

**Afire with Love:
Eucharist and Mission**

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September

Remain always an apostle of the God of the Eucharist; it's a mission of fire near those who are cold, of light for those who do not believe, of holiness for the soul of the adorer.

To Mrs. Lepage

January 24, 1864

Preface

In a meditation on March 25, 1865, during what is referred to as Father Peter Julian Eymard's "long retreat" in Rome, he wrote in his journal "should we not have both contemplative and apostles in the Society, both adorers and firebrands, since our Lord wants this eucharistic fire to set the world ablaze?" The legacy of Saint Eymard for the Eymardian Family is that we would "spread the (Eucharist) everywhere and make our Lord known, loved and adored everywhere."

Introduction to the Theme

Our theme during this session is Eucharist and mission. When we think of mission, our thoughts probably go first to the church's missionaries around the world, and then to those women and men we know personally who are actively involved in the mission of our local church or parish. Only remotely, it seems, do we conceive of *ourselves* as being on mission. However, mission is as central to us today as it was to Jesus 2,000 years ago, for in baptism we have been joined to Christ. Through us Jesus continues his saving work, his mission, in the world. In a real sense, the Eucharist is food and drink for disciples on mission. It is also the sacrament of mission. During this session we will reflect together on what this means for each of us personally and as members of the church.

Opening prayer

God of loving mercy,
to restore creation and to bring all people to intimacy with you,
you sent Jesus, your Son, into our world.
His mission was to reveal your love
and to build your rule of perfect justice and peace.

As we gather here for this time of reflection and prayer,
we accept our rightful share in Christ's mission today.
He has no eyes but ours,

no ears but ours,
no hands but ours.
Use them to touch and heal our world.

In your love, you invite us to the table of the Eucharist
which foretells the banquet of everlasting life and joy
in your presence one day.
In your love, you invite us to communion with you and one another.
Bring us to love you and the world so much
that we will give freely of ourselves for your glory and the good of all.

Jesus said, "I have come to light a fire on the Earth."
Kindle in our hearts the fire of the Holy Spirit
that our words will give you honor
and our deeds will help to bring about your reign on Earth.

We make this prayer
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who gave his life out of love for the world
and lives with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Song

"Take My Hands," by Sebastian Temple, Music Issue of Today's Missal, - Oregon Catholic Press.

Work exercise

1. When did you first feel that you had a mission as a Christian?
2. What is your personal mission statement (in 50 words or less)?
3. What relationship is there between Eucharist and mission in your life?

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

1. The church's mission is none other than the continuation of the mission of Jesus, under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' mission, as revealed in his "inaugural address" at Capernaum (Luke 4:16-21), was *to proclaim the coming kingdom of God*. Jesus' convictions about the kingdom and the kingdom's God touch almost everything he said and did. It was the core of his preaching and the preoccupation of his life.
2. A second aspect of the church's mission is *to proclaim the Gospel*. Why? Precisely because Christians see the realization of the kingdom in the life and ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In proclaiming the gospel message, the church acts in fidelity to the great mission mandate of the risen Lord in Matthew 28:19-20.

In *Ad Gentes* ("To the Nations"), the bishops at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) wrote: "Having been divinely sent to the nations that (it) might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the church in obedience to the command of (its) founder and because it is demanded by (its) own essential universality, strives to preach the gospel to all . . ." (#1).

