

Meditations on the Mass



Corpus Christi
PARISH

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Richard Conlin

Introduction

Vinny Flynn said in his book, *7 Secrets of the Eucharist*, that exploring the mysteries of the Eucharist is like discovering a bottomless treasure chest; as you unpack each gem, it reveals another that was hidden from view. No matter how many you discover, there are always more. In each of these meditations on the Eucharist, I hope to impart one gem, that will reveal more to you.

The Eucharist is Alive!: Part 1

This week, I'd like to share some insights from the first and greatest recorded Eucharistic miracle in the history of the Catholic Church — the miracle at Lanciano, Italy in the year 750. It is very appropriate to speak about this Eucharistic miracle today for 2 reasons.

First, the priest involved in the miracle was like the Apostle Thomas, who we celebrate today. Whereas Thomas doubted the real presence of the resurrected Christ, this priest doubted the real presence of the Eucharistic Christ. After this priest said the words of consecration, the Eucharist actually transformed into a piece of living flesh and started to bleed. Amazing! The priest, like the Apostle Thomas, believed right away: "My Lord and my God!" Maybe some of you here have been to Lanciano, Italy and seen this great Eucharistic miracle. One of my friends studying for the priesthood in Rome went to Lanciano, Italy on the feast day of Corpus Christi this year. I remember thinking how cool it would have been to be there.

And yet, with full gratitude for this Eucharistic miracle, we hear some challenging words in today's Gospel: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe."

We could spend thousands of dollars going to Lanciano, Italy to see this great Eucharistic miracle. And praise God if it strengthens our faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But Jesus wants to challenge us this morning: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe."

We are actually more blessed today — this morning — for what is about to take place than if we were with the Apostle Thomas — for he got to put his hand into the wounds of Christ but this morning Christ will pour His entire life into our very bodies and fill our wounds with His presence.

We are actually more blessed today — this morning — for what we are about to receive than the priest from Lanciano, Italy, for he put the Eucharist in a monstrance to venerate but we get to become living monstrances with the Eucharist inside of us.

Do we believe this? Do we believe in Jesus' words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe."

Jesus knows how difficult it can be at times to believe in His real presence in the Eucharist. He delights in the fact that you are here this morning and He wants to pour His life into you through Holy Communion. He also wants to challenge us to greater faith.

The Eucharist is Alive!: Part 2

Yesterday, I spoke about the first and greatest Eucharistic miracle recorded in Church history, which happened in Lanciano, Italy in the year 750, where, after the words of consecration, the Host was actually transformed into flesh and the wine into blood. The priest, who doubted in the real presence of the Eucharistic Christ, was immediately converted and began to weep joyously.

Jesus gave us this great Eucharistic miracle to prove that He is truly alive is the most holy Eucharist. And this miracle was profoundly confirmed in the year 1971, when the Vatican commissioned an atheist scientist to test these precious relics to verify their nature.

From the extensive scientific studies, I want to share two amazing facts — one today and another tomorrow:

The fact for this morning is that the relic tested was from a living human heart. That is, it contained all the proteins and minerals of fresh blood and it contained all the essential structural components of a human heart. Wow!

Jesus not only proved that He is alive in the Eucharist, that His flesh is real food, but that He gives us His entire Sacred Heart in some deeply mystical way through Holy Communion.

This should make us weep out of deep gratitude and joy that our Blessed Lord loves us this much.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how eager are we to be so intimately united to Jesus this morning through Holy Communion? How grateful are we that He wants to give us His entire self, His Sacred Heart, through our reception of the Eucharist?

Let us renew our faith right now in the real Eucharistic presence of Christ.

Let us receive Him as a real living Person and not as a dead object. Let us say again with the words of St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

The Eucharist is Alive!: Part 3

Over the last two days, we've been focusing on the Eucharistic miracle that happened in Lanciano, Italy.

During the first meditation, we reflected on the words: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet still believe." Our Lord challenges us to believe that we are more blessed this morning for receiving Him in the Eucharist than if we were at Lanciano, Italy to witness the miracle and not receive Him in Holy Communion.

During yesterday's meditation, we reflected on the first amazing fact that emerged from the 1971 scientific testing — that, after being in a monstrance for over 1200 years, what appeared to be flesh on the Eucharist was actually from a living human heart! This physical miracle points to an even deeper spiritual truth — that Jesus gives His whole heart to us in Holy Communion.

Today, we reflect on another discovery from the 1971 scientific testing. The blood type on the relic was AB+. This is fascinating for 2 reasons.

First, it matches the same blood type found on the Shroud of Turin, the supposed burial cloth of Jesus.

Second, blood type AB+ is a universal recipient, which is beautiful because it points to a deep spiritual truth that Jesus receives everyone who comes to Him.

It is easy to think that we just come to Mass and receive Jesus in the Eucharist in a somewhat passive way.

But have you ever thought that He also receives you?

Listen to these words of Mother Teresa: "The Eucharist involves more than just receiving; it also involves satisfying the hunger of Christ. He says "Come to me." He is hungry for souls. Nowhere does the Gospel say: "Go away," but always "come to me."

We should not just come to Mass every morning with the idea that we are merely receiving the Eucharist.

We should come also to Mass to satisfy Jesus' hunger for souls. This is true love. Jesus gives Himself entirely to us every morning in the Eucharist so that we can give Him everything back in return — give Him our joys, our sorrows, everything. Love for love.

As we prepare for Mass this morning, let us keep in mind this great truth from St. Teresa of Calcutta:

"The Eucharist involves more than just receiving; it also involves satisfying the hunger of Christ. He says "Come to me." He is hungry for souls. Nowhere does the Gospel say: "Go away," but always "come to me."

The Eucharist is Alive: Part 4

Over the last three days, we've been reflecting on the Eucharistic miracle that happened in Lanciano, Italy in the year 750. Based upon the scientific testing done in 1971, we heard that what appeared to be flesh on the Eucharist was actually from a living human heart! This is a beautiful discovery because it points to the spiritual reality that Jesus gives His whole heart to us in the Eucharist. And yesterday we heard that the blood type on this relic was AB+, which is a universal recipient. This is another fascinating discovery because it shows that Jesus receives us fully into Himself when we receive Him in the Eucharist.

Today, I'd like to share one final thought about the Eucharistic miracle at Lanciano. The scientist who tested the relic concluded that what he was testing was actually alive. After being in a monstrance for over 1200 years, it was still alive!

I want to share again the words that Jesus spoke to St. Faustina, Jesus says:

“When I come to a human heart in Holy Communion, My hands are full of all kinds of graces which I want to give to the soul. But souls do not even pay attention to Me; they leave Me to Myself and busy themselves with other things. ... They treat Me as a dead object” (Diary, 1385).

