

Emmanuel

Eucharistic Spirituality

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Stained glass window in the Sanctuary of the Church of St. Jean Baptiste, New York City. (courtesy of Dick Lopez)

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Stained glass window from the rectory of St. Jean Baptiste Church, New York City.

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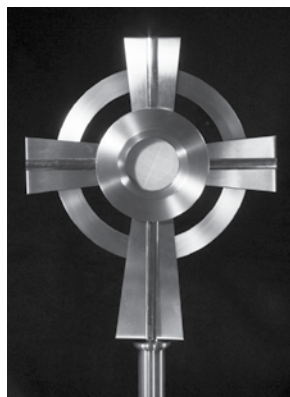
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Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 122 Number 2



EUCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

The Year of Mercy and the Prophet Jonah
by Owen F. Cummings

72

EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Karl Rahner on the Eucharist
by Dennis Billy, CSsR

80

EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Day of the Cross —
The Friday We Call Good
by Edward Foley, OFM Cap

90

For the Universal Prayers in the
Jubilee Year of Mercy
by Mary Grace Melcher, OCD

104

EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art, Music, Film, Poetry, and Books

132

COLUMNS

From the Editor 70

Pastoral Liturgy 107

Breaking the Word 111

Eucharistic Witness 140



FROM THE EDITOR

When I was in the final year of studies before ordination — more years ago than I care to admit — the esteemed Karl Rahner came to the south side of Chicago to deliver an address on the inscrutability of God according to Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas. Having spent long hours laboring over his writings in *A Rahner Reader*, one of the staples of our seminary education, I attended Rahner’s lecture, awestruck to be in his presence.

I do not pretend to have grasped the subtleties of Rahner’s thought, but to this day I still have a great appreciation of his core teachings, deepened by books like Harvey D. Egan’s *Karl Rahner: The Mystic of Everyday Life* (1998) and Rahner’s last work, *Prayers for a Lifetime*, published in 1989, five years after his death. I return to them often.

In *Prayers for a Lifetime*, Rahner pens a series of brief reflections on the Seven Last Words of Christ. I found the section on the first word, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34), especially powerful. Speaking to the crucified Christ, Rahner says:

A feeling of despair at the sight of such wickedness comes over you, a feeling more terrible than all the pain in your body. Are there men capable of such wickedness? Do you have anything in common with such men as this? Can one man torture another to death like this? Torture him to death with lies, wickedness, treachery, hypocrisy, and malice, and yet keep up the appearance of righteousness, the air of innocence, the pose of impartial judges? Does God let this happen in his world?” (49)

The response of the Savior is so different from what we would expect of any human being. “But you said: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ You are really a mystery, O Jesus. Where in all your

tortured and tormented soul did you find a place for words like these? Yes, you are a mystery. You love your enemies. You recommend them to your Father. You pray for them. And my Lord, if it is not blasphemous to say it, you pardon them with the most implausible excuse there is: they did not know what they were doing. Really they knew it all" (49).

Rahner, man of prayer, then moves to a profoundly personal plea: "Speak these merciful words of your boundless love over my sins also. Say to the Father in my behalf: 'Forgive him, for he did not know what he was doing.' Really I did know it. I knew all of it. But your love I did not know" (49-50).

We who are privileged to minister the mystery of the Eucharist at the table and receive his body and blood in Communion touch the depths of Christ's boundless love in this sacrament. It is mercy . . . and life . . . and healing for sinners, for you and me and all of us together.

In this Issue

You'll find much for fruitful reading and meditation in this issue, which is certainly right for the final weeks of Lent, the Sacred Triduum, Easter, and the Easter Season.

We feature two lengthy reflections, both of which I suggest you read in smaller sections over several sittings. The first, on the Jewish prophet Jonah, reveals a person whose ministry and underlying attitudes represent the very antithesis of divine mercy. Owen Cummings helps us to understand Jonah's world and the biblical story's enduring challenge. The second is Capuchin Ed Foley's beautiful examination of the theology and liturgy of The Friday We Call Good.

Ending where we began, Dennis Billy, CSsR, introduces us to the theology and eucharistic teaching of the late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner.



God's blessings on you in this paschal season!

Anthony Schueller, SSS
Editor



EUCCHARIST: LIVING & EVANGELIZING

The Year of Mercy and the Prophet Jonah

by Owen F. Cummings

Called to a mission of mercy, Jonah fought God at every turn. What about us?

Deacon Owen F. Cummings, of the Diocese of Salt Lake City, Utah, is the academic dean and Regent's Professor of Theology at Mount Angel Seminary in Saint Benedict, Oregon.

POPE FRANCIS'S YEAR OF MERCY IS SURELY A GRACED MOMENT FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, not only Catholics, indeed for all of humankind. Much continues to be written about the Holy Father's own theology of mercy, and one thanks God for this. Sometimes, however, one hears an alarm at Pope Francis' innovative views with their permeative stress on God's love and mercy. An informed acquaintance with the Christian tradition will quickly establish that this emphasis from the pope is nothing new, but is in fact a retrieval of the best of our theological thinking. This central theme of God's love and mercy, however, comes to us also from our Jewish forebears. Let me point briefly to a few passages that tell of God's love and mercy.

Jeremiah 31:20, with God speaking through Jeremiah: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore, I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him." Consulting the various Hebrew dictionaries, one finds out that this word for "mercy," *rehem*, is related to the word for "womb." Perhaps literally, the passage may be rendered "I will surely have womb feelings for Ephraim."

Psalms 103:13 tells of the "womb-love" of a father: "As a father has compassion (*rehem*) for his children, so the Lord has compassion (*riham*) for those who fear him." Once again, God's "womb-love" for his children.

And so beautifully in Hosea 11:1-8: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called after them, the more they went from me. . . . Yet it was I that taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to

them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them. . . . How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.”

Finally, with a repetition that never becomes tediously repetitive, Psalm 136, “His steadfast love endures forever.” This phrase occurs 26 times in the psalm.

This notion of God’s mercy and love is very ancient indeed, but it is very difficult to absorb in a non-tribal, non-exclusive way. We humans too often have reductive, parsimonious views of God, especially in respect of those who do not belong to our tribe, to our church. The Book of Jonah speaks to this condition.

Help from the Scholarly Community

Let’s begin our reflection on Yahweh’s merciful love in the Book of Jonah with some orienting quotations from the scholarly community. First, from the distinguished Irish Old Testament scholar and Syriacist Carmel McCarthy, RSM, and her late American colleague William Riley: “Jonah is, at heart, a humorous book. Its characters and story are intended to raise a smile on the lips of its hearers — or, rather, some of its hearers. For the Book of Jonah is a satire, which means that, although it will entertain those who are in tune with its message, it might anger those who are in disagreement.”¹ The God of the Book of Jonah has a great sense of humor that undermines silly and prejudicial assumptions that some religious people have, and, moreover, that are difficult to displace. God’s humor in the book is intended not to hurt, but to invite conversion of heart and mind.

Second, from the veteran Irish scripture scholar Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP: “I have long been convinced of the critical importance of one’s image of God. It is increasingly clear to me that that the basic reason for the rejection, by the religious authorities and the God-fearing Pharisees, of the word and person of Jesus was the image of God that he proclaimed and manifested. . . . Jonah had a nagging suspicion that, in sending him with stern warning to the Ninevites, his God had a hidden agenda. He feared that mercy and forgiveness might lurk within the word of threat. His worst fears have been realized. . . .”² Jonah’s image of God is distorted. His “God” is not the real God whose best name is Love, the Love finally enfleshed in Jesus, but rather a tribal and territorial God who loves only his own chosen people.



Third, from the Anglican Old Testament scholar John Eaton: “The theological point of the tale is of great significance, showing that God’s love is infinitely broader and deeper than the resentful, sectarian, nationalistic attitudes that warp many ostensibly pious people.”³ Eaton picks up on resentment, sectarianism, and nationalism, three toxic influences that can destructively infect how we think of God, not simply how Jonah thinks of God.

The Context of the Book of Jonah

The context in which the Book of Jonah was written is in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, 587 BCE, and the traumatic experience of the Babylonian Exile. When the people of Judah were permitted by Cyrus the Persian to return to their native land and to rebuild their temple, “a defensive ghetto mentality prevailed.”⁴ The Jews became inward-looking, insular both ethnically and religiously. Non-Jews were to be excluded from God’s care and concern. The Book of Jonah was designed to combat the insularity of post-exilic nationalism and patriotism, and so “the Book of Jonah became . . . a propaganda tract to ward off the rampant nationalism of the post-exilic period.”⁵ “God and God’s salvation are ours, not yours, whoever you are,” tended to be the attitude.

The Dominican theologian Paul Murray has written: “I am convinced that the Book of Jonah is the most profoundly Christian of all the books in the Hebrew Bible, and the book from which we have most to learn at the beginning of this new millennium.”⁶

To get at Murray’s meaning, let us proceed as follows. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus invokes Jonah in a two-fold way: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt 12:40). Jonah’s descent into the belly of the whale is a sign of the Lord’s descent to Sheol, the place of the dead, before his resurrection. In the Gospel of Luke: “This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. At the judgment, the queen of the south will rise with the men of this generation and she will condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and there is something greater than Solomon here. At the judgment, the men of Nineveh will arise with this generation and

condemn it, because at the preaching of Jonah they repented, and there is something greater than Jonah here” (Lk 11:29-32).

In both Matthew and Luke, the sign of Jonah is Christological and soteriological. Jonah’s sojourn in the belly of the whale is a sign of Jesus’ death and resurrection. In Luke, there is a more universal awareness of salvation. Salvation is a reality for the queen of the south and the Ninevites, not just for the Jews “of this generation.”

The God of the Book of Jonah has a great sense of humor that undermines silly and prejudicial assumptions that some religious people have and that are difficult to displace.

Could we find another dimension or level of intensity to the sign of Jonah? Following Luke’s hint of universal salvation, could we see in the sign of Jonah that God is a God of mercy, compassion, and love for all? That the God of the Book of Jonah anticipates the First Letter of Saint John, affirming that “God is love” (4:15)? To probe this possibility, we must go beyond the surface and popular narrative about Jonah and the whale and grasp something of the whole text of this remarkable little book.

To get beyond the Jonah and the whale narrative, of course, we need to recognize that the Book of Jonah is theological fiction and not literal history, a point well made by the Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad: “The straightforward message contained in the Book of Jonah has been distorted ever since people began to be puzzled by Jonah’s sojourn in the belly of a fish. The minor detail whether this could be accepted as an event that actually happened became the all-important matter of contention, and it was left to modern criticism . . . to explain the story properly. Quite obviously, it is a story with a strong didactic content, and should not be read as an historical account. . . . The story is told with a grace and ease unmatched in the prophetic literature.”⁷

Assyria and Nineveh

Perhaps we might say that there are two powerful symbols in this story: the city of Nineveh and the prophet Jonah. We could not make a better beginning in our understanding of Nineveh than by attending to the very short prophetic Book of Nahum. Nothing is known about the prophet Nahum except his name. It comes from the Hebrew root



meaning “comfort.” His name is perhaps an abbreviated version of *nahumiah*, “God comforts.” Think of Isaiah 40:1, *nahamu, nahamu ami omar eloheikem* — “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”

The very name Nahum is ironic because there is nothing comforting about this book. It centers upon a fierce description of the Babylonian siege of Nineveh, and is taken up for the most part with an angry, impassioned hatred against the empire of Assyria, whose capital city is Nineveh. Nineveh was a city across the river Tigris from what would be modern-day Mosul. Nineveh was destroyed entirely by the Babylonians in 612 BCE, and “entirely” is the operative word because its location was not discovered by archaeologists until the mid-nineteenth century.

Why such total and complete destruction of Nineveh? The answer is simple: Assyria symbolized by its capital Nineveh was code for the worst possible oppression and brutality in the ancient Near East. Assyria/Nineveh “had been the scourge of the ancient Near East for almost three centuries. . . . In the wake of their conquests, mounds of heads, impaled bodies, enslaved citizens, and avaricious looters testified to the ruthlessness of the Assyrians.”⁸ The description of the fall of Nineveh is so clear that Nahum may have spoken very near the date of the event, perhaps circa 615-610.

The theological irony behind the prophet’s name emerges in his description, with God speaking, of the destruction of Nineveh: “I am against you, says the Lord of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face; and I will let nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. I will throw filth at you and treat you with contempt, and make you a spectacle. Nineveh is devastated; who will bemoan her? Where shall I seek comforters for you?” (Na 3:5-7).

The punishment of Nineveh is the punishment of a woman found guilty of sexual immorality, perhaps as a result of sexual exploitation. She is stripped naked, pelted with filth, displayed naked for all to see. *And* there are no comforters for Nineveh. Nahum’s “God” is totally against Nineveh, in fact so against Nineveh that there will be no comforters for the city. The word “comforters,” in Hebrew *minahamim*, same root meaning as the name Nahum.

Nineveh stands for what is utterly reprehensible, unacceptable, what is in constant opposition to God, and what is beyond the pale of

God's salvific love. In Pope Francis's terms, the Ninevites are "on the peripheries," and there is no hope for them.

The Prophet Jonah

It is to these peripheral Ninevites that the prophet Jonah is sent by God. Told by God to go to Nineveh and preach there, Jonah takes off on a ship for Tarshish, "the ends of the earth." The ship is in great danger because of a storm. "Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him, 'What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps your God will spare us a thought so that we do not perish'" (Jon 1:5-6).

Jonah's description of God is beautiful: God is gracious, merciful, abounding in steadfast love. But how deep are his convictions?

Bruce Vawter has captured the situation perfectly and with some humor when he writes: "According to the current wisdom, such an unusual storm at sea must be the effect of an angry god of the elements. The sailors, proverbially a cautious and self-preserving lot when confronted by the indescribable hazards of the sea, would have known that their personal tutelary deities were properly placated and satisfied: the necessary insurance premiums were paid up in full. It must be, then, that whatever was wrong was the fault of the stranger in their midst, apparently the sole passenger that they had on board."⁹

The sailors were praying, each to his own god, and so they "appear in a much better light than the prophet."¹⁰ The pagans are more religiously responsive than the Jewish Jonah. The irony is taken further. Jonah finally acknowledges that he is the cause of the storm, and reluctantly the sailors throw him into the sea. Notice what happens. "Though Jonah is an apostate from his calling and his religious profession, the sailors force from him a full profession of his faith. 'I fear Yahweh the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land.'"¹¹ These peripheral pagans are the cause of Jonah's profession of faith. It is only after he has been swallowed by the big fish that Jonah begins to pray (Jon 2:1-10).



