

Light and Silence: A Eucharistic Diary

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CATHOLIC INFORMATION SERVICE



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Catholic Information Service

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Original edition:

Massimo Camisasca

La luce e il silenzio: Fogli di diario sull'Eucaristia

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Scripture citations adapted from the
Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition
(San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

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COVER IMAGE

“O good Pelican....” Because of the medieval belief that the pelican fed its young with blood drawn from its heart, the bird became a traditional symbol of Christ’s self-gift in the Eucharist. Altar mosaic, chapel of the seminary of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo, Rome, Italy. The mosaic was completed by Fr. Marko Ivan Rupnik and the artists of Centro Aletti in 2010. Photo copyright Elio and Stefano Ciol. Used with permission.

“At the Last Supper, on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.”

—Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47

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Bishop Massimo Camisasca



*Lord Jesus, good Pelican,
Wash me clean with your blood,
One drop of which can free
The entire world of all its sins.
Jesus, whom now I see hidden,
I ask you to fulfill what I so desire:
That the sight of your face being unveiled
I may have the happiness of seeing your glory. Amen.*

(From the hymn *Adoro te devote*, by St. Thomas Aquinas.)

Altar mosaic, seminary chapel of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo,
Rome. Photo copyright Elio and Stefano Ciol. Used with permission.

Introduction

This little book brings together some of my reflections on the Eucharist, the heart of Christianity, the high point of God's revelation to man and of man to himself.

I am not embarrassed to say that the simple thoughts that appear in these pages came to me for the most part before the Eucharist exposed for adoration in my small chapel. They are the brief pages of a diary, reproduced either as originally written, or as edited for inclusion in homilies and texts for meditation.

—M.C.

These pages were written while Bishop Massimo Camisasca was superior general of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo, prior to his elevation to the episcopate. At the time, Fr. Camisasca resided at the Fraternity's generalate and seminary in Rome, Italy. The reader will thus find numerous references to "the community" and "the house" — indications of the concrete community of persons that nourished Bishop Camisasca's encounter with Christ's luminous presence in the Eucharist. (– Ed.)

The School of Silence

1993

Enter into the Presence

To understand the Eucharist, one must understand silence: The silence of God the Creator, the silence of that moment when everything came forth from his hand, in which there was no voice except the roar of the waters and the storms, the planets, and the magma that crept slowly, forming as it went. And over everything, the silence of the Spirit of God the Creator.

The same silence of the stable at Bethlehem. Even before that, the silence of Mary's womb, the silence of her "yes." The silence of that hiddenness, which is nonetheless real. The silence of that infant, so easily overlooked, a speck like a planet in the universe, yet the meaning of everything.

The silence of the cross. The silence of the morning of the Resurrection, when they saw him and knew him – and the echo has not ceased to resound.

The silence of baptism. The silence of the confessional. The silence of death.

This is how it is: To understand the Eucharist, one must understand that the center of the world is this invisible, carnal silence. "Invisible," because it plumbs the inaccessible,

unattainable depths of the Trinity, like a whirlpool whose depths both attract and frighten us. And yet “carnal,” visible, made of ordinary bread.

A Dimension to Be Learned

We fear silence – a fear that reveals us to ourselves, and a fear that reveals us to you. In reality, silence is full of mercy: It has no words of condemnation, but only the helplessness of one who has given himself to the uttermost.

In the school of silence – and only in this school – words acquire their definitive weight, or show themselves to be illusory, diabolical, superficial or inappropriate.

If we do not love silence, it is because we do not know what to say or what to ask for, forgetting that it is always the Spirit who suggests these things. Silence seems empty to us because we are full of a multitude of thoughts, distractions, forgetfulness; or we are full of resolutions, but not the kind of resolution that transforms silence. Silence is transformed only by its continual repetition. The *habitus* of silence: only this creates silence.

We Pray, O Lord

We pray, O Lord, for our country, so degraded by an evil of which we know neither the end nor the purpose: Grant to this people, as by a miracle, the experience of being a people. Put an end to hatred, to bloodshed, to death.

We pray, O Lord, for your Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, that it would become aware of its dignity, its task and its grace.

We pray, O Lord, for the pope. Give him the consolation of the Spirit, prophetic strength, the peace of a servant, and the confidence of a friend.

Protect, O Lord, the poor, the young who are the poorest, the sick in body and spirit, those afflicted by terrible psychological illnesses that divide the person from himself, and by illnesses of the spirit – lack of faith, despair, self-destruction. Protect those peoples devastated by wars, violence and prejudice, those who wander about the world, deportees, the homeless, those without families, those without hope. We know that you are present to each one. Grant that many experience this presence, not just in the next life, but already on this earth. Grant the consolation of the Spirit, “Greatest comforter, sweet guest of the soul, sweet consolation.”¹

God's Surrender

1996

The Eucharist is the deepest sign of God's love for mankind. It reveals what a great condescension, what a great identification with our life and with our humanity, was the Incarnation. It shows the availability, the "surrender" of God into our hands.

The Eucharist is the center of the world. The center of the world is silence – that is, virginity. What a sense of history, of things and of events, does eucharistic adoration teach us!

The Eucharist indicates to us and testifies to a method of relating among ourselves and with others: a sharing, a letting the life that we are drawing near to flourish from within.

As a *sacrament*, the Eucharist refers to a reality, which is at once Christ and his body. It therefore recalls us to unceasing work for the building up of the Christian people.

In eucharistic adoration, we bring before Christ all that we have lived during the week: the faces and fears, the smiles, the sins, the sorrows, questions and hopes ... so that through Christ's passion, everything would manifest its glory, the glory of his and our resurrection.

Where Everything Has a Voice

1997

To Recognize You

What is it that we are here before you to do, O Lord? We are here above all to adore.

Adoration – you have taught us this – is the realistic attitude of the one who recognizes that there is something greater than himself. He discovers that this something, or someone, is the source of everything, because he comes to recognize that he did not make himself. Then he discovers that this something or someone guides the world. Otherwise he would have to accept the idea that everything is pure chance and therefore a terrible, tragic injustice.

This “You” that precedes us is therefore the source of wisdom, the one from whom we draw, hour by hour, the meaning and weight of what we live. Our attitude toward this “You,” therefore, cannot be the stupid familiarity of one who takes God as an equal, as an already known quantity. God is, and remains, other.

“The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord” (Psalm 111:10). But this fear – this, too, you teach us – is not terror, but only the intelligent discovery of a mystery that precedes

us and comes after us, a measure that does not admit of being measured. We are not free, but *freed* – freed by a measure not our own.

Your Mystery Has Taken on a Body

What does the Eucharist remind us of? Above all it reminds us of God’s majesty, of his eloquent silence, a strong, full voice in the midst of our chit-chat; and of his omnipresent, providential gaze, even if it is hidden and recognizable only with eyes of humility and truth.