This is truly amazing. Jesus is coming to our hearts today in Holy Communion. He desires to give “all kinds of graces” to our souls but some “souls do not even pay attention” to Him... they ignore Him and think about other things.

You can hear Jesus’ pain when He sums it up in this way: “They treat Me as a dead object.”

How about us?

If a stranger was here who knew nothing about the Eucharist and watched the way we receive Him, would he know that we are taking into our bodies the *living person*, Jesus Christ? Or would it seem to him that we are just receiving bread? Or as Jesus put it... a dead object?

Are we filled with awe and gratitude this morning that Jesus wants to come into our hearts in such an incredibly intimate way? Or are we distracted, busy with other thoughts, preoccupied with ourselves and our agendas for the day?

Listen again to similar words Jesus told St. Faustina.

“Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. I love them tenderly and sincerely, and they distrust Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy” (Diary, 1447).

Jesus wants to lavish His graces upon us this morning. He comes to us in Holy Communion full of love and mercy.

As we prepare ourselves to receive Him in the Eucharist, let us keep in mind that we are about to receive a *real living Person*, who loves us so much that He wants to come into our hearts this morning.

To finish, one helpful tip can be, when you receive Jesus in Holy Communion, say with the words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

The Eucharist is Alive: Part 5

We come to enter into a communion with Him.

That is why the Eucharist is called Holy Communion. The word "communion" literally means "completely one."

He is calling us not to merely receive Communion but to enter into communion. How do we enter into communion? One way to start is by taking a fresh look at the word communion itself. It literally means "union with," or "completely one." When used to denote the sacrament of the Eucharist, it suggests a similar union to that which is effected by the sacrament of marriage, where "the two become one flesh." As the *Catechism* explains, the Eucharist is called "Holy Communion"

because by this sacrament we unite ourselves to Christ, who makes us sharers in his Body and Blood to form a single body.

#1331

All who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form but one body in him."

#1329

Notice the actions in these quotes. "We *unite* ourselves to Christ" and "enter into communion with him." Just as a marriage takes active participation and "communication" from each person in order to achieve the desired union, so, too, the reception of the Eucharist. We cannot leave it all up to God. "Receiving Communion," writes Pope Benedict XVI, "means entering into communion with Jesus Christ. ... What is given us here is not a piece of a body, not a thing, but Him, the Resurrected one himself — the person who shares himself with us in his love. ... This means that receiving Communion is always a personal act. ... In Communion I enter into the Lord, who is communicating himself to me." When I receive Communion properly, I am not merely receiving something into me; I am actively involved in the process, fully present to the One who is present within me, uniting my whole being with Him, becoming "one flesh" with Christ, and through Him entering into a uniquely personal encounter with the Father and the Holy Spirit as well: Through the celebration of the Eucharist, the faithful ... gain access to God the Father through the Son. They enter into communion with the most Holy Trinity (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 15).

This "entering into" communion, this personal encounter with Christ and, through Him, with the other persons of the Trinity, doesn't simply involve God dwelling in us. It involves relationship. The indwelling of God is a gift demanding a reciprocal response. We must give ourselves to Christ as He gives Himself to us. Christ's plan is not merely to live in us, but also to enable us to live in Him: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56). Saint Cyril of Jerusalem uses a very graphic image to convey this intimate union to which the Eucharist invites us:

Throw melted wax into melted wax, and the one interpenetrates the other perfectly. In the same way, when the Body and Blood of Christ are received, the union is such that Christ is in the recipient and he in Christ.

The Meaning of the Mass: Part 1

If someone asked you to explain the meaning of the Mass, what would you say?

This week, I want us to reflect more deeply on the meaning of the Mass.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI described the Mass in the following way: **“We believe that the Mass, celebrated by the priest representing the person of Christ by virtue of the power received through the Sacrament of Orders, and offered by him in the name of Christ and the members of his Mystical Body, is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

The last line is key: **“The Mass... is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

In other words, the Mass we are about to celebrate in a few moments is the Sacrifice of Calvary which Christ is now offering to his heavenly Father through the hands of his ordained priests.

Don't worry if this doesn't make sense. I will continue to unpack this in days to come. Today we will focus on how the Mass is the same sacrifice as Calvary.

So, the Church teaches that the Sacrifice of the Mass today and the Sacrifice of the Cross 2,000 years ago are one and the same sacrifice. Why? Because on Calvary 2,000 years ago and in the Mass today, there is one and the same Priest and Victim, Jesus Christ.

The offering that Jesus made 2,000 years ago, which began at the Last Supper and ended on the Cross outside of Jerusalem is actually made sacramentally present today in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Did you know that the first Mass began in the upper room in Jerusalem and finished when Christ died on the Cross? The separate consecration of the bread and wine into His Body and His Blood offered to the heavenly Father signified the separation of His Body and Blood that would express His death on Good Friday.

Think of the Mass as like a time machine, where we are transported to Calvary 2,000 years ago and become recipients of Christ's one perfect sacrifice on the Cross.

Listen again to Pope Paul VI's definition of the Mass: **“We believe that the Mass, celebrated by the priest representing the person of Christ by virtue of the power received through the Sacrament of Orders, and offered by him in the name of Christ and the members of his Mystical Body, is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

As we prepare to celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, let us redouble our efforts to approach this great Mystery with awe, wonder, and gratitude for what is actually taking place. Although we do not see it, Jesus said it is most blessed for those who do not see, yet still believe. So let us have faith.

Resources used: http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Mass/Mass_009.htm

The Meaning of the Mass: Part 2

This week and next, we will be focusing on the meaning of the Mass.

As we heard yesterday, when Pope Paul VI was asked to describe the Mass, he said: **“We believe that the Mass, celebrated by the priest representing the person of Christ by virtue of the power received through the Sacrament of Orders, and offered by him in the name of Christ and the members of his Mystical Body, is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

The key thing is remember is that **“the Mass... is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

We can think of Mass as like a time machine that transports us to the first Mass that began at the Last Supper and ended at Calvary.

Although this is important to know in our minds, it is also important to know this truth in our hearts.

Feel free to close your eyes. Picture yourself present at Calvary standing underneath the Cross of Christ. Jesus is there gasping for breath. He calls your name... Richard... You look at Him, all bloodied and bruised and in great agony. He says: “I am doing all of this for you... I claim you as my own. I love you. You are mine.”

Feel free to open your eyes now. This experience at Calvary is something that is made present today on our altar here at Corpus Christi. As Pope Paul VI said: **“the Mass... is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

Maybe another image will help. I just started reading *Under an Afghan Sky* by Melissa Fung. Picture yourself kidnapped by the Taliban, brought into the desert, locked away in a dark room with no light, and left to die. No hope at all... All of a sudden, you feel that someone is present in front of you. He opens up His garment near His chest and rays of mercy fill the room with light. Picture the Divine Mercy Image. His love permeates your body. And He says to you: “Richard... I am here. No one will hurt you again. I claim you as My own. We are leaving here.” You cling to Him and He transports you to safety immediately.

