

MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - CONTEMPLATIVE

" To do ordinary things with
extraordinary love for the
greater glory of God "



Via S. Agapito 8
00177 Roma - Italy
Tel. 06/21707702
Fax 06/21707703

Laudetur Sacra Familia

The Eucharist, Blessed Teresa and the poor

The Most Holy Eucharist is the lifeblood of the Church. In it the whole spiritual wealth of the Church is contained, for the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life.

There is little wonder, then, that the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, declared from October 2004 to October 2005 the "Year of the Eucharist" (Cf. *Mane Nobiscum Domine* n. 4). We are invited to contemplate the great mystery of the Eucharist and live as far as possible the Eucharistic life: true Christian life is Eucharistic life.

The Holy Mass and Communion are inseparable from the life of a Christian. Its fruitfulness depends on how we prepare ourselves and how we participate in the Holy Mass.

Many saints spent half a day in thanksgiving for the Mass and Holy Communion, while devoting the other half to its preparation. In the sacristies of the Missionaries of Charity all over the world, one can see a little board hanging to remind each priest that he should celebrate each Mass with devotion, freshness, contemplation and enthusiasm. The board says:

*"Priest of God,
Celebrate this Mass as if it is your first Mass,
Your only Mass and your last Mass".*

Of course these words apply to the celebrant as well as to the participants.

Three parts of Holy Mass. The celebration of the mass has three distinct parts.

'Way of purification'. The first part is a very short Penitential Rite. Its main purpose is to prepare and to dispose the celebrant as well as the participants to listen to the Word of God and receive the Eucharist in a worthy manner.

The fruitfulness of the Mass depends on our inner disposition, how prepared we are to receive God's rich graces. This initial short Penitential Rite can be compared to the "way of purification" in the beginning of our spiritual life. It is the first step in our spiritual life. It depends much on one's effort, generosity, good will and above all, one's cooperation with the graces of God.

It can be and it is always a very painful process, because it necessarily involves sacrificing one's will to accept God's will

'Way of illumination'. This process is repeated and renewed in each celebration of the Mass. It prepares us to the next step, which is known as the "way of illumination", and as part of the Mass is known as the Liturgy of the Word.

No sower sows the seed if the field is not cleaned and properly prepared. The sower invariably knows that it will be a sheer waste of time to sow seeds in a field that is not ploughed, cleared and manured.

The same principle applies to each celebrant and participant of the Mass, especially with the Word of God being sown into our hearts at every Mass. The Liturgy of the Word is not only an essential part of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, but also an integral part of our spiritual nourishment and growth. We must be well prepared and disposed to listen to it; this means, if possible, to read the texts beforehand, to reflect, meditate and contemplate on them, not only on the part of the homilist but by all who celebrate and participate in the Holy Mass.

The homily should awaken the seed of faith in the listener, which may be dormant in the hearts of some believers. The quality of the homily does not depend on length but how well it is prepared and how convincingly it is delivered. There is a big difference between what we copy from a stereotyped homily book and what we speak from the heart with our life experience.

The Word of God and the homily are meant not only to illumine our hearts and minds, but also to prepare us to celebrate the most important part of the Holy Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Holy Communion.

‘Way of union’. If the second part - the way of illumination or Liturgy of the Word - concludes with the Creed (on Sundays and solemnities) and the prayer of the faithful, the third part concludes, practically speaking, with Holy Communion. This part can be called the “way of union”.

Just as in our spiritual life we have to pass through the way of purification and the way of illumination to arrive at the way of spousal and mystical union, so also in every celebration of the Eucharist these three ways are not only remembered but renewed and relived.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolakta writes. *“These desires to satiate the longings of our Lord for souls of the poor - for pure victims of His love – goes on increasing with every Mass and Holy Communion.”* (MFG, p. 19) For this reason back in 1946-47, when she was writing the very first Constitutions for the future Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity which she was asked by Jesus, her Crucified Spouse, to found, she writes: *“The Sisters should use every means to learn and increase that tender love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.”* (R. 34; MFG, p. 31)

