

Emmanuel



Eucharistic Spirituality

January/February 2016



The Year of Mercy

"We celebrate the Eucharist not because we are worthy, but because we recognize our need for God's mercy, incarnate in Jesus Christ."

Pope Francis

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EMMANUEL MAGAZINE (ISSN 0013-6719) is published bimonthly with 6 issues a year, by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44143-3092. Phone (440) 449-2103. E-mail: emmanuel@blessedsacrament.com. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland, Ohio and at additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIPTIONS (print subscription includes access to digital edition): individual (U.S.) \$35.00 one year/ \$65.00 two years; Canadian and foreign \$40.00 one year/ \$75.00 two years, U.S. currency; single issues \$8.00 plus postage. EDITOR: 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Cleveland OH 44143. POSTMASTER: send address change to Emmanuel Magazine, 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44143-3092. ©2016

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EMMANUEL MAGAZINE is a member of the Catholic Press Association. Indexed by The Catholic Periodical and Literature Index.



EDITOR
ART DIRECTOR MANAGER
LAYOUT
CIRCULATION MANAGER
BOOK REVIEW EDITOR
PHOTOGRAPHY

Anthony Schueller, SSS
John Christman, SSS
Kay Vincent
Elizabeth Zaller
Patrick Riley
John Christman, SSS;
Keith Chevalier

BOARD

Lisa Marie Belz, OSU
Thomas Dragga
James Menkaus
Gilbert Ostdiek, OFM

COVER

Jiawei Shen
PEOPLE'S POPE 2013
Oil on canvas, 54" x 66"
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emmanuel@blessedsacrament.com

Emmanuel Magazine is published by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament is a Roman Catholic religious group of men whose mission is to assist the church in its efforts to form Christian communities whose center of life is the Eucharist. "Our ideal," as it is stated in our Rule of Life, "is to live the mystery of the Eucharist fully and to make known its meaning, so that Christ's reign may come and the glory of God be revealed to the world."



Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 122 Number 1



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FROM THE EDITOR

The beginning of a new year brings with it a sense of introspection and reflection. We look within . . . and make “resolutions” to change and improve ourselves. We look to the world around us . . . and hope (and pray) that things might be better for the peoples and cultures that inhabit our common home.

If I could change one thing about the present situation of our world and church, it would be *to make compassion grow*.

Compassion isn’t much in vogue these days. The flood of refugees from Syria and other war-torn countries of the Middle East found little of it at the borders of Europe, nor have immigrants from the south felt it at our doors despite America’s reputation for being welcoming and philanthropic. We live in times of mind-boggling wealth for the 1% while the poorest among us grow ever more desperate. Our political parties and the machinery of government are paralyzed by partisanship and ideology, with almost a year remaining before national elections. Even the church is beset by battles between “liberals” and “conservatives,” between those who espouse Vatican II and those who advocate for a “reform of the reform.”

There is harshness and stridency in all of these realities. Is it any wonder, then, that Pope Francis has called for an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy?

The English essayist and poet Anna Letitia Barbauld wrote, “The well taught philosophic mind to all compassion gives; casts round the world an equal eye and feels for all that lives.” Shouldn’t the same be true of the “well taught religious mind”?

Compassion makes mercy possible.

If one sees another only as different, as alien or, worse, as an enemy, mercy will never happen. Only when we can look upon another person and feel compassion for a fellow human being will mercy come about. Compassion enables us to encounter the other without prejudice or judgment, to respect his or her dignity as one fashioned in the image and likeness of God, and to build bridges of understanding and empathy. Compassion tempers our words; shapes our thoughts and attitudes; moves us to act.

A compassionate church, Pope Francis reminds us over and over again, can counter the tenor of the times: “You are the salt, leaven, and light that provides a beacon of hope. . . . You . . . help to change the course of your local communities, your states, your country, and the world by your witness to that encounter with the Lord Jesus who gives us abundant life and joy.”

In truth, “The well taught *religious mind* to all compassion gives; casts round the world an equal eye and feels for all that lives.”

In this Issue

We hope you are enjoying and using Carmelite Sister Mary Grace Melcher’s powerful intercessions and concluding prayer on mercy and the Eucharist for the Sunday and solemnity Universal Prayers of the Year of Mercy. These are meant to complement those you prepare and pray locally.

Two articles in this issue focus on the theme of mercy: “Table of Mercy” and “*Laudato Si* — On Care for Our Common Home and the Eucharist,” written by Robert Stark, SSS. Another Blessed Sacrament priest, Vittore Boccardi, shares more about the cultural and ecclesial context of the 51st International Eucharistic Congress scheduled for Cebu in the Philippines at the end of January, as well as excerpts from the basic text of the congress.

As always, you will find much to nourish your spirituality, your prayer life, and your ministry in this issue. A blessed and joyous 2016 to you!



Anthony Schueller, SSS
Editor



EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

Excerpts from the Basic Text of the 51st 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.

The Philippine Context

“THE 51ST INTERNATIONAL EUCCHARISTIC 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 example 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. . . .

“The [congress] . . . forms part of the ‘nine-year novena’ which the faithful in the Philippines are celebrating in preparation for the joyous and historic observance of the 500th anniversary in 2021 of the coming of the Christian faith and of the Christian church to the

country. In the year 1521, the King and Queen of Cebu were baptized by the Spanish missionaries.

“The natives embraced the Christian faith with considerable ease and enthusiasm on account of their deep and natural religiosity. Their initial faith was nurtured by the sacraments, most especially the Holy Mass, notwithstanding that until the early twentieth century it was celebrated in a language not understood by the great majority. The Christianization of this land, realized in a remarkably short span of time, has made the Philippines the biggest Catholic country — with more than 80% of our people baptized in the faith — in this part of the world. Filipino Catholics through the centuries developed a high regard for the eucharistic celebration.

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

“The life and activities of the typical parish, whether of spiritual, social, or service orientation, are centered on the eucharistic liturgy. Patronal feasts of towns and villages (barangays) are celebrated with a multitude of Masses and abundant feasting with food and merry-making. Marriages, deaths, and the anniversaries thereof are usually celebrated with the Holy Mass. Indeed, Filipino family and community events are not complete if not graced by the eucharistic celebration. . . . The Mass has become perhaps the most familiar religious activity in Filipino society.

“The liturgical reform of Vatican II has brought about a number of steps forward in the way Filipinos celebrate the Eucharist. The texts of the Mass have been translated in almost all of the major local languages around the archipelago. The participation of the lay faithful has improved considerably not only in terms of actively responding and singing in celebrations, but also by undertaking various liturgical ministries.

“Yet it has to be admitted candidly that while there are rays of light, there are also shadows in how the Eucharist has figured in the Filipinos’ life of faith. Much still remains to be desired in terms of a proper understanding of the Eucharist by the faithful, as well as in an adequate sense of community in celebrating it. But that which has been pointed out as most urgently needing to be acted upon is the observable dichotomy between worship and life.

“Thus a special note of humble and joyous gratitude to the Lord, joined



with eager expectation, will mark this congress. It will give special meaning to the Filipinos' celebration of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, of the gift of his body and blood for the life of the world and the life of the nation. But it will also be a privileged opportunity to bring the Filipino Catholic faithful to a renewed understanding, celebration, and living out of the eucharistic faith.

"Now that Asia is becoming a new center of history in the contemporary world, the holding of the 51st IEC in its midst is an opportunity to radiantly manifest the continent's special and unique calling as a church of love, communion, and mission. Given the multi-dimensional context in which the Asian church accomplishes its mission, the continent has become a fertile field where the mystery of the Incarnation continues to be realized through genuine inculturation that brings the Christian faith to an authentic dialogue with the various Asian cultures, religions, and races."

The Eucharist: Christ's Work of Redemption Realized

"Having been told that the Colossians were 'adapting' Christianity to their culture and their beliefs, Paul had to assert with firmness that Christ possesses the fullness of redemptive power. Everything in the world is made for the sake of Christ. Right from the opening chapter of this letter, Paul applies the words 'all' and 'everything' to Christ over and over again. This important Pauline teaching is echoed without ambiguity by the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy as it affirms that the great works that God wrought among the people of the Old Testament were but a preparation for the work that Christ was to accomplish in order to redeem humankind and give glory to God.

"The paschal mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection was to be the central cause of salvation. It was 'by dying that he has destroyed our death, and by rising that he has restored our life' (Preface I of Easter). By the mystery of his dying and rising, Christ has indeed become our hope of glory. For the Holy Spirit whom he handed over as he breathed his last on the cross (cf. Jn 19:30) brought forth the wondrous sacrament of the whole church, so that just as Christ was sent by the Father, so also does he send his church, the community of his disciples, to continue proclaiming his work of redemption.

"The mystery has to be proclaimed unceasingly so that all may receive Christ and all may be presented to Christ (cf. Col 1:28). Paul considers

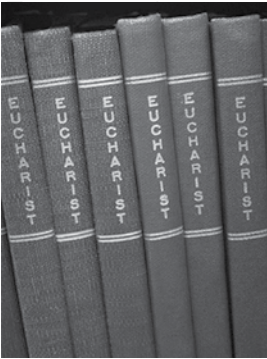
himself a minister of the Gospel of hope that is meant to be preached to every creature under heaven in order to bring to completion the word of God, the mystery which used to be hidden but is now manifested (cf. Col 1:23, 25-26).

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

“The Gospel was to be preached, however, not only by word, but also by means of sacrifice and sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life evolves. Hence, through the power of the Holy Spirit, men and women are plunged into Christ’s paschal mystery. By gathering together regularly to listen to the apostles’ teaching and to eat the supper of the Lord, they proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. . . .

“For the church to accomplish such a great work, ‘Christ is always present in his church, especially in her liturgical celebrations’ (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7). In the Eucharist, he is present to continually bring people to communion with himself and to fellowship with one another. In the person of the minister, in their gathering together, in the proclamation of the word, and in the eucharistic species of bread and wine, Christ continues to unite, to forgive, to teach, to reconcile, to offer himself for our redemption, and therefore, to give life. It is precisely for this that he instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his body and blood to be the embodiment and realization of the plan of salvation that culminated in the sacrifice of the cross, to be a living memorial of his saving death and resurrection.”





EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Table of Mercy

by Anthony Schueller, SSS

The Year of Mercy challenges us to make the Eucharist an experience of forgiveness and healing. Why? And how can we make the Eucharist more truly the table of mercy?

Father Anthony Schueller is the editor of *Emmanuel* and the provincial superior of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in the United States.

WE READ IN THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*: "THE GOSPEL IS THE revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners. The angel announced to Joseph: 'You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Mt 1:21). The same is true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of redemption: 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:28)" (1486).

In his homilies and public addresses, Pope Francis often speaks of the vital link between the Eucharist and mercy. During the general audience of February 12, 2014, for example, "We celebrate the Eucharist not because we are worthy, but because we recognize our need for God's mercy, incarnate in Jesus Christ." Elsewhere, the Holy Father has said: "In the Eucharist, we renew the gift of the body and blood of Christ for the remission of sins, and our hearts are enlarged to receive and show mercy" and "It is in our celebration that Christ fills us with his grace, so that our lives may be consonant with our worship of God in the liturgy."

As we enter fully now into the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, it is important for all of us to reflect on the place mercy has in our lives and in the celebration of the Eucharist. This is incumbent on all who come to the Eucharist seeking strength and nourishment for daily living, and especially on those who preside and preach and minister at the table of the Lord. We desire, in the words of Pope Francis, to have "our hearts enlarged to receive and show mercy."

The starting-point for our reflection on mercy is Jesus' own example of mercy and the central role that table ministry played in his mission.

The Example of Jesus

There is a dramatic moment in Jesus' ministry which illustrates his spirit of generous mercy. It takes place in the temple area as he is preaching, and is recounted in John 8:1-11, believed to be a later insertion into the Gospel missing from earlier Greek manuscripts. We read it on the Fifth Sunday of Lent this year. A woman "caught in the very act of committing adultery" is dragged before Jesus and publicly denounced for her sin. The scribes and the Pharisees seek his concurrence in carrying out the prescribed sentence of death by stoning.

