

# **Keeping Alive the Memory: Eucharist and Memorial**

George Dunne, SSS

*October*

*Our Lord comes into us sacramentally in order to live  
therein spiritually.*

To Mrs. Lepage  
January 24, 1864

## ***Preface***

Memory was very important to Father Peter Julian Eymard. So many events shaped and led him ultimately to a eucharistic vocation. He remembered the date of his baptism every year. He remembered his first Holy Communion which he made at age 12. One of his early biographers, Father Albert Tesniere, wrote that at his first reception of Holy Communion, young Peter Julian promised he would be a priest. “Thirty years later,” Tesniere says, “Father Eymard still shed tears over this and used to say, ‘What graces the Lord gave me at my First Communion’” Each mass Father Eymard celebrated, he remembered all the graces God had given him and each one of us.

## ***Introduction to the Theme***

“Do this in memory of me.” These words, spoken by Jesus, on the occasion of his Last Supper with his disciples, evoked a response that has continued in fidelity to his request right through the centuries. They are sacred words, with profound and time honored meaning. They are words that are said each day at the Eucharist immediately after the narrative of the institution pointing to the action of taking, blessing, and eating and drinking the bread and wine just as Jesus had done, and as he now asks us to do each time we gather to celebrate his redemptive sacrifice.

During our time together we will experience “remembering” before our mind’s eye and describe it from many sides. In this way, we will reflect on remembering in our own lives.

Consider the question of what it means to “remember” in a larger context than that of the Christian liturgy. Let’s look at the kind of remembering we do in the course of our everyday lives. Human memory, through its own laws, its own efforts, tends to restore a presence to the past. It fails to achieve it, but it strives toward it. It is in the Eucharist, in a unique and mysterious way, that this striving is accomplished. The Eucharist is a memorial of the past that preserves it, forever present and real, for each person for all time.

We might want to begin in the small groups by sharing together our understanding of our civil and religious memorials (Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, etc.). This will lead

us to examine together the importance and the quality of our own personal and collective memory-keeping in all aspects of our lives.

Perhaps then we might be ready to address the deeper theological issues surrounding this rich dimension of the Eucharist. We will then reflect on the Eucharist as memorial, beginning with an examination of the Old Testament background and continuing to the rediscovery of the importance of this concept in present day eucharistic reflection.

### *Opening Prayer*

God our Father, we come into your presence in a spirit of thanksgiving and hope, desiring to grow together in our understanding of your son's gift of the Eucharist, the memorial of his Passover and the promise to us of food and drink unto eternal life.

Through all times your love and concern for your faithful people has manifested itself through your mighty deeds on our behalf. This has already manifested itself in the Old Testament when you rescued your people from slavery in Egypt and renewed your covenant with them through your servant Moses. Following your command the people of Israel remembered this act of liberation on their behalf through the annual celebration of the Passover.

Your faithful love for the world was manifested in a special way when you sent your son to free us from the ancient power of sin and death. On the night before he died for us, in the atmosphere of the Passover celebration, your son Jesus celebrated his Last Supper with his disciples and gave a new meaning to the Passover through the institution of the Eucharist.

Jesus desired that we "do this" in his memory, and we have never failed to be faithful to his command, gathering as a community to be re-constituted through our participation in his Paschal sacrifice.

Help us, Father, to make the celebration of the memorial of the Lord the center of our lives so that in all that we do and say we may be inspired by this great mystery. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

### *Song*

"We remember," by Marty Haugen, Music Issue in Today's Missal-Oregon Catholic Press



## ***Teaching***

*Remembering is an essential dimension of life.*

1. We are constantly cheated of that which we treasure most: the present instant of life. Time will not stop in its flight, the past cannot be retrieved or made to return. Yet something in us dominates time - our mind, which is never totally submerged in the multiple and the instantaneous. Our mind is constantly re-uniting and grouping together the scattered instants. This unifying action of the mind is what we call memory.
2. When I speak of “remembering,” I am not referring to the phenomenon of simple reminiscing. I am speaking of calling to mind an experience one has lived in the past, an experience whose image, in rising before us, seems to contain something permanent. We are aware of ourselves as seeming to experience something beyond time. Let me give you an example: I first went to Lourdes the year of my ordination with my mother and one of my sisters. I concelebrated the weekly international Mass in the underground basilica. My mother and sister were in the congregation, which comprised approximately 8,000 people. During the Mass I scanned the crowd trying to find where my mother and sister might be, but it was impossible. When the time came for communion I was given a ciborium and taken to a far corner of this huge basilica. The attendant, a complete stranger to me, placed me immediately in front of my mother and sister. For me, that moment is timeless!
3. We seldom live an important event with the intensity it deserves; it is memory’s role to bring us back, to allow us to participate more fully and play our role completely. So much of our lives is spent recalling the events of the past. This is especially true when we gather as families or friends on social occasions. As people mingle and reacquaint themselves with one another, stories are told, events recalled, often in an exaggerated way, and the past seems closer and more real. This is more poignantly so after the death of a loved one when so much of our time is spent re-living precious moments from the past.
4. Human memory-keeping is precisely that - human. It is not just about retrieving data from the past, as we do with a computer. It is about who we are - laughter and weeping, tunes that make you a child again for a moment, a particular taste of bread or jam, the smell of your father’s Sunday suit. It is not stored on disks and it seems at times to be outside you; it clings to old fences and lanes, to a house, to a window, to the corner of the stairs. And it is not simply a matter of the past - these memories are still shaping you still.
5. To this very day, the people of your childhood, even if long dead, are still with you. You have their gestures, their walk - and even more so as you grow older. Have we all not heard the expression “She grows more like her mother every day”? The living body is a kind of memory. Individuals have their own memories, families have their memories, parishes,

towns and cities all have their memories too. And as a Nation we have our special “memorial” days, both civil and religious.

