

# Emmanuel

*Eucharistic Spirituality*



May/June 2015



The Eucharistic Vision of Vatican II:  
Dei Verbum

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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 121 Number 3



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## FROM THE EDITOR

Some years ago, I presided at the funeral of a longtime parishioner. The moment I remember most from the Mass is when a young man came forward in a wheelchair to proclaim the New Testament reading. He began: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose . . ." (Rom 8:28). He read with a clear, strong voice, perfectly cadenced, and concluded, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (38-39).

There was absolute silence in the assembly as he read. Afterward, tears flowed both for the deceased man and for Michael, the grandson who had proclaimed the text. I found out later that Michael had suffered the devastating injury that left him paralyzed one warm summer day as he swam with a group of college friends. With the exuberance of youth, he dove into the lake and hit bottom, severing his spinal cord. His life changed in an instant; yet he came to accept it and thus could proclaim on the day his grandfather was buried, "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Certainly all of us have had the experience of listening to a scripture passage being proclaimed so beautifully, so authentically that it felt like we were hearing it for the very first time. Such is the power of the spoken word!

Pope Francis reminds us, as he did two years ago while addressing an international gathering of biblical scholars, that the church's life and mission are founded on the word of God, "which is the soul of theology as well as the inspiration of all of Christian existence." And the heart of the word that God has enunciated to humanity is the person Jesus Christ.

As we highlight *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, in this issue of *Emmanuel*, let me quote a favorite number from the decree: "The church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body" (21).

We are fed at two tables; both nourish and govern our Christian life.

### **In this Issue**

Robert J. Nogosek, CSC, who was present at Vatican II as an invited theologian, has written a very clear article enumerating the core ideas and teachings of *Dei Verbum* and helping us understand, from the perspective of someone who was actually there, how the decree gradually took shape as it moved through three revisions to its final form. Complementing Father Nogosek's summary is a very personal reflection by James W. Brown on his experience of engaging the Scriptures and undertaking biblical studies after the council.

Also in Eucharistic Teachings, Dennis Billy, CSsR, introduces us to the distinguished abbot, spiritual writer, and liturgist Don Columba Marmion.

You will also find shorter articles on Trinitarian theology (David H. Powell) and the notion of sacrifice in the Judeo-Christian tradition and today (Hugh Cleary, CSC). The solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity is observed on Sunday, May 31, this year and the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) on the following Sunday, June 7. May these reflections enrich your celebration of these two title feasts! 🙏

Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Editor



## *EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# The Trinity and the Gospel of John

by David H. Powell

*The farewell discourse of Jesus reveals the depth of his loving intimacy with the Father and foreshadows the coming gift of the Spirit. Through his words, we come to understand the great mystery of the Trinity, into whose life and love we are invited.*

David H. Powell is a retired religious educator in Brooklyn, New York, who studied theology at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. During his professional career, he taught Scripture and conducted Bible discussions in parishes and Catholic high schools. He and his wife Carol have authored two books and many articles in the fields of religious education and spirituality.

**T**HE DIFFICULTY OF DOING TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY IS OFTEN SUMMARIZED IN THE legend of Saint Augustine and a little boy on the beach. While walking along the beach after a long day wrestling with the mystery of the Trinity, Augustine sees a boy trying to pour the sea into a hole in the sand with a small shell. Amused by the sight, the great theologian approaches the boy and tells him gently that no matter how hard he tries, he will never be able to pour the entire sea into the little hole, to which the boy replies, “Nor will you be able to get the mystery of the Trinity into your little human mind!”

Centuries later, preachers are still trying to fit the mystery of the Trinity into a sermon or homily. They often provoke flippant comments like, “Two’s company, but three’s not a crowd in God!” or “Doesn’t the Holy Spirit get a little jealous about something going on between the Father and the Son?”

Like the boy in the legend, contemporary theologians warn about what could be called the quicksand of Trinitarian theology. Elizabeth Johnson, Gerald O’Collins, Catherine LaCugna, and Walter Kasper — to name a few — speak about the danger implicit in talking about three persons in one God. It does not mean three individual people. Rather, it is an attempt to describe a love relationship.

### **Loving Relationship and Intimacy**

We can glean insight into that relationship if we look closely at chapters 14-17 in the Gospel of John, sometimes called the Farewell Discourse

of the Last Supper. It is not a theological treatise on the Trinity, but a place where Jesus reflects on his relationship with the Father and his asking the Father to send an advocate, the Holy Spirit, to help his disciples and to be with them forever (Jn 14:16, 26).

The farewell discourse speaks about something that is usually translated as *indwelling*: the Spirit will dwell in the disciples (14:17) and the Son will dwell in them too (14:20), as will the Father (14:23). But they in turn are to dwell in him the way branches dwell in a vine (15:4-7).

This, of course, is nothing physical; rather, it is a spiritual indwelling, something that in today's terms would be called intimacy, even mutual intimacy: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him" (14:23). Speaking at a very deep level, Jesus says that his knowledge of the Father is one of intimate communion, a knowledge that they, too, are now able to have because of their intimacy with Jesus (14:7). Moreover, the Spirit will continue to be an advocate for the disciples, for the Spirit will "teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (14:26). Thus, even after Jesus is gone from their midst, they will not be abandoned (14:18) and they will be able to do even greater works than he did (14:12). As Jesus himself testifies, his presence in them and the Father's presence in the disciples, and vice versa, will be even deeper than when he was on earth because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, sent as an advocate from the Father and Jesus.

According to scripture scholar Francis Moloney, SDB, the Holy Spirit "is the ongoing presence of the revelation of God to those who love Jesus. . . . Jesus' departure through death leads to a unique experience of life. This life flows from participation in the unity that exists between the Father and the Son, the intimacy of being loved by the Father and Jesus, and the ongoing revelation of God in and through Jesus" (*The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, Daniel Harrington, SJ, editor, Collegetown, MN, Liturgical Press, 1998, 402, 404).

In the Gospel of John, the Spirit as advocate is like Jesus coming back to them, teaching them what they need to know. But there is also something very Trinitarian here, for the Father sends the advocate at Jesus' request and in Jesus' name (14:26). All of this points to an intimacy between Father, Son, Spirit, and ourselves that is almost too deep for theological words.

The theme of intimacy continues in the famous passage about the vine and the branches at the beginning of Chapter 15. The closeness



between Jesus and his disciples is viewed as a way of life, a mutual abiding which bears fruit through the disciples observing Jesus' new commandment of love: "As the Father loves me, so also I love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (15:9-10). This is another expression of the intimacy of Father, Son, and Spirit with the disciples.

By coming to know all that Jesus has revealed to them, and by following his command to "love one another as I have loved you," the disciples of Jesus become his friends (15:12-15). But the followers of Jesus, including ourselves, do not have to figure this out on their own, for the Spirit of truth will guide them to the truth (16:13).

Raymond Brown, in his commentary on this passage, puts it this way, using the traditional word "Paraclete" to talk about the Spirit as advocate: "Precisely because Christians will experience Jesus in the internal dwelling of the Paraclete, they will also be close to the Father who is one with Jesus. . . . This is because the Paraclete/Spirit comes from the Father and begets the disciples as the Father's own children, so that their knowledge of the Father is almost connatural" (*The Gospel According to John*, Volume II, Anchor Bible Series, Garden City, Doubleday & Co., 1970, 733).

Even so, all will not be sweetness and light. Jesus points out that his followers will have conflicts in the world, just as he did (15:18-16:11). People who follow Jesus can expect to be hated and even persecuted. Passages like this lead Christian social activists to suggest that if we are not making enemies, we are not following Jesus very deeply. He promises that the Spirit will be our internal strength when we battle with political and religious authorities. A life of intimacy with Father, Son, and Spirit will involve living out the commandment of love even to the point of martyrdom.

Chapter 17 is sometimes called Jesus' priestly prayer because a priest is an intercessor between human beings and God, and in this prayer Jesus prays to his Father on behalf of his followers. He prays that those who have accepted him may be one, just as he and the Father are one (17:11). He prays that they will be protected from evil and that they will be sanctified by the truth (17:15-17).

Looking to the future, Jesus prays not only for the disciples with him



at the Last Supper, but also for those who will become his disciples as more and more people come to believe in him. He asks that all of them will be one, just as he and the Father are one in glorious unity (17:21-22). In this way, the world will come to know that the Father loves them just as he loves the Son (17:23).

The intimacy among Father, Son, Spirit, and us is so profound that it is almost too deep for words. The German biblicist Rudolph Schnackenburg expresses it thusly: "Through Jesus, who is one with the Father, the disciples are included in the unity of God and the community with him. . . . By Jesus being in the disciples and the Father being in Jesus, the community of disciples is entirely filled with God's being and in this way kept together. . . . It becomes a perfect unity and is at the same time called to make the mystery of divine unity visible in brotherly love. It is this that will enable the world to know that Jesus . . . is the one sent by God" (*Gospel According to Saint John*, Volume 3, Ch. 13-21, Herder's Theological Commentary on the New Testament, New York, Crossroad Publishing Co., Inc., 1982, 192-193).

*Speaking at a very deep level, Jesus says that his knowledge of the Father is one of intimate communion.*

Some theologians suggest that by emphasizing the intimacy between the Father and the Son, John the Evangelist leaves out the Holy Spirit. But theologians in the Middle Ages saw the Holy Spirit clearly at work in verse 26, where Jesus prays that "the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." Just as the bond of love that unites the Father and the Son is none other than the Spirit, so also the bond of love that unites Christians to God and to one another is nothing else than the Holy Spirit.

Theologians today likewise emphasize that the doctrine of God as Trinity is not about three individuals, but about love and relationship. Elizabeth Johnson reminds us that the "great minds of classical theology were aware of the poetic, allusive, and ultimately inadequate nature of the term 'person'" when speaking of the Trinity. Paul Tillich refused to use the word "persons" when speaking about the Trinity, but he was emphatic about God, Father, Son, and Spirit being personal!

### **Relational Activity**

The Father, Son, and Spirit are continually active, with the Father



abiding in the Son and ourselves so that we in turn can “act out” their love, and with the Son sending forth the Spirit to give us wisdom and courage. Theologian Anthony Godzieba says: “The triune God is primarily an event, a verb rather than a subject, a pure giving and receiving in an eternal perichoretic communion into which we are invited.” In ancient Greek, *perichoretic* meant dancing around in a circle.

Another action word derived from Greek is *kenosis*. Originally used by Paul to portray Christ emptying himself of his divinity by dying on the cross (Phil 2:5), it has now become used by theologians like Raimon Panikkar to describe the Father pouring himself out to the Son, the Son pouring himself out for us on the cross, and thereby pouring out the Spirit upon us through his blood. This kenotic theme continues in Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to his disciples, where he says, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” After which, the risen Christ breathes on them and says to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20: 21-22). Thus, the Fourth Gospel’s Trinitarian reflections in the farewell discourse continue and deepen in the passion and resurrection narratives.

*A life of intimacy with Father, Son, and Spirit will involve living out the commandment of love.*


Perhaps the most widely read work on the Trinity in the past decade has been *The Shack*, a novel by William Paul Young. After the main character’s daughter is kidnapped while on a family camping trip, he seeks solitude in an old shack, where members of the Trinity appear to him. At first glance, while the book seems to reflect the worst of every misunderstanding of three persons in one God, a careful reading reveals a stunning reinforcement of John’s emphasis on the relational activity of the Father, Son, and Spirit on our behalf.

The novel takes great liberties with the personifications of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The head of the family goes by the name Papa, but is an African American female, Jesus is an ordinary looking Middle Eastern laborer, and the Spirit is an Asian female named Sarayu. A judge named Sophia is also introduced later in the novel as the female personification of Papa’s wisdom.

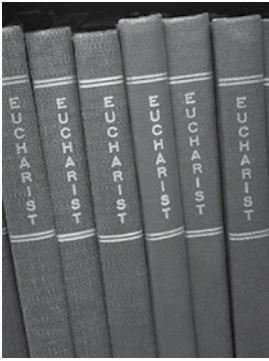
But as the novel unfolds and the connection of the characters with

each other deepens, the traditional Trinitarian theme of relationship becomes quite clear, and we see how their interaction is also an activity that brings salvation. Even the not-so-sophisticated reader will come away with the impression that the Trinitarian persons are not the product of vague abstract philosophizing. Instead, they are God whose nature is relationship and whose essence is ongoing, outpouring love for the universe and everyone in it.

In its own way, *The Shack* falls into the quicksand of trying to explain how the three persons fit with each other as if they were separate individuals. Because the characters are so memorable, the reader is tempted to continue imagining that the Trinity is three people relating to each other in some fascinating and mysterious manner.

Reflecting on John 14-17 pulls us out of that trap while helping us to understand that the Father, Son, and Spirit are in dynamic relationship with one another and ourselves for the sake of our salvation. 

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## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Revisiting Dei Verbum on Its Fiftieth Anniversary

by Robert J. Nogosek, CSC

*Pope Francis has said that only half of Vatican II has been acted upon, and that we need to put into practice what has not yet been implemented. The latter could include the teaching of Dei Verbum, the Constitution on Divine Revelation, which was approved by Vatican II 50 years ago during the council's third period in the fall of 1964.*

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**W**HEN THE NEWLY-REVISED TEXT OF DEI VERBUM WAS PRESENTED FOR consideration by the assembly on September 30, 1964, it was described as underpinning the whole project of Vatican II and thus in some way being an introduction to all the other documents of the council. Even though this key importance of *Dei Verbum* to the whole council was seemingly forgotten by the council fathers in their final rush to complete the council in the fall of the following year, the idea of *Dei Verbum* being foundational to Vatican II suggests that revisiting it should also involve revisiting the purpose for which Pope John XXIII summoned the council.

### The Council's Basic Purpose

For his startling announcement of an ecumenical council, Pope John XXIII chose the celebration of the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls on January 25, 1959, three months after he had become pope. The council was needed, he said, "that the new pontificate may come to grips, in a clear and well-defined way, with the spiritual needs of the present time . . . for the strengthening of religious unity and the kindling of a more intense Christian fervor."<sup>1</sup> A few days later, he mentioned that the church "is on a journey . . . and the task of the one who leads it is not to preserve it as though it were a museum."<sup>2</sup>

Within three months, the pope already was describing the council as "a new Pentecost"<sup>3</sup> — an expression he later would use in composing

a prayer to the Holy Spirit for the success of the council, asking that the wonders of the Holy Spirit be renewed now “in this our day, as a new Pentecost,” that “the light and strength of the Gospel may be extended more and more in human society.”<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the basic purpose of the council was to reignite the church’s mission of evangelizing the world of our time through the expression of a more intense spiritual fervor in all its members.

