

# Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament - Why?

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This pamphlet presents a simply-written clear statement of the solid dogmatic foundation of that true devotion to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament which flows from an informed faith. Its closing section suggests scripture readings and simple prayers by which we can develop and express this devotion. -Editor

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An event like an International Eucharistic Congress certainly sets you thinking. What is the point of 'devotion' to the Blessed Sacrament? Is it out of date now, 'contrary to the mind of the Church' after Vatican II? We can take away all the dated and tawdry pomp of a Congress. We must give it a fresh and modern pastoral form. But whatever we do, the Congress still centres around devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, embodied in the Liturgy and in public adoration of the Eucharistic Presence. Is there any theology for this Eucharistic devotion?

We must be honest with ourselves. If there is no sound Christian theology behind a devotion, then the devotion would be better abandoned. If there is no theology behind them, corporate devotions like Exposition and Benediction had better go. Private adoration, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, even the act of genuflecting could also, at least, be questioned.

But there are excellent theological understandings of this devotion. Indeed, the exciting revival and renewal of the Liturgy after the Council provides new and clear reasons for developing and understanding devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. We can confidently investigate these new reasons together with sound traditional reasons for devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. This investigation should help each of us to appreciate more deeply that central mystery of our lives - the Eucharist.

The 'Prisoner'?

Before investigating sound reasons for devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, some very unsound reasons should be dismissed. But here we must be gentle and sensitive to the customs, thinking and habits of older people. In no way do I wish to say 'You were utterly wrong!' as I criticize unsound traditional reasons for this devotion, They were motivated by love of Christ.

In old prayer-books, devotional manuals, pious pamphlets, we read of Jesus as 'a Prisoner' in the tabernacle or monstrance. Now we know that Jesus Christ is really, truly and substantially present in the Host. This is a truth of God's revelation. But is he confined in the Host, and locked in the tabernacle as a 'Prisoner'? The language of emotion, of devotion and prayer, may tend to say this. But it is a crude exaggeration - and limitation - of the profound truth of transubstantiation. It exaggerates the self-emptying and humbling of God taking our flesh, the Incarnation, because of an enthusiastic appreciation of that truth. When a person loves another person he will say exaggerated things out of love. But he may distort the truth.

St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest of theologians, examined this problem carefully. If we say that Jesus is a 'Prisoner', we imply he is in each Host just like we are in our bodies, just as we live in places. St. Thomas pointed out that this is ridiculous. It would give Our Lord the dimensions of bread and wine! [Summa Theologiae, 3a. q. 76, art. 5.] St. Thomas also went into the question of whether Our Lord really moves when the Host is moved - a mysterious and deep question. But he would not allow that Jesus Christ is in any way affected by the movement of the Host. [Ibid., 3a. q. 76, art. 6.] This makes the miracle of the Real Presence too physical. It would imply superstitious notions such as Christ being harmed when the Host, is broken, or eaten, or even treated with irreverence.

These distortions have helped discredit devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, because some critics have pointed to them and said. 'That's the sort of silly nonsense it creates.' It must be admitted that the silly nonsense has been there - but it has rested on poor theology, or no theology at all. It rested on sentimentalism. People were urged to make visits or to keep Holy Hours, not for the simple fact that Jesus is there, but for the false notion that Jesus is lonely, or locked up, or in need of consolation. The fact that, as St. Peter Julian said, 'The Master is there...' should be enough for us to say '...let us go to Him'. Sentimental devotional distortions only harm this simple and natural devotion.

But the tremendous and radical fact remains. The Master is there. With this truth in our hearts and minds we can find a theological basis for our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in its public and private forms.

## 1. THE MASS IS THE BASIS

We perhaps noticed something odd about those 'Prisoner' emotions. They were thoughts which came from men, sentiments thought up and then attached to the Real Presence. But the sound basis works the other way. The thoughts and sentiments burst forth from the Eucharist itself. The Liturgy in all its richness provides them for us. The theology of the Mass itself is the source for the devotion.

The Second Vatican Council, and subsequent teachings of Pope Paul VI and the Holy See, make this fact quite clear. Unless the reasons for this devotion are derived from dogma and Liturgy, it can only be an optional extra. But the Council and the Pope will not allow the devotion to be a mere optional extra. It is to play a normal part in Catholic life. However, it must be integrated into the action of the Liturgy, the source and centre of the living Church.

The devotion is not apart from the Liturgy, something 'extra-liturgical', nice trimmings and customs, not some pious practice we tack onto the Mass and sacraments. The Council Fathers teach that all authorized devotions of God's People should be so drawn up that 'they accord with the sacred Liturgy, are in some fashion derived from it, and lead the people to it, since the Liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them'. [Decree on the Liturgy, chapter I, para. 13.] This would be especially accurate in developing devotion to the Eucharistic Presence.

What the Mass is

If we understand the Mass as it really is, from this understanding we will see devotion of the Blessed Sacrament as a normal, natural and valuable part of Christian life. Then let us see the Mass as it really is.