*Remembering is essential to the life of the people of God.*

6. The Bible echoes with calls to “remember.” Abraham Joshua Heschel has said that the whole of the scriptures can be summarized in one word, “remember.” With some consistency the people of Israel cry out to God for remembrance, and in that remembrance that he would exert, once again, his life-giving power. Still more numerous are appeals from God that his people Israel remember their divine election and the rights and responsibilities that accompany this special relationship. This speaks to us of the memory of God for man and the memory of man for God. Each recalling implies past events where one had been in relation with the other, and the result of recalling these events is a renewal of the relation. Through remembrance, therefore, relationships are revitalized, renewed, or restored.
7. In the history of Israel, many things constituted a memorial of God’s salvific actions on behalf of his people, but our interest is in the memorial character of worship. Memory is exercised in a privileged way in liturgy. The role of memory is very important in the cult of Israel. In the liturgy of Israel, what is celebrated are the great deeds of Yahweh that have been a consistent reminder of the love and concern that he has for his people. Certain events had such importance and changed so thoroughly the life of the Jewish people that their remembrance was a requirement for the very existence of the individual and the community.
8. Such an event was the deliverance from slavery in Egypt and its celebration in the Passover liturgy. This celebration, repeated yearly, was the Jewish memorial, *par excellence*. In the Passover ritual we find a correspondence to the memorial (in Hebrew, “*zikkaron*,” in Greek, “*anamnesis*”) formula of the Eucharist. “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution” (Exodus 12”14). Jewish tradition stressed this by exhorting the believer to “act as though he himself were leaving Egypt” (Pesachim X, 5).
9. The dynamic of memorial consists of praise for God’s saving deeds and participation in the salvation they effect. In and through the worship of the community, God continues the act of redemption and creation begun in the Exodus. It was precisely in this Passover context, that our Lord instituted the Eucharist. When he said “Do this in memory of me” after he had offered his body and blood as food and drink, these words would have reminded the disciples of the divine ordinance concerning the celebration of the Exodus.

*Remembering is essential to the life of a Christian*

10. Christians are a community of living memory. We tell the story of the memory that is the source of our identity. Christ commands his disciples to commemorate what he has done: “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he offered also the cup, after supper, saying “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Remembering, therefore, is a Christian obligation.

11. The concept of memorial here is not that of the present commemoration of a past event, which establishes a purely mental connection between the two. Instead the past event becomes present in the here and now through the act of calling to mind. As is clearly articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

“The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the *making present* and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice . . .” (no. 1362).

“In the sense of sacred scripture the *memorial* is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for men. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become in a certain way present and real. This is how Israel understands its liberation from Egypt: every time Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are made present to the memory of believers so that they may confirm their lives to them (no. 1363).

**“In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present” (no. 1364).**

12. The Eucharist, therefore, is the real presence of our Lord’s sacrifice and it is by memory that we reach it. Mass, however, is not a mere commemoration of the cross. At Mass, by the action of the priest, our remembrance participates in the divine eternity and what begins as a memorial becomes a presence. For it is through the Eucharist that Jesus radiates his presence into history.

13. In summary we can say: our Lord instituted the Eucharist in a Passover context. This would have had a special meaning for his disciples. Central to their understanding would have been the significance attached to “remembering” in the lives of the Jewish people. Jesus said, “Do this in memory of me.” It is the clear teaching of our Church that the Eucharist is a memorial. *However, what differentiates the Christian memorial from the Old Testament memorials and from all human remembering is that at Eucharist, that which we remember, Christ’s Passover, his sacrifice on the cross, becomes present to us.*

Resources for this teaching:

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, numbers 1356-1366.

*Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, Xavier Leon-Dufour, S.J., Paulist Press, New York, 1987.

*The Eucharistic Mystery*, David N. Power, O.M.I., Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1992.

***Closing Prayer***

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

*Opening Song*: “We Remember”

By Marty Haugen, Music Issue of Today’s Missal - Oregon Catholic Press

*First Reading: Exodus 12:1-20*

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: on the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

This is how you are to eat it; with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the Lord. For on this same night I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast, and executing judgement on all the gods of Egypt - I the Lord! But the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood I will pass over you; thus, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.

This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution. Since it was on this very day that I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt, you must celebrate this day throughout your generations as a perpetual institution.

*Period of Silence*

*Second Reading: Luke 22:14-20*

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I shall not eat it again until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” This is my body, which will be given for you; *do this in memory of me.*” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.”

*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.  
grant us love.

*(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)*

*Benediction*

*Reposition*

*Closing Prayer*

God our Father,  
we have come into your presence  
in a spirit of thanksgiving and hope,  
desiring to grow together in our understanding  
of your son's gift of the Eucharist,  
the memorial of his Passover and  
the promise to us of food and drink unto  
eternal life.

On the night before he died for us,  
in the atmosphere of the Passover celebration,  
your son Jesus celebrated his Last Supper  
with his disciples and gave a new meaning  
of the Eucharist.

Jesus desired that we "do this" in his memory,  
and we have never failed to be faithful to  
his command, gathered as a community  
to be re-constituted through our participation  
in his Paschal sacrifice.

Help us Father, to make the celebration of the  
memorial of the Lord the center of our lives  
so that in all that we do and say  
we may be inspired by this great mystery.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*Dismissal with some sign of peace*