A similar scene is vividly portrayed in the 2007 film *The Kite Runner*, based on the bestselling book of the same name by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini. A soccer match in a crowded stadium in Kabul is halted and a woman and her lover are driven to the center of the field, where a Taliban official reads their crime of adultery and dishonoring the sanctity of marriage, and imposes the penalty of death by stoning. It is difficult to watch as a large rock hits the woman, rendering her unconscious, and others follow to complete the deed. There is a mix of religious zeal and bloodlust in the crowd.

What of Jesus' response to the adulteress in the Gospel? Pope Francis provides the answer in a homily on the text: "Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion. 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'"

"Ah! Brothers and sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful Father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy. He always has patience, patience with us; he understands us, waits for us, does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to him with a contrite heart. 'Great is God's mercy,' says the psalm."

Extreme as the situation of the woman is, the response of Jesus is utterly consistent and emblematic of his stance toward sinners. He meets the brokenness and sin in God's creation with understanding and compassion, not judgment and vilification.

Table Fellowship in the Ministry of Jesus

Popular imagination, even to this day, in examining the place of meals in Jewish life, tends to focus on things like the types of foods used and the distinctive practice of "keeping kosher" in an observant home.



There is, however, a far richer meaning to meals in Judaism, and it relates especially to *what is shared* and *with whom*.

Food represents life. Food is a gift of God and of the earth fashioned for our sustenance and happiness. In a nomadic culture like that of ancient Israel, food was especially precious. It was earned through the sweat of the brow and shared only with those whose common humanity one recognized. Sharing a meal was an act of human solidarity.

Jewish meals typically began with a *berakah*, a prayer of blessing over bread: "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." A lengthier blessing over a cup of wine was recited at the end of the meal.

Jesus meets the brokenness and sin in God's creation with understanding and compassion, not judgment and vilification.

By the time of Jesus, meals had taken on yet another meaning in Judaism — as symbolic of the messianic banquet in the age to come. The piety of the Pharisees, based on strict adherence to the Mosaic law and on practices such as the washing of hands and utensils before meals, was a lens on how they viewed life and life in the coming reign of God, as were their meals.

For Pharisees, meals were a symbol of God's holiness. Only the righteous, the religiously observant and those supremely devoted to the law, were therefore invited to share table fellowship with the Pharisees because, in their view, only the righteous will dine with God in the messianic age.

Jesus, too, practiced table fellowship. It was an integral part of his ministry, along with teaching and healing. He dined with people of every sort, to the extent that his detractors complained that he was "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt 11:19). Was Jesus simply profligate in his attitude toward meals and those with whom he shared table, or was something deeper at work in his thinking and his acting?

Like the meals of the Pharisees, the meals of Jesus are a lens on how he viewed life and life in the coming reign of God. His table ministry was inclusive, welcoming even those considered to be on the margins of

Jewish life and religiosity. Jesus' intent was to reveal God's abundant mercy and forgiveness.

Nowhere is the contrast between the meals of Jesus and those of the Pharisees drawn more clearly than in the story of an invitation extended to Jesus to dine in the house of Simon, a leading Pharisee, in Luke 7:36-50. From the first moment, the host's attitude toward his guest is evident: he regards Jesus with suspicion and does not offer him even the basics of hospitality: cooling water for his feet, a kiss of welcome, and oil to soothe his sunbaked skin.

Jesus is only slightly more welcome than the sinful woman who suddenly appears and begins to wash his feet with her tears, to wipe them with her hair, and to anoint them with perfumed ointment. Her presence is offensive to Simon and to the others reclining with him at table because of her sinfulness. Yet Jesus tells her that her sins are forgiven. Mercy is shown the woman because of her faith and her great love. In the encounter, she is healed.

Following his call to discipleship, Matthew invites Jesus to dinner. There he eats with "tax collectors and sinners" (Mt 9:9-13). He does so deliberately, and says to those who challenge him, "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mt 9:13).

Pope John Paul II states in *Dives in Misericordia*:

In Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in his mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as "mercy." Christ confers on the whole of the Old Testament tradition about God's mercy a definitive meaning. Not only does he speak of it and explain it by the use of comparisons and parables, but above all he himself makes it incarnate and personifies it. He himself, in a certain sense, is mercy. To the person who sees it in him — and finds it in him — God becomes "visible" in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy (2).

The Eucharist: Table of Mercy

Commenting on his hopes for the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wrote:



“In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. . . . From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people approach it.”

The sinful woman who washed the feet of the Lord with her tears and dried them with her hair in the house of Simon experienced the “great river of mercy” in Jesus’ acceptance of her gift of faith and love. The tax collectors and sinners who ate with Jesus after the call of Matthew discovered the “depths of the mystery of God” in him who “threw open the doors of his heart,” telling them that he and the Father loved them and forgave them.

Imitating the Lord’s example, then, how can we in this year of grace make the table of the Eucharist more truly a place of mercy for all who approach it?

There are many ways in which this can be done:

- the manner in which people are welcomed and received at the doors of the church;
- the words of the presider at the start of the liturgy, inviting all to enter into the prayer of the church, a community of sinners redeemed and loved by Jesus Christ;
- the proclamation of the word of God, which is nourishment for all, whatever their relationship to the church or their canonical status;
- a personal blessing given to those who approach the altar at Communion but who cannot or who choose not to receive the sacrament;
- encouraging and guiding people pastorally in the process of making needed changes in their lives and seeking to be reconciled with God and the church.

These and other moments in the liturgy are opportunities to express the love and mercy of God and a spirit of inclusion in our words and gestures.

Let me mention one more: the Penitential Act. Number 51 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says: “After [the Greeting], the priest calls upon the whole community to take part in the Penitential

Act, which, after a brief pause for silence, it does by means of a formula of general confession." While the absolution that concludes the rite is not sacramental in nature, the Penitential Act is nonetheless a sincere prayer for forgiveness and healing on the part of the assembly and of each person gathered at the Lord's Table, and not something perfunctory.

As powerful and life-changing as the humble admission of sinfulness is, it is the goodness and mercy of God that redeems.

"At the very beginning of the Mass, the faithful recall their sins and place their trust in God's abiding mercy." This statement, found on the website of the Office of Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, underscores the twofold movement of the Penitential Act (indeed of any prayer for forgiveness): *acknowledgment of sin* and *acceptance of divine mercy*. As powerful and life-changing as the humble admission of sinfulness is, it is the goodness and mercy of God — beyond the demands of mere justice — that redeems.

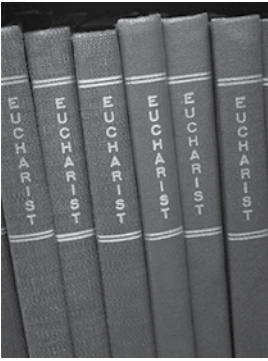
Ignatius of Antioch, the sainted first-century bishop and martyr, exhorted his fellow Christians: "Bless one loaf, which is the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continual life in union with Christ Jesus" (*To the Ephesians*, 20).

Conclusion

Because Jesus was merciful toward sinners, forgiving even those who conspired to put him to death, and because his sacrifice on the cross, the source of universal salvation, is memorialized until the end of the ages in the Eucharist, we are called to make the Eucharist a table of mercy and inclusion and to love and care for each other with "eucharistic tenderness," another of the Holy Father's favorite themes.

Nathan D. Mitchell, the noted liturgical scholar and author, expresses this so well in the following words from *Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation*: "The rood of dreams became a table of dreams. For both cross and meal had the same purpose: healing, reconciliation, bonding among all those whose elbows rest on the same wood, whose hands break the same bread, whose lips draw comfort from the same cup" (41-42).





EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Walter Kasper on the Eucharist

by Dennis Billy, CSsR

Walter Kasper has dedicated his life to Christian unity. His theology of the Eucharist underpins this commitment and is intimately related to his understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the church, and the work of universal salvation.

Father Dennis Billy teaches at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

WALTER KASPER WAS BORN IN 1933 IN HEIDENHEIN AN DER BRENZ, Germany, and ordained a priest in 1957. After serving two years as a parochial vicar in Stuttgart, he went on to earn a doctorate in dogmatic theology at the University of Tübingen and served on the faculty there at the outset of his academic career. From 1964-1970, he taught dogmatic theology at the Westphalian University of Münster and became the dean of the theological faculty both there in 1969 and upon his return to Tübingen in 1970. During this time, he was also the editor of *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* and, in 1983, a visiting professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

In 1989, he was named bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart and in 1994 was named co-chair of the International Commission for Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue. He was appointed the president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and also of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1999 and made a cardinal by John Paul II in 2001. An active member of the International Theological Commission, his best known theological works include *Jesus the Christ* (1976), *The God of Jesus Christ* (1984), *Theology and Church* (1989), *That They All May Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (2004), and *a Celebration of Priestly Ministry* (2007). His view on the Eucharist flows from these works and is best expressed in his book *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church* (2004).¹

Kasper's Theological Outlook

Kasper has written extensively in the field of systematic theology and

throughout his career has sought to present a cohesive vision of the Catholic faith, one rooted in the mystery of the Trinity and its revelatory self-disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ, the unique mediator between God and humanity, who has established the church as the universal sacrament of salvation and given us the Eucharist as the means of entering into and maintaining communion with his love.

In his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, Kasper maintains “the God of Jesus Christ . . . is the ultimate, eschatological, and definitive determination of the indeterminant openness of man.”² The Christian God, in this respect, is both the origin of our deepest yearnings and desires and the goal toward which they tend. The intimate community of divine persons — Father, Son, and Spirit — pours itself out in creation and draws creation back to itself. Humanity was created by God out of love and seeks to return to the source from which he came.

Kasper believes that the proclamation of the triune God is of the greatest pastoral importance in today’s world, for it represents the fulfillment of humanity’s deepest dreams and aspirations, and provides an answer to the situation created by modern atheism.³

This pastoral importance is rooted in the Christian conviction “. . . that there is only one instance in history where the Spirit found acceptance in a unique way, totally, undistorted, and untarnished — in Jesus Christ.”⁴ For this reason: “Light falls from Jesus Christ on the rest of history. . . . Only through him and in him is it possible to share in the complete fullness of the Spirit.”⁵ The universal activity of the Spirit culminates in his paschal mystery and, in the course of history, has been “sublated” in his body, the church, which draws its very life and being from Christ.⁶ For Kasper, the mystery of the Trinity has revealed itself fully, uniquely, and totally in the Spirit-filled Christ and continues its creative, redemptive, and sanctifying mission throughout history in the mystery of his body, the church.

Kasper’s understanding of the church flows from his understanding of Christ: “Jesus Christ alone is the primal sacrament: the church is a sacrament only ‘in Christ’; and that means that it is a sign and an instrument, both of which by definition point beyond themselves. The church is the sign which points beyond itself to Jesus Christ, and it is an instrument of Jesus Christ, since he is the real author of all saving activity in the church.”⁷ For Kasper, Christ is the head of his body, the church, and cannot be separated from it. The universal sacrament of salvation cannot exist apart from the primal sacrament of salvation. His teaching on the Eucharist flows from these fundamental theological insights.



Kasper's Teaching on the Eucharist

Kasper believes “the mystery of Jesus Christ can only be understood as a revelation of the Trinitarian mystery; and the same is true for the Eucharist.”⁸ The sacrament, in his mind, “... is directed toward the Father, the source and origin of all being, and of the whole of salvation; in thanksgiving, the church also receives in the Eucharist the unique gift of God to human beings, his communication of himself in Jesus Christ, so as to be joined with him in innermost communion.”⁹ What is more, “both movements . . . take place in the power of the Holy Spirit, who also prepares us for fellowship with Christ and allows this fellowship to become fruitful Christian living.”¹⁰

Belief in the Trinity and the celebration of the sacrament are thus intimately related: “the Eucharist is *the sacramental summing up* of that mystery (the Trinity). Both in their different ways are a ‘symbol’ — both creed and emblem — of the one mystery of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.”¹¹

When seen in this light, an authentic eucharistic spirituality “would have to be the most intimate unity of receiving and giving, contemplation and action. It would have to be strong enough to overcome the disastrous antitheses and conflicts in the present life of the church, conflicts which actually threaten the understanding and practice of the Eucharist itself. It would have to enable us to understand as a single unity the gathering for worship *and* the sending forth into the world of that gathered congregation.”¹²

Kasper points out that table fellowship lies at the very heart of this eucharistic spirituality and that, even today, believers recognize Jesus as he accompanies them on the road and reveals himself to them in the breaking of the bread. This presence is the risen Lord himself who has undergone death, been raised by the Father, and imparts his Spirit to the community of believers. When seen in this light, Jesus’ paschal mystery is intimately related to the eucharistic mystery, and vice versa. When they gather at the table of the Lord, Christians are immersed in his paschal mystery. There, at their celebration of table fellowship, the Lord quenches their hunger for life by giving them his body and blood as food for eternal life.¹³

The Eucharist, in this respect, is the “sacrament of unity,” for through

it God descends into our world, unites himself to the members of his body, the church, and dwells within them. The Eucharist, for Kasper is a living memorial of the Christ event which immerses the believing community in the sacrifice of Golgotha, points it to the empty tomb of Easter morning, and offers to those who receive it the intimate communion of love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. As such, it is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and an eschatological sign of the transformation of creation into the fullness of God's kingdom.

