” The kingdom of God is given to each one to accept. “God created you without you; he will not save you without you” (Sermon of Augustine of Hippo, 169).

The church’s pastoral activity hastens the coming of the new heavens and the new earth which we await.

In this optic, we understand that the delay of the parousia should be imputed not to God but to us humans. It is the slowness of the response of sinful men and women which, in truth, impedes the full manifestation of the kingdom. Under pain of rendering the patience of God vain, we must convert our minds and hearts and actions now, without delay!

It is here that all of the pastoral activity which fills the time of the church finds its ultimate meaning: the unceasing announcement of the Gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, the urgent appeal to faith and love and converted living. These hasten the coming of “the new heavens and the new earth” (2 Pt 3:12-13; Acts 3:19-21) which we await.

If the time of the church is a time of waiting, it does not consist in a simple prolongation of the messianic waiting we find in Judaism. Now we must consent and change. This is what God awaits and hopes for from us.





EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Seven Ways to Deepen Your Prayer Life

by Victor M. Parachin

"For the past 15 years I've been attempting to figure out how to pray. I've searched for every 'Praying for Dummies' book published, but have come to learn they aren't much help. Everyone has suggestions on how to pray, from the great spiritual writers to my grandmother. Ultimately, it's up to each of us to determine what prayer style works best."

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

That honest assessment about prayer was recently offered by a pastor. He is correct in saying that we are responsible for strengthening our prayer life. No one can do this for us. Prayer is never a "one size fits all" approach. It is up to us to shape it, structure it, and sustain it.

Rightly done, prayer is a highly personal matter resulting in a richer and more vibrant spirituality. British clergyman William Law noted, "He who has learned to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life." Here are seven ways to deepen your prayer life.

Pray in a way which feels natural for you.

In her book *God Alone Is Enough*, writer Claudia Mair Burney offers this worthy reminder: "People don't all pray in the same way, just as not every plant in the garden needs the same amount of moisture. What works for one doesn't necessarily work for another. We need to try on a few prayer styles to see what fits."

Customize your prayer life. If you like to write, then keep a prayer journal. If you are a person who enjoys reading, then read from a prayer book. If you are a person who enjoys walking, then pray while you walk. If you have a long commute to work, use that time for prayer. That is what Toronto resident David does. "It takes me an hour to get to work using the bus and subway. I used to bring books and magazines to read for the trip downtown every day. Then I realized that was an ideal prayer time, so five days a week for nearly an hour at a time I make use of those 60 minutes for prayer."



Pray like Jesus.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus included this sentence: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). Also, during times of deep distress, he asked that his time of trouble be removed but added these important words: "Yet not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42).

Pray like Jesus prayed by placing your life in God's hands with the confidence that "God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28). The fact is that we cannot always know what is best for us and that what appears to be a burden can become a blessing. A fascinating example comes from a man who was asked to put together a list of things he was grateful for. Though he was a person with many admirable achievements and accomplishments, his gratitude list was as remarkable as it was unusual. This is what he wrote:

- His first job upon graduating from college as a high school janitor.
- Being laid off from a job due to a bad economy.
- A diagnosis of melanoma.
- All the people who did not believe in him.

Pray like Jesus prayed by placing your life in God's hands with the confidence that "God works for the good of those who love him."

While the list does not appear in any way to qualify as a gratitude list, he explained that each one of those "burdens" was actually a blessing in disguise. Here's why:

- Working as a janitor led him to his future wife, the daughter of a fellow janitor.
- Being laid off forced him to jump-start his career as a book illustrator.
- His cancer diagnosis prompted him to organize events promoting melanoma awareness.
- All the people who were negative, cynical, and critical further fueled his determination to succeed.

The lesson in that man's approach is a powerful example of "thy will be done."

Pray without words.

This is called meditation and is highly recommended by the composers of Israel's psalms. Some examples include: Psalm 46:10—*Be still and know that I am God*; Psalm 4:4—*Search your heart and be silent*; Psalm 143:5—*I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done*.

The practice of meditation was also recommended by John of the Cross who advised: "Learn to abide with attention in loving waiting upon God in the state of quiet." In his book *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life*, Father James Martin, SJ, says: "Being silent is one of the best ways to listen to God, not because God is not speaking to you during our noisy day, but because silence makes it easier to listen to your heart and listen very carefully when your friend (God) is trying to make a point. . . . If your environment (inside and outside) is too noisy, it might be hard to hear what God, your friend, is trying to say."

Prioritize prayer.

Set aside time, preferably daily, when you will sit quietly and pray. Consistent, consecutive, continuous prayer will never be present in our lives unless it is made a high priority. Spiritual writer Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, observes: "Prayer is not a matter of mood. To pray only when it suits us to want God on our terms, to pray only when it is convenient is to make the God-life a very low priority on a list of better opportunities. . . . The hard fact is that nobody finds time for prayer. The time must be taken. There will always be something more pressing to do, something more important to be about."

Consistent, consecutive, continuous prayer will never be present in our lives unless it is made a high priority.

Pray spontaneously.

Whenever you see a need, offer a prayer. Don't hesitate because prayer delayed is almost always prayer denied. According to Saint Augustine of Hippo, such spontaneous prayer characterized early Christian communities. He noted: "We are told how the monks of Egypt prayed very frequently, but very briefly. Their prayer was sudden and ejaculatory so that the intense application so necessary in prayer should not vanish or lose its keenness by a slow performance."

One who seized an opportunity to pray spontaneously is a woman named Carol who was working as a waitress on Thanksgiving Day at a 24-hour truck stop. That day, one of her customers was a solo driver. When she brought his plate of food to the table, she noticed the man was weeping quietly. "I wanted to be helpful so I returned to his table asking, 'Is there anything I can do to help?'" The man responded with an "I don't think so" and explained his wife was asking for a divorce. "I wish I could talk to her about it in person, but I'm on the road for three more whole days." Knowing those three days would be excruciating for the man, Carol said: "I want you to write your name and your wife's name on this piece of paper," she said



placing her order pad and pen down on the table in front of him. “I am going to pray for the two of you.” He wrote the names down and Carol reassured him of her prayers. She didn’t see him again for an entire year, but twelve months later, on Thanksgiving Day again, he was back sitting in her station. “Thank you for your prayers. My wife and I worked things out. In fact, we recently had our first baby,” he said with a smile.

Pray briefly.

Jesus teaches that one model for prayer is brevity. In his parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Lk 18:9-17), it is clear that the Pharisee’s prayer is a far too long-winded and pompous prayer. It is also clear that the other individual in the story—the reviled tax collector—is the one whose prayer is effective, both in its sincerity and in its brevity.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifically taught: “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words” (Mt 6:7-8). Recalling these teachings of Jesus about prayer, Saint Augustine later wrote: “It was our Lord who put an end to long-windedness, that you would not approach God in too many words, as though you wanted to teach God by your many words. Piety, not verbosity, is in order when you pray.” Simple, brief prayers such as these are appropriate to offer throughout the day: *God, help me. God, strengthen me. God, guide me. God, grant me wisdom, patience, love, insight, etc.*

Pray when you don’t feel like it.

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton observed: “True love and prayer are learned in the moment when prayer has become impossible and the heart has turned to stone.” Don’t permit discouragement, despair, and dismay to keep you from prayer. When you just don’t feel like praying, tell yourself, “I will do it anyway!” and then proceed to do so.