The Mass is The Sacrifice. In the form of a holy meal, it brings into time the eternal sacrificial self-giving of Christ to his Father, in the Holy Spirit. There is only one Sacrifice, offered once and for all by Jesus Christ on the Cross. But when we ask, 'What was the Cross?', we soon realize that it was nothing less than a historical event which made the world perfectly open to God, to the Holy Trinity.

Giving himself up on the Cross, Jesus the God-Man atoned for the sins of the world by the glorious gift of his love and obedience. The Cross is the victory opening man's way to God, into God's Life, into that wonderful open Life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus takes our nature, our flesh and blood, into the Heart of the Trinity, for us, for all men.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and wine and adapted Jewish customs into his own ritual meal for his own People. This is how he chose to perpetuate that once-and-for-all event on the Cross. In his sacrifice-meal his own People would share God's Life, all the benefits won on the Cross - freedom and forgiveness from sins, the assurance of future life with God for ever.

At the Last Supper he said that the bread would be his Body, the wine would be his Blood. In the Jewish way of thinking this would mean (a) the food would simply be himself (b) but it would be himself offered up in Sacrifice. By eating this food, people would share fully in the Sacrifice, in communion with God, in communion with one another.

We can never understand exactly how the Mass is the same Sacrifice as the Cross. We know it does not repeat the Cross, but we also know that it is not just a symbol of the Cross. Perhaps the Real Presence is the key to our understanding of the Holy Sacrifice.

In a sacrifice a priest and a victim or offering have to be present. How does this happen at the Christian altar? The answer is simple. There is a radical change (transubstantiation). Bread and wine become Jesus Christ. The Priest and the Victim is present in the Person of Jesus. He is the Sacrifice - not out there, up there, over there, but here and now, in our midst, for us men and for our salvation.

The radical change of bread and wine makes Jesus our Sacrifice present. So we can see that the Real Presence under the appearance of bread and wine is not something separate from the Sacrifice. This view was presented in the past, but today a deeper understanding of the Bible and Hebrew thought helps us to see the relationship between meal and Sacrifice, the Presence of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus as our Food and as our Sacrifice. In our renewed rite of Mass we find this beautifully expressed in the Preface of the Holy Eucharist.

'Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the true and eternal priest who established this unending sacrifice.

He offered himself as victim for our deliverance and taught us to make this offering in his memory, so that by eating the bread of life in a holy meal we might proclaim his death until he comes.'

#### False Notions

The new preface of the Holy Eucharist gives us an accurate and balanced doctrine of the mass.

However, if we have false notions of the Mass, we will fail to appreciate the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. If for example we hold to the unbalanced view that 'The Mass is a meal', then the devotion becomes nonsense. Exposition and Benediction would simply be treating a portion of

Food in an unnatural and theatrical way. If we have been misled into believing that the only change in the bread and wine is a change in meaning or significance or purpose, then such devotion is a waste of time. We would say that this Food with a new meaning or purpose is to be eaten. We would not perceive a Reality present to be adored and loved. But we would be wrong.

The Church has not accepted these new attempts at understanding the Eucharist. In the new rite of the Mass the Church has certainly balanced the outer form of a meal with the essential reality of Sacrifice. The Church has recovered the community meaning of this Sacrifice, that we penetrate the Holy Sacrifice, best share in it, offer it best, by eating the Eucharist together. But in his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*, Pope Paul reaffirmed the central mystery of transubstantiation. He would not allow sophisticated and misleading theories which tried to re-express the Real Presence in terms of meaning, significance and purpose. The Real Presence requires a real change in bread and wine. The meaning, significance and purpose can only be derived from the fact of this radical change.

## 2. MAN RESPONDS TO THE PRESENCE

The Real Presence in the Eucharistic Food has always fascinated men. >From the earliest days of God's new People, the Church, believers and unbelievers have responded to that Presence with emotion, wonder, scandal and awe. For the believer, the Real Presence has always been something very wonderful, yet something quite natural - just what one could expect from the God who comes so close to men, that he becomes Man, flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood. It is this mystery of the Incarnation, God taking flesh, which is equally present in the Eucharist with the sacrificial mystery of our Redemption; the Cross, Resurrection, Exaltation and future Coming of the Lord. Where Jesus is truly present, there everything he did and will do is somehow present. Man's response to this Gift is a response of Faith and Love, looking forward to the future in Hope.

### In The Past

First, let us look back and see how men responded to this Presence in the past. If we understand how the Eucharistic devotion developed, how men were trying to express their Faith, then we may come to see how this devotion can be re-developed in our own times.

The early Christians did not reserve the Host in a tabernacle or join in public or private acts of adoration outside the time of the Mass. But soon certain practical problems of persecution, imprisonment and care of the aged and the sick led them to set aside portion of the Host to be taken from the Mass to those unable to attend. We may be familiar with the story of Tarsicius, the boy martyr who laid down his life rather than give up the Host he was taking to a persecuted Christian. Even in these times of persecution, the worship of the underground Church developed its own 'cult', the human theatre of worship, words, customs, actions, music, imagery carefully borrowed from Jewish and pagan religious practices. We have evidence now that special vessels, lamps, utensils were set apart for the Mass at a very early stage in the history of the Church - and this was a response to the mystery of the Real Presence, a natural human response.