If we can accept this truth in our hearts, if we can believe this morning that Jesus’ one perfect sacrifice at Calvary some 2,000 years ago is actually made sacramentally present here on our altars so that we can receive our salvation this morning... this would radically change how we view the rest of the day. We would no longer complain. We would see everything through the lens of Jesus’ love for us. That He has truly redeemed us. He has rescued us from the devil and claimed us as His own.

The Meaning of the Mass: Part 3

Yesterday, I was asked a great question after Mass. Since I said that the first Mass began at Holy Thursday and ended at Calvary with Christ's death, where does the Resurrection fit into all this?

I want to make 2 points regarding the Mass as the Sacrifice of Calvary and the Resurrection.

First, the Resurrection transformed the first Mass which began at Holy Thursday and ended at Calvary from a distant and depressing memory to a living and glorious event that we can take place in today. Since Jesus is risen from the dead, He can communicate the gift of salvation He won for us on Calvary some 2,000 years ago today here at Mass. In other words, Calvary is where Jesus merited the salvation of mankind and the Mass is where Jesus distributes those graces to us individually. Whereas Jesus offered Himself in a bloody manner on Good Friday, Jesus offers Himself in the Mass in an un-bloody manner and allows us, as members of His Mystical Body which is the Church, to offer ourselves with Him to the Father for the salvation of the world.

Second, in the Eucharist, we receive the Risen Christ in His glorified humanity. By receiving the Eucharist, we receive the risen humanity of Christ, which is the divinely ordained instrument by which supernatural grace is communicated to us. In other words, in Holy Communion, the Risen Christ gives us Himself in the fullness of His divinity and humanity. This is part of the reason why receiving Jesus' Body and Blood in Communion is not cannibalism – we receive the living and glorious Christ. Every time we receive the Eucharist, we can experience Easter Sunday.

In conclusion, I think that St. Paul understood this very well when he said in his letter to the Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" (2:20).

In the Mass, we get to unite all of our sufferings with Jesus or as St. Paul said, we have the opportunity to be crucified with Him. And everyone who dies with Jesus will live with Jesus. In faith, when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we can truly say, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me" – the risen glorified Christ.

As we prepare for Mass, let us renew our faith to receive the risen glorified Christ in the Eucharist.

The Meaning of the Mass: Part 4

This week, we have been reflecting upon the meaning of the Mass. Today, I'd like to give a summary of what we have covered so far.

Pope Paul VI described the Mass in this way: **“We believe that the Mass, celebrated by the priest representing the person of Christ by virtue of the power received through the Sacrament of Orders, and offered by him in the name of Christ and the members of his Mystical Body, is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

What is essential to remember from Pope Paul VI's statement is that **“the Mass... is in true reality the Sacrifice of Calvary, rendered sacramentally present on our altars.”**

The Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrifice of Calvary some 2,000 years ago are one and the same sacrifice because there is the same priest and the same victim; namely Jesus Christ. Through the hands of the ordained priest, Jesus presides as the Priest at the Mass and offers Himself through the symbols of bread and wine. We are not re-sacrificing Christ at the Mass. Rather, the one Sacrifice of Calvary is made present at the Mass.

With this in mind, we can also say that the Sacrifice of the Mass is different from the Sacrifice of Calvary because Jesus, having risen from the dead, is now in His glorified Body in heaven and can no longer undergo a bloody death like on Calvary some 2,000 years ago. Therefore, by the power of His Resurrection, Jesus offers Himself in the Mass in an unbloody manner, uniting all of us with Him in our own sufferings. Furthermore, whereas the sacrifice of Christ was visible and audible on Calvary some 2,000 years ago, it is completely hidden in the Mass and demands an act of faith on our behalf.

In summary, the Sacrifice of Calvary some 2,000 years ago will be made present here in a few moments when Mass begins. Mass is like a time machine in this way.

Why is all of this important to know? Well one of the great questions in life is how does Christ's redemptive act on Calvary become my redemption? Or in other words, you might have been asked one time, are you saved?

Since the Mass is the sacrifice of Calvary made present here today, the Mass is where Christ's redemptive act meriting salvation for mankind is offered for each one of us to receive today.

Jesus wants to give us a full share in His risen life through Holy Communion.

If we come to Mass with a living faith, we will indeed be able to answer, yes I am saved. I experienced it this morning.

The Eucharist and St. Josemaria Escriva

Today is the feast day of St. Josemaria Escriva. I'd like us to prepare for Mass this morning by reflecting the following words from this great saint. He said:

“Keep struggling, so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and the root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship — an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life” (The Forge, 69).

St. Josemaria teaches us a great lesson this morning:

He said that we are to struggle daily so that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass really becomes the centre and root of our interior lives, which in turn transforms everything we do into an act of worship.

What does this look like?

First, we are here at Mass with our own prayers, works, joys and sacrifices can be offered up with Christ... no one else offer up the things of your daily life but you alone... no one else can offer up your back pain... your house chores... your family problems... but you alone... when we offer this up with Christ in the Holy Sacrifice, we will see that just as the ordinary bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, so too our ordinary days can be transformed into moments of grace and bear the fruits of love, joy, and peace.

Second, when we leave this Mass, we can ask ourselves, one powerful question, that a monk at the seminary told me to always ask myself. How is this activity I'm doing, or conversation I'm having, flowing from the graces received in the Mass I recently attended and helping me to prepare for the next Mass?

So everything flows from the Mass and flows towards the Mass. Nothing in your lives is insignificant to Jesus. Every conversation, every prayer, every activity we do today should flow from the graces we received in the Eucharist and prepare us so that our next Holy Communion will be made with more faith and more love.

As St. Josemaria said so well, we are meant to keep struggling so that the Mass becomes the centre and the root of our interior lives and then our entire days will be turned into an act of worship.

Active Participation in the Mass: Part 1

I'm sure there are at least some people here today who have said at one time in their lives: "I don't want to go to Mass. I don't want to go to Church. I don't get anything out of it."

I'd like to focus this week on replying to this statement, on discussing how we can get more out of Mass.

Venerable Fulton Sheen had a great response to this question: He said: "Do you know the reason why you don't get anything out of Mass? It is because you don't bring anything to it."

For example, I'm sure if we sat down later today and watched golf on the television, many of you would find it boring, whereas I would find it quite interesting. The reason is because you don't have anything to bring to the game of golf... you do not have personal experience in playing golf tournaments, you don't know the players on the television, their stories, how difficult it was to get to that level of professional golf, and things like history of the golf course, etc. And the same story would be true probably if I sat down with you and watched your favourite television show or went to the opera.