But it is also true, O Lord, that if this mystery had not taken on a body, it would overwhelm us in its infinite otherness, so that in the end we would seek only to forget, or curse or flee. The first body of the Mystery is the creation of the world. Here God creates an absolute *novum*, a “you” outside of his “I,” yet not autonomous or abandoned: a beloved “you.” “God so loved the world,” in the words of Jesus (John 3:16).

The Eucharist is the highest testimony to this fabric of Being, which is communion. Bread: A piece of matter, a small bit of creation so invested by the Mystery as itself to become the Mystery in its very corporeity.

But, O Lord, you then wanted to bind creation to you with a special bond. You wanted a “you” who, though a creature, was intelligent, free and capable of willing, as you are. You wanted the apex of creation to be a “you” with whom to speak, a heart to love, someone capable of enjoying this love and loving in return.

We all know what happened: We know man's pride, provoked by the pride of the rebellious angel. The sin of the spirit is pride, before which all other offenses pale.

A Love without Measure

But you, O Lord, wanted there to be a human mind totally penetrated by you, a human heart totally filled with your presence, and you sent your Son. And for us here – as always before the Eucharist – words begin to fail, certainties become questions, and the conceptual schemes of our meager philosophies reveal all of their inadequacies.

Why did life demand a death? Why the cross? Why the abandonment, the scorn, the mockery, the loneliness? At the least we must respond: “Because God is God” – because he wanted to love to the end, without measure. He wanted to live that death which man chose and earned for himself, so as to defeat it, to empty it from within, as St. Paul says (cf. 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:26). From within, he wanted to defeat all separation, all loneliness, all evil.

Thus creation, Incarnation, Passion, death, Resurrection, are like the words of a single discourse. And the Eucharist gathers all of these words together, summing them up and presenting them to us, not as a discourse, but as a present reality.

This term – “present reality” – leads us to the deepest level of your charity, O Jesus, for each person. You loved personally. The Eucharist is not the repetition of an event, but its permanent actuality in every moment of human history. Jesus did not want to impose himself. He wanted to propose himself to our freedom in such a way that it

would be persuaded, almost compelled, as though dazzled by a mystery of yearning love that would allow itself to be destroyed so as to be accepted and recognized.

We Are Here to Learn

You became food, almost to bring us back to the biological phenomena of assimilation. At a certain point, we no longer distinguish what we are from what we have eaten. A carnal, mutual penetration deeper than any imaginable, which assimilates us to your divine reality. “Partakers of the divine nature”, says St. Peter in his letter (2 Peter 1:4). Besides adoration, then, being before you is a moment of thanksgiving; indeed, Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” Here our whole week is as though given back, offered. Here also it becomes a plea for fulfillment.

In this way the Eucharist becomes a school in which we never tire of learning, a teacher who always has new discoveries to teach us, new perspectives on life to open to us, new steps to ask of us. It becomes the school of true silence, where everything has a voice; the school of offering, where everything has weight and value; the school of virginity and of poverty, where we learn to live as you lived; the school where all of life fits together, without the violence that would want to explain everything and make everything balance out.

The school of a total surrender to God, which would be merely an unattainable measure for us if your surrender were not the revelation of a love which is a thirst and a hunger for our “yes,” the supreme human manifestation of your divinity.

The Place of God's Love for Us

1998

Life and Source of Life

What is Christ's supreme act of charity toward us? The gift of the sacraments. And the source and summit of all the sacraments? The Eucharist. St. Thomas also says this: "The Eucharist is truly like the fulfillment of human life and the end of all the sacraments".²

St. Thomas also writes that "all of the spiritual good of the Church is contained in the most holy Eucharist."³ Taking up this statement, Vatican Council II teaches that in the Eucharist is contained "Christ himself, our Pasch and Living Bread, by the action of the Holy Spirit through his very flesh vital and vitalizing, giving life to men who are thus invited and encouraged to offer themselves, their labors and all created things, together with him. In this light, the Eucharist shows itself as the source and the apex of the whole work of evangelization."⁴

To See the Lord

In the Eucharist we can see the Lord. He presents himself, defenseless, under the species of a piece of bread. A piece of bread that is he, the Lord, really present.

“No one has ever seen God” (John 1:18). And yet, wholly identified with the life of God’s Son, the apostle John was the first to try to describe God the Father, as the Spirit inspired him. In the striking passage of the fifth chapter of Revelation (Revelation 5:1-10), St. John described the ineffable vision of God the Creator. He sees him seated on a throne in heaven, thus the Lord of all the world, immersed in light, venerated and adored by the angels, by the fathers of the Old Testament and by the apostles of the New, the synthesis and center of the whole history of the world.

In the right hand of the One who is seated on the throne, John sees a scroll, written on inside and out; that is, visible but also invisible, or rather invisible for its depth of content and revelation, but destined to be known. This scroll is sealed by seven seals (Revelation 5:1). Though he indicates that what is written in it is crucial for the life of all people and of the whole world, this message remains mysteriously secret. This secrecy is a source of anguish: It seems that no one can open the seals, and the world’s secret, which God the Father and Creator would offer to each person, is destined to remain hidden (Revelation 5:4).

Contained in these verses of Revelation is the whole existential drama of thousands of literary, historical, poetic, artistic, philosophical and musical works, the hidden drama of millions of lives.

Is life, then, a gift that aspires to an unknowable meaning? Suddenly, one of the elders intervenes to break this anguish forever: “Weep no more” (Revelation 5:5). Man’s historical situation is profoundly changed. A man

who was put to the test and who, if he overcame the test, would release the secret contained in the scroll, has overcome. A descendent of Israel, he now appears as the center of the whole history of creation, from its first moment to its last.

A Free Gift

After the vision of God the Father, the Creator, seated on the throne of heaven, another being appears to John, this time in the image of a lamb who has been slain. The meaning of this rich symbolism is well known. Jesus was long prefigured by the prophets as the Lamb of God, meekly led to the slaughter, not forced, because he himself accepts the sacrifice and, through it, becomes a conqueror. He appears “as though slain” (Revelation 5:6) and with the marks of his Passion, but upright on the throne – thus alive, strong, holy and immortal. Precisely because he has conquered, he sees everything and makes everything alive.

John tells how the Lamb – though here already it is no longer the Lamb, but Jesus himself, crucified and risen – takes the book from the right hand of the One seated on the throne. All those present, even before the seals are broken and the book read, understand that he has the power “to take the book and open the seals,” precisely because he has been “slain” and has “redeemed” people from every part of the world with his blood (cf. Revelation 5:9-10).

This page of Revelation thus reveals the mystery of Christ’s infinite condescension toward us. Through his blood, shed for us – that is, through the sacrifice of his life

– he becomes a savior contemporaneous with every people, nation, tribe and tongue. Through the ministry of the priesthood, he manifests himself as the mystery of forgiveness and of educative zeal, as well as the mystery of royalty, of the capacity to build.