When the Church emerged into toleration and prominence, public churches were constructed for public worship. Then the practice of keeping portions of the Host reserved carefully in private homes became a part of public church practice. Special containers, safes, urns were developed to keep the Blessed Sacrament secure, so that it could be taken to the sick or isolated at any time, so that they could share in the Liturgy. Christian worship became more colourful at this time, with lamps, candles, incense and the gradual development of special vestments for clergy and servers.

In Western Europe a devotion began to form around the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the church. Men naturally paid reverence to the Real Presence. The Roman military reverence of genuflecting was gradually adopted, together with Eastern customs of bowing profoundly or prostrating oneself. Gradually some of the public ceremonial of the Mass was attached to the Real Presence prolonged beyond the time of Mass. Lamps and hangings marked out the place where the Sacrament was kept. People came to pray to Our Lord, present as Sacrifice and Food.

But, in the Middle Ages a less fortunate trend developed. Men made so much of the fact of the Real Presence that they lost sight of Christ's purpose in being with us in this special way. They came to see the Mass as only a Sacrifice, not as a Sacrifice-Meal. They were happy to adore the Real Presence at Mass and after Mass, but they rarely received Holy Communion. They saw Holy Communion as the 'fruit' of the Sacrifice, rather than as the best way of sharing in the Sacrifice. The ceremony of elevating the Host after the consecration developed at this time, and men saw this as the main part of the Mass.

In those days the Sacrament was reserved in various ways, in various forms of what we call the 'tabernacle'. There were hanging pyxes, a small tabernacle, often in the shape of a dove, suspended on chains over an altar. There was the aumbry, an elaborate safe set into a wall near an altar. There was the 'Sacrament House', popular in parts of Germany, a decorated tower or pillar, set up inside a church as a throne for a small safe.

The people's desire to see the Host led to various attempts to 'freeze' the action of the elevation. There were glass doors set into some tabernacles, so that people could see the pyx containing the Host. These were later forbidden. The pyx itself developed into an ornamental stand with a glass or crystal window set into it, the early form of our modern monstrance. Men wanted to see the sign of Bread, and to worship Christ under this sign.

Various public ceremonies were devised to express popular devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. The flowers, candles and incense of the Liturgy were taken into the action of these ceremonies. Processions of the Host became common, and gradually the practice of blessing people with the monstrance, Benediction, was introduced. St. Thomas Aquinas composed beautiful hymns and prayers for these new rites, but his accurate and balanced theology in these prayers and hymns did not always accord with exaggerated and superstitious devotions, and certain odd customs, which people attached to this devotion. In some places there were even elaborate games and theatricals associated with the sacred Host, customs which seem grotesque to us today.

### The Devotion is Reformed

When the Protestant Reformation split Europe in the Sixteenth Century there was a fierce assault not only on the Mass but on the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. The Protestant Reformers could point to grotesque customs and superstitions to justify their attacks. Although they went too far and fell into error, they prompted a healthy reaction among Catholics.

The internal reform of Catholic life, known as the 'Catholic Reformation' or 'Counter-Reformation', led to a reform of the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. Just as the Mass was standardized for most of the Catholic world (Missal of 1570), so the public ceremonies of Exposition and Benediction came to take a more standard and well-disciplined form. Many local customs were swept away. At this time, the modern tabernacle appeared, set upon the altar.

But the reforms failed to get back to the liturgical spirit expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas. The devotion was still cut off from the Liturgy itself. In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries it even took on a new and elaborate form. Exposition was a royal enthronement ceremony. Altars were constructed like thrones, so that the tabernacle and the canopy above it dominated and overshadowed the sacrificial table itself. Royal canopies, crowns, gilt cherubs, cascades of candles, all this pomp expressed the habits and instincts of the age of absolute monarchs and their glittering courts. Christ was enthroned and adored as King.

Certain excellent devotions developed at this time. The Counter-Reformation devotion of the Forty Hours exposition of the Host spread rapidly. Various religious orders devoted themselves to perpetual adoration. In the Nineteenth Century this practice was extended to public churches, especially through the witness of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. People's associations formed for participation in perpetual adoration, in vigils, and later in our own 20th century, in the holy hour. The great international Eucharistic Congresses encouraged the public and communal devotion of the Eucharist.

This brings us into the age of the Second Vatican Council. Once more, as at Trent, there has been a liturgical revolution and reform. But now the very existence of a public and private devotion of the Blessed Sacrament is questioned. Let us set this criticism in its context - and see a basic practical reason why the devotion must continue and develop.

### 3. THE LITURGY TODAY

Two great eucharistic movements culminated in the reforms of worship brought in by the Second Vatican Council. The first movement was the struggle to restore frequent Communion, to get away from the infrequent Communion of the Middle Ages and that later wave of scrupulous infrequent Communion brought about by the Jansenist heresy. The second movement was the liturgical revival, which developed rapidly in this 20th century, a return to the simpler more primitive form of worship of the early Church, a search for forms of worship suitable for men and women today. Bringing these two movements together, Vatican II sought the restoration of the view that the Mass is a sacrificial meal - the Sacrifice in the form of a holy meal, eaten by a community.