Eventually, the council’s purpose would be termed “renewal,” as evidenced in the council’s opening “Message to Humanity” of October 20, 1962. The assembly of the church’s worldwide hierarchy explained that they were gathering in council to devote all their energies and thoughts to the renewal of themselves and the flocks committed to their care, “so that there may radiate before all men the lovable features of Jesus Christ, who shines in our hearts ‘that God’s splendor may be revealed.’”

This quest for a new spirit of evangelizing the modern world brought about through a personal relationship with the risen Christ indicates that the council would focus not only on how the church relates to the world of today, but also how those belonging to the church relate to God by a personal faith in Jesus Christ. Both issues would be of concern to *Dei Verbum* as a pastoral document on the divine revelation meant to be transmitted by the church to all nations.

Obviously, the council could create only a pastoral plan to prepare the church for experiencing “a new Pentecost” dedicated to evangelizing the modern world. The task of implementing this plan remained as the council ended on December 8, 1965; and soon the pastoral leadership of the church began to worry about an apparent non-arrival of a new Pentecost. This resulted in Pope Paul VI issuing his 1975 apostolic constitution *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World) and addressing it “to the episcopate, to the clergy, and to all the faithful of the entire world.”

### **“Three Burning Questions”**

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* began with Pope Paul recalling the demands of Vatican II that we present the heritage of our faith to the people of our time in a way that is both understandable and persuasive. This had been a commitment of the assembly of the council already in its initial “Message to Humanity,” saying that the council would “take pains so to present to the men of this age God’s truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and gladly assent to it.” Pope Paul added that “it



is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity” (3). He then challenged us with “three burning questions” (4):

1. In our day, what has happened to that hidden energy of the Good News which is able to have a powerful effect on man’s conscience?
2. To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century?
3. What methods should be followed in order that the power of the Gospel may have its effect?

The obligation of the church to evangelize the modern world as a commitment of Vatican II was again highlighted by Pope John Paul II in his 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate), commemorating the 25th anniversary of the council’s Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*. He said the moment has come to commit all the church’s energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*” (3.4), for “God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity . . . in which people are gradually drawing closer to gospel ideals and values,” as seen by “the rejection of violence and war; respect for the human person and for human rights; the desire for freedom, justice, and brotherhood; the surmounting of different forms of racism and nationalism; the affirmation of the dignity and role of women” (86.1).

He says our response to this new worldwide evangelical opportunity is not to be based on human abilities, “but on the power of the risen Lord” (23.4), like the church experienced at Pentecost, filling the apostles “with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them” (24.1). This calls us, he said, to “a new evangelization, or a “re-evangelization” (33.4).

The call for “a new evangelization” was reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2012 motu proprio *Porta Fidei* (The Door of Faith), as a reason for his announcing a Year of Faith in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. He said that from the beginning of his pontificate he had insisted on “the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ” (2).

This Year of Faith was concluded on November 24, 2013, by Pope Francis issuing his apostolic exhortation *Gaudium Evangelii* (The Joy of the Gospel), calling the church to “a new phase of evangelization, one marked by enthusiasm and vitality” (17). We are “to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel” (20) with “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the church’s . . . ways of doing things . . . can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (27). It is to have “a missionary style . . . not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed,” but simply concentrating “on the essentials” (35). This requires what he calls “a pastoral conversion” in the way we express the life and mission of the church.

It is noteworthy that *Dei Verbum* has also been described with a similar language of conversion. On the day of its promulgation, the leading theologian of the council, Yves Congar, wrote in his Council Diary that *Dei Verbum* is “a great text which provides theology with *the means* of becoming evangelical.”<sup>5</sup> Later, the theologian René Latourelle called *Dei Verbum* “a kind of Copernican revolution” in his *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*<sup>6</sup> and Pope Benedict XVI would say in his 2010 apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (The Word of the Lord) that *Dei Verbum* involves a “paradigm shift in the church’s relation with the word” (28).

The fact that *Dei Verbum* involved a radical change of attitude could explain why the forging of its text was so arduous and extended across all the years of the council, such that whenever it came up for discussion by the assembly it incited a dramatic confrontation between opposing blocks, necessitating an annual revision of its text. Underlying this is the question of how *Dei Verbum* involves a radical change in attitude. That may be best answered by revisiting the story of its tumultuous journey through the council, as marked by each of its annual revisions from 1962 to 1965.

### **The First Revision: 1962**

The text on divine revelation was one of the first schemas presented to the assembly in its opening session in 1962. As entitled *De Fontibus Revelationis* (On the Sources of Revelation), it was already a revision of an initial text entitled *De Deposito Revelationis* (On the Deposit of Revelation) that had been formulated by the Theological Commission



under the presidency of Cardinal Ottaviani after Pope John XXIII had assigned to it "questions concerning Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, faith, and morals."<sup>7</sup>

The text *De Deposito Revelationis* began with a preface on the right and duty of the universal episcopate to defend this deposit of faith, and then took up as chapters 1. the power of the human mind to reach the truth, 2. the ability of natural reason to demonstrate the existence of God, 3. the condemnation of evolutionism, and 4. divine revelation as a communication of a body of truths. Following this, there were six additional chapters condemning contemporary threats to these doctrines.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, Pope John XXIII had established the Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs to consult bishops worldwide, the Roman Curia, and some Catholic universities on topics needing discussion by the council. After the tabulation of the results of this survey, a revision of the preparatory schema was formulated by the Theological Commission and entitled *De Fontibus Revelationis*. This text emphasized the authority of the church in defining and interpreting the truths of revelation necessary for salvation as contained in the two sources of Scripture and Tradition.

In the presentation of this preparatory schema to the assembly for debate on November 14, 1962, its contents were summarized as focusing on the task of the church's teaching authority to preserve, defend, and authentically interpret the truths of divine revelation, some of which were not set in writing by the authors of the New Testament and are to be found only in the Tradition of the church. The text also declared that every part of Scripture was inspired by God as moving the human author to write what God intended, with the result that every detail recorded, whether religious or secular, is entirely free from error. The text went on to condemn any questioning of the historical accuracy of the gospel accounts of Jesus' words and actions, such as saying that some words of Jesus in the Gospels were not his, but rather came from the evangelist composing the text or even from teachings of the early Christian communities.

Those formulating the schema believed that without the doctrine on the two sources of divine revelation it was impossible to defend the dogmatic definitions of the Immaculate Conception by Pius IX in 1854 and that of the Assumption of Mary by Pius XII in 1950. They also took



for granted that the intention of the Council of Trent in condemning the Protestant denial of the authority of the magisterium of the Catholic Church through Luther's principle of "Scripture alone" (*sola scriptura*) included the doctrine of the two sources of divine revelation.

In the immediate years preceding the council, however, many Catholic theologians had concluded from recent historical studies that in Trent's rejection of the Protestant reformers it had not decreed the teaching on the two sources of divine revelation. Among them were individual Catholic theologians, such as Karl Rahner, who held that Sacred Scripture could "materially" contain even these Marian dogmas.

*John XXIII hoped that through the council "the light and strength of the Gospel [might] be extended more and more in human society."*

Following the presentation of *De Fontibus Revelationis* to the assembly on November 20, 1962, leading members of the council immediately rose to declare that this schema on divine revelation was not suitable for discussion by the assembly because it was not in accord with the pastoral and ecumenical purpose of the council. Their stance quickly won the acceptance of a majority of the assembly because many of the episcopal conferences had been inviting their leading theologians to explain the issue, which included a new personalist and biblical theology of divine revelation describing the act of faith as a personal encounter with God, rather than simply as an act of obedience to the authority of God revealing for our salvation truths beyond the attainment of reason.

By November 20, 1962, it had become obvious that a vast majority of the members of the assembly was opposed to the scheme as it stood, and so the Council of Presidents interrupted the debate for a vote from the assembly on whether or not to continue the discussion of the schema. To this question, 1,268 agreed by a vote of *placet*, and 822 disagreed by a vote of *non placet*. Since the vote had not reached the needed two-thirds majority, the Council of Presidents announced that the discussion on the schema would continue the following day, creating a severe crisis threatening the very continuation of the council.

On the following day, however, Pope John addressed a message to



the assembly saying that “yielding to the wishes of many” he had decided to refer the document to a mixed commission made up of the members both of the Doctrinal Commission and the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Its task would be to amend the schema, shorten it, and make it more suitable, with an emphasis especially on general principles.

On December 6, 1962, Pope John created a new Coordinating Commission under the headship of his secretary of state, Cardinal Cicognani. It was to control the agenda of the council and was given authority to see that all the documents responded to the aims of the council that Pope John had set forth in his opening address.

### **The Second Revision: 1963**

The arrangements for revising the Constitution on Divine Revelation were promulgated by the Coordinating Commission at its first meeting January 21-27, 1963. Its leadership directed the meetings of the new mixed commission under Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea to formulate a compromise document. After nine sessions, however, the revised document was so severely criticized that the mixed commission agreed it was not ready to be placed on the agenda of the council in the fall. Instead, the second revision would be placed in the hands of the conciliar fathers with a request for their comments and criticisms on how it should be revised. These suggestions then became the basis for a third revision of the document that would be presented to the council for debate in the fall of 1964. In his address to the council at the conclusion of its second period, Pope Paul insisted that an important task remaining for their consideration was the Constitution on Divine Revelation.

### **The Third Revision: 1964**

On September 30, 1964, the assembly again took up for debate the schema on divine revelation, now in its third revision, but still without its final title of *Dei Verbum*. For the most part, this revision continued to follow the original outline of *De Fontibus Revelationis*, but the first two chapters were significantly different. Instead of assuming that revelation consisted of truths or doctrines, it emphasized that revelation was God’s self-disclosure, the revealing of himself, which was expressed in God’s action (*gesta*) in history and God’s pronouncements (*verba*).

God's own self-manifestation is the source of revelation, not Scripture or Tradition as such. Since it is in and through Jesus Christ, both by the incarnation and the resurrection, that the ultimate form of God's revelation is addressed to us, the object of our faith does not consist in timeless truths that can be expressed as revealed to us, but is the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate as a man and now present to us as the risen Lord. What we hold in faith is our acceptance of God's self-disclosure addressed to us in and through Jesus Christ.

This makes faith a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, passed on to others mainly by the witness of our faith. This transmission of the Christian faith takes place both by Scripture and Tradition. This results in faith formation being devoted to knowledge from the witness of our faith in Jesus Christ. It might be called the basis of "evangelical Catholicism," and makes Scripture the soul of theology.

*The object of faith does not consist in timeless truths that can be expressed as revealed to us, but is the person of Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.*

This is why *Dei Verbum* states that "all the preaching of the church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture" (21), that "the church is concerned to move ahead daily toward a deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures so that she may unceasingly feed her children with the divine words" (23), and why *Dei Verbum* ends with the "hope for a new surge of spiritual vitality from intensified veneration for God's word, which lasts forever" (26).

By citing Jerome that "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," *Dei Verbum* urges all the faithful "to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ" (25). This was the way in which the Constitution on Divine Revelation was formulated for the pastoral and ecumenical purposes of Vatican II.

In many ways, one could argue that *Dei Verbum* was a compromise document, thereby making it acceptable as it stands even to the conservative minority. By focusing on pastoral renewal and on openness to ecumenism, the document could bypass some of the pressing concerns expressed by the minority, based on a fear of errors creeping into the church. They saw such errors coming from modern methods of exegesis and from failing to define the church according to the methods of the Counter-Reformation. But *Dei Verbum* did



stress the importance of spiritual experience in our witness of the faith, despite the minority's opinion that an emphasis on such spiritual experience is a return to the errors of Modernism.

No clear stand was taken in the document on how and to what extent the Bible is free from error, nor was any decision made clarifying whether or not Marian doctrines recently defined as from revelation might be seen as sufficiently defended as contained "materially" in the Scriptures. Those of the minority who still held it essential that the document proclaim the two-source theory as the teaching of the Council of Trent retreated to a strategy of getting the constitution withdrawn from the council documents. These attempts were unsuccessful, as demonstrated by the overwhelming consensus expressed by the assembly when *Dei Verbum* was approved in the final weeks of the council in 1965. Of the 2,115 votes cast, only 7 were no and another 7 were void.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusion

The ongoing postconciliar series of papal exhortations on the church's evangelizing mission to the modern world may suggest a "sign of the times" like the haunting refrain of the Revelation 2-3: "Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches," warning us of having a faith that is merely lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold.<sup>10</sup> As in Revelation 3:20, the risen Jesus stands knocking at our door of faith, waiting for us to invite him into our lives in a personal relationship. Such a "first-hand" faith would overcome today's tendency of separating religion from life, cited in *Gaudium et Spes* as among the most serious errors of our age (43) and as having contributed to the birth of modern atheism (19).



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *History of Vatican II* (Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, Eds.), Vol. I, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, pp. 1f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II* (Walter M. Abbott, Editor), New York: Herder and Herder, 1966, 793.

<sup>5</sup> Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012, 845

<sup>6</sup> René Latourelle, "Dei Verbum" in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, eds.), New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1990, 2000, 218.

<sup>7</sup> *History*, Vol. 1, 227.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 240ff.

<sup>9</sup> *History*, Vol. V, 2006, p. 340, fn. 298.

<sup>10</sup> 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22.



## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Reflecting on Dei Verbum

by James W. Brown

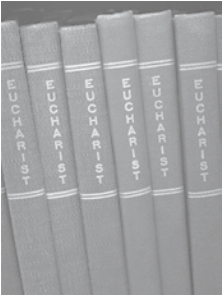
GROWING UP IN THE 1950s, OUR FAMILY OWNED A LARGE, BEAUTIFULLY-GILDED Bible. It sat prominently on a small chest in our living room. As I recall, our parents wanted to publicly witness to our Catholic faith. I also remember that inside the Bible there was a section with names and sacramental records of our extended family — a kind of family tree. I loved to look at the illustrations by famous artists of biblical scenes in that Bible. *But we rarely read it.* At that time, most Catholics did not.