The Eucharist, then, is nothing other than this: the place in which the absolute gratuitousness of God's predilection for man is most deeply manifest. How great is the gift of the priesthood, exactly as a response to the free gift of his sacrifice! In this light one better understands the importance of Holy Mass, of eucharistic adoration, of silence; the value of prayer, of meditation, of the observance of Holy Week; in a word, how essential is a personal love for Jesus.

Minister of the Eucharist

1999

The Priest

The priest is a man called to a total identification with Christ's life. There is no greater identification than baptism, but, within the baptismal vocation, Christ identifies some with his person and confers gifts upon them. These gifts are simultaneously powers and responsibilities, which enable them to express his mercy and compassion for his people. In this sense the priest acts "*in persona Christi cápitis.*" That is, he renders Christ present as the head of his people.

The Letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as the "merciful and faithful priest" (Hebrews 2:17). He always lives in the Father's presence – in this consists his fidelity – and at the same time he has solidarity with those whom he represents before the Father. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The priest is truly a man called to be a bridge between God and men, through the work of education and guidance of the people entrusted to him. In more than thirty years

of priesthood I have felt this strongly – but I think that it would be impossible to live the ministerial priesthood without this experience. It is perhaps the most impressive aspect of priestly life: to be chosen as the voice of supplication for people before God, to be called to keep Moses’s hands held aloft, like Aaron (cf. Exodus 7:12). To be the voice of humanity before God: This is the heart of the liturgy of the hours. It is the significance of bearing in one’s prayers, especially in the eucharistic sacrifice, the supplications, intentions, desires, hopes – at times desperate and despairing – of those who turn to us.

The Truth, the Eucharist

The priestly ministry is manifest, above all, in two tasks that are closely connected. The first is that of being servants of truth: to announce the truth, that is, to reveal reality, to remove the veil that covers people’s eyes so that they can see what has happened and what is happening. This is why the priestly life, like the Christian life, cannot be without silence, since without silence it is not possible to see the truth, nor can the truth take on flesh within us. What we would communicate without silence would just be superficial opinions. One consequence of this – certainly not the most important, but nonetheless fundamental – is that it is impossible to be servants of truth without studying the truth. One who is overrun by a thousand things to do no longer finds time to study or to meditate on what he finds; he no longer prepares the Sunday homily, or for the sacraments he celebrates or the

catechesis he directs. In time he becomes, first a simple “repeater,” then an annoyed and annoying man, disillusioned and disillusioning.

The priest’s second task, closely related to the first, is that of being a minister of the Eucharist. Why closely related? Because the Eucharist is the truth of the world, since the world is saved by the cross. “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).

If, then, the cross saves the world, the Eucharist makes present the cross and the Resurrection. From the Eucharist comes the beginning of the new world, which attracts people to itself and invites them to conversion, moving them to ask for baptism. In the Eucharist, therefore, we have the prophecy of the world to come.

Education

The Eucharist thus makes us understand the third task of the priest, education. To educate means to help the person recognize the form that God has given to his life; and the Eucharist is the manifestation of the form God has given to the world.

Why? For two reasons: because the Eucharist is sacrifice and the Eucharist is communion. The Eucharist as sacrifice, that is, as the memorial of the Passion, shows that the new and definitive form of life in the world comes

through a new birth, a *metánoia*, a change of oneself, a passover. In this sense the Eucharist is a prophetic act: It is Christ's prophecy concerning the world. At the same time, the Eucharist is communion, in that the presence of Christ's sacrifice on the cross effects union between God and men, reconciling them with their original and ultimate destiny.

In the Letter to the Hebrews we read concerning Christ's sacrifice: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:7-9). "When he came into the world, Christ said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10:5-7).

The Eucharist is the sacrifice that effects communion.

The Folly of Love

2000

With Us All Days

The Eucharist is a reality that surprises and surpasses us in every way. No other reality finds us so speechless and so inadequate: the infinitely great of God's compassion within the infinitely small and infinitely commonplace of bread and wine.

And yet I do want to stammer out some words, echoing the great reflection of the Church that has never ceased to gaze upon this mystery or to write wonderful, moving words, even sublime poetry, about it.

In one of his homilies on the Eucharist, Fr. Luigi Giussani said, "The Lord has come, and has come forever.... He has come to be with us all days, even to the end of the world."⁵ There is a continual action of God, not day by day, but moment by moment, toward us. This bending down to us, to each of us, began with the Incarnation, has continued until now and will continue until the end.

To Fulfill Our Life

The Eucharist is Christ's being present always within our daily life. It is a presence that saves, that transfigures, that changes one's life, fulfilling it.

“The Lord has not left us his portrait, a souvenir, a relic or a symbol, no: He has given us his real presence.” These are the words of the cardinal archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI, on Holy Thursday, 1959. “Love is presence, love creates nearness, love really can’t live at a distance, love is communication; love is presence, and Christ has realized his presence in the fullest, most mysterious way we could desire, which leaves us always enchanted and surprised.”⁶

To Move the World

When I place myself in adoration before the Eucharist, at first everything seems negative. There are no words, no movements, no colors – there seems to be no history. And yet the Eucharist speaks to every person who knows how to listen to it, and says words that no one would know how to say.

The Eucharist is not only the movement of God’s Mystery toward us. Through the change it effects, it is the source of the positive movement that bears things and people toward the shores of eternity. It is a light-wave that passes through, warms and burns all matter, even the most refractory and resistant.

Servant and Actor

One who, through priestly ordination, becomes a servant of the Eucharist, becomes an actor in a great movement in the history of the world. This movement begins from the unfathomable communion of the Trinity and ends by

encompassing the most infinitesimal movements of the person and the most hidden realities of creation.

The priest becomes a servant, therefore, of a recombination which has in the Eucharist its school, its source, its secret energy.

The Greatest Sign

The Eucharist is the greatest sign of the folly of love, that folly which scandalously appeared, once and for all, on the cross.

Thank You, Lord

Thank you, Lord, for the Eucharist, the gift, ever new, that surpasses every human desire and every human imagination.

Thank you for your incarnation, which has forever bound human history, the history of our mortal bodies, to the reality of your holy and immortal body.

Thank you for the resurrection of the body, of which the Eucharist is the sure pledge.

Thank you for your death and resurrection, which in the Eucharist takes place at every moment and for everyone.

Thank you for the transfiguration of creation, of which the Eucharist is the miraculous beginning.

Thank you for the communion that is stronger than sin and death, which you have given us in baptism, and that you strengthen each day in the Eucharist.