The Repentance of Nineveh and the Prophet's Disappointment

Chapter 3 of the book begins with God's word coming to Jonah a second time, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you" (Jon 3:1-2). "That great city" is an interesting phrase, variously handled by the translators. In Hebrew, the text reads: *weninwe hayetha ir gedolah lelohim*, literally, "Nineveh was a city great to God." Nineveh was "a great city" or "an exceedingly large city." Vawter comments that the phrase is "a superlative that is certainly approximated by our colloquial 'godawfully big.'" Perhaps, but in light of the overall theme of the book, it seems more theological than that.¹²

Jonah preaches to this city, "great to God," with enormous success. He is obviously skilled in the art of evangelization. The entire city of Nineveh repents, from the king to the cattle. However, Jonah was angry: "But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing'" (Jon 4:1-2).

His description of God is so beautiful. God is gracious, merciful, and abounding in steadfast love, in Jonah's words. How deep are his convictions about God? Not deep enough to extend this love of God to non-Jews. He does not want his loving God to be so disposed in grace and mercy to the hated Ninevites. Jonah is in greater need of conversion to the God of love than the Ninevites. This "half-hearted prophet can convert Sin City in a day's bad preaching, but God has to mobilize half of the forces of creation to teach his prophet anything."¹³

And so, "This was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry" (Jon 4:1). Jonah left the city and sat down, waiting to see what would happen. God makes a bush to provide some shade for his reluctant prophet, who is suffering from the heat. "Jonah was very happy about the bush" (4:6). Then God sends a worm to attack the bush and it withers. Fed up, frustrated, angry, Jonah wants to die.

God speaks to him, reprimanding but kindly and with humor. "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a

night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?" (Jon 4:10-11).

Conclusion

Paul Murray summarizes the experience of the prophet, who first of all disobeyed God's summons to preach to the Ninevites and then, when that preaching is successful, falls into a kind of narcissistic despair, in these words: "The prophet's disobedience and despair were merely symptoms of a deeper problem: Jonah, in fact, was a religious bigot. He was a man of strong will but of narrow intelligence, a staunchly religious man, who simply could not bear the idea that Yahweh might want to extend his kindness to people who were not members of his own religion, and especially if those people were living in great sin like the people of Nineveh."¹⁴

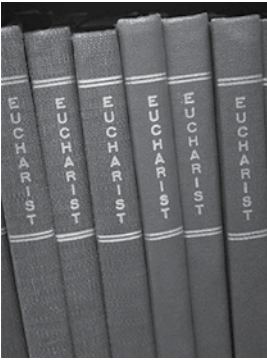
Notice how Jonah is described: religious bigot, narrow intelligence, staunchly religious. Above all, Jonah did not want *his* God to be merciful, kind, and loving to these "peripheral" Ninevites.

Murray concludes powerfully, "It is as if the question put to Jonah about prejudice and compassion is now, all of a sudden, and with a quite remarkable force and authority, directed at ourselves, the readers."¹⁵



Notes

- ¹ Carmel McCarthy and William Riley, *The Old Testament Short Story* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), 112.
- ² Wilfrid Harrington, *From the Presence of the Lord* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2006), 37-38.
- ³ John Eaton, *Mysterious Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 165.
- ⁴ Wilfrid Harrington, op. cit., 31.
- ⁵ Carmel McCarthy and William Riley, op. cit., 129.
- ⁶ Paul Murray, OP, *Journey with Jonah* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2002), 10.
- ⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 289-291.
- ⁸ *The Catholic Study Bible*, 2nd ed., 1210.
- ⁹ Bruce Vawter, CM, *Job and Jonah: Questioning the Hidden God* (New York-Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983), 92.
- ¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, op. cit., 291.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Bruce Vawter, op. cit., 92.
- ¹³ Carmel McCarthy and William Riley, op. cit., 137.
- ¹⁴ Paul Murray, op. cit., 53.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 57.



EUCCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Karl Rahner on the Eucharist

by Dennis Billy, CSSR

Karl Rahner combined Transcendental Thomism and modern categories in examining the mystery of God, the sacramentality of Christ and the church, and the graced reality of the world. His teaching reveals a rich, nuanced understanding of the Eucharist, which is central to salvation.

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KARL RAHNER (1904-1984) WAS A GERMAN JESUIT AND ONE OF THE MOST influential theologians of the twentieth century. He was born in Freiburg, entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1922, made his first vows in 1924, was ordained a priest in 1932, and professed his solemn vows in 1939. After his seminary training, he began graduate studies at the University of Freiburg, received his doctorate from there in 1936, and finished his postdoctoral work (*Habilitation*) in 1936. During his long academic career, he taught at various Jesuit seminaries and at such universities as Innsbruck, Munich, and Münster in Westfalen.

In 1961, Pope John XXIII appointed him to advise Cardinal Franz König to prepare the Second Vatican Council, and the following year he was named a theological expert (*peritus*) for the council. He was a member of the International Theological Commission from 1969-1971 and of the Synod of German Bishops from 1970-1975. During his lifetime, he received some 15 honorary degrees as well as numerous honorary awards and professorships.

Rahner is most remembered for his multi-volume *Theological Investigations* (1954-1984), as a promoter of Transcendental Thomism, and for such innovative theological concepts as the supernatural existential, transcendental freedom, and the anonymous Christian. His teaching on the Eucharist was known for its sensitivity to its transformative nature and its being the source of the other sacraments.¹

Rahner's Spirituality

Although Rahner had many influences on his spiritual and theological outlook, he was very conscious of his formation in the spirituality of Saint Ignatius and once said that his Jesuit formation had a greater impact on him than all his philosophical and theological studies.² He found in the *Spiritual Exercises* an invitation to find God in all things and discovered in them one of the guiding principles of his theological vision: the intimate unity of the love of God and the love of man.³

With Ignatius, Rahner believed it was possible to enter into the mystery of God only through the humanity of Jesus. This process of immersion took place throughout a person's life and enabled him or her to become a disciple of Jesus by dying with him in God.⁴ For this to occur, the gospel narrative of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection had to take root in one's life and become one's own. Rahner described his own vocation thus: "I have chosen the discipleship of the poor and humble Jesus, the poor and humble Jesus and no other. Such a choice has the underivability of specific love; it is a call which has its legitimization only in itself."⁵

Like Ignatius, Rahner believed that a person could experience God's very self. He derived from this notion a belief that God could be experienced existentially. The supernatural, he asserted, formed the existential backdrop of all human experience. "One thing remains certain," he once wrote, "God can and will deal directly with his creature."⁶ The Trinity, in other words, was directly involved with creation.

Rahner was deeply influenced by Ignatius' Trinitarian mysticism, which stressed that a person could experience the Father, Son, and Spirit both in themselves and in relation to each other. From this insight, he developed his Trinitarian understanding of grace, a theory that led him to see an intimate connection between the inner relations and outward actions of the Godhead, that is, between the immanent and economic relations of the Trinity.

With Ignatius, Rahner also placed a great emphasis on discerning God's will and finding it in the circumstances of everyday life. He believed that discernment of spirits took place through the Ignatian concept of "consolation without previous cause," through which God entered a soul and drew it into the love of his Divine Majesty. This process, he believed, could even manifest itself in a group and form



the basis of a communal logic of existential decision, the kind that gave birth to the Society of Jesus itself.⁷

Ignatius' mystical spirituality permeates Rahner's thought and enabled him to see a close connection between action and contemplation, between what a person *does* and what a person *is*. This is true especially of the priesthood and of the celebration of the Eucharist.⁸

Rahner's Teaching on the Eucharist

Rahner's views on the Eucharist must be seen against his sacramental understanding of Christ and his church. He calls Christ "the primordial sacrament of salvation," by which he means that Jesus represents "that historical event which, as an historical sign of God's will to save men, triumphantly succeeds in its purpose in spite of all the sins of men and from the beginning was implanted in the world as grace, brings about its own unmistakable historical manifestation, and establishes itself in the world and not just in the transcendent will of God."⁹

Moreover, he calls the church "the basic sacrament of salvation," by which he means "it is the sign that perpetuates Christ's presence in the world, the permanent and unsurpassable sign that the gracious entelechy of the whole of history, which brings this history into God himself, will be victorious in the world despite all sin and darkness, and will really prevail by bringing about the completion of the world in the form of salvation rather than judgment."¹⁰

The Eucharist, in his mind, is the embodiment of Christ's sacrificial offering, for "in that hour Jesus accepted his death as the giving of himself to God for the redemption of the world."¹¹ At the Last Supper, "he gave himself to God as the eternal covenant of redemption, and he gave himself to his disciples in the event and the symbol of a meal."¹²

Rahner believed that the church was the "church of the sacraments" and that the Eucharist was the "sacrament of the new covenant."¹³ By this, he meant that the church was the continuation through time of Christ's primordial sacrificial offering and that the Eucharist was "an absolutely central event in the church."¹⁴ "The church is most manifest and in the most intensive form, she attains the highest actuality of her own nature, when she celebrates the Eucharist."¹⁵ In this sacrament, "everything that goes to form the church is found fully and manifestly

present: her separation from the world . . . her hierarchical structure . . . her dutiful receptivity to God, which forbids her to be an end in herself . . . her recitation of the efficacious words which render present what they proclaim . . . her unity . . . her expectation of the final kingdom . . . her penitential spirit . . . her profound readiness to serve others."¹⁶

For this reason, he emphasizes the nature of the eucharistic sacrifice and warns against an overly individualized devotion: "It is the church that gives the individual the body of Christ, which she has in her possession as the pledge of her redemption and the presence of grace in her, and she makes the individual share, for his sanctification, in the unity, love, and plenitude of the Spirit of this holy community of God's covenant, and so she fills him with all grace."¹⁷

Rahner saw in the Eucharist the primary means through which believers were able to access the mystery of God through the humanity of Jesus, the Word-made-flesh.

Rahner also emphasizes the eternal dimensions of what took place at the Last Supper: "What happened there as an event once and for all is. It *is*."¹⁸ He points out that "the Lord in this meal has wrought something that endures forever since his voluntary deeds come from the infinite primal grounds of the eternal *Word of God* itself and are a spiritual-human reality, like the creative words of Genesis."¹⁹

In the Eucharist, Jesus "has wrought the 'new' and thus the final covenant."²⁰ For this reason, "he is the One he became in that time in his passion, ever and eternal: the crucified One and the resurrected One, the eternal grounds for trusting oneself to the mystery of God, the lover who experienced the deepest helplessness of being human and endured all futility of utter devotion until it became victory itself. He *is* the One he became, and when we in holy anamnesis proclaim his death until he comes again, we are not relating an incident from the scattered past, but proclaiming the once and for all presence with eternal validity."²¹

The Eucharist, for Rahner, represents "the transfigured world in the transfigured flesh of the Resurrected, here is the beginning of the glorious validity of this earth!"²² It is the "sacrament of the new creation," an eternal manifestation in time of the transformation of



the world and all that we hope to become.

Observations

This brief exposition of Rahner's teaching on the Eucharist underscores its close connection to his understandings of Christ as the primordial sacrament, the church as the visible extension of Christ's one redemptive sacrifice through time, and the Eucharist as the concrete manifestation that makes the church what it is and heralds the coming of a new creation. The following observations highlight some of the spiritual and theological underpinnings of his view of the sacrament and their relevance for today's Catholics.

1. To begin, Rahner's Catholic faith, Jesuit formation, and background in Ignatian spirituality gave him a deep appreciation of the central role played by the Eucharist in humanity's redemption and the spiritual life of believers. Together, they gave him a deep sense of the primary role the sacrament plays in the transformation of the human heart and the ultimate transfiguration of the world. He saw in the Eucharist the primary means through which believers were able to access the mystery of God through the humanity of Jesus, the Word-made-flesh. He recognized that eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood at the Eucharist gave believers the means to access in a unique way the self-communication of God that lies at the heart of their own experience. By becoming flesh and indeed by becoming humanity's food in the form of bread and wine, humanity is able to be divinized and thus realize its deepest hopes. Rahner's eucharistic spirituality confirms God's presence in human experience and realizes humanity's latent hopes for living a transformed existence.

2. In keeping with one of the basic goals of Ignatian spirituality, Rahner views the Eucharist as a sacrament of contemplation and action, or rather, "contemplation in action." It embodies, at one and the same time, both Christ's prayer to the Father and his salvific self-offering manifested in his paschal mystery. As the prayer of the church, it shapes the prayer of believers along these same lines, that is to say, it unites being and action in the church and its individual members, uniting the contemplative and active dimensions of their lives to make them "contemplatives in action." The Eucharist conforms the church and its members to the being and action of Christ. It not only heals their wounds, but elevates them in such a way that they are able to put on the mind of Christ and act accordingly. By eating

Christ's body and drinking his blood, they have access to the life of the Spirit, who prays within them, acts within them, and empowers them to lives of authentic discipleship.

3. Rahner's belief in God's underlying self-communication in human awareness allows him to emphasize the Eucharist's role in bringing this awareness to heightened levels. His affirmation that "grace is everywhere" does not diminish the need for the sacraments, but places them in a new relation to human experience and its need for redemption. The Eucharist, in other words, builds upon and transforms the primordial self-communication of God present in all human beings. In his view, God's self-communication in human experience is not at odds with his self-communication through the church and her sacraments, but confirms them and brings them to new heights. From this perspective, the Eucharist points to the complete transformation that God seeks to effect in all human hearts and in all creation and which his self-communication in human experience is but a faint reflection. It is the sacrament of humanity's and the world's transfiguration that has reached its concrete manifestation in Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave himself to God as the eternal covenant of redemption, and he gave himself to his disciples in the event and the symbol of a meal.

