

# Emmanuel

*Eucharistic Spirituality*

November/December 2015



The Eucharistic Vision of Vatican II:  
Sacrosanctum Concilium

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# Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 121 Number 6



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## FROM THE EDITOR

When Peter Julian Eymard made the difficult decision to leave the Society of Mary in 1856, one of the things he brought with him to the work of founding two religious congregations dedicated to the Eucharist was an enduring love for Mary, the mother of the Lord. Eymard's affection for Mary was shaped in his childhood by visits to the shrine of Notre Dame du Laus near his home, intensified in his teenage years when his mother died and he asked Mary to be his spiritual guide and protector, and deepened during almost two decades of ministry as a Marist.

In Marist spirituality, the frame of reference for understanding Mary as a model of discipleship is Nazareth and the nexus of relationships in the Holy Family. The society's charism was encapsulated by its founder, Father Jean Claude Colin — whom Father Eymard knew well and worked closely beside — in the phrase "hidden and as it were unknown in the midst of the world."

In living out his eucharistic vocation, Father Eymard searched for a new locus for understanding Mary. He found it in the Cenacle, as he wrote in 1865: "How she has led me by the hand, all by herself to the priesthood! And then to the Most Blessed Sacrament! From Nazareth, Jesus went to the Cenacle, and Mary there made her dwelling." Earlier, he told the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament: "It is the life of Mary in the Cenacle which should be the model and the consolation of your life. Honor this life of Mary in the eucharistic Cenacle."

The Cenacle is where Jesus shared a final meal with his friends and instituted the memorial of his saving death. It is the place of intimacy, as we read in John 14-17, where the Lord poured out his heart and soul and prayed for his disciples. It is from the upper room that the apostles emerged on the day of Pentecost to inaugurate their mission to the ends of the earth.

*Memorial. Intimacy. Mission.* The icon of the Cenacle tells us as much about the Apostle of the Eucharist's grasp of the eucharistic mystery as it does about his love for Mary.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the last of the conciliar documents to be highlighted in our yearlong series on The Eucharistic Vision of Vatican II, states: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows. For the aim and object of apostolic works is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's Supper" (10).

### **In this Issue**

Gil Ostdiek, OFM, and Susan Wood, SCL, offer different and very rich perspectives on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, promulgated on December 4, 1963. Each is worthy of careful reading and prayerful reflection. Both authors help us appreciate the central place of the Eucharist in the life, mission, mysticism, and self-understanding of the church.

The Jubilee Year of Mercy opens on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception this year and continues through the solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe in 2016. Carmelite Sister Mary Grace Melcher has accepted our invitation to write two intercessions and a concluding prayer on the themes of mercy and the Eucharist for the Sunday and solemnity Universal Prayers this year. These can be added to those you write and pray. The Pastoral Liturgy column will return with our next issue.

Cebu in the Philippines will host the 51st International Eucharistic Congress January 24-31, 2016. Vittore Boccardi, SSS, introduces us to the history of the IEC movement, the congress theme and program, and how these gatherings have changed to reflect current pastoral and social realities.



Anthony Schueller, SSS  
Editor



## *EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING*

# Looking to the 2016 International Eucharistic Congress

by Vittore Boccardi, SSS

*The Philippines is the only predominantly Catholic and Christian country in Asia. The faith planted by missionaries five centuries ago has flourished in the rich soil of the Filipino people, who have endured foreign domination, political upheaval, and a peaceful revolution, and emerged strong, resilient, and hopeful. Their faith is rooted in the Eucharist.*

Blessed Sacrament Father Vittore Boccardi is the secretary of the Pontifical Committee on International Eucharistic Congresses. He lives in Rome.

**T**HE THEME OF THE 51ST INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS, TO BE celebrated in Cebu in the Philippines from January 24-31, 2016, is "Christ in You, Our Hope and Glory." It is derived from 1 Colossians 1:27. The immediate context is verses 24 to 29:

Even now I find my joy in the suffering I endure for you. In my own flesh, I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church. I became a minister of this church through the commission God gave me to preach among you his word in its fullness, that mystery hidden from ages and generations past, but now revealed to his holy ones. God has willed to make known to them the glory beyond price which this mystery brings to the Gentiles, the mystery of Christ in you, your hope of glory. This is the Christ we proclaim while we admonish all and teach them in the full measure of wisdom, hoping to make all complete in Christ. For this I work and struggle, impelled by that energy of his which is so powerful a force within me.

The theme was chosen in order to express the nature of the Eucharist as mystery and mission. For the Philippines and Asia, the Eucharist is a mystery to be revealed, lived, and proclaimed. In the context of the "new evangelization" and within the nine-year preparation for the 500th anniversary of the coming of the Christian faith to the Philippines in 1521, the theme points to the Eucharist as the mystery or sacrament of the presence of Christ Jesus and of his saving mystery

in the church — People of God and the Body of Christ.

“Christ in You” indicates the presence of Jesus Christ in the church, which is also the church for the Gentiles and of the Gentiles. Thus, the church itself is present as mission, the church is itself missionary mandate and event.

The Eucharist, sacramental and real embodiment of this presence, is thus within the church in time its hope of glory for all peoples, for all of humankind and all creation. When the Eucharist is celebrated, this presence is sacramentally realized and the hope rekindled, experienced anew.

### **Congress History and Current Practice**

International eucharistic congresses may seem to be relics of the past which now insert themselves with difficulty into the contemporary world. Like the old vestments of sacristies, once shining gold but now ravaged by time, to many they have become just reminiscences of days gone by: the popular manifestations of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, through which the regality of Christ was put into the limelight in the biggest capitals of the world: the unending processions which involved tens and thousands of the faithful, the gathering of masses of adorers so as to pay the homage of faith, love, and reparation to Jesus Christ, God hidden under the veil of the sacrament, “insulted by the impious [and] ignored by the powerful desirous of a secularized society” (R. Aubert, “Les Congrès Eucharistiques de Léon XIII à Paul VI,” in *Concilium* 1, 1960, 118).

Eucharistic congresses came into existence in the second half of the nineteenth century; during the era of popular movements, of representative democracy and the press, the Catholics of France made use of the instrument of congresses to make people publicly aware of the vast activities linked to eucharistic devotion.

The first of the congresses was held at Lille in the northern region of France in 1881. In just a few years, the small seed of that modest beginning would grow and be transformed into an international movement.

In the early years of the twentieth century, while interacting with nascent liturgical movements, the congresses re-proposed the essential relationship between the church and the Eucharist, bringing back the ideal of “active participation” hoped for by the decrees of



Pius X (*Tra le Sollecitudini*, 1903). They maintained with conviction the eucharistic decrees of Pope Pius X, *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* (1905), about frequent Communion, and *Quam Singulari Christus Amore* (1910), regarding the age of First Holy Communion for children, and in more recent times, the action of Pius XII who signaled approval to a vast renewal program with *Mediator Dei* (1947) and the reforms of the Paschal Vigil (1951) and Holy Week (1955).

The emphasis on the essential relationship between the church and the Eucharist intensified as a result of the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council. Congresses have sought to contribute to the renewed face of the church produced by Vatican II and the doctrine of the Eucharist, the “source and summit of the entire Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11).

In recent years, pastoral concerns have increasingly influenced eucharistic congresses, among them the need to deepen the vision of Vatican II, address the collapse of culture and of religious practice in many parts of the world, the rise of secularism, the rediscovery of the meaning behind the eucharistic mystery and ways of living it, and the role the Eucharist plays in the “new evangelization.” Starting from this background, we can better understand the task and commitment of international eucharistic congresses today to answering the pressing concerns raised by cultural and ecclesial trends.

### *Humankind needs to hear the message of our hope in Christ Jesus.*

The Introduction of the Basic Text states: “The IEC is intended to be a station — a kind of a ‘stopover’ on a journey — where a local church community gathers around the Eucharist to celebrate, render honor, and pray in the presence of the Lord in his eucharistic mystery. To this sacred event, she invites nearby local churches and other church communities from all over the world, for the IEC is intended to be an affair of the universal church. The *Rituale* for the celebration of the congress demands that the actual celebration of the Eucharist be truly the center of all that takes place at the congress itself, so that everything points to it and prepares for it.”



## Eucharist, Mission, and Hope

The BasicText guides our reflection here on the upcoming congress. "All the components and details . . . should manifest an underlying vision of 'eucharistic ecclesiology' which is oriented toward communion and oneness in the community that is the church and which naturally seeks to reach out to all, especially those who are at the fringes of society, drawing them back until there will only be one flock under the one shepherd, Jesus Christ."

"The theme is meant to bring to fuller light the bond among the *Eucharist, mission, and Christian hope*, both in time and eternity. Today, there is a shortage of hope in the world as perhaps never before in history. Thus, humankind needs to hear the message of our hope in Christ Jesus. The church must proclaim this message today with renewed ardor, utilizing new methods and expressions. With these features of a 'new evangelization,' the church must seek to bring this message of hope to all, but especially to those 'who, though baptized, have drifted away from the church and live without reference to the Christian life.'"

*Pastoral concerns have increasingly influenced recent eucharistic congresses, underscoring the relationship between the church and the Eucharist.*

"The [congress] is envisioned to provide the participants opportunities for experiencing and understanding the Eucharist as a transforming encounter with the Lord in his word and in his life-giving sacrifice of himself, that we may have life and have it to the full (cf. Jn 10:10). It is intended to be an occasion for the discovery and rediscovery of the faith — 'that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family, and social life.'"

"This international gathering holds the promise of generating a more courageous and decisive carrying out of the Christian mission in the world and society that are becoming more and more indifferent and hostile to the faith and to the values of the Gospel. The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist can be a source of hope for the world when, transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit into the



likeness of him whom we encounter, we set out on a mission to transform the world with our zeal to bring to those who need most the same acceptance, forgiveness, healing, love, and wholeness that we ourselves received and experienced."

### **The Philippine Context**

"[This] congress should, in a specially radiant and effective way, proclaim the mystery of Christ considering the place of the faith and of the church in Philippine history. The church in the Philippines has a providential vocation for mission particularly in Asia, a vocation so constantly affirmed by the Roman pontiffs. The presence and active involvement of the Catholic laity in the various sectors of society, ecclesiastical and pastoral affairs included, bears a great potential to influence the socio-political and economic landscape in the manner of leaven in the dough."

"Poverty and lack of employment opportunities push many Filipinos to migrate to other countries both within and outside Asia, but when they do they bring their Christian faith along with them and share it with the people with and for whom they work, more perhaps by their examples and values than by their words. The Philippine church, then, is a source of hope in a special way precisely as 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' among the peoples of Asia, as Pope Paul VI affirmed in his 1970 visit to the Philippines."



*To be continued in January/February 2016*

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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 V, W, X, Y, and Z are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during November and December.



## EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Sacrosanctum Concilium Revisted

by Gil Ostdiek, OFM

*The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first document approved by the Second Vatican Council, and probably the most widely known. Promulgated in December 1963, it immediately caught the attention of the Catholic world and well beyond it. For it brought about a dramatic change in the centuries-long tradition of how Roman Catholic liturgy was celebrated.*

### The Context

THE CONTEXT IN WHICH *SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM* MADE ITS APPEARANCE WAS one of rival agendas. There was concern in some quarters to keep the tridentine liturgical tradition intact. Curia insiders hoped to limit the document and discussion to a statement of a few general principles for minor reforms of liturgical practice, leaving the actual details to their later decision. Alongside this concern was a growing hope for significant liturgical reform. Under the impulse of renewal movements in Scripture, theology, and liturgical history, the liturgical movement had for decades worked for reforms such as greater participation and use of the vernacular, a hot button issue during the decade before the council.

Active participation had been called for by Pius X and later by Pius XII. In the tridentine Mass, people had traditionally engaged in private prayer and devotion (e.g., the rosary). Increasingly in the twentieth century, alternatives had come into practice. Introduction of the Latin-English hand missal had enabled worshippers to follow the priest and quietly pray the Mass in English. It also allowed them to say responses, the Gloria, the creed, and the Lord's Prayer in Latin in what were called "dialogue Masses." Vernacular hymns came into use at four transition points in the Mass (entrance, offertory, Communion, and recessional). However, active involvement of the people in the Liturgy of the Word and Eucharistic Prayer, proclaimed in Latin, remained minimal. The encyclical of Pius XII on the liturgy (*Mediator Dei*, 1947) and his approval

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of the restoration of the Easter Vigil (1951) and reform of the rest of Holy Week (1955) had also encouraged pre-conciliar hopes for liturgical reform of the rites. The Second Vatican Council began in that setting.

Several reasons have been cited to explain why Vatican II chose to take up the liturgy document first: it was the most developed of the eight proposed documents; it would underline the pastoral intent of the council; it would energize the faithful at the start by renewing the sacramental center of Catholic life; and it would set the tone for subsequent discussions of other documents, a fervent hope of John XXIII. Those discussions were framed by two complementary processes dear to his heart, returning to the sources (*ressourcement*) and updating (*aggiornamento*). These were to mark the work of Vatican II.

The overall pastoral goals that were to guide the work of Vatican II are keynoted in the opening paragraph of SC, namely: to invigorate Catholic life, to adapt to the needs of our time, to promote Christian unity, and to reach out to the whole of humanity (1). The following reflections will focus mainly on the role the first two goals played in the reform of the liturgy.

### **What Sacrosanctum Concilium Said**

The highlights of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* are well known and can be recalled briefly. Important theological foundations for liturgy are laid out in the opening paragraphs. First, the paschal mystery of Jesus' dying and rising lies at the heart of the liturgy (4-5). In him, God's saving plan is brought to completion.

Second, to accomplish that saving work among us, Christ is present and active in the liturgy in many ways: in the assembly gathered to pray, in the word proclaimed, in the ministry of the presider, and in the eucharistic elements (7). Tridentine theology had spoken only of Christ's "real presence" in the sacred species after the consecration. Apart from that, he was not active in the liturgical celebration; Mass and the other sacraments simply applied the stored-up grace Christ had previously earned for us.