Thank you for having made us capable of offering all, even our sufferings. The passion of Christ, the now-glorified

Lord, enters into the eucharistic sacrifice through the human passion of the faithful who form the body of Christ.

Thank you that the sacrifice of the Mass in this way becomes the Church's sacrifice, and that the sacrifice of the cross works in the world through the sacrifice of the Mass.

He Couldn't Bear Not Having Us 2000

God's Desire for Us

Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” It means to restore to God what he has given to us. This is why in the Mass, for his purpose to be accomplished, God wills to need human beings.

And why does God will to need us? Perhaps the very mystery of the Trinity explains this, or at least sets us on the right path for understanding this mysterious reality of creation. God did not want to be one person, but three: He wanted to be communication, dialogue, exchange — mutual, reciprocal and free dependency.

For us human beings, to understand something of this tremendous desire that he has for us is like touching the last waves of a deep ocean that lap upon the shore. Obviously, God’s “need” for us is not the same as our need for him. His need is rooted in the depths of his generosity, that is, in a freedom of decision, an absolute freedom which is his love. The truest love is absolute freedom, a freedom so great that it discovers itself as need.

And this is why God so humbles himself that he wills to need human beings. He couldn't resist overflowing the communion that he is. He couldn't bear not having us.

We don't know how long he waited, or even if it makes sense to say that God waited – Augustine would say that before time, there was no time⁷ – but at a certain point, God created. And in doing so he gave rise to a new “need”: the need to choose some of us in order to reach the rest of us, to reach other human beings.

When we say that God wills to need human beings, we are therefore speaking of the mystery of election. And here we touch the mystery of the Son in the Trinity. Looking at him, each of us understands something of himself. He understands the reason for his own vocation, this “segregation” from the world in order to be a gift to other men and women.

God's freely chosen need for us, which is made manifest through election, then becomes, as our response, a willingness to go out, to encounter. A willingness called to become ever deeper, since the need is limitless. And here we touch the mystery of the Spirit.

The Joy of the Eternal

The Eucharist makes joy and gladness possible in life. It is the source of youth, a youth that is all the more amazing in a mature man than in a young person. The Eucharist is the secret of this miracle.

The Eucharist makes our life like the tree of Psalm 1: always growing, putting down its roots into the water that

is God himself, that is baptism, the gift of the Spirit. Raising itself fearlessly toward heaven, it tangles even with lightning bolts, like those that in some storms seem ready to topple the wonderful poplars outside my window, which stand because their roots are strong.

You Teach Us the Words

2001

What We Live

I can't find the words, Lord, to express what we are living.

When we think seriously about our life, we become aware of how ultimately inexpressible it is, of how much it surpasses us, of how superabundant it is – and we are amazed that such great richness would pass through such an interminable fragility. And then the words we are unable to find, we come here to learn before you, who are utterly real. As reality itself, in its simplicity, is greater than we are, so also is this presence of yours greater than us, in its absolute defenselessness, its ordinariness, its docility. You have called yourself “daily bread” (cf. Matthew 6:11).

The Meaning of Existence

What words do you teach us? Above all, you teach us that life has a direction: one that must be discovered and recognized, and that can only be glimpsed in silence.

This is why the Eucharist is above all the school of silence, the school of the gaze that knows how to look inside of things, to penetrate the facts, until it reaches the source, the Mystery that gives them origin.

We thank you for granting us this school during this year, in which we have learned and continue to learn that life has a meaning, that things have weight, that our days have a direction, that time has significance.

The Meaning of Every Moment

Here before you we discover the value even of hours that seem to be lost – hours of distraction, forgetfulness, rebellion and superficiality, hours of suffering and weariness, darkness and night. We thank you for giving us, along with joy, the experience of weariness, with light, the experience of darkness, with lightheartedness, the experience of heaviness – so that we can understand when others speak to us of darkness, heaviness and weariness. Because you too lived this darkness, heaviness and weariness, and in your obedience they were transformed into light. Is not the Eucharist itself the most incomprehensible and powerful example of darkness changed into light, of blood changed into life, of death changed into eternity?

Thank You

We are here to thank you for all the time you have given us. We don't know how much more we have, and for this we thank you, for making us perceive how precious time is. You said, "While there is light, walk in the light" (cf. John 12:35).

Thank you for having granted us to not be alone, to have rescued us from this curse, the most awful to which a person can feel himself condemned or condemn himself:

loneliness, isolation, rejection of others out of spiritual pride, hardness or illness. Allow us to perceive the whole divine and human aspect of this reality, the companions with which you have surrounded us, that you have brought together for each of us. All the others for each one of us, and each one of us for the others, in a web of solidarity of which only you know the weave.

Thank you that we have found a place in which we are not measured by what we don't have or what we aren't, but accepted for what we are, yet without being coddled. An awareness of our limitations is clear as crystal before us; we know them well, but we also know the way, and this allows us to walk, even to run, carrying with us even what weighs us down.

In this school that you are for us, then, you teach us the direction of the road. In silence you give others to us, the first and basic fruit of the Eucharist; you make us partakers of the gifts of the Spirit.

We Ask You

We ask you that our life be more courageous, more open, more decisive, less cluttered with our past.

We ask you that the loftiness of the ideal that you are, and that you realize in us, would more powerfully affect our days, our hearts, our hopes, our plans, our horizons. That our hearts would not shrink back or harden, but be continually renewed. "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength," says the prophet Isaiah, "they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not

grow weary, walk and not grow faint” (Isaiah 40:31). Each of us is called to become like an eagle, endowed with strength but also with agility, characteristics of the Spirit.

We thank you for all the times you have saved us from danger, from deadly illnesses, from our enemies, from violence, from ourselves.

Grant that our brothers who are to be ordained might contribute to our life through the renewal they will bring to our community. This is the greatest usefulness their lives can have for us: to change us. Indeed, if our life is not renewed before such an objective testimony of grace, what can make us change?

Grant that we never allow ourselves to be discouraged by the labors, the fears, the opposition – and so to draw from you alone the strength to go through life, just as in the past you showed yourself to the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19:6-8). This is the way you have wanted to be among us permanently: as a sacramental sign of nourishment, of food, and thus of energy, continuity, communion.

We ask you for all this. We ask it of you, who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Near to Us, a Gift for Us

2002

Absolute Objectivity

Among the various ways by which Jesus wanted to fulfill his promise, “Lo, I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20), the Eucharist is certainly the most pure: the absolute objectivity of the presence. There is nothing to interpret, nothing to understand; one need only recognize, accept, receive, be immersed and transformed.

He First

Is there something you might suffer that he has not already suffered? He was innocent, you guilty; he immensely good, you evil; he God, you man; he, in infinite loneliness and the abandonment of those closest to him, even of the One to whom he had entrusted everything.

The Eucharist, even in its symbolism, brings together all of these mysteries.