3. A final aspect of the church's mission is *to invite intimacy - communion - with God*. The church's mission mandate is ultimately grounded in the love of the Trinity. Pope John Paul II has said that the ultimate purpose of mission is to bring all people into that communion which exists between Father and Son in their Spirit of love (*Redemptoris Missio* 23).
4. The Eucharist relates to each of these mission aspects. The Russian theologian Alexander Schmemmann called the Eucharist the "sacrament of the kingdom." The eucharistic liturgy anticipates what life in the reign of God will be like; it images the kingdom, albeit imperfectly. For example, the inclusiveness of the assembly images the radical inclusiveness of the kingdom where all will be welcome, irrespective of racial, ethnic, religious, and gender distinctions. And the sharing at the common table of word and sacrament prefigures the perfect sharing of the messianic banquet. At their best, then, our Eucharistic celebrations introduce us to kingdom living even now.
5. Secondly, the Eucharist enfleshes the good news mercy and love in Jesus Christ. Sinners and outcasts alike receive God's mercy and forgiveness, the essence of the gospel.
6. Lastly, the Eucharist is an experience of intimacy with God in Jesus Christ. Traditionally, the church has used the word *communion* to speak of God's drawing-near in this sacrament, to the point that the heart and mind of God and communicant become one. The moment of sacramental union is fleeting, but it foretells an eternity of happiness. Some of the church's great mystics, among them Juliana of Norwich, have used powerful experiences of

sacramental communion as the starting point for reflection on the mystical union between God and the soul.

7. One very practical connection between Eucharist and mission lies in the very name *Mass*, the origin of which is in the dismissal rite of the liturgy. The presider says in these or similar words, “Our celebration of Eucharist is ended. *Go* in the peace of Christ.” In the pre-Vatican II liturgy, he simply said in Latin, “*Ite Missa est*” (“Go, the Mass is ended”).

In a sense, the dismissal rite crowns the entire liturgy. It sends God’s people into the world! We are to bring what we have experienced and proclaimed at the Lord’s table to the world outside the walls.

At the end of the Mass, we are sent forth to put into practice what we experienced in the words and actions of the liturgical celebration. We in the assembly of the Mass are to show by our own words and deeds what was celebrated. The final dismissal brings together all that has happened in the mass: “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Or in the new translation, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.”

8. A Eucharistic community centered exclusively on its own inner life and concerns has not, therefore, really celebrated the Eucharist in truth or understood its implications. For as important as these issues and realities are, *the church’s ultimate concern must always be its mission*, that is, the continuation of Jesus’ saving mission in the world today.

Pope Paul VI once stated that the church must never allow internal issues and problems to preoccupy it. He went so far as to say that if the church ever chose survival and maintenance over mission, it would be better for it to go out of existence! That’s how critical the link between Eucharist and mission is.

9. Take time to sum up the learnings about Eucharist and mission.

Closing Prayer

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

Opening Song: “Take My Hands”

By Sebastian Temple, Music Issue of Today's Missal - Oregon Catholic Press

First Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12

Because of this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ [Jesus] for you Gentiles - if, as, I suppose, you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, [namely, that] the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly earlier. When you read this you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this I became a minister by the gift of God's grace that was granted me in accord with the exercise of his power. To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the principalities and authorities in the heavens. This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness of speech and confidence of access through faith in him.

Period of Silence

Second Reading: Luke 9:1-6

He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal [the sick]. He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither walking stick, nor sack, nor food, nor money, and let no one take a second tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there and leave from there. And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them." Then they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Period of Silence

Intercessory Prayer

Eucharistic Litany

Leader:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us.

All:

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, graciously hear us.

Jesus, Son of God most high,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, sent from heaven to earth,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, anointed with the Spirit,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, Savior of all peoples,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, teacher of the nations,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, compassion of God,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, healer of souls,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, worker of miracles,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, liberator of the masses,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, missionary of the apostles,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, head of the church,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, dwelling among us,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, bread for the journey,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, bread of life eternal,	Send us forth in your name.
Jesus, reward of the faithful,	Send us forth in your name.

(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)

Benediction

Reposition

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
we cannot live the Eucharist
unless we are animated by the same spirit
which led you to give your life for the world.

When you proclaimed the new covenant
by the gift of your body and blood to the church,
it was out of love that you gave yourself up.

Sharing in your gift of self,
may we place ourselves at the service of the kingdom.

We ask this in your name,
for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit
as God, for ages unending, Amen.

Dismissal with some sign of peace