

## THE EUCHARIST: FOUNTAIN OF HOLINESS

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Foundress

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### The New Saints

"Do not be afraid of being the saints of the New Millennium" was one of the greatest exhortations of the Holy Father to the Church throughout the Jubilee Year. In this loving cry, the Pope gives us an invitation that manifests both the hope that today's Church places in its sons and daughters, and its vision for the future. In this "do not be afraid," he has called us to assume - with determination, courage and joy - the challenge to live the universal vocation of holiness we received at baptism and also to unfold all its transforming and missionary strength; thus we would become the living presence of Christ, a presence that is so real and so lively that it has the power to transform the history of this new millennium.



Our world and our civilization live in a state of "spiritual and moral ruin," and thus, there is decadence in all areas of human life. The only way to reconstruct contemporary humanity is by constructing a civilization of love, life, and solidarity, a civilization that values the human person. The Church of the Third Millennium has the ardent task of going out into the deep and entering into the ruins of this civilization in order to reconstruct it from within. Rowing the ship into the depth of today's civilization will take place with two great oars: Holiness and Mission. This mission will give not give fruit, the Holy Father tells us in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (NMI), if it does not come from holiness, for the mission requires a testimony of life that is coherent and eloquent. "It is therefore the task of the present generation to bring the Gospel to future humanity. Be 'witnesses to Christ in the new millennium,' as the theme of your congress says. Be well aware of it, and respond with prompt fidelity to this urgent missionary call. The Church is counting on you!" (JPII in his message to Cardinal Stafford on the occasion of the Congress of the Catholic Laity, Nov. 21, 2000, no.8).

John Paul II has told us in NMI that the pastoral way of the Church today is singular and urgent: holiness. For John Paul II, the new springtime of the Church is, before all else, a moment of abundant grace in which great saints will flourish - the new saints of the Millennium.

Many times we have heard the prophecies that the Lord gave during the International Congress of the Charismatic Renewal in 1975: times of darkness are coming into the world and times of glory for the Church. What is the glory of the Church? It is the holiness of its sons and daughters, a holiness that reflects the light of Christ, the life of Christ in the world. "The Church expands, shines, grows and develops through the holiness of its faithful" (cf. LG 39). The principal characteristic of the Church of the third millennium must be holiness. It is up to us to recognize this call and this responsibility. History is forged through the lives of the men and woman who live in it.

Last century, the century that brought the second millennium to a close, went into history as one of the darkest for humanity because of its generalized selfishness and forgetfulness of God. It has been the century of the world wars, of great oppressive political systems, of the atomic bomb, of legalized abortion, of the holocaust, of experiments on humans, and of atheism. It has been the century of great persecution of the Church, which has produced many martyrs. In this century, in the midst of such darkness and of potent figures of evil, we still have seen great rays of light flourish among these shadows. In this same century, the Church has been crowned with men and woman who, in the midst of evil, have become to the world great torches that give forth light: Saint Therese of Lisieux, Saint Gemma Galgani, Saint Maria Goretti, Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Maria Faustina, Saint Teresa of the Andes, Saint Padre Pio, Saint Edith Stein, Saint Josemaria Escriva, Blessed Jacinta and Francisco, Blessed Pier Giorgio, Blessed Padre Pro, Blessed Padre Hurtado, Blessed Bishop Manuel Gonzalez, Blessed Carlos Rodrigues, the couple Maria and Luigi Beltrame, and soon to be beatified Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Bishops, priests, religious, married, singles, and children. This is in addition to the hundreds of Christians that have given their lives in martyrdom through their fidelity to Christ. "Days of darkness to the world, and of glory to the Church." In the middle of the dark history of humanity, God has revealed His saving presence... The light of Christ can not be extinguished by the darkness. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1, 5). The Holy Father John Paul II has revealed the abundant holiness that has flowered in the Church by means of so many beatifications and canonizations precisely to show that the light of Christ is never overcome by the darkness. This is proof that the power of God transcends the darkness of the world and that in the middle of a generation that is hostile and indifferent, Jesus' words to Saint John are confirmed: "My Father is at work" (Jn 5, 17). When the world has desired to exclude God from its history, God has manifested that He is Lord by means of His saints.