How God Speaks to Us

Scripture and the Eucharist are two gifts left to us by Christ, by which he reaches us now. Through them, he is

contemporaneous with every person and every time. These two ways are profoundly different, almost to the point of seeming divergent: Scripture is entirely historical, requiring people of every time to pass through specific histories and cultures to arrive at Christ, whereas the Eucharist seems to do away with all this with its absence of words, its non-attachment to any specific culture. One understands the superficiality of this view when he reflects on the fact that the Eucharist speaks to the person in his own history, to his weakness, his fragility, his need to be transformed. In any case, both speak to us of Christ, introducing us to him so as to create a progressive identification of our life with his.

The Eucharist is the closest and most continual locus of his nearness to us. No locus is everything – only the Church is the complete sacrament – but certainly his unobtrusiveness under this form, his almost apologizing for being among us ... brings to light the abyss of God's condescension toward us, the incomparability of his love, and likewise our yearning need of him.

What is absolutely necessary must be absolutely simple: Here one needn't know how to read, or have studied. The One whom the highest heavens cannot contain has made himself food, a piece of bread for me.

The Eucharist is the university of Christianity, the school from which we can never exempt ourselves if we want to enter into the reality of Christ. Just as Scripture requires study and ultimately silence, so the Eucharist requires adoration and silence.

Return to the Center

In the heart of the earth is fire, in the center of the house is the Eucharist, which is also the center of the life of the person.

There is a path to adoration that departs from afar, from our distraction: as Augustine would say, from our being outside of ourselves, lost in things, alienated.⁸ “*Rede in teípsum*”, Augustine exhorts us.⁹ This should not be translated “return to yourself,” yet this is how most people today translate it in their lives. Rather, it means: “Return to that center from which you came.” The source of adoration is there. But this return, this road from being outside of ourselves to being in the center, is a very long one.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. Luke 15:11-32) teaches us all. The first step is the consideration of the events and faces which make up my life at the present moment. Then, to listen to the cry that issues from them, to take this cry within myself and to make it a prayer, to enter with my whole life into the history of God. Better, to recognize that, within this history, I am continually called. In this passage, in this “yes,” consists adoration.



“When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him....”
(Luke 24:30-31)

Detail of the risen Jesus breaking bread for the two disciples at Emmaus. Chapel of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, Rome, Italy. Image courtesy of Centro Aletti.

Supreme and Irresistible Gift 2002

Beyond Every Possible Recompense

The closer we draw to the Eucharist, the more we give way to increasing amazement. We are almost confused by a condescension, a humility that surpasses us in every way.

The Eucharist, in its defenselessness, is the maximum point of God's charity, the point at which, out of this amazed look, adoration springs to life in us.

Adoration arises as the only possible response on our part in the face of such an immense condescension, so impossible to measure against any act with which we might compare it.

An Astonishing Availability

If Jesus himself had not wanted it and the Church had not preserved it, I would have found the defenseless availability of the Eucharist, this absolute availability of God, difficult to believe possible. So much does it upset every human schema and idea.

Yet at the same time it is the *summa*, the apex of humanism, which is the total giving over of oneself to the other,

to God and to neighbor, not as an accommodation to human ideas, but rather as a constant desire to cling to the Mystery.

Christmas and Eucharist

The link between Christmas and the Eucharist is so obvious that there is no need to dwell on it here. A few comments will suffice.

Silence permeates both, and yet both are very eloquent; they always reveal new aspects of life to one who knows how to listen.

They represent a mystery of helplessness, as well as of infinite self-donation.

I am the Word made flesh, Jesus said: “The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:54).

Stronger than Death

We would be mistaken if, in trying to understand and imitate Jesus’ way of being present to humanity, we limited ourselves to looking at the Eucharist. The Eucharist is rather an always-present dimension of his presence among us. It is the dimension of “to the end,” of total availability to his own, of the forgiveness that covers every error and of the love that anticipates, not stopped or exhausted by anything.

“Strong as death is love,” says the Song of Songs (Song 8:6). In the Eucharist we understand that love is stronger than death.

Dialogue and Silence

A dialogue with you can take place anywhere and in many ways, but the dialogue that begins before the Eucharist has a character that distinguishes it absolutely from all human dialogues.

What is this characteristic? Above all, one of the dialogue partners does not speak with the sound of human words. Rather, he speaks by bringing forth words and experiences in the depths of the other.

The other listens. He also speaks, not out loud, because his partner has no need of sounds to grasp the words. There may be sounds, though, and they are welcome, if they correspond to the interior words.

The Voice

Silence is not a good in itself, but when it is the condition, the preparation for dialogue. Indeed, the great value of silence is that it can be indwelt, not by voices, but by the Voice.

The sign of a personal love without measure.

A Light Always Penetrates

Impurity besets our every action, even the highest and noblest, like adoration. In a certain way, this is inevitably linked to our mortal condition. And yet, even through the hardest crust, a light makes it through the dubiousness of our action. Something remains. And this something is the “remainder” from which everything begins again.

The Lessons of Adoration

2003

Jesus Thirsts for Us

Eucharistic adoration reminds us at every moment of our lives that Jesus thirsts for a relationship with us.

It is true, of course, that our love for Jesus can neither be predicted nor planned, but arises as our free response to the discovery of his love. It is also true, however, that Jesus needs this response. He thirsts for it, desires it and waits for it. This is why he decided to remain present in human history in such a singular way as the Eucharist.

These expressions might seem bold, but they aren't. Jesus' heart has the desires of a man because it is the heart of a man. His correspondence with our humanity is not a matter of indifference to him. Even in his glory he continues to thirst for a relationship with each of us, the same thirst which he once manifested to the Samaritan woman: "Give me something to drink" (John 4:7). He continues his earthly life with us in heaven, still thirsting that we rest upon him, as John did when he laid his head upon his breast (cf. John 13:25).

To enter into this mystery of Jesus' thirst for a relationship with us is something crucial for our life. Indeed, the

desire for a personal relationship with the beloved characterizes the experience of every love. The Gospels attest this on every page. Jesus' incarnation, his continual reaching out to man, his incessant seeking of the lost, not only reveal his compassion and his humbling of himself. More deeply, they indicate that the humanity of each person interests his divine humanity.

We think of Jesus' words to the apostles at the end of his earthly life: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you" (Luke 22:15); or, of his weeping before Lazarus's tomb (cf. John 11:35). If God is communion, his supreme suffering is man's failure to reciprocate this communion. Not only can man not live without God, but God doesn't want to live without man. He doesn't want to live without me; otherwise he would not have made me, would not have called me to life. This is why indifference toward love is a sign, not so much of ingratitude, but of superficiality and small-mindedness.