4. Rahner believes that Christ is the "primordial sacrament" and that his abiding presence in the church is "the official presence of the grace of Christ in the public history of the one human race."²³ As such, the church is the fundamental and primal means by which Christ brings his redemptive love to humanity in the concrete circumstances of space and time. The Eucharist, in his mind, is the primary means by which the church accomplishes this historical mission. It is the work of Christ's body on earth that makes the church what it is and enables it to be "the abiding promulgation of his grace-giving presence in the world."²⁴ This means that the church cannot exist without the Eucharist; the Eucharist cannot exist without the church; and neither can exist without Christ. At the Last Supper, Jesus united his passion and death to a meal and told his disciples to celebrate it in memory of him. By uniting his body and blood to his death and the sharing of a simple meal, he united himself for all eternity to the members of



his body and to the celebration of the Eucharist: the sacrament of his sacrificial offering, of his abiding presence in the church, and of the heavenly banquet.

5. The Eucharist, for Rahner, is an action of Christ and his body, the church. As such, it is communal in its orientation and private only in a secondary, derivative sense. Although he does not necessarily see a conflict between private devotion to the sacrament and its communal, liturgical celebration, he is wary of devotions that overly emphasize individual devotion to the detriment of the communal. He asserts that a person's access to the sacrament comes through the body of Christ's members and that his or her individual sanctification is mediated through the sacrament of the church, which in turn mediates God's salvific mercy through the paschal mystery of Christ. For Rahner, authentic private devotion to the Blessed Sacrament gives a person a deeper appreciation of the eucharistic liturgy as an action of Christ manifested through the community of believers for its collective good and the good of its members. In his mind, the Eucharist preserves an intimate balance between the individual and the community — and vice versa.

6. Rahner sees a close connection between the Eucharist and the priesthood. He says "the priest is he who, related to an at least potential community, preaches the word of God by mandate of the church as a whole and therefore officially, and in such a way that he is entrusted with the highest levels of sacramental intensity of this word."²⁵ The Eucharist, he believes, is a sacramental intensification of the priest's mission to preach the Gospel. As "an absolutely central event in the church," it represents the fullest sacramental expression of Christ's salvific message and needs to be celebrated with dignity and great reverence. As a servant of the Gospel, the priest must be a servant of the church and the Eucharist. In becoming a priest, he has taken on the great responsibility of being Christ for others and of feeding God's people with Christ's word and with his body and blood. For a priest, to celebrate Mass and the sacraments is to preach the Gospel of Christ, a message of sacrificial love and divine mercy that resonates in both eternity and in time to heal the wounds of humanity and make it whole for the glory of God.

7. Finally, Rahner calls the Eucharist the "sacrament of the new covenant" and finds in it a transfigured world reflected in the transfigured flesh of the risen Lord. This "sacrament of the new creation"

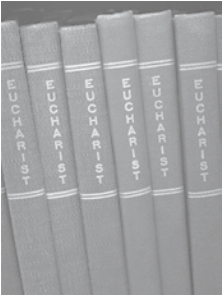
embodies the hope not only of what humanity desires one day to become, but also the entelechy of entire world. This eschatological orientation enables believers to have a glimpse of the eternal in the present moment and get in touch with their deepest, most intimate yearnings. In this respect, God's self-communication in human experience mingles with his sacramental self-communication in the consecrated bread and wine and gives way to a mystical vision of a fully transformed creation gathered around the table of the heavenly banquet. When seen in this light, the Eucharist affirms both God's presence in human experience and his desire to envelop it within the eternal through a process of historical divinization that makes it fully alive and able to cross the threshold of divine mystery.

Although these observations do not exhaust Rahner's teaching on the Eucharist, they cover its main contours and point to the important role it plays in his understanding of how Christ mediates his redemptive love to humanity through the church and the sacraments. They also reflect the various nuances of his spiritual outlook and how they impact his understanding and presentation of the Gospel message.

For a priest, to celebrate Mass and the sacraments is to preach the Gospel of Christ, a message of sacrificial love and divine mercy that resonates in both eternity and time to heal humanity's wounds and make it whole for the glory of God.

Conclusion

Karl Rahner was one of the great Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. As a Jesuit, he was deeply influenced by the spirituality of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and brought his deep desire to find God in everyday life to his philosophical and theological studies. He developed in his research a mystical understanding of existence based on the notion of God's self-communication in human experience. The experience of God, he believed, formed a natural part of human knowing and was not predicated on something coming from without human nature, but from within it. In making this assertion, he weakened the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, a stance for which he was criticized and, at times, even ridiculed by



more traditional Catholic thinkers.

Rahner's stance on the Eucharist navigated the turbulent waters of twentieth-century Catholic thought. He was a theological innovator who sought to interpret the gospel message through contemporary philosophical and theological categories. While doing so, he sought to remain faithful to the Catholic tradition, yet present it in a way that would be sensitive to both modern intellectual categories and human sensitivities. The Eucharist, for him, was the sacrament of Christ and his body, the church. Through it, Christ continued to preach his message of divine mercy and actualized his redemptive action through time.

As an action of Christ and his church, this sacrament was communal in nature, but oriented toward the good of the individual. It was divinizing in its effects and played a major role in the transformation of humanity and all creation. It was rooted in history yet oriented toward the world to come. It provided daily bread, yet was eschatological in its outcome. It manifested the truth of a kingdom both in our midst and yet to come. The Eucharist, for Rahner, was the sacrament of the new covenant and the new creation. It constituted the church and was constituted by it. It remembered the past, celebrated the present, and looked to the future. In this sacrament, eternity embraced time; infinity touched the finite; Christ's saving mystery crossed the threshold of the human heart; the Word-made-flesh became food for the soul and grace-filled light for the eyes of faith.



Notes

- ¹ For a detailed chronology of Rahner's life, see Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: The Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 14-18.
- ² See *Ibid.*, 28.
- ³ See Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 36.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Egan, *Karl Rahner*, 33.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ⁸ For more on the influence of Ignatian spirituality on Rahner, see Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For an overview of Rahner's spirituality and theological outlook, see *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, eds. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- ⁹ Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), xv.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 11, 82.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 82.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 84.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 84-85.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 87.
- ¹⁸ Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments*, 33.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., 41.
- ²³ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 19.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Karl Rahner, "What Is the Theological Starting Point for a Definition of the Priestly Ministry?" in *The Identity of the Priest*, ed. Karl Rahner, *Concilium* 43 (New York/Paramus: Paulist Press, 1969), 85.

In Christ's Peace Deceased Members

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



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Day of the Cross — The Friday We Call Good

by Edward Foley, OFM Cap

At the center is the cross.

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A Cross Spirituality

THE CHALLENGE — EVEN MISSION — AT THE HEART OF THE LITURGY ON THIS FRIDAY we call “good” is to hold the center. One need admit early on, however, that there are multiple distractions from that center: ritual distractions such as the Communion appendix to this liturgy, as well as a word surplus in prayers and readings that can bring this fragile liturgy to a grinding halt; theological distractions such as our tendency to fixate on chronology or our penchant for supplanting authentic memorial with historical remembrance; and cultural distractions such as our inability to acknowledge, embrace, or even name the reality of death. But it is death — precisely the death of the Lord — which reveals the center of this liturgy. And it is the death of the Lord evoked in that shattering, implicating symbol of the cross which is the entrée into the heart of this and all Christian prayer.

“Paschal mystery” is a phrase which easily rolls off the tongues and escapes the lips of contemporary liturgists. Yet this most blessed of phrases, this prized articulation of what the exsultet sings to be *felix culpa* must — with the worship which embodies it — reacquire something of its awe, its *tremendum*, maybe even something of its holy terror. Only such can rescue it from its demotion to a facile catchphrase or a theological placebo in the face of divine mystery.

This Friday we call good is blameless, and right, and good only insofar as it peels away the veneer of deflective language and ritual strategies designed only to elicit momentary empathy or guilt. This Friday we call good achieves its true *bonum*, when in its utter starkness, in almost *Bauhaus* beauty, it embraces the cross, and in so doing, allows us to glimpse even momentarily something of the passion which eternally

fires the Trinity — the eternal source of that cross — in unrelenting love.

While the cross is not the historical spark which ignited the Trinity in consuming mutuality — for that eternal passion has no beginning or end — it is the death of the Lord which provides humankind with its most unobstructed glimpse into that Trinitarian blaze. Most assuredly, the death of the Lord is not the totality of the paschal mystery, but it is the necessary, unavoidable passageway into that center of our faith.

Who knew this better than Paul, our first and maybe finest theologian of the cross?² Paul, the most prolific author in the New Testament, gives us virtually no information about Jesus' teachings, does not quote the Our Father, cites no parable, nor discusses the news of the kingdom. If we had only the letters of Paul — as formidable a slice of Scripture as that may be — we would know virtually nothing about the life of Jesus except his crucifixion and death.

Paul is not totally unaware of his cross fixation, and early in the First Letter to the Corinthians (2:2) admits, "I decided to know nothing among you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified." It is not that Paul ignores the resurrection, for as he writes later on in that same letter, "If Christ has not been raised then . . . you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). Yet Paul can stress the death of Christ for human salvation without mentioning resurrection (1 Thes 5:10, Gal 2:20, Rom 3:25), and he does so to emphasize the cost that this experience demanded of Christ. "You have been bought for a price," he writes (1 Cor 6:20).

It was no small thing that the Godhead did for us in Christ, and Paul is unwilling to let us forget it. Thus even his preaching of baptism calls us to the cross, as we hear at the turning of the great vigil, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom 6:3). To be baptized into Christ is to be included in the domain of Christ, to participate in Christ, but not first of all in his divinity or glory, but in his death, and thus to be linked with the definitive event of atonement and revelation.

Paul's preoccupation with the cross might be explained away as a theological idiosyncrasy of a renowned apostolic eccentric. Paul was a crusader, a missionary, a zealot whose passion, even radicalism, is well documented throughout his writings. But was his cross obsession simply a personal quirk, or was it an accurate reflection of a pervasive sensitivity in the early community to the profoundly startling, barely believable truth that God had died before their eyes: that divinity had been sacrificed on the jib of a tree? Here is the awe, here is the



mysterium tremendum, here is the unimaginable reversal that gives the paschal mystery its bite.

Unfortunately, the facile formula of “paschal mystery equals death and resurrection” has acquired such theological domestication in our God-speak that we spout it with little reverence, much less terror. How frequently we fast forward through death in anticipation of the blessed relief that comes in resurrection, with little self-critique for our rapid catapulting from one side of the mystery to the other. Thus when compelled to announce publicly the *mysterium fidei*, we often select a jaunty tune, that musically swings through the jaws of death and happily resolves in risen expectation of the final coming in G major.

But the early community had come to know a different tune, one not easily translated into major mode. Recall, for example, that the very origin of the annual paschal feast did not revolve around the day of resurrection, the third day of *pesach*. Instead, it was the first night, an eve of deliverance, a death watch, in which the believers’ fast was a counterpoint to Jewish feast.³ Holding the night, followers of the Way kept vigil for the dawn on empty stomachs, in anticipation of a eucharistic break-fast. This was, no doubt, what we have come to call a “unitive feast,” celebrating the totality of the mystery. Yet it was a unitive feast which recognized the historical reality, experiential priority, and chronological necessity of dwelling with death so as to fully rise from it.

Was it tonic tune which marked this night of vigiling and the breaking of bread at dawn, planting the seed for paschal triduum, or rather do we discover in that under used Pauline text echoes of a cross spirituality, a sacrifice spirituality, a triduum spirituality that echoes and renews an authentic paschal spirituality?

Interesting concepts: cross spirituality, sacrifice spirituality, triduum spirituality. “But,” you may be asking, “when are we going to get to planning the Good Friday liturgy?” I can assure you that we will turn to that rite soon enough. Yet I believe that this cross-centered preamble is both essential for and the only appropriate antidote to a problematic instinct in liturgical planning. We jump too quickly to the nuts and bolts, texts and structures, music and rubrics of the rite without grasping its center. This reliance on technique rather than theology is especially problematic for the liturgies of the Triduum, as they expose the heart of all Christian worship worthy of the name. But

let us be clear here: they expose the heart of all Christian worship, but they do not create it.

This leads us to a first guiding principle for preparing the Triduum liturgies in general, and Good Friday in particular. It is not an effective Triduum celebration or Good Friday service which generates effective worship throughout the rest of the year, but the other way around. It is only by embracing the fullness of that mystery we call paschal in all its holy terror and blessed resolve Sunday after Sunday and season after season that we can dare to celebrate the Triduum with anything that approaches adequacy.

The Church Year Makes the Triduum

Think, for example, of how we lament the pastoral urge rampant among so many presiders and people to schedule the great vigil in full sunlight. Thus we concoct catechetical resources, theological rationales, and diocesan guidelines to curb what some of us may consider this most unworthy assault on the queen of all vigils.

The people of God and their leaders, however, will not and cannot celebrate with sensitivity to light and dark, sun and shadow on this most holy of nights when week after week they pray in buildings designed to ignore the natural passage of light; when their worship environments have room only for electric light and not flickering flame; when there is no consistent cycle of prayer to greet the dawn and praise Christ at the setting of the sun; when the annual pattern of worship virtually ignores the psychological and metabolic changes that a shortened or elongated day effect, or when in text and tune, in homily and holy writ, nature's own rhythmic praise in sunburst and twilight is unexposed, unheralded, and unappreciated. *Triduum does not make the church year, but it is the year which makes Triduum.*

Similarly, how can we coerce reluctant believers in the opening moments of these three days to clothe themselves with a banquet demeanor, to shout joyfully in eucharistic acclamation, to accept bread which fulfills both the legal and theological requirement of actually appearing to be real food, or maybe most challenging of all, to drink from a common cup, when Sunday after Sunday Eucharist is no banquet, the great prayer of thanksgiving evokes little more than a reverential yawn, Communion is unbroken bread which defies its own definition, and the precious vessel of Christic blood is not even



proffered? *Triduum* does not make the church year, but it is the year which makes *Triduum*.

And then there is this day of holy rood and exquisite passion, whose ritual is perched on the edge of searing sacrifice and, in unadulterated barrenness allows us to glimpse with shaded eyes and shielded view something of that Trinitarian cauldron of agape which erupts upon the cross. But how do we bare the cross, hymn the cross, embrace the cross and the consuming Trinitarian terrain it exposes, when throughout the rest of the year we so often confine the cross, ignore the cross, corral the cross — tendering it as a salvific symbol and instrument of grace only in Lent, or Holy Week, or on Good Friday itself?