This all changed following the Second Vatican Council with the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) on November 18, 1965. Within a decade, Catholics were not only reading the Bible, they began taking Bible study classes and owning new translations, e.g., *The Jerusalem Bible*. *The Good News for Modern Man: The New Testament in Today's English* became a widely used “textbook” in Catholic high schools (where I taught in the 1970s) and in parish CCD programs.

My own Bible journey and love for exploring the Scriptures was largely influenced by a scripture professor I had in the late 1960s, Father Eugene Maly. He was a *peritus* at Vatican II and at the time the chair of the editorial board of *The Bible Today*. He taught with joy and a genuine enthusiasm for the Scriptures. As we were learning to apply critical tools in our study of the Bible, he impressed upon us: “You have nothing to fear in reading the Bible. For you have nothing to fear from the truth.”

One of his favorite examples is from Daniel 5:31, where we read that Babylon was conquered by “Darius the Mede.” Actually, it was captured by the Persians who had already conquered the Medes. Father Maly would smile and say something to the effect that this historical inaccuracy does not alter the fundamental truth of the story: that all earthly kingdoms would one day give way to the messianic kingdom.

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A careful reading of the opening chapters of Genesis reveals two creation accounts. The first is the story of the world created in seven days (1:1-2:3), written, scholars tell us, in the sixth century B.C. The second is the account of Adam and Eve (2:5-25), written around 950 B.C. Like all great stories, it contains powerful truths about life, good and evil, humanity's relationship with God and nature, and more. I'll leave it to scientists to explain how the world evolved. The biblical truth of these stories speaks of God the creator of the universe and of his covenant with humankind — whatever the scientific or historical process involved.

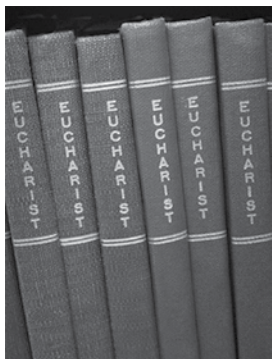
Soon after the council ended, our parish priests began encouraging us to read the Bible and stressed the importance of the Scriptures for both the deepening of our faith and our spiritual growth. We read in *Dei Verbum*: "Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and the increase in faith of the peoples of God" (8) and "Easy access to Sacred Scriptures should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (22).

We were taught to appreciate the times and cultural experience of the sacred writers and to "carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words;" to "have regard for 'literary forms.' For truth is proposed and expressed in a variety of ways, depending on whether a text is history . . . prophecy, poetry, or some other type of speech" (12).

And so, with great relish and the freshness of curious minds, we read the four "profiles" of Jesus by the four gospel writers and reflected on the different audiences to whom they, Paul, and the other evangelists wrote, all the while appreciating the diversity of the 73 books of the Bible and looking for nuggets of truth to apply to our own faith journeys. I confess that I still like to consult *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* and other commentaries when I want to dig deeper into the meaning of a word, a phrase, or a story in the Old or New Testament.

Let me close with another illustration. Look at the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-12) and the Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20-26). Then google the account of Pope Francis' response to the question of the formerly homeless twelve-year-old girl in the Philippines during his recent trip there. I invite you to pray and to ponder with me the truth contained in these passages about what it means to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect."





## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Dom Columba Marmion on the Eucharist

by Dennis J. Billy, CSsR

*Abbot and writer Dom Columba Marmion probed the powerful truths of the church's eucharistic faith and sought to present them clearly and comprehensively. He saw the intimate connection between the altar of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary and the altar of the Eucharist, discovering in each the undying love of the Savior who gave himself entirely for all of us.*

**D**OM COLUMBA MARMION (1858-1923) WAS A BENEDICTINE ABBOT AND renowned spiritual writer in the early decades of the twentieth century. He was born in Dublin of Irish and French decent and given the name Joseph Aloysius at birth. He entered Dublin's diocesan seminary in 1874, completed his theological studies in Rome, and was ordained in 1881. After ordination, he was curate for a short time in Dundrum before becoming a professor at the major seminary in Cloniffe and a chaplain for both a monastery of nuns and a women's prison. In 1886, he received permission from his bishop to become a Benedictine monk at the monastery of Maredsous in Belgium, where he professed solemn vows in 1891.

Soon afterward, Marmion took part in the founding of the Abbey of Mont César in Louvain, eventually became its prior, and in 1909 was elected Abbot of Maredsous, a position which he held until his death. A close friend and confidant of Cardinal Désiré Mercier, the archbishop of Mechelen, he was a very influential voice in Belgium and beyond in the early decades of the twentieth century. A popular retreat master and spiritual director, he gave many conferences on the spiritual life, which were eventually prepared for publication and appeared as *Christ, the Life of the Soul* (1917), *Christ in His Mysteries* (1919), *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk* (1923), and *Christ, The Ideal of the Priest* (published posthumously, 1951). His teaching on the Eucharist reflects his Benedictine love for liturgy and contemplation and lies at the heart of his spiritual outlook.<sup>1</sup>

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## Dom Marmion's Spiritual Outlook

Marmion's spiritual outlook has its roots in the Benedictine tradition, which seeks conversion of life through work, prayer, and spiritual reading. The *Rule of Saint Benedict* sought to create a "school for God's service" that would sanctify the day through a community life dedicated to liturgical worship, study, fostering the interior life, and the care of souls.<sup>2</sup> Steeped in this tradition, Marmion placed Christ at the center of all things; this brought to his writings a vision of the Christian life with appeal to Catholics from all walks of life.

Christ, for Marmion, is the author of our redemption, the cause of all grace, and the head of a mystical body that imparts his Spirit to his followers and gives life to the soul. Faith in Jesus, which lies at the very heart of the Christian life, comes to us through baptism and opens for us the possibility of sharing in his divine life. We begin this sharing at baptism when we are immersed in Christ's paschal mystery and born again as adopted sons and daughters of the Father. As a result, we are made dead to sin and empowered by the Spirit to live for God and not ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

For Marmion, everyone is called to live for God. We do so by participating in the life of the church, especially by sharing in the sacraments and seeking to grow in our relationship with Christ through prayer and love for God and neighbor. This supernatural growth in Christ comes by leading lives of continual conversion that foster the life of the theological and moral virtues.

"The sacraments," Marmion maintains, "are the principal sources of growth of the divine life within us. They act in our souls by the efficacy of their very operation, *ex opere operato*, as the sun produces light and heat; it is necessary only that within us no obstacle stand in the way of their operation."<sup>4</sup> "The Eucharist is the one [sacrament] which most increases the divine life in us, because we receive Christ in person, we drink at the very source of the living waters."<sup>5</sup>

Marmion sees the Eucharist as the food of the soul and "the sacrament of life par excellence;" it is the major means by which we grow in the love of both God and neighbor.<sup>6</sup> Through it, we are conformed to Christ's life and empowered by his Spirit to grow in his love and to live our lives centered totally on God and others. It provides us with food for our spiritual journey, gives us access to the transforming grace of Christ's redemptive action, and lies at the heart of his spiritual outlook.



## Marmion's Teaching on the Eucharist

Dom Marmion is quick to point out our own inability to bridge the gap between the human and the divine: "All the efforts of human nature, left to itself, at a distance from Christ, are not able to advance us one step in the achieving of that union, in the birth and development of the life it brings forth. It is God alone who gives us the seed-germ and the growth; we care for the plant, we water it: that is necessary, indispensable . . . but the fruits are produced only because God causes the sap of his grace to rise within us."<sup>7</sup> The Eucharist, in his mind, is the principal means God uses to bridge that gap, nourish our souls, and transform us into his adopted sons and daughters.

How does this happen? In the Eucharist, Christ immolates himself as an eternal offering for sin. This eucharistic sacrifice is a mystery of faith that cannot be fully captured in words. The Mass, for Marmion, is a true sacrifice where Christ is both victim and high priest and where the bloody sacrifice of Calvary is made present in an unbloody manner. The same Christ who was immolated on the altar of the cross is immolated at the sacrifice of the altar. As high priest, he is the mediator between God and man, the "anointed one" who bridges the chasm between divinity and humanity. Christ possesses an eternal priesthood, which he shares with others in different degrees and for varying purposes.<sup>8</sup>

*The Mass is an act of perfect worship, for it represents the selfless offering of Christ on our behalf.*

For Marmion, the sacrifices of the Old Testament are only vague figures of the immolation that took place on Calvary. This sacrifice possesses infinite value and is the only way in which we can reestablish the communion with the divine that we lost on account of our sins. The immolation of Christ on Calvary is reproduced and renewed at the sacrifice of the altar: "The Mass is not just a simple *representation* of the sacrifice of the cross; it is not just the value of a simple remembrance. It is a true sacrifice, the same as the sacrifice of Calvary, which it reproduces and continues and the fruits of which it applies."<sup>9</sup>

In Marmion's eyes, the Mass gives us access to the same fruits as the cross. It is an act of perfect worship, for it represents the selfless offering of Christ on our behalf. For this reason, it is a source of confidence and pardon, a true propitiatory sacrifice in which Christ, the divine victim,



appeases God and makes him favorable to us. It is also an act of petition and supplication, whereby those worshipping seek light, strength, and consolation. At Mass, we participate in the oblation of the altar by identifying ourselves with Christ, the high priest and the victim. Receiving Holy Communion is the most assured way of maintaining the divine life within us. In this banquet, Christ gives himself to us as the bread of life; he becomes food for our souls and offers us his divine friendship so that he dwells in us and we in him.<sup>10</sup>

Through the Eucharist, Christ transforms us into himself: "In receiving Jesus Christ, we receive him whole and entire — his body, his blood, his soul, his humanity, his divinity. Christ makes us enter into his thoughts, share his feelings; he communicates his virtues to us, but above all he enkindles in us that 'fire' he came to cast upon the earth, the fire of love, of charity; *that* is the purpose of this transformation produced by the Eucharist."<sup>11</sup> To receive these fruits, however, we must be properly prepared to receive them and take care to remove any obstacles that would hinder their proper functioning in our lives. "As food is only given to the living, so the Eucharist is only given to those who already possess the life of grace."<sup>12</sup> We must take care to prepare ourselves properly to receive it by rooting out sin and seeking to adhere more closely to God's life in us.

For Marmion, the distinctive fruit of the Eucharist is "the identification of ourselves with Christ, through faith and love." If we receive the body of Christ well, we become what we receive.<sup>13</sup> The Eucharist, in this respect, ". . . is the food of the soul that *maintains, restores, increases,* and *gladdens* the life of grace in the soul, because it gives to it the very author of grace."<sup>14</sup>

Marmion also sees the Eucharist as the "sacrament of union with Christ as head of the mystical body."<sup>15</sup> The sacrament "makes the faithful enter more fully into that plenitude of the supernatural order which makes Christ and us one incomparable unity."<sup>16</sup> When we receive Holy Communion, we come into contact with Jesus and submit ourselves to his gentle rule of love: "In the sacrament, Jesus touches, sanctifies, and takes possession of the soul. He casts his rays upon it from the glorious shelter of the Eucharist. As long as the sacred species remain unaltered, the soul receives the benefit of this *contactus virtutis*; it becomes more dependent on the action of the Lord, more profoundly united to his mystical body. But when the sacramental presence ceases, the faithful Christian, as a member of the mystical body, remains still

under the influence of the Savior.”<sup>17</sup> Marmion bids us, moreover, not to place any obstacles in the way of receiving the fruits of Communion: “Christ cannot unite himself to a soul which is not humble, to a heart which does not receive him unreservedly, which neglects the duties of its state, or above, all, which is closed to its neighbor for lack of charity or the spirit of forgiveness.”<sup>18</sup>

## **Observations**

This brief exposition of Don Marmion’s teaching on the Eucharist shows the central place it holds in his spiritual outlook and emphasizes his understanding of the sacrament’s importance for the church’s life and worship. The following observations develop some of the implications of his view of the sacrament and their relevance today.

1. To begin with, Dom Marmion roots his teaching on the Eucharist firmly in the tradition of the church. He employs quotations from Scripture, the ecumenical councils (especially Trent), and the church fathers, as well as distinctions from scholasticism, and the monastic emphasis on experience to offer a synthesis of the church’s teaching on the Eucharist. His teaching is comprehensive, thorough, and well-rounded, one that goes to the heart of the sacrament, while at the same time respecting the limits of human knowledge and our inability to exhaust the full meaning of this central mystery of our faith. His knowledge of the tradition enables him to present the Eucharist in a way that fosters faith across a wide spectrum of the faithful, from those who are well along in their spiritual journey to those just starting out. His influence as a spiritual director and retreat master stems, at least in part, from his ability to stress the essentials of the faith in a simple and relatively easy manner to a wide audience.

2. Dom Marmion emphasizes the sacrificial nature of the Mass and its intrinsic connection to Jesus’ death on Calvary. This immolation of Christ at Mass is the same as his immolation on the cross, the only difference being that the first occurs in an unbloody rather than bloody manner. While this teaching comes straight from the Council of Trent,<sup>20</sup> Marmion uses it to expound the mysterious connection between the sacrament and the faith of the believer. Through the eyes of faith, the believer is immersed in the saving mystery of Christ’s passion and death: the cross of Calvary becomes one with the consecrated bread and wine; those who eat and drink of Christ’s body and blood and are immersed in his redemptive self-emptying. His oblation becomes



their oblation, and theirs, his. Marmion brings new life to the church's traditional teaching by highlighting the experiential nature of the sacramental mysteries. By eating Jesus' eucharistic body and blood, believers unite themselves in an intimate way with Christ and his journey to the Father.

3. Dom Marmion describes the Eucharist as the sacrament that most increases the divine life within us. It does so because it puts us directly in touch with the person of Christ and his paschal mystery. At the altar of sacrifice, our meager offerings of bread and wine are transformed into Christ's body and blood to become food for our souls that nourishes and strengthens us for our spiritual journey. The Eucharist, in this respect, has a transformative effect on our lives; it conforms us to Christ and empowers us to love as he loves. By means of the Eucharist, we enter into communion with Christ and share in his divine life. This supernatural ordering of our persons to Christ is accomplished primarily through grace and only secondarily through our willful cooperation. The most we can do is purify our hearts by repenting of sin and opening our hearts to the work he wishes to accomplish in us. The purpose of the Eucharist is to foster the divine life of Christ within our hearts so that our thoughts, feelings, words, and actions might be in concert with the promptings of his Spirit who dwells in us.