### **Who are the saints?**

They are the men and women that have had sufficient love and courage to overcome the temptations of the devil, the seductions of the world, and the inclinations of their flesh, and in this manner, have grown in the stature of Christ until they are able to say like St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2, 20). The saints make themselves present in the history of the Church, and taking a step forward they say, "Here I am. Present." This is just as Saint Maximilian did when he stepped forward from among a group of prisoners in the concentration camp to give the testimony of heroic love by taking the place of another prisoner and dying for him. They are living testimonies of the presence of Christ in the world.

### **Holiness for All**

**"All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (LG 40).**

In order to achieve this perfection, Christians must be willing to follow the footsteps of Christ with all of their hearts, conforming themselves to His image and being obedient to the will of the Father in all things. In this manner, the holiness of the People of God will produce abundant fruits, as the history of the Church has manifested clearly in the lives of the saints (LG 40).

"The perfection of the Christian has only one limit: to have no limit in love and in virtue" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa v. Mos.). St. Josemaria Escriva explains to us, "The great secret of holiness can be reduced to the becoming more and more like Him, who is the only and the most loving Model" (Forja, 752).

### **Where are the saints formed?**

In the same place where you are: before the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is "God with us," Emmanuel. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1, 14). And dwells... "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28,20). He is with us to actualize all of His saving and sanctifying power in each generation. "His mercy is from age to age," the Blessed Virgin told us in the Magnificat (Lk 1, 50). (The Eucharist is already prophesized in this proclamation.)

One day someone told Saint Teresa of Avila, "If I only would have lived during the time of Jesus. If I only would have seen Him and would have heard Him talk." Saint Teresa responded, "But don't we have Jesus with us, living and truly and really present in the Eucharist?"

The Eucharist is our Lord really present - His Body, His Blood, His Soul and His Divinity, hidden beneath the appearances of bread, but real and physically present in the Consecrated Host. He lives among us to sanctify us, to transform us into His image, to free us from sin, the devil and the flesh, in order to lift us up with the power of His divine life, resurrecting us from all spiritual death and sterility. He is with us to calm the interior storms of our lower passions; to open the blinded eyes of our souls; to break the chains of oppression, sinful habits, and attachments to earthly things; to elevate our human potentials towards celestial things; to transmit to us the charity and mercy of His Heart, giving us generous hearts that are capable of forgiving, and even doing good, to our enemies; to enable us, form us and forge us into His image; to model us after Him to such an extent that the world may recognize the Face of Christ in our faces. The Eucharist is Christ Himself, the Light of the World: "I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8, 12). He who is before the light and imbued with the light can do no other thing but illumine. "You do not light a lamp in order to place it under the table" (cf. Mt 5, 15). "As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord" (Ex 34, 29). Saint Stephan fixed his eyes on the Heavens and saw the Son of God. His face became filled with the light of Christ (Acts 6, 15).

"Holiness, a message that convinces without the need for words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ" (NMI 7). Holiness is visible, brethren, and this does not necessarily mean extraordinary manifestations, although many times the Lord has permitted them in the lives of saints in order externally to reveal His great inner works. The faces of many saints - such as Saint Clare of Assisi, to whom this would happen after many hours before the Blessed Sacrament - became lit, which manifested the light of Christ in their souls. Others - such as Padre Pio - would leave, wherever they would go, the fresh smell of roses, flowers that revealed the fact that they were the good fragrance of Christ. Others levitated to manifest that elevated holiness was in their souls - such as St. Joseph Cupertino who, at Mass during the Consecration, when contemplating the consecrated Host and the Chalice, would levitate so high that often he reached the top of the Church.

### **The Eucharist is the Secret of the Saints**

Did not Jesus tell us, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15, 5)?