Writing on his blog, one man said: “Sometimes even I don’t feel like praying—and I’m a pastor. It’s normal. Human beings are very fickle. One day you feel like you can take on the world. The next day you feel like you don’t want to be in the world. When I don’t feel like praying, here’s what I do: I pray anyway. And I find that just like a lot of things in life, once you start doing something, the feeling will follow. First motion, then emotion. The main thing is to settle in your head that you absolutely *need* to pray.”

Finally, let your whole life be a living prayer. Saint Frances de Sales advised: “Aspire to God with short but frequent outpourings of the heart; admire his bounty; invoke his aid . . . give him your whole soul a thousand times a day.”





PASTORAL LITURGY

Fruits of the Constitution: RCIA—Final Thoughts

by John Thomas Lane, SSS

Over the last year, we have been examining one of the fruits of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). Let us review the last “step” of Christian initiation, the final period of post-baptismal catechesis called mystagogy.

RCIA, 244 says:

[Mystagogy] is a time for the community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the paschal mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel, sharing in the Eucharist, and doing the works of charity. To strengthen the neophytes as they begin to walk in newness of life, the community of the faithful, their godparents, and their parish priests (pastors) should give them thoughtful and friendly help.

This paragraph sets the tone for mystagogy, the most difficult part of the RCIA. Difficult? Well, most of us involved in formation during the RCIA realize that many neophytes do not return regularly for this period of formation. It isn't that parishes aren't trying or don't provide satisfying experiences for the neophytes to participate in. As with many experiences of faith formation and the sacraments, after receiving one, those initiated do not return “for the rest of the story.”

The first part of RCIA, 244 reminds us, however, that mystagogy is the community's time; it is ongoing formation for the community that has been gathering year after year. Easter Time is everyone's mystagogy, a time to grow in many ways, but as RCIA, 244 states, “in charity.” Perhaps this is the opportunity for the parish to have a community day of service that grabs the attention of many, especially young adults. Seeing concrete examples of service, such as building a house, planting trees, feeding the homeless, and countless other examples of Christian service might inspire neophytes and seasoned parish members to gather to work for

Father John Thomas Lane is the pastor of Saint Paschal Baylon Church, his home parish, in Highland Heights, Ohio. He is available for workshops and presentations on the liturgy or you may contact him with a question or comment at jtlanesss@gmail.com.

the good. Too often, perhaps, we have created information nights where we have paraded every parish organization before those assembled to give a presentation on their works rather than *working together*, “getting our hands dirty.”

Later, in RCIA, 246, post-baptismal catechesis for the neophytes and “the rest of the community” is again stressed. Pastorally, this is a challenging time of the year, isn’t it? We have First Communion and confirmation preparation along with classes for parents and sponsors. Perhaps we could invite the neophytes to attend these classes in order to experience another level of integration into the life of the community. We must not stop offering parishioners of all ages opportunities for ongoing faith formation and religious education.

RCIA, 247 adds another key element:

Since the distinctive spirit and power of the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy derive from the new, personal experience of the sacrament and of the community, its main setting is the so-called Masses for neophytes, that is, the Sunday Masses of the Easter season.

We all know the difficulties posed by the decline in Mass attendance from Mother’s Day onward through the summer. Through personal invitation, scheduled special events (i.e., potlucks, service projects, a time to go to the cathedral again for the neophyte Mass celebrated in many dioceses, RCIA, 251) may provide meaningful opportunities for our neophytes to stay close to the church.

Many parishes find it difficult to keep neophytes involved in their post-Easter relationship and participation in parish life (see Sherry Weddell’s *Forming Intentional Disciples* for her research on this subject). Having anniversary celebrations for the neophytes (RCIA, 250) and other events in which we regularly ask them to return for special roles in our church’s life will encourage their ongoing development and assimilation into the community.

As the ritual books go through another revision (i.e., *Order of Mass*, matrimony, lectionary, etc.) in light of the new norms for liturgical translations, the RCIA is also in line for probable revision. It isn’t known at this point if a specific overhaul of the liturgical texts of the RCIA is on the horizon; however, the following points will likely be discussed:

1. Formation versus knowledge. It isn't one or the other; it is both for everyone. Adults especially need to experience things to internalize church teaching. We are forming people for a culture, a way of life, to truly become Catholic Christians. Certainly, this takes more than nine months.
2. It is a process that cannot be limited to a few months of the year. We receive a spark of faith and are charged with keeping it going. Often, those desiring to become a Catholic want to rush into it. Certain scripture passages reinforce this idea. While being sensitive to the desire of those who seek the immediate "gratification" of becoming a Catholic quickly, we must also demonstrate that living the Gospel and entering into the life and mission of the church is a lifelong journey.
3. If the liturgical texts are revised, many adaptations particular to the United States may not continue, since these were deemed unique to our pastoral reality. (The smaller letters in the margins of many ritual books show the texts that are unique to our pastoral context.) In the world of "being faithful to what the Latin says," we must be prepared for the eventual removal of certain rites. It is helpful to remember that the RCIA was intended only for those being fully initiated. RCIA has served as a nice stepping-stone, which is why most parishes merge candidates for initiation (baptism/confirmation/Communion) with those entering the Catholic Church from another Christian denomination. Many non-Catholic Christians want to learn, review, and deepen their understanding of the Catholic Church. The rituals in the RCIA can be helpful in this process and this is why many leaders of the catechumenate find the texts quite pastorally sensitive and useful.
4. Catholic leaders must see faith formation as essential to their call as evangelizers and assisting people in their faith journey. We have invested heavily in Catholic schools in this country. Perhaps equal resources should be given to adult formation. Look at most Catholic parishes in the United States and where our financial commitment is. Is there even a tithing percentage that goes toward adult formation? Good for those parishes that do commit their tithing to adult formation, but the vast majority of us (and I include myself and my parish in this) do not financially commit to adult formation.

5. Let us keep discovering the many rituals in the RCIA. There can be a tendency toward minimalism: “What do we *have* to do?” The catechumenate is a “retreat year” for those becoming Catholic, and the rituals in the RCIA, especially many of the excellent prayer texts, provide a rich spirituality that people are hungering to experience. Let us be true to the ritual and allow it to unfold in the life of the catechumens and our community.

Mystagogy is for the life of the church, helping all of us to continue growing in charity. The RCIA assists in the process of developing an appreciation for Christian liturgy and life. It is a fruit of Vatican II worthy of our attention and care until the Lord returns and welcomes us to the banquet table in heaven.

The November and December Calendar

A Month of Solemnities

This year, three of the Sundays of November have particular liturgical feasts and solemnities that provide catechetical and ritual formation and a sense of our Catholic culture. It is meaningful to have the paschal candle standing and lit beside the *Book of the Dead*, allowing people to remember those who have died by inscribing their names. November 9 is the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, but also the day for parishes to remember their own church dedication. This feast provides an opportunity to focus on the importance of church buildings as a reflection of the people, the stones built on the foundation of faith in Christ. Of course, the last Sunday of the year is the solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, with a particular focus on social justice.

Also, the American bishops have moved National Vocation Awareness Week to November 2-9. The reason offered was to separate the attention on respect life issues and the March for Life each January from the important issue of church vocations and ministry. This observance underscores the need of encouraging and affirming the call to the consecrated life and the ordained ministry, and it serves as another chance to nurture the seeds of God’s call in our young people.

Other days or opportunities to note during this time period:

- **Saturday, November 1—All Saints**
Prepare special intercessions for Election Day (United States, Tuesday, November 4).