The mystery of Jesus Christ can only be understood as a revelation of the mystery of the Trinity; the same is true for the Eucharist.

"The Eucharist," in his mind, "makes present and synthesizes the entire mystery of salvation in a sacramental manner."¹⁴ It exists as sacrifice for the unity of the church: "If we were to abandon the sacrificial character of the Eucharist and its intimate link to the cross, we would also lose the seriousness which is inherent in its character as fellowship meal. Eucharistic community means community under the cross."¹⁵

Kasper accentuates the intimate connection between the Eucharist and the church and says the sacrament must therefore lie at the heart of the church's efforts for genuine unity and authentic apostolic mission. He insists *ubi eucharistia, ibi ecclesia* ("Wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, there is the church").¹⁶ "The church is not something we 'make' and organize. It is the Eucharist that makes the church, just as it is the church that celebrates the Eucharist."¹⁷ In celebrating this sacrament, priests are called to embrace a eucharistic existence and be ministers of unity.¹⁸

Observations

This brief exposition of Kasper's teaching on the Eucharist highlights how the unity of the church reflects the intimate love of the Trinity and how the fellowship of believers is rooted in mystery of the cross and the risen Lord's presence to them in the breaking of the bread. The following observations highlight some of the spiritual underpinnings of his view of the Eucharist as the "sacrament of unity" and its relevance for today's Catholics.

1. To begin with, Kasper's presentation of the Eucharist flows from his understanding of the mysteries of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and



the church. His Trinitarian theology, Christology, and ecclesiology are intimately related and overflow into his understanding of the Eucharist as the “sacrament of unity.” At the center of his theology is the insight that an intimate communion of love (*communio*) underlies all of reality and rests in the very heart of God himself.¹⁹ This intimate love of Father, Son, and Spirit pertains not only to God’s inner relationships but also to his outer (or economic) relationships with his creation as manifested in the threefold work of creation, redemption, and sanctification. When seen in this light, the Eucharist is the “sacrament of unity” because it establishes this intimate communion of love in the new creation (as an eschatological sign), in the redeeming action of Christ (as a real, albeit sacramental representation), and in the sanctifying work of the Spirit (as a concrete expression of God’s transforming and divinizing love). The Eucharist thus brings the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying work of the Trinity in the midst of the believing community and empowers it to carry on Christ’s evangelizing mission in the world.

2. Kasper points out that we recognize Jesus in the “breaking of the bread,” especially when we gather at Mass for Sunday worship. The experience of Emmaus in the testimony of the church tells us that Jesus not only accompanies us often unrecognized during our sojourn through life, but also reveals himself to us as the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. This recognition deepens our commitment to build up the community of faith and to give witness to his love in our own lives. As the disciples recognized him when they broke bread at table together at Emmaus, the believing community proclaims Christ’s presence in their midst whenever they gather to offer this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God the Father, through Christ, and in the Spirit. In doing so, their hearts burn within them as they read the Scriptures and interpret them in the light of his paschal mystery. What is more, the sacrament deepens their commitment to life in community and confirms their conviction that they never walk alone, but that Christ is always with them, both walking beside them and being present to them in the deepest recesses of their hearts.²⁰

3. Kasper maintains that the Eucharist “makes present and synthesizes the entire mystery of salvation in a sacramental manner.”²¹ For this reason, the sacrament lies at the very heart of the church and its proclamation of Christ coming to redeem the world and make all things new. The Eucharist, in his mind, constitutes the church and is constituted by it. The sacrament exists for the church, and vice versa. By immersing itself in eucharistic worship, the believing community

renders glory and praise to the Father, is renewed interiorly so that it may deepen its relationship to Christ and his Spirit, and is empowered to go out and make disciples of all by living out in their lives the Gospel of love. As a summary of Christ's salvific message, it brings together the mysteries of the Trinity, the incarnation, Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, and the church and, in doing so, offers believers a concrete way of affirming their love for God and participating in the communion of love that overflows in the mission of love. In this respect, the Eucharist is not only the "sacrament of unity," but also the "sacrament of communion" and the "sacrament of mission."

The Eucharist is the "sacrament of unity," but also the "sacrament of communion" and the "sacrament of mission."

4. If, as Kasper claims, Christ is the "primal sacrament" and the church, the "universal sacrament of salvation," then the Eucharist is the basic means by which the community of believers gains access to these saving mysteries in the concrete circumstances of their everyday lives. It is through the church and its sacraments that Christ sheds light on the rest of history and brings about its transformation along with the rest of creation. As the preeminent sacrament of the church, the Eucharist plays a special role in the world's ongoing redemption, for it makes the Christ-event present within the ordinary confines of space and time and, in doing so, gives those who participate in it the opportunity to cross over into the threshold of eternity and receive the divinity into their very selves. In this sense, the Eucharist is the "sacrament of unity" because of the communion it brings about between God and man, the human and the divine. Rooted in the intimate *communio* of divine love, this unity empowers the community of believers to extend its circle of love to others and build up the kingdom of God.

5. Like the wood of the cross itself, the Eucharist, as the "sacrament of unity," has both vertical and horizontal dimensions which, although not identical, are themselves intimately related. The upright dimension is the unity the sacrament brings about between God and man; the horizontal, the unity it effects among the community of believers and, from them, outward towards others and humanity at large. The point of intersection is Jesus Christ, who has embraced our humanity and taken it into the presence of the Father. The Eucharist, in other words, is a celebration of both God and humanity, of Jesus, the God-man, and of the church, in its divinized humanity. It brings



together our yearning for transcendence and our desire to live in peace with one another. What it more, it affirms without any hesitation that such peace is not possible apart from Christ and that to achieve it one must embrace the sacrifice of the cross and walk with it along the path of discipleship. Thus, the Eucharist, the “sacrament of unity,” is also the “sacrament of discipleship” and the “sacrament of the cross.”

6. Kasper also points out that the Eucharist is not an individual act of worship, but a celebration of the community of believers. This communal dimension flows from the very source of the God himself who, as an intimate community of love, sustains the uniqueness of each of the divine persons, while at the same time maintaining the divine *communio* of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Because the Eucharist reflects this intimate communion of divine love, it seeks to maintain a balance in the community of believers between the common welfare of the church and the dignity of the human person. It seeks, in other words, to avoid the extremes of excessive individualism and collectivism by maintaining a delicate balance between the identity of the person and the identity of the community. This balance should be reflected not only in the theology of the sacrament itself, but also in the way it is explained to believers, and especially in the way it is celebrated. The Eucharist, in other words, is not a private devotion but an act of worship of the community as a whole (both local and universal) that includes the various needs of the individuals gathered there. The extent to which the celebrating community maintains this delicate balance in its liturgical life says a great deal about the depth of its understanding of the underlying mystery from which it flows.

7. Finally, the eschatological focus of the Eucharist orients the believing community toward the heavenly banquet and gives it a foretaste of it in their breaking of the bread. This foretaste is rooted in the experience of faith and blesses the community with the hope that God’s love abides in it and will not abandon it during its earthly sojourn. When seen in this light, the sacrament is a celebration of faith that makes love possible in the present moment, and promises to carry the community of believers into the very heart of God. This eschatological orientation of the community of believers enables it to view things in their proper perspective and to live their lives according to the values of the kingdom. These values are rooted in the life of the Spirit and give a witness to an unbelieving world of the community’s hope in the beyond and its willingness to both live and die for its coming. As such, the community itself becomes a eucharistic foretaste

of the coming of the kingdom and the values it seeks to promote.

These observations do not exhaust Kasper's teaching on the Eucharist, but convey its major contours and demonstrate the important role it plays as a force of unity in the community of believers (both Catholic and non-Catholic) and in the entire human community. Among other things, they demonstrate the intimate *communio* that flows from the Trinity itself to Jesus, our incarnate Lord, to his body, the church, and those who gather for Eucharist. They also affirm Jesus' real presence and sacrificial offering in the breaking of the bread and the passing of the cup that takes place at the celebration of every Eucharist.

Conclusion

Walter Kasper is one of the most profound Catholic thinkers of his generation and has dedicated his life to the exploring the mystery of *communio* as it exists in the mystery of the Trinity, God's self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, the universal sacrament of salvation of the church, and especially in the "sacrament of unity," the Eucharist. Because of his deep love for the church, he has also striven throughout his life to promote the cause of Christian unity and, as a result, has become a prominent voice in ecumenical dialogue at the highest levels.

Kasper's teaching on the Eucharist flows from his understanding of the intimate communion (*communio*) of love existing in the very heart of the Godhead and flowing into the visible world through his creative, redemptive, and sanctifying actions. This *communio* exists in Jesus' intimate relationship with the Father, is imparted to the community of believers through the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, pours into the confines of space and time at the celebration of the Eucharist, is the guiding concept in Catholic ecumenical theology, and forms the basis of what Kasper calls "spiritual ecumenism."²²

For Kasper, the Eucharist is the sacramental summing up of the mystery of the Trinity and represents the origin and source, the beginning and end, of the entire Christian sojourn. It both constitutes the church and is constituted by it. It brings the divinizing power of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross into our midst and points to a world beyond the grave and a transformed existence rooted in the intimate communion of the Godhead.



For Kasper, the church is most itself at the celebration of the Eucharist. This celebration represents all that the Gospel stands for and all that the church exists for. Without it, the church would not exist; with it, the church not only exists, but is also empowered to bear the sufferings of the world upon its shoulders until the end of time. This eschatological orientation of the sacrament enables the faithful to savor the past, live in the present, and yearn for the coming of the new creation and ultimate consummation of all things in Christ.

As a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, the Eucharist inspires the members of the believing community to forge bonds of loving communion with those around them. In doing so, it helps to build God's kingdom on earth and looks forward to the time when the communion of divine love has fully taken root in the hearts of all. Until that time, the church continues its earthly sojourn and seeks to remain faithful to the gospel message proclaimed by Christ and his church. As an action of Christ, this "sacrament of unity" continues to forge bonds of friendship with all who listen to the word of God proclaimed from the pulpit, sacrificed at the altar, and planted in the depths of the human heart.



Endnotes

¹ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, trans. V. Green (London/New York: Burns & Oates/Paulist Press, 1976); Idem, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Idem, *Theology and Church*, (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Idem, *That They May All Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London/New York: Burns & Oates, 2004); Idem, *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad, 2004); Idem, *A Celebration of Priestly Ministry: Challenge, Renewal, and Joy in the Catholic Priesthood*, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad, 2007). [Note: The original German editions of these works normally appeared one or two years before their English translations]. For the major details of Kasper's life, see the following Vatican Internet site: http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/cardinali_biografie/cardinali_bio_kasper_w_en.html (accessed September 6, 2013). See also the Catholic-pages Internet site: http://www.catholic-pages.com/hierarchy/cardinals_bio.asp?ref=167 (accessed September 6, 2013).

² Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 315

³ Ibid., 315-16.

⁴ Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*, 267

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 116.

⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kasper, *Sacrament of Unity*, 38-56.

¹⁴ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵ Ibid., 132.

¹⁶ Ibid., 139.

¹⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹⁸ See Kasper, *A Celebration of Priestly Ministry*, 143-75.

¹⁹ For Kasper, the concept of *communio* also lies at the heart of the church's ecumenical efforts. See Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, 50-74.

²⁰ See Kasper, *Sacrament of Unity*,

²¹ Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 194.

²² See Kasper, *That They May All Be One*, 50-74, 155-72.