We must note that public devotion to the Blessed Sacrament did not hinder this reform of past practices. The centres of perpetual adoration were centres of frequent Communion. Recent Eucharistic Congresses, for example Munich in 1960, presented experiments and reforms of the Liturgy. Was this simply a process of self-destruction? Was the fervour of the devotion being turned into other channels, so that people saw that full participation in the Mass, and frequent Communion, are far more important than keeping holy hours? Some have claimed that this is what has happened, hence the fading of parish Benediction. But let us look at the nature of our renewed Mass and see that it in fact requires the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament to fill out and complete a balanced liturgical life for all Catholics.

In the renewed Mass we see clearly an accurate theology of the Sacrifice and Presence. We see the holy meal as the community action. We see that Jesus Christ is present as Food for his People, so that they may fully share in his Sacrifice, making it their own Sacrifice. We notice that in the renewed Mass there is little adoration. Indeed there is much action, full participation, restored ceremonies, some simple, others more elaborate. But the end of the old silent Mass, in Latin, back to the people, means that the elevation of the Host and the adoration pattern of worship has less emphasis. Nevertheless, men still want to respond to the Real Presence, in ways different to the

greatest response, Holy Communion. They still want to adore. The inherited living tradition of centuries of adoration is still part of them.

The Church recognizes this desire to adore and welcomes it. But if it is no longer possible at Mass, when can men adore? The answer is obvious. Far from vanishing, the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament comes into its own again. It provides the public and private opportunities for adoration which our renewed Mass does not provide. This is the practical reason for Eucharistic devotion.

The Liturgy has been renewed and reformed. Therefore, this devotion must be renewed and reformed, otherwise it would be out of step with the liturgy, and all popular devotions are to be related to the liturgy, as the Council teaches. Practical directions came from Rome in 1967 to cover the renewal and reform of the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament. These are embodied in the Instruction on the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery. (Available as an A.C.T.S. publication) [and accessible from the Vatican web-site - [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) ]. This document is the blueprint for a truly liturgical revival of public and private devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

We may summarize the renewal of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament in two ways. (a.) Such renewal must proceed from an understanding of the Mass as the Sacrifice in the form of a community meal. (b.) Such renewal must be organized to avoid the historical problem of allowing the devotion to separate the Real Presence from the Holy Sacrifice and Holy Communion.

The Instruction from Rome shows a pastoral and liturgical understanding of this renewal of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. But because it is an official document, taken up with practical matters, we must go more deeply into modern theological reasons for the devotion. We cannot merely rely on the official policy of the Church, without penetrating the new and old thinking which lies behind that wise policy. We have seen man responding to the Real Presence in the past, in different historical circumstances. Let us investigate how he can respond to the Real Presence today - and why he ought to respond to this Gift of a loving Father.

#### 4. WHY MAN RESPONDS TO THE PRESENCE

When someone loves another person, he will keep and cherish a picture of his beloved. The lifeless object, the picture, will always remind him of the living person whom he loves. The picture will help him objectify his love.

The Blessed Sacrament is like this picture cherished by a lover. But the Blessed Sacrament is far more than a lifeless symbol. It is far more than something a man uses to objectify his love. It is God's own way of objectifying man's love. In the Host, God provides Himself as the object of man's love. Man does not turn God into an object, or a 'thing'. The God-Man Jesus Christ becomes present to us and for us under the appearance of Bread. The response of man to this Gift, a response of faithful love, will far surpass any devotion a lover would bestow on a picture of his beloved.

#### The Mystery of the Real Presence

There is something clearly objective about the Real Presence. We can point to the tabernacle and say that Christ is there, and yet say that he is not there in a crucifix set up near the tabernacle. We can say that this Real Presence is his supreme way of being with his People, even more intense and far deeper than his Presence in the Word of God read at Mass, or his Presence in the whole community gathered at Mass, or his Presence in each person. But we must always remember that the Real Presence is a mystery. How can Christ be present on so many altars at the same time? The

key to this mystery is the fact that he is present as the risen and glorified Lord, the Saviour who has broken the bonds of death and made himself available to all men.

The risen Lord, as we read in Scripture, has complete control over time, space and place. He can be wherever he wills, whenever he wills, however he wills. It is his will, expressed at the Last Supper, to be with us always in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the only answer we dare give to the question, 'How is he present on so many altars at the same time?'

But in the Western world we have less sense of mystery than the inhabitants of the East. We like matters to be straight, clear cut and 'objective'. We ask 'how?', rather than 'why?' This is embodied in our philosophical and scientific thinking. It also has direct bearing on the way devotion to the Blessed Sacrament developed in the West.

Under the influence of certain philosophical traditions, Western theologians have shown great interest in times, actions, places, that which involves man in his world, the objects man can perceive over and against himself. This interest in times, actions, places, is evident in the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament, the veiled tabernacle, the lamp, the genuflections, the specific ceremonies of Exposition and Benediction. Man in the West wants to relate in a direct and practical way with the God who presents Himself to man as Bread. He wants to be objective in his worship.

#### The Eastern Tradition

In the Eastern Churches we find a different tradition, a different mentality. Under the influence of other philosophical traditions and forms of culture, Eastern Christians express the sacred nature of time and space within the Liturgy itself. But in the Liturgy they make it clear that the actions and places of men are only important insofar as they reflect the eternal realities of heaven.