- **Sunday, November 2—Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed**
Prayers for Visiting a Cemetery (*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* [CHBP]).
- **Tuesday, November 11—Veterans Day (United States)**
Pray for veterans, living and deceased, and all who have served in the cause of peace.
- **Thursday, November 27—Thanksgiving (United States)**
Votive Mass with special preface in the *Roman Missal*.
Blessing of Food (*Book of Blessings* [BB], 1755-1780).
Prayer for Thanksgiving Day (CHBP).
- **Preparation for Advent**
Beginning of a new liturgical year, Sunday, November 30.
Blessing of an Advent Wreath (BB, 1509-1540; CHBP).
- **Monday, December 1—World Aids Day**
- **Wednesday, December 3—Migration Day**
Also the memorial of Saint Francis Xavier, the great missionary.
- **Monday, December 8—Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
The patronal feast day of the United States and a holy day of obligation.
- **Friday, December 12—Our Lady of Guadalupe**
- **December 17-24**
The Great O Antiphons.
- **Sunday, December 21—Fourth Sunday of Advent**
Blessing of Parents before Childbirth (BB, 225-228).
Blessing during Pregnancy (CHBP).
- **Thursday, December 25—Nativity of the Lord**
The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ from the *Roman Martyrology*, *Roman Missal*, 1293.
Blessing of a Christmas Manger or Nativity Scene (BB 1541-1569)

- **Sunday, December 28—Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph**
Blessing of the Family (BB, 42-67).
- **Thursday, January 1—Ocatve Day of Christmas; Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God**

Taizé Prayer Service for Advent

Prepare ahead of time: monstrance on the altar in the church, an incense bowl, candles, mood lighting, tea light candles, the Advent wreath, and other candles.

Opening Song “Wait for the Lord”

Option I: Process from the tabernacle to the altar in the church with the luna for the monstrance. Reverence the Blessed Sacrament and add incense, then go to the chair for the Opening Prayer.

Option II: Invite the people to process around the church with the monstrance. Then, when the monstrance is placed on the altar, remain standing to say the Opening Prayer. People sit in lotus position after the prayer, even in the sanctuary and have their tea lights with them.

Opening Prayer *From the Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament*

Creator God,
you gather us in Advent time,
awaiting your coming again
and preparing us to remember your first coming as a child.

You sent your Son
to be with us, our Emmanuel
and real presence of you and the Holy Spirit.

Enliven us and be with us this night
as we take time to wait in joyful hope
for the coming of your Son, who is Lord, forever and ever.
Amen.

Silent Meditation *5 minutes*

Taizé Song "In the Lord I'll be Ever Thankful"

Silent Meditation *5 minutes*

Add incense.

Reading *Suggested from the Office of Readings
or Advent Weekday Masses*

Silent Meditation *5 minutes*

Taizé Song "Nada Te Turbe" (*5 minutes*)

Silent Meditation *5 minutes*

Reading *Suggested from the Office of Readings
or Advent Weekday Masses*

Silent Meditation *5 minutes*

Song "Jesus Christ"

Intercessions *Spontaneous*

The Lord's Prayer

Benediction "Tantum Ergo"

Prayers *From the Order for the Solemn Exposition of the
Blessed Sacrament*

*After the song, bless the assembly with the monstrance and then return the
luna to the tabernacle.*

Closing Prayer

We wait in joyful hope for your coming, Lord God.
We ask that you tend the seeds
that you have sown
and bear fruit in our world
with vocations to serve the church.

Advent invites and encourages us

to see the possibilities of the kingdom of God
and discern and engage in new possibilities
with a new awareness.

Awaken the call within young people
and stir up your mighty Spirit
to encourage and affirm them in your service,
to share their faith with the community.

May highways be made straight,
mountains made low,
and all rejoice that you are with us to guide
and direct your church and its future.

May we recognize the signs of the times
and be hopeful and patient with life changes
that open us to your will.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Greeting and Blessing

If ordained:

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit
May almighty God bless you + the Father, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit.
Amen.

Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

If laity:

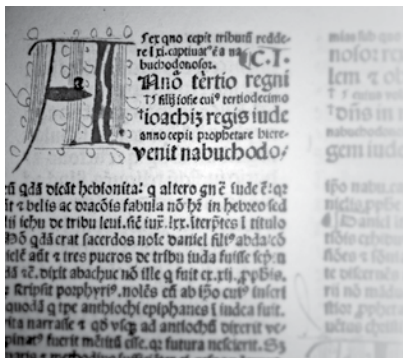
May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil,
and bring us to everlasting life.
Amen.

Sign of Peace

Closing Song

“I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light”





BREAKING THE WORD

HOMILETICS - Ordinary Time/Advent/Christmas

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

Wake Up the World!

Beginning this month and continuing through next year, Pope Francis has declared this year to be the Year of Consecrated Life. In an address to the Major Superiors' Union in Rome last November, Pope Francis said that "the church must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world. We are speaking of an eschatological outlook, of the values of the kingdom incarnated here, on this earth. It is a question of leaving everything to follow the Lord. No, I do not want to say 'radical.' Evangelical radicalness is not only for religious; it is demanded of all. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way. It is this witness that I expect of you. Religious should be men and women who are able to wake the world up" (Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "Wake Up the World: Conversation with Pope Francis about Religious Life," tr., Donald Maldari SJ, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2014, 3-17; [online: http://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articoli_download/extra/wake_up_the_world.pdf]).

Waking up the world to the Good News of Jesus Christ is prophetic indeed! Sometimes, the prophetic mission of religious life can be misinterpreted as what our culture might describe as being "liberal" rather than "conservative." And yet, biblically speaking, the prophets were conservative in the best sense of the word, for they called the people back to their roots, back to the covenant. Fidelity to the covenant was the people's source of hope in exile, the promise of future glory and of God's justice. This biblical prophecy is paradigmatic for religious today who are called, in the words of Pope Francis, to wake up the world with the joy of the Gospel.

Throughout, we hear the prophets calling Israel to hope in God's never-failing mercy and love. This promise is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, the promised Savior. May we who are called to the religious life, and all the baptized, wake up the world around us with the Good News of God's tender mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel.

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

Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed
(All Souls)
November 2, 2014

The Souls of the Just Are in the Hand of God

Breaking the Word

Wisdom 3:1-9

The sacred author encourages his readers to hope in God's justice and mercy, especially in time of suffering and death. The images of gold being tested in a furnace and a holocaust offering of the innocent offers a sense of purpose in the death of those who suffer.

Romans 5:5-11

Paul insistently emphasizes the doctrine that Christ died for us sinners because of God's immense love for us (see 5:8). This is the key to Pauline theology in Romans, and arguably throughout his writings. Our justification comes through the precious blood of Christ, "through whom we have now received reconciliation" (5:11).

John 6:37-40

Today's gospel passage is found within the so-called Bread of Life discourse (6:22-59) in John's Gospel. Jesus tells his audience that the Father's will is that Jesus' disciples who believe in him will have eternal life and they will be raised from the dead. No doubt, this passage is among the difficult or hard teachings of Jesus that drove some of his listeners away (see Jn 6:60, 66), but it is a central tenet of our Christian faith.

Sharing the Word

During my first few months following ordination, I found myself praying often for our deceased sisters and brothers—more often than I did prior to becoming a priest. This was especially true whenever I read the newspaper or heard from the news about a killing or a tragic death of someone near or far. "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord" was a frequent prayer on my lips. I still pray, in fact, often for the dead, especially

whenever I drive past a cemetery. It is an important thing to do, and today the church reminds us of our suffrages for the dead.