So why don't people get anything out of Mass? Because they don't bring anything to Mass. They don't have a knowledge of the Mass, they don't understand what is actually happening, what Jesus is doing in the Mass, and therefore they find it boring.

So what exactly is the Mass?

Fulton Sheen described the Mass this way:

"It is reaching to Calvary over 2,000 years ago and laying hold with your hands the Cross of Christ, with Christ on it, and planting it down here today, at Corpus Christi. The Mass is the continuation of Calvary. And in order to take part in it, you have to bring little crosses. Our Blessed Lord said "take up your cross daily and follow me." We all have crosses. And we bring them all and plant them down alongside the great Cross and Christ and mass them all together under Him. That is the Mass."

So, the people who don't get anything out of Mass are the same people who are not bringing anything to it. They are not bringing their little crosses and therefore do not experience the transformative power of the Mass.

As we prepare ourselves for the holy sacrifice of the Mass, let us bring all of our little crosses and plant them here at the foot of the altar alongside the great Cross of Christ. Let us offer up everything with Jesus this morning. The more we do this on a daily basis, the more we will see our little crosses transformed into life-giving instruments of holiness and the more we will come to love the Mass.

Active Participation in the Mass: Part 2

Yesterday, we reflected on the following statement from Venerable Fulton Sheen. When someone complained to him, saying, "I don't want to go to Mass. I don't want to go to Church. I don't get anything out of it." Sheen responded: "Do you know why you don't get anything out of Mass? It's because you don't bring anything to it!"

This points to the truth that **the more we know about something that is good, true, and beautiful, the more we will come to love it**. And this is supremely true about the Mass, since we are veiled from seeing the reality of what is actually taking place before our eyes.

So this week, we are reflecting on the meaning of the Mass.

Yesterday, we heard Fulton Sheen describe the Mass as the continuation of Calvary, where Christ's sacrifice on the Cross 2,000 years ago is planted here today at Corpus Christi on this altar. This demands that we too bring our little crosses and plant them down alongside His Cross.

Fulton Sheen went on to explain the Mass in more detail as the greatest drama in the world, composed of 3 acts, entrusted to the Apostles on the night of the Last Supper to re-present this great drama on all the different stages of the world until the end of time.

In the 1st act of this great drama -- you offer yourself to Christ. In the Mass, this happens at the **Offertory**, where we offer ourselves to Jesus in union with His perfect offering to the Father for the salvation of souls. We bring Him our little crosses and become present on the altar under the symbols of bread and wine.

In the 2nd act, you die with Him. In the Mass, this happens at the **Consecration**, where just as the separation of Christ's body and blood sacramentally re-enacts His death, we too are called to die to all that is evil in us -- pride, anger, envy, jealously. It all must die. `

In the 3rd act, you receive new life. In the Mass, this happens at **Holy Communion**, where all those who have died with Christ are guaranteed to receive new life. St. Paul said, "it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

This is an awesome mystery and I do not expect any of us to get this stuff right away. As we prepare for this great drama of the Mass, let us keep in mind these words from St. Faustina to conclude:

"Oh, what awesome mysteries take place during Mass! One day we will know what God is doing for us and what sort of gift He is preparing in it for us. Only His divine love could permit that such a gift be provided for us" (St. Faustina, 914).

Active Participation in the Mass: Part 3

This week, we have been reflecting on the meaning of the Mass. The truth is that the more we come to understand what is really taking place in the Mass, the more we will come to love it and see our lives transformed by it.

As mentioned yesterday, Fulton Sheen describes the Mass as the greatest drama in the world that He entrusted to the Apostles on Holy Thursday. By saying “Do this in remembrance of Me,” Jesus wanted the Apostles to re-present this great drama on all the different stages of the world until the end of time.

The Mass, as the greatest drama in the world, is essentially composed of 3 acts: First, the offering. Second, the death. Third, the resurrection.

In the first act, we offer ourselves with Christ. In the Mass, this happens at **the Offertory**. The bread and wine offered on the altar must become symbols for all that we have, for all that we are. When the priest is offering up the bread and wine, we must say to Jesus, “Jesus, I offer myself completely to You! Take everything. I want nothing for myself. I want to be one with you in your great act of redemption!”

In the second act, we die with Christ. In the Mass, this happens at **the Consecration**, where the priest sacramentally re-enacts Christ’s death by the separate consecration of bread and wine. Since we have offered ourselves with Him, we must now die with Him. It is a rule of the spiritual life that we must die to our lower nature, die to all that is evil in us, if we want to live with Christ, to live His divine life. This is why Jesus continually said, “If you want to be my disciples, you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” When the priest says the words of consecration, we should say to Jesus, “Jesus, I want to die with You! This is my body! This is my blood! I want to die to all that is evil in me and live your divine life.”

In the third act, we receive new life. In the Mass, this happens at **Holy Communion**. Since we have offered ourselves with Christ and died with Him, we are guaranteed to receive new life. This happens when Jesus pours His divine life into us through Holy Communion.

So here we have it. The Mass, as the greatest drama in the world, composed of 3 acts. The offering. The death. The resurrection.

To conclude, I’d like to leave you with one thought. When the priest says at the end of Mass, “**Go forth, the Mass is ended,**” this does not mean, “Okay, go back to living your normal life, see you tomorrow.” No, this means, “Go and carry with you, out of this church and into your daily routines, all that has just happened here. This is the pattern. Offer everything to God. Die with Him daily and receive His divine life.”

Active Participation in the Mass: Part 4

This week, we have been reflecting on the meaning of the Mass with Fulton Sheen, who described it as the greatest drama in the world. This drama is composed of 3 acts:

First, the offering. This is Holy Thursday. In the Mass, this happens at the **Offertory**. We are called to offer ourselves with Jesus through the symbols of bread and wine.

Second, the death. This is Good Friday. In the Mass, this happens at the **Consecration**. We are called to die with Jesus through the symbol of the separate consecration of bread and wine.

Third, the Resurrection. This is Easter Sunday. In the Mass, this happens at **Holy Communion**. We are called to receive Jesus' divine life through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Today, I'd like to reflect more deeply on the 1st act of the Mass and what it means to offer ourselves with Christ.

As I've said previously, just as the bread and wine are offered on the altar at the Offertory, we are called to symbolically put ourselves on the altar and become living sacrifices offered to God the Father with Christ. This is why the priest says, "Pray brethren that my sacrifice and yours..."

It might seem scary to you to offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice.

But the Mass proves to us that everything we offer to God is transformed into new life. Imagine if the bread and wine could speak this morning and they told us that they did not want to be offered up as a sacrifice. We would obviously tell them, "Don't worry, it is worth it. You become the Body and Blood of Christ."