Third, the liturgy is the action of Christ and his body. The latent image of the church as the People of God will be drawn out clearly in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* will later say that the whole assembly is the

liturgist (*leitourgos*) along with Christ (1188).

Fourth, in liturgy God is worshipped, and signs perceptible to the senses signify and effect sanctification (7). This balanced the medieval stress on causality. The communicative role of signs and symbols has become an important and rich source for contemporary theology and catechesis of the sacraments.

Fifth, the liturgy is a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy (8), and sixth, the summit and font of the church's activity on earth (10).

There are also highlights of a more pastoral nature. First, full, conscious, and active participation is the right and duty of all the faithful by reason of their baptism and the nature of the liturgy itself (14).

*Sacrosanctum Concilium speaks of the faithful's baptismal right to full, conscious, and active participation. Such participation is their due as a matter of justice.*

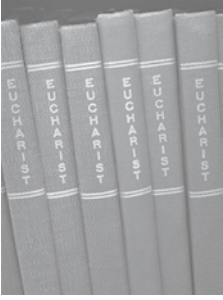
Second, such participation is the pastoral aim to be considered above all else in renewal of the liturgy (14). That principle is applied throughout all subsequent chapters, not only to each sacrament, but also to liturgical music, art, and architecture. Experience of full participation in the heart of every liturgical celebration has been perhaps the most significant contribution of SC.

Third, that participation is the indispensable source for the true Christian spirit. We'll return to this in the last section.

Fourth, to make participation possible, catechetical formation is needed for presiders, liturgical ministers, and the faithful (15-19, 35.3). This remains a crucial ongoing task.

Fifth, to enable participation, the rites are also to be simplified, within people's power of comprehension (34, 50).

Sixth, more and varied scripture readings are to be part of every celebration (35.1, 51), and the homily is drawn on these texts (52). Traditionally, sermons had expounded on doctrinal or ethical themes unrelated to the readings. This richer fare of the Scriptures has led



to an increasing biblical literacy among Catholics, witnessed in the growth of Scripture-sharing groups and personal reflection on Scripture (*lectio divina*).

Seventh, to benefit the people and respect their cultural context, SC made cautious provision for introducing vernacular into the liturgy (36.1) and for legitimate local variations and adaptations of the rites (37-38).

### **What More Could Have Been Said**

Recent discussion has posed the larger question of how to interpret the entire body of work of Vatican II. Some see the Constitution on the Church (LG) as the interpretative key; others opt for *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. In it, they see lines of thought planted like seeds for the future work of the council. To be sure, these remained to be thought out and nurtured in the later documents. One wonders what might have happened if the final text of SC, and indeed of each successive document, had been put on hold, without being promulgated, and then revisited as an entire corpus to allow for editing or further development. For example, would the documents on Church (LG), Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*), Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*), and the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) have led to any revisions in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*? Would some of the lines of thought implicit in SC have been given a more explicit voice in guiding the liturgical renewal? Or might other avenues of thought have been opened up? Two examples come to mind.

One is the question of liturgy and justice. SC spoke of the faithful's baptismal right to full, conscious, and active participation (14). Such participation is their due as a matter of justice. Any exclusion or minimizing of that participation — by lack of preparatory and mystagogical catechesis, by not taking account of their spiritual needs as lay people in their everyday world, by eliminating or curtailing their liturgical role(s), by failing to honor the genius of their language, arts, and culture — can be seen as an injustice. Might more attention have been paid to celebrating liturgy justly?

If liturgy models how Christians are to live in the world, then a liturgy celebrated unjustly rehearses acting unjustly in daily life. Might what GS said about human dignity, social justice, and culture (e.g., 8, 12ff, 27, 29, 34, 53ff, 66, 69) have tweaked what SC had to say about

how sacraments are celebrated? Regrettably, implementation of the liturgical renewal addressed the issue of social justice in only one little-noticed instance, in the introduction to the Rite of Penance (5). SC and its implementation were tightly focused inwardly on the liturgical life of the church.

The relationship of liturgy and mission is an example of looking outward beyond the inner liturgical life of the church. Early on, SC had stated that “the liturgy . . . and most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church” (2). The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (AG), promulgated in the last session of Vatican II, has a wonderful opening statement: “The pilgrim church is *missionary by her very nature*, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (2, emphasis added).

*Sacrosanctum Concilium and the liturgical renewal it inaugurated offer us another way to think about eucharistic spirituality.*

The phrase emphasized above has become a mainstay in subsequent papal documents on mission. Might this statement have urged a fuller wording in SC, 2? More importantly, might it have led to a more robust treatment of the rite of dismissal in the implementation of the liturgical renewal? In a recent reflection on the dismissal (*Ite missa est*), Benedict XIV noted that “these words succinctly express the missionary nature of the church. The People of God might be helped to understand more clearly this essential dimension of the church’s life, taking the dismissal as a starting-point” (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 51). We will return to this in the next section. That the council did address seminal SC issues in later documents testifies to an increasing depth of the discussions as the council went on.

### **Eucharistic Spirituality Revisited**

We turn now to explore some further implications of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* for a church that places Eucharist at the center of its life and mission. How can this constitution further invigorate Catholic life today? How can its message be updated to address the needs of our



times? What seeds planted in SC might now be nurtured into a new growth of eucharistic spirituality for today? Several threads of thought in SC can be woven together to sketch the outlines of a eucharistic spirituality that links liturgy and life.

First, Eucharist is not simply a stand-alone celebration, disconnected from daily life. SC (5-7) sets it firmly within a larger vision that ties together God's plan of salvation, its fulfillment in the paschal mystery of Christ, and its continuation in the mission of the church. To accomplish that work among us now, Christ is present in liturgical celebrations, still exercising his priestly office.

Those plunged by baptism into his paschal mystery join him in that priestly action in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist. That mission, as AG later explained, flows from the "fountain-like love" within the Trinity into the mission of Christ and the Spirit to become the mission of the church (2). At the heart of it all is love's dynamic of completely giving oneself to others, holding nothing back. Sent to bring God's love down to earth, Christ gave himself completely in the paschal mystery, and his disciples are sent to spread that love throughout the world.

What role does Eucharist play in that mission? In paragraph 48, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* identifies the pivotal eucharistic moment that captures the heart of our mission as disciples. To appreciate what SC says, though, we need to look first at the entrance procession. Busy with our hymnals, we often pay little attention to the procession. But think about it.

As a poet says, procession is journey distilled, journey at its heart. Those few who march in it are our representatives; they march in our name, in our place. What do they carry? A processional cross flanked by candles and the Gospel Book. The cross tells the story of Christ's death out of love for us. But it is also our story. Did he not tell us to take up the cross and follow him? It is the story of the many ways in which we have died to ourselves that week, putting the life and needs of others before our own. Those mini-deaths are at the same time mini-moments of rising above ourselves. Candles give a little light and warmth. *The* candle for Christians is the paschal candle, symbol of the One who is the light of the world. Did he not also tell us that we are the light of the world? Candles are symbols that tell the story of the witness and charity we show others in daily life. No matter how weak our little lights may seem, together they can light up the world, just like our tapers, lighted



from the paschal candle at the Easter Vigil, set the church aglow. The Gospel Book tells the story of God's hopes and plans for God's reign on earth, the story we strive to live out. What the entrance procession brings into the assembly, through our midst and in our name, is that week's story of our dying and rising, our witness and service to others, our gospel way of living. These are to be brought in for what follows, not checked at the door lest they distract us. If only it were possible for all of us to walk in that procession!

Think next of the presentation of the gifts. Bread and wine are carried up in procession and placed on the altar. The prayers over the bread and wine name them as gifts — gifts of God, of the earth, and of human labor. Anthropologists call them condensed symbols. What is condensed in them is the labor not just of a few farmers and vintners, but of all who have had a hand in their production, providing the factories and equipment needed by farmers, vintners, and all who process, transport, and distribute these fruits of field and vine. They also condense in themselves the fertile gift of the earth God has given us to cultivate. In presenting the bread and wine, what we are really presenting is all our work, our lives, ourselves, our world — all that we brought into the assembly in the entrance procession. We should all walk in spirit in this procession, presenting the gifts of ourselves, our work, and our world for the offering that will follow.

*Seeing Christ in others and being Christ for them truly honors and venerates his abiding presence in us.*

That brings us to the pivotal moment named in SC, 48. In the prayer proclaimed after the words of institution, SC says, the faithful offer not only the spotless Victim; they should learn to offer themselves as well, with and through Christ (see also *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 79f). Eucharistic Prayer III says it beautifully: we offer God "this holy and living sacrifice." That is the New Testament name for Christian life. That is the gift of self we have brought into the assembly, placed on the altar with bread and wine, and now offer along with Christ's self-giving under the symbols of bread and wine. In so doing, we join ourselves to Christ's mission. We then pray that our reception of this holy sacrament may make of us one body, one spirit in Christ. Sadly, this pivotal moment of offering our self-gift has received little or no attention in homily and catechesis.



As the body of Christ, we are then sent back into the world. In the words of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the dismissal is like the breaking of the bread. We are broken and sent to be bread for the life of the world (*Guide for the Assembly*, 49). The dismissal sends us back out into daily life, into what some have called the “liturgy of life” or the “liturgy of the neighbor.” We are sent on mission to be Christ for the world. Dying to self, loving service of others, living witness of gospel values — these are our mission and the gift we bring back the next time we gather for the Eucharist.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the liturgical renewal it inaugurated thus offer us another way to think about eucharistic spirituality. To be sure, adoration and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament remain an important part of Catholic spirituality. It is also right and just to venerate and honor another form of Christ’s abiding presence among us. He is also present in his body, the church (classical theology called this his indwelling). The Head is never absent from his body; we take him with us into the world. A poem by Saint Teresa of Avila says it so clearly: “Christ has no body now but ours” (full text available on the web). Being his presence in the world means living out and manifesting to others the paschal mystery of Christ (SC, 2).

Celebrating the Eucharist demands of us a eucharistic lifestyle, imitating his self-giving in love and service. It calls us to become bread broken for the life of the world, just as he did. Such a lifestyle can become a powerful expression of eucharistic spirituality today, taking its place alongside traditional eucharistic spirituality. Seeing Christ in others and being Christ for them truly honors and venerates his abiding presence in us. This is a spirituality for which people hunger today, for it gives them a noble mission, it gives meaning and purpose to daily life in the world. It is a eucharistic spirituality worthy of our best pastoral efforts in homily and catechesis.





## EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

# Teilhard de Chardin on the Eucharist

by Dennis Billy, CSsR

*Teilhard de Chardin was a scientist as well as a poet, theologian, and mystic. Firmly rooted in his Catholic faith and in the study of the cosmos, he brought the dialogue between science and religion to new heights of complexity and power. The Eucharist was central to his vision.*

**T**EILHARD DE CHARDIN (1881-1955) WAS ONE OF THE MOST CREATIVE (AND controversial) Catholic thinkers of the twentieth century. He was born in the Château of Sarcenat at Orcines, France, studied philosophy and mathematics at the Jesuit college of Mongré in Villefranche-sur-Saône, and entered the Jesuit novitiate at Aix-en-Provence in 1899. After earning a licentiate in literature in Caen in 1902, he taught physics and chemistry in Cairo at the Jesuit College of the Holy Family from 1905-1908, studied theology at Hastings in the United Kingdom from 1908-1912, and was ordained a priest in 1911. He worked in the paleontology laboratory of the *Museum National d'Histoire* in Paris from 1912-1914.

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Teilhard served as a stretcher-bearer in the 8th Moroccan Rifles during World War I and received several citations. He pronounced his solemn vows as a Jesuit in 1918, studied natural science at the Sorbonne, lectured in geology at the Catholic Institute of Paris in 1920, and became a professor there after being granted a doctorate in science in 1922. He traveled to China in 1926 and would remain there for roughly 20 years, making from 1926-1935 a total of five geological research expeditions that enabled him to establish a geological map of China.

In addition to his scientific expeditions, Teilhard lectured extensively in Europe and the United States and was recognized for his groundbreaking insights into the dialogue between religion and science. His wide acclaim brought him to the attention of the Vatican's Holy Office, which silenced him at various points in his career and prohibited him from publishing any works that would undermine



the faith. His views on Christianity and evolution, once condemned, would be rehabilitated in later years by many mainstream Catholic theologians and authorities with close ties to the Holy See.

A prolific author, he is probably best known to English readers for *The Divine Milieu* (1957), *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959), *Hymn of the Universe* (1961), *Christianity and Evolution* (2002), and *The Heart of the Matter* (2002). He wrote extensively on the Eucharist, because he believed it gave the world a clear indication of the spirituality of matter and marked the beginning of the recapitulation of all things in Christ, the Omega Point of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

### **Teilhard's Theological and Spiritual Outlook**

Unified and comprehensive in its outlook, Teilhard's thought underwent continuous development and is noted for a simplicity underlying its vast intellectual complexities. His anthropology is intimately connected to his cosmology, for he believes that human consciousness represents the culmination of the universe coming to a consciousness of itself. Man, for him, is both involved in the physical universe and transcendent to it. Our experience of isolation from the world results from an existential anxiety and fear of annihilation and can only be counteracted by a growing awareness that God is involved in a continuous creative process through which the orders of the natural and the supernatural converge.<sup>2</sup>

Christ is the initial point of contact between these two orders, the Omega point toward which humanity and, through it, all the universe are tending. Evolution is but a single aspect of a much larger process involving the movement of the cosmos to higher and higher levels of consciousness. Matter, in his mind, is a "matrix of spirit" moving toward ever higher and higher states of existence.<sup>3</sup> The biological, which he calls the "biosphere," is one such state; human life, which he associates with the "noosphere," yet another.<sup>4</sup> Both are tending toward yet another transcendent state, which he calls the "Omega Point."<sup>5</sup> This new level is both an immanent principle and a transcendent goal; it represents the inner dynamism behind all reality and the end toward which it tends. It is actual, stable, transcendent, and personal.<sup>6</sup>

First localized in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, it gradually gathers all things to itself as it expands and opens itself up to the universal. For Teilhard, all things are being recapitulated into this universal, cosmic

Christ.<sup>7</sup> With the exception of sin, everything forms a part of the movement of unbounded and unconditional love at work in the universe.<sup>8</sup>

Teilhard's theological and spiritual outlook is rooted in the philosophical assumptions that the world as we know it is involved in a process of evolution toward ever higher and higher states of consciousness and that all matter is spiritual at its core and gradually being recapitulated into advanced forms of existence. This convergence of process and panpsychist (i.e., all reality participates in mind) thought leads him to construct a vision of the cosmos in which the orders of the natural and supernatural, while distinct, are in the process of converging into a unified, harmonious whole.