All Souls' Day is a reminder for us not only to pray for those who have died in God's grace and friendship, but are undergoing purification so as to enter into heavenly glory (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1030), but also to live our lives in the hope of future resurrection in Jesus Christ. In other words, the kind of life we live here and now on this side of eternity is to lead us to the joy of heaven. The choices we make should be reflective of our final destiny. The readings for today express the hope that we have because of God's reconciling love for us revealed in Jesus Christ (see Rom 5:8-11).

Praying the Word

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
May the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God,
rest in peace.
Amen.

Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
in Rome
November 9, 2014

The Parish as a Eucharistic Community

Breaking the Word

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12

The prophet Ezekiel, writing as an exile in Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, speaks of a new temple in a new Israel, following the return of the exiles (see Ez 39:25ff). The pericope for today's liturgy is pieced together from a magnificent vision of life-giving water flowing from the new temple. This stream changes the Dead Sea into fresh water (Ez 47:8) and waters the fruit trees along the river's banks, which in turn nourish the people.

1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17

The *lectio* for this Sunday offers us a theology of being the people of God. The church building is simply an edifice, a sacred space to worship God, but Paul reminds us that we are the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor 3:16).

John 2:13-22

Today's passage depicts Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover festival. The evangelist John notes that Jesus' disciples, having witnessed his actions against the money-changers and temple merchants, recalled a biblical verse (cf. Ps 69:10): "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Jn 2:17).

Sharing the Word

Today's commemoration recalls not only the dedication of the cathedral of the bishop of Rome, the pope, but it serves as a timely reminder of the importance of our parish communities. Most Catholics discover who Jesus Christ is and celebrate his life, passion, death, resurrection, and the power of the Holy Spirit alive in their hearts in the

context of a parish. The Sunday Mass celebrated in our parishes is where most of us experience the church. Therefore, it stands to reason that the parish is where Catholic Christians not only worship God, but also come to know their destiny as God's beloved daughters and sons in the family of the church.

Bishop Anthony M. Pilla, the bishop-emeritus of my home Diocese of Cleveland, wrote a magnificent pastoral letter on the importance of parishes entitled *Vibrant Parish Life*. In it, Bishop Pilla stated eloquently that "a vibrant parish is a caring and welcoming community of faith, a place to which we come willingly, where we feel at home, where we know we can grow in our faith, where we can find God and be reconciled when we feel lost, where the emphasis is on the individual worth and dignity of every person. A parish should be, above all else, a good place in which to grow spiritually—a supportive and caring community to be proud of." In short, our parishes are eucharistic communities shaped by the word of God and nourished by the church's sacraments and ministries.

Today's feast reminds us that we need to focus our resources and energies into creating life-giving parishes from which the joy of the Gospel will radiate and bring hope to our world. And, just as Jesus did in today's Gospel of the cleansing of the temple, so, too, we need Christ to cleanse our own hearts so that we can truly become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the temple of God (see 1 Cor 3:16), and a eucharistic community.

Praying the Word

God our Father,
give us a true sense of communion
whereby we can become a eucharistic people
starting in our family, the domestic church,
and extending to our parish, diocese, and the universal church.
May we have the courage to create vibrant parishes
and joyfully proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.
This we ask through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 16, 2014

Sharing in the Joy of the Lord

Breaking the Word

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

In these short, poetic verses which come from the end of the Book of Proverbs, the ideal wife is described as ultimately one who is devoted to God above all (i.e., “the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” [Prv 31:30; see Prv 1:7]). Fear of the Lord is a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of the Most High; an acknowledgement of our creatureliness and God’s divinity. Note that the sacred author, while praising the worthy wife, states that the husband is to entrust his heart to her (Prv 31:11).

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Coming toward the conclusion of Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians, we find this exhortation to be alert to the signs of the times. As we draw near to the end of the liturgical year, the passage is an apt reminder to be spiritually attentive as we await the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25:14-30 or 25:14-15, 19-21

Our gospel passage contains the parable of the talents. The short version of today’s reading excludes the actions of the people entrusted with the talents and jumps to the Master praising the good and faithful servant who did well with his responsibilities. The full text is preferred, in my opinion, in order to preserve the integrity of the parable.

Sharing the Word

Each of us—clergy, religious, lay person; married or single; adult or child—has a personal vocation. And God intends us to play a unique role in carrying out his divine plan; in building up the kingdom of God. Each of us is entrusted with the wealth of the church—not financial, of course, but the wealth that springs from love: loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and being, and loving our neighbor as our selves.

We have a choice to make: we can either take the task Christ entrusts to us, according to our vocation and state in life, and invest our talents in building up the kingdom of God, or “out of fear” (see Mt 25:25), we can do nothing, like the last man who hid his talent and got nothing on the return. Either we can be people who make a difference in our world, being men and women of charity—remember, they will know we are Christians by our love—or we can complain about life’s problems, spread gossip, and divide one another. We can work to relieve poverty and end injustice in society by assisting the wider church’s charitable efforts, or we can simply pass the blame for poverty onto conservatives, liberals, or some other scapegoat we might imagine.

The servants praised by the master in the Gospel are the ones who took their talents and got involved in the world around them. They took risks and challenged themselves. They lived life with gusto and vigor because they loved their master. The foolish servant was the one who retreated into himself, who refused to make a commitment or take a risk for good in life.

As followers of Christ, we are called to transform the world through love, to spread the Gospel joyfully by living holy lives; glorifying God by serving others and bringing his light into our darkened world.

Through baptism, Christ has entrusted to us this awesome task of investing our lives in the kingdom of heaven; generously building up one another in love. The way we live our life here and now will be reflected in the eternal life to come. Nourished with the food of the Eucharist, Christ’s body and blood, we strive to share his love generously with one another, and so one day hear our divine Lover say to us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. . . . Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt 25:21).

Praying the Word

God our Father,
you have entrusted us with the task
of building up one another in love.
By your generous grace, may we come to share one day
in the joys of heaven
and there forever sing your praises.
This we ask in hope through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ,
King of the Universe
November 23, 2014

¡Viva Cristo Rey!

Breaking the Word

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

The whole of Ezekiel 34 is about shepherds. The first ten verses are a condemnation of false shepherds, the leaders of Israel. What we find in today's reading is the prophet Ezekiel describing how God himself will pasture his sheep, caring for them properly. The last verse (17) connects with the gospel text from Matthew.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Paul points to the resurrection and glorification of Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical key to understanding the Gospel (see 1 Cor 15:1-2). It is the wondrous mystery of the resurrection that brings hope and salvation to believers. And where Christ, the first fruits of redemption, has preceded us, we, too, will one day follow.

Matthew 25:31-46

Today's Gospel follows last week's story of the parable of the talents. It is the scene of the final judgment, the separation of the sheep from the goats by the Son of Man. This pericope is unique to Matthew, and it has formed the basis of the Catholic Church's social teaching and theology on final judgment.

Sharing the Word

Which group do we want to be a part of: those who did not care for the least brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus, or the the righteous who will enter into eternal life? The solemnity of Christ the King is about this fundamental question. Do we want to inherit the kingdom of heaven with all the saints, our ancestors in the faith? If we choose to follow our Lord Jesus Christ—the Good Shepherd—in good times and in bad, then

we will enter into the promised eternal life. But we do not make a simple one-time decision to follow Christ. Each day we must renew our resolve to say “yes” to Christ and “yes” to his church. If we truly make Christ our King, our shepherd, then the way we live our lives will be different. Our life will be noticeably different! “Love for Jesus and his church must be the passion of our lives,” as New York’s Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan once told his brother bishops (see www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1104455.htm).