Blessed Teresa not only renewed daily her “call within a call” to give wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor at every Eucharistic celebration, but also drew her strength from its daily reception. She writes: *“One thing I request you, Your Grace, to give us all the spiritual help we need. If we have our Lord in the midst of us, with daily Mass and Holy Communion, I fear nothing for the Sisters nor (for) myself. He will look after us. But without Him I cannot be – I am helpless.”* (MFG, 26)

She even wanted the Sisters to do the work of priests. In her original Rule book, she writes. *As each Sister is to do the work of a priest – go where he cannot go and do what he cannot do, she must imbibe the Spirit of Holy Mass, which is one of total surrender and offering. For this reason, holy Mass must become the daily meeting place, where God and His creature offer each other for each other and the world.”* (MFG, p. 31; R. 33)

Here we see Blessed Teresa's deeper understanding of the reality of the Eucharist and her mystic union. It was this unbroken spousal union that gave her all the energy, strength, vitality and enthusiasm to go on doing what she did. The life she lived was no longer her life, but it was Jesus who lived in her and worked through her. She was able to do all things in Jesus, for Jesus and with Jesus, who strengthened her through daily reception of the Eucharist.

What did Blessed Teresa hear?

In her first letter to the Archbishop of Calcutta, Ferdinand Périer, SJ, written on 13 January 1947, she wrote: *"One day at holy Communion I heard the same voice very distinctly."* (MFG, p. 10)

What did Blessed Teresa hear from the Eucharistic Jesus?

- 1) The kind of the nuns she should have and the qualities they should possess:
 - *"I want Indian nuns, victims of My love, who would be Mary and Martha, who would be so united to Me as to radiate My love on souls.*
 - *I want free nuns, covered with the poverty of the Cross.*
 - *I want obedient nuns, covered with the obedience of the Cross.*
 - *I want full of love nuns, covered with the Charity of the Cross."*
- 2) She heard the kind of people she and her nuns should take care of:
 - *"There are plenty of nuns to look after the rich and well-to-do people but for My very poor people, there are absolutely none. For them I long, them I love. Wilt thou refuse?"*
- 3) The name of the Congregation Jesus wanted her to found:
 - *"I want Indian Missionaries Sisters of Charity, who would be My fire of love amongst the very poor, the sick, the dying, the little street children."*
- 4) She heard very distinctly that she and her nuns should bring the poor to him:
 - *"The poor I want you to bring to Me.*
 - *The Sisters who offer their lives as victims of My love should bring these souls to Me."*
- 5) The Eucharistic Jesus told her that:
 - *"You are, I know, the most incapable person, weak and sinful, but just because you are that, I want to use you for My glory. Wilt thou refuse?"*
- 6) Jesus told her the kind of habit she should bear:
 - *"You will dress in simple Indian clothes or rather like My Mother dressed-simple and poor,...your sarie will become holy because it is My symbol."*
- 7) Jesus told her very clearly what exactly was her vocation:
 - *"Your vocation is to love and suffer and save souls."*
- 8) He told her that she is his little spouse and she will suffer very much:
 - *"You are My own little spouse, the spouse of the Crucified Jesus, you will have to suffer these torments in your heart."*

It was her Eucharistic Spouse who promised that he would never leave her provided she trusted him lovingly and blindly, obeyed him cheerfully, promptly and without any questions (cf. MFG, p. 18)

In the account of the second vision our Lady told Blessed Teresa to take care of her poor people and carry Jesus to them. Her exact words were: *“Take care of them-they are mine-bring them to Jesus-carry Jesus to them.”* (MFG, p. 19) Here our Lady apparently wanted Blessed Teresa to continue to do what she did immediately after the Annunciation. At the Annunciation she received Jesus first in her heart and then in her womb and then with Jesus she went in haste to give him to her cousin Elizabeth and others. *“The Annunciation was our Lady’s first Holy Communion day”*, Blessed Teresa said.

Just as our Lady received Jesus at the Annunciation and then went in haste to give him to others, so too all Missionaries of Charity Sisters and Brothers receive Jesus in Holy Communion and go in haste to give to the poor. Our Lady told Blessed Teresa to bring the poor to Jesus and carry Jesus to them. She also promised her unending help: *“Fear not, Jesus and I will be with you and your children.”*

Christ in the poor. Hence we see the inseparable twofold presence of Jesus in the Bread of Life and in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor. Jesus told Blessed Mother Teresa: *“Carry Me with you into them, for I cannot go alone. They don’t know Me-so they don’t want Me-you go amongst them.”* (MFG, p. 18) Jesus wants Blessed Teresa, the Sisters and the Brothers to go amongst the poor not as social workers, politicians or even masters; but as unworthy servants asked to carry Jesus with us into the people’s homes and holes.