In the several hours devoted to the Mass, they set aside the time when man is raised into the angel hosts, into the worship of heaven. The great altar-screen hides the mystery of the Real Presence from the view of men, and the mystery is wrapped in a rich garment of ritual colour, sound, clouds of incense. At one point during the Mass there is a ceremony similar to Benediction, but every act of devotion to Christ present takes place within the action of the Mass. After the Liturgy, the Blessed Sacrament is reverently reserved in a small shrine on the altar, but no one salutes the Real Presence with a genuflection. There is no provision for public or private acts of objective adoration. The people believe exactly what we believe about the Real Presence, but find all their needs to worship and adore perfectly fulfilled in a rich and mysterious Liturgy.

We do not have this Eastern mentality, although there are Catholics who use these Eastern Rites and who share this liturgical mystery view of the Eucharist. We prefer the objective relationship with Christ in the Eucharist. We want to worship and adore him. With a renewed form of the Mass we find that this is best expressed outside our practical Liturgy, before the tabernacle or monstrance.

#### An Objective Relationship

We can see now that the devotion of the Blessed Sacrament is a Western way of making my personal faith relationship objective. There is nothing complicated about this. (Outlines for this are set out in Section 7).

When I enter a church to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, I am devoting myself to specific actions. I recognize the Presence 'over there' in the tabernacle by genuflecting. I kneel down. In prayer I raise myself into the Presence of Jesus Christ. I talk to him. I affirm my own personal



relationship with him. What a delightfully easy form of prayer this is! Potentially it can be one of the free and most personal forms of prayer.

## 5. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

We may have been trained as children to recite certain formulas in making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Adults should move beyond formulas, indeed children can be encouraged to be spontaneous in prayer. Let us be as free as possible in our personal prayer to Jesus in the Eucharistic Bread. We may pour out our innermost thoughts and problems to him. We may make a carefully planned holy hour. Perhaps we only have time to drop in, to make a salute of love to our God-Man. We may discover that the best form of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is uttered in perfect silence, the adoration of quietness.

In the frantic pulse of modern life, men and women, especially certain young people, are rediscovering the ancient wisdom of silent meditation. What better place is there to meditate, in peaceful relaxation, than before the Blessed Sacrament? Let us learn to relax, to be recollected, to rediscover ourselves, to revitalize our inner peace, our Faith, in the Presence of the God who gives himself to man in the form of Bread.

However, this objective relationship with Jesus is not something we can keep to ourselves. The Church is a community, a People. This is why men spontaneously seek public and corporate acts of worship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. As a community we gather for Mass, joining the priest as he offers the Sacrifice for us and with us, together a priestly people. We join fully in the Sacrifice by sharing the holy meal together. But beyond the time of the Liturgy, we can perpetuate the Liturgy in the beautiful ceremony of Benediction. As a community we adore Christ. We accept his blessings. We are humble before the God who humbles himself in order to feed and save the world. But for a few Catholics today this is a difficult devotion.

Some people complain about the public rites of Benediction and Exposition. They say, 'I don't get anything out of it. What am I supposed to think about when I see the Host in the monstrance?' One of the most incredible personal objections I have ever heard went so far as to say '-...bread is so ordinary. If God meant Himself to be adored in this ceremony, why didn't he use something more interesting?'

### Adoration demands Understanding

Bread is so ordinary. Let us start with this fact. Here is a simple fact on which a rich and deep devotion can be rediscovered - not a pious activity divorced from daily life, but a devotion grounded in the life of man in this world, here and now.

Gandhi is said to have remarked once, 'If God were to present himself to men, there would be no more appropriate way than in the form of bread'. That was the voice of India, the voice of a land where bread and life are tied together in a cruel and inevitable way. Man is seen to depend for his very existence on that ordinary food - on bread.

Can we consider the Eucharist in this way? I raise my eyes to the monstrance. I see the perfect plain form of the white Host. It is so simple, so ordinary - and yet... I raise my eyes to the God who is always presenting himself to men in the form of Bread. Here is not something dull and lifeless. Here is the dynamic heart of the living Church. Here is the Food which has vitalized millions for two thousand years.

'This is my body which will be given up for you.' With those words I know that at the hands of a man taken from this community, a priest, this ordinary Bread became Jesus Christ. But the meaning of those words always penetrates this new Bread. 'My body... given up for you.' These are the two dynamic words, restored to the Eucharistic Prayer in our renewed Mass, 'for you'.

The Real Presence is a constant proclamation, 'my body... given up for you'. In these few words the facts of Sacrifice and Food are held together. In the ordinary form of bread, that which man needs to survive in time, God is giving up his only Son, to save man in Sacrifice, to nourish him not simply for time but for eternal life beyond death itself. We have been called into a community which depends on this Food just as much as a poor man in India depends on natural food for survival.