This is the point of today’s Gospel. Jesus describes for us what he expects of us as disciples and members of the kingdom. I think so often in our lives we simply try to fit into the wider society, the prevailing culture. We do this at the risk of abandoning our Catholic faith, for which Blessed Miguel Agustín Pro, a Jesuit priest who was martyred in Mexico on this date in 1927, and countless others faithfully bore witness. This should not be the case. Being a faithful Catholic, loving Christ and his church does not mean that we should be forced to compromise our beliefs and practices in private or in public. We are Christian at every moment of our lives; it is written on our hearts since baptism! If Christ is King of our hearts, then what we say we believe in the sacred space of our churches and shrines must be reflected the sacred space of our wider culture.

Love is at the heart of the judgment scene in the Gospel. The kingdom of God is where we truly love God with the gift of our entire lives, and we love our neighbor as Christ loves us. In the Eucharist, we receive Christ’s pledge of his divine love for us, and this love in turn nourishes our love, our charity. Each time we receive the Eucharist, we boldly proclaim that “the Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want” (Ps 23:1). We commit to serving the Lord in love.

Praying the Word

Heavenly Father,
strengthen us with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit
so that we might have in our hearts and minds
the same attitude of your co-eternal Son,
Jesus Christ,
who is king of the universe and Lord forever and ever.
Amen.

First Sunday of Advent
November 30, 2014

Would that You Might Meet Us Doing Right!

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

The reading portrays the prophet Isaiah pleading for God's return, bringing with him awesome deeds and justice. The poetic imagery used herein is magnificent. Today's passage is found near the end of Isaiah.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

The lectionary offers us the beginning few verses from Paul's epistle to the Corinthians. In these verses, Paul reminds his audience that as they await the return of the Lord Jesus, they are equipped with the necessary spiritual gifts (see 1 Cor 1:7). Later in the epistle, Paul will chide these early Christians for divisions within their community.

Mark 13:33-37

Today we begin Year B of the lectionary cycle; hence, our Gospel *lectio* is taken from Mark. In this pericope, from near the end of the Gospel, Jesus is situated in Jerusalem calling his disciples to vigilance. The key word Jesus uses in the text is "Watch!"

Sharing the Word

The season of Advent that we begin today helps us to prepare both for the liturgical commemoration of Christ's birth (Christmas) as well as for Christ's coming in glory at the end of time. Today's readings focus our attention on Christ's second coming in glory.

I imagine that many of us probably don't give much thought to the end of time. Endings are not as easy as beginnings. For the most part, we look forward with eager joy to something beginning, don't we? Thinking of the end of time, the end of our world, is not something we look forward to with joy.

The prophet Isaiah challenges us to reflect on the time of

salvation when God will bring justice to our world. He calls upon the Creator to “rend the heavens and come down” to earth to render justice for his people (see Is 63:19). We are God’s people, and it is at the end of time when our salvation, Jesus Christ, will return in his glory to render justice and bring an end to sin and death. This is why in the Gospel, we hear Jesus telling us to be alert, to be watchful and ready for his glorious return. Being vigilant is characteristic of being Christian. We are vigilant against sin and evil taking root in our lives and in our families and communities. Would that Christ might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of our Lord in all our ways, (cf. Is 64:4). As we begin a new liturgical year, the church reminds us to “be watchful! Be alert! [For we] do not know when the time will come” (Mk 13:33) when Christ will return in glory.

The judgment is something that we must not fear, for the coming of Christ in glory is what we eagerly anticipate and hope for in joy. It is why we gather each Sunday around the table of God’s word and Eucharist. At every Mass, we pray in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ. His coming in glory offers us the hope of our eternal salvation and perfect justice. And as we journey toward that final end when God will make all things new in Christ, we trust—like the apostle Paul—that “God is faithful, and by him [we] were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,” (1 Cor 3:9).

Praying the Word

Merciful Father,
you tenderly prepare us for the coming harvest.
Help us to conform our lives to the Gospel,
so that you might meet us doing what is right in your sight
and in the peace of Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns forever and ever.
Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent
December 7, 2014

Prepare the Way of the Lord!

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

The prophet Isaiah offers a truly comforting scene: God promises his people an end to their suffering and exile. The salvation which God promises is their restoration in the Promised Land, and God himself will shepherd his people into green pastures (see Is 40:11). Within the liturgical context of today, the image of “a voice cries out: in the desert prepare the way of the Lord” (Is 40:3) is tied to the gospel portrayal of John the Baptist (see Mk 1:3-4).

2 Peter 3:8-14

How does an early Christian deal with the apparent delay in the parousia? The reading gives an insight into how the early church, and in particular the apostle Peter, responded.

Mark 1:1-8

The opening chapter of Mark’s Gospel is a fast-paced “day-in-the-life-of-Jesus” account, starting with Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan (see Mk 1:9ff). However, these eight verses provide an insight into the ministry of the great precursor to the Lord, John the Baptist. Mark ties John’s prophetic ministry of baptizing to the prophecy contained in Isaiah 40:3.

Sharing the Word

The second stanza of an eighteenth-century Advent hymn, “On Jordan’s Bank,” gives us a sense of what our readings are all about this weekend:

Then cleansed be every heart from sin,
make straight the way of God within;
O let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

This is the point that the prophet Isaiah was asserting when he said, “A voice cries out: in the desert prepare the way of the Lord” (Is 40:3). That voice comes from none other than John the Baptist. And we hear John in the desert preaching “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4). Repentance is the way that we are to prepare our hearts “for Christ to come and enter there.”

In Greek, the word repent (*metanoia*) means a complete change of mind and heart. In other words, *metanoia* requires a conversion. When we repent of our sins, we are actually undergoing a conversion. I suspect that oftentimes when we hear the word “conversion,” we tend to think of somebody being baptized, becoming a Christian, embracing the faith. Yes, this is the case and it is right to keep this word “conversion” associated with baptism. That is because, for us Christians, conversion is an ongoing process that began with our baptism. It is not something that is done once and that’s it. Conversion is not automatic. Daily, deep within our hearts, the Holy Spirit calls us to conversion, to *metanoia*, to repentance from our sinful past to the new life of Christ given us at our baptism. It is never easy, but God’s grace and mercy, celebrated and received through the sacraments of Christ’s church, give us the help we need to daily say “yes” to our baptismal promises and reject sin and evil in our lives.

“The Lord is patient with us,” Peter tells us, “not wishing that any should die but that all should come to repentance” (cf. 2 Pt 3:9). God our Father does not want anyone of us—his beloved sons and daughters—to die without his friendship. Rather, God wants us to repent and live, to know his saving love and mercy. This is the Good News, the Gospel, which John the Baptist preached in the desert. God loves us so very much that “in the fullness of time, God sent his only Son, born of the virgin” (Gal 4:4), to save us and restore us to his friendship. This is what the season of Advent is all about: preparing the way of the Lord (see Is 40:3) so that we might be ready for his return in glory.

Praying the Word

Heavenly Father,
may every heart be cleansed from sin
so that your way be made clear within.
May we our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there,
who is Lord forever and ever.
Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent
December 14, 2014

Gaudete in Dominum!

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

The prophet Isaiah writes of a time when God will bring vindication for his people. God's justice will "spring up before all the nations" like plants in a well-watered garden (see Is 61:11). God's purposes are unstoppable.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

At the end of the epistle, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to rejoice always and to pray unceasingly in gratitude (see 1 Thes 5:16-18). This hortatory message follows on Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians to be vigilant for the day of the Lord (1 Thes 5:1-8) and to hope for God's salvation in all tranquility (1 Thes 5:9-15).