A part of God's providential plan for the universe from time eternal, the movement toward this "New Creation" is working itself out in the universe's evolutionary movement through time. The mystery of the incarnation represents a critical stage in this development and the doctrine of the mystical body of Christ points to its ever-expanding embrace. The church and the sacraments, for Teilhard, are mediators of this divinizing process at work in the very fabric of the universe, and the Eucharist is the concrete manifestation of this process becoming reality.<sup>9</sup>

### Teilhard on the Eucharist

Teilhard was an ontological realist who believed that the sacraments operated not only "symbolically," but also "biologically."<sup>10</sup> The Eucharist, for him, is the sacrament of Christ par excellence and has a certain "devouring power" on those who receive it.<sup>11</sup> Rather than our assimilating it through the process of digestion, it assimilates us and involves us in a process of divinization which he called "Christogenesis."<sup>12</sup> In this respect, it is the prototype through which God consecrates the universe and enters into a close, intimate relationship with it. This process entails a kind of "eucharistization of the universe," a process at work in the entire cosmos as it makes its way toward the Omega Point of the cosmic, universal Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Teilhard's teaching on the Eucharist hinges upon his unique interpretation of the mystery of the incarnation and his analogous interpretation of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The incarnation represents a stage in the evolution of the cosmos when matter itself sets out on a stage of being recapitulated into Christ. Cosmogensis is subsumed into Christogenesis.<sup>14</sup> Christ in becoming man has initiated



a much larger process of Christ becoming the entire universe. Although he does not go into great detail into how this process takes place or even how this insight conforms to traditional Catholic teaching, he is adamant in his assertion that as a result of the incarnation matter itself is in the process of becoming incarnate.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, however, the cosmos is being divinized only in a derived and secondary sense; he seeks not to equate the universe with God or in some way dilute the substance of his divinity, but merely to show that God seeks to permeate the universe with his abiding and embracing presence.<sup>16</sup>

Teilhard correlates this innovative interpretation of the Eucharist with Catholic doctrine through an analogous interpretation of the doctrine of transubstantiation.<sup>17</sup> While the bread and wine are the primary analogates of the doctrine, the world is the secondary one. The bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ, yet point to an even greater change taking place on the level of the cosmos. Matter itself, according to this view, is being transformed into the presence of the universal, cosmic Christ.

*God is involved in a continuous creative process through which the orders of the natural and the supernatural converge.*

Teilhard is quick to maintain not only the importance of each of these understandings of transubstantiation, but also their close interconnection: "The center of Christ's personal energy is really situated in the host. And, just as we rightly give the name of 'our body' to the local center of our spiritual radiation (though that does not perhaps necessarily mean that our flesh is more ours than is any other matter), we must say that the initial body of Christ, his *primary body* is confined to the species of bread and wine."<sup>18</sup>

Although he has, at times, been accused of coming close to (if not embracing) a pantheistic view of the cosmos, a careful reading of Teilhard's thought shows that he is not so much pantheistic as panentheistic in his outlook. He holds a view that God penetrates every aspect of the universe, while at the same time extending infinitely beyond it.

Teilhard has a difficult time rectifying the traditional Aristotelian matter/form categories upon which the doctrine of transubstantiation

is based with a view of the Eucharist that falls more in line with a Neoplatonic understanding of the sacrament based on the notion of participation. As the cosmic Christ represents universal form in which the historical incarnate Word of God participates, so too the eucharistic sacrament of the world represents the universal form in which the consecrated species share. This underlying philosophical concept of participation enables him to extend the sacrament of the Eucharist beyond the eucharistic species of bread and wine to the entire cosmos.

In his *Hymn of the Universe*, Teilhard relates how his insight into the *eucharistization* of the cosmos stemmed from his inability to celebrate Mass during his scientific fieldwork and how he decided at one point to see the sacrifice of the Mass at work in the world at large: "Since . . . I have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world."<sup>19</sup> Through this expanded understanding of the Eucharist, Teilhard incorporates everything in the cosmos into the power, influence, and realism of the universal Christ.

His subordination of the historical Jesus to the universal Christ is replicated in his understanding of the sacrament. Although the consecrated elements are the primary analogates in this extension, the body of Christ in the world is, in his mind, the much deeper reality, for it represents that toward which the sacrament tends.

## Observations

Although this brief exposition of Teilhard's teaching on the Eucharist does not do justice to the complexity and various nuances of his thought, it highlights its relevance for his overall theological vision shows how he sought to root his insights in the church's traditional teaching on the Eucharist. The following observations develop some of the implications of his views and their relevance for today's Catholics.

1. To begin with, Teilhard extends the meaning of the Eucharist in a way that seeks to preserve its sacramental integrity while, at the same time, accentuating its ramifications for the cosmic order. While the traditional Catholic teaching has no difficulty asserting the impact the sacrament should have on the spiritual and moral lives of the faithful, Teilhard takes



a further step by extending its relevance to the ontological order. The sacrament, in this respect, embodies not only the transformation of bread and wine into the glorified body and blood of Christ, but also the transformation of the world of matter to a higher plane of spirit and consciousness, one that lifts it up into the very being of the universal Christ.

One of the key difficulties in Teilhard's eucharistic teaching concerns the way these two orders relate to one another and which of them takes precedence. From all indications, and despite heated claims to the contrary, Teilhard seems to opt for the priority (teleological if not historical) of the universal Christ and the eucharistic world sacrament. This emphasis runs the risk of diminishing the importance of the original sacrament as the primary analogate or, in the very least, of shifting its preeminence to a secondary plane.<sup>20</sup>

2. Teilhard uses the concept of analogy to extend the meaning of the Eucharist to the cosmic order, identifying the bread and wine as the primary analogues and the world of matter as the secondary analogue in this sacramental extension. Analogy, however, always contains both a "likeness" and a "difference" and embraces different types, ranging anywhere from a simple metaphor to one involving proportionate likenesses and differences.

Teilhard's failure to develop his analogical use of "transubstantiation" to any great extent leaves himself open to misinterpretation. Some critics maintain that his employing of this analogy waters down the uniqueness of the sacrament as an eschatological sign of transcendence; others say he brings out the sacrament's hidden potential by connecting the order of the new creation to the world of matter. In addition to being a scientist, Teilhard, we must remember, was also a poet, theologian, and mystic. His vague and often imaginative use of language points to his own difficulty in finding appropriate concepts to convey his intuitions into the nature of the divine milieu.<sup>21</sup>

3. Teilhard's creative interpretation of the Eucharist caught the attention of the Holy Office on a number of counts and was at least partially responsible for his being silenced. By tying the sacramental order to the order of the cosmos, he could easily be accused, on the one hand, of collapsing the supernatural



order unto the natural plane or, on the other hand, of extending the natural into the supernatural. Behind these accusations lay Teilhard's belief in the eventual convergence of the two orders in the Omega Point of the universal Christ. Also coming under suspicion was the seemingly facile way in which he ties the recapitulation of all things in Christ to the theory of evolution, as well as the way he uses the Eucharist as the means by which the world of matter is divinized and brought into the order of the New Creation.

*The Eucharist gives the world a clear indication of the spirituality of matter and marks the beginning of the recapitulation of all things in Christ.*

If these areas of concern caused the Holy Office to curtail the spread and general influence of these creative ideas, the rehabilitation of Teilhard's thought in later years has vindicated if not the orthodoxy of his ideas, then at least the church's willingness to recognize in him a loyal son who sought to explore the boundaries and ramifications of some of its most sacred teachings.<sup>22</sup>

4. The mystery of the incarnation lies at the heart of Teilhard's extension of the Eucharist to the world. He believed that, by becoming human, God initiated a process of divinization that would ultimately extend to all humanity and the entire cosmos. In his *Hymn of the Universe*, he writes, "Through your own incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate."<sup>23</sup> If this process begins in the mystery of the incarnation, it is furthered at every celebration of the Eucharist and will reach its consummation when all matter is recapitulated into the universal Christ.

This divine unfolding "in our midst" yet "still to come" emphasizes the return of all things to God while, at the same time remaining separate from him: ". . . each of us is our own little microcosm in which the incarnation is wrought independently with degrees of intensity, and shades that are incommunicable."<sup>24</sup> The convergence of the natural and supernatural orders, in other words, does not bring about a fusion of the human and divine, but a dynamic union and harmony of wills and an ontological sharing in the divine.



5. Teilhard's teaching on the Eucharist has much more in common with a Platonic or Neoplatonic understanding of the sacrament than its classical Aristotelian/Thomistic counterpart.<sup>25</sup> As the universal Christ represents the form or pattern for the first historical realization of Christ in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, so does the universal sacrament of the Eucharist do for the Mass. Teilhard, however, gives this Neoplatonic rendering of the sacrament a marked evolutionary flavor.

Rather than the typical Neoplatonic framework of having lesser and lesser degrees of emanation flowing from the One, he equips the concrete localization of the universal with an inner dynamism that moves it toward ever higher and higher degrees of complexity. The result is a hybrid model using Aristotelian/Thomistic language (matter, form, transubstantiation), Neoplatonic ontology (participatory being), and Darwinian dynamism (evolution). Whether this represents a comprehensive theory or a syncretistic blend of essentially incompatible concepts, it is clear that Teilhard's Neoplatonism softens his evolutionary bent and makes it more palatable to Christian sensitivities.

6. It has been said that, despite its analogous use of "transubstantiation," Teilhard's teaching on the Eucharist moves the sacrament away from this traditional understanding of what takes place during the sacrament to a model of "transignification" that is more in line with the philosophical sensitivities of his time.<sup>26</sup> A change of "meaning" occurs rather than a change in "substance." Just as the bread and wine take on new significance in the light of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, so does the entire world of matter as the universal Christ celebrates his cosmic Mass and recapitulates all things in himself.

While this approach to the sacrament solves the difficulties modern philosophers have with the notion of "substance," it is not at all clear that this is what Teilhard intends. "The host," he states, "is in the first place, and primarily, the fragment of matter to which, through transubstantiation, the presence of the incarnate Word attaches itself among us, that is to say, in the human zone of the universe."<sup>27</sup> Teilhard uses *transubstantiation* not merely out of respect for the tradition, but because he believes it conveys something unique about what takes place in the sacrament. For this reason, it would be better to say that he complements the

traditional “transubstantiation” model with a “transignification” model to explain his understanding of the cosmic Eucharist.

7. Finally, Teilhard’s teaching on the Eucharist cannot be fully understood apart from his devotion to the Catholic faith, his deep priestly fervor, and his formation in Jesuit spirituality. His scientific explorations and his attempt to bring them into dialogue with the Catholic faith stem from one of the fundamental principles of Ignatian spirituality: “to find Christ in all things.” As a Catholic and as a priest dedicated to the administration of the sacraments, this meant finding the Eucharist in all things, and vice versa. Even when silenced by the Holy Office, he saw this as an opportunity to bear the sufferings of Christ with courage, the paschal mystery of the cosmic Christ manifested in the microcosm of his own life.

No less a figure than Henri de Lubac has this to say about Teilhard’s loyalty to the Catholic faith: “If this bold Christian sometimes, as has been said, came close to the edge of the precipice, it was his roots in the tradition, held firmly in place by his choice of unswerving fidelity, that saved him from a fall. We may, indeed, go further and say that it was from those roots that he drew nourishment for what we admire in him as being the most vigorously personal.”<sup>28</sup>

When seen in his light, Teilhard’s teaching on the Eucharist represents an attempt on his part to remain faithful to the teachings of the faith while at the same time exploring new avenues of thought with a view toward possible reformulations that would propel the tradition forward.

Although these observations barely skim the surface of Teilhard’s profound insights into the Eucharist, they highlight the centrality of the sacrament for his thought and the key role it plays in his comprehensive vision of the cosmos. They also reveal his desire to probe the truths of the Catholic faith and to allow those truths to be questioned by the findings of empirical research. To a large extent, Teilhard’s legacy is rooted in his eagerness to pursue this dialogue between religion and science, integrate his findings, and follow with persistence whatever path it set before him

## **Conclusion**

Teilhard de Chardin was a seminal Catholic thinker who sought



to deepen his faith through the insights gained through scientific research. He was not afraid to let his empirical findings challenge his Catholic beliefs, since he held that the unity of truth would not permit reason to undermine the doctrines of the faith. He used the insights of reason to explore the mysteries of the faith still further and to push the boundaries of orthodoxy to its limits. He is remembered as a foundational thinker whose unshaken faith in “the primacy of the personal” led him to wed the insights of science, philosophy, and theology into a comprehensive vision of the universe.<sup>29</sup>

Teilhard was a pioneer in the dialogue between science and faith, a penetrating thinker who sought to synthesize the insights from a number of fields of inquiry into a unified, integral whole. His theory of the evolution of the universe — from the biosphere to the noosphere to the cosmic Christ — weds evolution to Christianity in a way never before imagined. His belief in the sentient nature of matter and the notion of the cosmic Christ recapitulating the entire universe led him to test the limits of Catholic orthodoxy and to pose new ways in which some of the most traditional doctrines of faith could be formulated.

Even though he suffered for these innovative insights and took criticism from many directions, he remained intensely loyal to his Catholic and Jesuit moorings and followed the instructions of his superiors to the letter. He was a man who was ahead of his time and who unfortunately never lived to witness either the rehabilitation of his reputation or the vindication of many of his most profound insights.