4. Dom Marmion emphasizes the importance of our being properly prepared to receive the Eucharist. For the grace of the sacrament to bear fruit in our lives, we must take care to remove any obstacles that might get in the way of its operation. The stream of grace cannot enter a vessel whose mouth has closed by sin and hardness of heart. Repentance of our spiritual and moral failures is necessary before the redemptive and transforming grace of the sacrament can touch our lives and bring about its desired effect. It is wrong simply to presume God's forgiveness without taking advantage of the means God has provided for us to confess our sins and receive forgiveness. There is an intimate relationship between the Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation, and the faithful are to take care to seek forgiveness for serious sin before receiving Holy Communion. The bread of angels has no positive effect on those who have embraced the dark side of human nature and done nothing to free themselves from the hold it has over them.

5. Dom Marmion emphasizes not only the sacrificial and

nourishing dimensions of the Eucharist, but also Christ's real presence: "Through Holy Communion, Christ *dwells in us* and we in him."<sup>21</sup> When we receive the sacrament with the proper dispositions, our humanity enters into close, intimate contact with the humanity of the glorified Christ, who embraces us, dwells within us, and transforms us from within. Through the Eucharist, Christ transforms us into himself and empowers us to give a complete gift of ourselves to God and others.<sup>22</sup> Every action of our lives, therefore, ought to be oriented toward receiving Communion and maintaining this deep relationship with Christ. His real and abiding presence in the sacrament demands special reverence, because it points to his real and abiding presence in our own lives and the transforming effect it has on the members of his mystical body. Seen in this light, the Eucharist, in its various dimensions (sacrifice, banquet, and presence), represents the primary means by which we participate in Christ's paschal mystery and share in its fruits.

*For Marmion, the distinctive fruit of the Eucharist is "the identification of ourselves with Christ, through faith and love."*

6. For Marmion, Christ is both priest and victim at the eucharistic sacrifice, and we have been given the privilege in sharing in his redemptive life. Because of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, we have become a priestly people who offer ourselves to God the Father through Christ's mediation. Christ takes the burdens of our weak and sinful humanity onto himself and suffers the penalty of death on our behalf in order to free us from our sins and allow us to enter into right relationship with his Father. His Spirit is the bond that unites us to him and makes us members of his mystical body. Christ continues to live his paschal mystery in the members of his body, the church. Because we share in his paschal mystery in such an intimate way, we, too, become both priest and victim in the offering of ourselves at Mass and in the living out of the fruits of the Eucharist in our lives.

7. Finally, the Eucharist for Marmion is both the "sacrament of unity" and the "sacrament of thanksgiving."<sup>23</sup> Through it, we celebrate our communion with God and one another and give thanks to God for the gift we have received as a result of Christ's sacrificial self-offering. Through the sacrament, we are immersed in the mystery of Christ's paschal mystery and become one with his mystical body. This



union has repercussions in the way we relate to ourselves and to one another. The Eucharist is a concrete reminder that we are no longer isolated individuals, wandering haplessly about in search of meaning for our lives, but people with a clear identity: brothers and sisters of Christ and adopted sons and daughters of the Father. The sacrament unites us to Christ and deepens our bonds with one another, enabling us to offer our lives as a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to the Father. The Eucharist is a “sacrament of unity” because it is a “sacrament of thanksgiving”—and vice versa. The two dimensions are intimately related.

### Conclusion

Although these observations barely scratch the surface of Marmion’s insights, they highlight the centrality of the Eucharist in his thought and overall spiritual outlook. They also reveal his desire to explain the profound truths of the faith in a way that is both easy to understand and that touches the experience of ordinary believers. His legacy is rooted in his eagerness to convey the truths of the Catholic faith in a comprehensive and uncompromising manner for the people of his day and for generations of believers to come.

Dom Columba Marmion was the abbot of a renowned Benedictine monastery and one of the premier spiritual authors of his day. His writings cover nearly every aspect of Christian spirituality and represent a return to the fundamentals. He places Christ at the center of the spiritual life and, in all his teachings and writings, never veers from that one basic truth. Marmion believes Christ is central to the spiritual life, because the opportunity to become adopted sons and daughters of the Father comes only through him. Without Christ’s selfless sacrificial gift on the cross, we have no possibility whatsoever of entering into communion with God, let alone relating to him as a son or daughter.

The Eucharist, for Dom Marmion, is the way Christ chose to continue his redemptive action in the hearts of his followers. Through it, Christ nourishes our souls and transforms them into living members of his mystical body. He sees the Mass as an unbloody manifestation of the one bloody sacrifice of Calvary, thinks of the Eucharist as an essential spiritual food for the soul, and believes those who consume it receive the body and blood of the glorified and risen Lord. Holy Communion, for him, is an intimate and living contact with the person of Christ.

Those who do not put any obstacles in the way of the working of grace can be assured of a growing intimacy and friendship with the divine.

The Eucharist, for Dom Marmion, is the primary means by which the divine life takes root in our lives and by which we grow in love for God and neighbor. It is the sacrament of love, the sacrament of unity, and the sacrament of thanksgiving. It lies at the heart of Catholic theology and imbues every aspect of the spiritual life. This food for the soul enables Christ to be the life of the believer. Marmion dedicated his life to making this fundamental truth of the spiritual life known to as many people as possible, both within and without the walls of his monastic cloister. Beatified by Pope John Paul II on September 3, 2000, his spiritual legacy is well established and his writings continue to provide sound direction and solid food to many of today's faithful.



### Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> This biographical information comes from *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly English Edition (September 6, 2000), [http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/saints/ns\\_lit\\_doc\\_20000903\\_columba-marmion\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20000903_columba-marmion_en.html) (accessed May 20, 2014).
- <sup>2</sup> See *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, prologue, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. del Mastro (Garden City, NY: Image, 1975), 45.
- <sup>3</sup> Columba Marmion, *Christ, The Life of the Soul*, trans. Alan Bancroft (Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus Press, 2005), 60, 83, 107, 130, 167, 195, 242, 294.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 98.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.
- <sup>8</sup> See *Ibid.*, 332-34.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 342-44, 346, 349, 357-58, 361.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.
- <sup>15</sup> Columba Marmion, *Christ, The Ideal Priest*, trans. Matthew Dillon (Saint Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1952; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 249.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.
- <sup>19</sup> See Council of Trent, Session 22, chap. 2 (Denzinger, 43 ed., 1743).
- <sup>20</sup> See Marmion, *Christ, The Life of the Soul*, 296.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 364, 371.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 346, 361.



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Incensing the Altar of God

by Hugh Cleary, CSC

*Do sacrifice and the offering of incense have any place in the modern world? And what of the sacrifice of Jesus once for all?*

Father Hugh Cleary, CSC, is chaplain to the Monastery of Bethlehem, a foundation of the Monastic Family of Bethlehem, of the Assumption of the Virgin and of Saint Bruno. Their life is lived in the contemplative vocation of Saint Bruno, the patriarch of solitary monks in the West.

THE MONASTERY OF BETHLEHEM IS SITUATED IN THE PICTURESQUE CATSKILL Mountains of New York, a beautiful, serene, and sacred setting. On entering these grounds, one cannot help but be moved to worship the God of goodness, the creator of the vast universe beyond perception, but whose imminence to the earth is expressed most acutely in unfathomable intimacy with the human heart. God is “wholly other,” yet closer to us than we are to ourselves.

The monastic sisters who worship God in this place day in and day out and at every hour of the day convey a joy beyond one’s expectation. In their privileged vocation, God clearly loves them deeply and dearly through inscrutable secrets of his heart; they, in turn, know and love God through an array of spiritual dimensions seldom experienced by those whose life responsibilities and leisure necessarily situate them beyond the monastic setting.

The humble, hidden life of the sisters is one of prayer, personal prayer undertaken in the privacy of their hermitages and public prayer celebrated devoutly through solemn liturgical worship. The sisters have 32 monasteries scattered throughout the world, all constructed of a comparable architecture. In each, a simple, stark, stone altar is the centerpiece of worship and the immediate focus of the chapel.

### **Incense and Sacrifice**

During the daily rhythms of liturgical prayer, the altar is incensed conscientiously at least three times a day, often more than that. It is the sacred space set apart for sacrifice and communion in the body



and blood of Christ and the setting for eucharistic prayer, where heaven and earth are joined in a way like no other.

The rite of incense, so reverently undertaken, expresses this reality concretely, unambiguously. The aromatic smoke of incense has a varied history and meaning, but within the Judeo-Christian tradition it is used to venerate and to reverence what is sacred. This is why in the liturgy not only the altar is incensed but also the participants, because every believer is sacred. We all make up the body of Christ.

Incense is also employed as a sacrifice of praise helping to make holy the gifts offered to God on the altar. We pray in Psalm 141: "Let my prayer come like incense before you, the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice." We offer our lives as a sacrifice of praise, giving to God the best of our love, as was given to us through Jesus the best of God's love. As Jesus did on the altar of sacrifice, we offer God our love, pouring out our lives and seeking to love to the very end. That is the best of our praise. In the oblation of our sacrifice, we commit to giving the best of our love in service of our neighbor as an act of devotion to God.

The root of the Hebrew word for sacrifice, *olah*, means "to draw near." As incense rises, symbolically drawing near to God as it drifts heavenward, the purpose and value of sacrificial worship is expressed beautifully. In sacrifice, we desire to draw near to God while praying that God will "bend his ear" to us.

The sisters of the Monastery of Bethlehem devote their entire day and night to drawing near to God, the giver of all that is and the author of life. When all is said and done, we human beings are needy, dependent creatures. Without God's love, we cannot survive. We reach our highest dignity and integrity when we express our humble gratitude to God.

Sacrificial worship is uncommon today; perhaps it is only found in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Sacrificial offering was constitutive of Jewish worship. The temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus was a magnificent structure and a place of sacrifice.

At the time Jesus was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist was conceived by Zechariah and Elizabeth, despite their advanced age and barrenness. Zechariah, as a direct descendent of the high priest Aaron, the elder brother of Moses, was born into the priesthood, as were all males in Aaron's lineage. Since the offspring of Aaron were numerous — as many as 20,000 priests — many never had the opportunity to experience the great honor of offering sacrifice in



the temple on behalf of the entire nation.

The daily schedule called for a burnt offering of a one-year-old spotless male lamb twice each day, at morning and evening, as an act of praise and gratitude to God for the covenant and as a sin offering for the people. Whatever the offering might be, produce or livestock, it was always the best of the harvest or the healthiest and strongest of the herds that was returned to God in sacrifice, accompanied by an offering of incense and prayer.

In the first chapter of Luke's Gospel, Zechariah is chosen by lot to enter the innermost court of the Temple of Priests to offer incense as the unblemished lamb was slaughtered. As scripture scholar William Barclay notes, "Incense was burned on the altar of incense so that, as it were, the sacrifice might go up to God wrapped in an envelope of sweet smelling incense." Incense wrapped priest, altar, and victim in a unity of praise to God in gratitude and reparation.

*In sacrifice, we desire to draw near to God while praying that God will "bend his ear" to us.*

Catastrophically for the Jews, sacrificial offerings to God ceased once and for all when the Roman armies marched on the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in the year 70, burning it to the ground. Rome laid siege to Jerusalem to end an uprising against Roman occupation. It was a holocaust. The great historian Josephus claimed that 1.1 million people were killed, of which the majority was Jewish, and another 97,000 were captured and enslaved.

The slaughter surely tested the faith of the Hebrew people. Was God with them or not? All seemed lost; the city lay in ruins.

In the aftermath of the slaughter, bereft of their temple, the people continued to practice their faith by gathering in synagogues. There is considerable debate among archaeologists as to the actual existence of buildings called synagogues, both before and immediately after the destruction of the temple. It is thought by many scholars that perhaps the faithful gathered together in "synagogue communities," much the same way as today's "base communities" assemble without having specifically designated structures. In short order, however, actual buildings called synagogues were built for the purposes of assembly,

prayer, and study of the Torah. Unlike the temple, however, no altar of sacrifice was found in a synagogue. Sacrificial worship was replaced by prayer and study of the Jewish law.

### **A New Priest and Sacrifice**

In the gap between the end of sacrifice in the temple and the acceptance of study, prayer, and assembly in the synagogue replacing sacrificial worship, the mysterious Letter to the Hebrews appeared. Scholars still speculate the exact date, purpose, author, and audience of this letter, which boldly reformulates the identity of Jesus. Jesus was not a priest, yet the Letter to the Hebrews develops a new and rich theology of Jesus as the high priest whose sacrifice fulfills and brings to completion the promise of the Old Testament: in his unique sacrifice of self, he returns love for love. Jesus obtains forgiveness of sins for all by loving to the end. He is the priest, the altar, and the victim, fulfilling religious sacrifice offered to God.

Perhaps the author of Hebrews sought to bridge the chasm in authentic sacrificial worship rendered impossible once the temple ceased to exist. Identifying Jesus as the high priest and highlighting his once-and-for-all sacrifice, the sacred author restores a continuity of sacrificial worship in the person of Jesus, the living temple. Sacrificial worship, lost in the breach following the temple's destruction, was reestablished in the person of Jesus, fulfilling the prophet Hosea's proclamation: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

*Jesus obtains forgiveness of sins by loving to the end. He is the priest, the altar, and the victim, fulfilling religious sacrifice offered to God.*

In Jesus, the entire Christian community becomes a living temple of "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 Pt 2:5).

This identification of Jesus with the temple allowed for an expansive theological understanding of the Eucharist. Initially, celebrated domestically like the Passover meal, the Eucharist would henceforth be understood as both meal and sacrifice.

While the destruction of the temple brought an end to Jewish rites of sacrificial worship, neighboring tribes and peoples only



began forsaking their rites in the process of mastering their natural environments. For the ancients, the offering of sacrifice expressed a primordial instinct for survival rooted deep in the human psyche. Gradually overcoming their fear of nature's forces, they slowly desacralized and abandoned their gods, becoming gods unto themselves.

Human history has surely seen the repression of the instinct to worship powers above and beyond us, and sacrificial worship has long since been consigned to the dust bins of time. The Age of Enlightenment, also a decisive moment in epochal change, has taught us to move beyond such superstitions to place our trust, instead, in the powers of human intelligence. Reason is now the object of worship, celebrated through cults of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and self-determination.

