

EUCCHARISTIC LOVE

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Since the beginning of creation, when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit and doubted the love and intentions of the Father, the Lord has been trying to reveal to us the profound love He has for His creatures. Despite sin, despite rejection, He continues to patiently pour forth His abundant love on us with the hope that one day all men will turn to Him and be saved (1Tim 2:4). Since the first sin of our parents, He has manifested this all-enduring, unceasing love in the form of mercy. He will continue to seek us and pursue us until we take our last breath, ever changing us, ever conforming us to His image in which we were made. He will not cease until all aspects of our lives, hearts, and minds are fully converted to Him, where we will then find perfect fulfillment and happiness.



When we are fully conformed to His image, we are then in full communion with Him; this conformity is His will and desire for us, and it is also what brings Him joy. Not only does it bring Him joy, but communion with Him, *through and united with His Son*, is the only thing that truly satisfies the love and fatherhood of God that man has been rejecting since the beginning of time.¹ Throughout history, He has gradually manifested His love and mercy, slowly guiding man back to the true image of Himself and His love. He fully and perfectly revealed it when He "gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (Jn 3:16). In this act He gave *everything* He had to give in order to reveal His love for us. He does not cease to do the same today. So that all men may be saved² and come to worship Him, He continues to reveal His love by remaining fully with us, soul and divinity, in the form of the Eucharist. In fact, the Eucharist is "the culmination of both God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit."³ Because the Eucharist is the full revelation of God's love for humanity and contains the "whole spiritual good of the Church,"⁴ it is definitively the "source and summit"⁵ of our life and faith.

The first way the Eucharist reveals God's love for humanity is by revealing to men the heart of the Trinity. In fact, the life of the Trinity not only reveals the heart of God, but also who we are and who we are called to be. In the Trinity, the Father pours out His love to the Son, and the Son, in turn, offers Himself back as a gift through His obedience and death on the Cross.⁶ The fruit and outpouring of the love between the Father and the Son gives birth to the Holy Spirit, Who is the manifestation of the love between Father and Son.⁷ The Eucharist is the summit of this love, where we can visibly and interiorly see "the sacrifice of the Son offered to the Father for the purpose of receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."⁸ Since we are created in the image and likeness of God, we in turn, are called to live our lives as a gift to God and one another.

The revelation of Trinitarian love in the Eucharist will allow us to perceive our vocation, which is a commitment our "whole self freely to God," where we offer Him our intellect and will⁹ and make a gift of self back to the Creator who has already made Himself gift for us.¹⁰ The self-gift to which we are called mimics the love between the Persons of the Trinity. Through the Incarnation, we have been united to Christ by His humanity, which in turn, intrinsically unites us with Christ's vocation of offering Himself as a sacrifice to the Father for the salvation of men. Our vocation is "divine and one."¹¹ In the Eucharist, we unite ourselves with Christ and His mission. The Eucharist is the summit of sacrifice and offering in that Jesus fulfills the will of the Father each time He offers Himself as a gift for us to be consumed. We also are invited to give this same 'free gift of self' back to God in union with Christ.

Jesus offers Himself as a gift to the Father *for the salvation of men*, revealing both His love for the Father *and men*. In the Eucharist, Jesus offers Himself to men, in order that we may attain the communion for which we were created. The Eucharist, united to the Cross, is the perfect and actual manifestation of God's offering of self for love of men. We also are called, because we are united in the mission of Christ through the Eucharist, to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to mankind. In fact man "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."¹² In offering the gift of ourselves, we become fully human and hence, holy and perfect, which allows us to enjoy full communion with God, the end for which we were created.

As well, by calling us to share and participate in the work of redemption with Him, he further reveals our dignity and His love for us. As discussed by John Paul II, redemption is twofold: it is both an invitation and

gift from the Father and man's acceptance of the gift.¹³ In His extension of the gift, God remains "faithful to himself"¹⁴ by loving man, and man's dignity is *revealed* when he realizes he is the subject of such an invitation. His dignity is *realized* when he chooses to accept the gift of being loved and being united in the mission of salvation. For even in the midst of our weakness and ineptitude, God trusts us with the work of sanctifying men. He, in allowing man to redeem man, actually allows us to fulfill our vocation of giving ourselves as a free gift to others, thereby revealing our supreme dignity of being created in His image.¹⁵ Through the grace He imparts in the Eucharist, we are able to accomplish this otherwise impossible task. The grace we receive also allows us to see that we do not save ourselves and it is only through the grace of God that we are able to receive *and* accomplish our vocation. Even though we are neither the initial cause of our salvation or the power that carries it out, God wishes for us to freely cooperate and participate with Him in the work. In the Eucharist, we do just that by freely laying down ourselves as a gift to God and man. In this way, the Eucharist brings us full circle. Because it is a Sacrament, it actually imparts the grace we need in order to realize our vocation of communion with God and man, and it actually *is* communion with God, and therefore man united in the Body of Christ, which is the end for which we were made.