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home and the Eucharist

by Robert Stark, SSS

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis echoes his namesake Francis of Assisi's loving embrace of all creation and the saint's concern for the poor of the earth. How does our celebration of the Eucharist lead us to care for our common home and live as responsible stewards of its beauty and diverse resources?

Father Robert Stark is the director of the Office for Social Ministry of the Diocese of Honolulu, Hawaii. He also serves as the provincial treasurer of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in the United States.

IN *LAUDATO SI (ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME)*, POPE FRANCIS PROVIDES many inspiring reflections on the Eucharist, focused in a few compelling paragraphs at the end of the encyclical. Our Holy Father's recent visit to the United States underscored some of the themes found in the following final reflections from *Laudato Si*.

"The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, 'creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself.' Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation" (236).

"On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the world. . . . And so the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor" (237).

The Context

To appreciate the comprehensive implications of these passages, it is helpful to point out prior passages in *Laudato Si* that prepare the reader for the encyclical's concluding reflections on the Eucharist.

Laudato Si opens with beautiful, all-embracing words from the *Canticle of Creatures* of Saint Francis of Assisi, and throughout the encyclical emphasizes the “all encompassing” implications of creation and the urgent challenges of the environment for living our faith.

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change” (13).

“I urgently appeal . . . for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (14).

“The climate is a common good belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life” (23).

“Even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.”

Concern for the Poor

Throughout *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds all of the Gospel’s preferential option for the poor, which is also reflected in the encyclical’s reflections on the Eucharist quoted above.

“Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing, and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited.”

“For example, changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. . . . Our lack of response to



these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded” (25).

“In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” (158).

Laudato Si makes it clear that our faith and the Eucharist are grounded in an ethical imperative for all to be engaged in addressing interconnected social and environmental crises.

“Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society” (91).

Faith and the Eucharist are grounded in an ethical imperative to be engaged in addressing interconnected social and environmental crises.

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature” (139).

“We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (229).

Conclusion

These rich and challenging themes are woven into the encyclical’s reflections on the Eucharist and beautifully expressed in *A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation*, the second of two prayers personally composed by Pope Francis to close *Laudato Si*.

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.

They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.

O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,



for the coming of your kingdom
of justice, peace, love, and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

In this prayer, Pope Francis voices a new psalm linked to the encyclical's passages on the Eucharist. They bear repeating as a fitting way to end this reflection. They call us to implement the encyclical in our lives through our eucharistic ministry with and for God's creation and the poor.

"The Eucharist is a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation" (236).

"The Eucharist sheds its light . . . and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor" (237).



In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

Rev. Msgr. William A. Genuario
Diocese of Bridgeport

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



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

For the Universal Prayers in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

by Mary Grace Melcher, OCD

Mary, The Holy Mother of God — January 1

That through the intercession of our Lady, the Lord may let his face shine upon us in mercy during this Jubilee Year, and be gracious to us in his kindness

That this Eucharist may give us confidence to call upon the Father in the affectionate terms taught by the Holy Spirit

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, on this festival of Mary, Mother of God, we invoke your blessing upon us for this dawning year within the Jubilee of Your Mercy. Hear our prayers, for we confide them to you through Jesus Christ.

Epiphany of the Lord — January 3

That during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we may embrace the stewardship of God's grace entrusted to us, and announce God's mercy to all through our deeds of loving kindness

That as we encounter Jesus in this Holy Eucharist, we may adore him profoundly with the outpouring of all our treasures

Concluding Prayer

God of expansive mercy, you announced to the nations the birth of your Son on earth with the rising of the great star. May we become more aware of your guiding mercy in our lives. Hear the prayers we offer in Jesus' name.

Sister Mary Grace Melcher is a cloistered nun of the Carmel of Terre Haute, Indiana, and the author of *Intercessions for Mass*. During the Jubilee of Mercy, she will compose a couple intercessions and a concluding prayer on the themes of mercy and the Eucharist for the church's Universal Prayers, to augment those written by parish liturgists.



Baptism of the Lord — January 10

That this Year of Mercy may bring comfort to God's people, and enable them to speak tenderly to those who have lost their way, attracting them by kindness to come home to the Lord

That we who receive in this Eucharist the Beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased, may be more deeply united to him and more in tune with his Holy Spirit

Concluding Prayer

Merciful Father, you acknowledged your incarnate Son at the river Jordan and poured out upon him the Holy Spirit. Pour out your grace and mercy upon us as we confide our prayers to you in Jesus' name.

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time — January 17

That we who are no longer forsaken or desolate, but called to a wedding feast with the Divine Bridegroom in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may respond with the delight and gratitude that honors his love

That we who taste in this Eucharist the wine that has become the blood of Jesus for our joy and salvation may in turn offer ourselves gladly to others in his name

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, you worked through the compassion of Mary and the power of Jesus to bring the new wine of joy to Cana's wedding feast. Hear us now as we bring our needs before your mercy in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time — January 24

That this Jubilee Year, holy to our Lord and consecrated to works of mercy, may find us rejoicing in his law of love and sharing the feast with those who have nothing prepared

That this Eucharist, which unites us more deeply in the body of Christ, may bring us under the Spirit's anointing for the up-building of his church

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, in this Jubilee Year acceptable to you, we ask you to grant our petitions and to send us in the power of your Spirit to be messengers of mercy to others. We pray in Jesus' name.

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time — January 31

That we who are beneficiaries of God's gentle mercy may make progress through his greatest spiritual gifts, practicing faith, hope, and love under the guidance of his Holy Spirit

That we who receive Jesus in this Eucharist may allow him his full prophetic rights in our lives, treating him as our true Lord with respect and submission

Concluding Prayer

God of love, kindness, and compassion, look with favor on the petitions we place in your care. Grant them in your great mercy, through our Lord Jesus Christ

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time — February 7

That with Peter, we may recognize our sinfulness before the Lord's holiness and power, and like Isaiah, receive the mercy of deep cleansing and the call to be sent in God's name

That in the intimacy of this Eucharist, we may hear the Lord when he directs us to put out into deep water beyond our personal securities, and take courage as he accompanies us on the way

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, when we have worked hard and caught nothing, let us be encouraged to new efforts by the presence and the direction of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

First Sunday of Lent — February 14

That by the mercy and the help of our Savior, we may begin this season of Lent filled with the Holy Spirit and strong in our resistance to the Evil One



That we who receive Jesus in this Eucharist may go bravely with him into the Lenten desert of fasting and prayer, confident in his power to sustain and redeem us

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, Jesus gave you adoration and glory as he engaged in combat with the devil. Help us to acknowledge your majesty and count upon your strength in our own struggles and temptations. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Second Sunday of Lent — February 21

That in this Jubilee Year of Mercy and this season of repentance and forgiveness, we may establish our citizenship in heaven and stand firm in the Lord

That in the mystery of this Eucharist, the Father may overshadow us and strengthen us for the trials of our own Jerusalem by directing us again to listen to his Beloved Son

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, you strengthened the chosen disciples through the vision of your Son's glory so that they could endure his suffering and humiliation. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on our Savior wherever his path may lead. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Third Sunday of Lent — February 28

That we may understand how deep is the mercy of Jesus, who delays the severe outcomes of our actions, and continues to cultivate and care for our souls in the hope of seeing us bear fruit

That we may realize we are standing on holy ground as we approach to receive this Eucharist, which brings us into a direct encounter with the living God

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, in your mercy you warn us that our sins carry with them deadly consequences. Bring us to true repentance, and deliver us from slavery to any form of evil. We ask these favors and offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus our Lord.





PASTORAL LITURGY

Celebrating the Sacraments Part 6: Holy Orders and Religious Profession

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

We continue reviewing the six sacraments other than the Eucharist, examining how the renewal of these sacraments has been a fruit of the vision of the council. Here we review “best practices” for the sacrament of holy orders and for the rite of religious profession.

THIS IS THE FINAL COLUMN IN THIS SERIES. AS WE BRIEFLY REVIEW THE SACRAMENT of holy orders, let us also take a look at the rite of profession of vows for the consecrated life. Both of these rituals were revised after Vatican II and share a common theme: call. First, let us take a moment to reflect on the nature of these “vocation” events in the life of the church.

In North America, we had many women and men offering their lives in the service of the church in the period between the 1940s and the 1960s. Today we do not have the same number of religious professions or instances of men coming forward to be ordained. In some locales, it is becoming more common for Catholics to have little firsthand experience — ministerial or other — of religious sisters, brothers, deacons, and priests. The profession of religious vows, however, like ordination, is a public ecclesial act that needs to be highlighted and celebrated appropriately.

May I suggest something that is in the 1970 ritual? Paragraph 6 of the introduction states that it is “very fitting that the rite of final profession should take place within Mass.” Why not conduct the rite in a parish affiliated with the religious order? (Every religious community is technically attached to or part of a canonical parish.) If a formal relationship does not exist, encourage one to grow so that the ceremony or ritual takes place with the larger parish community. Public celebrations, especially within the context of a regular eucharistic community, are key to encouraging vocations to the consecrated life.

Father John Thomas J. Lane is the pastor of Saint Paschal Baylon Church, Highland Heights, Ohio, and a liturgical consultant and presenter. He is the author of *Guide for Celebrating Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, published by Liturgical Training Publications and the Archdiocese of Chicago in 2015. You may contact him with a comment or a question at jtlaness@gmail.com.

In paragraph 9 of the rites of ordination (2003 edition) we read:

Ordination is to be celebrated within the rites of Mass, in which the faithful, particularly on a Sunday, take an active part “at one altar at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his presbyterate and ministers.” In this way, the preeminent manifestation of the church and the conferral of holy orders are joined with the eucharistic sacrifice, the fount and apex of the whole Christian life.

In many dioceses, celebrations of orders occur when the seminary semester ends, or according to the bishop’s schedule, or on a Saturday around Mother’s Day. I repeatedly hear that Saturday ordinations allow for Sunday “Masses of Thanksgiving,” whereby the newly ordained celebrates a Mass in his home parish or another church significant to him. While this is meaningful, would it not be wonderful to have ordinations on the Lord’s Day, not just to follow the rubrics of the rite, but also to have more of the faithful present to witness the gift of ministry continuing in the church? Most priests are not available on Saturdays due to funerals, weddings, and travel. Additionally, in dioceses where the cathedral is not an active parish community, celebrating the sacrament of ordination in the ordinand’s home parish allows the ceremony to be witnessed by the community that formed him.

In this series on “best practices for celebrating the sacraments,” we have given suggestions in the hope of encouraging better ritual celebrations. This series hopes to actively engage in the rites that the church has given us since Vatican II, adhere to what the ritual *praenotanda* include, but also amplify the rubrics of these beautiful rites.

Too often, traditions from before Vatican II or minimalist interpretations of the sacraments continue to guide the theology and practice of the current rituals. Let’s open ourselves to the Spirit’s prompting in order to take a fresh look at these celebrations, and continue to work toward “full, conscious, and active participation” of the sacraments. These liturgies open the mysteries of the sacraments and of God. Let us unlock the possibilities and build on the successes of wonderful liturgical principles.

Order for the Burning of Palms and a Mardi Gras Celebration

Sunday, February 7, or Tuesday, February 9
by John Thomas Lane, SSS

Opening Song "Shepherd Me, O God"

Opening Prayer

Leader: We have gathered this Mardi Gras Sunday/night,
to remember the paschal mystery.
We call to mind that it is death,
Christ's death on the cross, that brought us life.

We look forward to a season
that will culminate in this sacred space,
where the Easter fire will renew us in life.

May we continue to grow in the saving mystery
which Christ calls us to each year,
renewing our commitment to pray, fast, and give alms
and to grow in holiness,
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Reading Peter 1:10-16 (see special sheet)
From Eighth Week of Ordinary Time, Tuesday

Gospel Acclamation "Celtic Alleluia"

Gospel John 12:24-26
See special sheet

Blessing of the Fire and the Burning of the Palms

Leader: Loving God,
we light this fire,
confident in your burning love
which illumines our hearts.

Last Palm Sunday,
we used these palms
to remind us of Christ's solemn passion
and his entrance into the holy city of Jerusalem.

There, Lord Jesus, you came into your glory
and invited us to take up the same cross and follow you.