*Today's secular temples are the world's stock exchanges, where the worship of mammon is carried out as devoutly and intensely as prayers in a monastery.*

In today's world, the worship celebrated in the Monastery of Bethlehem and in the liturgical tradition of Catholicism may seem to unbelievers to be but a quaint relic of the past. There are few, if any, reference points to rituals of sacrifice in contemporary culture. Instead, advances in the fields of science and technology elicit a similar sense of awe, and trust in these seems to have superseded trust in God. We have become the masters of our own fate; in so doing we have also, paradoxically, become the greatest threat to our own existence as we recognize our dependency, not on God, but on earth's limited resources.

Since we have yet to master the greed of our insatiable appetite for created things, perhaps once again we are slowly arousing a primordial instinct for worshiping that for which we rely on for survival. The primordial instinct to worship and appease someone or something greater than ourselves persists in the threats and chaos of our post-modern age as we seek redemption.

Perhaps we could say that today's great secular temples are the world's stock exchanges, where the worship of mammon is carried out for the sake of survival, offered devoutly day in and day out as intensely as prayers in a monastery. Through sophisticated rituals of trade at the altar of mammon, we offer our goods on altars of exchange,

accompanied not with incense but with virtual tickertape. The gods of money and consumption have power over us; they set before us life or death.

In a general audience on June 5, 2013, Pope Francis lamented: "What rules today is not man, it is money [and] an economy and financial system lacking in ethics. Men and women are sacrificed to the idols of money and consumption. That some homeless people freeze to death on the street, that is not news. On the other hand, a drop of ten points in the stock markets of some [countries] is a tragedy. That is how people are thrown away. We, people, are thrown away, as if we were trash."

And speaking to a group of young people, he asked them what they treasured and held close to their hearts. "Is it power, money, pride, or goodness, beauty, and the desire to do good?" He asked them to find the answer "for yourselves, alone, at home." It is a good question for all of us to ponder.

The sisters in the Monastery of Bethlehem, and we believers around the world who worship in a cloud of fragrance at the altar of sacrifice where God's love is ultimate, where Christ's body is broken and his blood is poured out in absolute love, once and for all, discover joy beyond all telling. As we gather to offer the sacrifice of Jesus, we offer the sacrifice of our own love as well. It is our very life. Christians choose life; we choose love. It is where our heart is.



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## In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

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



## PASTORAL LITURGY

# Celebrating the Sacraments— Part 3: Penance

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

*We continue examining the renewal of the sacraments following Vatican II, a “fruit of the vision of the council,” by looking at “best practices” for the sacrament of penance.*

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

THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB) ISSUED AN updated ritual edition in 2010, containing the 1974-1975 edition of the Rite of Penance (RP), which has not changed or been revised since its promulgation. The introduction (paragraphs 1-40) serves as a wonderful catechesis on the sacrament along with a rich theology of sin, conversion, and “the mystery of reconciliation in the history of salvation.” The praenotanda is helpful and enlightening as we look at the role of reconciliation in the life of the church.

In reviewing the celebration of the sacrament of penance, RP, 12 states that conferences of bishops are to establish the norms pertaining to the confessional, which include provision for clearly visible confessionals equipped with a fixed screen between the penitent and the confessor. In 1978, the USCCB Committee on Liturgy issued a statement in *Environment & Art in Catholic Worship*, 81 on the importance of a “reconciliation chapel,” with a screen, a cross, a table, and a Bible:

The purpose of this room is primarily for the celebration of the reconciliation liturgy; it is not a lounge, counseling room, etc. The word “chapel” more appropriately describes this space.

The current U.S. guidelines for art, architecture, and worship, *Built of Living Stones* (BLS), (2000), has three paragraphs devoted to penance or reconciliation. BLS, 105 focuses on “a sound-proof place” with a chair for the priest and a kneeler and chair for the penitent, and adds

Since the rite includes the reading of Scripture [which we will come to later in this column], the space should also include a Bible. Appropriate artwork, a crucifix . . . icons or images

reflective of baptism and the Eucharist or scriptural images of God's reconciling love, help to enhance the atmosphere of prayer. Warm, inviting lighting welcomes the penitent, . . . [and] additional rooms or spaces will be needed . . . in Advent and Lent.

While there is mention of visual and aural disabilities, no mention of special handicap doors is made, a common addition to liturgical spaces as churches are renovated. No one need depend on another to enter or exit the sacrament of penance in this installation:

Another aspect of the sacrament and the RP is the use of Sacred Scripture for Rite 1 (individual celebration) and Rite 2 (communal celebrations). Most are aware of the use of Scripture in communal celebrations: all our liturgies are to follow the "model" of the Mass and see Scripture as instrumental in the celebration.

Increasingly, penitents are coming to celebrate the sacrament with Bible in hand. We confessors should allow for this moment of grace to be expressed or perhaps offer short bits of Scripture to be read, similar to what is done at the Rite of Committal during the *Order of Christian Funerals*. By incorporating Scripture, based on the liturgical seasons, available on the table of the place for the sacrament (such as we do with the Act of Contrition prayer), we allow for this important element of the sacrament to be "fulfilled in our hearing." See RP, 17 for more on the use of Holy Scripture.

Another aspect of the individual rite (Rite 1) that could be improved is the "dismissal of the penitent." Most penitents say, "Thank you, Father," and leave. On a resource sheet, along with quotations from Scripture and the Act of Contrition, one could include an acclamation of praise ("Give thanks to the Lord for he is good" or "His mercy endures forever"), and catechize on its place in the rite.

Many parishes celebrate the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution (Chapter 2 of RP), especially during Advent and Lent. However, Rite 2 is truncated in many places due to large crowds or not wishing for penitents to stay unduly long to wait for everyone to be present and finish the rite together. It could be helpful to recall the vision of this rite: "Everything which is customary in individual confession is omitted" (RP, 55). There are key proclamations of praise of God's mercy that are truncated. Some parishes mention that it is a penance to stay, sing, pray, and wait for everyone to celebrate together. It is worth the effort to review pastorally why and how your parish celebrates this ritual.

The RP offers many options, litanies, and scripture selections for Rite 2. In planning your own parish celebration, include the short, simple prayers that have resonated with Christians down through the centuries: “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner”; “Lord, have mercy”; “We pray you hear us.” Of course, the ritual is accentuated when music accompanies the texts and acclamations.

It is disheartening that Rite 3 (General Absolution) is no longer an option for the U.S. church as it was at the introduction of the Rite of Penance in 1975. RP, 60-63 state the spiritual benefits this rite offers and are worthy of reconsideration by our bishops. The church is an instrument of God’s mercy and should offer every means to people to avail themselves of grace.

Chapter 4 of the RP features various texts for use in the celebration of reconciliation, from invitations to prayers, short readings from Scripture, prayers of the penitent, opening prayers, intercessions, etc. Almost 75% of the new ritual book is variations, options, and texts. The sample penitential services are excellent guides and can assist parish life. Parishes without a resident priest may find these rituals meaningful when no priest is available to celebrate the sacrament.

Lastly, there is a children’s service available in Appendix II. It provides a nice guide to preparing for first penance or other reconciliation services with children. These guides help us appreciate the marvels of the ritual edition and provide opportunities to expand our celebrations of reconciliation, opening up God’s grace and forgiveness as a boon to Christian living.

## **The Calendar for May and June**

### **Sunday, May 3 — Fifth Sunday of Easter**

This is a common weekend for the celebration of First Communion. Continue to incorporate elements of the parish celebration into the general life of the parish: if the First Communion Mass is separate from ordinary parish Masses, include a petition in the Universal Prayers.

Remind parishioners in your bulletin of the upcoming solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord. Liturgical calendars are still quite confusing as to whether Thursday or Sunday is the date of this feast.

### **Crowning of the Image of the Blessed Virgin Mary (within Mass)**

See *The Rites: Volume Two* for this ritual which is traditional in May.



Review the Rite of Crowning following the homily, with the special prayer of thanksgiving, invocation, and crowning. The ritual also provides Universal Prayers that catechize well on the meaning of this ceremony.

**Sunday, May 10 — Sixth Sunday of Easter and Mother’s Day (United States)**

See the *Book of Blessings* (BB), Chapter 55 for a blessing of mothers.

**Monday, May 25 — Memorial Day (United States)**

We enter into Ordinary Time (Eighth Week). Chapter 57 of the BB has the Order for Visiting a Cemetery on Memorial Day.

**Sunday, June 7 — Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)**

This solemnity is a fitting day to hold a eucharistic holy hour (several texts are available from Emmanuel Publishing) to highlight contemplation of the great mystery of the Eucharist.

Review *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass* for an annual procession with the Blessed Sacrament. Whether in the church, around the grounds, or to a neighboring parish, planning and implementing this devotion will assist the faith development of your parish.

Other June Observances

- Friday, June 12 — Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
- Wednesday, June 24 — Nativity of Saint John the Baptist
- Monday, June 29 — Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

***Prayers and Blessings***

*At this time of the year, the Book of Blessings does not offer prayers for certain occasions. The following are offered to assist your parish*

**Blessing of Graduates**

Eternal God,  
source of every gift and talent,  
through your Son Jesus Christ,  
you grant us your blessings  
that the church might be nourished and strengthened.

Bless these graduates (of high school and college today)  
and confer upon them the gifts of your Spirit  
that they may remain humble in heart

as they serve your household, the church.

Guide them in the future  
as they discern your will  
and give them the courage to follow your pathways.

As they thank you  
and their parents, grandparents, and godparents  
for a successful completion of their education,  
may their joy and love give them hope  
that you will be with them in their endeavors.

We remember those who have gone before us in faith.  
Bring us all into the peace of your kingdom,  
where all honor and glory are yours,  
forever and ever. Amen.

### **Blessing of Kindergarten Students**

Loving God,  
we thank you for your special gifts of knowledge.  
We thank you for our parents, grandparents, and godparents,  
who helped us to come to school each day,  
and for all the wonderful things  
you have helped us learn this year.

Help us continue to grow,  
help us to study hard this summer,  
to read our books,  
to play with our friends nicely,  
to stay safe,  
and to be helpful to others.

You have taught us about your Son Jesus Christ  
and all the wonderful things he did,  
especially how he helped other people.

Help us, like him, to be your good sheep  
and to be helpful to our parents  
and other family members,  
those who are sick,  
(and those who have gone to God).

May your Holy Spirit always be our guide,  
and may we serve you with all our heart.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.





## BREAKING THE WORD

# HOMILETICS - Easter/Ordinary Time

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

### A Spirituality of Communion

**T**HIS BEING THE YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE, I DECIDED THAT IT WOULD BE GOOD to do some reading on this vocation in the church. A fine book from a regular *Emmanuel* contributor, Father Dennis J. Billy, CSsR, entitled *Living in the Gap: Religious Life and the Call to Communion* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011) is one that I readily recommend. In this slim but edifying work, Billy looks to the renewal of the consecrated life coming from the spirituality of communion, especially as envisioned by Saint John Paul II and his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

One important point about the spirituality of communion that Billy makes relates well to the readings during these transitional months of May and June when our liturgical calendar concludes Easter and enters into Ordinary Time. As Billy writes in *Living in the Gap*, “The ‘spirituality of communion’ flows from the very heart of the Trinity, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a timeless community of mutual love and respect. By its very nature, this community is ‘self-diffusive’; it freely goes out of itself to express its love” (52).

With the conclusion of the Easter season, it is good for us to recall the image of *communio* or *koinonia* as recounted in Acts 1:13-14. The early Christians gathered around the apostles with the Virgin Mary in prayer and supplication. Those of us living the consecrated life today are called to continue this spirituality of communion as related from the early church. Like our ancestors in the faith, we gather in communion with our bishops, the successors of the apostles, and with one another and the Virgin Mary in prayer for the church. And like that early community, our *communio* becomes self-diffusive as the Holy Spirit sends us to proclaim the Gospel joyfully to all the nations (see Acts 2:4).

Blessed  
Sacrament  
Father Anthony J.  
Marshall earned  
a Master of  
Divinity and a  
Master of Arts  
in theology  
from Catholic  
Theological  
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Law Society of  
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Father Anthony  
presently  
serves the U.S.  
Province of his  
congregation  
as Vocation  
Director.

## Fifth Sunday of Easter May 3, 2015

*Remaining with the Lord Jesus Christ*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Acts 9:26-31**

The Christian community rejects the newly converted Saul/Paul out of fear, but Barnabas brings him to the apostles who receive him warmly. The initial negative reaction to Paul did not discourage him. He boldly proclaimed the Gospel in Jerusalem before being missioned to Tarsus. The passage concludes by noting that the church found herself at peace, despite many growing pains.

#### **1 John 3:18-24**

John calls his readers to a life of integrity, loving God and neighbor not just with one's lips but in reality — "in deed and truth." Keeping God's commandments is how we can be sure of doing God's will and remaining steadfast in the Spirit.

#### **John 15:1-8**

This passage is taken from the farewell discourse following the Last Supper. Jesus describes his relationship with the disciples as analogous to that of a vine and branches. We glorify God our Father by remaining united to Jesus and bearing abundant fruit as his disciples.

### *Sharing the Word*

They deal in extortion, prostitution, drugs, and murder, yet in the movie *The Godfather*, the Corleone family is also depicted as faithful Catholics, baptizing their babies and celebrating First Communion. One could say that they are ruthless mobsters by night, Roman Catholics only on Sundays. It is evident that the Corleone family is able to compartmentalize their lives into "church" and "world," and one has nothing to do with the other. In short, they are, to use Jesus' metaphor from today's Gospel, cut off from the vine and, in the

end, will wither and die. They are living a disconnected life.

Jesus warns us against this kind of life, one that is disconnected or compartmentalized. "Remain in me," Jesus urges us, "as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you" (Jn 15:4). The Christian life is not a compartmentalized life. No, ours is a life lived in consistency and communion with God, neighbor, and creation. And Jesus himself is the source of our communion of life and faith. For if we truly believe what we profess each Sunday, then our lives, our families, and our community will become radically different.

As people who hear the truth of Christ in the Gospel, we speak the truth not only with our words, but also our actions. And so we bear the fruit of truth. As people who struggle for justice in our own lives, we freely extend a just hand to our neighbors who are in need. And so we bear the fruit of justice. As people who are in love with Christ, we strive to love each other just as Christ loves us. And so we bear the fruit of love. This is what it means to remain in Christ as branches on the vine, bearing much fruit.