Unfortunately for us, it is quite evident that we have not realized full communion with God in our lives here on earth. Because of sin, we have broken apart our relationship with our Creator. Sin can be defined as disobedience rooted in doubt about God's love.¹⁶ When we doubt that God is the only answer for our happiness and fulfillment, we choose lesser goods over the Greatest Good in our false quest for happiness. Consequently, we become attached to the creation instead of the Creator (Rom 1:23). Thus, in order to restore the communion we seek and to find the Good we have lost, conversion is necessary. We must root out the doubt and false perceptions we have about God and His love through the process of conversion. Conversion is the process in which man comes to realize his sins, suffers from interior, heartfelt repentance, and as a result, turns away from disobedience with full desire and intention to change his life.¹⁷ In conversion, man comes to recognize the love of God and his own turning away from it, and when he recognizes that love again, he responds by turning back toward communion with his Creator.

God is love,¹⁸ and in our broken state, He manifests His love as mercy, which is His unending willingness to restore the bond we broke through sin. He refuses to let our sin and doubt have the last word; therefore, He gives a new and full demonstration of a love that has no greater (Jn 15:13). The source of conversion is the recognition of God's unending love for us, and it is in the Eucharist where we find its greatest manifestation. If man does not experience conversion, it is because he is not able to recognize the true nature of God; the image of God is distorted in his mind. For instead of seeing a loving God, always ready to take us back, man sees only a judge, ready to condemn and destroy. This is the lie fed to us by the father of lies. What greater source of restoring this image in our minds than seeing a God who is willing to humbly hide Himself in a piece of bread simply to be with us? Upon receiving and meditating on the Eucharist, man is able to see the profound love present in it. Because it is the perfect revelation of God's love for man, there exists no greater source of conversion than the Eucharist. In it we see a God willing to do anything to be with us and repair a bond He so deeply wishes to restore. In it we are able to see His profound love expressed through mercy. Through it we receive the understanding and grace to lose the fear that is cast out by perfect love (1 Jn 4:18), and we are able to return to Him with all our heart, mind and soul (Mt 22:37). The image in our mind of a judgmental and condemning God from whom we must run cannot but die when confronted with the profound love present in the Eucharist.

However, in order to be healed with love by the divine Physician, we must first believe in Him and His ability to heal; we must have faith. The greater our faith becomes, the greater our understanding of our Lord becomes. Paradoxically, the Eucharist, in all its scandal and misunderstanding, *best* leads us toward greater faith in Christ.

In natural knowledge, we come to understand objects and concepts by their effects.¹⁹ The effect leads us back to the cause. In the Sacraments, namely the Eucharist, it is the opposite. It requires an act of faith in the cause to understand the effects. We can only know God by first believing in Him. Through our faith, we are then enlightened further about Him. An act of faith, our free gift of intellect and will, brings great glory to God, in that His people are "so convinced of His wisdom, power and love, that they trust Him for the existence of realities they cannot verify apart from trusting in Him."²⁰ "The glory of God consists in the realization of this manifestation and communion of his goodness."²¹ Hence, the greater the act of faith, the greater glory given to God. As well, the greater the act of faith, the deeper and more penetrating is the knowledge of the cause. In this way, the Eucharist, being the greatest act of faith, brings the greatest glory to God and the deepest knowledge of God Himself. It is the summit of our faith. For what greater act of

faith exists than to see a piece of bread and believe that your God and Father is present in it? "St. Thomas points out that on the Cross the divinity of Christ was hidden, but on the altar and in the Eucharist even his sacred humanity is veiled from our eyes. It is truly a sacrament of faith."²²

Peter in the Gospel of John is one of the first to exemplify profound faith in our Lord in the Eucharist. After feeding the thousands with a few loaves, the crowd sought to make Jesus king. Jesus then proceeded to deliver the famous Bread of Life discourse in which He pointed the people to an everlasting food, his flesh and blood, which would bring them to eternal life.²³ Many who had been following Him left after this difficult teaching (Jn 6:66). Jesus then turned to the Twelve, and with tenderness and vulnerability, asked them, "Will you also go away?" He understood that His teachings required a profound act of faith in order to believe. What he preached was scandal. At that point, Peter delivered perhaps one of the most beautiful lines of the entire Gospel: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life..." (Jn 6:68). Peter did not understand the profound mystery Jesus had just revealed. He had absolutely no idea how one was to eat the flesh and blood of the Christ and be saved. He knew only one thing: Jesus had the words of eternal life. Here is one of the most beautiful acts of faith in the Gospels. Peter did not wait for proof, for evidence, for explanation. With *only* faith, he puts His trust in a God who can be trusted. Even though he does not see, he believes. He trusted in the *source* before he understood the mystery. May we all accept the grace to believe with Peter in the profound Mystery always before us. When confronted with the scandal and difficulty of the Eucharist, may we humbly bow down with Peter, and exclaim, "Lord I do not understand, I do not fully comprehend, but 'to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life.'" Oh, the glory and knowledge that will pour forth abundantly from this simple, yet profound act of faith!