May we, who prepare to enter
into the solemn season of Lent,
continue to take up our cross,
and be reminded of this saving mystery
by signing ourselves tomorrow with these ashes,
and recommitting and renewing the living fire within us.

May these ashes and fire
culminate in a new Pentecost,
where the living fire of faith,
your promised gift of the Spirit,
will grow and burn brightly in your service.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Placing of the Palms in the Fire

Blessing of the People

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

Priest: Bow your heads for the blessing,
responding Amen to the three invocations.

Priest: May the Lord continue to bless us in his service.

All: Amen.

Priest: May the Lord help us strive to follow the Lenten journey.

All: Amen.

Priest: May the Lord bless us in our celebration,
preparing for the holy days ahead
and renewing us in the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

May almighty God bless you,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Priest: Let us continue to live in peace.

Closing Song "Jesus, Remember Me"



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Counsels on Prayer from Saint Peter Julian Eymard

"In order to succeed in it (prayer), it should be done when we first awaken, when our whole being is calm and recollected. We need to make our meditation before anything else.

"As far as possible, you should pray in quiet and silent devotion. Try to have a favorite topic of prayer, such as a devotion to the passion of Jesus, the Blessed Sacrament, awareness of the divine presence; go directly to Jesus without too much fuss.

"Before prayer begins, leave aside any duties which would distract you."
(Excerpt from an 1837 letter to his sister and godmother Marianne)

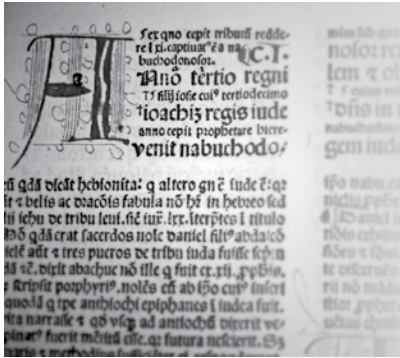
"Have confidence in prayer. It is the unfailing power which God has given us. By means of it, you will obtain the salvation of the dear souls whom God has given you and all your loved ones. 'Ask and you shall receive,' our Lord said. Be yourself with the good Lord."
(From a letter written on January 4, 1864, to Mme. Mathilde Giraud-Jordan)

"We must know where mediocrity of spirit comes from. The first is the worst: it's a scattered mind, a life which is too active. Nothing can cling to it. It's like the seed of the Gospel falling on the open road. The remedy is to bring the mind back to natural reflection by some reading or serious meditations which strike it and help it to be focused. In general, it's better to choose a great truth rather than a pious feeling. The work of truth is to refocus our attention, reflection, and finally, devotion.

"The second source of mediocrity of spirit is mental boredom toward what is serious and positive. This illness can only be healed by openness to divine love, since it is based on discouragement.

"The third source is laziness of the mind which fears to consider the truth. The fourth source is when we counteract the grace, the attraction of the moment. The mind becomes closed and foolish. We must follow the need and light of the moment."
(From a letter written in 1868 to Mme. Mathilde Giraud-Jordan)





BREAKING THE WORD

HOMILETICS - Christmas/Ordinary Time/Lent

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

Looking for What's Good and Right in Culture

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I MUST SAY THAT I WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE VISIT of our Holy Father Pope Francis to the United States in September. His whirlwind three-city tour of the East Coast was well received in the media, as evidenced by the enthusiastic coverage they gave of papal events and liturgies. One such event, the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, the last stop of Pope Francis, caught my attention in particular.

During his homily at the closing Mass in Philadelphia, the Pontiff said, "God wants all his children to take part in the feast of the Gospel. Jesus says, 'Do not hold back anything that is good; instead help it to grow!' To raise doubts about the working of the Spirit, to give the impression that it cannot take place in those who are not 'part of our group,' who are not 'like us,' is a dangerous temptation. Not only does it block conversion to the faith; it is a perversion of faith!"

I think that all too often we can be tempted to exclude rather than include those with differing opinions, ideas, or agendas than our own. We can be angry at the secular world around us and condemn it, or we can look for what is true, good, and beautiful with our world and celebrate such goodness, while at the same time reaching out in mercy to bind the wounds of our society. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, let's make this our motto: *Do not hold back anything that is good; instead help it to grow!*

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.

Octave Day of Christmas —
Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God
January 1, 2016

Giving God Thanks and Praise

Breaking the Word

Numbers 6:22-27

The reading depicts Moses relating God's blessing to Aaron and his kin. It is typically called the "priestly blessing," as it was to be used by Aaron and his sons as they blessed the people; it is one of the optional blessings found in the *Roman Missal*. In Hebrew, the word blessing (*berākā*) suggests a gift that is given and received. Usually, it leads the recipient to offer praise and thanksgiving for the gift. This is often the sense in which a blessing is found in the psalms (e.g., Ps 34:1 — I will bless the Lord at all times; praise shall always be in my mouth").

Galatians 4:4-7

Paul reminds the Galatians of the human and divine origins of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that in this pericope, he mentions that that "God sent his son" Jesus, born of a human mother (see Gal 4:4). Like the evangelists Matthew and Luke, who revealed through their infancy narratives that Jesus had a human mother but not a human father (see Mt 1:20; Lk 1:35), Paul stresses the same point: Jesus' Father was divine. This reading continues the Christmas theology for this Octave Day. Jesus is true God and true man; and we are called to share in his divinity as adopted sons and daughters of God, calling out to him "Abba, Father!" (see Gal 4:5-6).

Luke 2:16-21

The Gospel for the Octave Day of Christmas is the narrative of the shepherds proclaiming the good news of the Messiah's birth, while giving God thanks and praise for what they were privileged to see and hear (see Lk 2:17, 20). In addition, since it is the eighth day of Christmas, the Gospel includes the verse that describes what happened eight days after Jesus' birth, namely, the circumcision and formal name-giving. Mary and Joseph were obedient to the dictates of the law, as

Luke demonstrates with today's story (cf. Gn 17:12; Lv 12:1-3).

Sharing the Word

On this Octave Day of Christmas and first day of the civil calendar, our readings invite us to make three spiritual New Year's resolutions: 1. to bless and be blessed; 2. to pray more intensely; and 3. to be ever thankful. The first resolution flows from the first reading, the priestly blessing of Aaron. As Christians, we are called to be a blessing for others and to recognize God's abundant blessings in our own lives.

Blessedness leads us to prayerfulness. To truly call upon God as "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6) means much more than simply reciting the Our Father. What Paul is suggesting here is that as Christians, we are to be in such an intimate and deep relationship with God that we can dare call upon the Most High, the Creator of heaven and earth, as Father, Abba (i.e., daddy). This intimacy is a blessing that we received because we have been adopted as sons and daughters of the Father. When we bless others and receive God's many blessings, when we intensify our prayer life and trustingly call upon God as our Father, this naturally leads to the third resolution: thankfulness.

Thanksgiving is what today's Gospel depicts. The shepherds came to adore the newborn Christ, to be blessed by his presence in the midst of the Holy Family. Following this, Luke indicates that "the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them" (Lk 2:20). Giving God glory and praise are acts of thanksgiving. The Eucharist is the church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and it is why we gather every Sunday to offer him thankful praise around the eucharistic table of the Lord.

Praying the Word

Compassionate Father,
you have given us this feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary
to conclude the annual celebration of Christmas.
In this Jubilee Year of Mercy,
help us to recognize your compassion,
and be generous in blessing one another.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Epiphany of the Lord January 3, 2016

Every Nation on Earth Will Adore the Lord

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 60:1-6

Isaiah speaks of a time when Jerusalem will be a shining light for the world to see, a guide to the nations as they come to worship the Most High. This will be a time of new hope and promise after the clouds of despair have vanished. In its fuller context, the passage denotes that although God's people were oppressed and seemingly forsaken, God will bless them beyond imagining so that "the children of your oppressors shall come, bowing low before you; all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at your feet" (Is 60:14). In the context of the feast of the Epiphany, the text lends itself well to foreshadowing the church as the world's beacon of hope, reflecting Christ our light, whom all nations will come to adore.

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

The reading emphasizes the universal mission to preach the mystery of faith to the nations, the Gentiles, proclaiming the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. This short passage comes from a larger pericope wherein Paul offers the Ephesians a justification for his mission to the Gentiles, ultimately arguing that the mission of the church is indeed the proclamation of the Gospel to all the world (see Eph 3:8-10).

Matthew 2:1-12

Unique to Matthew's Gospel is the story of the Magi coming to pay homage to the infant Jesus, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (see Mt 2:11). Important to note is Matthew's use of the verb *proskuneo*, rendered in our English translation as "homage," when describing the action of the Magi. In Greek, *proskuneo* means to worship and adore. By using *proskuneo*, Matthew is pointing to the divinity of Jesus Christ very early in his Gospel, something that the

nations, as represented by the Magi, had come to recognize.

Sharing the Word

The annual celebration of the Epiphany traditionally highlights three miracles that manifest Christ's glory. These are suitably described in the Magnificat antiphon for Vespers II of the Epiphany from the Divine Office: "Today the star leads the Magi to the infant Christ; today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast; today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation." Each is a mini Epiphany whereby the church recognizes in them the revelation of Christ's divinity.

Recognition is at the heart of the human journey. Each of us longs to be recognized for who we are and who we will one day become. The theme of recognition is central to today's liturgy. As Christians, we are called to recognize Jesus as the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah and our Savior. Advent prepared the way for us to make such a recognition. Now the task that remains is our response.

The Magi offer a paradigmatic response to the presence of Christ. They traveled a great distance, following a star, facing dangers and political strife along the way. Nothing deterred them from their destination. And once they arrived in Bethlehem and beheld the infant Jesus with his mother Mary, they worshipped and adored. They offered him their gifts and hearts.

Just as the Magi worshiped Christ and offered him their treasures in an act of thankful praise, the risen Christ now empowers us to do likewise through the Eucharist.

Praying the Word

Eternal Father,
in every age you reveal your glory
through mysterious signs and wonders.
By the power of the Holy Spirit,
enable us to recognize your presence and glory
at every moment of our lives.
To Christ be glory in the church,
now and forever.
Amen.

Baptism of the Lord January 10, 2016

The People Were Filled with Expectation

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

The reading is taken from the suffering servant oracles of Deutero-Isaiah. The sacred author never identifies the suffering servant mentioned in his texts. Later Christian tradition and the evangelists will see in the oracles the figure of the suffering Christ. Today, however, in its liturgical setting, the pericope dovetails nicely with the gospel passage wherein the heavenly voice declares his pleasure with Jesus his Son (cf. Is 42:1, Lk 3:22).

Acts 10:34-38

Luke recounts Peter's magnificent speech to Cornelius and his household. Peter preached Jesus Christ and recalled how Jesus was baptized and anointed "with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 10:38). Peter's speech, his proclamation of the Gospel, resulted in the baptism of Cornelius and his family (see Acts 10:48). The inclusion of this passage from Acts in today's feast is likely because it alludes to Jesus' baptism by John, and it shows forth the universal mission of Christ, "who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36).

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Our Gospel depicts John the Baptist receiving Jesus and baptizing him in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descends upon Jesus and a voice thunders from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22; Mk 1:11).

Sharing the Word

It is the small details in life that make all the difference. When we receive an invitation to join someone for dinner, for example, how

that invitation is sent (via e-mail, text, in person, or formal card posted) can make a difference in our reply, right? The small details in life, from invitations to communications media to subtle accents or inflections in speech, tell us a lot about one another.

And so it is that as we break open the Gospel of Luke on this feast, one strikingly small and seemingly insignificant detail that the evangelist includes might be overlooked. It is not found in Mark's or Matthew's rendition of Jesus' baptism, but fits wonderfully with Luke's theological outlook. Luke notes that in response to the preaching of John the Baptist "the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ" (Lk 3:15). This little detail about the people expecting the Christ is telling, for in the Magnificat of Mary (Lk 1:16-55) and the Cantic of Zechariah (Lk 1:68-79), Luke has demonstrated how the people were in hopeful expectation of Good News. The angels announced the message of Jesus' birth to the least of the people, to shepherds, who in reply visited the Christ child in the manger (Lk 2:8-20). All this to say that the sentiment of expectation has been building up in the narrative of Luke's Gospel; it is palpable to readers today as it likely was to Theophilus (see Lk 1:3). The people were longing for news of a Savior who would "give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Lk 1:17).