How can we hope to inspire our assemblies to profound and authentic devotion to Christ crucified on the Friday we call good, when the death of the Lord hardly receives favorable mention in much of the rest of our worship? How frequently, for example, do we attend to the cross in the Sunday assembly as it permeates eucharistic worship: not simply in the penitential rite, but also in Scripture, creed, great thanksgiving, and fraction rite? Even the very offering of the cup in Communion is an invitation to the death of the Lord, for to drink the cup is not simply to receive another part of Christ for we have already received the whole Christ, humanity and divinity, in the eucharistized bread.

To receive the holy bread is to accept the awesome invitation to become what we eat,⁴ to become the body of Christ. To receive the cup, however, is not somehow to become Christ's blood, but rather, to learn in holy presence how to become what we eat, how to become the body of Christ.⁵ As virtually every New Testament passage about the cup reminds us, to drink of the cup is to enter into Christ's death. Thus Communion itself is truly not only a communion with the presence of a living God, but also a proclamation as unmistakable as the blood-red stains on the purificator, that complete communion with the Holy One through Jesus Christ is possible only through his death and through our participation in that death, both figurative and literal.

So, too, through the whole of the church year, must we reckon with the cross as an integral and defining aspect of each season of grace. Yes, it is the foundational symbol of Lent and of Passiontide, but is it any less central to Advent or the Christmas season? Consider, for example, how at the onset of the season of *theophania* we erect the crèche to which parents and children flock to gaze at holy family and

visitors from the East.

Do we ever exegete that crèche tableau in all of its paschal symbolism: the child lying in a feeding trough, to be consumed soon enough by a prophetic word that would cost him his life; lying in a manger constructed of wood, the same material one day reconfigured to provide the scaffold of a cross; visited by seers from the East who among their precious gifts, offer spices for embalming the dead?

And lest one think that I am reading too much about the death of the Lord into this season, most readily framed as a moment of untarnished light, consider the great carols which punctuate that season. Yes, there is verse one to Isaac Watts' beloved "Joy to the World" which we could probably sing together from memory, but how many of us recall that this great carol is not simply about joy and birth, but also about the end of sin and death through the cross of Christ?

NO MORE LET SIN AND SORROWS GROW
NOR THORNS INFEST THE GROUND.
HE COMES TO MAKE HIS BLESSINGS FLOW
FAR AS THE CURSE IS FOUND, FAR AS THE CURSE IS FOUND
FAR AS, FAR AS THE CURSE IS FOUND.

So, too, in numerous other carols, which in tune and text hymn of sin and death, often missed because we have extracted the cross from Christmas; thus we forget that it is not only a festival of light, but also a festival of planting in which are sown the seeds of Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the night of the immortal sun.

Who dare believe that an effective celebration of Good Friday begins simply with a good Lent? Rather, it begins at the onset of the Advent-Christmas cycle. And if we have hermetically sealed the cross within the confines of the 40 days, we have not only diminished the Triduum, we have gutted the church year. We have reduced Christmas to ogling a baby, and missed the point that there is no more baby: for the baby grew up and suffered, and died and rose.

Thus at Christmas, consider planting the seeds of the Triduum — of Good Friday — with prayer and homily, environment and music that reveal not only the birth of the child, but also the ultimate rejection and death of that child, in whose death our reconciliation was purchased at great price. Hymn the whole of the paschal mystery. It



is not the Triduum which creates the year, it is the year which creates the Triduum. Good Friday does not rise and fall on its own, and cannot even be perceived much less prepared for on its own. Pattern provides integrity here, and to achieve the wrenching integrity which this pivotal day requires, we must replant the cross throughout our entire repertoire of public prayer.

As we struggle to replant the cross through the whole cycle of public worship, so must we replant the cross in the whole of the Triduum. This is essential in order to rescue these three days from any reduction to simple historical remembrance. As Holy Thursday is not at its core an historical remembrance of the Last Supper or the institution of ordained ministry, Friday is not a special anniversary of the Lord's death or his annual funeral, and Saturday become Sunday is not the resolution of the whole shocking matter in memory cleansing Alleluias.

Maybe this is the most challenging issue of all: affirming that what these three days celebrate is not in the past. We need grasp with every fiber of our being and communicate unerringly through the worship we shape and direct that Christian worship — and particularly these three days — are first and foremost not about former events. At their heart, they are about a relationship: first the Trinitarian communion of the Godhead that seethes in uncontainable love, and then our relationship to and in that Godhead.

To be baptized into Christ is to be included in the domain of Christ, to participate in Christ, but not first of all in his divinity or glory, but in his death.

If one is to take the insight of the Johannine Prologue seriously, then from all eternity the Word has been in never ending union with the one called Abba. And the passionate exchange of the First and Second Persons of the Trinity for all eternity has been so complete, so exhaustive, so utterly self-emptying, that this dialogue of agape is actually another Person: the Holy Spirit. But while we are gripped by the story of Jesus of history, and the world to its foundations has been changed by his incarnated presence among us, it was not the life, death, and resurrection which created the eternal love of the Trinity. Rather, it was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ which revealed it.

An important, crucial, and essential difference. Because if this triplex

inferno of love we call Trinity existed before all time — and was not created but revealed in the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord — then it must be clear that the dynamic love of the Godhead was also not exhausted, depleted, or spent on Calvary. It exists now. And it is this every present, all-consuming relationship into which we were baptized and to which we are constantly called. The pouring out and filling up of the Christ, extolled in the great chant from second chapter of Philippians, is not over. At this very moment, Christ is being poured out and filled up in a never-ending spiral of love with the one he named Abba in the Spirit.⁶

All Christian liturgy — every wedding, baptism, funeral, morning prayer, and Eucharist — celebrates, broaches, reveals this self-sacrificing, death-defying relationship. It is a relationship too consuming, too baffling in its total self-giving for mortals to grasp, and like the sun itself, too blinding to behold. Thus we shield our eyes and know only, as through a mirror darkly, something of the awesome community of love into which we were baptized.

It is like a great multifaceted jewel, whose many facets cannot possibly be glimpsed in a single sweep of the eye.⁷ Thus we turn the jewel to contemplate and gaze and adore. Thursday, Friday, Saturday are not, however, separate jewels or truths or mysteries to be celebrated. Nor are they individual historical moments to be reverently savored and ritually enshrined. No, these are key facets of a single jewel which slowly turns from day to day, allowing us to see something of the dazzling brilliance of Trinitarian love. At the heart of all three days is exactly the same mystery — the consuming loving of the Godhead — not created but revealed in all its terrible beauty on Golgatha.

It is this same mystery, of course, which is the white-hot core of every Sunday Eucharist. A truth which led Cyrille Vogel to remark that it is no surprise that the liturgical year developed so slowly; it is a surprise that it developed at all, as the whole of the Christian mystery is ignited in every Sunday Eucharist. But the year did develop. Triduum did emerge from the Christian imagination. And that Friday we hold so good did appear as one radiant facet on this great jewel so that we might enter the thrice holy love of the Godhead through startling revelations: in suffering servant song and passion narrative, in universal prayer attuned with the liturgy of the world,⁸ and in paradoxical Communion bereft of the cup of suffering. But first of all, and foremost, in wood.



The Good Friday Liturgy

It is not chronologically the first element in the rite. To think chronologically, however, is to miss the particular character of this rite. Other days have word, even passion narrative, and though in unusual form on Good Friday, other days also have prayer for the world's inhabitants, and many other days have Communion. But on no other day do we with almost brazen reverence hold high the cross-beam, to contemplate a God in defiance of all logic, who voluntarily, shamelessly sacrificed incarnate divinity in the almost pitiful hope that creatures might love their creator in return. What excruciating love, made visible in rough-hewn wood.

Contemplate for a moment the power of unadorned wood. It is not draped in a corpus as though some kind of visual aid to remind us of a past historical event. There is no figurine here, but form, the same form with which we almost involuntarily bless ourselves at every turn. The same form we trace on the heads of catechumens. The same form employed for anointing the walls of our buildings and all things which we hope will mediate God's gracious presence.

It is not with a face, or skeleton, or lifeless corpus that we mark our way through faith. Thus it is no face or skeleton or lifeless corpus we hold high this day — only a wooden outline, a tracery in timber, which summons us to behold the Godhead in present pursuit of humble and humbled creatures. The crucifixion — a once and for all historical event — is over. But God's relentless quest for creaturely love, the depth of which was once and for all time exposed on Calvary, continues. It is uncovered and exposed again when wood thrice pierces the sky, and we are summoned to adore.

It is the awe of this cross that the opening prostration must evoke. It is the shocking grace of this cross that the Liturgy of the Word must lay open. It is an alliance between this cross and the liturgy of the world which the solemn prayers must forge. And it is long shadow of this cross which communion cannot be allowed to distinguish.

To hold the tree of life at the center of this ritual is to discover one of the more challenging principles in liturgical preparation: that is, the necessity of planning from the inside out.⁹ The rituals of the Triduum, with their singular unity in great complexity, demonstrate that to attempt linear and sequential planning — beginning with the

first item in the worship, moving to the second and so on through the entire prayer schema — is to risk wandering aimlessly along the skeleton of the ritual without ever entering into the marrow of the rite. Here cross is marrow and substance, and it is cross which must animate this rite from its core.

Thus the opening prostration is not simply a reverent beginning, but rather is one of two great moments of silence which bookend this rite in awe. This parenthesis in speechless wonder is not only an act of soundless gratitude for the horrific sacrifice of the Godhead in the past; it is also a “reverse call to attention” that the Godhead is still and eternally engaged in the same self-immolating love. In stunning silence, we contemplate that inexplicably, unaccountably we are yet an object of that love today, now, and forever.

Christ died once and for all in history, and Christ dies no more. But the love which gave birth to that one visible moment of perfect self-sacrifice continues. Our only recourse in the presence of such excruciating beauty is to be still. This opening in stillness also provides a much to be heeded ritual tourniquet to any instinct to talk away the worship. Thus at the outset of this liturgy, we learn the discipline of silence as a first step toward full homage.

This quietude is halted with an opening collect which, while unremarkable in prose, is yet noteworthy for the dialogic void which precedes it. Shorn of any introductory exchange or invitation to pray, the church dare not say, “The Lord be with you” on this day when the Godhead’s eternal desire to be united with us is laid bare in the cross. So it is superfluous to announce, “Let us pray.” On this feast of such awesome revelation, what else could we do?

Cryptic prayer soon gives way to extravagant word, beginning with Isaiah. In this fourth song of the servant of God, the prophet hymns of amazement, chants of marred look and startling appearance, and sings of the smitten, afflicted, pierced, and crushed. But this is not a morbid lied or funereal dirge. The prophet’s song finds its coda in texts of light, fullness of days, justification, and parabolic victory. In its own proleptic way, this text embraces the whole of the mystery, and offers all who would hear a necessary counterpoint to any instinct to focus only on the death of Jesus. Rather, it prophetically announces not only the physical passion of Jesus, but also the unremitting passion of God for us in the present: a passion which veritably seethes below the



austere surface of this liturgy.

It is a word not to be rushed, or eclipsed, or pruned from the rite. And after its proclamation, blessed silence returns so that we might savor the just proclaimed word and prepare for the psalm. Old Testament prophecy refracted through psalmistic lament gives way to the paschal articulation of Hebrews. This text celebrates the presence of a high priest, a sacrificial specialist — but one whose competency is not acquired through rubrical proficiency, but through the school of the cross.

Then, without a phalanx of candles, the sweet scent of incense, or the coaxing of any introductory dialogue, it commences: “The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to John. . . . Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley. . . .” Thus do we begin the anamnetic journey from valley to garden, cohort to high priest, praetorium to the judge’s bench, then to the place of the skull — the place of death — followed by retreat to a once empty tomb, soon to be empty again.

It is a challenging moment in the rite, to be sure. A daunting text, in its length and complexity. In order to hold the assembly’s attention, we often employ various participation or distraction techniques: the division of parts among readers, an occasional line for the faithful, a change in posture, pause for prayer, or even the introduction of a musical score.

Be aware, however, that the division of texts between lectors according to character parts may contribute to a sense of historical reenactment, in which the assembly is unhappily cast as the mob, half-heartedly mouthing, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Maybe better is the division of texts between a few gifted readers according to the progression of the narrative. A single musical refrain well punctuates this progression without breaking it. Then, perhaps in place of any brief homily which the rubrics indicate “may” be offered, consider a musical recapitulation in reflection and prayer.

The word concludes this day with prayers of intercession. These prayers remind us that God’s saving self-communication, while irrepeatably expressed in the crucifixion, continues throughout the whole of human history. It often happens, however, that these prayers in historic form, following upon a heavily texted Liturgy of the Word, may only be perceived as a very long prayer of the faithful somehow gone awry.

The possible variations on these prayers suggested in the rubrics need to be explored: adding an acclamation, eliminating kneeling, adding a special intention for local need, judiciously selecting from among the prayers. There must be sufficient amplitude here to conjoin that terrible and sublime liturgy now being celebrated in the world with the once and for all intercessory act of Calvary. Fullness, however, should not give way to textual excess — especially as this secondary moment of intercession is positioned between the two ritual peaks of passion and veneration.

Of veneration, wood, and cross we have spoken much. As should be clear by now, this is not some catechetical moment with visual aids between the Liturgy of the Word and Communion — not some pleasant but transitional time as though a preparation of gifts between Gospel and Eucharistic Prayer. Rather, it is one of two true centers of this ritual and requires substance and magnitude, achieved with a cross which can bear the weight of the moment, appropriate movement, gesture, song, pace, and veneration.

It is not only the careful expansion of this liturgical turning point which is important, however, but also the contour of the whole rite: accenting the primary, and muting the secondary. Thus there is a certain challenge in the official liturgy which, to my way of thinking, has the tendency to eclipse veneration with Communion.

The world has been marked with the sign of the cross, as have all who have risen from the saving bath of the tomb.

