

Saying Yes to God and to Others: Eucharist and Our Lady

George Dunne, SSS

January

*I meditated on the Blessed Virgin's love for me since my childhood.
I blessed Our Lady of Laus, and the day I took her for my Mother,
my dear mother died. And since then, so many graces!*

Retreat of Rome

Mary 17, 1865

Preface

The mother of Peter Julian Eymard, Marie, was considered by contemporaries to be a saintly woman. She was especially devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and she would regularly take young Peter Julian to Benediction.

Before receiving his First Communion at age 12, Peter Julian made a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame du Laus, some 38 miles from his hometown La Mure. During this retreat, he experienced a special grace, which he later expressed in this way, "There, for the first time I knew Mary and loved her."

While he was away at the age of 17, Peter Julian's beloved mother passed away. It was a terrible blow to him. Upon hearing the news, he went to the chapel and prostrated himself before the statue of the Virgin Mary. It was then that he took the Blessed Virgin for his mother. It was in this chapel that Peter Julian prayed to her that he would one day become a priest.

At the "Great Retreat" in Rome in 1865, Father Eymard wrote: "It is the Blessed Virgin that has led me to the Lord, to weekly Sunday Communion through the 'Laus' at 12, from the Society of Mary to that of the Blessed Sacrament" (February 1 meditation).

Introduction to the Theme

During this time together we will reflect on the relationship between Mary and the Eucharist. Saint Peter Julian Eymard, founder of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, invoked Mary under the title of "Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament," and this feast is celebrated on May 13.

We know that Mary is invoked under many different titles. Why this one? What is the meaning of this title? What is the nature of the relationship between Mary and the Eucharist? We will reflect together on this topic, starting from the biblical background, moving to an examination of the rich liturgical associations, and ending by reflecting on Mary as a model for all who wish to live and pray the Eucharist in their own daily lives.

Opening Prayer

God our Father, with love we come into your presence and give you thanks and praise as we honor the memory of Mary, our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

When she brought forth her child you revealed him as your son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the light to all nations and the sign and source of our salvation.

In celebrating the mystery of Christ, it is likewise our joy to lovingly and with deep reverence honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of her close bonds with her son.

These bonds are most clearly seen in her loving willingness to be the mother of Jesus and the one who would give him his flesh and blood, which he, in turn, would give as food and drink for the life of the world in his own gift of himself in the Eucharist.

In her “Magnificat,” Mary proclaims in her song of praise the wonders of your love from age to age.

In Mary we see an example of the faithful companion of Jesus, attentive to her son and aware of the daily needs of his brothers and sisters. At Cana, this awareness was seen in a special way when, at her request, water is changed into wine. The wedding guests rejoice, the glory of her son is revealed and his disciples' belief in him is confirmed.

At Calvary, she is the faithful mother, keeping faith by the cross of her son and becoming the mother of all those who are brought to life through his saving death.

As she keeps vigil in prayer, her heart on fire with love, she is the model of the church, enriched by the gifts of the Spirit, and keeping watch for the coming of Christ.

Father, we pray that like Mary we may welcome Christ by treasuring his words in our hearts and celebrating with deep faith the mysteries of our redemption.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song

“Hail Mary, Gentle Woman” by Cary Landry, Music Issue of Today’s Missal – Oregon Catholic Press.

Teaching

1. On the basis of a straightforward reading of the New Testament, there might not appear to be any very obvious reason for associating Mary and the Eucharist. However, her presence and the part she played in some important moments in which eucharistic implications have been seen - the Incarnation, the miracle at Cana (John 2), at the foot of the cross (John 19), and in the midst of the community of believers (Acts 2:42), call for closer examination and reflection.
2. At the Incarnation, God called Mary to cooperate with him at the very outset of his redemptive plan. Mary dedicated herself totally to this tremendous plan of God as “Theotokos,” “Bearer of God,” who through the power of the Holy Spirit gave virginal birth to her son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In her womb the Word became flesh and rightly we say “that which we consecrate is the body born from the virgin” (Saint Ambrose).

Thus from the very first moment of God’s plan of salvation, the Savior and his mother are joined in the closest union, in a partnership and in grace which is already an indication of Mary’s co-operation in the redemption of mankind. In the Incarnation of Jesus Christ - “who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary” - we have the first link of Mary with the Eucharist. Jesus, who was of the flesh and blood of Mary, would give his flesh and blood for the life of the world and the building up of his body, the church.

3. At Cana, Mary’s maternal solicitude moved her to intercede with her Son even though his hour had not yet come. What is most clear in this text is Mary’s awareness of the needs of others. As she said “yes” to God in the Incarnation, so she would say “yes” to all God’s children, especially in their time of greatest need. Her sensitivity and care coupled with her strong faith in her son’s power to respond have been the hallmarks of traditional Marian spirituality down through the centuries. This moment of intercession at Cana evokes from her son his first miracle, which traditionally has been seen as sign and symbol of the Eucharist and the Messianic banquet.
4. Mary was present at Calvary, when the redemptive sacrifice was offered. Through her own sufferings she finally became forevermore the intimate associate of Christ in the work of salvation. In no. 58 of *Lumen Gentium* we read:

“At the cross, Mary stood, in keeping with the divine plan, suffering grievously with her only-begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to his sacrifice and lovingly consented to the immolation of this victim, which she herself had brought forth.”

And again, the same council says in no. 61 that Mary “was united with him in suffering as he died on the cross.” If the Eucharist is the sacramental representation of Calvary and if Mary cooperated in the sacrifice of her son, then can we not see here yet another vital link between Mary and the Eucharist.