The Lord's baptism and Luke's rendering thereof invites us to live every day in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior. This living in joyful hope, the joy of the Gospel, as Pope Francis reminds us, is what it means to be a Christian. We recognize God's beauty in the world around us and because of our own baptism we proclaim a yet more wondrous world to come.

Praying the Word

Almighty and ever living God,
as we joyfully recall the baptism
of your beloved Son,
we give you thanks and praise
for the gift of our own baptism.
May we spend this feast day in thanksgiving
and give you fitting praise
by loving service to our neighbors.
This we ask in faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time January 17, 2016

The Abundance of God's Mercy

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 62:1-5

Isaiah describes the loving relationship that God intends for Jerusalem and compares it to the love of husband and wife. Chapters 60-62 speak of God's inexhaustible mercy and compassion for his people who were once in exile. Now, having begun the return to the Promised Land, Isaiah describes in this pericope God's fidelity to Zion as a faithful husband who delights in his wife.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Paul describes the manifold gifts of the one Spirit of God. In the context of the epistle, Paul scolded the Corinthians for sowing discord in the Christian community (e.g., 6:1-20) and addressed their liturgical abuses (11:1-34) during their eucharistic celebrations, expounding on the institution of the Eucharist. This description of the many gifts of the Spirit is meant to illustrate that the church is the body of Christ, unified in her diversity as a body is one though it has many parts (cf. 1 Cor 12:12).

John 2:1-11

Unique to John's Gospel is the narrative of the miracle at the wedding in Cana. The first of seven signs John presents finds Jesus and his mother and disciples as guests at a wedding where he changes water from Jewish ceremonial washing vessels into fine wine (see Jn 2:6, 10). The sign (*sēmeía*) serves to disclose Jesus' identity. As a result, John tells us that "his disciples began to believe in him" (Jn 2:11).

Sharing the Word

Believers have many ways to describe their relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the Good Shepherd, Divine Physician, Brother, Savior, and Redeemer. One relationship that is often missed is that

of Bridegroom of the Church. To be sure, Christ as the church's bridegroom is not as popular as the others just enumerated. Despite the lack of popular usage, Christ as the Bridegroom is an essential relationship for Christians as today's readings suggest.

It is often noted that the Bible begins and ends with a wedding feast, and at various places Sacred Scripture uses the analogy of a marriage to describe the relationship between God and his people. This is evident from the first reading from Isaiah. God's fidelity is like that of a husband and wife. In John's Gospel, Jesus' identity is revealed through signs, the first of which is the miracle or sign (*sēmeía*) of the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

The church, as Christ's bride, is called to fidelity to her spouse and to bear fruit in the generation of children at the womb of the baptismal font. Accordingly, the church nourishes and sustains her daughters and sons at the eucharistic banquet, and as a good mother, she heals us through anointing and penance. The church accompanies us in sickness and in health, and when our lives end, she is there to invoke God's mercy and usher us into the heavenly banquet. In the words of Saint John XXIII, "Mother and teacher of all nations — such is the Catholic Church in the mind of her founder, Jesus Christ; to hold the world in an embrace of love, that people, in every age, should find in her their own completeness in a higher order of living, and their ultimate salvation" (*Mater et Magistra*, 1).

Jesus' miracle at Cana serves to illustrate that when we do whatever he tells us (see Jn 2:5) and so remain faithful to him, we can expect an abundance of God's mercy and love to flow into our lives. Doing whatever Jesus tells us to do, loving one another (see Jn 15:12), requires the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Paul describes for us in the second reading. The Holy Spirit blesses the church with a diversity of gifts, so that together we might build up one another in love and truth.

Praying the Word

Lord Jesus Christ,
Bridegroom of the Church,
you are faithful and true to your people
and you shower upon us mercy and love in abundance.
Sustain us in your compassion
and heal us of all that keeps us
from recognizing you in one another,
for your live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time January 24, 2016

The Spirit of the Lord God

Breaking the Word

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

From the Torah, Ezra, the priest and scribe, teaches the people who have been restored to the Promised Land after their exile. The people respond accordingly. He exhorts them to rejoice and to live in the light of God's blessings and commands.

1 Corinthians 12:12-30 or 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27

The lectionary offers two versions of the reading: the longer presents Paul's analogy of the body with all its parts working together, whereas the shorter passage simply states the theology of the church as the body of Christ, unified by the Spirit.

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

The Evangeliary presents Luke's prologue to the entire Gospel as the opening verses of today's reading and then jumps to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, where he preaches on the Sabbath at the Nazarene synagogue.

Sharing the Word

It must have been a magnificent experience to be in that crowd when Ezra read from the Torah to the people in the Promised Land. Our first reading offers us a glimpse from that scene when the people, who were once exiled in a foreign land, were reunited in Israel and ready to begin anew their life in communion with God. The only thing that I can imagine that comes close to such a scene in modern times is when the pope came to the United States in September of last year. The crowds in Washington, New York City, and Philadelphia were ecstatic to see and hear the Successor of Saint Peter. So it must have been for the people who stood together and listened to Ezra

and Nehemiah and all the Levites. "Amen, Amen!" (Neh 8:6) is the most appropriate response that could be given. It was a genuine renewal of the covenant.

Likewise, I imagine that it would have been a wonderful experience be in the Nazareth synagogue listening to Jesus proclaim the word of God from the prophet Isaiah and hearing him say, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21).

Of course, we know that the people listening to Jesus in his hometown that day were not ready to hear their native son challenge them so directly as he preached God's word, and, as we will hear next Sunday, they were perfectly willing to throw him out from their midst (see Lk 4:29). The same is true of the people who listened to Ezra and Nehemiah. While they were quick to say, "Amen, Amen!" to the word of God that day, history tells us that they too went against God and the covenant that had just been renewed.

The point that our readings make for us is that God continually offers us his love and mercy, and that even when we fall short of God's will, in his compassion God reaches out time and again to raise us up. God doesn't give up on his people! As Paul reminds us, we are members of Christ's body, the church, and through the Holy Spirit we are in communion with each other as long as we remain a part of the body. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Powerful words, are they not?

The people in Ezra and Nehemiah's time no doubt had the best intentions. The faithful of Nazareth likewise had started out listening to Jesus with joy: "All spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth" (Lk 4:22). Despite their failings, God's mercy never failed them, nor does it fail us. We are part of Christ's body, and we have received the anointing of the Spirit of mercy. As the first reading reminds us, rejoicing in the Lord must be our strength (see Neh 8:10).

Praying the Word

Father of infinite mercy,
you are aware of our weaknesses and shortcomings,
yet you never tire of forgiving our sins
and restoring us to your friendship.
May we find our strength in you
and share in the joy that comes from your Holy Spirit.
This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time January 31, 2015

The Lord God is With Us

Breaking the Word

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

The opening verses of the Book of Jeremiah describe the prophet's call to ministry. Despite Jeremiah's protests of his youthfulness (see Jer 1:6), God promises to be with his chosen prophet during the many challenges he will face.

1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13 or 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Once again, the lectionary offers two options for the second reading: the shorter choice contains only Paul's discourse on love, while the longer version includes a preface to the discourse. Noteworthy is Paul's emphasis on love as the greatest of virtues following his discourse on the legitimate diversity found in the lavish gifts of the Spirit.

Luke 4:21-30

Following upon his preaching in Nazareth and the initial reaction of astonishment on the part of his listeners (see Lk 4:16-22), Jesus soon discovers that his prophetic ministry is not welcome in his native place when the townsfolk challenge his words and try to kill him by throwing him off a cliff.

Sharing the Word

I think it is safe to say, especially during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, that at the very heart of Jesus' message — and that of the entire body of Sacred Scripture — is God's abundant mercy extended lavishly to all creation. Today's readings especially illustrate this.

In the first reading, Jeremiah is chosen for the prophetic office despite his youth. Contrary to Jeremiah's own doubts later in his ministry about God's transparency in calling him (see Jer 20:7-9), God

does not mince words with Jeremiah at the onset, telling him that his mission will be a source of contention for the people and will require Jeremiah to “gird his loins,” or as some might say today, to “man up” and be courageous. Doesn’t sound like a very promising prophetic career, does it?

And yet, God’s mercy is demonstrated in a verse that can easily be overlooked: “They will fight against you but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer 1:19). God’s promise to Jeremiah that, despite the people’s rejection of his message, God will remain with him to deliver him, is extraordinary. God said the same to Moses from the burning bush when he was called to free God’s people from slavery in Egypt (see Ex 3:11-12). God’s presence among his chosen ones is probably the preeminent sign of his mercy in the Old Testament.

Jesus’ preaching, which we heard last Sunday, was based on the beautiful Isaian text that speaks of God’s mercy for captives, the sick, the poor, and the marginalized (see Is 61:1-2). Jesus was preaching God’s mercy not so much through his words — his first sermon was simply “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21) — but primarily through his actions. And for this, his fellow Nazareans were intent on killing him.

As we proclaim God’s mercy, the church faces an uphill climb much like Jeremiah and Jesus. The Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ is not often welcomed in our increasingly secular society. But as preachers and doers of God’s word, we must “gird our loins” and be ready to proclaim God’s mercy in word, and especially in deeds of mercy. Hence, Paul’s audacious claim that love is the supreme virtue over and above faith and hope.

Praying the Word

Father of boundless mercy,
you show your people compassion
by your presence among them.
Set us free from all fear and doubt
as we strive to reflect your mercy
in all that we say and do.
This we ask through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time February 7, 2016

Here I am, Lord

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8

In a fantastic vision of the Almighty, the prophet Isaiah is called by God to be sent to serve his people. Isaiah believes he is a dead man since he saw God despite his unworthiness. God reassures him by purifying him from his sins, thereby enabling Isaiah to respond enthusiastically, "Here I am, send me!" (Is 6:8).

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 11

In our continuous reading of the First Letter to the Corinthians, we hear Paul recalling the apostolic tradition of Jesus' resurrection and the first preaching of the Gospel. The longer version is preferred simply because it presents a fuller text rather than truncating the pericope and the message of Paul.

Luke 5:1-11

Jesus preaches the word of God along the Sea of Galilee (or the Lake of Gennesaret) and calls Simon Peter to the ministry of catching souls, despite Peter's protestation of his own unworthiness.

Sharing the Word

In an episode of *Seinfeld*, Jerry is depicted doing his standup routine and he says, "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Now this means to the average person, if you have to go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

We can get caught up in fear if we allow it to take hold of our hearts. Fear keeps us from doing a lot of things in life that are worth doing. Think about how many marriages fail because of the couple's

fear of honest dialogue with each other or of counseling when problems arise. Fear keeps most people from going to life's margins to embrace the sick, the poor, the elderly, the forgotten, and from welcoming immigrants those of different cultural backgrounds. As the vocation director for my congregation in the United States, I can tell you that fear keeps many men from the priesthood and religious life; it probably keeps them from even engaging in serious discernment. I suspect that most of us are afraid of the truth, and thus we avoid it. Fear serves ultimately to keep us from Jesus and God's infinite mercy.

While both Isaiah and Peter feared their respective vocations, God's invitation to them to not be afraid, despite their unworthiness, offers us hope. If fear keeps us from God, then it is God's perfect love and compassion which eliminate our fears (see 1 Jn 4:18).

Saint John Paul II began his Petrine ministry on October 22, 1978, with the resounding call to be fearless heralds of the Gospel in all aspects of society: "Do not be afraid. Open, I say open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization, and development. Do not be afraid."

Praying the Word

God our Father,
you are rich in mercy
and your love knows no limit.
Send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts,
so that we might know the saving grace
of your eternal Son, Jesus Christ,
who is Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.

First Sunday of Lent February 14, 2016

In Memory of Him

Breaking the Word

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Moses exhorts the people to acknowledge the mercy of God who brought his people from slavery in Egypt to a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Dt 26:9). In so doing, the people are to offer as a sacrifice their first fruits of their harvest as a thanksgiving offering.

Romans 10:8-13

Paul preaches Jesus as Lord and encourages the Romans to believe and profess their faith in the risen Lord. None are excluded from God’s abundant mercy in Christ Jesus.

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus is baptized, filled with the Holy Spirit, and led into the desert for 40 days of fasting and testing by the devil. His physical hunger serves as the springboard from which the devil will tempt Jesus to turn stones into bread, acquire worldly power, and false worship.