Holiness is the fruit of the Eucharist because it is its fountain. Only those who are in communion with the vine - Eucharistic Jesus - can be fertile branches. Let us look at the lives of the saints, eloquent testimonies of this truth: the Eucharist is the secret of the saints. It is the school in which great souls are forged.

### **Cure de Ars**

When St. John Vianney came to the small village of Ars, someone stated with resentment, "There is nothing to do here." The saint replied, "Well then there is much to be done." Immediately he began to act: he would

rise at 2am to be in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, spending long hours there until early in the morning when he would celebrate Holy Mass. When he was done, he would remain in prayer with his rosary in his hand and with his eyes fixed on the Eucharistic Jesus.

The holiness of the Cure de Ars, holiness that was forged in those hours before the Eucharist, attracted so many men and woman that he was obligated to spend 10, 15 - up to 18 hours a day - listening to confessions. Who brought about this transformation? The power of the Eucharist.

### ***Blessed Father Damian, Apostle of the Lepers***

"Were it not for the constant presence of our Divine Master in our humble chapel, I would not be able to persevere in participating in the same fate as the lepers of Molokai. The Eucharist is the bread of life that gives me strength for all of this. It is the most eloquent proof of His Love and the most powerful means to increase His charity in us. He gives Himself to us daily in order to consume our hearts with His purifying and transforming fire, so that we can then enflame others with His love."

### ***Mother Teresa***

"Recently, in 1973, when we began the daily Holy Hour, is that our community began to grow and flourish... In our Congregation we would have adoration once a week for one hour. Later in 1973 we decided to have a daily hour of adoration. The work which we have to do is enormous. The homes that we have for the sick and dying destitute are completely full everywhere. But from the moment in which we began to have an hour of adoration each day, the love of Jesus became more intimate in our hearts, our charity among us was more understanding and the love of the poor was full of compassion, and in this manner, our vocations doubled. The hour that we dedicate to Jesus in the Eucharist is the greatest moment of the day, it is what changes our hearts."

### ***Saint Padre Pio***

The life of Padre Pio revolved around the Tabernacle. The Eucharist was the center of its gravitation. The people of Pietrelcina testified that, from childhood, he would assiduously visit Jesus in the Sacrament. As a brother, we are told that he would spend long hours in front of the Eucharist, sometimes whole nights. During the night he would experience a great fire in his chest which would consume him interiorly. If Padre Pio was not at the altar, his eyes were continually directed to the Tabernacle. The same was true of his long hours of confessions. One of his spiritual daughters who died in sanctity, while participating in a Mass celebrated by Padre Pio, saw a ray of fire come from the heart of the saint towards the Tabernacle. Jesus explained that it was the love that was constantly communicated between the heart of Padre Pio and the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. So much more could be said of the Mass of Padre Pio. They were often 2 hours and half long, submerged in complete communion with the sacrifice of Christ.

### ***Saint Faustina***

She tells us in her diary, "Once when I was seven...before the Lord Jesus in the Monstrance, the love of God was imparted to me for the first time and filled my little heart; and the Lord gave me understanding of divine things. From that day until this, my love for the hidden God has been growing constantly to the point of closest intimacy. All the strength of my soul flows from the Blessed Sacrament" (no. 1404). Sister Crecencia, one of the sisters of her Congregation said that Sister Faustina, "lived the Mass in total recollection without seeing anything of what was going on around her. She had an immense devotion for the Blessed Sacrament. Whenever she was before the Eucharist, she would pray with great fervor and with a fixed and ardent gaze on Jesus. Whenever she had free time, she would rush to visit Jesus in the Sacrament."