Teilhard’s teaching on the Eucharist lies at the very heart of his thought. The “eucharistization” of the cosmos, as he calls it, has its roots in the mystery of the incarnation and was extended by Christ to the world of matter when he celebrated his Last Supper with his disciples. This process of divinization continues every time the Eucharist is celebrated in the church and will not relent until it converts the entire cosmos into the universal Christ celebrating the cosmic Mass at the Omega Point, when all of reality will be recapitulated in his divine embrace.

The Eucharist, for Teilhard, is the bridge between the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ. It challenges believers to embrace a comprehensive vision of the cosmos, where the Lord of history converges with the cosmic Christ and where divinized creation offers itself as an eternal offering of love to the communion of divine love from which it came.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*, trans. René Hague. (New York: The New American Library, 1967), 13-21. For the stages of Teilhard's life and thought, see Emile Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin: A Guide to His Thought*, trans. René Hague (London: Collins, 1967), 27-30. The dates after Teilhard's works refer to the appearance of the first English edition.
- <sup>2</sup> Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 35-36.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.
- <sup>4</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 180-83, 190-211, Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 52-53.
- <sup>5</sup> Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 57-60.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-62.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-24, 138-40, 538, 107.
- <sup>9</sup> Christopher F. Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 68, 168.
- <sup>10</sup> Joseph Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist: A Reflection," *Theological Studies* 34 (2, 1973): 258.
- <sup>11</sup> de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 61.
- <sup>12</sup> Mooney, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 162.
- <sup>13</sup> Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 251.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.
- <sup>16</sup> See de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 27.
- <sup>17</sup> See Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 255-59.
- <sup>18</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 65; Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 256.
- <sup>19</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Hymn of the Universe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 19; Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 252.
- <sup>20</sup> Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 255.
- <sup>21</sup> For an analysis of Teilhard's language, see Rideau, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 257-76. For Teilhard's general use of analogy, see de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 161-68. For Teilhard's analogous use of "transubstantiation," see Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 255-59.
- <sup>22</sup> For the controversies surrounding Teilhard's thought, see de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 161-90.
- <sup>23</sup> de Chardin, *The Hymn of the Universe*, 24, 26; Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 253.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 28; 253.
- <sup>25</sup> "... Teilhard's eucharistic fragments evidence, in and through the negativities of both decadent scholasticism and modern technology, an anguished yet joyful reinvention of a species of eucharistic Platonism." See Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 263.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.
- <sup>27</sup> de Chardin, *Science and Christ*, 65; Fitzer, "Teilhard's Eucharist," 255.
- <sup>28</sup> de Lubac, *Teilhard de Chardin*, 13-14.
- <sup>29</sup> See *Ibid.*, 26.



## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# Vinculum Caritatis: Bond of Love

by Susan K. Wood, SCL

*In what way can it be said that the Eucharist is “a bond of charity” among believers? How are we to understand the inseparable relationship between the sacramental body of Christ and the ecclesial body of Christ, the church? Sacrosanctum Concilium invites us to see and to experience the Eucharist mystically.*

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THE CONSTITUTION ON THE SACRED LITURGY FROM VATICAN II CALLED THE Eucharist a “vinculum caritatis,” “a bond of charity.” This reference occurs within a passage giving us the purpose for which the Eucharist was instituted:

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 love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us (SC, 47).

This bond of love is not only between an individual and the risen Lord, but also the bond of love among all who receive the Eucharist, and is thus inseparable from the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist as well as its social meaning. It is not a warm fuzzy feeling, but has a deep ontological density. It is the final effect of the koinonia established by the Eucharist.

I will develop the relationship between the Eucharist and the bond of charity within the Christian community by looking at Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, patristic sources in the mystagogical teaching of Augustine, the scholastic analysis of sacramental sign and efficacy, and the post-modern eucharistic theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Thus, I will look at this traditional theme as it has been appropriated through

various historical periods and sacramental methodologies.

## The Church of Corinth

A prime example of a community having problems with charity was the Corinthian community. The community had broken their bond of charity through quarrels and divisions, factions, some saying, "I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos," "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ" (1 Cor 1:12). They tolerated a Christian living with his own stepmother without interference from the community (5:1ff). Paul had to remind them not to have relations with prostitutes (6:12ff). He appeals to them to settle their grievances against each other within the community (1 Cor 6:1). Some members of the community accepted invitations to meals at which meat that had been sacrificed to idols was served (10:27ff), and took part in meals in pagan temples (8:10). At the Lord's Supper, the rich stuffed themselves with food and drink they had brought along, while the poor remained hungry (11:17ff). Worship was disrupted because glossolalia, speaking in tongues, threatened to suppress all other workings of the Spirit (14). Some denied the resurrection of the dead (15:12). The Corinthian community certainly bears witness to the fact that we are not the only Christians who have a difficult time living up to the example of Christ and getting along with one another.

In the face of this dissension, Paul appeals to the Corinthians: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17). Paul grounds the bond of charity that should exist among the members of the community in their participation in the Eucharist. Christian identity is grounded in Jesus Christ.

The meaning of the Christian community which the liturgy "mediates, establishes, and maintains" is that the church is in some way the body of Christ. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor notes the close relationship throughout the epistle between "body of Christ" referring to the eucharistic body and referring to the ecclesial body. He finds that it is habitual in Paul's vocabulary to attribute the name "Christ" to the community.<sup>1</sup> This is not an identification between the community and the historical Christ, but indicates that the community performs the same function as Christ.<sup>2</sup>



## Augustine

A similar identification between the ecclesial and the eucharistic body is found in Augustine of Hippo's Easter sermons and his sermons on the Gospel of John. The Easter sermons were addressed to the newly baptized, initiating them into the mysteries of the Christian life, and were instructions on the sacraments of the altar. He first affirms that the bread which they see on the altar consecrated by the word of God is the body of Christ and that the chalice holds the blood of Christ. He then asserts, "If you have received worthily, you are what you have received. He then repeats 1 Corinthians 10:17 to support this assertion.

The dominant image here is that the unity of the bread is a type or sacramental symbol of the unity of the ecclesial body. In a very similar sermon, Augustine extends the image as it applies to the newly initiated:

Bear in mind what this creature, wheat, was formerly when it still grew in the field; how the earth caused it to germinate, how the rains nurtured it; how it ripened in kernels; and how afterward the laborers carried it to the threshing floor, treaded it, winnowed it, stored it in the granary, brought it out again to be milled, then added water to it, and baked it, until at last it emerged as bread.

Bear in mind what happened in your own case, imagining a time when you did not yet exist, but then you were created and brought to the threshing floor of the Lord, threshed by hard-working oxen, that is to say, by the heralds of the Gospel. The period of your probation as catechumens was the time when you were being stored in the granary. Then came the day when you handed in your names, and the milling process began by means of the fasts and exorcisms to which you were subjected. Afterward, you came to the font, were immersed in the water, and kneaded into one dough. Finally, you were baked in the fire of the Holy Spirit, and became the bread of the Lord. . . . Now ponder on what you have received. And as it dawns on you what unity there is in the sacrament which has been instituted, be impressed with the unity that ought to prevail among yourselves. . . .



Likewise, there is an identification between the newly initiated and the eucharistic wine:

So, too, the wine made from many grapes is now one liquid, one sweet liquid in the chalice after being crushed in the wine press. In Christ's name, you also, as it were, have come to be present in the chalice of the Lord through your fast and good works, through your humility and contrition. There you are on the altar, there you are in the chalice. In this sacrament you are united with us — we are joined together, we drink together, because we share life together."

In yet another sermon, he exhorts: "Take then and eat the body of Christ, for in the body of Christ you are already made the members of Christ." In this same sermon: "Because you have life through him, you will be one body with him, for this sacrament extends the body of Christ and by it you are made inseparable from him."

*The eucharistic sacrament as a sacrament of unity signs, signifies, and creates the unity of the church, the vinculum caritatis.*

However, the unity of the body received at the altar is a sign and measure of the unity of the ecclesial body. The eucharistic sacrament as a sacrament of unity signs, signifies, and creates the unity of the church, the *vinculum caritatis*. The sacramental realism of the historical Christ leads to the sacramental realism of the ecclesial Christ, so that Augustine can say, "There you are on the altar, there you are in the chalice." Affirmation of the Christological reality leads to the affirmation of the ecclesial reality. The presence of the latter is as real as the presence of the first. When we commune with the sacramental body of Christ, we commune with the resurrected Christ and the church which is also the body of Christ.

### **The Ecclesial and Eucharistic Body**

Henri de Lubac's historical study *Corpus Mysticum* traces a fascinating change in the application of the term *corpus mysticum*. Before the eucharistic controversies with Berengar of Tours in the eleventh century, the church was designated as the *corpus verum*, the true body. In contrast, the Eucharist was the *corpus mysticum*, the mystical body. This is just the reverse of our use of these terms today. In the familiar



hymn used at benediction, "Ave Verum," composed by Thomas Aquinas after this shift in usage occurred, the "true body" is the Eucharist, not the church. The church fathers, however, "had seen [Christ's] ecclesial body as the *veritas* of his mystical eucharistic body. The Eucharist was "mystical" because it was received spiritually.

Within this earlier view, there was an inherent unity between the historical body of Christ born of Mary, his eucharistic body, and his ecclesial body. In response to the threat posted by Berengar, the church emphasized the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, calling it the "*corpus verum*." To prevent any misunderstanding concerning the reality of Christ in the Eucharist, it emphasized the link between Christ's eucharistic body and the true body born of Mary, dead and risen.

As vital as this link is, sadly, the other connection with the ecclesial body was lost in the process. In emphasizing eucharistic realism, we have lost the ecclesial realism of the Augustinian view of the *totus Christus*, the whole body of Christ comprised of Christ the head and his members, which will only be complete in the eschaton.

*The sacramental body of Christ in the Eucharist is inseparable from his ecclesial body.*

The scholastic analysis of the sacraments also shows the relationship between the sign of the sacrament, the sacramental presence of Christ, and Christian unity. The scholastics spoke of the *sacramentum tantum*, that is, the sign of the sacrament, the *res et sacramentum*, that is, the reality of the sacrament, and the *res tantum*, the effect of the sacrament. According to this schema, with respect to the Eucharist, the *sacramentum tantum* is the outward sign and appearance of bread and wine. The *res et sacramentum* is the reality of the Eucharist, that is, the body and blood of the risen Christ. The *res tantum* is the effect of the sacrament, that is, the unity or bond of love created by the sacrament. Too often in our piety we get "stuck" at the level of the *res et sacramentum*. We think that the purpose of the liturgy of the Eucharist is to make the body and blood of the Lord present so that we can receive him in Communion. That is true enough, but it does not go far enough.

The Lord does not give us his body and blood just so that we can adore and worship him in the Eucharist or even that we may individually receive him, but so that a greater unity, a greater bond of love may

be created in forming the *totus Christus*, the whole body of Christ comprised of Christ the head and we his members, what we may call the mystical body of Christ. The *res et sacramentum* does not exist for itself, but so that the *res tantum* may be effected.

### **Expressions in the Liturgy**

This unity is expressed through a number of liturgical elements in the eucharistic liturgy: the very fact of being gathered as an assembly, singing hymns and acclamations with one voice, exchanging the sign of peace, and receiving the one body of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Eastern Rite liturgies, there is an exclamation, "Let us love one another!" which at times replaced the action of exchanging a kiss of peace.<sup>3</sup> This love is the "origin, content, and goal of the church's life, the only sign of the church, and the essence of the holiness and unity of the church."<sup>4</sup>

Consider all the scriptural citations directing us toward this love: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5); "Abide in my love" (Jn 15:4, 5, 9); "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35); "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 12:1-3).

Alexander Schmemmann says that the church is a union of love, not just because the members of the church are united by love, but because through this love of one another, the church manifests Christ and his love to the world. The church witnesses to Christ and "loves and saves the world through the love of Christ."<sup>5</sup> The regeneration of a fallen world is accomplished not by the "natural" love we may have for those to whom we are attracted, but by the love of Christ manifest and enacted in his life, death, and resurrection. The mission of the church is to manifest this kind of love in its body, the body of the whole Christ.

Schmemmann asserts that we go to church so that this divine love will be "poured into our hearts" so that we may once again "put on love" (Col 3:14).<sup>6</sup> In doing this, we constitute the body of Christ and manifest Christ to the world. This is why he deploras an "individualized" piety, in which "we egotistically separate ourselves from the gathering."<sup>7</sup> I cite him at length:

How often do seemingly "spiritually" attuned and "devout" people openly declare their distaste for crowded gatherings,



which disturb them from praying, and seek empty and quiet chapels, secluded corners, separate from the “crowds.” In fact, such individual “self-absorption” would hardly be possible in the church assembly — precisely because this is not the purpose of the assembly and of our participation in it. Concerning this individual prayer, the Gospels say: “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray . . .” (Mt 6:6). Does not this mean that the *assembling of the church* has another purpose, already contained in the very word “assembly”? Through it, the church fulfils herself, accomplishes our communion with Christ and with his love, so that in participating in it, we comprise “out of many, one body.”<sup>8</sup>

Schmemmann’s comments point to a problem we also encounter in Roman Catholicism, that we make the liturgical assembly bear the weight of all our prayer. In doing so, we fail to distinguish private prayer from public prayer or a certain kind of individual contemplation from liturgical prayer.

He notes that in the simple rite of the exchange of peace we turn to others who may be strangers to us and exchange the love of Christ. In this exchange, “we are both ‘revealed’ to each other as participants in Christ’s love, and this means as *brothers* [and sisters] *in Christ*.”<sup>9</sup> This seems to be a much richer explanation of the gesture, although it remains related to the catechetical instruction based on Matthew 5:23-25: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

In the present Western liturgy, the exchange of peace does not occur before the preparation of the gifts, but as part of the Communion Rite. Pope Innocent I interpreted the gesture as putting a seal on the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, as the people’s consent to everything that has gone before.<sup>10</sup> If this is true, it is significant that the Eucharistic Prayer is sealed by a sign of love. However, the liturgical history of the placement of this gesture in the liturgy is both varied and contested, sometimes occurring before the preparation of the gifts, so it is probably best not to make too much of this.