### The Living Bread

If we are to enrich our understanding of this dynamic purpose of the Real Presence, let us go back to the words of Jesus himself, set out in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, verses 26-58. If we can grasp the meaning of the Host presented to us for adoration, these words of Our Lord, where he contrasts ordinary food and the Eucharist, will give adoration a sound and valid direction. Far from detracting from Mass, adoration will drive us towards the Mass, with fresh understanding. Because we can appreciate the meaning of the Host, in tabernacle or monstrance, we can appreciate the meaning of Holy Communion.

There is a simple way of keeping this in mind. We can see that the Host is not merely Jesus Christ present to console his Church. That view arose out of past exaggerations of the devotion. We see the Host today in terms of its purpose - Food. The same Host carried in procession, raised up in a sign of blessing, enshrined in a tabernacle has but one destiny. It will be eaten in Holy Communion. The Blessed Sacrament is always reserved primarily as Food. Whatever liturgical actions of adoration and devotion are directed to the Blessed Sacrament after the consecration, the completion of the Liturgy requires that this living Bread be eaten, and that more bread be consecrated to perpetuate the endless self-giving, the self-expenditure of God.

Perhaps this points directly to the Food meaning of 'my body... given up for you'. The Father is ceaselessly giving his Son to us. But we know that this Gift is made in terms of Sacrifice, for, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'. John 3: 16. We are totally dependent on this sacrificial Food because, '...he who eats me will live because of me'. John 6: 57.

As we look further into the meaning of the Blessed Sacrament in our personal devotion we note how Jesus says 'my body... given up for you'. This concept of his Body given up shows us how the Sacrifice is truly present in the tabernacle or monstrance.

### Adoration in Sacrifice

When I go to Mass, I unite my will, to some extent at least, with the generous will of Jesus Christ giving himself ceaselessly to his Father. Jesus is making perfect adoration on our behalf in his Holy Sacrifice. His whole Person, Godhead and Manhood, is given up for us. By my simple act of the will, no matter how faint it may be, even by the fact of my making the effort to go to Mass, I am showing that I accept Jesus' gift of himself to his Father, that I recognize that it saves me, that I want to be part of it. I am able in this way to give myself to God. I can share in the Sacrifice, uniting my imperfect acts of adoration and love with the one sufficient and perfect act of adoration and love. In history that was the Cross and the glory which followed the Cross.

When I go into a church and kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, I can renew these sentiments of sharing in the Liturgy. We have already considered God's gift of his Son 'for us', as Food, that this is always present wherever that Food is reserved. Now we consider that the Son's gift of himself 'given up for you' is always present wherever this Food is reserved - that the Presence of Jesus is directed not only to us, but to the Eternal Father.

This is a great and wonderful mystery, and it is difficult for us to understand it. But let us simply recall what was set out as the basis and source of true devotion to the Blessed Sacrament - what the Mass is. The radical change of bread and wine makes Jesus our Sacrifice present in our community. Thus, as long as this Bread of life is reserved in the church, so in a sense, the Liturgy continues, the Sacrifice is still present. Jesus is present, himself adoring the Father, as he always adores the Father. Our adoration is therefore directed not simply towards him - but in him and through him and with him, to the Father, in union with the Holy Spirit praying in us.

Our friend who was puzzled at Benediction would soon lose his confusion if he realized that Benediction, or any public or private time of adoration, is a chance to renew the same sentiments we have at Mass. Once more we return to the practical reason for the devotion today. In the renewed Mass we are expected to be involved, to get into the action, to participate. This is the active way we share in the Sacrifice. In the renewed devotion of the Blessed Sacrament we participate in the Liturgy in a 'different key'. We are left free to contemplate what the Liturgy means, to meditate upon the realities and depths of 'my body... given up for you' and the personal and community meanings of the Food of Sacrifice. There is a certain freedom about this devotion which, for good reasons, has been removed from the renewed Mass.

Once we appreciate the Real Presence of the risen Lord, giving himself to his Father for us, giving himself from the Father to us as Food, then we will not slide into misunderstandings of this devotion. We will see it simply as a free extension of the Liturgy of the Mass.

The words 'time' and 'duration' are important here. Our Western mentality is interested in time and duration. Our Western devotion of the Blessed Sacrament consecrates time by extending the short duration of the Liturgy of people assembled. Men, women and children, as individuals making visits, or in groups, or in large gatherings for Benediction, re-enter the short duration of the Liturgy whenever they relate themselves to the Blessed Sacrament. Not only 'The Word became flesh' has meaning for us in the Eucharist, but 'The Word became time'.

In the form of Bread, the risen Lord is involved in our time. He is not subject to time any more - not a 'prisoner'. He is the free and risen Lord of all time. He comes with a purpose. Men do not have to wait until eternity to adore God. Now in time and space, in our world, our suburb, our town, our parish, we can adore because God has provided the objective means - the Blessed Sacrament.

## 6. ADORATION BURSTS INTO ACTION

If God is involved in our time, he is the God who cares. If God is the God who presents himself as Bread, he is the God who cares about our ordinary bread, our daily lives, our hopes, anxieties, problems, loves, fears. The Real Presence is the assurance of this God who cares. In his wisdom Jesus chose bread and wine, ordinary human food, 'work of human hands', the matter of creation, to become the raw material of the Eucharist. Up till now we have thought of the Eucharist in terms of the Church. Let us now take this into the world, for which the Son gave himself up, because the Father so loved this world.

