

The Love of God in Action: Eucharist and the Holy Spirit

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May

*God has loved man, and has given him all **He** is and all **He** has. The Father gave his son; the son gave his very self; the Holy Spirit became man's habitual Sanctifier.*

Retreat of Rome

March 14, 1865

Preface

Father Peter Julian Eymard was very trinitarian in his eucharistic theology. For he taught that God the father loves us and gave us Jesus his son as the ultimate sign of that love. The most profound expression of that love is found in the Eucharist. Quoting the Gospel of Luke (1:35) he emphasizes the fact that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason also the holy Child will be called the Son of God.”

Very prescient for our modern eucharistic theology, Father Eymard preached that the Holy Spirit inspires all that takes place at the Eucharist, especially the liturgical prayers. As such he wrote during his retreat of Rome on February 24, 1865: “I took the resolution to read the word of God with a very deep respect and to pronounce with affection the liturgical prayers of Holy Church, inspired as they are by the Holy Spirit; it is the prayer of the Holy Spirit offered by His spouse.”

Introduction to the Theme

The role of the Holy Spirit in the work of eucharistic celebration is not only important, but absolutely essential. Without the action of the Holy Spirit, there would be no Eucharist. During this session, we will investigate three aspects of the Spirit's work upon and within us: as *sanctifier*, *transformer*, and *actualizer*. We will also enrich our theme of Eucharist and the Holy Spirit by examining several prayers from the liturgy of the eastern churches which have always maintained an elevated role for the Holy Spirit in their liturgical theology.

Opening Prayer

Our opening prayer is taken from the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. Because the prayer is short we are going to pray it twice. The first time it will be read for us. The second time we will read it, slowly, together. Please be attentive to what the prayer has to say about the Holy Spirit.

Again we offer unto thee
this reasonable and bloodless worship
and ask thee, and pray thee, and supplicate thee,
send down thy Holy Spirit upon us
and upon these gifts here offered.
And make this bread the precious body of thy Christ,
and that which is the cup,
the precious blood of thy Christ,
making the change by thy Holy Spirit,
that they may be for those who partake
for the purification of soul,
for the remission of sins,
for the communion of the Holy Spirit . . .
and not for judgment and condemnation.

Song

“Spirit Come” by Greg Norbert, Music Issue of Today’s Missal – Oregon Catholic Press.

Teaching

1. *Holiness!* The primary work of the Holy Spirit during the celebration of the Mass is to make us and the gifts that we offer holy. At our baptism, each of us received from God the call to holiness. The sacraments of the Church, especially the holy Eucharist, are the spiritual vehicles that facilitate our growth in holiness.

As *sanctifier*, the Holy Spirit comes down upon our gifts and upon us, the worshipping assembly, to infuse us with the very holiness of the Godhead. As our gifts of bread and wine become consecrated through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, so too do our lives become consecrated through our communion in the body and blood of Christ. Holiness, then, becomes a way of life and the way to life eternal.

2. *Change!* Another important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit during the eucharistic celebration is his role as an agent of change. The Greek word that describes this change is “epiclesis.” While we in the western church have emphasized the praying by the priest of the words of institution over the bread and wine as *the* moment when the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, the eastern churches have always emphasized the epiclesis - those parts of the Eucharistic Prayer that ask the Father to send down his Spirit upon the bread and wine so that they may become the body and blood of his Son, the Christ.

It is not our task during this session to explain the complex history of liturgical development that brought the churches of east and west to highlight different aspects of consecratory change, but rather, to appreciate how in the eastern liturgies, the Holy Spirit is seen as the one who *transforms* bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The transformation that takes place in the bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ as an analogue of the transformation that is to take place in us who participate in the Eucharist. We are to become the mystery we celebrate.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, or as the eastern liturgies put it, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, we become the body and blood of Christ for our world.

3. *Energy!* The Holy Spirit actualizes God’s presence and gifts in our lives. In the liturgy, God desires to give us the special gifts of his light, life, and love. These gifts are invisible to the eye, but that does not mean that they are not real.

As we participate in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit energizes us with these divine gifts. The Spirit makes real in us God’s desire to draw us into himself. Christ’s sacrifice of his life for us on the cross made the divine energy available to all who enter into his paschal mystery.

The Holy Spirit transmits this divine grace into our bodies, minds, and spirits, that is, into our whole being, as we celebrate Eucharist. A greater appreciation of the actualizing power of God's spirit during the Eucharist would result in many people having profound experiences of psychological and emotional healing as a result of a more prayerfully conscious participation in the Eucharist.

4. *New time!* In our post-modern world, with its analytical and scientific mindset, it is very difficult to explain how our participation in the Mass, while not taking us out of chronological time, does, nevertheless, insert us into a "new time." For our Christian ancestors of the first through sixth centuries, the boundaries between this world and the world of Heaven were not so inseparable or so clearly delineated. Perhaps the interest in angels that has captivated the spiritual imagination of so many people is an indication of the deeply felt need to once again try to understand how our participation in the Eucharist is also a participation in the heavenly liturgy.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we gather in "the communion of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit connects our earthly Eucharist to the heavenly Eucharist and inserts our earthly Eucharist into the heavenly liturgy.

We can grasp this idea when we remember that in Eucharist, Christ is both the offerer and the offered. Christ, the risen Lord of glory, is always the main celebrant at every Eucharist. We enter into his eternal act of self-offering to his Father. Thus, Christ is the offerer. We, when we come to celebrate the Eucharist, unite ourselves through our offering of bread and wine to this self-offering of Christ. Thus, Christ is the offered.

It is the Holy Spirit who is our connector to Christ's action and our bridge between earth and heaven. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit inserts us into something that is always and already taking place, the heavenly liturgy. Without leaving our time, we enter into a new and eternal time.

5. Let's sum up our learnings on this theme of Eucharist and the Holy Spirit. One way of doing that is to concentrate on the "powers" of the Holy Spirit: the power to sanctify, the power to transform, the power to actualize, and the power to transport us into "new time." The purpose of these powers is to make us holy, change us into Christ's body, energize us with the divine gifts of light, life, and love, and insert us into that glorious worship that is always taking place in Christ before the throne of God. During the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit is God's love in action.

Closing Prayer

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

Opening Song: “Spirit, Come”

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

First Reading: Sequence of Pentecost

Come, Holy Spirit, come!
And from your celestial home
shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor!
Come, source of all our store!
Come, within our bosom shine!

You, of comforters the best;
you, the soul’s most welcome guest;
sweet refreshment here below.

In our labor, rest most sweet;
grateful coolness in the heat;
solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine,
shine within these hearts of yours,
and our inmost being fill!

Where you are not, man has naught,
nothing food in deed or thought,
nothing free from taint of ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
on our dryness pour your dew;
wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
melt the frozen, warm the chill;
guide the steps that go away.

On the faithful, who adore

and confess you, evermore
in your sevenfold gift descend.

Give them virtue's sure reward;
give them your salvation, Lord;
give them joys that never end. Amen.
Alleluia

Period of Silence

Second Reading: John 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Period of Silence

Intercessory Prayer

Eucharistic Litany

Jesus, Bread of Life: a 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

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

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

(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)

Benediction

Reposition

Closing Prayer

Jesus, Lord and Savior, nourishment and center of our lives,
empower us to feast joyfully at the table of your word and sacrament.

Teach us to understand all of human reality in the light
of your Eucharist.

Living sacrifice of praise, cleanse us in your saving blood.
Victim that has reconciled all to God, bring us to live in peace with one another.

Bread of life, wine of compassion, transform us into your body.
Inspire us to become true adorers in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Dismissal with some sign of peace