A more post-modern explanation of the same idea is found in the work of Louis Marie-Chauvet who distinguishes between the Eucharist as

esse and *adesse*, that is, being in itself and being for, a being for us. He notes that "Christ is here" in the liturgy in the assembly, the Scriptures, and the Eucharist, but he is "not here like a "thing," but in the gift of his life and his coming-into presence."<sup>11</sup> The Eucharist does not exist for Christ to be present sacramentally for himself, but that we may be united with him and each other in a bond of love.

The Scriptures contain this same message. For example, the institution narrative in Matthew says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Mark says the blood of the covenant is poured out for many (14:24). Luke says, "This is my body, which is given for you" (22:19). The body and blood broken and poured out are for us and for our salvation.

Chauvet comments that the *sacramentum*, that is, the sign of Christ's presence is not the bread as such in its unbroken state. Rather, it is the bread "*in its very essence, bread-as-food, bread-as-meal, bread-for-sharing. It is in the breaking of the bread that its ultimate reality is manifested.* As the 'he broke it and gave it to them' and the 'for you and for all' of the story of the institution indicate, the gesture of breaking the bread is *the symbol par excellence* of the *adesse* of Christ giving his life."<sup>12</sup> In the liturgy, this breaking of bread is accompanied by the sign of peace we extend to each other and our coming forward with others to commune with Christ. Chauvet notes the parallelism between the *breaking of bread* and the *communion* between members in the charity of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

### *A eucharistic people is a missionary people.*

The sacramental body of Christ in the Eucharist is inseparable from his ecclesial body, as the liturgy shows. In Eucharist Prayer IV, the double nature of the epiclesis, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is particularly evident. The first epiclesis invokes the Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body of Christ. The second epiclesis invokes the Spirit to transform the assembly into the ecclesial body of Christ, so that joined to the Christ, they may be gathered up in his return to the Father. Thus the structure of the Eucharistic Prayer is a great *exitus-reditus*, a coming forth and a return. We receive the gifts of creation from the Father to whom we give thanks. These gifts are transformed into the body of his Son, who joins us to himself and gives himself to his Father. The bond of charity is none other than being gathered up



into the life of the Trinity by being joined to Christ in the power of the Spirit to return to the Father.

Chauvet speaks of the emptiness of broken bread and the absence of Christ under sacramental sign. By this, he means the sign of bread and wine, the sacramentum, conceals what it reveals, the risen Christ, who cannot be seen by our bodily eyes, but only in faith. He comments that “the Eucharist seems to us the *paradigmatic figure of this presence-of-the-absence of God* outside of which the faith would no longer be the faith, which holds us upright, watchful in hope, and exacts that we live in love in order to give God this body of humanity and of world for which God has made us responsible.”<sup>14</sup>

The eucharistic presence, concealing yet revealing the presence of Christ with us, refers us back to the body, to the “here” of faith. This can be none other than the historical, social, economic, and cultural specificity and particularity where the love of Christ and the bond of charity can be made manifest. The presence of the absence of God impels us forward. The sacramental drives us to the ethical enactment of that which we acclaim and celebrate in faith, for it is only within the ethical that sacramental modality can be translated into the social, the economic, and the cultural, and that ritual time becomes historical time. The bond of charity cannot remain sacramental, the product of “ritual time,” but must find its place in the “historical time” of our everyday lives.

### **The Heart of Christian Mysticism**

As Kenneth Leech observes, the Eucharist is the heart of Christian mysticism, but this is not a flight of the alone to the alone, but a real communion with God through the materiality of bread and wine shared together.<sup>14</sup> Eucharistic liturgy points to the fulfillment of the incarnation in the redemption of the material world. Leech identifies liturgy as a deeply subversive act, a spiritual force working within the fallen world to undermine it and renew it. The bread and wine symbolize human labor and human struggle, placed upon the altar so that they can be sanctified. It is bread “which earth has given and human hands have made.”

Liturgy becomes the microcosm of the work that God is doing in the world, that is, transforming it into his body. This is the theme of Romans, chapter 8, which speaks of all creation being set free from its bondage

to decay, obtaining the freedom of the glory of the children of God, groaning in labor pains as they wait for adoption and redemption, the reconciliation of all things in Christ. The Eucharist signs and effects the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Although not transubstantiation in the technical sense of the word, the analogous transformation of creation, particularly human creation, into the body of Christ is the task of human history.

At the eucharistic liturgy, we celebrate, commemorate, and participate in this cosmic transformation. The task of realizing the bond of charity, the root of this cosmic transformation, celebrated liturgically, must be effected by being sent forth into our world to enact what we have just celebrated.

We rarely refer to the liturgy as “Mass” today, but this older term does reveal directionality within the eucharistic liturgy. It does not exist for itself or even for the spiritual lives of those assembled there, but for mission. The Latin word *missa* meant the dismissal of the group at the end of an assembly. Isidore of Seville suggests that the word “Mass” was applied to the Eucharist because the catechumens were dismissed at the beginning of the sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> However, as Robert Cabié notes, the word *missa* covers the entire celebration, including the entrance rites and the Liturgy of the Word.<sup>16</sup>

Does this not suggest that the whole of the Eucharist is meant to send us forth to enact in the world what we have just celebrated? In other words, Eucharist is for mission. A eucharistic people is a missionary people. Someone has said that the model of a parish should be less a service station filling the spiritual needs of the members than a campaign headquarters strategically planning for the kingdom of God.

It is more than appropriate that stable eucharistic communities such as parishes develop mission statements. Moreover, these mission statements should orient the parish or eucharistic assembly beyond itself. An example of a mission statement I saw recently was “Saint \_\_\_\_\_ Parish is a family of believers, dedicated to carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ through prayerful openness to the transforming presence of God, a generous response to God’s many blessings, and respect for all God’s creation.” This seems to be a rather self-referential and consequently a rather weak mission statement. It really does not ask the parishioners to do anything.



This is in contrast to another parish I visited in Louisville. A declining center-city parish experienced dramatic revitalization when it undertook to live out three objectives: to have the best preaching in the area, to invest in high quality liturgical music, and to extend itself in mission as a “hospital for marginalized people in the church.” This group includes divorced Catholics as well as gays and lesbians. It is now such an example of congregational revitalization that the Lilly Foundation takes theological educators to visit it. The circle of the bond of charity must be an open one to embrace the other as other. In extending itself it becomes stronger.

In conclusion, the Eucharist creates a *vinculum caritatis*, a bond of charity. This bond constitutes the church as the body of Christ and manifests the church to the world. It also identifies the mission of the church in the world, uniting liturgy and ethics, ecclesial identity and mission, prayer and action. This bond of love reveals us to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, specifying the basis of our unity and communion with one another and with Christ.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of Saint Paul* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1982), 183.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood, New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 134.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Innocent I, *Ep. 25 ad Decentium*, cited in Cabié, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 404.

<sup>12</sup> Chauvet, 406.

<sup>13</sup> Chauvet, 407.

<sup>14</sup> Chauvet, 405.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 288.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VI, 19 (PL 82:252), cited by Robert Cabié, *The Eucharist* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Cabié, 2.





## EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

# For the Universal Prayers in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

by Mary Grace Melcher, OCD

### **Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary — December 8**

That as we begin this Jubilee Year of Mercy and rejoice in the grace of forgiveness, we may imitate the Father's merciful intervention to heal every tragic situation caused by sin

That this Eucharist may bring Mary's blessing and the grace of loving surrender to all the advances of our merciful Father in his constant work to redeem and save his children

#### **Concluding Prayer**

Heavenly Father, on this festival of Mary Immaculate, we bring our petitions joyfully to you, humbly confident in your divine compassion. We invoke your mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Third Sunday of Advent — December 13**

For all God's people, as the Father removes the judgment against us and rejoices over us with gladness, that we may show the same kind mercy to one another

For all of us gathered at this Eucharist, that without anxiety and full of confident thanksgiving, we may make the secret petitions of our hearts known to God

#### **Concluding Prayer**

Heavenly Father, as we offer you the homage of our joyful expectation today, we ask that you hear our prayers and grant them in your great mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sister Mary Grace Melcher is a cloistered nun of the Carmel of Terre Haute, Indiana, and the author of *Intercessions for Mass*. She has been asked to compose a couple intercessions and a concluding prayer on the themes of mercy and the Eucharist for the Universal Prayers during the Year of Mercy, to augment those written by parish liturgists.



### Fourth Sunday of Advent — December 20

For all of us during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, that Jesus may shepherd us as his flock, guiding us in the ways of his blessed peace

That Mary may visit us in this Eucharist with the Fruit of her womb, and build up in us the faith for which she was called blessed

#### Concluding Prayer

Father of our hope and expectation, may the proximate coming of your divine Son make us more aware of your mercy. We ask you to grant our petitions in the name of Jesus.

### Christmas — December 25

That the humble birth of our Holy Savior may proclaim with the angels and the shepherds the surpassing mercy of our heavenly Father

That in this Eucharist our Blessed Mother may lay to rest in the manger of our hearts the Child who brings peace to souls of good will

#### Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, you unveiled to us your mercy when your beloved Son pitched his tent among us on the night of his holy birth. Hear the prayers of our hearts, for we offer them in the name of Jesus.

### Holy Family — December 27

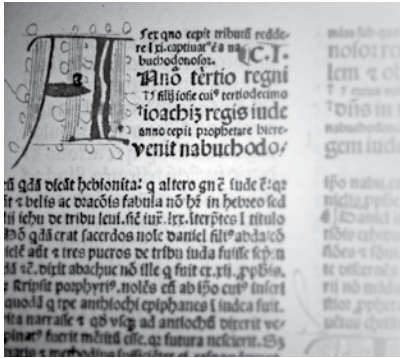
That we who have confidence in God to receive from him whatever we ask in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may please and honor him by our faith and our love

For all of us who receive Jesus into the temple of our baptized souls in this Eucharist, that we may remain obedient to him in the sanctuary of our Father's house

#### Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we advance in wisdom and age and favor before you through your blessing on all the petitions we offer in Jesus' name.





## BREAKING THE WORD

# HOMILETICS - Ordinary Time/ Advent/Christmas

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

### Preaching the Word of God

**W**HEN I WAS IN THE SEMINARY, A PROFESSOR OF MINE POINTED OUT SOMETHING very striking concerning the priestly ministry for which I was preparing: the fathers of Vatican II, in formulating the mission of priests in the church, placed preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ as first and foremost. To quote the bishops: "Since no one can be saved who does not first believe (Mk 16:16), priests, as coworkers with their bishops, have the primary duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God to all" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4).

This was striking to me because while I associated preaching the Gospel as a duty of priests, I never realized that proclamation of the Good News was the "primary duty" of priests. I would have placed the Eucharist and sacramental ministry before preaching. But as I read *Presbyterorum Ordinis* more carefully, and doing so in light of the other texts of Vatican II, I came to understand how important the preaching ministry is in the life of the priest. Lived experience in sacred ministry also helped.

In reflecting on this primary duty for priests of preaching, I have a better appreciation for why the church teaches us that "the most important form of preaching is the homily, which is part of the liturgy, and is reserved to a priest or deacon. In the course of the liturgical year, the mysteries of faith and the rules of Christian living are to be expounded in the homily from the sacred text" (canon 767 §1). Lay preaching does have its place, just not in the sacred liturgy. Preaching is best when the words attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi are followed: "Preach the Gospel, if necessary use words." The best preaching — both lay and cleric — comes from a life of integrity. Proclaiming the Gospel is the primary duty of priests. It is an awesome task and a privilege to break open God's word.

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

## All Saints November 1, 2015

*For All the Saints*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14**

This passage stitches together two distinct visions that John experienced. The first is that of the 144,000 who are marked and sealed under God's protection during the age of great upheaval. The second is of a great variety of peoples from different cultures, lands, and languages who are gathered with angels and other heavenly beings around the throne and the Lamb of God in celestial worship.

#### **1 John 3:1-3**

The sacred author describes the immense love of God our Father in adopting us as his own children. Even though we already enjoy such surpassing dignity, what we shall one day be in heavenly glory has yet to be revealed. John exhorts his readers to authenticity in order to one day enjoy the fullness of God's love.

#### **Matthew 5:1-12a**

Jesus offers his disciples the beatitudes as paradigmatic of authentic discipleship. They are the prelude to the Sermon on the Mount, which Matthew presents throughout the next two chapters. Jesus ascends the mountain at Matthew 5:1 and descends the mountain at Matthew 7:29, the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who would hear his teachings and follow them must first live by the beatitudes.

### *Sharing the Word*

All Saints is among my favorite feasts in the church's liturgical calendar. Today we commemorate the countless women and men who have faithfully lived the Christian life. The saints and blessed tell us that authentic Christian discipleship is possible, and it is joyful. This is an important message we need to hear these days.

I admit that growing up, I did not pay much attention to

the saints, other than the Blessed Virgin Mary, Joseph, and my own patron, Anthony of Padua. My family taught me about Mary as Jesus' mother and our spiritual mother. Although the rosary was not a part of my family experience of prayer growing up, it is has since become an important prayer in my life. My maternal grandmother taught me to invoke Saint Joseph for a "happy death" and Saint Anthony to find lost objects. This was the extent of my hagiographical education as a Catholic youngster. I really began to develop an appreciation of our ancestors in the faith and to form a devotion or friendship with them during my years in preparation for perpetual vows and priestly ordination.

During my seminary studies on Chicago's south side, my order served a largely Latino parish in the McKinley Park neighborhood. It was during interactions with this diverse community of God's people that I developed a deep love for the saints. I learned not only a renewed appreciation for the rosary, but also a sense of calling upon the saints as trusted friends, lighting candles before their icons and statues, reverencing their relics, and even "chastising" them when I felt slighted by a lack of saintly intercession. Popular devotions, as I would later come to know them in theological studies, are at the heart of a simple yet profound Christian faith, the faith of my grandparents and of generations past.

