



The Eucharist: God Among Us

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop John Noonan
to the holy people of God

*Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, far too lofty for me to reach.
Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee?
If I ascend to the heavens, you are there; if I lie down in Sheol, there you are.
If I take the wings of dawn and dwell beyond the sea,
Even there your hand guides me, your right hand holds me fast.*

Psalm 139 : 5 - 10



My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As we begin our journey toward a Eucharistic Revival, I write with great hope and joy in God that His Presence will ever be our guide. I offer you my prayerful reflection about how we might begin our journey together and consider our relationship with God as the defining moment of our faith. I ask you to pray and discern where we might together recommit our desire to receive Jesus in the Eucharist that we are filled with God's Presence and become Christ to one another. It is my fervent prayer that, on our journey, we will love Jesus in one another.

Invitation from Jesus

Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him (Matthew 9:9).

How many of us wish to follow Jesus? For those of you whom I have met, from the youngest to the oldest, I believe your response would be a resounding, "I do!". When we are born, Jesus already knows each one of us, loves us and calls us to follow Him. From the moment we are baptized, we begin to follow Jesus. Some of you consented as adults to be baptized and some of you were presented by your parents and godparents to follow Jesus and as your family and friends taught you about Jesus, you also continue to follow Him.

This call is a love-filled invitation from Jesus to you! He invites each one of us to give our lives completely, without measurement or personal interest, without thinking, "what's in it for me?" Remember Jesus was criticized because He called sinners – people like you and me. They accepted His invitation because they recognized Jesus is the Way to Perfection. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we make a Covenant with Jesus to love Him above all things and to serve Him in our brothers and sisters.



Encounter with Jesus

Jesus took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me."

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you (Luke 22:19,20).



Who is the Eucharist? The Eucharist is Jesus! Just as John said to Peter after the Resurrection, "It is the Lord! (John 21:7)!" Jesus speaks to the apostles, His disciples, and us with great love and knows that we need to be nourished to follow Him. He knows the difficulties we will face. With the Eucharist, He gives Himself to us so that we are able to receive Him and continue our journey with Him each day. St. Justin Martyr wrote, "We have been taught, the food which has been made the Eucharist by the prayer of his (the priest's) word, and which nourishes our flesh and blood by assimilation, is both the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh" (St. Justin Martyr (c.155 AD), First Apology, 66).

How can we refuse Jesus? What or who keeps us from receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus, our Lord and Savior? The Eucharist is our participation in the Divine Life through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. "The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit" (CCC1325). This is a great mystery of our faith—we can only know it from Christ's teaching given us in the Scriptures and in the Tradition of the Church.

St. Francis of Assisi said, "In this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He says, "Behold, I am with you until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

If we love Jesus, then wouldn't we want to do what He asks? Jesus ever calls us to a new commandment. He said, "love one another as I have loved you" (cf: John 13:34).

We are a part of God's story. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, encourages us to "write stories of redemption on the pages of our time." As we receive Christ in the Eucharist, we continue salvation history for Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and forever. "Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope" (Ecclesia de Eucharistia 1).

Just as our physical bodies are nourished by the food harvested from the earth for strength and energy, so too does the Bread from Heaven nourish us to bring forth heaven upon the earth. In our spiritual reality, food plays a primary role in the story of salvation, from the forbidden fruit in the garden which brings forth sin and death to the food of Christ's body on the Cross which brings forth everlasting life.

St. Paul tells us, "For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).





Being a Eucharist with Jesus

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life (John 3:16).

It is not the Eucharist who is changed into us, but rather we who are transformed by Him. From receiving Jesus, we are compelled to go forth wrapped in His love to bring His love, the Eucharist, to one another. We become His dwelling place. “When, at the Visitation, Mary bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a “tabernacle” – the first “tabernacle” in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating His light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled Him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia 55)?



St. Irenaeus wrote, “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.” How might our community be transfigured if we offer the love of God to one another freely with no expectation in return? When we receive Jesus, we accept His mandate. The love we give is united to Jesus. We present Him to one another. We are called to go out from our comfort zone and be a eucharist: to bring forth Jesus among ourselves and with our brothers and sisters wherever we encounter them.

Pope Francis said, “In practice, what does it mean to live this love? Before giving us this commandment, Jesus had washed the disciples’ feet; then, after giving it, he gave himself up to the wood of the cross. To love means this: to serve and to give one’s life. To serve . . . to share the charisms and gifts that God has given us. Specifically, we should ask ourselves, “What do I do for others?”

Our Journey to Heaven

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30,31).

After the Resurrection, two disciples were walking along the road to Emmaus and met Jesus as they walked; however, they were unable to recognize Him. It was only when He presented Himself to them as the Eucharist, that they recognized Him.

I think we are like those disciples still. Jesus is within each one of us and yet we do not see Him present. Remember Jesus speaks to us about recognizing Him as we are called to serve each other. The people asked, ‘When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ Jesus replied, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me’ (cf: Matthew 25:38-40).

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM writes in one of his homilies, “We must make our lives a gift of love to the Father for the good of our brothers and sisters. We must make ourselves a Eucharist.”

Will you follow Jesus? Will you respond to His mandate to receive Him? Nourished by Jesus the Eucharist, will you be as Christ to one another?

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