Communion appears a curious appendage to the rite. It appeared later than the other ritual essentials; included because of people's desire for reception.¹⁰ Such devotion must always be encouraged, to be sure. Yet, because of the rampant confusion in our own day between Eucharist and Communion, between verb and noun, between the great sacrifice of the Mass and reception of consecrated species, we must guard against allowing this pivotal day in Triduum to extend the confusion.

The radically different nature of Communion from the eucharistic liturgy must be maintained. But, to return to an earlier mantra, such cannot be achieved simply on the merits of this Good Friday liturgy. It is not Triduum which makes the year, we say, but year that makes Triduum. Thus those elements which mark this as a Communion rite and not Eucharist must be



consistently and relentlessly counterpointed by Eucharist throughout the year which does not appear as a Communion service.

This day people should feel bereft of the cup, because in their ordinary experience the cup accompanies each Sunday Eucharist. This day people are startled by the appearance of previously consecrated elements for their food, because on the first day of the week they are accustomed to being fed from the table, not from the tabernacle. This day people note the absence of plentiful fraction rite, because in the richness of Sunday fare, it is the fraction rite in all its amplitude which builds anticipation for the feasting called Communion. It is the year which makes triduum for good and for ill. If the pattern of Sunday Eucharist disables people from distinguishing between the eucharistic liturgy and Communion service, then Good Friday is severely disadvantaged, appearing to many of our folk as an odd Mass rather than the unique Triduum ritual it is meant to be.

Communion is an unusually poignant, almost ironic turn in this ritual where, in the shadow of the cross, we are reminded of God's almost desperate yearning for communion with us. This parabolic moment may not benefit from the lush or treasured songs which accompany this rite in the eucharistic liturgy. Angular hymn or psalm with stark accompaniment need set this rite apart. It should not be allowed to resolve simply into a comforting moment at the close of a difficult rite. The pilgrimage to the bread need happen under the shadow of the cross. That freshly erected tree of life should loom large in the sanctuary, drawing us to transformation in and through this cross, and witnessing how God's self-sacrificial love still beckons us.

Conclusion

If the truth be told, to taste so briefly of this Good Friday liturgy is to realize aloud that it is a difficult one. Many prefer the rich koinonia of Thursday or the almost daunting athleticism of Saturday night. But the Friday we dare to call good stands boldly and decisively in the middle of the Triduum, as does the cross itself. In its austerity, it is not only to be endured but also to be embraced, as is the rest of the Christian life and all of human history which this day so marks. As blessed Irenaeus writes,

The Son of God was crucified, putting his imprint on the world in the form of a cross, in some way sealing the whole universe with the sign of the cross; and the

sign of the cross, with its four dimensions, is the perfect sign that it is the whole universe that is so sealed. Indeed, it was necessary and fitting for him, when he had become visible, to give the whole world a share in his universal cross, so that his visible operation should be made manifest under a visible form . . . [making] the heights of heaven shine with what is born in the depths . . . and stretching out to embrace the distance from east to west . . . calling creatures dispersed in every direction to a knowledge of [God].¹¹

The world has been marked with the sign of the cross, as have all who have risen from the saving bath of the tomb. Thus claimed by God, we assume a posture of adoration, awe, and thanksgiving as we pray: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you: because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.



Notes

- ¹ This text has been adapted from what was originally a mystagogical event which included musical performances from the following selections: “Only This I Want,” Dan Schutte (1981); “Christ Has Died,” Joe Wise (1969); my “When We Eat This Bread” (1997); “We Remember,” Marty Haugen (1980); “Lamb of God,” Marty Haugen (1997); “Joy to the World,” Isaac Watts (1719); “Every Stone Shall Cry,” Michael Joncas (1981); “Behold the Wood of the Cross” from the Sacramentary (1974); “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence,” from the Liturgy of Saint James, paraphrased by Gerard Moultrie; “My God, My God,” Christopher Willcock (1977); “Kyrie Eleison,” Michael Joncas (1988); “O Sacred Head,” harmonization by J.S. Bach; “In the Shadow of Your Wings,” Robert O’Connor (1985); and “Adoramus Te, Christe,” Théodore Dubois (1920).
- ² The section on Paul is shaped by the insights of Leander Keck. See, for example, his *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).
- ³ See Thomas Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo, 1986), 27.
- ⁴ See Augustine’s Easter Sermon of 410, 272.
- ⁵ For a further exploration of this concept, see my “Sharing the Cup: A Way of Being in the World,” *Assembly* 18:3 (1992), 562-563.
- ⁶ See Kenan Osborne’s discussion of the “Ministry of the Risen Jesus” in *Priesthood* (New York: Paulist, 1988), 24-8.
- ⁷ I am grateful to my student, Aline Paris, for this image.
- ⁸ See Karl Rahner, “Considerations on the Active Role of the Person in the Sacramental Event,” in *Theological Investigations XIV: Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, The Church in the World*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 169.
- ⁹ For further treatment of this concept, see my *Rites of Religious Profession* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1989), 73-82.
- ¹⁰ See John Tyrer, *Historical Survey of Holy Week*, Alcuin Club Collections 29 (Oxford: University Press, 1932), 133-40.
- ¹¹ From his *Demonstration of Gospel Truth*, as cited in Jean Daniélou, *The Advent of Salvation* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1950), 137.



EUCCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

For the Universal Prayers in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

by Mary Grace Melcher, OCD

Sister Mary Grace Melcher is a cloistered nun of the Carmel of Terre Haute, Indiana. These intercessions and a concluding prayer on the themes of mercy and the Eucharist are written by her for each Sunday during the Jubilee of Mercy.

Fourth Sunday of Lent — March 6

That we may experience the joy of homecoming, and then share with those who are still resisting God's love the message of reconciliation

That this Eucharist may be a feast of family intimacy and joy, reuniting brothers and sisters under the Father's tenderness and compassion

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us the grace to rise up and return to you when we have sinned, and to rejoice with you when your wandering sons and daughters come home. Grant all our prayers through Jesus, our Lord.

Fifth Sunday of Lent — March 13

That during this Jubilee of Mercy, many souls who have been caught in the act of sin may experience the unexpected reprieve offered them by Jesus, and the grace to begin a new life

That the encounter of this Eucharist may enable us to accept the loss of all things except our union with Jesus in his sufferings and in his glory

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, you continually create something new and surprise us with your boundless mercy. May we always honor you with our trust and respond to your forgiveness with humble and thankful hearts, through Christ our Lord.

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion — March 20

That we may never forget the price of mercy and what our Lord suffered

to save us, but allow him to forgive our sins and help us embrace our share in his cross

That we who partake of the Supper of the Lord may accompany him as we recall his redeeming sacrifice, and acknowledge him as our Lord no matter what the consequences

Concluding Prayer

Holy Father, as we humbly recall the sacrifice of your divine Son, grant us a deeper share in his mercy and the courage to imitate him in his self-emptying love. Hear all our prayers in the name of Jesus our Lord.

Easter Sunday — Resurrection of the Lord — March 27

For all of us drinking at the unending sources of mercy, the glorious wounds of our Savior, that we may be washed clean and renewed in his resurrection joy

That this Eucharist may unite us more closely to the paschal mystery, flooding us with grace to consent to our cross so that we may also experience new life and glory in union with Jesus

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the overflowing joy of this Easter celebration. May your compassion respond to all our prayers, which we offer in the name of your risen and glorious Son, Jesus our Lord.

Second Sunday of Easter — Mercy Sunday — April 3

That Jesus may penetrate into every fearful and locked space of our hearts today with his gift of merciful forgiveness and the breath of his Holy Spirit

That this Eucharist may be the opening for our faith to come into direct contact with the wounds of Jesus, that we may acknowledge him as our Lord and our God

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, on this Feast of Mercy within the Jubilee of Mercy, we ask for a double portion of grace, peace, and your loving response to all our needs, in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.



Third Sunday of Easter — April 10

That this Jubilee Year may bring us a morning encounter with the risen Lord, who makes our efforts fruitful in his merciful compassion

For all of us receiving this Eucharist, that we may know the intimate gaze of the Savior and his gentle appeals for our love, along with his request to help him care for his people

Concluding prayer:

Heavenly Father, we offer you our needs and our long night labors. May Jesus bring us the response of your merciful love. We ask you for everything in his holy name.

Fourth Sunday of Easter — April 17

For all of us in the flock under the protection of the Good Shepherd, that his merciful watchfulness may keep us safe and that our obedient love may be his delight

For all of us who come into living contact with the blood of the Lamb in this Holy Eucharist, that we may be purified and strengthened to survive the time of great distress

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, we are grateful to be held in your powerful hands and sheltered by the care of the Good Shepherd. Attend to our needs and receive our prayers, which we offer in Jesus' name.

Fifth Sunday of Easter — April 24

For all of us celebrating this Jubilee Year of Mercy, that Jesus may be glorified by our obedience to his commandment of love, through which others may come to know of the divine compassion

That with this Eucharist the old order may pass away in our souls, and we may be renewed and purified by our immediate encounter with the Bridegroom, Christ

Concluding Prayer

God our Father, you always work to break down all barriers to your union with the human race. Be close to us in our needs and petitions, which we offer you in the name of Jesus.





PASTORAL LITURGY

Year of Mercy - Celebrating the Jubilee with Penance Services

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

An often-overlooked treasure in the church's revised rites of penance can be a graced occasion in this Jubilee Year for experiencing and celebrating God's merciful love and goodness, and an invitation to the sacrament of penance.

POPE FRANCIS HAS GIVEN THE CHURCH THE "GIFT" OF THE YEAR OF MERCY. Traditionally, we think of Lent and perhaps of Divine Mercy Sunday as when the church focuses on this aspect of God's life and love. In the pope's wisdom and charity, he offers all of us the opportunity to share in one of the penultimate gifts Christ and the church offer regularly. As a way to share this opportunity of mercy, let us turn to the *Rite of Penance* (RP, the 2010 edition with revised lectionary) and a rarely used section, Part V, Penitential Services, to see how we might implement these in the life of our parish, campus ministry, monastery, convent, or prison.

RP, 36 says:

Penitential services are gatherings of the people of God to hear God's word as an invitation to conversion and renewal of life and so as the message of our liberation from sin through Christ's death and resurrection. The structure of these services is the same as that usually followed in celebrations of the word of God and given in the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents.

Another key aspect to remember is in RP, 37:

Penitential services, moreover, are very useful in places where no priest is available to give sacramental absolution. They offer help in reaching that perfect contrition that comes from charity and that enables the faithful to receive God's grace through a desire for the sacrament of penance.

Father John Thomas J. Lane is the pastor of Saint Paschal Baylon Church, Highland Heights, Ohio, and a liturgical consultant and presenter. You may contact him with a comment or a question at jtlanesss@gmail.com. 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.

I suggest that another key aspect for a penitential celebration is to share God's mercy and to reflect this gift to a community always seeking the face of God.

The basic structure of the ritual is outlined in RP, and there are many useful scripture readings that are available in this ritual handbook. RP, 36 outlines this:

Introductory Rites

- Song
- Greeting
- Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

- Hebrew Scripture
- Psalm
- New Testament Scripture
- Gospel Acclamation
- Gospel
- Homily/Reflection on God's Word
- Litany
- The Lord's Prayer
- Concluding Prayer
- Dismissal

RP, 36 suggests prolonged periods of silence interspersed with readings from the church fathers or other writers that "will help the community and each person to a true awareness of sin and heartfelt sorrow, in others words, to bring about conversion of life" and a desire to share God's mercy.

The "benefit and importance" of penitential celebrations is outlined in RP, 37 and summarized here:

- to promote conversion of life and purification of heart
- to foster the spirit of penance within the Christian community
- to help prepare for confession which can be made individually later at a convenient time
- to help children gradually form their conscience about sin in human life and about freedom from sin through Christ
- to help catechumens during their conversion.

Appendix II of RP has services that were prepared by the Congregation for Divine Worship to help those who plan or lead penitential celebrations. It is important to note that children and catechumens are

especially mentioned as they prepare to celebrate the sacrament of penance for the first time. The appendix suggests these be celebrated during Lent, and this is the first example ritual given. The title is "Penance Leads to a Strengthening of Baptismal Grace." Paragraph 11 of the notes emphasizes the importance of this ritual:

- fulfilling the grace of baptism by living faithfully the Gospel of Christ
- the seriousness of sin
- *the unlimited mercy of our God and Father who continually welcomes those who turn back to him after having sinned (see Luke 15)* [emphasis added]
- Easter as the feast when the church rejoices over the Christian initiation of catechumens and the reconciliation of penitents.

The celebration includes an examination of conscience, which is found in Appendix III.

The second example included in RP, Appendix II, is entitled "Penance Prepares for a Fuller Sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ for the Salvation of the World." This ritual is meant to highlight, as stated in paragraph 17:

- we became God's members through baptism
- the paschal mystery shows us the love God has for us
- the way we affect each other when we do good or choose evil
- the social and ecclesial dimension of penance
- *the celebration of Easter as the feast of the Christian community which is renewing itself by the conversion or repentance of each member, so that the church may become a clearer sign of salvation in the world.*


The emphasis added in the last statement is by way of stressing that this is an appropriate service for the Easter season, and that we might want to add this ritual, especially in light of Easter being quite early this year, as a chance to introduce a new liturgical element to the parish's repertoire.

The appendix continues with "Penitential Celebrations during Advent" and "Common Penitential Celebrations," including texts for "Sin and Conversion," "The Son Returns to the Father," "The Beatitudes" (which I found to be the most helpful in its examination of conscience based on the beatitudes), For Children: "God Comes to Look for Us," For Young People: "Renewal of Our Lives according to the Christian Vocation," and finally, For the Sick: "The Time of Sickness is a Time of Grace."

In both the Introduction and in Appendix II, RP repeatedly states that these services *are not to be confused with the actual sacrament of penance*; they are sacramentals leading to the celebration of the sacrament of penance.

However, such celebrations are important aspects of our grace-filled life and useful tools that should be shared with our worshipping community. Too often, the celebration of God's mercy in the sacrament of penance is limited to a Saturday afternoon or an Advent or Lent penance service. Let us heed the Holy Father's call to expand the experience of God's mercy and add one of these services to our Year of Mercy observances.