The profound faith needed to approach Jesus in the Eucharist is seen even more profoundly in our Blessed Mother Mary. When approached by the angel Gabriel, she did not fully understand the mystery that was to be revealed in her Son. But she did know her God was a God to be trusted, and it is this *trust* that inspired her Fiat, not *understanding* of what was to come. When we demand to see power and glory before we believe, we transport ourselves back to the crucifixion as a Pharisee shouting at Jesus on the Cross to come down and 'prove' His divinity. We fail to see that the greatest "proof" of His love is his willingness *not* to show His full glory; it is in His humility.

At the same time that Peter and Mary uttered their profound acts of faith, they demonstrated along with them profound humility. In fact, humility is the prerequisite for belief in the Eucharist. Humility is rooted in self-knowledge and our relationship to God; it recognizes that we are frail and dependent creatures and anything good we have received is from the Creator.²⁴ Like Peter and Mary, we cannot approach the Eucharist looking for evidence of existence before we believe. We must instead approach our God humbly, knowing that He has all the answers, becoming as a child in His arms. We jump into His arms to receive the answers; we do not wait for the answers before we jump into His arms. At the Annunciation Mary is "troubled" at the approach of Gabriel and his pronouncement of "Hail, full of grace" (Lk 1:28-29). She is so deeply humble that she recognizes her unworthiness in the approach of God's angel, so much that it 'troubles' her. If Mary, woman born without sin and Mother of our Lord, can recognize her utter unworthiness in the presence of an *angel*, how much more should we when before the presence of our *Lord* in the Eucharist? Let our Blessed Mother be a model of humility to us as we utter the Eucharistic prayer, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed."

Even more profound than the humility of our Blessed Mother is the humility of our Lord hidden in the Eucharist. This deep humility is another truly profound aspect of the overwhelming love He has for His creatures. In order that His creatures can approach Him and be with Him, he disguises Himself in a piece of bread, knowing that the full revelation of His glory could not be handled by all on a consistent basis. His humility and hiddenness allow us to have the bold confidence to approach a God who is willing to become little in order to be with us. The Eucharist is, in fact, the ultimate revelation and act of humility. It is to this humility that we are called. Christ exhorts us in the Blessed Sacrament to imitate him. If He came in His full glory as He did in the Transfiguration, we, in our lack of understanding, would be tempted to mimic Him and His full glory as did Peter when he requested that they stay there on the mountain (Mt 17:4). But instead, he calls us to lower ourselves, to serve others, to give ourselves as a gift to the world, through nothingness, hiddenness and rejection. He calls us to live our lives in the valley below where we toil, suffer and die a violent death to ourselves each and every day, for we must *first* come to understand that it is only through service and gift that we can eventually be glorified (Rom 8:17).

Within His humility is also hidden His obedience. Most evident is His obedience to the Father, in which He

continually remains with us at the Father's request. Even more striking though is His obedience to humanity. At any time, in any place, despite the sinfulness or intentions of the person, Christ will humbly obey the words of consecration and come down to the altar, manifesting His full self to us. What an incredible example and lesson on how to live our vocation. We also are called to serve the world in humble obedience to the Father *and* to man, *despite* the apparent unworthiness of those who demand it. These moments serve to manifest God's will for us at that time, and they give us an opportunity to mimic Christ's obedience in doing the will of the Father, despite the suffering that the rejection of man brings about in our hearts and lives. We obey for the sake of love.

Last, and most importantly because it directly guides us to conversion, the profound humility in the Eucharist roots out its adversary in us - pride. Since pride, the root of all sin, is the "inordinate desire for one's own excellence,"²⁵ it must be combated by its opposite, which is humility, the desire for the manifestation of God's excellence. When confronted with the ultimate source of humility, the Eucharist, it is impossible to open our hearts to Him and not be simultaneously confronted with our own immense pride. Through the Eucharist, we are able to recognize the source of sin in our life, and we are led to sorrow by it. This sorrow at the offense given to our Savior leads to conversion, the end that we seek, in that it leads to further communion with God. The humility of Christ guides us back to Him, to restore the lost relationship. Here, we are able to see a profound revelation. God does not gain our love back by laws and fear of punishment. Instead, He lowers Himself to barely recognizable to win our love. We are called to the same: the only way to love God and others is in a spirit of humility. Rooting out pride in our lives and undergoing conversion is a difficult process, "a laborious effort of conscience"²⁶ that involves much suffering, which leads us to the summit of our spirituality and the Eucharist- suffering for the sake of love.