The Eucharist is offered in thanksgiving for our communion with the risen Christ. We remain in him and he in us. "This is my body," Christ tells us, "This is my blood." We are members of his body, and his precious blood flows through our veins. We belong to Christ. And as members of Christ's body, the church, we are called to reflect his love and compassion. To be true to Jesus means that we cannot divide our lives into little compartments as if one had nothing to do with the other. You and I are Christians seven days a week, 365 days a year.

### *Praying the Word*

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

## Sixth Sunday of Easter May 10, 2015

### *The Impartial Love of God*

#### *Breaking the Word*

##### **Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48**

The reading describes briefly Peter's encounter with the Gentile Cornelius and his household. Peter recognizes the diversity of gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit on different peoples, and proclaims that God indeed shows no partiality in his love (see Acts 10:34). Cornelius and company are subsequently baptized.

##### **1 John 4:7-10**

This short passage proclaims that God is love and we love God because God first loved us "and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (10).

##### **John 15:9-17**

The lectionary continues Jesus' farewell discourse from last Sunday. Jesus invites his disciples to remain in his love and to keep the commandments, including the new commandment, "Love one another as I love you" (Jn 15:12). The act of supreme friendship and sacrificial love Jesus offers us on the cross is paradigmatic for his followers.

#### *Sharing the Word*

The way we imagine God shapes the way we relate to him and to one another. If, for example, we imagine God as vengeful, recording our every sin and mistake, then we will relate to God solely out of fear, and not out of love. We will fear damnation rather than hope for salvation.

Today's readings depict a different, more life-giving image of God: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). And because God is love, he has formed us and fashioned us in his love. God loved us so much that he "sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). As Christians, we are shaped

by God's love, revealed through the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, remembered each time we gather in Christ's name. It is easy to be overcome with paschal joy, as the preface reminds us, as we reflect on this mystery of God's love and mercy. "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34) in his love.

It has been said that our lives are shaped by those who love us and by those who refuse to love us. Jesus tells us that if we want to be shaped by God's love, if we truly want to become his friends, then we are to "love one another" (Jn 15:17). God is love, and therefore "whoever is without love does not know God" (1 Jn 4:8). And since "God [has] so loved us, we also must love one another" (1 Jn 4:11). As Christians, we are to shape the lives of those around us by reflecting God's tender love and generous mercy at every turn.

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13). The eucharistic sacrifice we offer at the altar is the same sacrifice of Christ, who lovingly laid down his life on the cross for us. "In this way, the love of God was revealed to us. God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1 Jn 4:9). We are shaped by God's love, and this divine love is life-giving, joyful, and transformative. This is the Christian image of God.

### *Praying the Word*

In every age, O God,  
you reveal your love to those who seek you.  
May we pursue you with sincere hearts  
and reflect your merciful love to all we meet this day.  
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Ascension of the Lord May 17, 2015

*Living in a Manner Worthy of the Lord*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Acts 1:1-11**

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

#### **Ephesians 1:17-23**

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

#### **Mark 16:15-20**

Mark describes Jesus' commission to the Eleven to preach the Gospel to the entire world. Baptism is the gift of salvation for believers. Certain signs will accompany believers, such as speaking new languages, driving out demons in Christ's name, etc. Finally, Mark briefly notes that Jesus ascended up into heaven where he sits at God's right hand in glory, and the Eleven go forth to proclaim the Gospel.



## Sharing the Word

Sometimes in life, it's easy to fall into the trap of believing that what we *do* is more important than who we *are*. Of course, it's the opposite that's true: who we *are* ultimately determines what we *do*!

This discovery of who we are is what the Easter season is all about. For the past seven weeks, we have been savoring the mystery (*mystagogia*) of our Lord's resurrection from the dead. We heard the stories from the Acts of the Apostles about how our ancestors in the faith were so inspired by the Holy Spirit that they went out and built up the church. They boldly proclaimed the Gospel, the Good News of Christ's resurrection, his victory over sin and death. The gospel texts for these past Sundays of Easter have also helped us to deepen our understanding of God, who is love. Indeed, these seven weeks of Easter have taught us about who we are: God's beloved daughters and sons, redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and given new life through the sacraments.

And so, we come to today's feast of the Ascension. The solemnity of the Ascension is about what we do as Christians: we proclaim the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ. "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:15-16). Each of us has been given the gift of faith through the waters of baptism. Faith in Jesus Christ leads to salvation. And since we have been entrusted with this gift of faith, it is our mission to hand on this precious gift to others, so that all might be saved and know God's love. And where Jesus is now, ascended into heavenly glory and seated at the Father's right hand, so we hope one day to be. We hope for our own future resurrection and a place at the banquet table of heaven.

## Praying the Word

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

Pentecost Sunday  
Mass During the Day  
May 24, 2015

*Come, Holy Spirit!*

*Breaking the Word*

**Acts 2:1-11**

Luke describes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the newly reconstituted Twelve (see Acts 1:12-26) in Jerusalem. Under the influence of the Spirit, each is emboldened to preach to the diverse assembly of people, gathered in the holy city for the Jewish feast of Weeks, which commemorated the arranging of the covenant some 50 days after the Passover; hence, the name Pentecost.

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

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

**John 20:19-23**

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

*Sharing the Word*

As we celebrate Pentecost, we give thanks and praise for the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Most Holy Trinity. Jesus promised that, following his resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right

hand, the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon us. At our baptism, we were washed clean of all sin and evil, and at our confirmation, we were sealed with the gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows us, but do we know him?

In today's Gospel, we see the power of the Spirit as healer or comforter. Christ breathed on the apostles and made them and their successors ministers of reconciliation. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). This ministry of healing and forgiving sins continues today in the sacraments of penance and the anointing of the sick. Bishops and priests have received this gift of the Holy Spirit to impart sacramental absolution, and to bestow Christ's healing power through anointing with holy oil. The Holy Spirit is among us for the forgiveness of sins and our spiritual and physical healing.

In addition to being our healer, the Holy Spirit also unites us in one family, as one people of faith. We notice this especially in our first reading, which tells of the Spirit's power to break down barriers and prejudice of every kind. The apostles preached in languages that were not their own. The apostles were freed from the sin of fear and anxiety, which is a work of the Holy Spirit as healer. And once freed, they brought the people together as one community.

The Holy Spirit heals us of our sins and infirmities, both of body and soul. He unites us as one people of faith. And, finally, the Holy Spirit sends us forth to proclaim that we are saved through Christ and made heirs to the kingdom. Knowing this about the Father's great gift of the Spirit, we clearly have much to give thanks and praise for as we celebrate the Eucharist.

### *Praying the Word*

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

## Most Holy Trinity May 31, 2015

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40**

Moses invites the people to remember the loving ways of God. By recalling divine providence, Moses notes that the people should have no fear in committing their whole lives to the God of all creation and follow his commandments in order to enter into and flourish in the Promised Land.

#### **Romans 8:14-17**

In this brief pericope, Paul mentions the work of the Spirit who enables us to cry out, "Abba, Father." In and with Christ Jesus, we are heirs of God.

#### **Matthew 28:16-20**

Following his resurrection, Jesus commissions the Eleven to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Jesus promises to remain with them always (20). Thus, the Gospel of Matthew ends where it began: Emmanuel (see Mt 1:23).

### *Sharing the Word*

The communion of life and love found in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity is first communicated to us through baptism, sealed in confirmation, and nourished by the Eucharist. We are invited to not only enter into the Trinity's infinite mystery, but we are also invited to a life of communion here on this side of eternity.

This being the Year of Consecrated Life, allow me to note how consecrated women and men are uniquely called to a spirituality of communion in the Holy Trinity. Saint John Paul II noted firmly in his

apostolic exhortation on the consecrated life that “the consecrated life can certainly be credited with having effectively helped to keep alive in the church the obligation of fraternity as a form of witness to the Trinity. By constantly promoting fraternal love, also in the form of common life, the consecrated life has shown that *sharing in the Trinitarian communion can change human relationships* and create a new type of solidarity. In this way, it speaks to people both of the beauty of fraternal communion and of the ways which actually lead to it. Consecrated persons live ‘for’ God and ‘from’ God, and precisely for this reason they are able to bear witness to the reconciling power of grace, which overcomes the divisive tendencies present in the human heart and in society” (John Paul II, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* [March 25, 1996] 41).

Through their faithful living of the evangelical counsels, consecrated women and men bear witness to our often-divided world that unity can come from legitimate diversity. The Holy Trinity is a diverse communion of divine persons who form one God. This communion is a gift to the church, and it is who we Christians are called to be, a people of communion with one another in the Church and with our triune God. Again, Saint John Paul II: “Consecrated persons are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice the spirituality of communion as ‘witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.’ The sense of ecclesial communion, developing into a *spirituality of communion*, promotes a way of thinking, speaking, and acting which enables the church to grow in depth and extension. . . . In a specific way, through the richness of their charisms, consecrated persons help the church to reveal ever more deeply her nature as the sacrament ‘of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind’” (*Vita Consecrata*, 46). This is the prophetic mission of each consecrated person: bearing witness to the triune communion of life and love, both as individual religious and as a community.

### *Praying the Word*

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

## Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ — Corpus Christi June 7, 2015

*The Gift of Self*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Exodus 24:3-8**

This passage is the story of Moses sprinkling the blood of bulls on the altar and the people. The people heard the word of God and responded, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do" (Ex 24:7), and Moses proceeded to sprinkle the blood on the people, ratifying them in the covenant.

#### **Hebrews 9:11-15**

The sacred author describes Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant, sealed not with the blood of animals, but with his own blood. The sacrifice of Christ Jesus, the great high priest, is our pledge of future glory.

#### **Mark 14:12-16, 22-26**

Jesus describes for the disciples, in accurate detail, the Passover meal logistics they would undertake in Jerusalem. The lectionary skips over the story of Judas' betrayal in order to focus our attention on the institution narrative of the Last Supper.

### *Sharing the Word*

The fathers of the Second Vatican Council, quoting heavily from Saint Thomas Aquinas who was the "spiritual architect" of today's feast, taught that "at the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a

paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47). What beautiful words to meditate upon as we give thanks to the Father for the gift of his love manifested in the Eucharist on this feast of Corpus Christi.

Our readings focus our attention on the covenant that God has made with us. This covenant was initiated at our baptism, sealed at our confirmation, and is renewed each time we gather at the altar. At every celebration of the Eucharist, God renews with us his covenant of love and mercy. Jesus offered himself to the Father on the cross in sacrifice for our reconciliation. He poured out his blood to redeem us from the evil one, so that we might be cleansed from sin and freed "to worship the living God" (Heb 9:14) and love our neighbor as ourselves.

The sacred bond of Holy Communion commits us to being Christ's disciples; it also commits us to one another. Following upon the example of Jesus who gave the gift of himself on the cross and who renews this gift in the Eucharist, we are invited to offer the gift of ourselves each time we say, "Amen" at Communion. Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, wanted his religious to profess not only the three traditional vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, but also a fourth vow, the "gift of self," in imitation of Christ. While it was never approved, Blessed Sacrament religious nevertheless see our eucharistic life and works as expressions of the gift of ourselves, following Christ's example. Today's feast is an auspicious moment for us to renew our pledge, as Christians, to love God and one another by making our "Amen" a renewed "gift of self."

### *Praying the Word*

Merciful Father,  
may the love you manifested in Jesus Christ  
and which we celebrate in the Eucharist  
move us to respond to your gift with the gift of ourselves.  
Grant that we may build up one another in love and truth  
for your greater glory and our salvation.  
This we ask through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time June 14, 2015

*God's Grace and our "Yes"*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Ezekiel 17:22-24**

This passage is somewhat complicated. It is offered as our first reading no doubt because of the connection with the parable found in the Gospel. In its biblical context, Ezekiel used the image of a cedar tree as a way to describe God's justice for his people. Those who break their covenant with God will answer for it (cf. Ez 17:19), and the story of the cedar tree is an allegory of how God will restore justice.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:6-10**

Paul teaches the Corinthians to await the final judgment of Christ with courage, not fear. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7), he says, encouraging them to strive to please Christ and look forward to their appearance before the "judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor 5:10).

#### **Mark 4:26-34**

Two parables are offered to describe the kingdom. The first parable is of the farmer who sows the seed, but is ignorant of how the harvest comes about. The second parable, echoing the allegory from the first reading, is of the kingdom of God being likened to a mustard seed. The kingdom emerges not of our accord, but of God's, and it is large enough to welcome all people.

### *Sharing the Word*

It is not easy to watch the news about the challenges we face in society. The culture of death seems to dominate the headlines. What can we do to end gang violence in our neighborhoods? What can we do to relieve the sufferings of our neighbors who go hungry, who struggle to put food on their tables for their families? How can we graciously welcome immigrants? How can one person make a



difference in our troubled cities, our families, and our work places? It seems impossible, doesn't it?

On our own, it is impossible to make dramatic changes. "We walk by faith and not by sight," Paul tells us. The indwelling Spirit in each one of us is always prompting us to do good and avoid evil, thereby bringing about change in our families and society.

Jesus tells how the kingdom of God starts out like a seed sown, scattered on the ground, which eventually produces a harvest of grain. Or how the kingdom is like a small mustard seed that, once planted, grows to become a large plant so that even birds can find a home in its branches. In other words, if the farmer didn't scatter the seed, there would be no wheat harvest. If the mustard seed was never planted, there would be no bush. *God's kingdom starts out with his grace and our yes!*

We're called to be like the farmer, scattering seeds of goodness and love in our families and community; the Holy Spirit will do the rest. God brings our good efforts to fulfillment. We can make a difference if only we open ourselves to love: loving God with our entire being and loving one another as Christ loves us. The kingdom of God can *only* grow according to our heavenly Father's will and grace. Nothing we say or do flourishes by itself. God's grace, working in and through us, brings about the kingdom.

The Lord Jesus calls each of us to work along with him for the good of all. This is our baptismal calling. We do our best to nurture the kingdom of God by living our faith each day, in public and in private, and by sharing our faith with others. When we witness to our faith in God and his church, we bring about change in our communities, our families, and throughout the world.