Jesus wants us to visit the people, but he cannot go alone. Jesus is helpless to do his work amongst his people without us; we are helpless to do his work without him. *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”* (Jn 15: 5) *“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”* (Phil 4: 13) There is a reciprocal helplessness and a mutual strength. In a sense Jesus depends on us to save souls and we depend totally on Jesus for our life and work, as electricity and bulb. Through the bulb the electricity becomes luminous and useful.

Our Blessed Teresa goes further and deeper with her Eucharistic Jesus. In her own words: *“Just as Jesus allows Himself to be broken, to be given to us as food, we too must break, we must share with each other, with our own people first, in our house, in our communities, for love begins at home. Every Holy Communion fills us with Jesus and we must, with our Lady, go in haste to give Him to others. For her, it was on her first Holy Communion day that Jesus came in her life, and so for all of us also. He made Himself the Bread of Life that we, too, like Mary, become full of Jesus. We too, like her, be in haste to give Him to others. We too, like her, serve others.”* (Talk to the Brothers and co-workers, Los Angeles U.S.A., July 1 1977)

According to Blessed Mother Teresa, Jesus in the Eucharist keeps us zealous, fervent and enthusiastic. Love for the Eucharist helps us to love our poor people, for she says: *“Try to be Jesus’ love, Jesus’ compassion, Jesus’ presence to each other and the poor you serve. Humility always is the root of zeal for souls and charity. We see that in Jesus on the Cross and in the Eucharist.”* (Letter, June 1990)

The Eucharistic Jesus little by little took possession of our Mother Teresa, transforming her whole being so utterly into Him so that she could become Jesus for all. People looked up and saw no longer her, but only Jesus. Like a piece of iron stuck to the magnet, she became one with her beloved

Spouse, whom Jesus himself addressed as his little spouse: “*You are my own little Spouse-the Spouse of the Crucified Jesus.*” (MFG, p. 11)

‘To be really only his’. In Blessed Teresa there was the insatiable spousal longing, which became identical with the thirst of Jesus on the Cross for love of souls. From now on, she was going to pray, suffer and work day and night for Jesus, because her beloved Spouse was everything for her: “*Jesus, my own Jesus, I am only Thine... I love you not for what you give, but what you take, Jesus.*” (MFG, p. 17) She continues in writing to the Archbishop of Calcutta: “*I long to be really only His-to burn myself completely for Him and souls. I want Him to be loved tenderly by many...I have already given my all to Him.*” (MGF, p. 13-14)

The Eucharist and the poor are inseparable. This is not anything new for the Church as we can clearly see it in the Gospels. The one who said: “*This is my body*” is the same one who said: “*I was hungry and you gave me to eat...*” (cf. Mt 26: 26; 25: 35) Some of the Fathers of the Church like St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom etc. were very clear and emphatic in their pronouncements. St. John Chrysostom, for example, said: “*Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: ‘This is my body’ is the same who said: ‘You saw me hungry and you gave me no food,’ and ‘whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me...’ what good is it if the Eucharistic table is over loaded with golden chalices when your brother is dying of hunger. Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.*”

In conclusion we can say that it is a great need for each and every person to rediscover the importance and the necessity of the Eucharist in his or her life, the Eucharist which necessarily urges everyone to go in search of the poor.

The Holy Father, John Paul II, writes to the youth of the world on the occasion of the XIX World Youth Day 2004: “*Dear friends, if you learn to discover Jesus in the Eucharist, you will also know how to discover him in your brothers and sisters, particularly in the very poor...*”

It is with such inner freedom and such burning charity that Jesus teaches us to find him in others, first of all in the disfigured faces of the poor. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta loved to distribute her “visiting card” on which were written the words: ‘The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace.’ This is the way to meet Christ...”

Let us go out and meet him in the poor making our love all the more fruitful in service. Let this be our unquenchable thirst, constant effort and fervent prayer.

Love and prayers. God bless you.

Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C.