Calendar Highlights for March and April

- Check on the status of your order of palm branches for the Palm Sunday, March 20, liturgies.
- Choose parishioners to represent the parish at the Chrism Mass and to present the blessed oils to the community at the Holy Thursday liturgy.
- Organize the schedule of rehearsals for key participants in the liturgies of the Triduum. This will make things flow more smoothly and contribute to the beauty of the ceremonies.
- Experiment with a potluck supper or an "Agape" meal to acquaint your parishioners with the early church practice of meeting in homes for the Eucharist at a time in history when Christians were not allowed to worship publicly. Some parishes do this on Holy Thursday prior to the Mass of the Lord's Supper in the evening.
- The Annunciation of the Lord is celebrated on Monday, April 4, this year.
- While the memory is still fresh, schedule an evaluation meeting of the Triduum liturgies sometime during April.
- Looking for an experience for personal or community enrichment this summer? The Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament is sponsoring a convocation on the theme "Celebrating the Gift of Self in the Year of Mercy" from July 29-31 at Saint Paschal Baylon Church in Highland Heights, Ohio. This event will explore a key element in the eucharistic spirituality of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, the Apostle of the Eucharist, within the context of the Jubilee of Mercy. Call (440) 442-6311 for a brochure or reservations. 



BREAKING THE WORD

HOMILETICS - Lent/Easter

by Anthony J. Marshall, SSS

Merciful Like the Father

I AM EXCITED TO BE IN THE MIDST OF THIS SPECIAL JUBILEE OF MERCY, AREN'T you? This is truly a year of immense grace, which I hope you have experienced already, as have I. In the Bull of Indiction declaring the jubilee, Pope Francis described God's mercy in this way: "In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a 'visceral' love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 6).

Our liturgical readings during these days are excellent reflections on divine mercy. In Lent and throughout the Paschal Triduum and the subsequent Sundays of Easter, God's tender, "visceral love" is reflected in the word of God. God does not abandon humanity in its misery, but looks compassionately upon each of his beloved daughters and sons.

The extraordinary grace this Jubilee of Mercy offers is the opportunity to again open wide the doors of our hearts to God's "tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy" in all aspects of our lives, and in turn to share God's graciousness with one another. The church's traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy are wonderful, simple yet challenging ways we can live the grace of this Jubilee of Mercy.

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

Fourth Sunday of Lent March 6, 2016

The Lavish Mercy of the Father

Breaking the Word

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

Joshua and the Israelites, on the verge of besieging Jericho while in the plains of Gilgal, celebrate the Passover, using the fruits of the Levant. The manna, which had been provided them thus far as they journeyed from Egypt, ceases as they no longer need divine sustenance now that they are entering into the Promised Land.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Through the reconciliation wrought by Christ Jesus, Christians are a new creation. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to recognize their new dignity in Christ and to remember that as a result of our reconciliation with God we are to live differently, “so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ” (see 2 Cor 5:21).

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The Gospel contains the beautiful and moving story of the so-called Prodigal Son. This is the third and final parable of Luke’s mercy narrative that begins with the preposterous actions on the part of a shepherd searching for a single lost sheep, a woman frantically searching for a lost coin and throwing a celebration upon finding it — costing more than the lost coin itself — and a father joyfully welcoming home a wayward son whom most fathers would have disowned. All reflect the lavish mercy of the Father.

Sharing the Word

During this Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis has invited the world to experience the compassion and extravagant mercy of God our Father through our spiritual and concrete actions of tenderness.

In calling for this holy year, the pope noted in *Misericordiae Vultus* that “in the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them, we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon” (9).

In the parable of the prodigal son, it is hard to imagine a more poignant tale of compassion. As we read this moving passage during Lent, it is usually the case that we imagine ourselves in the shoes of the wayward son returning home to the Father’s embrace, prepared to beg God for forgiveness. And rightly so. But in this jubilee year, might we imagine ourselves in the shoes of the father who patiently awaits his son’s return and welcomes him with joy? I suspect that it is easier to imagine ourselves in the former rather than the latter, yet the mercy of God is offered both to us as repentant sinners and through us to our sisters and brothers. Perhaps this is what this grace-filled year is asking of us: to see the world through the perspective of God the Father and thereby inviting us to show mercy to one another. Again, Pope Francis: “This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 9).

Praying the Word

Compassionate Father,
you are lavish in your mercy
and always ready to forgive.
Enable us to see one another
as you see and love us,
so that we can be merciful
as you, Father, are merciful.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Lent March 13, 2016

The Mercy of God Sustains Us

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 43:16-21

Part of the suffering servant songs, Isaiah here speaks of a time of healing and restoration. Despite the odds, God will overturn the suffering of the people in extraordinary ways.

Philippians 3:8-14

The reading emphasizes Paul's extraordinary sense of himself as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Despite his past, Jesus has taken hold of Paul and made him his own for his purposes. And yet, with such self-knowledge, Paul knows the inner struggles he faces as he strives for perfection.

John 8:1-11

The story of the woman caught in adultery is unique to John's Gospel, although some scholars question its authenticity in terms of Johannine authorship. Nevertheless, the church has recognized this story as canonical, and it is a marvelous passage depicting Jesus in both his role as teacher and forgiver of sin. Jesus did not condemn the woman to death by stoning per the Mosaic law (see Dt 17:1-7), but instead admonished her to sin no more. At the same time, he points out the duplicity of her accusers.

Sharing the Word

I remember facing a rough time in life, wondering how I would ever make it through to the end of my ordeal. At the time, it seemed impossible for me to discover a happy solution to what now seems like a simple matter. I suspect that most of us have had such experiences; perhaps we are in the midst of one right now.

Take hope! Our readings today call attention to the tender mercy of God that can surmount all obstacles in life. Imagine the people in Isaiah's time hearing his comforting prophecy that God would make "a path through mighty waters" or "put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink" (Is 43:16, 20). "Mighty waters" indicates to me turbulent times ahead, and yet God promises a navigable path through them. "Deserts" are hot, dry wastelands. That doesn't stop God from promising flowing rivers with potable water for his people. Nothing can stop God's mercy!

Imagine the adulterous woman brought before Jesus by people intent on stoning her to death for her sinful behavior. The shame, fear, and terror she felt makes our everyday frustrations pale by comparison. Jesus didn't flinch for an instant. He bent down to her level and raised her up again, restoring her dignity as a beloved daughter of God.

So it is for us: God's mercy is capable of overcoming all obstacles that lie before us. Are we willing to accept the tenderness and love the Father is offering?

Praying the Word

Eternal Father,
Nothing can separate us from your mercy and love
revealed in Christ Jesus.
May we recognize your tender embrace this week
and celebrate with joy your forgiveness.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion March 20, 2016

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 50:4-7

Isaiah speaks of the sufferings the servant of God endured because of his fidelity. Seen through the lens of Christianity, Isaiah's words reverberate throughout the passion narrative of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. In its original biblical context, however, who exactly the suffering servant is remains an enigma. It could refer to the prophet himself, or to Israel (see Is 49:3), or to another personage. The church has precisely set the suffering servant canticle in conjunction with the passion narrative in order to draw attention to the suffering servant, Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:6-11

Paul sings a hymn in praise of Jesus Christ, who condescended to become human and was obedient to the Father's will, even when that meant death by crucifixion. Paul's words contain some of his finest theology concerning the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus. According to Paul, Jesus did not consider it problematic, despite his being "in the form of God" (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ), to take on the form of a slave (μορφὴν δούλου λαβών) in human likeness (see Phil 2:6-7). And Jesus further abased himself to die a cruel death in obedience to the Father and to achieve our salvation and his exaltation. It is true love.

Luke 22:1-14-23:56

The gospel passage depicts Jesus' Last Supper with his apostles before his arrest and passion. The institution of the Eucharist is recounted, and Jesus tells the Twelve that just as he came to serve, so they must consider themselves to be servants. The passion narrative then begins with the scene in the garden and Judas' betrayal.

Sharing the Word

In ancient times, “Palm Sunday’ was not a thing of the past. Just as the Lord entered the Holy City that day on a donkey, so, too, the church saw him coming again and again in the humble form of bread and wine. The church greets the Lord in the Holy Eucharist as the one who is coming now, the one who has entered into her midst. At the same time, she greets him as the one who continues to come, the one who leads us toward his coming” (Joseph Ratzinger [Benedict XVI], *Jesus of Nazareth, Part II: Holy Week, “From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection,”* 10-11).

We devoutly recall today Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem and his sacrificial death. With the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in the grace of the Eucharist, we enter into Christ’s passion as we wait in joyful hope for his return in glory.

Christ’s love does not end with death, but continues with his resurrection at Easter. It continues each time we break the bread of life and drink from the chalice of salvation. It continues each time we recognize the true Son of the Father and proclaim, “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11).

Praying the Word

Lord Jesus,
you loved us so much
that you became human like us in all things but sin.
In obedience to the Father’s will,
you endured your passion
and gave us new life.
As we enter into this Holy Week,
enlighten us with your grace,
so that we might worthily celebrate
the sacred mysteries of our redemption.
For you live and reign, forever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper March 24, 2016

As I Have Done for You, You Should Also Do

Breaking the Word

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

This pericope is the story of the Passover meal of the ancient Hebrews prior to their escape from slavery in Egypt. The two verses (9-10) that the lectionary drops describe how the people were to cook the meal and leave nothing to waste. An unblemished lamb was to be sacrificed, roasted, and eaten along with unleavened bread, and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts of the Hebrews' domiciles. The feast of Unleavened Bread becomes a perpetual memorial of the Passover and the liberation from Egypt (14-20).

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Paul recalls the tradition of the institution of the Eucharist. His rendering of the institution resembles that which is found in Luke 22:19-20. He adds the teaching, not found in the Gospels, that whenever the Christian community gathers to eat and drink the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, his death is proclaimed until his glorious return (see 1 Cor 11:26).

John 13:1-15

Unique to John is the tradition of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, in place of the institution of the Eucharist as found in the Synoptic and Pauline traditions. Perhaps John wished to illustrate for his audience what the implications of the Eucharist are rather than simply recall the tradition of its institution. The act of washing feet was normally done by household slaves; hence Peter's objection to Jesus washing his feet (13:8). Jesus points to his gesture of foot-washing as paradigmatic, and something that is required of his disciples (see Jn 13:12-15). The evangelist has interpreted "Do this in memory of me" to be actualized as "Love one another" (Jn 15:12, 17); (see Anthony J. Marshall, "The Eucharist as Sacrament of Social Justice: John 15:12-17," *Emmanuel* 114/4 [2008], 292-304).

Sharing the Word

As we enter into the Sacred Triduum with the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, it is helpful for us to recall the nature of a memorial. The first reading describes both Israel's memory of the Passover as well as the institution of its memorial to be celebrated from one generation to the next. Paul describes for us the apostolic tradition of the institution of the Eucharist. Both of these events are memorials. In the biblical world, and in our own Christian theology, memorials not only commemorate past events; they invite us into the mystery being celebrated. In other words, the Passover celebration for Jews and the Eucharistic Sacrifice along with the liturgical celebrations of this Triduum are not history lessons, but they in some way bring about for us the historical realities they commemorate.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, referring to the Council of Trent, sums up the nature of the Eucharist as memorial: "The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it represents (i.e., makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit: [Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper 'on the night when he was betrayed,' [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be represented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit" (1366).

These holy days simultaneously recall sacred history and apply the grace of the Lord's passion, death, and resurrection to us.

Praying the Word

Almighty and ever living God,
you once freed the ancient Hebrews from slavery
and formed them into your chosen people Israel.
May the Eucharist we celebrate
free us from our own iniquities
and enable us to live in freedom
as your beloved daughters and sons.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Friday of the Passion of the Lord
Good Friday
March 25, 2016

Jesus Became the Source of Eternal Salvation

Breaking the Word

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

As on Palm Sunday, the lectionary proposes for our first reading today another canticle of the suffering servant from Deutero-Isaiah. It is a moving pericope, filled with imagery vividly describing an altruistic servant who, on behalf of the people, “makes himself an offering for sin” (Is 53:10). In the liturgical setting, it is impossible for Christians to not see in Isaiah’s words the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who having taken upon himself our sins, suffered on the cross for our eternal salvation.

Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote to a community that had endured much adversity and suffering and was in need of encouragement in the faith (see Heb 2:1; 3:12; 4:14; 11:1-3; 12:1-29). It is a marvelous piece of Christian exhortation, with homiletic overtones, albeit surrounded with the trappings of a letter. Today’s passage is very comforting, describing Jesus as a compassionate high priest able to sympathize with our plight (cf. Heb 4:14-15). In the context of Good Friday, the description of priestly sacrifice leads into John’s passion where Jesus is revealed as willingly offering himself on the cross.

John 18:1-19:42

In the passion narrative of John’s Gospel, Jesus is fully aware of the course of the events from the moment of the Last Supper (see 13:1-3), to his betrayal in the garden (see 18:4), to his discourse with the high priest and trial before Pilate; Jesus is in charge of the events. His death was truly a sacrifice: his life was not taken from him, like that of a passive victim, but rather he willingly offered his life on the cross.

This detail of John's passion (i.e., Jesus' knowledge of his fate and his willingness to suffer and die for others) should not be overlooked.

Sharing the Word

I had the privilege of studying the Sacred Scriptures in the Holy Land during a semester while in seminary. One of the most moving moments for me was when our instructor took us on a "biblical Way of the Cross," which meant that we would be walking in the footsteps of Jesus from the Upper Room, to the garden, to the praetorium, and finally to Calvary hill. The thing that struck me while standing in the Garden of Gethsemane was the view Jesus had of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that he would have seen Judas and the soldiers coming for him, carrying their burning torches and weapons. Our professor pointed out that the garden's location lends itself to easy escape through the Kidron valley, and Jesus could have easily escaped there under the cover of darkness and thereby avoid the passion. But he did not. He stayed and willingly endured betrayal, calumny and mockery, scourging, carrying the wood of the cross, and finally an agonizing death. Why? One word: love! "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). What an awesome gift to be considered the friends of Jesus!