The Mass proves to us that any sacrifice we make for God, anything we offer up to Him, will be transformed into something beautiful for God, something life-giving.

Offer up your aches and pains. Offer up your difficult family problems. Offer up your boredom and tiredness. Offer up whatever you are begging God to get rid of in your life. Offer it all up.

And watch over time, eventually Jesus will fill it with His presence. Just as Jesus transformed bread into His Body and wine into His Blood, so too will He change our lives.

As we prepare for this Mass, let us offer Jesus everything. Let us place it all on the altar. And when we leave Mass to go back home, let us take our strength from what we have just received and continually offer everything up to Jesus.

Active Participation in the Mass: Part 5

This week, we have been reflecting on the meaning of the Mass with Fulton Sheen, who described it as the greatest drama in the world, composed of 3 acts:

First, we offer ourselves with Christ at the Offertory through the symbols of bread and wine.

Second, we die with Christ at the Consecration through the separate consecration of bread into His Body and wine into His Blood.

Third, we rise with Christ at Holy Communion through receiving His Body and His Blood.

To conclude this week's reflections, I want to make sure we understand one important point, which should be very clear.

We are not passive spectators when we come to Mass. We are active participants, co-offering the Mass with Christ through the priest. Jesus is inviting us to take part in this great drama today, this morning. What a pity it would be if we came to Mass day after day as passive spectators when Jesus wants all the members of his Mystical Body, which is the Church, to become active participants in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

So, are you going to be a passive spectator this morning? Or an active participant?

Are you going to sit back and think about all you have to get done today? And receive Communion as though you were receiving a dead object?

Or are you going to become an active participant today? Offer yourself with Christ. Die with Him. And receive a real living Person in Holy Communion, who wants to fill you with His divine life.

Choose to be an active participant this morning.

“You are What You Eat”: Part 1

As I was praying with today's Gospel reading about Jesus' saying that "You will know them by their fruits," I thought of an important question.

What is our goal of coming to Mass every morning and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist?

There's a famous saying, "**You are What You Eat.**" This applies pre-eminently to the Eucharist. The goal of coming to Mass every morning and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist is to become another Jesus, to bring His love to the world.

This is not my idea. In the 3rd century, St. Augustine wrote,

"If you receive the Eucharist well, *you are what you eat*. Since you are the Body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery which you receive. As you come to communion, you hear the words 'The Body of Christ' and you answer 'Amen'. Be, therefore, members of Christ that your 'Amen' may be true. Be what you see. Receive what you already are."

From this quote from St. Augustine, I want to highlight one important point.

St. Augustine says that ***you are what you eat...* if you receive the Eucharist well.**

This point about receiving the Eucharist *well* is essential if we want the Eucharist to achieve its purpose of transforming our lives.

My spiritual disposition before, during, and after receiving the sacrament will determine whether the sacrament will produce good fruit in me (in varying degrees), have no effect at all, or, as St. Paul said, result in my condemnation (see 1 Cor 11:27-29).

So every time I receive the Eucharist I can enter into communion with God in a more complete, personal, and fruitful way. This is an exciting truth.

Before we receive Him this morning, let us renew our faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist

As we receive Him. Let us tell Him how much we love Him.

After we receive Him, let us continually thank God for this amazing gift He has given us.

“You Are What You Eat”: Part 2

Yesterday, we reflected on St. Augustine’s quote: **“If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat.”**

This morning, I’d like us to reflect more deeply on the words: **“you are what you eat.”**

St. Thomas Aquinas gives us a great insight into applying this saying to the Eucharist, by making a clear distinction between material food and spiritual food. He says:

“**Material food** first changes into the one who eats it, and then, as a consequence, restores to him lost strength and increases his vitality. **Spiritual food**, on the other hand, changes the person who eats it into itself. Thus the effect proper to this Sacrament is the conversion of a man into Christ, so that he may no longer live, but Christ lives in him; consequently, it has the double effect of restoring the spiritual strength he had lost by his sins and defects, and of increasing the strength of his virtues.”” ~ St. Thomas, Commentary on Book IV of the Sentences, d.12, q.2, a.11

This might seem like a lot to hear so early in the morning. What is important to take away from this is that the Eucharist, as spiritual food, is radically different from all other forms of food.

Whereas all material food is first changed into us, the Eucharist first changes us into Christ.

This is the ultimate goal of the Eucharist. This is why Jesus gave us the Eucharist. To be able to say with St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Isn’t this amazing? How much our God loves us. That He wants to come to us in this incredibly intimate way this morning, to change us into Him, so that we can leave this Church and bring His love everywhere we go? Our hearts should be full of love and gratitude this morning.

Let us keep in mind these words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Repeat these words often throughout today. Live this reality that happens at the Mass.

“You are What You Eat”: Part 3

Over the last two days, we've been reflecting upon St. Augustine's saying: **“If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat.”** Yesterday, we entered more deeply into the truth of the saying, “you are what you eat” with the help of St. Thomas Aquinas, who revealed the radical uniqueness of the Eucharist. He said that whereas the material food we eat is meant to change into us, we are meant to change into the spiritual food we eat. That is why the proper effect of the Eucharist is found in the words of St. Paul: **“It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”** (Gal 2:20).

This morning, I'd like us to reflect more deeply on the phrase, “If you receive the Eucharist well”.

St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized this in different language when he said: **“A person receives the effect of this sacrament according to his condition.”**

In other words, we will receive graces from the Eucharist this morning based upon our condition — how open we are to receive the graces from the Eucharist.

To put it simply:

If we have no faith, we will receive no grace.
If we have a little bit of faith, we will receive a little bit of grace.
If we have great faith, we will receive great graces.

This is why Mother Teresa, who had great faith, was able to say: **“I know I would not be able to work one week if it were not for that continual force coming from Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”**

Mother Teresa knew about the transformative power of the Eucharist, so she tried her best every day to receive the Eucharist well.

So how can we, like Mother Teresa, be more open to receive the graces from the Eucharist this morning?

One practical step we can take right now is to make an **act of faith** in the power of the Eucharist to transform our lives.

Join with me in prayer. Jesus, increase my faith. Jesus, increase my faith in the power of the Eucharist to transform my life. We come before you today with great expectations, even if we do not feel it in our hearts, we believe that you have the power to make all things new and to give us the strength and courage to be missionaries of your love today. We trust that you have given us the Eucharist to change us into you... slowly, over time... help us to believe in this truth and prepare our hearts for this incredibly intimate encounter we are about to take part in this morning. Amen.