At a recent gathering of clergy, seminarians, and religious in Ecuador, Pope Francis spoke of the sentiment that popular devotions can evoke: "The faithful express the faith in their own language, and they show their deepest feelings of sadness, uncertainty, joy, failure, and thanksgiving in various devotions: processions, votive lights, flowers, and hymns." Today's feast honoring our holy ancestors is a wonderful opportunity for each of us to renew devotion or friendship with those whose lives are living reflections of Jesus' beatitudes.

### *Praying the Word*

Eternal and ever faithful God,  
in a unique way you raise up in the church  
men and women who are outstanding examples  
of an authentic humanity and true holiness.  
Through their intercession for us and by following their example,  
lead us to a life of beatitude in this world  
and eternal happiness with you forever.  
We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time November 8, 2015

*No Pain, No Gain*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **1 Kings 17:10-16**

Elijah prophesied a massive drought upon the land (see 1 Kgs 17:1). As a result, he journeyed east and came to the home of a widow and her son at Zarephath in search of food and drink, which the widow reluctantly provides due to her own lack of resources and growing desperation. Elijah proclaims that God will provide for the three of them during the period of drought.

#### **Hebrews 9:24-28**

The reading compares the imperfect ministry of the high priest to the perfect and salvific ministry of Jesus Christ, the true high priest. The shedding of Jesus' blood on the cross is the source of salvation and the forgiveness of our transgressions.

#### **Mark 12:38-44 or 12:41-44**

The Book of the Gospels presents us with two options. While both texts contain the story of the poor widow who contributed her whole livelihood to the temple treasury, the longer version introduces the event with a sharp warning from Jesus to his disciples to beware of the rapacious lifestyle of the scribes, who "devour the houses of widows" (40).

### *Sharing the Word*

My doctor tells me that I need to lose weight. It is not surprising news for me to hear. Weight loss and a proper diet and exercise regime are in point of fact goals of mine in order to be a healthy, happy, and holy disciple of Jesus Christ. So while my doctor's advice to me to lose weight is of no surprise, what he says often in reference to exercise made me think of today's readings: "Remember, 'no pain, no gain.'" If I hope to

be fit, I have to sacrifice of my time and comfort. No pain, no gain.

While Jesus never used that clichéd phrase, his point in the gospel story of the poor widow who gave her entire livelihood certainly drives home a similar message. Jesus wants everything from us, our very selves, if we are to become his disciples. This is not for the faint of heart!

Christianity without the cross makes no sense. Jesus gave his entire self for our salvation on the gibbet of the cross; so it must be for us who are members of God's household, the church. Before Easter Sunday, we must experience Good Friday.

Love isn't cheap; it comes at a great cost for both the lover and the beloved. Marriage without sacrifice is devoid of love; it is cheapened and likely will end in divorce at the first sign of the cross. Love requires sacrifice; it requires a complete gift of self. This is the point our readings make, and the widow from the first reading and the widow from the Gospel both demonstrate this message beautifully. While it is tempting to take an easy way out, to avoid life's daily crosses, Jesus tells us elsewhere that discipleship entails self-denial and a daily embrace of one's own cross (see Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23).

Sacrificial love is never easy. We need food for the journey to strengthen us as we endure life's crosses. Just as the widow of Zarephath gave Elijah the food and drink he needed to sustain his journey in time of drought, so does Jesus provide us with the food and drink of his body and blood in Holy Communion. Strengthened by the Eucharist, we can joyfully offer to God, through, with, and in Christ, the complete gift of ourselves to the praise of his glory.

### *Praying the Word*

God our Father,  
with so great a love you fulfilled the promise of salvation  
by sending us Jesus, your coeternal Son,  
to be our Savior and redeemer, our brother and friend.  
May we unite all of our joys and sufferings  
to the great sacrifice of Calvary renewed in the Mass,  
and so become a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time November 15, 2015

*Trusting in God's Mercy and Love*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Daniel 12:1-3**

This pericope, extracted from near the end of the Book of Daniel, contains the final vision Daniel received during the reign of Cyrus, the king of Persia (see Dn 10:1ff) of violence and war affecting God's faithful people. Michael is depicted as the guardian of the people, a great prince, along with the implied promise of a future resurrection and judgment of the dead (see Dn 12:2).

#### **Hebrews 10:11-14, 18**

The passage continues the comparison of the ministry of the Jewish high priest with the efficacious ministry of Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest. His sacrifice alone is capable of the remission of sins; thus, no other sin offering is required.

#### **Mark 13:24-32**

Jesus foretells the final judgment of the world by the Son of Man, who will come in glory on the last day, and he exhorts his disciples to vigilance. Sandwiched in between is the parable of the fig tree, whereby Jesus demonstrates that unlike the predictability of the seasons, no one — not even the Son — knows the time of the last day except the Father.

### *Sharing the Word*

Before seminary studies, I had a brief stint as a radio and television weather anchor in Erie, Pennsylvania. Growing up, my dream was to become a TV meteorologist, accurately predicting the weather for viewers in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. I enjoyed my brief on-air experience delivering the weather report during the weekend 6:00 and 11:00 nightly newscasts, and on the radio at various times



during the week. To this day, people tell me that I have a face made for radio, which I take as a compliment!

Predicting the weather and presenting accurate forecasts for viewers and a listening audience is the essence of being a broadcast meteorologist. Meteorology is an inexact science, and unfortunately people will not remember an accurate forecast as much as they will recall a popup thunderstorm on what was supposed to be a mostly sunny afternoon.

As human beings, we desire accuracy not only in weather prognostications but also in most of life's contexts. Accuracy and knowledge imply control of events and outcomes. This is what the scientific method has taught us to expect, and rightly so. Nevertheless, our readings remind us that ultimately no matter how technologically sophisticated our lives might be now or one day become, we are never truly in charge of our destiny; we cannot control the future nor predict every outcome. This is where faith takes over from the realm of science; that what is unseen cannot be known solely through empirical evidence.

I find the lack of control and predictability in my life to be frustrating. I wish I knew what the future holds for me, my community, and the people I am privileged to serve and to love. It is very tempting to venture down the road of the known and the predictable rather than to set out on the adventure of faith and trust. Jesus invites us to a living faith and complete surrender to God's will. Trials, tribulations, and temptations impinge on our lives daily, but our faith in Jesus Christ is born of the conviction that he is the way, the truth, and the life of the world (see Jn 14:6). We need not seek complete and total control of our lives; rather, we are called to relinquish our anxieties about the future and to trust completely in God's tender mercy and love.

### *Praying the Word*

Almighty and ever-living God,  
each day you invite us to show our love for you  
by the way we love one another.  
Shower upon us the grace we need  
in order to be a people of integrity, mercy,  
and zeal for your kingdom.  
We make our prayer in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
King of the Universe  
November 22, 2015

*The King of Glory*

*Breaking the Word*

**Daniel 7:13-14**

Daniel experiences a terrifying vision during the night depicting four beasts: a lion with eagle's wings, a bear devouring flesh, a winged leopard with four heads, and finally an iron-toothed horned beast (see Dn 7:1-8). These creatures, intent on destroying humankind, are contrasted with the merciful figure of the Son of Man, who brings victory over the four frightening creatures.

**Revelation 1:5-8**

In the beginning of this text addressed to the seven churches of Asia, John proclaims the dominion of Jesus Christ as supreme King over all earth's rulers. Christians share in Christ's priesthood and kingship, offering praise and worship to the Father.

**John 18:33-37**

This passage is taken from John's passion narrative. Pilate questions Jesus as to whether or not he is the king of the Jews. Jesus describes his kingdom as otherworldly and asserts that his mission is to testify to the truth.

*Sharing the Word*

Next year, my hometown of Cleveland will be hosting the Republican National Convention. A gathering of political minds of this importance is certainly an honor for the city. American politics, especially of the presidential variety, has captivated our collective imagination since the dawn of our nation and the fight for independence. With universal suffrage comes the right to vote as well as the obligation to responsible citizenship. While popular culture

may be taken with the British royalty, most if not all Americans would never dream of being subservient again to a king. Independence is a major theme underlying our culture (e.g., the stereotype of the “rugged individualist”). We want to be free.

In contrast to today’s celebration of Christ the King, American culture chafes at the notion of subjection to any human kingdom, let alone the kingdom of God. This may be why evangelical Protestantism with individual congregations has such a storied history in our nation. And yet, here we come upon this most unusual feast honoring the kingship of Jesus Christ.

What we acknowledge in this feast is that we are not God but rather God’s creatures, and this is a major ego bust for us. We might have inscribed on our currency “In God We Trust” — and most of us would readily agree with such a statement — but our lives often reflect a different mentality at work. Technology has become our “savior” as we look to the tech giants to create new devices, medicines, tools, etc., that will make our planet, workplaces, homes, and lives more efficient and less stressful. Truth be told, as much as I enjoy new technology and consider myself a bit of a tech geek, I find that the more gadgets I have become dependent upon, the more stressful my life is.

Christ is ultimately in charge, not me. That’s what we’re acknowledging on this final day of our liturgical year. Jesus Christ is the world’s only Savior, not Silicon Valley or someone or something else. His salvation is altogether simple, as Jesus told Pilate: “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37). Listening to the voice of Jesus Christ keeps us consecrated in his truth and loyal subjects of the kingdom of God.

### *Praying the Word*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
King of the Universe,  
everyone who hears your word and acts on it  
is your disciple and a member of the kingdom.  
Send us the Holy Spirit so that our hearts may indeed  
recognize your word and our lives radiate your glory,  
for your live and reign forever and ever.  
Amen.

## First Sunday of Advent November 29, 2015 (Year C)

*Be Vigilant and Prayerful*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

While imprisoned (see Jer 33:1), Jeremiah receives the word of God about Jerusalem's vindication. Our passage focuses on God's justice and fidelity in fulfilling the promises sworn to David (see 2 Sm 7:8-17).

#### **1 Thessalonians 3:12—4:2**

The lectionary offers us what appears to have been the conclusion to Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, which extends for another two chapters (4-5). Here, Paul offers thankful praise for the Thessalonians, invoking God's favor upon them. He also encourages them to continue to act in a manner worthy of God's favor.

#### **Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

Jesus exhorts his disciples to vigilance as they await the coming of the Son of Man. Watchful prayer will be a source of strength in times of doubt and tribulation, especially in the post-resurrection period.

### *Sharing the Word*

Advent, our liturgical preparation for Christmas, invites us to remember with praise and thanksgiving the first coming of Jesus, and to prepare ourselves, with God's grace, for the second coming of Christ in glory. And so we find ourselves this First Advent Sunday pondering the latter: the triumphant and glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks two things from us in order to be well prepared, to be ready for his return in glory. He tells us, "Be *vigilant* at all times and *pray* that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk 21:36). Be vigilant and pray.

Let's begin with prayer. The Gospels depict Jesus at prayer

quite often, especially in the early morning. Jesus' prayers consisted of his self-offering and abandonment to the Father's will, as well as prayers of thanksgiving and praise. There's our lesson for prayer. We need to pray always. Jesus gives us the example and encouragement to find the time to pray.

Prayer is important for us because our personal and liturgical prayer builds up our relationship with our loving and compassionate God. Prayer is essential to our souls as oxygen is to our lungs. No oxygen, and we're dead; no prayer, and our souls are lost. To prepare for the glorious return of our Savior, then, we need to be a prayerful people.

This leads us then to vigilance. Merriam-Webster defines *vigilant* as being "alertly watchful especially to avoid danger." It comes from the Latin *vigilare*, which means to keep watch or to stay awake. Exactly how are we to stay awake, to be "alertly watchful" until Christ comes again in glory? We find our answer in today's second reading.

There, Paul tells us to love one another, to conduct our lives according to the teachings of Christ and his Gospel (see 1 Thes 3:12; 4:1-2). In other words, we are being vigilant, made ready for the coming of Christ in glory, when we publicly and privately live our faith with integrity. By fidelity to Christ and his church, we are living lives that are "pleasing to God" (cf. 1 Thes 4:1) and worthy of eternal life.

"Be *vigilant* at all times and *pray*," says the Lord, "that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk 21:36). I can't think of a better and more fitting way to prepare for not only the liturgical celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas, but also for the eternal life to which we are called and destined as Christians. Let us be concerned this Advent with inspiring each other to love and to do good works, to prayerful vigilance, as we await in hope the glorious coming of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

### *Praying the Word*

Most high and glorious God,  
you sent your Son Jesus Christ,  
as the promised Savior in fulfillment  
of the promises you made to our ancestors.  
As we await his glorious return,  
may you rouse us to prayerful vigilance  
and lead us to lives of integrity.  
This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Second Sunday of Advent December 6, 2015

*Partnership for the Gospel*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Baruch 5:1-9**

The opening verses of the Book of Baruch indicate that the author is an assistant to the prophet Jeremiah (see Bar 1:1; Jer 32:12). In our pericope, the scribe Baruch writes to console the exiles in Babylon, for God is about to restore them to Jerusalem. His purpose is to announce hope to those in captivity.

#### **Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11**

This brief passage is extracted from Paul's greeting to the Philippians, where he gives thanks to God for their partnership with him in proclaiming the Gospel.

#### **Luke 3:1-6**

The ministry of John the Baptist is described in considerable detail. Placed on the lips of the Baptist are the prophetic words of Isaiah (40:3-5) calling the people to "prepare the way of the Lord."

### *Sharing the Word*

My favorite television show as a child was *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. There's a story about Mr. Rogers that I especially appreciate, and I think it fits well with today's readings.

He was asked to give a speech to a graduating class of his *alma mater* in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. During his speech, Rogers spoke of his own time at the school. He told the students that he never imagined himself being a television personality on a children's show, thinking instead that he would one day become an airline pilot. Rogers recalled a particular mentor who helped him in many ways, who believed in him and nurtured him. He told the audience: "You know, none of us gets to be competent, mature people without the help of others. . . ."

In fact, no one gets to be a graduate without the investment of other people: people who have loved you all along the way.”

This is exactly what today’s readings underscore. None of us received our Catholic faith on our own. No, there was somebody in our lives who pointed out to us the vibrant faith of the church, someone who shared his or her faith with us either by word or example — and perhaps both. In the second reading, Paul refers to such people as “partners for the Gospel” (Phil 1:5).