John 1:6-8, 19-28

The gospel passage is truncated in order to highlight the ministry of John the Baptist, who was not the light itself but rather a witness to Christ the Light (see Jn 1:6-8). Similar to last Sunday's portrayal of John the Baptist, the evangelist John again paraphrases Isaiah 40:3, this time placing the prophet's words directly upon the lips of the Baptist in a self-deferential manner.

Sharing the Word

John the Baptist cautions us in today's Gospel: "There is one among you whom you do not recognize" (Jn 1:26). We need only to look at society and see a world that ostensibly fails to recognize God's salvation in Jesus Christ. Sin and evil are celebrated in our culture as different ways of being human, rather than being recognized as the disorders and diseases of the soul that they truly are. People are without meaningful employment, not able to provide for their families. Poverty and injustice are commonplace. Our children face untold challenges in their youth

that many of us never even imagined when we were their age. It appears that it is harder to be a faithful Christian in our secular age today, than perhaps it was for our ancestors who were filled with a seemingly simple and humble joy in the Lord.

If our society is to ever recognize its Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, it will do so only through God's grace and our joyfully sharing the Gospel. Just as John the Baptist courageously testified to Christ with his life, so, too, we profess a public and passionate love for Jesus and his church. For "whoever loves Christ loves his church, and desires the church to be the image and instrument of his love" (Benedict XVI, encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, 33).

Isaiah is our model in this regard. He struggled to give God's people a vision of hope during their darkest moments. When Isaiah recognized God's saving presence, he rejoiced enthusiastically in the Lord because the Most High had become the very joy of his soul (see Is 61:10). In God alone, Isaiah recognized a true and passionate lover who tenderly cares for his people. And this recognition enabled him to look forward in hope to a time when "the Lord God will make justice and praise spring up before all the nations" (Is 61:11).

We are summoned to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing and daily give God thanks and praise. We are a hopeful people, who look forward in joy to a time when all nations will offer God fitting worship and praise. At every celebration of the Eucharist, we anticipate that time when "the Lord God will make justice and praise spring up before all the nations" (Is 61:11). In the Eucharist, Jesus offers us along with himself to the Father as the supreme act of divine worship, thereby enabling us to joyfully proclaim the Gospel to a world which so desperately needs Emmanuel.

Praying the Word

God our Father,
by the power of the Holy Spirit
you have gathered us together
around the eucharistic table of your beloved Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ.
May we daily give you thankful praise, pray without ceasing,
and rejoice always
through, with, and in the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 21, 2014

Proclaiming Jesus Christ

Breaking the Word

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

King David desires to build a dwelling place for the ark of the covenant, but Nathan tells him of God's intention to make an everlasting kingdom of David and his descendants.

Romans 16:25-27

These are the final verses of Paul's magnificent epistle to the Romans, wherein we hear a doxology praising God through Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:26-38

Presented for us this final Advent Sunday is Gabriel's announcement to Mary of the birth of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Read in the light of today's first reading and in the light of subsequent tradition, the virgin Mary is considered to be the Ark of the New Covenant.

Sharing the Word

With only days remaining before Christmas, most malls and retail centers and online shops are buzzing with activity as shoppers make last minute gift purchases. Commercials, news reports, and the endless hours of Christmas music blaring on the radio remind us that we have limited time left to get that perfect gift for our loved ones.

What a contrast we find in today's readings. The Scriptures remind us that God has *already* given us the greatest gift imaginable. And this gift does not come wrapped in fine paper, placed under a Christmas tree. Rather, this holy and precious gift came some 2,000 years ago, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. And he comes to us now, in word and in sacrament, at every celebration of the sacred liturgy. The gift, of course, is God's promised Savior, Jesus Christ.

The story about King David in the first reading helps us, I think,

appreciate this better. David was busy forming his administration and trying to unite his people. And he had a good idea: since he himself lived in a beautiful palace, he thought he should give God a gift and build a magnificent temple. But what David had forgotten was that God was powerfully active in his life, in his kingdom. God did not need David's gift for God is the source of all good things. Besides, what could the Creator of the entire cosmos receive as a gift? David's problem was that he didn't recognize God's gracious presence at work in his life. Nathan reminded David of God's providential love and care. He showed David that God was always with him and at work in his life. And Nathan told of God's promise that David's house and kingdom would remain forever (see 2 Sm 7:16).

Just as God reminded David of this important fact, so, too, does this holy season of Advent offer us an opportunity to acknowledge God's graciousness, to give the thanks and praise that is due to God's majesty.

In the busyness of this holy season, the church invites us to be still and to praise God for his fidelity and love, to join with Mary in acknowledging the mystery and graciousness of God in our lives. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is truly a gift. In our desire to thank the Most High for fulfilling his promises, "manifested through the prophetic writings" (Rom 16:26), God gives us more than we can ever hope for or imagine. In the presence of such an awesome mystery, we respond, like Mary, with faith and hope: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

Praying the Word

Gracious Father,
as we near the great feast of Christmas,
we ask you to still our hearts so that
we might recognize the greatest gift
that you have given humankind:
your Son, our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ,
who is Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.

Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)
December 25, 2014—Mass at Midnight

Today is Born our Savior, Christ the Lord!

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 9:1-6

Isaiah poetically describes for us the various names of the child born to save us: “Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace” (9:5). His Davidic kingdom will last forever; justice and right judgment will sustain it. The child spoken of here is likely the one referred to earlier at Isaiah 7:10-16, Emmanuel.

Titus 2:11-14

The grace of God that saves all is none other than our Savior, Jesus Christ. As a result of this grace, Paul encourages Titus and his community to reject the godless ways of the world and to live in eager hope of glory in Christ Jesus.

Luke 2:1-14

This Gospel is the one most associated with Christmas: the census, the birth in Bethlehem, the laying of the Christ-child in a manger, angels singing, and shepherds being the first to receive the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ!

Sharing the Word

All too often, today’s solemn feast gets overshadowed by gifts bought, given, and exchanged, especially for our children. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; it is good to give and receive gifts from loved ones. But this shouldn’t be the overriding focus of today. Christmas is not about buying gifts for somebody or opening them under the tree. Rather, it is about celebrating with gratitude the gift we have all received from God our Father: the birth of his Son Jesus Christ, by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

Our exchange of Christmas presents should in fact remind us of

the great exchange God made with us some 2,000 years ago. Christmas is about God entering into human history, exchanging his divinity for our humanity. God humbled himself to become human like us in all things but sin. This is the cause for our rejoicing on this solemnity. Saint Thomas Aquinas beautifully speaks of the *admirabile commercium*: “O marvelous exchange! Man’s Creator has become man, born of the virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity” (as quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 526). This is worth pondering time and time again. God became man in order to divinize human beings.

As Christians, we proclaim Jesus to be the one whom the prophet Isaiah called Prince of Peace (see Is 9:5). Jesus is the one who took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the one whom Paul loved, preached, and proclaimed as Lord and Savior. Jesus is the one whom we dare call our brother, for in the wondrous exchange effected on that first Christmas, we now share in God’s divinity and are rightly called God’s beloved daughters and sons.

Praying the Word

Thank you, Father most holy,
for fulfilling your promises
by sending us a Savior and a Redeemer.
Your mercy and love are infinite!
May we spend this Christmas
with a grateful heart for your promised Savior,
Jesus Christ, who is our brother and Lord forever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Family
of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
December 28, 2014

The Family as a Community of Love and Sharing

Breaking the Word

Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

This reading describes the covenantal promise God made with Abram and the sign of that covenant, the birth of Abraham and Sarah's son Isaac.

Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages his readers to look in grateful hope to the faithful ancestors of ages past, including Abraham. His steadfast faith in God is paradigmatic for all believers.

Luke 2:22-40

The evangelist Luke depicts the Holy Family bringing the child Jesus to the temple after the purification period following Jesus' birth in order that he might be consecrated according to the Jewish precepts (see Lv 12:2-8).

Sharing the Word

It can arguably be said that the pontificate of Pope Francis is focused on God's tender mercy and love. This can be seen most especially in the emphasis the Holy Father has placed on the church's ministry to the family. In October of this year, and again next October, many of the world's bishops gathered in the Vatican for the extraordinary synod on the family. In his encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis wrote these words on the importance of family life:

The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This union is born

of their love, as a sign and presence of God's own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cf. Gn 2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator's goodness, wisdom, and loving plan. Grounded in this love, a man and a woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture which engages their entire lives and mirrors many features of faith. Promising love forever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love (52).

Families face extraordinary pressures and forces from the surrounding secular culture as well as from within the family unit itself. It is sad to say that many families today suffer the effects of divorce, adultery, poverty, homelessness, abusive situations, and pornography—just to name a few of the challenges confronting couples and families. At the same time, the number of Catholic weddings has fallen precipitously in recent years. In the midst of such “bad news,” today's feast sets a tone of prayer and hopefulness for family life, imagined in the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Praying the Word

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,
you are the model of family life
and our source of joy this day.
We ardently pray for all engaged couples, married persons,
and families:
may they experience the help of your love
so that the church and our society
may always benefit from healthy, happy, and holy families.
Amen.





THE EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •
Poetry • Books

Film Review



L'ENFANT
(The Child)
Jean-Pierre and
Luc Dardenne,
2006, France

by John Christman,
SSS

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne are two of the most well respected European filmmakers of the last 20 years. Together, these brothers have won too many prestigious awards at international film festivals to mention. Originally honing their skills through documentary filmmaking, the Dardenne brothers bring to their dramatic films a true concern for social justice and a keen insight into the challenges facing contemporary European society. In particular, their films grapple with a society that has lost touch with its moral underpinnings.

More troubling for the Dardenne's is the question of how today's youth might navigate this world without role models and moral direction. As Luc Dardenne has said of the treatment of the youth in their films, "We put them in a situation and asked the question, how are these people, who are now alone and without the help of the past, going to find their way to be fully human?"¹ Of course, human flourishing is of preeminent concern to Christianity, as Jesus says in the Gospel of John, "I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

L'enfant, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's Palme d'Or winning film at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, explores this fragile and precarious circumstance with frightening clarity. Through hand-held camera work and a documentarian's eye. *L'enfant* focuses upon two young parents and their newborn child. Sadly, the newborn child "Jimmy" is born into a kind of moral vacuum. His seemingly jobless mother Sonia spends most of her time walking the streets with her hoodlum boyfriend Bruno. Alternately, Bruno can barely eke out a living through petty theft and has little interest in raising a child, let alone providing for one. This leads to some shocking and heartbreaking moments for both Sonia and the audience.

Through the Dardenne's deft handling, however, this intimate portrait of a small family is raised to the level of an engrossing morality tale that holds society's future in its thoughtful gaze. As Luc Dardenne has said: "When you go back in time, it's the story of the father and mother; and the future is the story of our children and their children. The day that we

are unable to be fathers and mothers, then humanity is finished.”²

Watching *L'enfant* is a trying exercise. One almost holds one's breath throughout the film hoping for some element of grace to break into these young people's lives. And, admittedly, it's not the kind of sentimental and entertaining film one might normally seek out in the weeks leading up to Christmas. However, it might suit us well during this Advent season to recall that Jesus was also born into humble and precarious circumstances. Seen in this way, *L'enfant* reminds us of how fragile life can be and just how dependent we all are upon the goodness of others.

From this Christian and liturgical viewpoint, *L'enfant* might even raise a troubling christological question—without loving and morally principled parents, what might have become of Jesus? As Luc Dardenne said, “The day that we are unable to be fathers and mothers, then humanity is finished.”³

¹ www.theguardian.com/film/2006/feb/11/features accessed July 19, 2014 (interview by Geoff Andrew Sat. February 11, 2006).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Art Review

How many artistic depictions of the Holy Family have you seen where Jesus, Mary, and Joseph actually look like a family? Perhaps we more frequently see images emphasizing the hagiographic or iconic portrayal of the three. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in these representations are often fitted with golden halos and set in idyllic landscapes. They appear otherworldly. Sometimes Mary and Joseph gaze upon a radiant toddler who seems to already possess and comprehend God's infinite wisdom and his place in salvation history. How these paintings reconcile themselves with scripture passages like Luke 2:52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (NRSV), is difficult to ascertain. In reality, so many of these paintings tend to emphasize the *holy* in the “Holy Family.” Far fewer are thoughtful artworks that depict the more universal and experiential reality represented by the second word in that honorary title, *family*.

Simon Vouet's lovely etching entitled *Holy Family with a Bird* captures just such an insight. Through Vouet's elegant, airy lines, we gain a glimpse of something most young families would recognize: parental delight. How often have you seen parents in a park enjoying their children's newfound wonder at the natural world? Or how often have you witnessed the tenderness with which a newborn is treated by his or her awestricken

COVER ART

Simon Vouet
(French, 1590-
1649)

HOLY FAMILY
WITH A BIRD,
1633

Etching Plate:
7-1/2 × 8-3/8 in.
(19.05 × 21.27 cm)

Sheet:
14-15/16 × 11-1/4 in.
(37.94 × 28.58 cm)

Milwaukee Art
Museum, Gift of
the Hockerman
Charitable Trust
M2004.1

Photographer:
John R. Glembin

by John Christman,
SSS

parents? This is the simple, yet compellingly familiar experience that is reflected in Vouet's deft depiction. Joseph gently presents his newborn son with the sight of a small bird perched atop his finger, all the while observing the child's reaction. The delighted boy innocently stretches out his hand in return. Mary, too, leans forward, curious to gaze on the little bird. The image has the fleeting quality of a family snapshot, a tremendous achievement given the much more laborious process of etching. These are the happy moments that strengthen the bonds of young families and become cherished memories. This may be especially the case during holidays such as Christmas where taking joy in the gift of family offsets the weight of everyday work and responsibilities. Perhaps Vouet's etching is suggesting to us that in order to be a "holy" family attention should first be given to being a "loving" family.

Book Review



James Alison, a priest and a leading Catholic theologian, presents this four-book set as an adult introduction to Christianity. Its deceptively simple covers suggest rather lightweight reading. Although Alison's language is simple and nearly jargon-free, his thought is profound and challenging. No short summary can do it justice.

Book One, subtitled *Starting Human, Staying Human*, covers Christian anthropology. Alison grounds the entire series in the thought of René Girard, whose mimetic theory of desire is treated in this slim volume.

Often using common everyday examples, Alison sets forth how the human person is inducted into being through the imitation of the social other. He consistently steers clear of any moralizing interpretations of Scripture and illustrates how Jesus is trying to suggest a new self into existence, a self that has nothing to do with death. He reads the Emmaus story in a fresh way that considers this "dead man talking" as the hermeneutical key that opens the Scriptures. Jesus "re-narrates" Cleopas and his friend into being in a whole new way.