Praying the Word

Righteous Father,
out of love for us,
your Son, Jesus Christ,
willingly chose to endure his passion
so as to break the chains of sin and evil
that kept us from you and one another.
May we spend this day
in the light of Christ's passion
and in the hope of his glorious resurrection.
This we ask through the same Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Resurrection of the Lord Mass of Easter Sunday March 27, 2016

Christ is Risen, Alleluia!

Breaking the Word

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

The words of Peter to Cornelius and the Gentiles at Caesarea form the context of this reading. Cornelius, at the bidding of an angel (see Acts 10:3ff), asked Peter to come to his house so that they might hear the proclamation of the Good News (see Acts 10:33). In our Easter liturgy, we hear the kerygma, or apostolic preaching, of Jesus Christ who was “hanged on a tree” but raised by God on the third day (Acts 10:39b-40).

1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

This short pericope connects well with readings from Holy Thursday, where the story of the Passover was recounted. Here, Paul declares, “Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7).

John 20:1-9

Today’s Gospel recounts the story of Mary Magdalene being the first to see the empty tomb and Simon Peter and the beloved disciple verifying her reportage. None of the Gospels describe how the resurrection occurred; they simply report the fact that his tomb was empty. Matthew’s account of the passion is the only one to note that guards were placed at the tomb’s entrance in order to prevent the disciples from removing his body and claiming he had risen (see Mt 27:62-66). Christ is risen!

Sharing the Word

There is something peculiar about our Christian faith. We believe that not only did God send his Son to be born of the Virgin

Mary, a man like us in all things except sin, but he willingly gave his life for our salvation and — this is clincher! — he rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion. It is too fantastic a story to be made up by the apostles and early church.

It is Jesus' resurrection that probably prevents many people from accepting our faith (see Acts 17:32-33). It is so incredible that none of the evangelists dared to even describe for us how the resurrection occurred, except for Matthew who offers some external signs (see Mt 28:1-8).

The point for us is that our faith is based upon the confession of Mary Magdalene, the apostles Simon Peter and Paul, Cornelius, who believed Peter's words, the church of Corinth that preserved Paul's epistles, and the countless others who bore witness to Christ with their very lives down through the centuries to our own day. It is up to us to continue to tell the Good News of our salvation, that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and that Christ will come again as judge of the living and the dead.

Praying the Word

Our hearts rejoice,
Lord Jesus Christ,
for you conquered sin and death
by triumphantly rising from the dead,
and you opened for us the gates to life eternal.
May we spend this day
offering you grateful praise
for you are Lord, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Second Sunday of Easter
Sunday of Divine Mercy
April 3, 2016

Jesus, I Trust in You!

Breaking the Word

Acts 5:12-16

The apostles are able to effect many miracles among the people. Luke describes the apostles' esteemed stature, such that no one dared to disturb their time in Solomon's portico and even the shadow of Peter upon the sick and the lame was enough to effect healing. It is a time of wondrous new life.

Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

Sent to the island of Patmos for his preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, John shares in the sufferings of those who face a similar persecution for the sake of Christ. Such maltreatment does not deter John from sharing his message of challenge, hope, and Easter joy in this apocalyptic work.

John 20:19-31

Our Gospel for this Second Sunday of Easter is situated both in the evening of the first Easter Sunday, and one week later. There we find the risen Christ appearing to his disciples, who are huddled in fear in the Upper Room. As he manifests himself, Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and commissions them to be agents of mercy and forgiveness. It is reminiscent of Genesis 1:1-2 where the breath or Spirit of God hovers over the chaos and creation is brought forth. A new creation has now dawned because of the resurrection. It is an age of mercy and grace. Unfortunately, Thomas is missing, and he doubts the others' reports of having seeing the risen One. He is reconciled by a very merciful Christ who shows him his wounds, the signs of divine mercy.

Sharing the Word

On this Divine Mercy Sunday, we remember the tender mercies of a loving and compassionate God, who entered our human condition, suffered death, and triumphed over the grave in the supreme act of regeneration or new creation: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's tender mercies are celebrated in the life, death, and glorious resurrection of his co-eternal Son. It is this mystery that we enter into on this day and at every Eucharist.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we do well to recall that "mercy is the very foundation of the church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. . . . The time has come for the church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 10).

Praying the Word

Father of Mercies,
through the death and resurrection of your Son,
you reconciled the world to yourself
and you sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins.
Through the church's ministry,
and by living holy lives,
may we experience your tender love and mercy each day.
Through the risen Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

Third Sunday of Easter April 10, 2016

Love, Joy, and Fidelity

Breaking the Word

Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

The apostles are brought before the Sanhedrin to defend their preaching. Peter speaks on behalf of the others in declaring that God's will must be obeyed over that of mortals. The Sanhedrin's order of silence persists . . . as does the apostles' preaching of the Gospel!

Revelation 5:11-14

John shares his vision of the celestial worship of the Lamb of God by the elders and the angelic creatures.

John 21:1-19

Based on textual clues therein, some scholars consider this pericope to be a later addition to the Johannine text. The passage chronicles the story of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples and the reconciliation of Peter, with the threefold reaffirmation of his love for Jesus to counter his three denials.

Sharing the Word

Today's readings present three characteristics that describe the ideal Christian: love, fidelity, and joy.

The first characteristic is love. The Gospel shows Jesus asking Peter three times if he loves him. "Peter do you love me?" "Yes, Lord." Jesus expects his friends to be lovers: to love God above all else, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. "This is my commandment," says the Lord, "love one another as I love you" (see Jn 15:12). Love is revealed not only in our words but also in our actions. It's one thing to tell somebody that you love him or her, and it is quite another to show that love.

If we say that we love the poor, but we don't regularly pray, fast, and give alms to help the least of our brothers and sisters, then what good is our verbal love? If we say that we love Jesus, but we don't regularly show up to Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, then we're just saying a bunch of pious words with no actions to back them up. Christian love requires us not only to say with our lips that we love God and neighbor, but also to actually show it. Peter proved his love for Jesus and the church by laying down his life.

The second characteristic that our readings suggest to us is fidelity. This word comes to us from the Latin *fidelitas*, which means faithfulness, or to be full of faith. Our first reading shows us what Christian fidelity looks like. Peter and the other apostles were filled with faith in Christ's resurrection. And because they were men of fidelity, they risked everything and suffered much, including punishment, imprisonment, and even death. "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

As Christians, as the friends of Jesus, we, too, must obey God first, above all other loyalties. We are called to fidelity — to follow Jesus and the teachings of his church.

Joy, the third characteristic of Christians, is found in today's second reading from the Book of Revelation. In it, we catch a glimpse of the heavenly liturgy, where the angels and saints worship and adore Christ, the Paschal Lamb. Faithful love is what brought the saints to joyfully praise the Lamb at the heavenly banquet feast.

For us, "saints-in-the-making, joy comes from worshiping God in our minds, hearts, and bodies. Above all, joy comes from an encounter with the risen Christ, from being made holy in his presence, and from meeting Christ in and through the sacraments of the church, especially the Eucharist.

Praying the Word

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

Fourth Sunday of Easter April 17, 2016

Master of the Harvest, Hear Our Prayer

Breaking the Word

Acts 13:14, 43-52

Luke describes the ministry of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles and summarizes ten of the value of this ministry, despite some misgivings from the Jewish community. Persecution forces the two to set out to new cities where they preach the Gospel.

Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

John continues his vision of the heavenly worship of the Lamb of God. The martyrs who suffered hatred and violence in this life are now rejoicing in the glory of the Lord.

John 10:27-30

Jesus is the Good Shepherd whose voice the sheep of his flock knows and follows. He identifies himself with the Father.

Sharing the Word

Traditionally, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, especially to the priesthood and consecrated life. During our three-year cycle of readings, the Fourth Sunday of Easter includes part of John 10, the Good Shepherd narrative; hence, the focus on ecclesial vocations.

For this fifty-third annual celebration, Pope Francis has desired to draw our attention to the source of vocations: "The call of God comes to us by means of a mediation which is communal. God calls us to become a part of the church and, after we have reached a certain maturity within it, he bestows on us a specific vocation. The vocational journey is undertaken together with the brothers and sisters whom the Lord has given to us: it is a con-vocation. The ecclesial dynamism

of the call is an antidote to indifference and to individualism" (Message for the 2016 World Day of Prayer for Vocations).

This sense of the communal dimension of vocations is reflected well in our first reading. Paul and Barnabas set out together to preach the Gospel. They preach Jesus, fully aware of the consequences their words will bring. The apostolic community was unified in mission and ministry. The same must be true for each of us today.

In every Eucharistic Prayer, there is a prayer for communion with the pope, the local bishop, and the people of God. Ecclesial communion bears abundantly the harvest of Pope Francis' vision for this Jubilee Year of Mercy as expressed in his message for this day dedicated to praying for vocations, namely that of "con-vocation" for every Christian.

Praying the Word (From Pope Francis)

Father of Mercy,
who gave your Son for our salvation
and who strengthens us always with the gifts of your Spirit,
grant us Christian communities
which are alive, fervent, and joyous;
which are fonts of fraternal life,
and which nurture in the young
the desire to consecrate themselves to you
and to the work of evangelization.
Sustain these communities in their commitment
to offer appropriate vocational catechesis
and ways of proceeding
toward each one's particular consecration.
Grant the wisdom needed for vocational discernment,
so that in all things the greatness
of your merciful love may shine forth.
May Mary, Mother and guide of Jesus,
intercede for each Christian community,
so that, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit,
it may be a source of true vocations
for the service of the holy People of God.
Amen.

Fifth Sunday of Easter April 24, 2016

Love One Another

Breaking the Word

Acts 14:21-27

Paul and Barnabas conclude a successful missionary campaign. They edify others by their preaching and establish stable communities wherever they go. Finally, the two return to Antioch from whence they were missioned and share with the church the stories of their preaching efforts among the Gentiles.

Revelation 21:1-5a

John describes the vision of a new heaven and a new earth; a new order has begun. God is the source of his people's joy and hope; hence, suffering in this new reality is no longer possible.

John 13:31-33a, 34-35

Part of the Last Supper discourses in John's text, this short passage deals with the glorification of the Son of Man. Jesus does not supplant the Decalogue, but offers his followers a new commandment: love one another. Love is the key characteristic of Christians.

Sharing the Word

There's a lot of talk about love today. We hear it often in commercials and in popular culture: "I just love my new car" or "I love my iPhone." "Love" is tossed out at everything and everyone. In the ancient world, this was not a problem. That's because the Greeks had three distinct words for love: *eros*, which is sexual love; *philia*, which is the love between friends, and *agape*, which is the highest kind of love and demands a complete gift of oneself. True love requires three things: a lover, a beloved, and a relationship between them.

That's why we can't really love things or objects like a car or an

iPhone, because it's impossible for objects to love us back; there's no relationship with things. We can only love God and one another, our fellow human beings.

In today's Gospel, Jesus commands us to "love one another" (Jn 13:34). But what kind of "love" is he talking about? Jesus speaks of *agape* love, which is a sacrificial love for one another. And this is far greater than marriage and friendship alone; yet both marriage and friendship need *agape* love in order to endure!

We see what Jesus means when he tells us to love one another in today's first reading. Paul and Barnabas strengthened the faith of the early Christians throughout Asia Minor. They preached the Gospel to them, sanctified the people with the sacraments, and established the church in their communities. In other words, Paul and Barnabas sacrificed their ambition and their lives for love of Christ and their fellow Christians. Each of us can do the same.

When Jesus commands us to love one another, he doesn't mean that we have to like our neighbors or that we have to be best friends. Rather, he calls us to sacrifice for our community, to wish what is good for our neighbors and not harm or evil, to desire their holiness and eternal salvation, and to work and pray for that. This is *agape* love. At the judgment, Christ will ask each of us what we did for our brothers and sisters.

Praying the Word

Lord Jesus,
love is the key characteristic of your friends,
and you command us to love one another
and to follow your example of selfless service.
Help us not to be fearful to reach out to others,
but rather enable us to see and love you in them.
You live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

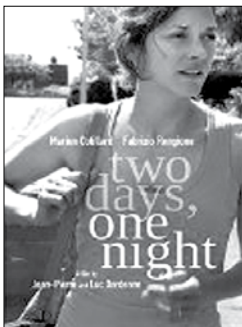




EUCHARIST & CULTURE

Art • Music • Film •
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Film Review



TWO DAYS, ONE NIGHT

Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne
France, 2014

John Christman,
SSS

The great eucharistic saint, Peter Julian Eymard, tirelessly spent his life bringing the Eucharist into people's lives. But his unique vocation in the church was not without great trials and tribulations. Toward the end of his life, he reflected back upon all of the "little deaths" that he had suffered to bring him deeper into the life of Christ. And thus it is with all human experience. We all experience different types of deaths in our lives: deaths of family, deaths of friends, deaths of our dreams, deaths of our images of ourselves. Death can be a constant companion. But as Christians death brings with it the possibility of new life.

The smaller journey from death to life in the context of everyday existence is brilliantly brought to the screen in *Two Days, One Night*, the latest film by critically acclaimed auteurs Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. Having accrued numerous prestigious film awards including the Palm D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival not once but twice, a new Dardenne film comes with significant expectations. *Two Days, One Night* certainly meets these expectations, while at the same time embarking on new territory.

The Dardennes' films have always been characterized by a stark and intense realist aesthetic, utilizing hand-held camera work, non-professional and lesser-known professional actors, and gritty urban locations. This new film sees a significant departure in their first-time use of an international film star, Marion Cotillard, in the lead role as Sandra. And their risk was rewarded as Cotillard's performance earned her numerous accolades including an Academy Award nomination.

The film centers on Sandra, who is faced with a life-changing dilemma. Having been off work due to a struggle with depression, she is about to return to her job when she receives horrible news. The owner of the factory where she works had given the employees an unconscionable choice: to take a vote choosing between receiving their yearly bonus or to let Sandra go. Many employees voted to take their bonus instead

of helping Sandra. However, confronted with the fact that some of the employees might have been coerced, the owner agrees to a new vote. Sandra then has the weekend to track down her fellow employees and try to convince them to vote to let her keep her job. What ensues is an eye-opening and thoroughly engaging exploration into how economics affects human behavior.