Baptism empowers us to become partners for the Gospel, handing on the Gospel to family, friends, colleagues, and others. The best way to share the Good News of Jesus Christ is by courageously witnessing to God’s love and mercy in public and in private, wherever life finds us. But how do we become partners for the Gospel?

Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, tells us how. He said — and I’m paraphrasing here – that every person has his or her own inner grace, gifts, and talents given by God. It is up to us to discover how best to use these in the service of the Gospel and the church. God has uniquely called and gifted each of us to be a partner for the Gospel. And we do this as married persons and loving families, committed singles, consecrated men and women, and those called to the ordained ministry. In the case of my religious community, we are blessed with the call to a eucharistic life in service to the church.

The point is this: everybody is able to become partners for the Gospel simply by being faithful and committed Catholics, each according to his or her own particular vocation.

In the second reading, Paul reminds us that the future of our partnership for the Gospel is ultimately in God’s hands, and God, who has begun this good work in each one of us, will bring it to fulfillment (Phil 1:6). We need simply to remain faithful to our particular calling, and God will bring it to fulfillment on the last day.

### *Praying the Word*

God our Father,  
you place in our lives good and holy role models  
who show us the way to live in this world  
and so come to glorify you in the next.  
May we recognize our partnership for the Gospel  
and proclaim the Good News in word and action.  
This we ask through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Third Sunday of Advent December 13, 2015

*God is Loving and Forgiving*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Zephaniah 3:14-18a**

Zephaniah's ministry was at a time of great religious upheaval for God's people. They abandoned their ancestral faith and worshiped false gods. Today's selection from this minor prophet is not one of rebuke for the people's sins but rather a call to hope in God's restorative mercy lavished upon his beloved people.

#### **Philippians 4:4-7**

As this is Gaudete Sunday, the entrance antiphon for the liturgy is drawn from this passage of Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Christians are exhorted to rejoice in the mystery of our salvation; the Lord is near.

#### **Luke 3:10-18**

Continuing the description of John the Baptist's ministry from last Sunday, the Gospel depicts people wondering whether John might be the Christ. The evangelist notes that "the people were filled with expectation," hoping for the advent of the Christ.

### *Sharing the Word*

The reading from the prophet Zephaniah comes from a tumultuous time for the ancient Israelites. The people of Judah forgot their own religious values and traditions and instead adopted pagan customs and secular values. They turned their backs to God, rejected traditional religion, and sought to conform to prevailing social and religious conventions.

How did God respond? Did God destroy his people or show mercy and love? Zephaniah tells us that God removed the guilt of his people and showed them compassion and mercy (Zep 3:15). In short, God renewed his people in love (17).



Fast-forward to the Gospel and the scene of John the Baptist at the Jordan River baptizing all sorts of people. Groups of people who were considered the most sinful of that era asked John, "What then should we do?" (Lk 3:10, 12). They were far from God; yet in desperate need of divine mercy. That need drove them to John to be baptized. They came repenting of their sins. And, as in the first reading, God showed them compassion and mercy through his anointed servant. God is loving and forgiving.

Throughout his life, Jesus showed us how to be merciful and loving. The Gospels tell us that he cared for the poor and the forgotten. He treated all people with respect. He reached out to sinners, calling them back to the Father's merciful embrace. And, through the ministry of his church, the risen Christ continues to show us his compassion and love today. This is why Paul tells us to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil 4:4).

Like the ancient Israelites in the first reading and the tax collectors and sinners in the Gospel, we, too, have reason to rejoice in the Lord always. Through the church, we come to know that God loves us and calls us to share his love and mercy with others. It has been said that the hardest thing to do in life is to go through life without loving. And the second hardest thing to do in life is to go through life and, having been loved, to keep love a secret inside you. We cannot keep God's love for us a secret. We have to share it with our neighbors, our community, and all of creation. The Holy Spirit will help us to do so.

I can think of no better reason to offer God our thanks and praise at the Eucharist than this: God loves us and invites us to genuine conversion so that we can more closely resemble his Son. This takes place over time, of course, and is why Jesus asked us to offer the eucharistic sacrifice in his memory.

### *Praying the Word*

Merciful and compassionate Father,  
when we sin, you do not abandon us  
but rather stretch out your merciful hand  
to lift us up from sin and evil  
to the glory of your name.  
You sent Jesus to redeem us  
and to show us how to be fully human.  
Help us to follow his example  
as we rejoice at his coming.  
This we pray through the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2015

*God's Promised Savior is Near: Leap for Joy!*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Micah 5:1-4a**

The prophet foretells that from small Judah shall come the promised ruler of Israel, who shall be called peace. Judah's prominence in the prophecy connects the promised Messiah to David. Some have seen a reference to Isaiah's Emmanuel prophecy (Is 7:14) in verse 2 of this reading.

#### **Hebrews 10:5-10**

The author of Hebrews connects Psalm 40:7-9 with the kenosis (self-emptying) of Jesus to the Father in his incarnation and sacrifice on the cross.

#### **Luke 1:39-45**

Today's Gospel relates the story of Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth greets her with a benediction because of the promised Messiah within Mary's womb. Even John leaps for joy in his mother's womb, anticipating the salvation Christ will effect.

### *Sharing the Word*

I can remember when I was a kid the excitement and joy that I felt at this time of year. In particular, I recall once when my grandmother traveled from her home in New Jersey to Cleveland to be with us during Christmas. I was so excited that she was coming that I kept asking my mom how much longer it would be until she arrived. When she finally arrived, I ran down the stairs to give her a big hug and a kiss. Our readings today convey that same sense of anticipation.

The excitement and joy found in Scripture come from the fact that what the ancient prophets had foretold was finally being

realized: God promised salvation for his people, and Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this promise. John “leaped for joy” when Mary greeted Elizabeth, recognizing that Mary carried God’s promised Savior. Mary’s womb was the new Ark of the Covenant.

In order to capture the excitement that John the Baptist had, that Mary the mother of the Savior experienced — the true Christmas spirit — we have to take a trip back to the beginning, all the way back to Adam and Eve.

Because our first parents had disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden (see Gn 3:6ff), they had been exiled from paradise. They had lost their original holiness because they had sinned against God, the fount of all holiness. But God did not abandon them to the power of sin and death; God did not forget his people. Instead, God promised a Savior who would recreate us in his divine image and likeness. And God destined us for eternal life.

God said to the serpent, the devil: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel” (Gn 3:15). Through the ages, our ancestors in the faith have understood these words to be the first promise of a Savior for a fallen world. Christ is the woman’s offspring, and the woman is the Blessed Virgin Mary. From that moment on, the Most High promised a redeemer who would free humankind from their sins and restore them to God’s friendship.

Throughout history, God made known the mystery of his faithful love. God wills that we be saved and come to eternal life through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. We have become sharers in God’s own divine nature through our union with Christ (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 51).

Is it any wonder, then, that John leaped for joy when he encountered God’s promised Savior in the womb of Mary? He will bring us and all creation eternal salvation.

### *Praying the Word*

Blessed are you, ever-faithful God,  
for in your son the hope of our ancestors is fulfilled.  
As we await his return in glory,  
we ask for a share in his grace  
so that we might wait in joyful hope  
for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)  
December 25, 2015  
Mass at Midnight

*Today is Born our Savior, Christ the Lord!*

*Breaking the Word*

**Isaiah 9:1-6**

With high lyricism, Isaiah describes the various names of the child born to save us: “Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace” (9:5). His Davidic kingdom will last forever; justice and right judgment will sustain it. The child spoken of in Isaiah 9:5-6 is likely the one referred to earlier at Isaiah 7:10-16, the Emmanuel.

**Titus 2:11-14**

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

**Luke 2:1-14**

This is probably the story from the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke that we most associate with Christmas: the census, the journey of the young couple, the birth in Bethlehem, the laying of the Christ-child in a manger, angels singing, and shepherds being the first to receive the Good News — the Gospel — of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

*Sharing the Word*

All too often, the spiritual dimension of today’s solemn feast gets overshadowed by the gifts bought, given, and exchanged, especially for our children. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this — it is good to give and receive gifts from loved ones— this should not be the overriding focus of the day. Christmas is not about giving gifts and opening them under a tree; it is about remembering

with gratitude *the Gift* we have received from God our Father in the birth of his Son Jesus Christ.

Our exchange of Christmas presents should in fact remind us of the great exchange God made with us 2,000 years ago. Christmas is about God entering into our human history, exchanging his divinity for our humanity. God humbled himself to become human like us in all things but sin. This truly is cause for rejoicing on this solemnity.

Saint Thomas Aquinas speaks of the *admirabile commercium*: “O marvelous exchange! Man’s Creator has become man, born of the virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity” (quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 526). This is worth pondering time and time again not only at Christmas, but every day. God became human in order to raise our humanity to divinity.

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

### *Praying the Word*

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord,  
your grace into our hearts;  
that we to whom the incarnation of Christ  
was made known by the message of an angel,  
may by his passion and cross  
be brought to the glory of his resurrection,  
through the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph December 27, 2015

*The Family as a Community of Love*

### *Breaking the Word*

#### **Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

The author's ideal family is portrayed. Sons are encouraged to revere their fathers as an atonement for sin, a preservation from sin, and the source of blessings.

#### **Colossians 3:12-21**

Paul tells his readers how a Christian community is to be organized. The longer version of the reading includes several admonitions: for wives to be subordinate to their husbands, for husbands to love their wives generously, and for children to be obedient.

#### **Luke 2:41-52**

Luke depicts the Holy Family making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover when Jesus is twelve-years-old. The child Jesus is mistakenly left behind in the confusion of the journey. His parents return to Jerusalem and discover him in the temple, posing questions to the elders and scholars of the Jewish law, who are amazed at his responses. The experience underscores the break he will one day make in order to pursue his saving mission.

### *Sharing the Word*

It is sad to say that many families today suffer the effects of divorce, adultery, poverty and homelessness, abusive situations, and pornography — just to name a few of the challenges confronting couples and families. At the same time, the number of Catholic weddings has fallen precipitously in recent years. In the midst of such “bad news,” today's feast sets a tone of prayer and hopefulness for family life in the image of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

While the language of Paul's words regarding wives in the second reading sounds harsh, even jarring to our modern ears, it was welcome news in his day. Compare, for example, Paul's admonition to wives, husbands, and children with the reading from Sirach, which speaks only of the relationship between a father and a son, with barely a mention of a mother or wife.

We understand today that family life is grounded in the mutual love and communion of both husband and wife. Their loving and sacramental union is essential for healthy, happy, and holy children, and an antidote to the doom and gloom that is so often reported. In the *lineamenta* of the recent Synod on the Family, we read: "The Gospel of the Family, faithfully preserved by the church from the time of Christ's revelation, both written and transmitted through the ages, needs to be proclaimed in today's world with renewed joy and hope, continuing all-the-while to look at Jesus Christ. The vocation and mission of the family is fully configured to the order of creation which develops into that of redemption, as summarized by the desire of the [Vatican] Council, 'let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising to life again' [*Gaudium et Spes*, 52])."

The feast of the Holy Family is an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of the Family to a world in need of Good News on the family.

### Praying the Word

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate the splendor of true love,  
to you we turn with trust.  
Grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel,  
and small domestic churches.  
Graciously hear our prayer.  
Amen.

(From the Synod Prayer to the Holy Family)





## EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •  
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### Art Review

How could any artist not be flattered by the opening sentence of *Sacrosanctum Concilium's* chapter on sacred art? — “Very rightly, the fine arts are considered to rank among the noblest expressions of human genius.” In particular, the council identifies religious art and sacred art as exemplary.



**THE BANQUET**  
Oil on Canvas,  
3ft x 3ft

John Christman,  
SSS

However, today, as it was 50 years ago, what remains a persistent challenge is finding theologically rich religious art that truly intersects with the stuff of daily life. Saint Bonaventure believed that our encounter with God begins with the things of this world. When Jesus took simple everyday things, like bread and wine, and shared them, he provided the foundation for such thinking. That the things of this world, and indeed creation itself, can bring us into contact with the divine provides a strong theological framework for Christian religious art and sacred art.

Eating a meal with Jesus, however, was never a simple affair. From the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to the transformative healing that was brought about in table conversations, Jesus turned meals into life-changing events. The theologian Jan Michael Joncas speaks of Jesus’ “meal ministry” in similar terms, and he does so compellingly.<sup>1</sup> Particularly insightful is the way he applies this transformative dimension to our experience of the Eucharist. Joncas offers a change in perspective on our eucharistic sharing, “from a cuisine of subsistence to a cuisine of abundance.”<sup>2</sup>

As an artist and member of a religious order dedicated to the Eucharist, this change in perspective captured my imagination. Moreover, it quickly set my mind to work picturing an “abundant” table. I began imagining a contemporary gathering of people around an “abundant” table, with Jesus’ “meal ministry” as the paradigm. Instead of depicting a liturgy, I desired to depict a meal imbued with a eucharistic theology of “abundance,” “hospitality,” and “communion.”



In this painting entitled *The Banquet*, bread and wine can be found on the table (albeit bread for Peking duck and a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon). They are in a meal context, as were early church celebrations of Eucharist. The glass of wine centrally placed in the composition is likely the most recognizable allusion to Eucharist, perhaps all the more so given that there is only one glass at the table. To a person approaching this painting through a eucharistic perspective then, the liturgical allusion may be apparent. Importantly, however, it also retains its identity as simply an enticing glass of wine. Placed as it is in front of the viewer the implication is clear, "Take and drink" (cf. Mt 26:26-29). This need not be an overtly religious act. In our house, it is customary to offer a glass of wine to all of our dinner guests. It is an act of hospitality.

I strongly desired to make this offer of hospitality explicit, so much so that the painting is composed in such a manner that the viewer is an implied guest at the table. The scale of the painting is important here. The dishes are roughly the size of normal dishes. They then share our same space. Likewise, the painting is hung such that the plate, the food, and the wine are directly in front of the viewer. The viewer is then a partaker of the meal. The plate is set before the viewer. The utensils are ready. All the food is within reach. A cup of tea has been poured. Even a glass of wine is offered. All is there for the viewer . . . any viewer. This meal is for everyone. Everyone is welcome without question.