“You are What You Eat”: Part 4

This week, we have been reflecting upon St. Augustine’s phrase: **“If you receive the Eucharist well, you are what you eat.”** With the help of St. Thomas Aquinas, we heard how appropriate it is to say that **“you are what you eat”** with regards to the Eucharist because, unlike material food that is meant to change into us, we are meant to change into spiritual food. Hence, the goal of the Eucharist is to be transformed into Jesus, to say with St. Paul, **“It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”** (Gal 2:20). But this transformation is not automatic. As St. Augustine said, it all depends on whether you receive the Eucharist well. Or as we heard yesterday from St. Thomas Aquinas, we will receive the effect of this sacrament according to our condition.

So we return again to the question: **How can we receive the Eucharist well?**

The best place to receive an answer is found in the liturgy, in the words of the Mass. For the Church is our Mother and she gives us the liturgy as our tutor. The liturgy puts the right words in our mouths and teaches us how to behave when we approach the mysteries of our faith.

So what are the words that the Church gives us to receive the Eucharist well?

Providentially enough, the words are found in today’s Gospel, **“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter unto my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”**

We say these words every single day before we approach Holy Communion. Often, they can become mere routine. Today, let’s reflect more deeply on these profound words and make them a true prayer of our heart so that we can receive the Eucharist well.

I’d like to make 2 points about why this saying captures how we can receive the Eucharist well:

First, the liturgy gives us the words: **“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter unto my roof.”** This teaches us humility. Christian humility is not thinking badly about yourself but rather acknowledging the truth that we are entirely unworthy that God should come into our hearts.

But immediately after, the liturgy gives us the words: **“but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”** This also teaches us confidence. We approach Holy Communion like little children, that we do not deserve anything but we expect everything because we know how good Jesus is and how much he loves us.

Let us come to Holy Communion this morning with humble confidence. Let us receive the Eucharist well so that we can become what we eat... so that we can say with St. Paul more and more each day: **“It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me”** (Gal 2:20).

The Eucharist and Humility: Part 1

This week, I'd like to reflect on the Eucharist and humility. Jesus teaches us many lessons in the Eucharist and many saints say that the greatest thing He teaches us is humility.

For example, here is what St. Teresa of Calcutta had to say about Jesus' humility in the Eucharist.

"The humility of Jesus can be seen in the crib, in the exile to Egypt, in the hidden life, in the inability to make people understand Him, in the desertion of His apostles, in the hatred of His persecutors, in all the terrible suffering and death of His Passion, and now in His permanent state of humility in the tabernacle, where He has reduced Himself to such a small particle of bread that the priest can hold Him with two fingers. The more we empty ourselves, the more room we give God to fill us."

So, Jesus, as God, practiced humility to a degree beyond our comprehension by becoming man in the Incarnation and throughout His whole public ministry.

Jesus had concealed His divinity so that only His humanity could be seen. But in the Eucharist, He hides not only His divinity but His humanity as well.

This is the most extreme expression of God's humility. The fact that the Eternal Wisdom of God who made all things condescends to come among in the form of ordinary food is truly astounding!

How are we to respond and imitate Jesus' humility in the Eucharist?

Mother Teresa said that the lesson she learnt was this: "The more we empty ourselves, the more room we give God to fill us."

How do we empty ourselves so that God can fill us?

One practical way we can empty ourselves right now is to tell Jesus how badly we need Him, to tell Jesus how apart from Him we can do nothing. As we prepare to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us empty ourselves of any thought that we can survive apart from Jesus. Let us provide Jesus an empty tabernacle in our hearts so that He can fill us with His divine Presence.

And let us beg Him when we receive Him this morning and throughout this day with the words, "Jesus, meek and humble of heart in the Eucharist, make my heart like unto thine."

The Eucharist and Humility: Part 2

This week, we are reflecting on the great lesson of humility that Jesus teaches us in the Eucharist.

Yesterday, we heard from Mother Teresa about how Jesus is in a “permanent state of humility in the tabernacle” calling us to “empty ourselves” so that we can give more room for God to fill us. We can empty ourselves by telling Jesus how apart from Him we can do nothing.

Jesus hides His divinity and His humanity in the Eucharist. We too should hide what others may see and praise. We should beg Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the grace never to exhibit, never to display, never to show off who we are or what we have in order to be praised by others.

St. Faustina knew this well. She said to Jesus: “I want to become a sacrificial host before You, but an ordinary wafer to people. I want the fragrance of my sacrifice to be known to You alone” (483).

We must beg for the grace to be an ordinary wafer. Like a little piece of bread.

She also said: “All the good that is in me is due to Holy Communion. I owe everything to it. I feel that this holy fire has transformed me completely. Oh, how happy I am to be a dwelling place for You, O Lord! My heart is a temple in which You dwell continually.”

And let us beg Him when we receive Him this morning and throughout this day with the words, “Jesus, meek and humble of heart in the Eucharist, make my heart like unto thine.”

Extra:

The Eucharist teaches us humility. St. Cyril of Alexandria pointed this out saying: "If the power of pride is swelling up in you, turn to the Eucharist; and that Bread, Which is your God humbling and disguising Himself, will teach you humility."

““O admirable height and stupendous condescension! O humble sublimity! O sublime humility! that the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under a morsel of bread. Consider, brothers, the humility of God and pour out your hearts before Him, and be humbled that you may be exalted by Him. Do not therefore keep back anything for yourselves that He may receive you entirely who gives Himself up entirely to you.” – **St. Francis of Assisi**

“O Jesus, Divine Prisoner of Love, when I consider Your love and how You emptied Yourself for me, my senses fail me. You hide Your inconceivable majesty and lower Yourself to miserable me. O King of Glory, though You hide Your beauty, yet the eye of my soul rends the veil. I see the angelic choirs giving You honor without cease, and all the heavenly Powers praising You without cease, and without cease they are saying: Holy, Holy, Holy.” – **St. Faustina**

Resource: http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Eucharist/Eucharist_012.htm

The Eucharist and Humility: Part 3

This week, we are reflecting on the important lesson of humility that Jesus teaches us in the Eucharist.

So far, we've heard from **Mother Teresa** about how Jesus is in a "permanent state of humility in the tabernacle" calling us to "empty ourselves" so that we can give more room for God to fill us. And we heard from **St. Faustina** yesterday about how she wanted all of her sacrifices to be hidden from others and known to God alone, saying that she wanted "to become a sacrificial host before God but an ordinary wafer to people."

In summary, we could say that Mother Teresa teaches us to empty ourselves of any pride and St. Faustina teaches us to hide ourselves from the praise of others.

The next lesson that Jesus teaches us about humility in the Eucharist is the desire for humiliations. This might be the hardest lesson of all.

In the Eucharist, Jesus shows the extreme of being humiliated. Think of all of the people who have received Him in the Eucharist as though they were just receiving a piece of bread or have received Him in a state of mortal sin, or those who stole the Eucharist for some satanic purpose like a black Mass. Jesus is constantly being humiliated in the Eucharist out of love for us to give us strength to learn true humility.