### ***Saint Therese of Lisieux***

The center of her life, affections and attention was the "prisoner of love" as she called the Eucharistic Jesus. This is so to such an extent that she composed a beautiful poem that reveals her ardent love and total dependence on the Sacrament of Love. She opened her heart in this poem and manifested a great desire: "I want to be the key of Tabernacle in order to open the prison of the Holy Eucharist. I want to be the lamp that is consumed near the Tabernacle... I want to be the stone of the altar so as to be a new stable in which the Eucharist may repose. I want to be a corporal in order to protect the Consecrated Host... I want to be a paten, a monstrance, a chalice" (cf. from "My Wishes Before the Tabernacle"). This was her joy. She considered it a great joy that on a particular day at the moment of Communion, a Host having fallen from the priest's hands, she was able to receive it with her Scapular. She considered it such a privilege, like that of the Blessed Virgin, because she had held in her arms Jesus Himself.

Venerable Alejandrina da Costa lived for the Eucharist, she nourished herself from the Eucharist, and she died with the desire to be buried in the parish Church in such a manner that her face would be contemplating the Tabernacle.

His Holiness John Paul II will certainly go down in history as one of the greatest Popes of the Church. Where did his greatness - both in his holiness as well as in his fruitful pontificate - come from? We will understand it in the light of history, narrated by a priest that worked very close to the Pope.

Having just been elected Pope, one of his secretaries was searching for him. No one knew where he was. The secretary narrates that after dinner, he had gone to his room with an armful of papers that needed to be signed; however, he was not there. He asked various Cardinals, but no one knew where he was. He went to the kitchen thinking that he might be there but did not find him there or anywhere.

Then the secretary met up with the pope's secretary from Poland. He asked the polish secretary about the pope's whereabouts, to which he replied, "Whenever you do not know where the Holy Father is, you can be certain that you will find him in prayer in the Chapel before the Eucharist." The secretary then went to look for him in the Chapel to confirm this, and there he found the pope, prostrated with his face to the ground, his hands extended towards the Eucharistic Jesus.

The Holy Father has told us that the most important thing in his 50 years of priesthood has been his celebration of the Eucharist. I have had the privilege of being at a Private Mass of His Holiness in Rome, and one cannot imagine what one experiences there. I have seen in his eyes, fixed on the Eucharist, enter into a dimension that transcends those of us present. I felt that I was before a priestly soul completely submerged in the mystery of the Real Presence. That is where John Paul II has been forged. I could see how these words were fulfilled: "The Holy Mass is the absolute center of my life and of each day of my life." Since John Paul II lives from the Eucharist, how could not call his last encyclical, "On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church"? The "*adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness*" (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 10). Since his First Communion, he has received the Eucharist every day.

"Let us take our place, dear brothers and sisters, *at the school of the saints*, who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. In them the theology of the Eucharist takes on all the splendor of a lived reality; it becomes 'contagious' and, in a manner of speaking, it 'warms our hearts'" (EE, 62).

### Conclusion

In these dark hours we need the light of Christ to shine in the holiness of the children of the Church. To humanity, we ought to present the "true light that enlightens all men that has come into this world" (cf. Jn 1,9). In the Eucharistic Miracle of Cracovia, there was a light that shone so brightly from the swamps that it was possible to see it from a great distance. After draining that portion of swamp, a completely clean Consecrated Host was found.

Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior of mankind, truly remains with us in the Holy Eucharist. In the Holy Eucharist Jesus gives Himself completely "for the life of the world" (Jn 6,51) - for our lives, for the life of our whole world, for our histories. The Eucharist is the sublime presence of the love of Christ. It is **permanent, sanctifying, efficacious and powerful love**. Blessed bishop Manuel Gonzalez, a bishop of the Eucharist, would say: "The Tabernacle is the most powerful place in the world." Do we believe this? In the Tabernacle we find the "Holy, Holy, Holy" One - there to form us and fashion us into saints in the power of His grace and in the school of His holiness. The world today is in need of witnesses so that it can say with joy, "God is with us, for we have seen the effects of His presence in the men and woman who have not been afraid to open their hearts generously to the Heart of Jesus, and who have allowed themselves to be transformed into living images of His love and holiness."

I end with the words of His Holiness John Paul II: "Through the intercession of this great host of witnesses, may God make you too...the saints of the third millennium!" (Message for WYD 2002).

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