The Host I see in the monstrance may also be called the 'Bread of the world'. Its form and shape is part of this world. Its Reality is Jesus - the God-Man. The Host presents to me the scandalous reality of the Incarnation, God so close to us, too close for comfort, God involved in this world, here, now.

How can I adore Christ in the Eucharist and fail to serve him in his world? How can I adore this 'Bread of the world' and fail to see men starving for their daily bread? How can I love Christ in the Eucharist and not love him in his poor? This is the God who presents himself as Bread so that men may never become smug and comfortable, so that men may never retreat from the problems and sufferings of this world. If God is involved, how can we refuse to be involved?

You cannot worship Christ in the monstrance and welcome Christ in Holy Communion and fail to worship and welcome him in the slum, the ghetto, the high rise flats, the crumbling rural community, the broken home...

Adoration must burst into action. Adoration brings us face to face with the facts about Christ, man, the world, face to face with the God who is identified with the agony, the struggle, the defeat of life, with the celebration, community, hope and victory of man in this world. When the Host is presented to each of us at Holy Communion, the priest says, 'The Body of Christ'. We reply, 'Amen'. When the Host is set before us in tabernacle and monstrance, there is a silent refrain, 'The Body of Christ'. We must continue to say, 'Amen'. What does this 'Amen' mean?

#### The Meaning of 'Amen'

It means much. It means 'Yes Lord! Yes, I accept you on your terms. Yes, I accept all you have done, all you will do. I accept your total claim on me, in my life, because you have taken on my life, because you penetrate my life here and now, as my Food, my Sacrifice. Yes, I accept this Food, not as something to treasure to myself, not as a private luxury, not even as a community pleasure, but as Food. I need this nourishment to drive me into life, into the world you came to redeem. I adore you now in order to go into action, revitalized, fed, nourished, sustained by you alone. Having eaten your Body and Blood I must learn to find you in others, in the flesh and blood of my neighbour. Having eaten you I can trust in the strength to go into action, to find some practical way, no matter how quiet or humble, of putting into practice your words, "Love one another as I have loved you".'

We may seek examples of others within the Christian community who really live off the Eucharist, who make the Blessed Sacrament the dynamism of their action in this world, living for others. This is evident in the lives of so many great saints of the past. Frequent Communion, regular and prolonged adoration, well-reasoned meditation on the meanings of the Eucharist, this is the fabric woven through so many of the lives of the great humble ones of God. But let us look to the guidance of a woman in our world today, Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Her words are simple and to the point. 'In Holy Communion we have Christ under the appearance of bread. In our work we find him under the appearance of flesh and blood. It is the same Christ. "I was hungry. I was naked I was sick. I was homeless..." '

Mother Teresa's nuns live a Eucharistic life - for others. They present to us perhaps the most striking example of Christians who know that to 'love one another' we must rediscover Christ in the Blessed Sacrament saying to us '...as I have loved you'. If we can find the whole Christ in the Host, loving us by identifying himself with the humble appearances of bread, then we can eat this Bread of the world, then we can receive the strength to 'love one another'. We will be identified with the world -

not by being swallowed into its sinfulness, but identified with Christ in the world, ready to give ourselves for others, to others, sharing in the healing and redeeming work of the Lord Jesus.

Malcolm Muggeridge perceived the Eucharistic ground beneath the lives of Mother Teresa's nuns. The tabernacle is always prominent, central, almost dominant in the chapels of this radically simple religious order. The nuns know Him whom they receive each morning in Holy Communion. They know Him, for they are often in His Presence, adoring before the tabernacle, involved in the loving concern of a familiar Friend. How easy it is for them to recognize that same Friend in the frail and shrivelled flesh of the dying men of Calcutta, in the shattered lives of the destitutes of Melbourne, or, is it easy?

If only we could know Christ in this way... But we can know him. We may not be called to a heroic vocation, but each of us has a vocation and God has given us the same source of strength to live that vocation - our familiar Friend ever present in the Blessed Sacrament.

He is there. Let us come to him - and live!

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## Section 7

### PRAYERS BEFORE THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

#### Faith

In order to bring to mind where we are, it may be useful to make a small act of Faith, silently, again and again. For example:

- (i) You are Jesus. You are here.
- (ii) My Lord and my God.
- (iii) You are the living Bread from heaven.
- (iv) Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.
- (v) I believe you are here - really, truly, substantially.

#### Adoration

We make an act of personal adoration.

Lord Jesus Christ, I adore you.

I adore you for what you are - my Saviour. I adore you for what you will - my Sacrifice. I adore you for what you intend - my Food.

Truly God, truly Man, you are present, risen and glorious beneath this veil of Bread.

I adore you in your humility, eternal Son of the Father, involved in our world, enfleshed in our time, coming to us now under this simple form of Bread.

I adore you in your power, risen Lord, King and Master of matter, space and time, the Victor who has liberated your People from the dominion of Satan and death.

I adore you, above all, for your love, and I see this love in your humility and your power, hidden in this Blessed Sacrament, this generous gift of your love to us, your love to the Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, I adore you.