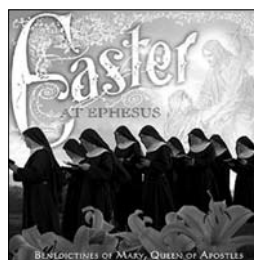
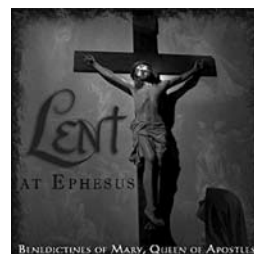
Each employee that Sandra meets opens up a whole web of relationships and circumstances. No character or story is one-dimensional, and no choice is easy. At the heart of the film is the question: Would someone really choose the good of another over their own good? One employee even puts it in Christian terms, saying that he wants to love God and love his neighbor, but he's scared. What if he loses his job because they can't afford to keep everyone on? Greed, selflessness, family responsibilities, and fear play into each of these encounters.

Visually, Sandra's seemingly insurmountable task is exemplified in all of the brick walls portrayed in the film. Each new house she approaches and each new street she walks is filled with imposing brick walls. The walls convey the formidable challenge she faces to break through to the hearts of her coworkers and get them to see the world beyond their own life.

Two Days, One Night exceptionally shows forth the complexity of living in a society and the challenges people face if society is to be more than human beings simply coexisting. It also shows how different people choose to face the trials of life, all our "little deaths." Each choice no doubt comes with real consequences, but some of those choices might just hold the promise of new life.

Music Review

Who would ever imagine that a small order of contemplative nuns in rural Missouri would be named *Billboard* magazine's classical traditional artist of the year for three consecutive years? Who could've guessed that each of their four major releases would crown *Billboard*'s annual top Christian and traditional classical album charts for 2012, 2013, and 2014, and that one of those albums would land at Number 3 on the popular music charts as well? The answer: no one! The religious nuns of the Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Apostles, would have never anticipated such a reaction to the music that is part of the literal soundtrack of their lives. Yet, despite the odds, this group of 22 women living in the middle of 260 acres of farmland in Gower, Missouri, is commanding the attention and accolades of music



Benedictines of
Mary, Queen of
Apostles

LENT AT EPHEBUS
Benedictines of
Mary, 2014

EASTER AT
EPHEBUS
De Montfort Music,
2015

Julie Parrotta

industry insiders while inspiring thousands with their song.

The music resonating from the small chapel of the Priory of Our Lady of Ephesus can best be described as heavenly, and rightly so. These women, who have devoted themselves to lives of service and sacrifice to God and the church, spend more than eight hours a day in prayer, chanting the psalms and hymns of the Divine Office in its entirety. Their faithfulness and joy is imbued in their music and their song draws them and their listeners into an encounter with the divine. Their most recent releases, *Lent at Ephesus* (2014) and *Easter at Ephesus* (2015) are packed with solemn chants and majestic hymns, including several original compositions, which are infused with intricate harmonies, decisive counterpoint, and authentic prayerfulness. The bright timbre of the mostly young voices is pure and refreshing. The music is intrinsically steeped in the tradition and beauty of the liturgy of the church, the sound further enhanced by being recorded within the chapel of their own priory.

The 27 tracks of *Easter at Ephesus* include well-known hymns such as “Regina Caeli,” “O Sons and Daughters,” and “Veni, Sancte Spiritus,” as well as signature new arrangements of “Jesus Christ Is Ris’n Today” and “This Is the Day.” The album is filled with liturgically rich music that can enhance any church’s repertoire from Easter through Pentecost. Similarly, *Lent at Ephesus* takes the listener on a liturgical journey through Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday. The compilation of familiar chants and hymns, including “O Sacred Head Surrounded,” “Stabat Mater,” “Adoramus Te Christe” and the captivating “Improperia” from the liturgy of Good Friday, tells the story of God’s mercy and redemption. Of the 23 tracks of *Lent at Ephesus*, one of the most noteworthy is an original composition entitled “My Mercy.” A truly fitting reflection well suited for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, this poignant anthem crescendos to a conclusion with the lyrics “Mercy, mercy, forever will I sing the mercies of the Lord!”

Sheet music for 27 of the songs from the various albums, including “My Mercy,” is available on their website: www.benedictinesofmary.org

Poetry

Holy Woman's Obituary

Her heart lived in monasteries
and rejoiced with the angels about
the great wonders of the Eucharist.

The fullness of heaven come to us
from sunrise to sunset,
the banquet of evermore in this life.

She worked late in her yard
in the midst of the turmoil of weeds —
recreating a new Eden.

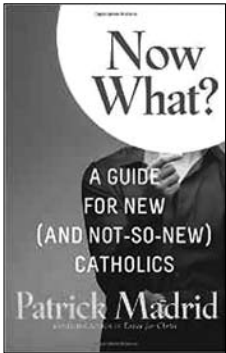
Her house was a sanctuary for souls
seeking a rest from restlessness,
lives fleeing the flurry and fault of self.

She poured goodness and trust
into hearts others had violated
and sent thousands to the altar.

Every fall she baked bread for the homeless
and fed a table full of envelopes
begging for her rich mites.

Philip C. Kolin

Book Reviews



**NOW WHAT?
A GUIDE FOR
NEW (AND
NOT-SO-NEW)
CATHOLICS**
Patrick Madrid
Cincinnati, Ohio:
Servants Books
(Franciscan Media),
2015
160 pp., \$14.99

Written in a breezy, conversational style, Patrick Madrid covers the sacraments, Mary and the saints, Catholic customs, church protocol, struggles with faith, and living the faith throughout a lifetime. Like the rich young man who listened to what Jesus taught and wondered what else must he do to serve God, the reader of this book learns what it means to believe and practice the Catholic faith.

Setting a context for the topics, Madrid first explores what it means to “be Catholic,” in terms of what’s involved in living out a Catholic identity as well as what comprises that identity. He approaches the explanations from the perspective of someone considering the Catholic Church, and perhaps involved in an RCIA program.

Madrid uses the common experience of someone who has had relatives or friends pose such questions as “Why can’t I go to Communion in your church?” and “Are Catholics allowed to receive Communion in my nondenominational church?” His writing is very readable and includes material from biblical and other sources to explain Catholic beliefs and practices.

In the chapter entitled “Bells and Smells — Become Familiar with Catholic Piety, Calendars, Customs, and Quirks,” Madrid explains everything from the sacred vessels used for Mass to sacramentals such as pilgrimages, incense, making the Sign of the Cross, medals of saints, and palm branches.

Madrid, a best-selling author of many books on Catholic themes, is also the host of *Right Here, Right Now*, broadcast weekdays over the EWTN Catholic Radio Network as well as on Sirius Satellite Radio. The experience of responding to the questions of listeners enables him to draw on typical questions asked by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Now What? is an excellent book for RCIA programs, high school CCD classes, and parish discussion groups, or anyone seeking to brush up on their Catholic faith.

Mary Denis Maher, CSA, PhD
Archivist
Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine
Richfield, Ohio

Donna Eschenauer is associate academic dean and professor of pastoral theology and religious education at Saint Joseph Seminary and College, Yonkers, New York, and the author of numerous titles including *Reflections on Renewal: Lay Ecclesial Ministry and the Church*, which she wrote with Harold D. Horrell in 2011.

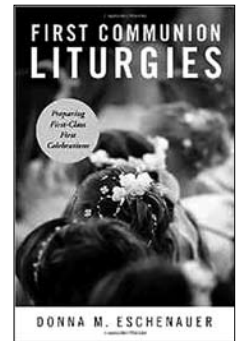
In this book, she gives a theological and pastoral background to the liturgical theology of the Eucharist, helping ground the basis for good liturgical principles for the celebration of the parish's First Communion Mass.

The first of five chapters focuses on liturgy with children and the *Directory for Masses with Children*, which is the liturgical document that supplements the *General Instruction on the Roman Missal*. Eschenauer works from a vision which sees children as part of the larger liturgical assembly and the important context of the Sunday Mass.

Chapter 2 explores early ritual practices through the current *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) and the sections devoted to children. Chapter 3 highlights the Eucharist and six aspects of eucharistic theology. It also discusses the particular terminology used to communicate effectively, such as "Eucharist" and "First Communion" (not "First Eucharist"). Chapters 4 and 5 explore practical suggestions toward an ideal First Communion celebration. The epilogue challenges the reader to a "radical change in catechesis, [and] toward the [fuller/meaningful] celebration of First Communion and beyond" (89).

Eschenauer's notes and bibliography are quite helpful. Additionally, she tracks the "grassroots movement": from the Council of Trent, through Saint Pius X, and into current practices, making it a great study in the particular history and celebration of First Communion. Another strength of this book is the focus on six aspects of eucharistic theology, Scripture, and church documents. The suggestions for preparation and involvement in a First Communion Mass are quite helpful (77-87).

However, focusing on two particular catechetical models (family-based) almost felt like a "sales job," even with one of the programs not available for purchase. Furthermore, the family is often so fragmented that it is a challenge to build this particular model of family-based catechesis. While all can agree there is never enough catechesis, there are so many challenges in modern day parishes this book simply does

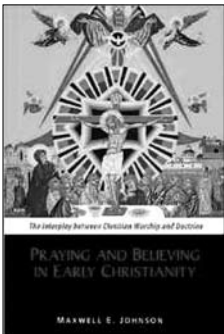


FIRST
COMMUNION
LITURGIES
Donna M.
Eschenauer
Collegeville,
Minnesota:
Liturgical Press,
2014
112 pp., \$12.95

not take into account. Some of the judgments (for example, pages 80-82) are quite harsh and not helpful to her goal, which is forming Catholics who desire to celebrate Mass well.

The best catechetical teaching reaches both children and their parents; this goal sometimes gets missed in the depiction of a theologically "ideal" First Communion celebration. This book does a wonderful job in presenting this ideal; however, it does not touch on the less than ideal family situations many DREs and catechists deal with in parishes. I also believe catechists would prefer a resource that gave ideas for readings, music selections, and "best practices." On the cover, there is a "sticker" promising that the book will "prepare first-class first celebrations." This is a fine foundational theological and historical resource rather than a practical liturgical resource and planning guide for the First Communion Mass.

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**PRAYER AND
BELIEVING
IN EARLY
CHRISTIANITY:**
The Interplay
Between Christian
Worship and
Doctrine
Maxell E. Johnson
Collegetown,
Minnesota: A
Michael Glazier
Book, Liturgical
Press, 2013
166 pp., \$19.95

Renowned liturgical historian from the University of Notre Dame and pastor Dr. Maxwell Johnson has written a scholarly tome on the impact of liturgy on doctrine in the early Christian church. He focuses on four main areas in the church's history: soteriology, the Trinity, Christ and Mary theologies, and ethics, through the lens of the first four ecumenical councils of the church: Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451). The book is written for students in the study of liturgy (master's level) and for those wishing further study in liturgical history and doctrine from this particular lens.

As with many of Johnson's works, there is a plethora of notes at the bottom of each page, representing a wide range of scholarship and interplay among many voices of history. Our liturgical texts in both the Eastern and Western churches are shaped by how people prayed and believed. Early worship texts also shaped the doctrine and "orthodoxy" of this significant period of ecumenical councils in the

fourth and fifth centuries.

Johnson provides an excellent translation of significant sources throughout his chapters, serving as a great resource on how these ancient doctrinal and liturgical discussions shaped how we prayed and later believed. Quoting the great Nathan Mitchell on page 126, "Christian liturgy begins as ritual practice but ends as ethical performance . . . [the] liturgy of the neighbor verifies liturgy of the church." From the New Testament to early Christian texts, Johnson demonstrates that all doctrine and belief matters, and that liturgy shapes our worship and belief structure.



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EUCHARISTIC WITNESS

Robert and Elizabeth Robleto

Elizabeth

Adoration is my uninterrupted hour with my Lord. Sometimes it is simply a time of reflection and prayer. Other times it is so much more: a communion with him. I start with a prayer, written by Raissa Mardain, which begins: "My God, I am here before thee, I crumble into nothing before thee. . . ." I then read from the Eymardian *Rule of Life for Associates* and contemplate how I have or have not fulfilled my promise. So begins the dialogue. Slowly the Holy Spirit takes charge and inner peace permeates my mind and soul. At these times, I am surprised to find the hour over. I leave feeling refreshed and at peace, ready to face the world. This leads me into my favorite ministry, that of Eucharistic Minister. When I serve, when I go to the altar, I become filled with the Holy Spirit so that when I distribute Communion it is not I but truly the Spirit within. Such a gift, such a joy!

Robert

I often accompany my wife Elizabeth to adoration. I began doing that when I was given the penance in confession to spend an hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament. I remember thinking, "What did I do to deserve this penance?" I brought my rosary and some inspirational reading material to keep occupied. As I knelt in front of the monstrance, it occurred to me that my plans might be construed as rude. I looked at the Eucharist and considered that this is God's great gift to mankind, his great gift to me. I began thinking of a childish analogy: this is the original Christmas gift, all wrapped up in a mystery. I realized that this gift was given at great expense. I am consumed by the gift itself. With it, I can be in heaven as a child of God while still here on earth.

Now when I go to adoration, I begin by considering the Eucharist as a gift and thank God for it. I look for ways that the Eucharist makes my life full. I realize that I open this gift when I receive Communion. It is then that all other gifts are given. I reawaken to the gifts given me at confirmation: wisdom, fortitude, understanding, knowledge, counsel, courage, and reverence. The day is full of struggles and challenges, failures and triumphs, but the Eucharist brings joy and meaning to all of it.

Elizabeth and Robert

As you can see our spirituality and love of the Eucharist is the core of our lives. We struggle with putting our faith into practice, and give thanks to our Lord when we are successful. We hope you find joy and peace in the Blessed Sacrament as well.





In the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament,
what is there to regret, to desire?
All the mysteries live anew through the Savior's
presence. . . .Whether you are thinking of the
mortal life of Jesus or of his risen life,
you know that Jesus Christ is there.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard



Up till now, the Sun of the Eucharist had not yet dawned. But the full richness of the Eucharist is unfolding before us.

It is truly amazing.

We perceive but a single Ray;

What will it be like later?

Eymard
Op. 1. 1.

Saint Peter Julian Eymard