5. Mary was present, too, in the Cenacle among the community of believers (Acts 1:14) and we know that they were faithful to the “breaking of the bread” (Acts 2:42). In these opening chapters of Acts, Saint Luke paints an intriguing picture of Mary in the early Church. The small persecuted Christian community drew its strength and life from the scriptures, the teaching of the apostles, and the breaking of bread. From the Word and the Eucharist came forth joy, peace, and unity which all but neutralized the impact of trial and suffering. Mary had lived these ideals her whole life long and especially during the years of faith-filled and faithful association with her son. Now, within the faith community of Christians, she mirrored the life of the community and challenged it to “proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.”

From this examination of the New Testament material we can say that Mary is the perfect and the most concrete model in the sharing of Christ’s body and blood.

6. *Mary in the liturgy*: Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater*, said: “The piety of the Christian people has always very rightly sensed a ‘*profound link*’ between devotion to the Blessed Virgin and worship of the Eucharist; this is a fact that can be seen in the liturgy of both the West and the East . . . ‘Mary guides the faithful to the Eucharist.’”

The profound link has been expressed by the church throughout the centuries in its liturgy and life in two ways. Firstly, the church honors Mary in the celebration of the Eucharist and secondly, the church proposes Mary as the model of eucharistic prayer.

7. *Mary in the celebration of the Eucharist*: In all four eucharistic prayers the place of Mary is given particular prominence. Taking the first eucharistic prayer, the “Roman Canon,” as an example, we pray: “In communion with those whose memory we venerate, especially the glorious ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, . . .” The naming of Mary at the heart of the eucharistic sacrifice is the church’s daily tribute to one “so highly favored by God” (Luke 1:28).

Some recent studies have highlighted the intimate bonds between Mary and the Holy Spirit reflected in the epiclesis at the Eucharist. This idea is expressed beautifully in the prayer over the gifts for the fourth Sunday of Advent: “May the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

Mary also is presented as the one who best models the attitude required for a positive participation in the Eucharist. This was especially well-treated by Pope Pius VI in his Apostolic Letter, *Materialis Cultus*. He speaks there of Mary as model of the spiritual attitude with which the church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries in the liturgy. This attitude is characterized by faith. Mary's faith gives us an example of how to enter most fully into the Mass, because it was by her acceptance of the word of God that the Word truly became flesh and dwelt among us.

8. *Mary as model for eucharistic prayer*: Mary is often portrayed as the virgin-in-prayer. We see this illustrated most especially in her "Magnificat" and at Cana in her petition to her son. Here we have the prayer of praise, gratitude and petition. The last occasion in which she is mentioned in the scriptures is again one of prayer: she is absorbed in prayer in the Cenacle, awaiting the Holy Spirit.

Mary is often portrayed as the model adorer of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. While the custom of keeping the Blessed Sacrament in reservation outside of the time of Mass was not established until long after the time of Mary, nevertheless, we have every reason to consider Mary as a perfect example of devotion towards the real presence. By her offering of what was essentially a eucharistic worship, an internal and external homage to the real presence of Christ, Mary paved the way for the later devotion of adoring Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, for she spent her whole life in loving worship of the humanity of Jesus, who she had conceived and brought forth.

As the church has reflected on the person and life of Mary, it has come to a deeper realization of what it is to follow Christ. In fact, the early church saw her as the model, the ideal Christian who faithfully follows the Lord in word and action.

9. In summary, we can say that while the New Testament material is somewhat limited, that which is available to us certainly illustrates the close link between Mary and the Eucharist. In confirmation of this, the liturgical tradition of the church proposes the Virgin Mary as exemplar of the attitude with which Christians should celebrate the sacred mysteries: attitudes of faith, of attentive listening, of praise and gratitude, and of contemplative wonder.

Perhaps Pope John Paul II should have the last word: *At the root of the Eucharist is the virginal and maternal life of Mary (L'Osservatore Romano, [English Edition] June 13, 1983, page 2).*

Closing Prayer

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

Opening Song: "Hail Mary, Gentle Woman"

By Carey Landrey, Music Issue of Today's Missal - Oregon Catholic Press

First Reading: Acts 1:14, 2:42-47

All (the disciples) devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day The Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Period of Silence

Second Reading: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him. After this, he and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there only a few days.

Period of Silence

Intercessory Prayer

Eucharistic Litany

Leader:

Jesus, word of God
Jesus, son of God
Jesus, son of Mary
Jesus, conqueror of death
Jesus, conqueror of sin
Jesus, risen Lord of glory

All:

grant us faith.
grant us faith.
grant us faith.
grant us faith.
grant us faith.
grant us faith.

Healer of the sick
Friend of the oppressed
Teacher of wisdom
Herald of God's kingdom
Worker of miracles
Source of peace

grant us hope.
grant us hope.
grant us hope.
grant us hope.
grant us hope.
grant us hope.

Lamb of God
Bread of life
Bread from Heaven
Bread of true freedom
Bread of liberation
Bread of reconciliation
Flesh for the life of the world
Wine of compassion
Wine of joy
Wine of forgiveness
True drink of God's spirit
Taste of our future
Taste of eternal life
Pledge of immortality

grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.
grant us love.

(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)

Benediction

Reposition

Closing Prayer

O Most gracious Father,
grant that with the help of the Immaculate Virgin Mary,
we may so persevere in the communion of the breaking of the bread
as to be filled with the eucharistic spirit and so to spread your kingdom
of love with abiding zeal.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Dismissal with some sign of peace