One Carmelite writer said that "it is impossible to gain humility without humiliations; for just as studying is the way to acquire knowledge, so it is by way of humiliation that we attain to humility" (Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene, *Divine Intimacy*).

When humiliated by someone, we can either seek a way to get revenge toward that person or we can be silent and forgive them, like Jesus in the Eucharist, and pray for their salvation.

Accepting humiliations silently out of love for Jesus, like being made fun of or mocked for your faith, for getting weird looks when you say grace before meals at a restaurant or getting sneered at when praying your rosary in public, or a look you would get from correcting people when they use the name of the Lord in vain... all of these humiliations are a way that we can share in Christ's humiliations and follow in His footsteps.

We need to ask Jesus to send us whatever humiliations we need to make that next step on our unique path to holiness. Beg Jesus when you receive Him in the Eucharist this morning to imitate Him in being humiliated.

The Eucharist and Humility: Part 4

This week, we are focusing on the connection between the virtue of humility and the Eucharist.

So far, we have heard from Mother Teresa about how Jesus' permanent state of humility in the Eucharist teaches us to empty ourselves of any pride and we have heard from St. Faustina about how we must imitate Jesus in the Eucharist by hiding ourselves from the praise of others, since Jesus appears to be an ordinary piece of bread in the Eucharist, but in reality is a living sacrificial host before God. And yesterday, we reflected on how Jesus is often humiliated in the Eucharist, giving us the example and courage to accept our humiliations out of love for Him as the true path to attain Christian humility.

The next lesson that the Eucharist teaches us about humility in the Eucharist is the importance of having the spirit of little children. Jesus comes to us in what appears to be a tiny piece of bread. Even the smallest crumb of the Eucharist is in fact the whole Jesus – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity! And He is almost helpless in a way like a little baby in the Eucharist – entirely obedient to the words and hands of the priest.

By becoming little for us in the Eucharist, Jesus invites us to become small too, to become like little children.

Fulton Sheen realized this important truth as essential to discovering God. He said this:

“How can souls find God? It is a psychological fact that it is only by being little that we ever discover anything big. This law raised to the spiritual level tells us how we can find the immense God, and that is by having the spirit of little children” (*Eternal Galilean*, 3).

This is why so many people today do not find God. Their pride prevents them from discovering God.

Jesus comes to us in what appears to be a little piece of bread – He is almost helpless in a way like a little baby – to teach us that we must have the spirit of little children in order to discover that the Word through Whom the entire universe was made is actually present in this little Host.

The more we spiritually approach receiving Holy Communion like little children, the more open our hearts will be to find the immense God in the Eucharist. This is why true Christian humility is not a source of sadness but a source of joy.

Let us pray: “Jesus, meek and humble of heart in the Eucharist, make my heart like unto thine. Give me the spirit of a little child this morning so that I may have the joy of discovering You in Holy Communion and of sharing Your love everywhere I go.”

The Eucharist and Love: Part 1

Last week, we spoke about the Eucharist and the virtue of humility. Since humility is the foundation of the spiritual life and love is the goal of the spiritual life, this week I want to reflect on the Eucharist and love.

I'd like to begin again with the words of Jesus in His conversation with St. Faustina.

"Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. I love them tenderly and sincerely and they distrust Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas My Heart is full of love and mercy. In order that you may know at least some of My pain, imagine the most tender of mothers who has great love for her children, while those children spurn her love. Consider her pain. No one is in a position to console her. This is but a feeble image and likeness to My love" (*Diary*, 1447).

Jesus reveals how His heart is full of love... He loves us tenderly and sincerely when He gives us Himself in Holy Communion... far greater than the love the most tender of mothers has for her children...

Let us choose this morning to tell Jesus in Holy Communion how much we love Him. Let us console His Heart by loving Him in return by placing all our trust in Him, by accepting all the graces that He wants to give us in Holy Communion, by spreading His love to every person we meet after we leave Mass this morning, by taking up our cross and following Him.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 2

This morning, I'd like us to reflect on Pope Benedict XVI's words about the Eucharist and love. He says:

"By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, Jesus anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an **action of love**. What on the outside is simply brutal violence – the Crucifixion – from within becomes an **act of total self-giving love**. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a **series of transformations** leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)... The **process of transformation** must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood" (*Heart of the Christian Life*, 21-3).

This reflection by Pope Benedict XVI is profound and packed with meaning. I just want to reflect on two insights:

First, the Eucharist transformed a brutal act of violence – the Crucifixion – into an act of total self-giving love. By making a total gift of Himself to His Apostles on the night before He died, Jesus showed that love triumphs over evil.

Second, Pope Benedict XVI shows that this first transformation that happened at the Last Supper is meant to gather momentum and set in motion a series of transformations. That includes us. We are to be transformed into other Christs. That is what it means to be a Christian. To be another Christ.

When we receive Jesus in Holy Communion this morning, let us open our hearts to Jesus' act of total self-giving love. Let us allow ourselves to be transformed by Jesus. Let us cooperate with our whole hearts as best as we can today so that we can do our part in the transformation of the world where God will be all in all.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 3

This week, we have been reflecting on the lesson of love that Jesus teaches us in the Eucharist.

I'd like to share again the quote from Pope Benedict XVI.

"By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, Jesus anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an **action of love**. What on the outside is simply brutal violence – the Crucifixion – from within becomes an **act of total self-giving love**. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a **series of transformations** leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)... The **process of transformation** must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood" (*Heart of the Christian Life*, 21-3).

So, Jesus' institution of the Eucharist was a perfect act of total self-giving love that He intended solely for the purpose of transforming us into Him, to be other Christs. This is why Jesus is giving Himself to us in Holy Communion this morning. He wants us to be transformed into Him.

This is the universal call to holiness. Every single one of us here today is called to the heights of divine intimacy with God.

The Eucharist this morning can give us the strength we need to make that next step in the journey to holiness.

The more receptive we are to being transformed into Christ, the more His grace will act in our lives. We can start this morning by begging Jesus to work through us.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 4

This week, we have been reflecting on the Eucharist and love.

I'm sure that a desire in all of our hearts – whether we realize it or not – is that we want to fall more deeply in love with Jesus, especially in the Eucharist, since we are here at Mass this morning.

One of the most practical ways that we can fall more in love with Jesus is by making a spiritual communion.

St. John Vianney said: "A spiritual communion acts on the soul as blowing does on a cinder-covered fire which was about to go out. Whenever you feel your love of God growing cold, quickly make a spiritual communion."