Book Two, entitled *God, Not One of the Gods*, undertakes the topic of biblical hermeneutics. Alison treats in brilliant fashion how the violation of the ban in Joshua 7 discloses a sacrificial system in full operation, culminating in the stoning of Achan. Catholics cringe at the story today precisely because everyone is now used to reading Scriptures from the point of view of the victim. That viewpoint itself describes the fulfillment of Scripture in a way that avoids petty proof-texting.

JESUS THE FORGIVING VICTIM:

Listening for the Unheard Voice.

James Allison,
Glenview, IL:

Doers Publishers,
2013,

572 pages

(4 vols.), \$30.00.

The Bible, for Alison, is not a long book with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but rather a book that offers a single interpretive center (the viewpoint of the forgiving victim), with all of its texts coming down at different angles to that one interpretive center. The Old Testament builds up to that interpretive center, and the New Testament opens it up to the present moment. Alison continues his treatment of Scripture through a profound analysis of the relationship between creation out of nothing and resurrection. He concludes with an exegesis of the burning bush episode from Genesis that portrays God as the real protagonist, while leaving Moses to receive his identity sometime in the future.

Book Three, *The Difference Jesus Makes*, presents Christ as the enabler of our freedom. Jesus begins a change in us by showing us how different God is, different from anything we had suspected possible. He does this by occupying the place of death, and showing us how non-toxic death really is. To pull this off, Jesus makes evident that God has reversed the flow of sacrifice. We should not sacrifice anything to God; rather God sacrifices to us. God gives us a victim who will save us even as we kill him.

In demonstrating this aspect of christology, Alison leads the reader through a theologically rich interpretation of the passion narratives that is geared to understanding both the forgiving victim and our own role in victimizing others. As conversion takes place, we learn to receive our identities peacefully rather than to assert rival identities over and against others.

Book Four, called *Unexpected Insiders*, treats prayer, church, and ethics. For Alison, people desire by imitating other people's desires. The social other thus exerts an enormous influence over our very identities. A good spirituality will show us that we have not only a social other, but "another Other" who can shape our very selves.

For Alison, one who prays by asking God for things can be likened to a gambler who pulls the handle of a one-armed bandit, expecting eventually a huge cash payout. Such prayers are pointless because "your Father knows what you need even before you ask." The author turns the tables. It is rather God who is pulling our handles, expecting a big payoff. Stingy bandits that we are, God too often is left empty-handed.

Alison then plays with several very interesting images of the church. First, he portrays the church as a really good restaurant whose chef has invited guests for dinner. The waiters often sadly figure the whole show is about them, their uniforms, and the performance that they put on. The church is also likened to a halfway house where former inmates of a prison learn to cope with freedom on the "outside." He caps off his church imagery with the image of an embassy where citizens enter foreign territory to become ambassadors showing others a wholly different way of being.

Finally, Alison gives a non-moralistic account of sin. Understood correctly, ethics should position us in such a way that we accept our status as creatures. We relax into that status and begin to ask ourselves not “What Would Jesus Do?” but “What Is Jesus Doing?” Eventually, we discover ourselves operating from within God’s Spirit as “unexpected insiders.”

Alison supplements the text with an index of biblical citations, cross references to his video series, and a glossary of terms. Although pitched at the level of ordinary laity, these books reach depths that would be welcome in any graduate school setting.

Alison consistently presents surprisingly rich theological and biblical interpretations. I only wish he had included academic footnotes for those who would like to explore his sources further. Although the set would not suffice by itself for RCIA classes, I would highly recommend that RCIA programs use Alison’s material to provide the depth for which all people hunger.

Father Gerald J. Bednar, PhD
Saint Mary Seminary and
Graduate School of Theology
Wickliffe, Ohio

Poetry

Exact Likeness

The immensity
of God himself
now resides
in this tiny child.
The Flawless One comes
to live among
the utterly flawed.
Because he entered
a human womb,
even we may stand
before the holy.

Teresa Burlison





EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Louise Borgione

As a youngster, I was in the “habit” of attending Mass. However, as I look back, I was just an ordinary Catholic, understanding little and not getting much out of it, until about 30 years ago when I attended a retreat called Christ Renews His Parish, held at our church, Saint Paschal Baylon.

Not having had the benefit of a Catholic school education, attending a retreat was new to me. I must admit that the first day seemed to drag and didn’t make much of an impression. But God sure changed that! The weekend ended with a special Mass with the priest, the participants, and the team members gathered around a large dinner table. Just before we received Communion, God chose to touch me in a special way. It changed my life forever. It was a feeling I had never experienced before. I knew he was present in me and would always be with me, no matter what life would bring. After that weekend, I hungered for a deeper relationship with him, which grew stronger as the years passed.

It was divine providence that, ten years later, a program called Life in the Eucharist came to our parish. I attended and subsequently got deeply involved in it for many years, learning more about Christ’s love in the Eucharist, reading Scripture, and understanding the meaning of the Mass more fully. I could never grasp why the church calls the non-holiday season, “Ordinary Time,” because, to me, Mass is anything but ordinary.

I could go on and on about how my new Christian life has changed me, but I would simply like to expound on one of my favorite scripture stories, the Road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). What strikes me is how the eyes of the disciples were opened when they realized Jesus was before them, as if they were seeing him for the very first time.

After a lifetime as a Catholic, my eyes have been “opened” and I can see Jesus everywhere and work hard to see him in everyone I meet and in all situations, particularly with difficult people and circumstances. It is something I work at and pray about every time I receive the Eucharist. His example of love, forgiveness, and inclusiveness permeates the back of my mind, even though at times it is difficult to implement.

Every time I receive the Eucharist, Jesus reveals himself to me as the Bread of Life and calls me to recognize his presence in all people. He comes to open my eyes and help me see him in those around me and share his love.



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Anthony Schueller, SSS

(Signed) Anthony Schueller, SSS, Editor, Emmanuel.



The Blessed Virgin Mary was one of the great loves of Saint Peter Julian Eymard's life. He frequently visited shrines and places of Marian devotion. This love for Mary also led him to join the Society of Mary. He would be a steadfast and passionate minister on behalf of the Marists for 17 years until he could no longer refuse the stirrings of his heart to found a religious order dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament. Yet even in this dramatic step the Blessed Virgin Mary was never far from his mind. As he wrote in his retreat notes, "Mary has led me by the hand . . .to the priesthood; then to the Holy Eucharist."¹

For such a great love Advent must have been a time of tremendous joy for Father Eymard. Not only was it the season of anticipation for the great Emmanuel, but it was also the commemoration of Mary's selfless Magnificat. Moreover, it was a joyous reminder of Mary's beautiful words to the angel Gabriel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word (Lk 1:38 NAB)." Perhaps through Mary's words and actions Father Eymard even found some inspiration for his own "gift of self" whereby he wished to give his whole self to God. May our hearts be so disposed in this Advent season.

¹Saint Peter Julian Eymard, Note de Retraite 44, 109 March 1865.



“The dominant virtue of a religious of the Blessed Sacrament. . . . Let me explain it to you: it is the virtue of Saint John the Baptist. His disciples were jealous of his glory; the servants are jealous of their master’s glory since they have none of their own. ‘Master, the one that you baptized in the Jordan, everyone is going to him—everyone is abandoning you. Saint John answered, You make me happy! . . . He must increase and become great, while I must disappear, become less, and bury myself. . . .’”

Conference to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
December 28, 1860

Saint Peter Julian Eymard