The eucharistic spirituality of "abundance" in the painting is perhaps most readily apparent. This can be likened to the great gifts of grace, love, and transformation offered in the Eucharist. They are gifts that can occur at any meal gathering, as the magnificent film *Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, Denmark, 1989) so wonderfully portrays. Moreover, the painting portrays nourishment. It is physical nourishment and hopefully communal nourishment, for the table is surrounded with people.

I believe there is a spirit of joy in the painting. I tried to paint the food as lusciously as possible. Sumptuous vegetables and succulent noodles are vibrantly painted. Cadmium reds make the sweet and sour chicken mouthwatering, while the green broccoli practically looks like it would snap in your mouth. I wanted to stir hunger in the viewer. I also utilized a warm color palette that helps make the painting inviting as well as possibly stirring pleasant memories of dinners shared with friends. This, too, is enhanced by not showing the faces of those gathered at the table, giving greater room to memory and imagination. This device also draws attention to the meal and the "abundance" rather than the individuals at the table.

Painting the guests in this manner also enhances the spirit of communion. The emphasis becomes on sharing, not necessarily upon whom we are sharing with. In fact, as every viewer is an implied member at this table, communion is a strong message. This may be an eschatological hope. That the banquet we strive for in the kingdom of God is one where all are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. And that is a hope firmly rooted in the documents of the second Vatican council. May our own tables and meals give a glimpse of such wonder!

<sup>1</sup> Jan Michael Joncas, "Tasting the Kingdom of God: The Meal Ministry of Jesus and Its Implications for Contemporary Worship and Life." *Worship* 74, no. 4 (2000), 329-365.

<sup>2</sup> Joncas, 332

## Music Review



Jason Isbell  
SOMETHING  
MORE THAN  
FREE

Southeastern  
Records, 2015

John Christman,  
SSS

Odds are if you're Catholic, you like tradition. You may certainly have differing views on types of traditions and how they engage the present. But, somewhere in you, there's a value for things of the past and a sense of meaning you find in seeing those things continue.

Americana Music taps into that same desire to be connected with the past. It draws from a vast variety of different traditional American music genres like country, folk and blues, and gives them a modern day expression. Here, contemporary artists like Alabama Shakes and Mumford and Sons take up their places next to musical greats like Loretta Lynn and Neil Young. The results are often invigorating as the familiar becomes new.

In recent years, one of the most talented singer-songwriters to emerge on the Americana music scene is Jason Isbell. With his emollient Southern accent and keen turn of phrase, Isbell chronicles the rough and tattered life country and blues has always explored. Often built upon the sturdy foundations of an acoustic guitar backed by bass, drums, and the occasional fiddle, his songs nevertheless rise above the standard fare. This is due in great part to his lyrics, at once authentic, poetic, and edgy.

His new album, *Something More than Free*, finds him sifting through the past reflecting upon the passage of time, relationships, and loves lost. A teenage love sparks the insightful line, "How could we expect to stay in love / when neither knew the meaning of / the difference between sacred and profane?" in the song "Children of Children." While

in "The Life You Choose," he ponders of an old romance, "Where's the Jesus that you swore you'd find / after running the last line?"

Religion peppers Isbell's songs like gas stations on a country road. It makes an appearance just when you're starting to notice its absence. In the title track, "Something More Than Free," the protagonist laments not being able to go to church on Sunday because his work responsibilities are so all time-consuming. But still he thanks God for work. "24 Frames" finds him a bit more edgy, comparing God to a pipe bomb that tears away all ostentation.

But these reflections are mixed in so seamlessly with his reflections on love and life that the songs unfold completely naturally. Would that more contemporary music seek to resonate deeply with human experience, while showing an appreciation for traditional American music genres!

## Poetry

### Love Song

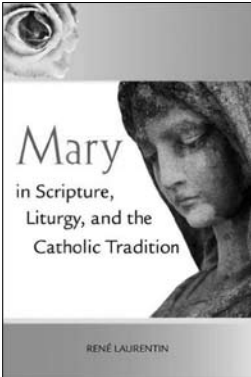
In the house of prayer  
deep in my heart,  
I immerse myself  
in silence,  
the silence of waiting . . .  
the stillness of *be-ing*.

I am attentive, expectant . . .  
waiting for God  
to speak to me.  
In the silence,  
I am present  
to his eucharistic presence.

Embraced by Love,  
my spirit meets  
the Spirit of God.  
God whispers, and my heart,  
now on fire,  
bursts forth in joyful songs of praise!

Jeanette Martino Land

## Book Reviews



**MARY IN  
SCRIPTURE,  
LITURGY, AND  
THE CATHOLIC  
TRADITION**

René Laurentin.

Mahwah, New Jersey:  
Paulist Press, 2014  
194 pp., \$24.95

Some of us from our earliest remembrances have known the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, through the Hail Mary, statues in our homes, the rosary, holy days, and devotions as part of our daily lives. Even after I entered our Ursuline Congregation, before Vatican II, we recited the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin three times daily. Therefore, in my short lifetime, I have experienced the Blessed Virgin often and have made her a part of my life.

The author, René Laurentin, explains that devotion to Mary has been with us through the centuries in a variety of ways. As the title of the book indicates, the first chapter focuses on Mary in the Gospels, especially in Luke and John, but also in Matthew. In addition, Father Laurentin alludes to passages from the prophets and Exodus that relate to the Gospels. Through these references, the author emphasizes Mary's presence in Scripture even before the time of Christ. However, the concluding emphasis of the chapter is on the suffering of Mary caused by the separations from her son, Jesus.

Next, Father Laurentin refers to "Mary's Presence in the Liturgy and Worship of the Church" from the fourth century until today (45-61). As early as the fifth century, the feast of the Assumption on August 15, although given various names, "began to be celebrated as the *dies natalis* of Mary" (55-56). Devotion to Mary throughout the centuries became so popular that "there [was] one [feast] for every day of the year . . ." (57). Today, however, these feasts of Mary have been reduced to 13: three solemnities, two feasts, four mandatory memorials, and four optional memorials (57-58). "Her place in the prayer and the daily life of the church . . ." establishes her presence (61).

Mary's presence and patronage are seen in numerous and varied ways. Iconography, shrines, pictures, churches, and shrines are usually dedicated to Mary, if not to Christ. "The place of Mary in local churches shows us in a striking way the unity in diversity that characterizes the church" (71).

In our Ursuline tradition, we honor Mary's presence by always scheduling a date for entrance to the convent on a feast of Mary, and on November 21, the feast of the Presentation, a procession with the sister in charge carrying a statue of Mary throughout the motherhouse acknowledging her patronage. An icon of Mary holding the child Jesus in her lap — *theotokos* or *kyriotissa* — adorns our chapel wall.

In the chapter entitled “Witnesses in Tradition,” Father Laurentin reviews various saints, preachers, writers, and others who had devotion to Mary since the second century until the twentieth century, before Vatican II.

Subsequent chapters focus on issues such as Mary as Mediatrix and Queen and Mariology. It is clear that the presence of Mary continues to be concretized through “scapulars, medals, badges, beads, icons, pictures, statues, etc.” (142). Even today there are new ways to invoke the help of Mary. One recent example I discovered is the “Fortnight for Freedom Prayer,” begun in 2013 to be said from June 21 to July 4. Since Mary is the patroness of the United States, we pray, “Heavenly Father . . . we place our country in the hands of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, our refuge and hope, and ask that you hear her prayer to keep this land: one nation, under God. Amen.”

Susan Mary Rathbun, OSU  
Director, Ursuline Institute of Learning  
Pepper Pike, Ohio

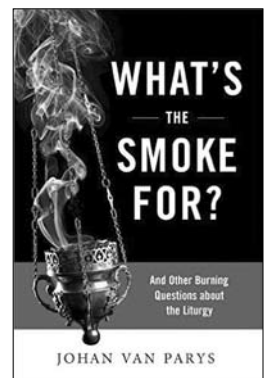
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Since 1995, Dr. Johan van Parys has been the director of liturgy and the sacred arts at The Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Additionally, since 1997, he has been a managing editor and columnist for *The Basilica Magazine*.

This book is a collection of the “best of his columns” over the many years he has answered “burning” liturgical questions.

The book is divided into different themed sections: art and architecture, prayer and devotions, diversity and inclusivity, furniture and objects, posture and gesture, praxis, theology, vesture, and the liturgical year. The pun in the title is a reflection of the humor found in his columns, which is one of the great features of this book. Additionally, van Parys includes many poignant and touching moments, such as his reflection on foot washing, on why we offer prayers for people with AIDS on World AIDS Day, and holy days of obligation, to name a few.

Some slight drawbacks need to be noted: the frequent use of technical jargon may turn some readers away (e.g., “praxis”) and more Latin than the average Catholic understands, how Ordinary Time is computed, and the lack of a glossary for easy references.

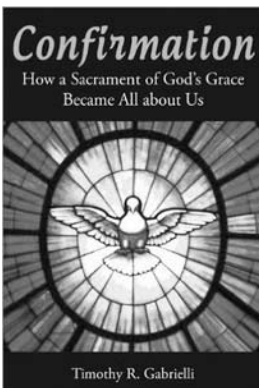


**WHAT'S THE  
SMOKE FOR? AND  
OTHER BURNING  
QUESTIONS  
ABOUT THE  
LITURGY**  
Johan van Parys.  
Collegeville,  
Minnesota: Liturgical  
Press, 2014  
164 pp., \$16.95

However, these should not stop the pastor or other liturgical professionals from purchasing this book as a helpful guide in teaching about the liturgy. The author's pleasant tone and enlightening examples can assist the average person in the pew. His answers are rooted in sound theology, church teaching, and liturgical law. They foster a deeper appreciation of our liturgical habits of past and present.

John Thomas J. Lane, SSS  
Pastor, Saint Paschal Baylon Church  
Highland Heights, Ohio

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**CONFIRMATION:  
HOW A  
SACRAMENT OF  
GOD'S GRACE  
BECAME ALL  
ABOUT US**  
Timothy R. Gabrielli.  
Collegeville,  
Minnesota: Liturgical  
Press, 2013  
132 pp., \$19.95

Here is another survey on the history and practice of the sacrament of confirmation, especially from a sociological perspective. Assistant professor of theology at Seton Hill University, Timothy Gabrielli, highlights the history of this sacrament in the United States, beginning with Pius X's *Quam Singulari* (1910), which dropped the age for First Communion from fifteen to seven, and the impact this movement had through the twentieth century to the present day.

Gabrielli encourages a deeper look into why it is so difficult to develop a quality religious education program for teens; yet this part of the study is barely explored. However, a great amount of research and study is given to the development of the sacrament and movements along the way (e.g., Catholic Action, Vatican II, and the charismatic renewal). Other themes are cited, such as the "dissolution of the Catholic subculture, commitment, and identity."

Gabrielli's main premise is summarized on page 50: the theology of confirmation and its practice change to reflect shifts in the relationship between Catholics and the wider U.S. culture, and confirmation and graduation are closely related.

Gabrielli provides an excellent bibliography on confirmation, but offers no proposals or new ground for changing current practice. He hopes, like so many others, that we will "search for clearer ways to communicate to young Catholics that they have been chosen by God" (83), and not use a sacrament as a "graduation" from the church but instead as a reflection of the Holy Spirit's activity in young peoples' lives.

John Thomas J. Lane, SSS  
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## EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS


James Brown

In his e-book *Eucharist: The Basic Spirituality*, Blessed Sacrament Father Frank O’Dea writes: “We wonder and marvel at the extraordinary transformation which takes place when the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.” He suggests the Eucharist provides a great opportunity to undergo our own personal transformation, particularly in those areas of our lives that need changing, and says, “The way of transformation is to present ourselves along with the bread and wine to be changed.”

As I sit in the pew before Mass, I think about the many relationships I have: parent, grandparent, friend, uncle, neighbor, consultant, citizen, etc. Then there are also those persons I encounter daily: on the street, in the grocery store, in the airport, at a party. And some of them can be very challenging — testing my patience, even threatening my ability to “turn the other cheek.” I also think about the people, even loved ones, I have at times disappointed or let down. In honest moments, I realize there is still much in me that needs changing so that I can be more present, patient, compassionate, and more loving.

Some time ago, I had this experience. At the Reconciliation Rite, our celebrant said, “If you have offended anybody this week, please place them on the altar and ask the Lord’s forgiveness.” Oddly enough, a person from my past came immediately to mind, a relationship that had gone sour and ended in conflict. I felt my body tense just thinking about it. As the presider led us through the “Lord, have mercy,” the tension eased and I managed to mouth the silent prayer, “I hope things are going well for him and his family.”

During the Eucharistic Prayer, I felt a letting-go of the hurt or anger that still resided in me so many years later. And now for the “kicker”! At the Sign of Peace, I turned around and amazingly two pews over stood this very person. Grace truly broke in as I walked over to extend to him a reconciling hand.

I believe the journey of faith continues until we die. The challenges and hardships of life don’t abate. I think often about the eucharistic spirituality Father O’Dea and other Blessed Sacrament religious have taught me. At each celebration of the Eucharist, we are invited to bring our sins, our challenges, and our woundedness to the altar, and present our real selves along with the bread and wine to be changed. And often, as I am sent away to love and serve the Lord, I marvel at the ordinary transformations that have taken place. 

*Jim has worked as an organizational consultant with the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for 28 years. He is a lay associate and the director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing, a ministry of the order.*

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“THE BASIC IDEA, THE PURPOSE OF ADVENT, IS THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD, IN THE PRESENT WORLD, THE MANIFESTATION OF IT TO EVERYONE. HIS DWELLING PLACE IS NO LONGER THE STABLE, BUT HUMAN BODIES.”

*Eymard*  
1871

SAINT PETER JULIAN EYMARD  
CONFERENCE TO THE SISTER SERVANTS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT (DEC.10, 1861)



At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Saviour 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.