I find some reflections written by Joseph Ratzinger, then a cardinal, to be very close to my own: "To receive Christ means to go to him, to adore him. This is why the act of receiving can go beyond the eucharistic celebration, indeed it must. The more the Church grows in the eucharistic mystery, the more it understands that it cannot celebrate communion fully only in the circumscribed moments of the Mass."¹⁰ And again,

Communion and adoration are not realities that are one beside the other, or even one before the other. They are inseparably one thing. To receive communion in fact means to enter into communion.

To communicate with Christ means to have communion with him. For this reason communion and contemplation mutually imply each other: A person cannot communicate with another without knowing him. He must be open to him, listen to him, see him. Love or friendship always also involve the moment of fear, of adoration. To communicate with Christ demands, then, that one look upon him, that one allow himself to be looked upon by him, that one listen to him, that one know him. Adoration is simply the personal aspect of communication.¹¹

Everything Is for Us

Through adoration God teaches us the unity of life: He works good even through evil, perhaps even especially through evil.

At a certain point in our lives, an inevitable, crucial question imposes itself. St. Augustine summed it up like this: If God exists, what is the origin of evil?¹² Put otherwise, is the history of the world guided by two distinct, opposing forces, or just by one? Do good and evil share dominion over the world equally, or is there only one ruling principle? This is the essential question for man. The existence of evil is in fact obvious; it is urgent, therefore, to understand what it is, what it means vis-à-vis the good. The answer is that evil is the echo of the abyss. To arrive at this conclusion, however, we must follow a path not lacking in difficulties.

To this end, I want to recall a very enlightening exegesis by Cardinal Ratzinger of the biblical passage of the sacrifice

of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). In a certain sense, the event expresses the height of scandal, the most profound contradiction in all of human history: God asks for the destruction of the youth with whom he has identified the beginning of his inheritance and of his permanent presence in the world. Ratzinger writes:

Since [Abraham] knew ... God, even in the night of incomprehension he knew that God is a God who loves. This is why, even there, when there was nothing left to understand, Abraham could rely on God and know that the very one who seemed to be threatening him was in fact the one who truly loves.... The more we descend into the night of the incomprehensible mystery and entrust ourselves to him, the more we find him, we find the love and the freedom which sustain us through every night.”¹³

When Isaac asks his father who will provide the animal for the sacrifice, Abraham replies, “God himself will provide” (Genesis 22:8). Ratzinger comments very pointedly on these words: They show the form of Abraham’s faith, that is, his certainty that God would remain faithful to his promise of life.

The philosopher Søren Kierkegaard rightly identifies in this biblical episode the deepest essence of faith, dedicating an entire work to it.¹⁴ There is nothing like it in the whole history of salvation, except for Jesus’ cry on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Mark 15:34). This cry makes it clear that the moment of the Son’s greatest nearness to the Father was also that of his greatest distance from him.

Meditating on these texts, one begins to understand what faith is: to accept being guided by God toward a land we don't know, toward a land that is always new. Availability to God is something serious, even dramatic. God asks this availability insistently and, if someone offers it to him, he accepts it completely. He knows how to console, to comfort, to help and to repay, but he accepts completely the availability offered to him and wants it to be total. Jesus' availability was this way: He loved us to the end (cf. John 13:1). The episode in the Gospel of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44) has always struck me. Placed right before the account of the Passion, it is like a great entryway that brings us before the total gift that Jesus made of himself, "to the end." Jesus gave his whole self for us, agreeing to follow the Father to the extremity to which he led him.

One who truly wants to be a teacher must help others to say a total "yes" to God. Everyone will say this as best he can, with his own human weakness, with much hesitation, even a thousand second thoughts; but all of us are asked to be docile to God's will. This is asked of us as the road to our happiness.

The question of the nature of evil is resolved with the affirmation of the existence of a single principle which comprehends all others – the alternative would be nihilism. Evil does not exist except in relation to the good. Death is not the contradiction, but the explanation of life.

Is It You Who Look at Me, or I at You?

2003

A New Landscape

“In the simplicity of my heart I have offered you my whole self.” ¹⁵ I am yours.

Relating our life to God, wholly, gratefully, loved as the greatest good; belonging to him, being his servants, his slaves, his friends (different forms of the same relationship) – what a wonderful road, landscape, horizon and adventure this opens before our eyes! It truly makes it possible to bear the burdens, the weariness, the trials that inevitably accompany, and will continue to accompany, this sacrifice.

We know well that no sacrifice is without blood. You, O Lord, teach us this every day, right here in the Eucharist: “Take and eat, this is my body”; “Drink, this is my blood” (Matthew 26:26-28). This blood is a blood that leads to life, that transforms into life, that makes us cling to life. Blood of regeneration, blood of purification, blood of salvation, and, finally, blood that gives us joy.

The Factor which Brings Change

I would that all of our houses learn the good that could come to their life from a weekly hour of eucharistic adoration together.

I am mindful of your kind gift to me of a monstrance. I have not had a particular hour for adoration in my chapel; I have done so when I can, but it has certainly been the most decisive factor in the change in my life during this year. Not just because I constantly brought there all that I felt I needed to bring, but because from there, almost by an interior suggestion, have come to my mind the words which I have then said to you during the year.

Knowledge of Jesus has been suggested to me there, in eucharistic adoration. The compassion of Jesus has been suggested to me there, in eucharistic adoration. Not as words extrinsic to that presence, but as the extension of that event.

Eucharistic adoration is really a school. Little by little, almost without our noticing it, we find reflections, thoughts, observations and perspectives within ourselves, which flow into us from eucharistic adoration.

An Exchange of Glances

I have tried to fill page after page with thoughts that came to me during adoration. This thought struck me, for example. It seems as though Jesus said to me: "Is it you who look at me, or is it I who look at you?" The Eucharist is both of these movements. Certainly he first looks at us – a

movement whose source is the infinitude of the Mystery, but which becomes a face.

The Mystery has taken on a face, even to the point of becoming an object familiar to us, a piece of bread. And yet, in his becoming something familiar to us, nothing is lost of his infinite depth, his extraordinary mysteriousness, his inexhaustibility with respect to any human conception, any attempt at definition. A gaze that arises from the depths of life and comes face to face with our existence, like the last wave which, from the depths of the sea, arrives on the shore to deposit its gift of seashells and little creatures.

The Eucharist is like the last, visible emergence from an abyss. We would wear ourselves out trying to understand it. It is first a “You” who comes to indwell our “I,” even before it is our “I” indwelling its “You.” It is a “You” who comes to indwell our “I” because, if our “I” were not made capable by that “You” of looking upon the infinite, we would be lost.

Only in this way does adoration also become my looking upon him. It is really a meeting of glances, the most mysterious meeting of glances in the whole history of lovers. The deepest, the most provocative, a meeting capable of bringing about the most decisive changes.