Because sin involves the absence of good, when we sin and do not possess the full good we are meant to have, we suffer. When we form attachments to things other than God, it is necessary to break them, and we suffer from the pulling away. Fortunately, the reattachment to the Creator, if we allow it to happen, brings much joy and repairs the suffering experienced. God experiences this same suffering when His creatures reject Him and choose lesser goods. Since the Mass, and primarily the Eucharist, is "the same sacrifice as that of Christ on the Cross," the Eucharist is the continual manifestation of the suffering of rejected love that is God's. When we experience conversion and take part in the suffering over sin, we also share in Christ's sufferings.²⁷ This is the suffering to which we are called, and it is most patiently taught and exemplified through Christ in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, we again see Christ being crucified and rejected over and over each day. Like those who could not look past His humanity and see God, we also decide to crucify Him when we do not choose the eyes of faith to look past the mere ordinary appearance of bread to see the Eternal Word hidden in it for the sake of love. He continually sits each day alone in the Tabernacle, in almost empty Adoration rooms, patiently waiting, wanting us to visit and adore Him. He puts Himself ever at our disposal, only to be left and abandoned most of the time. He experiences the same rejection in the Eucharist that He experienced during His life on earth and death on the Cross. In fact, the pain of rejected love experienced in the Eucharist *is* that of the Cross. But again, He willingly takes on this pain, over and over each day, in Churches all around the world, in order that all men may have every opportunity to come to knowledge of the Truth. In His obedience, suffering and hiddenness, He gives us the perfect example of how we are to respond in our own lives to our vocation of service to God and man.

We, in our vocation to serve God and man, are called to die to ourselves in obedience and humility. When we take part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we not only offer up the "divine victim to God," but we "offer [ourselves] along with It."²⁸ Seeing Christ willingly take the form of bread for the sake of love forces us to die in obedience and faith to our preconceived notions about who God is. In this willing self-death, we offer up ourselves freely, uniting ourselves with the one Eternal Sacrifice. We see that to love means to die to every selfish desire inside us. We see that to love means willingness to take on persecution and rejection from the very people we are trying to save and love. In the Eucharist, we cannot help but be confronted with the question, "Do I love in this way?" We cannot help but be met with the profound love that is there. When continually exposed to His willingness to suffer for the sake of love, we cannot help but respond by a free gift of self back to our Creator and therefore, man.

Finally, we can see that in every aspect of the faith, the Eucharist is the source and summit of it. It is the source in that it actually imparts grace to the people of God and at the same time "most effectively disposes the faithful to *receive* this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God fully and practice charity."²⁹ Presently

we have only partial communion with God, and the Eucharist, being actually Christ Himself, provides the grace to achieve the full union for which we were created. It is the summit in that it is total perfection of the manifestation of God's love for mankind. When we receive the Eucharist in us, we are actually receiving the end - communion with God. The grace we receive is God's love which we seek, making the grace itself the actual end. The Eucharist then is both the means and end. In the Eucharist "grace is poured forth upon us, and the sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God, to which all other activities of the Church are directed as toward their end, is achieved in the most efficacious way possible."³⁰ By directly consuming the Body and Blood of our Lord, we actually *become* holy; we eat and are transformed. We receive Love in order find the fullness of Love. Love becomes a pathway for Love. Glory to Love Who loves with such power! Glory to God who loves us!

¹ RH 9

² 1 Tim 2:4, LG 16,13

³ Congregation of Rites, instruction, *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 6, as quoted in the CCC 1325.

⁴ PO 5, as quoted in CCC 1324

⁵ LG 11

⁶ CCC 606

⁷ CCC 246

⁸ Bushman, Douglas, Course notes, *Foundations of Catholic Spirituality*, 150

⁹ DV 5

¹⁰ GS 24

¹¹GS 22

¹² GS 24

¹³ RH 9

¹⁴ 1 Thess 5:24, as quoted by John Paul II in RH, 9.

¹⁵ RH 10

¹⁶ DeV 37-38

¹⁷ Bushman, Douglas, Course notes, *Foundations of Catholic Spirituality*, 54

¹⁸1 Jn 4:16

¹⁹ Bushman, Douglas, Course notes, *Foundations of Catholic Spirituality*, 139

²⁰ Bushman, Douglas, Course notes, *Foundations of Catholic Spirituality*, 140

²¹ CCC, 294

²² Aumann, Jordan. *Spiritual Theology*, chapter 9

²³ John 6

²⁴ Aumann, Jordan and Royo, Antonio. *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, 490-491

²⁵ St. Thomas, *Summa*, As quoted in *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, 490-491

²⁶ DeV 45

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ LG 11

²⁹ SC 59

³⁰ SC 10

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