Sharing the Word

Remembering important items or family events is essential for us. There are computer passwords, phone numbers, birthdays and anniversaries, medical appointments: all-important things that we commit to our memory. As we get older, it is said that the memory is the first thing to go. We become more forgetful as we age and may even fear dementia or some other disease that will rob us of our ability to remember.

In our first reading, Moses was afraid that the people would forget all that God had done for them, how God had heard their cries for mercy, saw their oppression, and freed them from the bond of

slavery in Egypt (see Dt 26:7-8). Moses feared that once the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Dt 26:9), which means peace and prosperity, that they would forget how they had become God's chosen people. And once the people forgot God's tender love and abundant mercy, then they would be easily tempted to forsake their covenant with him and turn to a life of sin and evil. They would end up becoming just like the pagans whom God had cleared from the land before settling his people there.

We know the rest of the story, don't we? The Israelites, time and again, broke their covenant with God through sin and injustice. They had lost the memory of God's power and might, and so they turned against him, rejecting his love. They didn't remember God's abundant love and merciful actions.

Contrast this with Jesus who was tempted in the desert. Jesus didn't forget God's merciful love. Jesus didn't forget the commandments, the precepts of the law. In fact, Jesus was able to resist the devil's temptations precisely by recalling God's fidelity as recorded in Sacred Scripture. As Jesus remembered God's fidelity to his people in ages past, this strengthened him to remain faithful to the Father as Satan was tempting him to do otherwise. Jesus not only remembered God's faithful love; he acted on those memories.

Our memories of salvation history need not only to be remembered but also acted upon, lest we forget the saving deeds of the past and thus forsake our future glory in Christ.

Jesus taught us that the best way to remember our salvation is by celebrating the Eucharist: "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). For centuries, the church has faithfully celebrated the Eucharist in remembrance of him who died and rose again for our salvation. As we eat his body and drink his blood, we offer praise and thanksgiving to God for Jesus, who died for our sins and rose from the dead!

Memories are important to keep alive and maintain. But what is even more important is acting upon those memories.

Praying the Word

With joy and thanksgiving
we come before you, ever faithful God,
imploring your divine mercy
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Second Sunday of Lent February 21, 2016

Transfigured Lives

Breaking the Word

Genesis 15:5-12

God promises the childless Abram that one day his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. For his part, Abram believes in God's promise and his faith is a credit to his personal righteousness.

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Paul charges the Philippians to live their lives with Christian integrity. They are to think and act not as pagans, but as those who have put their faith in Christ Jesus and who live in this world and yet realize that their lasting citizenship is in heaven. The resurrection is promised to those who believe.

Luke 9:28b-36

Jesus takes Peter, John, and James up the mountain to pray, and is transfigured in their presence. Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet appear in celestial conversation with Jesus, speaking about the "exodus" he is to undergo in Jerusalem.

Sharing the Word

Luke offers a particularly rich account of Jesus' transfiguration. He is the only evangelist to describe for his readers the subject matter of the conversation Jesus had with Moses and Elijah: "They spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem" (Lk 9:31). In Greek, the word *exodus* can mean both a geographical journey or be a euphemism for death, "a departure from among the living" (BDAG, 350). No doubt, Luke used the word in the metaphorical sense, referencing Jesus' sacrificial death that he will endure in Jerusalem.

In other words, Luke is indicating that Jesus knew of his

impending death and with such knowledge, as his readers will be told later in the text, he “resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). Jesus embraced the cross willingly for our salvation.

Lent has been described with the metaphor of a journey. It certainly can seem like a long journey for the elect in the RCIA heading to the Easter sacraments. But the journey metaphor works well for the baptized as well. We need a transfiguration moment in our Lenten journey in order to be reminded of the exodus we ourselves must undergo: an exodus from sin to a life worthy of the kingdom, as Paul reminded the Philippians in today’s second reading. This requires a different way of seeing reality, looking through the lens of faith. Peter, John, and James were privileged to witness the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountaintop. That grace-filled experience served to strengthen their faith following the Lord’s passion, resurrection, and ascension. Luke’s Acts of the Apostles tells us of the early church’s apostolic preaching and zeal for mission. Our ancestors in the faith had their own transfiguration moment; it led them from fear to kerygma.

At this point in our Lenten journey, the question for us to ask ourselves is from what do we need to undergo an exodus? What spiritual death do we need to endure (e.g., getting rid of a vice or addiction) so that the risen Christ can one day “change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body” (Phil 3:21)?

Praying the Word

Heavenly Father,
at the transfiguration of your Son,
your heavenly voice invited the disciples
to recognize your chosen Son and to listen to him.
Open wide the ears of our hearts
so that we might indeed listen to Jesus
and be transformed into members of his body, the church.
We make our prayer through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Third Sunday of Lent February 28, 2016

God is Gracious and Full of Mercy

Breaking the Word

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

The cries of the Hebrews reach the ears of the God, who calls to Moses from the burning bush and makes him the liberator of his people from servitude in Egypt. God reveals himself to Moses as "I AM" and promises that Moses will lead the people to the Promised Land.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Paul recalls the events of the Exodus in order to remind the Corinthians that their freedom in Christ is a gift. The Christian is a humble person, not prideful, for grace is freely given.

Luke 13:1-9

Jesus uses two tragic events to underscore the necessity of repenting of sin lest his audience die in their sins. The parable of the fruitless fig tree continues the warning: those who persist in their sins and fail to bear fruit for the kingdom will die, like a dead, withered tree.

Sharing the Word

Patience is not an easy virtue to acquire or to practice. I often find myself in awe of the patience parents have with their children, especially children with special needs. These precious gifts from God require extra care and attention along with a big dose of patience. As my mother would say, "Those parents are saints, and so too are their little ones." Another example of the need for patience comes from driving and navigating busy city streets and congested freeways. Driving requires a great deal of patience along with defensive skills. The increasing number of incidents of road rage indicates to me that patient drivers are an "endangered species."

As we come to this juncture in Lent and reflect on today's readings, it seems to me that the lesson for us is that God is a patient Father who never tires of reconciling us when we repent of our sins and amend our ways. In the words of Pope Francis, "Brothers and sisters, the face of God is that of a merciful Father, an ever-patient one. Have you thought of God's patience, the patience that he has for each of us? That's his mercy. He's always patient, patient with us; he understands us, approaches us, he never tires of forgiving us if we know to turn to him with a contrite heart." What a wonderful image of the Father of mercies!

The story of the Exodus is one of divine patience and mercy. The people continuously grumbled against God and Moses during their desert journey. Yet God brought them to a "land flowing with milk and honey" (see Ex 3:8). God did not give up on his people; he was merciful and patient with them. That's the point Jesus was making in the parable of the fig tree. The gardener, who might serve as a type for Jesus, pleads with the landowner, an image of the Father, to be patient and let him nurture the tree for another year to see if it will bear fruit.

God is gracious indeed and very merciful. We need to undergo *metanoia* — repentance — and so conform our lives to Christ, who is always making intercession on our behalf.

Praying the Word

Merciful Father,
you are slow to anger and rich in kindness,
ever patient and ready to forgive.
Hear us as we acknowledge our need for your mercy;
envelop us in the warm embrace of the Comforter
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.





EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •
Poetry • Books

Art Review



THE PEOPLE'S POPE

Oil on canvas,
54" x 66"

Jiawei Shen, 2013
Vatican Art
Collection
Official Gift from
the Australian
Government

by John Christman,
SSS

Portraiture is a long honored tradition, and papal portraiture has some exceptional examples of the genre. Great papal portraiture often commands our attention, from Raphael's aged and pensive portrait of Pope Julius II to Velazquez's intense portrait of Pope Innocent X, which the avant-garde artist Francis Bacon infamously reimagined to horrific effect.

The portraits of popes are compelling for a number of reasons. Their psychological affect is one important reason. Many viewers come to a papal portrait hoping the artist has provided a glimpse into these unique persons and personalities, at once imbued with power and influence but also frequently perceived as holy and Christ-like. Some historical knowledge and awareness of the times likewise enhances interest in the particular pope being depicted. For instance, Titian's famous portrait of Pope Paul III garners interest because Paul called the Council of Trent that occurred in tumultuous times and had such a lasting effect upon the church.

Sometimes, the composition of these paintings adds to the dramatic affect. Popes are often depicted sitting in a throne-like chair surrounded by velvet drapes that create a rarified and distant atmosphere. This is the case with all of the papal portraits mentioned thus far. Add to this the rich and highly decorative vestments worn by the popes and the scene becomes instantly striking or, as Francis Bacon intuited, somewhat off-putting and even intimidating.

All of this makes Jiawei Shen's recent portrait of Pope Francis all the more exceptional. On seeing Shen's painting of Pope Francis, the viewer is struck by two things. First, what is instantly apparent is that this is not an austere, distant, and unapproachable pope nor is he a reclusive meditative or mystic pope. Instead, he is portrayed as so many people have come to see Pope Francis: as a warm, happy, and

inviting person who seeks to make the love of God present to the people he encounters.

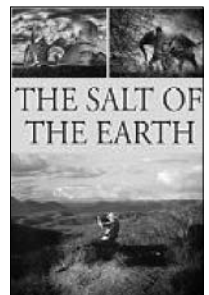
Second, unlike all the portraits mentioned thus far, Pope Francis is depicted surrounded by people. In fact, the painting itself is entitled *The People's Pope*. This is such a dramatic but powerful device. Instead of sitting enthroned in a faraway private location, Pope Francis is surrounded by people. In fact, people of different ages, genders, and cultural origins surround him. All are as moved to see the pope as he is to see them. Shen's pope is a pope of encounter, meeting people where they are. Moreover, as the sunlit birds might indicate, Pope Francis brings the grace of the Holy Spirit into the lives of the people he encounters. If a papal portrait gives us any indication of who a pope can be for the church and the world, the people of Pope Francis' time are blest indeed.

Film Review

Wim Wenders is a rare, multifaceted talent in our world today: an author, a photographer, and a filmmaker. Major art galleries have displayed his photographs, and books have been published of his works. His films have won best film and director at the Cannes Film Festival and other prestigious international film festivals. He has been awarded honorary doctorates for his work in film, including an honorary doctorate in theology.

In the last 20 years, he has also gained much recognition for his documentary films, three of which were nominated for Academy Awards: *Buena Vista Social Club* (USA, 1999), *Pina* (Germany, 2011), and last year's *The Salt of the Earth* (France, 2014), co-directed with Juliano Ribeiro Salgado. All of these films are about artists and their particular art forms. *Buena Vista Social Club* tells the story of the great American guitarist Ry Cooder, who went to Cuba in the late 1990s to put together a band of classic Cuban jazz musicians and the album they made, which created an international sensation. *Pina* focused on the life of the famous modern dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch, capturing her troupe's moving performances in 3D.

His latest documentary, *The Salt of the Earth*, centers upon the life and photography of Sebastião Salgado. A natural resonance occurs between the work of Wenders and Salgado in that both place the highest regard upon the dignity of the human person. In fact, Wenders recalls thinking, upon seeing Salgado's photography for the first time, "He really cared a lot about people. That meant a lot in my book. After

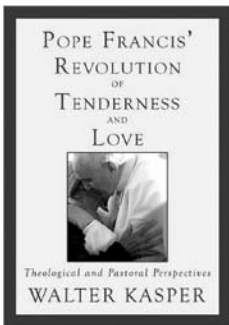


**THE SALT OF
THE EARTH**
Wim Wenders
and Juliano Ribeiro
Salgado
France, 2014
by John Christman,
SSS

all, people are the salt of the earth.”

Hard-hitting and empathetic black-and-white photographs of people fill this film. There are images of people leaving their country due to famine and hunger. There are images of babies in tiny caskets, who died before being baptized; their tiny bodies surrounded by flowers. Haunting images. In these small communities, people believed that if these children died with their eyes open they should be left open so the children can find their way beyond this world. But these photos are surrounded by equally strong uplifting images of native peoples and small rural communities, capturing their dignity and strength.