## Scriptural Reflections

We may choose to make a reflective meditation on the meanings of the Real Presence. A New Testament should be in our hands, and we may choose one or more of the following key passages on the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is instituted by Christ

I Corinthians 11: 23-25.

Mark 14: 22-24.

Matthew 26: 26-28.

Luke 22: 15-20.

The great Eucharistic discourse

John 6: 25-27. Men must seek Christ the true Bread.

John 6: 28-34. God gives us this true Bread.

John 6: 35-40. Christ is the true Bread.

John 6: 41-51. We find this in the Eucharist.

John 6: 52-58. In the Eucharist we find eternal life.

The Holy Sacrifice

I Corinthians 5: 7, 8. Christ is our Passover.

I Corinthians 10: 14-22. False sacrifice and the true Sacrifice.

Ephesians 2: 13-18. Christ the way to the Father.

Hebrews 4: 14-16; 5: 1-10. Christ our High Priest and Victim.

Hebrews 7: 15-28. Christ and Melchisedech.

Hebrews 8: Christ and his New Covenant Sacrifice.

Hebrews 9: 11-14, 15-28. Christ the Sacrifice.

Hebrews 10: 1-18. Christ's will in Sacrifice for us.

Hebrews 10: 19-25. Through Christ to the Father.

Hebrews 13: 8-16. Our community altar.

Revelation 5: 6-14. The eternal Sacrifice.

Matthew 5: 23-24. The Sacrifice of reconciliation.

Holy Communion

I Corinthians 11: 27-32. Discerning the Body of Christ.

John 15: 1-12. Union with Christ the Vine.

Revelation 3: 20. Union in a holy meal.

Revelation 19: 6-9. The marriage feast of the Lamb.

Luke 24: 36-43. The Presence of the risen Lord.

Luke 24: 28-35. 'Known to them in the breaking of the bread.'

Before making a meditation we should ask the Holy Spirit for understanding:

Come Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind, strengthen my heart, encourage my will, so that I may truly understand the meaning of this sacred Word.

Come Holy Spirit, guide me to a deeper knowledge of this mystery of Faith.

Requests

We may choose to pray for the needs of others and our own needs, placing these before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Lord Jesus Christ, I want to place before you now the needs of others. You are involved, identified, at one with, the world of men, in this world of men as the Redeemer, presenting yourself to this world of men in the simple form of Bread.

Eucharistic Lord, hear my prayers.

Eucharistic Lord, hear my prayers. For others... For world problems... local problems... For friends... For peace... For enemies... For the holy souls...

In our own words, in our own free way, we add any other areas of need.

Lord Jesus Christ, I place myself before you. Here is my life, my past, my present, my future. You know what is best.

I am sorry for the past, especially...

I thank you for... (here we can express past joy.)

I am involved at present in... (here we can express our interests and our problems, in our own words, in a direct way, placing them before God.)

I look to the future in hope... (here we can express our innermost hopes, asking for particular graces, favours, needs, making requests, leaving the future in the power of God's Will.)

Lord Jesus Christ, hear my prayers.

There are many other ways of praying before the Blessed Sacrament, and what is suggested here is simply an outline because this personal prayer should be truly spontaneous, in our words direct, adult, mature. We will learn in such prayer, whether silent, simple or even wordless, really to appreciate Holy Communion.

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament will thus stem from the Liturgy and lead us back to the Liturgy. By experiencing this extension of the Liturgy we will learn to love and enjoy the mysteries of the Sacrifice in the form of a holy meal.

We will integrate this supreme Sacrament into daily life. We will gain the strength and the will to be active, practical Christians.

Adoration is something we do because the Holy Spirit is within us, helping us to pray. We do not adore alone. We are, each of us, part of the Church, not only in this world but in eternity.

We have a perfect model in adoration in Mary, our Mother. Let us always call on her for help and companionship.

Mary Immaculate, Mother of the Church, our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, pray for us, adore with us, help us to adore, teach us the way of faithful adoration, show us the way of humility in which the dignity of human nature is restored, pilgrims with you in one People.

Mary Immaculate, always direct us to your Son in the Eucharist.

Through you may we know Christ Jesus. Like you, may we trust in Christ Jesus.

With you, may we count all things as nothing, except insofar as we know him, our Saviour and our Lord. Hail Mary...

Finally, we may see Christ in the Eucharist as the Way to the Father in the Holy Spirit - that the Blessed Sacrament incorporates each of us into the open and endless Life of the Holy Trinity.

Glory to you Eternal Father, for we thank you for the Gift of your Son in the Eucharist, the way of thanksgiving you provide for men.

Glory to you Eternal Son, for we thank you for your obedient love, in your birth, your redeeming death, your resurrection and exaltation, all this for us, to your Father, for us, returned to us always in this Eucharist Gift.

Glory to you Eternal Spirit, for we thank you for your loving power, transforming the bread and wine of man into the Gift of the Son from the Father, and we thank you for your life within us, renewed by Holy Communion, for your life within us, ever showing us how to pray, banding us together as one people.

With you and in you, O Christ, we offer ourselves today, as one Host.

'Through him  
with him  
in him  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all glory and honour is yours,  
almighty Father,  
for ever and ever.  
AMEN.'

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