The Peace of One Who Abandons Himself to You

I would desire that everyone learn at least this from eucharistic adoration: the beauty and peace that come from abandonment into God’s hands. We should never let

the whirlwind of life spread into our hours of adoration so as to bury them.

The Eucharist brings to us the depths of a terrible, apocalyptic, cosmic struggle between the devil, demons, God, his Son and human beings. And yet, even though this battle which shook humanity has been fought and won, even if here and there consequences and traces of the battle remain on him who fought it, the Eucharist speaks to us of the peace that comes to those who follow the Lamb.

To learn this profound participation in life of the person who rejects indifference and despair; to learn the humanity of Christ, never indifferent, never hopeless: This is not a Stoic just mean between two extremes. It is the whole attitude of Jesus' divine humanity, which is taught, presented, offered and finally promised to us in the Eucharist.

You Are Here for Me

2003

Jesus Desires to Be with Me

Jesus needs to be with me. He is *thirsty* for a *personal* relationship with each of us. This is something I have not thought much about, except in passing. In fact, it is plainly part of the very experience of love, and is clearly expressed in the Gospel.

Truly, he has first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:19). He humbled himself unto death, death on a cross, because he is thirsty for you. He is thirsty that you would love him in return, that you would respond to his love.

You, O Jesus, have come in search of me because you hunger and thirst for me, because you cannot live without me.

Coming Home

“To come home” now means to return here, before the Eucharist. This is the center of the house, which then extends to a hundred faces, a thousand moments, the many memorable events. It becomes spontaneous to bring one’s weariness and trials here.

At this moment I have within me such weariness and so many trials, which come from those who should be closest to me. With these trials come many consolations. But the work of learning never ends and is not limited to any particular time.

Yesterday, for example, I was outside the gate of my house in Milan. A woman said to me, “Your mother, I see her cheer up while she waits.” Then she added, “After waiting for you for nine months, we mothers wait for you always.” As though she were awaiting the return of her son, my grade-school companion who committed suicide. Here, before the Eucharist, one learns that everything is a school in which God not only reveals himself but also gives himself.

To Be Near Jesus

How stiff is my resistance, but especially my incomprehension, in the face of your love! Incomprehension, above all, because the sufferings you send me to bring me closer to you, I consider as something that separates me from you.

These sufferings don’t have to be desired. But once they arrive, they must be loved.

It is not suffering that explains love; rather, love explains suffering. Jesus’ love for us allows us to enter into the reality of the suffering he accepted on Good Friday.

To accompany Jesus beneath the cross – to say on the cross would be folly and unspeakable pride. Is this not the secret of understanding the deep, humble desire of the shepherd children of Fatima to suffer and to be with Jesus? Is this not the message of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: The one vocation is love?¹⁶

And so, only after decades of meditation and prayer does one arrive at the conclusion that those children grasped immediately, by a gift of the Spirit.

To be near Jesus in the Eucharist is the fundamental way of accepting the way he becomes near to us, always and everywhere, in the Eucharist.

Strength to Live

I come here not to flee from the responsibilities you have entrusted to me but to find the strength to live them.

And yet this is not enough. It is not enough to live our responsibilities. We must live them without being diminished by them, and indeed even be enriched by them. In order that our daily experience not distance us from God, but bring us nearer to him, it must be lived in faith. It must be the response we give to God who calls us, who loves us precisely through what he causes to happen in us and around us.

“The mighty God,” says the Eastern liturgy.¹⁷ The Spirit is the strength of God, the strength of the Most High, God as he becomes strength in life.

To Immerse Oneself in You

To look upon, or to be looked upon? In Eucharistic adoration, which is more important?

Ultimately, the two movements are the same, since to look upon is to immerse oneself in the concrete infinitude before us, just as to be looked upon is to enter into a relationship with a “You” that is both personal and inexhaustible.

Encounter

I am happy that my day begins with adoration.

Adoration arises from a recognition of the mysteriousness of life, as an inability not only to dominate it, but even to understand it. Adoration develops as the discovery of a personal “You,” transcendent and reasonable, so reasonable as to deserve our attention and ultimately our obedience.

We discover a “You” who governs history and our personal events without extinguishing human freedom. Finally, adoration ends as a revelation, that – without taking anything from the mysteriousness of his presence – this “You” is the presence of a friend, even a loving presence. The discovery of love as the secret that guides the world, and therefore as the ultimate and deepest motive for adoration, is the discovery of an abyss in which one would be lost without a guide.

The Foundation of the Day

Adoration is above all an encounter of the creature with his Lord, of the sinner with his Savior, of friend with friend, of lover with beloved.

Adoration is an experience, the experience that underlies the whole day, whose content guides the whole day.

Beginning

It is not the dialogue that we will have in Paradise, “with unveiled face” (2 Corinthians 3:18), but the beginning of it.

Jesus of Nazareth

You are here. You, the same Jesus who walked in Judea and Galilee, the same Jesus of the apostles, of the Ascension, the same Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father, Jesus of Zaccheus, of the Magdalene, Jesus born of Mary....

You are here for me, in the total availability of the Eucharist.

Source of Life and Mission

2003

Light on Our Whole Life

The Eucharist is a reality so great, immense and immeasurable that we can receive light on it from many points of view, just as it sheds light on our life from many points of view.

It is the source of the Church community and of its mission, and the source of the life of the person and of his mission.

Jesus' Pasch Made Present to Us

Jesus did not limit himself to dying for us. In dying, he gave himself for us, for each person. Desiring that his gift of self on the cross be accessible to and drawn upon by every person, he wanted to leave us the means of participating in this event “as though we had been present,” to use John Paul II’s happy expression.¹⁸

The Eucharist, therefore, makes it possible for our personal history to participate in Jesus’ Pasch, that is, to participate in the gift that Jesus makes of himself to the Father and thus to all people. At the same time, to participate in the Father’s response to the gift of the

immortal life of the Risen One. In the Eucharist, this exchange of gifts between Father and Son becomes contemporaneous with every moment of human history. The death and resurrection of Jesus is re-presented to us so that each of us might live it: that we might die with him, so as to rise with him.

The Eucharist is not a simple recalling of the death and resurrection of Jesus but a memorial, a presence of that event to the moment we are now living.

Presence of the Risen One

It is because of his Resurrection that Jesus can give himself to us as bread of life and chalice of salvation in the Eucharist. This is signified at the moment in which the priest, having broken the bread, puts one part, the “*fermentum*”, in the chalice of wine. The body and blood are reunited: The body of Christ returns to life again.

It is therefore the risen Jesus who comes to us in the Eucharist.

Food and Drink

In the Eucharist Jesus makes himself present as food and drink, offering himself as a banquet prepared for us.

Pledge of Glory

The Eucharist assures us of the resurrection of the body. The flesh of the Son of Man is his glorified body. Receiving the glorified body of Christ, our body receives the anticipation of glory and the certainty of its final glorification.