All of the photographs are accompanied by Salgado’s reflections and commentaries, thus adding layers of meaning. Importantly, however, the film is not just a running commentary on Salgado’s photography, but it is also interspersed with the story of his own life: from his early career as an economist to the difficulty of having a family and being an international photographer. Most touching, perhaps, in all of this is his relationship with his wife Lélia, who bought him his first camera and worked with him behind the scenes throughout his career, organizing and promoting all his endeavors. It’s a good reminder that we don’t do anything alone, in a film that tries to emphasize the interconnectedness and dignity of all people.



**POPE FRANCIS'
REVOLUTION
OF TENDERNESS
AND LOVE:**

Theological
And Pastoral
Perspectives

Walter Kasper
(Trans. William
Madges)

New York: Paulist
Press, 2015

120 pp., \$16.95

Book Review

Cardinal Walter Kasper, widely known as the pope’s theologian, has produced an elegant and informative theological treatise for those who want to understand Pope Francis and his sometimes-surprising ways.

This pope embraces the tradition of the Catholic Church, but not as his predecessor did. Pope Benedict XVI moved comfortably through abstract formulations that were always properly rooted in intellectual history to lead his readers to marvel at the rich theological tapestry of the church. His polished works grounded the faithful confidently in profound statements of faith that were true to life. Pope Francis, on the other hand, begins with the concrete experience of living the Gospel. He proceeds from real encounters in which he sees, judges, and acts according to the Good News of Jesus Christ. This prompts Kasper to recall Saint Thomas More’s description of the process of tradition: “What pertains is not to pass on the ashes, but rather the glowing embers hidden underneath” (13).

Kasper challenges those who see Pope Francis as limited by his Argentine background. He calls to the reader's attention that Argentine theology has strong European roots that draw upon Johann Adam Möhler and the Tübingen School. As the first pope who did not participate in Vatican II, Francis looks back to Paul VI for guidance in the proper interpretation of the council's documents. Francis endeavors to remain faithful to "polyhedral reality," a concept that keeps alive the wide variety of tensions found in real life encounters (20). While faith can never be an ideology that reveals with rigid clarity everything all at once, it can be likened more to a lamp that illuminates the path as believers travel along its way.

The author moves at a healthy pace, noting highlights such as the pope's respect for the faith of the common people, his call for the restoration of the central place of mercy in the faith, his recognition of the church more as merciful mother than as a pure and holy virgin, and his commitment to collegiality that moves the church away from a "one-sided Roman centralization" that has produced the "unnecessarily harsh formulations" of *Dominus Iesus* (48, 54).

Francis views ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as an opportunity to make good on his pledge concerning the conversion of the papacy which should be open to the sort of unity through diversity proposed by Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullman. Kasper comments on all these tendencies, while showing that they are consistent with the doctrinal commitments of both John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

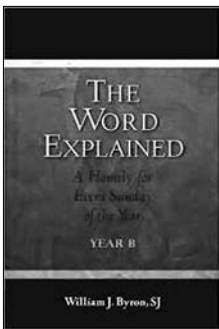
In a helpful chapter on the poor, Kasper clarifies that a "poor church" does not mean a church without possessions, but a church that uses its wealth for the benefit of the poor. The pope has actively supported the so-called "Catacomb Pact" signed by 40 bishops before the close of Vatican II, committing themselves to simple lifestyles, vestments, titles, and work on behalf of the poor.

Kasper softens somewhat the pope's criticism of trickle-down economics by acknowledging statistics that show that global economic programs have improved the plight of the poor; nevertheless, he notes that massive poverty still exists as a result of present economic systems that should do more to encourage employment. Francis does not oppose the markets, only the unbridled abuse exhibited by some unscrupulous corporations.

In the end, Kasper makes the case that Pope Francis is not a liberal. He is a radical: "Nothing is worse than the rage of Cathars, inquisitors, and merciless rigorists, who mourn the loss of a pure church of the past, which never existed; and nothing is worse than the zeal of enthusiastic, progressive-thinking utopian individuals for a pure and ideal church of the future, which is mercilessly hard on the church's present condition" (92).

If you have time to read only one book about Pope Francis, this one will richly reward you with profound insights in a very brief format. College classes and adult education groups can profit from this book. The endnotes contain ample references to source material as well as suggestions for further reading. While most references appear in German, the English equivalents are given as well.

Gerald J. Bednar, PhD
Saint Mary Seminary
Wickliffe, Ohio



**THE WORD
EXPLAINED:**
A Homily For Every
Sunday Of The Year
(Year B)
William J. Byron, SJ
New York: Paulist
Press, 2014.
256 pp., \$19.95

Even though my not having read the two companion volumes (*The Word Proclaimed, Year A*, and *The Word Received, Year C*) to this volume, a collection of 67 homilies, this reviewer does not hesitate in highly recommending all three books. Recommend to whom?

First and foremost, to homilists, as superb "how-to" models of excellent liturgical preaching. Second, and by no means secondarily, to all of us who come to be fed by word and sacrament throughout the three annual cycles (A, B, and C) of the liturgical calendar. Those who regularly take the time prior to the Sunday liturgy and other seasonal liturgies to meditate on the scriptural riches of our liturgical heritage will welcome the inspired, practical insights of these homilies to enhance their spiritual growth.

To be sure, one homilist need not (nor should not) slavishly mimic what another has prepared. But any homilist ought to welcome the opportunity to be inspired by one good example after another, week after week and season after liturgical season, on how to mine the riches of Sacred Scripture. Such mining and modeling and applying of biblical texts to everyday living are the upshot of what any reader of this volume is being offered.

What particularly characterizes the contents of this volume is the concreteness of Byron's applications to everyday living. Abstractness, by far, is not characteristic of what he presents. He draws from television shows and movies, as well as from concrete, personal, and often poignant examples of tragic and triumphant, current and not-so-current news events.

His homilies attend to all of the scripture readings of a particular liturgy, including even the responsorial psalm which is often overlooked by homilists. Byron's homilies come from the heart of a good and sensitive pastor as well as a savvy academician and college administrator. He is colloquial and practical as well as being a scholar who is theologically astute. He draws from the riches of his Jesuit heritage without overusing Jesuit references in these homilies.

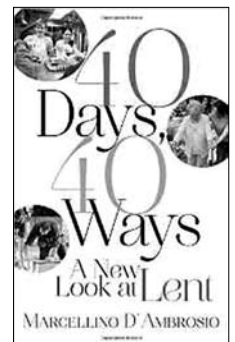
By and large, Byron's homilies in this volume, and in the view of this reviewer, are relatively short and to point. In keeping with the well-known Shakespearean line in *Hamlet*, Byron gives ample credence to the truth that "brevity is the soul of wit" (Act II, Scene ii). Such brevity, coupled with an abundance of meaning, might very well be emulated and appreciated by homilists and congregants alike.

If this volume for Year B is any indication of Byron's offerings for Years A and C — and I suspect that should be taken for granted — then let this review be an incentive to purchase and read and be inspired by all three!

Conrad T. Gromada, PhD
Professor Emeritus of Theology
Ursuline College
Pepper Pike, Ohio

Throughout the 40 days of Lent and even into the Easter Season, D'Ambrosio gives suggestions for daily exercises to promote a healthy spiritual life. And, as the author states in his Postscript, "If you accepted the forty-day challenge in this book, you've had a spiritual makeover. It would make no sense to stop the spiritual exercises" (115).

Besides giving a suggested activity for each day, D'Ambrosio often refers to the scripture readings for the day. After commenting on the Easter Sunday scripture readings, he includes suggestions for



**40 DAYS, 40 WAYS:
A NEW LOOK AT
LENT**
Marcellino
D'Ambrosio
Cincinnati, Ohio:
Servant (Franciscan
Media), 2014
144 pp., \$14.95

“celebrating the Easter Season” with a listing of materials, hard copies, and online resources (116-118). Following this is an appendix with a Mini-Retreat for Good Friday and the Triduum (119-121). Then he gives suggested scripture passages for Easter Week.

Although I have read a variety of books about Lent, some that contain Lenten practices, I found that this book gave a refreshing perspective to the seasons of Lent and Easter. As D’Ambrosio recommended, these practices, such as partaking of the sacraments more often, reading spiritual books and articles, viewing inspirational videos and DVDs, helping others, praying daily, visiting the sick and lonely, serving the poor, and others should be a permanent feature of my life.

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



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Timothy Radcliffe,
OP (Illus. Martin
Erspamer, OSB)
Collegeville,
Minnesota: The
Liturgical Press,
2014
73 pp., \$14.95

Every Catholic church or chapel has some form of the 14 Stations of the Cross — the significant moments of Jesus’ journey from condemnation by Pilate to his death on the cross. Some of these depictions are simple wooden markers with a number and perhaps symbols; others are scenes painted on the wall; and still others, graceful sculptures.

This small, yet elegant book by the prolific English Dominican writer and former Master of the Order of Preachers, Timothy Radcliffe, offers a short reflection on each of the stations. The book is accompanied by color iconographic pages done by Martin Erspamer, OSB, the well-known liturgical artist and monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

While we sometimes think we are the ones accompanying Jesus along the way, Radcliffe reminds us that *it is Jesus who is on the journey of our life with us*. The missteps, the falls, the strangers and friends along the road that Jesus travels parallel our own journey until the end.

In reminding us that “we are fallible human beings who fumble,” Radcliffe recalls Pope Francis’ words: “Appearances notwithstanding, every person on our way to the kingdom, keeling over from time to time, is immensely holy and deserves our love” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 274).

Radcliffe seamlessly weaves the stops that Jesus made on the way to

Calvary with spiritual reflections drawn from Scripture as well as his own experiences and references to poetry, film, literature, and art.

The book provides a wonderful Lenten reflection that can be used in schools, parishes, and homes for the elderly, as well as for personal reflection throughout the year.

Mary Denis Maher, CSA, PhD
Professor Emerita
Ursuline College
Pepper Pike, Ohio

Poetry

Holy Communion Is

infinity's gift to time
the hasty bread of Egypt
ravens carrying meat to a prophet

the showbread anointed priests feast on
in the sacred silence of the ark

and the corn sweaty apostles pluck
from hot Sabbath fields of grain

the paschal lamb's shank
and smoke climbing upward to heaven

bags of balm, honey, resin, and almonds
meals for a holy pilgrimage

barley loaves and a few fish
the banquet of belief on a mountain top

the bread of angels
consumed by the faithful
which in turn consumes them

Philip C. Kolin



EUCCHARISTIC WITNESS

Mary Muehle

In preparation for First Communion, we were taught a simple prayer: "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief." We were instructed to say this prayer during the consecration at Mass to be sure we would understand the sacredness of what we were about to receive.

As a child, I prayed this prayer with all the fervor I could muster. Perhaps fear of dreaded consequences motivated the prayer. After all, what would happen if I didn't have enough faith? How terrible it would be to approach this sacrament with too little faith. And so I prayed that I would be given more and more faith.

At some point in my life, I began to realize that the Lord had been answering my prayer all along. Through the people I encountered who showed me what living a life of faith really means, the Lord answered my prayer — help my unbelief. Through the opportunities to learn about our Catholic faith and the challenges to let go of childish beliefs and replace them with a more mature understanding of the gift of the Eucharist, the Lord answered my prayer. Through becoming involved in parish ministry and exploring with others what it means to live a vibrant life of faith, the Lord answered my prayer. Through becoming an Associate of the Blessed Sacrament Community and discovering Saint Peter Julian Emyard's eucharistic way of life, the Lord has answered my prayer.

Over the years, the prayer of fear — help my unbelief — was replaced with a prayer of wonder. As I was given the opportunity to prepare children for their First Communion and saw the wonder of their simple yet complete faith in the gift of the Lord that they were about to receive. As a hospice chaplain, bringing Communion to the sick and the dying and being given a glimpse of their intimacy with their Lord as well as the comfort they received.

I have been overwhelmed with wonder over and over again. As I listen to others share their faith-filled experience of Christ in the Eucharist, I am moved to pray: I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.

And now the prayer of wonder is gradually being replaced by a prayer of awe. Awe at the immensity of the gift the Eucharist is in my life. It is a gift that will never be fully appreciated and never exhausted because there is always more to discover, to experience, and to love. And so I pray: I believe, Lord, help my unbelief.





“Eucharistic contemplation is more active than passive; it consists in the soul giving itself unreservedly to God propelled by God’s continually new and sweet goodness, and by the ever increasing flame of his love.”

Saint Peter Julian Eymard

It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed, the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love...