### *Praying the Word*

God our Father,  
you often choose to manifest your glory  
through those whom the world considers weak  
and powerless.  
May your Holy Spirit strengthen our resolve  
to do good and to avoid evil  
so as to further your kingdom.  
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 21, 2015

*For the Love of Christ*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Job 38:1, 8-11**

The extremely short passage from the Book of Job is taken from God's reply to Job's discourses addressed to God. It serves to illustrate the power and wisdom of the Creator over his creation.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:14-17**

Moved by the love of Christ, Paul states emphatically that since we have all died with Christ we are a new creation in him. Therefore, we are to live now for Christ Jesus, who died and was raised.

#### **Mark 4:35-41**

Mark recounts the story of Jesus calming the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are rebuked for their lack of faith, just as Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves.

### *Sharing the Word*

"Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?" (Mk 4:41). That's a good question for us to ponder. Who is Jesus? The Creed tells us what we believe about him, but not necessarily who he is. We know about the mighty deeds Jesus wrought, like calming the wind and the sea, changing water into wine, or exorcising demons from the possessed. But do we really know Jesus?

Having a relationship with Jesus Christ is at the heart of being a Christian. No reasonable person, for example, would expect to be in a marriage long if all that was known about the other were basic facts but no relationship. "Where's the love?" one might well ask. Similarly, we can't expect our love of God to grow and deepen if we remain only at a superficial or even intellectual level. No, we need a relationship, which is what faith is all about.

I think it is safe to assume that Job had a deep faith and trust in God. He knew the basic tenets of Judaism, but he didn't stop there. The words he spoke in challenge to his suffering and God's reply, part of which we hear in the first reading, give evidence to an abiding faith in and love of God. Job suffered greatly, but he never offended God (see Job 1:22, 2:10). Because he knew God deeply and intimately, he knew God could not be the cause of his suffering, but rather the source of his healing. Paul, too, had a deep faith in God and his Son Jesus Christ. Paul suffered much for the sake of the Gospel, even to the point of shedding his blood. It took more than doctrinal knowledge to make Paul a martyr. Paul knew Jesus Christ intimately and loved him passionately, completely.

The question of the fearful disciples in the boat in the Gospel is a good one. Who is this man Jesus? The Eucharist reveals the depths of his love and his desire to become one with us. How will we respond?

### *Praying the Word*

Lord Jesus,  
you have told us that if we seek,  
we shall indeed find,  
and if we knock, the door will be opened.  
As we seek to know who you are,  
we pray that the doors to our hearts  
may remain open always to you,  
who live and reign for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 28, 2015

*Your Faith Has Saved You*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24**

This excerpt from Wisdom teaches us that death was not part of God's original plan for creation; God is life-giving. Death is a result of "the envy of the devil" (Wis 2:24).

#### **2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15**

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be generous in their offerings for the poor, in imitation of Christ Jesus who, being rich in mercy, lavishly poured out his mercy upon us, thereby enriching us in our own spiritual poverty.

#### **Mark 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43**

The full text of the Gospel is two stories in one. The first is of Jesus being asked to heal the daughter of Jairus, a local synagogue official. Mark interrupts the narrative to include a second story of a woman being healed of a hemorrhage after touching Jesus' clothing. The shorter version of the Gospel omits the story of the woman being healed and completes the first story of Jesus restoring life to Jairus' daughter.

### *Sharing the Word*

As a priest, the funeral liturgy is a regular part of my ministry. I would venture to say that funeral directors and priests assist at more funerals than just about anybody else. And so far in my priestly ministry, the most difficult funeral that I had to preside at was that of my paternal grandfather. He died not too long ago in my hometown of Cleveland. I made it through the Funeral Mass without crying until we reached the final commendation at the end of the liturgy, where the priest incenses the casket and then the final procession forms to

accompany the body of the deceased from the church. My eyes filled with tears as I incensed grandpa's casket and the pallbearers put him into the back of the hearse.

Today's readings challenge the common view of death. As Christians, we believe that the mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord from the dead has forever destroyed death and wiped away all sin. Our faith in Christ will save us; he will bring our mortal bodies to life with him on the last day. The Eucharist that we celebrate and the Communion that we receive are Christ's pledge to us of eternal life with him. Our scripture passages tell us that the Lord Jesus wants to give us life and so build up a new creation, where there will be no more sadness, no more pain, no more death.

From the very beginning, Christians have understood death to be a passage to new life. By referring to death as being asleep, they thought of death not as the final end, but rather as a door to a new life in Christ. Life has changed, not ended, as one of the prefaces reminds us.

This knowledge doesn't make it any easier to bury a loved one. That's because death is not a part of God's original design, as the first reading states. This is why we feel pain and sadness at another's death and, perhaps, why we might even fear our own death. Nevertheless, faith gives us hope that when Christ comes again in glory, he will raise to life everlasting all who now sleep in death.

### *Praying the Word*

Father,  
in Christ your Son,  
the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned.  
Indeed, for your faithful people  
life is changed, not ended,  
and when our earthly dwelling turns to dust,  
an eternal dwelling is made ready for us in heaven.  
For this we bless and praise you  
through the risen Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

*Adapted from the Roman Missal, Preface I for the Dead*





## EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •  
Poetry • Books

### Film Review



IDA  
Pawel Pawlikowski,  
2013, Poland

John Christman,  
SSS

Pawel Pawlikowski's exquisite masterwork *Ida* belongs within an entirely unique category of film. Its thoughtful ambiguity, its restraint and detached yet careful observation makes easy comparisons with the great cinematic auteurs of the 1960s. Even its undemonstrative black and white cinematography with its delicate palette of grays adds to this allure. Add to these two brilliant nuanced performances by its two female leads and it's obvious why *Ida* has been garnering awards and critical praise in film festivals and publications throughout the world including the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Much of the critical discussion of *Ida* has centered on how the film deals with a unique period in Polish history. It raises questions about the relationship between the Polish government and Jewish citizens during the Second World War. It also explores the Stalinist years following World War II as well as the early 1960s when society and culture in Poland began to change incrementally. This last period is where the film's narrative takes place. The other periods hover just below the surface as the characters deal with their complicated pasts.

The two pasts in question are that of a young orphaned religious novice named *Ida* and her Aunt *Wanda*, a state prosecutor in the communist regime. *Ida*, on the eve of taking her religious vows, is summoned by her Mother Superior for a private conversation. The convent has finally received contact from *Ida*'s only living relative (*Wanda*) and the Mother Superior would like *Ida* to have the chance to meet her and find out about her past before making a life-long commitment to religious life. When *Ida* meets the confident and abrasive *Wanda*, it's with some shock that she finds out, not only that she is Jewish, but that her whole family was killed during the war. Thus the two embark on a solemn journey of discovery to ascertain the circumstances of the death of their family.

Numerous other reviewers have written compellingly about the

political and historical dimensions of the film. What is perhaps just as interesting for Catholic readers is how thoughtfully the character of Ida is portrayed. First, religious life and faith are foundational to who she is. This is witnessed in scenes of her praying at shrines and moments spent contemplating her future. Indeed, her perseverance in wearing her religious habit in differing circumstances attests to her values. And the basic premise of the film underscores the freedom, integrity, and dignity afforded to Ida in her choice of vocation.

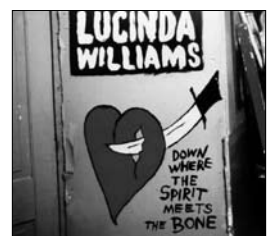
This is a question she takes up with great care. It is a testament to the film's artistry that words don't have to be spoken for the viewer to know how she is grappling with the question of her future. And while the film's ending is ambiguous and open to varying interpretations, there's nothing there that I can find to question the persistence of her faith. Whatever vocation Ida might find, her faith is there to support her.

And isn't that the real meaning of discernment? Indeed, *Ida* could be considered perhaps one of the most thoughtful of discernment films, because it is her whole life that she is lead to consider, past, present, and future. It is not without, sin, struggle, self-discovery, and trial. And it takes place in a tumultuous period of history. But it is most certainly not taken lightly. And so we find ourselves pulling for Ida, that she may discover her own path in life and find peace. Isn't that what lies at the heart of true discernment?

## Music Review

Does anyone have as much grit, swagger, and tenderness as Lucinda Williams? She's more country than anything on the radio. She's got more blues and rock and roll in her little finger than most of the bands playing on any given Saturday night. Her distinctive, weather-beaten voice stretches from vulnerability to howling anger with a haunting richness. And to top it off, she's a compelling songwriter whose non-sense lyrics disarm with clarity and truth. Whether she's singing about heartbreak, politics, faith, family, or the suicide of a close friend, each verse resonates with complete authenticity. Lucinda Williams puts it all on the line with every song, and she's one of the greats because of it. It is no wonder the musicians respect her and critics adore her.

Williams' new album *Down Where the Spirit Meets the Bone* finds her at her most prolific. It's a double length album with over 120 minutes of music. And that could easily be daunting for any musician.



Lucinda Williams  
DOWN WHERE  
THE SPIRIT MEETS  
THE BONE  
Highway 20 Records  
2014

John Christman,  
SSS

Double length albums are often spotty and would benefit from some thoughtful editing. But halfway through the second disc of *Down Where the Spirit Meets the Bone*, it's clear that Williams has entered a mature and unusually strong stage in her musical career.

The album begins somewhat meditatively with Williams putting music to her father's poem entitled "Compassion," with its message of true Christian compassion that can't be mistaken. But that's not the only voice rumbling around in William's head, as songs like "A Cold Day in Hell" attest. That song makes it obvious that compassion and forgiveness can be hard to come by despite good intentions. In fact, Williams seems to be at her best when discontented. She lets her sharpened tongue loose in protest in the strutting sounds of "West Memphis." And her spleen is amply vented against hypocrisy in the biting lyrics of "East Side of Town."

But there is another side to Lucinda Williams: the one who loves with her whole heart; the one who feels the pain of the downtrodden; and the one who, despite life's sufferings, encourages listeners to improve the world. As she sings, "You got the power to make this mean old world a better place / People say they hate you, try to kill you / While they're grinning in your face / But you got the power to make this mean old world a better place." And as the reverb hums through the electric guitar, she leaves little doubt where someone is to find the strength to do such a thing as she sings out, "God put the firewood there, but you gotta light it yourself." No, there's nothing easy about Lucinda Williams . . . and you end up loving every minute of it, because it's true.

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## Poetry

### The Older Brother

The table is spread.  
Nothing is held back.  
The birthright is ours,  
yet we live like orphans.  
Striving to improve  
our performance,  
we are slow to take his favor  
that comes with each dawn.  
We stand outside  
and silently rail  
against the Father,  
who is still waiting  
for us to come  
to the party.

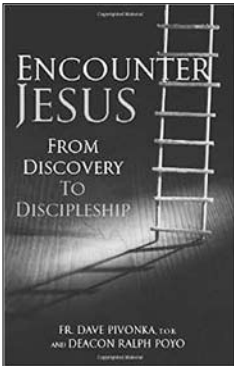
Teresa Burleson

### Sunflowers

No one has to teach a field  
of sunflowers how to worship.  
Before dawn in high summer  
  
their necks are bent  
in silent prayer like monks.  
But as the sun comes up,  
  
sunflowers rise as well.  
At noon they adore the sun  
the way monks in pews  
  
adore the host at elevation.  
Listen and you may hear  
sunflowers sing Alleluia!

Donal Mahoney

## Book Reviews



ENCOUNTER  
JESUS: FROM  
DISCOVERY TO  
DISCIPLESHIP  
Dave Pivonka, TOR,  
and Ralph Poyo,  
Cincinnati, OH:  
Franciscan Media  
(Servant Books),  
2014  
134 pp., \$14.99

To show the development of discipleship in the time of Jesus, both authors have chosen biblical passages that provide encounters with Jesus. The purpose of their insights into each of the 14 scriptural passages chosen is to help the reader personalize knowledge about God prior to sharing it with others (105).

The interpretations Father Dave and Deacon Ralph give the scripture passages relate these encounters with Jesus to the present time. Prayer is the central focus of many encounters from the four Gospels, the story of Paul's conversion, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (1:15-19). Interspersed in each chapter are quotes and references from other parts of Scripture.

This short book gave me new insights into familiar scripture passages. The authors' interpretations can be helpful in understanding the meaning of discipleship. And this "discovery of discipleship" might be helpful to all readers who are striving to become true disciples of Jesus.

Susan Mary Rathbun, OSU  
Ursuline Institute of Learning  
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Cardinal Francis George says that the new pope's choice of name was "his first surprise." All the surprises that have come afterward (and are yet to come!) can be traced back to Jorge Mario Bergolio's desire to align himself with Francesco Bernadone, the saint from Assisi who was a man full of surprises. Saint Francis presented himself to the world as *Il Poverello* (the little poor man) and strove to be God's jester, poet, and ambassador of peace. Pope Francis seeks to imitate his namesake, and he urges all of us to do the same.

We don't think of popes as spontaneous or unconventional. We don't expect them to tell jokes during their homilies or to confront Mafia members and unceremoniously pronounce their excommunication.

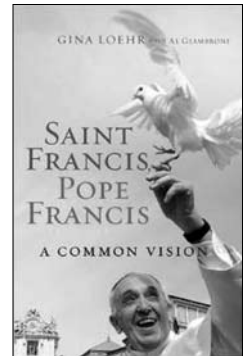
We don't expect the pope to live in a hotel or drive an old Ford. "Who am I to judge?" is not the kind of papal pronouncement we're used to hearing.

Pope Francis surprises us. He unsettles us. He challenges us while forgiving and encouraging us. He really is like the little poor man from Assisi — full of paradoxes (apparent contradictions) and beaming with the peace and joy that can only come from Christ. When we look at these two men together, their many differences dissolve and the ways they are alike stand out in bold relief.

These are men of the church, wholly dedicated to humility, charity, poverty, peace, and joy. They are unconventional, but fully aligned with Catholic tradition. They are spontaneous — eager to move beyond their "comfort zones" — but they never stray from the program outlined in the Gospels, especially the beatitudes and the parables of Jesus. They can, and do, question the way priests, bishops, and even popes preach (and practice what they preach), but they never doubt the authority given to Peter by our Lord to bind and loose, comfort and heal, challenge and forgive the people of God, the Good Shepherd's wandering flock.