What is a spiritual communion? "A spiritual communion is a personal devotional that anyone can pray at any time to express their desire to receive holy Communion at that moment, but in which circumstances impede them from actually receiving holy Communion. The impeding circumstances might be a variety of things: the person could already be "maxed out" because they have already received holy Communion twice that day; or the person could be in prison and unable to attend Mass; or the person might be elderly and at home watching Mass on the television or listening to it on the radio; or the person might be hiking a mountain and wants to be more deeply united to Jesus Christ at that moment. When you pray a spiritual communion, your soul receives grace to the degree that you have true hunger for the holy Eucharist."

St. Francis de Sales said that he recited a spiritual communion prayer every 15 minutes!

"My Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to possess You within my soul. Since I am unable at this moment to receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as being already there and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen." – **St. Padre Pio**

The Eucharist and Love: Part 5

This week, we have been reflecting on the Eucharist and love. I'd like to review this morning what we have covered so far.

Pope Benedict XVI said:

"By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, Jesus anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an **action of love**. What on the outside is simply brutal violence – the Crucifixion – from within becomes an **act of total self-giving love**. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a **series of transformations** leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)... The **process of transformation** must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood" (*Heart of the Christian Life*, 21-3).

Pope Benedict XVI's key insight is that the Eucharist not only transformed the Crucifixion from an act of violence into "an act of total self-giving love" but that it set in motion a series of transformations in which we ourselves this morning are to take part in... we ourselves are called to receive the Eucharist in order to be transformed into Jesus.

This is why Jesus is giving Himself to us in Holy Communion this morning. Listen to these words Jesus spoke to St. Faustina, He is speaking them to us right now as well:

"Oh, how painful it is to Me that souls so seldom unite themselves to Me in Holy Communion. I wait for souls, and they are indifferent toward Me. **I love them tenderly and sincerely** and they distrust Me. I want to lavish My graces on them, and they do not want to accept them. They treat Me as a dead object, whereas **My Heart is full of love and mercy**. In order that you may know at least some of My pain, imagine the most tender of mothers who has great love for her children, while those children spurn her love. Consider her pain. No one is in a position to console her. This is but a feeble image and likeness to **My love**" (*Diary*, 1447).

This is why Jesus gives us the Eucharist. His Heart is full of love. He wants to unite Himself with us.

To conclude, as I mentioned yesterday, one practical way to grow in our love for Jesus in the Eucharist is by making a spiritual communion prayer – this is a spontaneous and personal prayer that one can make at any moment to express your loving desire to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. Every 15 minutes, St. Francis de Sales would visualize being in-front of Jesus in the tabernacle and express his desire by saying a prayer like: "Jesus, I love You. I cannot receive You in Holy Communion right now. But I desire to receive You. So come spiritually into my heart."

Let us tell Jesus often today how much we love Him. Let us express a new fervent desire to receive Him in Holy Communion as a living Person and not as a dead object. Let us allow ourselves to be transformed into Christ by receiving Jesus' total act of self-giving love for us this morning.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 6

Today is the feast day of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. I was very struck by the Office of Readings this morning and thought I would share some insights from this great saint and connect it back to the theme we focused on last week, that of **love**.

St. Bernard says this:

“For when God loves, all he desires is to be loved in return; the sole purpose of his love is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.”

This is a beautiful insight from St. Bernard. We heard last week from both St. Faustina in how Jesus comes to us in Holy Communion because His Heart is full of love and mercy and we heard from Pope Benedict XVI in how the Eucharist was Jesus' act of total self-giving love to transform the world.

Now we hear from St. Bernard in how God loves us for only one reason – to be loved in return. And why? Because those who love God are made happy by their love of Him.

So Jesus comes to us this morning in the Eucharist for 1 reason only – because He loves us. And Jesus wants only 1 thing in return – our love. Why? Because Jesus knows that when we love Him, we find our true happiness in life.

So how can we love God in return?

St. Bernard gives us some help.

First, he says: **“Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead, flows back to its source, always drawing from there the water which constantly replenishes it.”**

The Eucharist is the source of all our strength and ability to love God. The Eucharist is the fountainhead of all love because the Eucharist is Christ Himself.

Second, St. Bernard says: **Loves “profit lies in its practice. I love because I love, I love that I may love.”**

St. Bernard realized that we must practice love if we want to truly love others. God pours His love into our hearts this morning in Holy Communion, but if we do not go out and actively try to love others, we will not be signs of Christ's love.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 7

Yesterday, we reflected on St. Bernard of Clairvaux's commentary on the love of God.

In summary, St. Bernard said the following.

First: **“The sole purpose of God’s love is to be loved [in return], in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him.”**

Second: **“Love is a great thing so long as it continually returns to its fountainhead... its source.”**

Third: **Love’s “profit lies in its practice.”**

This morning, we have an amazing privilege. We get to go to the fountainhead, the source of all love – Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is commonly called “the sacrament of love.”

The more we come to understand the Eucharist as a sacrament of love, the more we realize how much God loves us, the more we should be eager to practice love. If we can love Jesus present in the Eucharist, then we can love Him present in our brothers and sisters today.

Extra:

St. Thomas Aquinas called the Eucharist “the sacrament of love” because it is both a *sign* of God’s perfect love for us and an actual *source* of love in which Christ shares His divine life with us this morning.

The Eucharist and Love: Part 8

Over the last two days, we have been reflecting on the Eucharist and love with the help of St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

In summary, St. Bernard said that the only reason God loves us is so that we may love Him in return because God knows that our true happiness is found in loving God.

By coming to daily Mass, we get to come to the fountainhead and source of all Love – Jesus Christ, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament.

But, as St. Bernard said so well, **“love’s profit lies in its practice.”**

We all know that this is true. Love’s profit lies in its practice. In other words, talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. If you love someone, you have to prove it.

And when we truly love someone, we always want that love to grow. If we do nothing at all, our love will go lukewarm and eventually die off. Thus, we give ourselves in any way possible – no matter what it is, no matter what the cost – to make that love grow.

As Fr. Peter John Cameron said so well: **“This is what Christians mean by "sacrifice." It is not about "giving up things"; it is about doing whatever is possible to get as much love as we possibly can. Sacrifice is the way that we eagerly adjust our lives so that our greatest desires come true.”**

Too often, we can have a negative view of sacrifice as Catholics. We can be afraid of making sacrifices. But we all know that whatever comes first in our life, sacrifice is taken for granted. You probably did not consider all the sacrifices you made for your children or spouses or best friends as sacrifices – sacrifices are taken for granted when love is the goal.

In the Eucharist, we have the supreme sacrifice – Jesus offers Himself totally to the Father out of love for the Father and for our salvation.

If we want to fall deeper in love with Jesus, we are going to have to make sacrifices. Remember, this is not about giving up things... but rather about eagerly adjusting our lives for the sake of loving God.

As we prepare to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, let us ask Him what sacrifices are most pleasing to Him... let us ask Him how we can eagerly adjust our lives so that we can fall more deeply in love with Him and so that our greatest desires come true.