The Eucharist Builds Up the Church

How does the Eucharist build up the Church? Above all, by bringing about the indwelling of Christ in our life. Through participation in the eucharistic sacrifice, the incorporation into Christ realized in baptism reaches its maturity.

The indwelling of Christ in us makes us partakers of his one body. The work of man without God, the work of sin, is disintegration. Unity is the work proper to God.

Communion with Christ, which is realized in its highest form through participation in the eucharistic banquet, continues and is nourished in eucharistic adoration, which arises from the eucharistic sacrifice and tends toward it. Eucharistic adoration – as John Paul II wrote – is a leaning back on Jesus’ breast, a “being touched by the infinite love of his heart.”¹⁹

The Church’s Mission

In the light of the Eucharist one understands what is properly the Church’s mission, that is, the way in which she is to walk: She gathers up the whole life of humanity in the life of Jesus, so that the lives of all people, with their greatness and their smallness, their discoveries and their fragility, might return to the Father through the consecration, as part of the body of Christ.

In this way the Eucharist realizes Jesus’ promise: “I am with you all days, even until the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus’ being with us is not passivity, not simply a presence among us, but a presence that attracts,

redeems, gathers, presents to the Father, transforms and sanctifies.

In the Eucharist Christ is present, giving his life to human beings through the gift of the Spirit.

Before the Eucharistic Gift

The gift of the Eucharist elicits our wonder. It is an event that touches us, moves us, sets us in motion. It moves us and therefore sets us in motion.

It is not just the Christian who is amazed before the act of self-gift that Christ once lived and now lives in every moment of human history. Above all the priest, the minister of the Eucharist, is amazed. Again John Paul II writes,

It is he who, by the authority given him in the sacrament of priestly ordination, effects the consecration. It is he who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: ‘This is my body which will be given up for you... This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...’. The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room, and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church share ministerially in his priesthood.²⁰

The Eucharist and the Ordained Priesthood

Ordained priests, like the apostles, are men chosen and sent to perform the eucharistic sacrifice “*in persona Christi*” (“in the person of Christ”), offering it to God on behalf of the whole people.

There is no Eucharist without the ordained priesthood. The priesthood began at the moment when the Eucharist was instituted, for its celebration.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of the priestly life and ministry: as its source, as the spiritual energy which allows him to face the various tasks of the ministry, and as the most effective antidote to activism, one of the worst temptations to beset our days. In this light, Vatican Council II recommends the daily celebration of the Eucharist to every priest, for the good of his spiritual life as well as for the good of the Church and the world.²¹

The Heart of the Word in a Piece of Bread 2004

A Heart Only Apparently Silent

What is the relationship between the Eucharist and silence? To me it seems obvious: Apparently, the Eucharist does not speak. The Eucharist teaches us that the heart of the world is a Presence, before which we must listen. A real Presence, but invisible to most people. For most people, that small piece bread says nothing.

The heart of the world is therefore something trivial: a piece of bread. The heart of the world is a triviality pregnant with Mystery, and which reveals the Mystery. If we listen, or if we watch – not just with the eyes of the body, although it begins with that – the Eucharist becomes a great school, the greatest school of the Mystery possible.

Virginity

What is the relationship between the Eucharist and virginity? An extremely close one. After all, what is the Eucharist? A piece of bread completely related to another, to Christ's body: It is Christ's body under the appearance of a piece of bread.

The reality of that piece of bread is related entirely to its being the body of Christ.

And what is virginity? It is the relation of our being to Christ's body.

An Expression of Communion

What does the Eucharist teach me at this moment? That the Eucharist is the basis of the truth of my action.

Why? In what does the truth of my action consist?

The Eucharist is the basis of the truth of action because it inserts my action into the unity of the Church, as the source of the action.

The Eucharist imposes on life that distance which allows action to be an expression of communion and not of the individual's will to affirm himself. True action is an expression of communion.

What often strikes me negatively in our dioceses in the Church today, is that everyone does what he likes, even with the best of intentions. But this is not Christianity! Christianity is my action as an expression of communion.

If everyone does as he likes, the criterion of action becomes simply self-affirmation. And then actions separate us, all that we do distances us from one another.

Why I Come Here

Am I here with You, or am I really just alone with my thoughts, and you are a pretext, an excuse? A terrible hypothesis and a terrible misunderstanding, but a necessary question, surely suggested by the Spirit. Must I pass "by way of my thoughts" to reach you?

I come here to you because you are Reality and Truth. I come here to learn what is true and what is real, I come here to learn the judgment on the things that happen to me and what I must do.

This *being next to you* continually recalls my thoughts, which run in every direction.

It must be clear to me *the reason* why I come here, before you: to be with you, to remain with you. All the rest can spring from this.

To be here with you because you are *in* the problems that I live, the responses I must give.

The Defenseless Availability of the Eucharist

2005

Defenselessness is once again what strikes me about the Eucharist. The most holy thing of all, which should be the most highly protected, or even unapproachable, presents itself to us as utterly defenseless and available.

Perhaps the simplicity of my chapel suggests this to me, my being alone before the Most Holy Eucharist exposed in the monstrance.

The Eucharist teaches us of God's availability, of his love for us to the end, beyond any possible human imagination and consideration.

Sources

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- 4 Vatican Council II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* [On the Ministry and Life of Priests], 5.
- 5 Luigi Giussani, *Rito perenne*, Homily for Holy Thursday, March 31, 1988, typescript, Archive of Communion and Liberation.
- 6 Giovanni Battista Montini, “Una legge sublime d’amore,” Homily at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on the afternoon of Holy Thursday, March 26, 1959, in *Discorsi e scritti milanesi (1954-1963)* (Rome – Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI – Studium 1997), vol. 2, 2704.
- 7 Cf. St. Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* I, 2, 3.
- 8 Cf. *id.*, *Confessions*, X, 27, 38.
- 9 *Id.*, *De vera religione*, 39, 72.
- 10 Joseph Ratzinger, *Il Dio vicino: l’eucaristia, cuore della vita cristiana*, Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2003, 92.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 100.
- 12 Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 5, 7.
- 13 Joseph Ratzinger, *Il Dio vicino...*, 44.
- 14 Sören Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986).
- 15 Offertory for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus according to the Ambrosian Rite. Cf. 1 Corinthians 29:17-18.

- 16 Cf. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, *Manuscript B*, in *Story of a Soul: the Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, 2nd ed., (Washington: ICS Publications, 1976), 194.
- 17 For example, in the Byzantine hymn *Trisághion*: “Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us..” Cf. O. Raquez (ed.), *Guida alla celebrazione dell’ufficio divino nelle chiese di tradizione bizantina*, (Rome: Lipa, 2002), 17.
- 18 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* [On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church], 11.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 21 Vatican Council II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13.

About the Author

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