Gina Loehr, a part-time theology professor at Marian University in Wisconsin, assisted by her father, Al Giambrone, has done a marvelous job of juxtaposing the words and life stories of the "two Francises." Their book, *Saint Francis, Pope Francis: A Common Vision*, is easy reading but also quite profound. Using a simple formula of 1. scripture reflection, 2. examples from the lives of Saint Francis and Pope Francis, 3. brief examination of church teaching, and 4. questions for personal reflection, the authors examine the Franciscan approach to loving Christ and living the Gospel. The result is a brief but substantive examination of the two Francises' amazing witness to the virtues of humility, charity, peace, and joy — lived always in loving fidelity to the church as the living body of Christ.

There is a danger in comparing these two men. Saint Francis we are sure of (in spite of his many contradictions). Pope Francis is still very new to us, a pastoral and spiritual work in progress. Most of the time, the authors avoid this trap, even as the very structure of the book would seem to support the notion that the "two Francises" are equal in most respects. But it would be a serious mistake (on many levels) to conclude that the pope from Argentina is a living saint. Certainly,



**SAINT FRANCIS,  
POPE FRANCIS:  
A COMMON  
VISION**

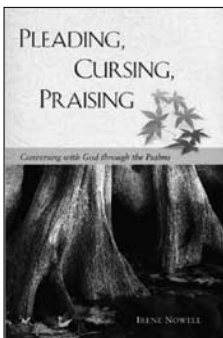
Gina Loehr and Al  
Giambrone,  
Cincinnati, OH:  
Franciscan Media  
(Servant Books),  
2014  
144 pp., \$14.99

he is a man of the church who strives for humility, charity, poverty, peace, and joy. One day, he may be proclaimed a saint, but for now it is enough to let ourselves be challenged and encouraged by the “Spirit-filled” witness he gives to the joy of the Gospel!

*Saint Francis, Pope Francis: A Common Vision* is a great book for daily spiritual reading. In the words of G.K. Chesterton, it is a romantic tale of two troubadours and the wild things they do for love of our Lady and for the church who is our mother. “In such a romance, there would be no contradiction between the poet gathering flowers in the sun and enduring a freezing vigil in the snow, between his praising all earthly and bodily beauty and then refusing to eat, and between his glorifying gold and purple and perversely going in rags, between his showing pathetically a hunger for a happy life and a thirst for a heroic death.”

In the end, it is the cross of Christ leading inevitably to the joy of Easter that unites the saint from Assisi and the pope from Argentina. Both sing of Jesus. Both seek to imitate him, to live as he did, as poor little men who are rich beyond all measure in the abundance of holy joy.

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**PLEADING,  
CURSING,  
PRAISING:  
CONVERSING  
WITH GOD  
THROUGH THE  
PSALMS**  
Irene Nowell, OSB,  
Collegetown, MN:  
Liturgical Press,  
2013  
94 pp., \$12.95

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Benedictine Irene Nowell is steeped in the monastic tradition of praying the psalms. She notes that she has lived with the psalms most of her life from high school to the present. Her thesis in this short book is that the psalms not only provide a book of prayer, they also teach models of prayer that one can use throughout life.

The book is divided into nine short chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the psalter in general and a particular reflection on the first psalm, a primer on how to be happy. The second chapter reminds the reader that the psalms invite us to tell and pray our story. Chapter Three focuses on the psalms of lament. Chapter Four deals with the “cursing” indicated in the title, by reflecting on one’s enemies and the psalms that deal with violence. Chapter Five moves the reader away from lament and violence to thanksgiving. Chapter

Six directs our attention to Psalm 34. Here Nowell provides a more detailed explanation of the literary device used by the psalmist in writing the psalm: that is, the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and each subsequent verse uses the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter Seven outlines a theology (in the best sense of “faith seeking understanding”) of trusting God. Chapter Eight deals with the royal psalms. In this chapter, Nowell discusses the importance of the sequencing of the psalms. The final chapter ends, fittingly enough, with praising God. Not only is praise the predominant theme of the last several psalms, Nowell reminds us that this doxology is part of the rhythm of our lives.

I loved this book. Here are some of the reasons why. First, it is very readable. The narrative is both informative and engaging. From the very beginning, Nowell draws the reader into the world of the psalms. She connects the psalms to the reader’s life experience and the current day.

Second, this book is perfect for those who are new to the psalms. Nowell does not presume that the reader knows anything about the psalms. She writes clearly and simply about the psalms to draw one into the topic. Consequently, someone new to *lectio divino*, the Liturgy of the Hours, and/or spiritual direction will find this a valuable source.

Third, though this book is perfect for newbies, there are many things that are valuable for people who have been praying with the psalms for years. Nowell reminds readers about the importance of the sequencing of the psalms, of the variety of genres, of the literary genius of the psalmist, of nuances in vocabulary and of God’s fidelity.

Fourth, Nowell provides suggestions for personal prayer at the end of each chapter based on the content of the chapter. These could also be used for small group faith sharing.

A short bibliography and a chart that suggests ways to classify the psalms by genre are also included.



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## EUCHARISTIC WITNESS

### Frank and Marjorie Zalar

After we finished our morning reflection on the Eymardian way of eucharistic prayer at Saint Joseph's Catholic Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, a young woman came up to us and said, "I am so happy I came this morning. What you said made so much sense to me. I have been conflicted for so many years about this devotion and that devotion. Now I understand that the Eucharist is central to being Catholic and should in fact be the center of my life. Thanks so much for your insights." We told her that we were happy that she made the effort to attend, but we did not tell her that preparing the reflection had been a powerful revelation to us both. But we are getting ahead of ourselves; let's start at the beginning.

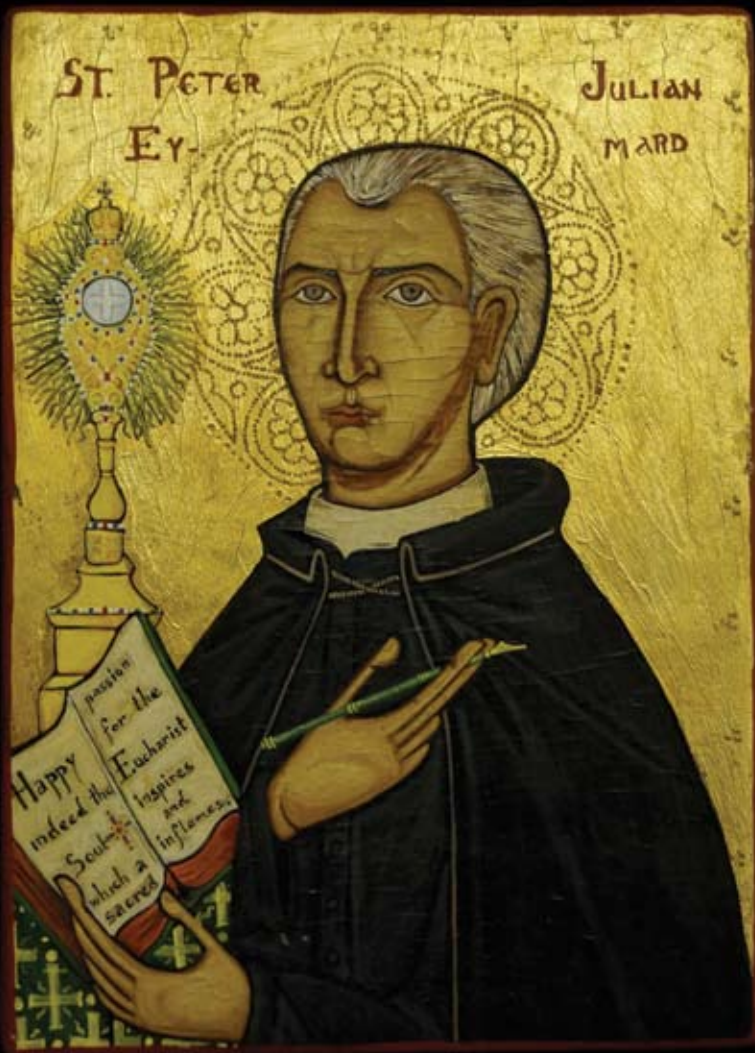
We have been part of the extended Blessed Sacrament family for over 30 years, centered at Saint Paschal Baylon Parish in Ohio. We were heavily involved in the parish and in the congregation's mission of eucharistic evangelizing and were among the first group to be installed as Blessed Sacrament Associates in North America.

Our decision to leave Ohio and begin a new life in Northern Virginia, close to our daughter and her family, was particularly difficult because we would be leaving the comfort of being near the congregation and all that it entails. It has been two-and-a-half years since we left Ohio. We have been discovering what it means to be associates, eucharistic evangelizers, and keeping the Eucharist at the center of our lives in new and unexpected ways.

We began by introducing Saint Peter Julian Eymard and the congregation to the leaders of our chosen parish, Saint John the Evangelist, in Frederick, Maryland. It was a long process, but resulted in the presentation of a eucharistic mission with Father Bill Fickel, SSS, in Lent 2014. The mission led to our introduction to Saint Joseph Parish and an invitation to present a reflection on eucharistic prayer. Blessed Sacrament religious were available to help in many ways, but it's not quite the same as personal presence. Our separation, although painful, has resulted in some important breakthroughs in our eucharistic spirituality.

In preparing the reflection, we used the fourfold way of eucharistic prayer developed by Saint Peter Julian — Adoration, Thanksgiving, Reparation, and Petition. As we read and worked and reworked the message, we began to finally realize just how revolutionary Father Eymard was in proposing a way of eucharistic prayer that transcends any one moment of ritual devotion. These four modes of prayer are *a life plan, a formula for living our lives eucharistically and making it relevant as we interface with the world around us*. The simplicity of this method of prayer belies the profound eucharistic spirituality and attitudes it embodies. Preparing this reflection was a revelation to us. Our "desert experience" away from the Blessed Sacrament Community has had some positive impact on our spiritual lives.

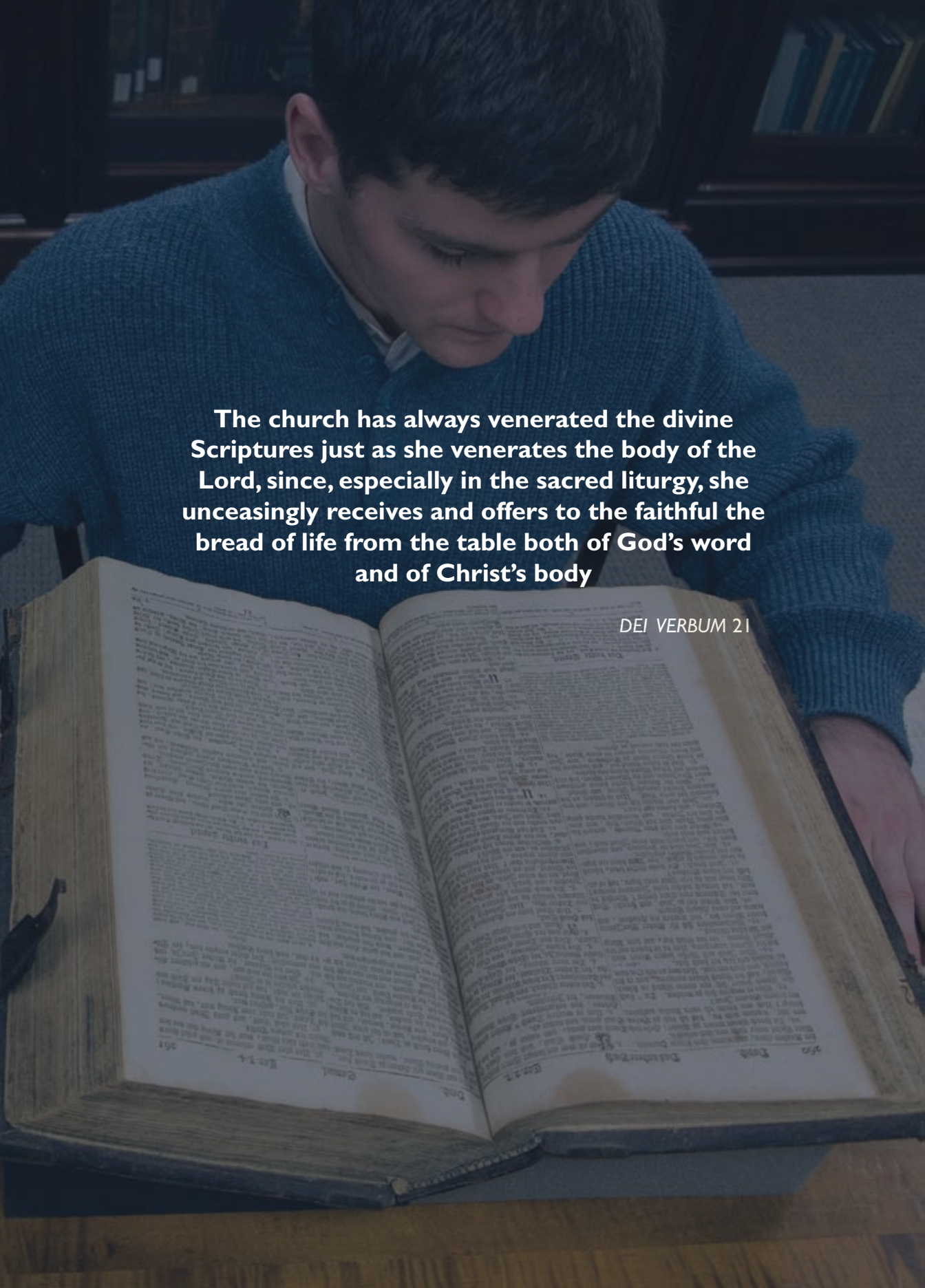




A priest has wasted his time when he allows a day to pass without reading the Sacred Scriptures. In this study, what I write will be for my ministry, but my meditation will be just for myself. My neighbor will be in second place. I will first nourish myself, and then feed others.

May I seek you with a pure intention, and with a pure zeal may I proclaim your Gospel; may I work for your glory alone, that you may be known in the Blessed Sacrament, that your life may be manifested in my life...

Saint Peter Julian Eymard  
(Guitton: *Life of Eymard*, 33, 39)

A young man with dark hair, wearing a blue textured sweater, is looking down intently at a large, open, antique-style book. The book is resting on a wooden surface. The background is a dimly lit library with bookshelves filled with books. The overall mood is quiet and studious.

**The church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since, especially in the sacred liturgy, she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life from the table both of God's word and of Christ's body**

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