

UNDERSTANDING  
EUCHARISTIC  
ADORATION



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## GOD'S PRESENCE: THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR LIVES

*“We must discover anew the sense of wonder and awe at the Lord’s great gift of himself and to spend time with him in the celebration of the Holy Mass and in personal prayer and adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.”* —Pope Francis (June 19, 2023)



As Christians our belief in God’s presence—God’s choice to be with us and bring us into the right relationship with God and others as God envisioned it from the first moment of creation—is the foundation of our human existence, the message of the Bible, and the content of our most fundamental Christian beliefs like the Trinity and the Incarnation.

The basic truth is that God loves us and wants to be in a relationship with us. Like every personal relationship, the partners freely choose not just to be present locally or temporally, but to open up their inner selves to one another through communication that leads to deeper communion and to their commitment to be faithful to the mutual obligations that

go with continuing the relationship. By our sharing in the intimate communion of Christ with us in the Eucharist as our nourishment, healing and comfort, we participate in God's own life and so hope to live beyond our death in an eternal life of loving relationship.

**Adoration** (Greek: *latreia*, “worship and service to a deity”; Latin: *latría*, hence the word *idolatry* means “idol worship”) summarizes the fundamental attitude and obligations of our side of our relationship with God (Mt 4:10). We owe to God alone supreme honor and respect for God's unique holiness which we show through our praise, worship and obedience to God's commands. Adoration is rooted in the first three of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-11, Dt 5:6-15) and the first two petitions in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-10, Lk 11:2) requiring us to honor and serve God alone. Adoration thus includes personal and communal prayer, liturgical sacraments and ceremonies and even everyday actions to bring God's ruling presence on earth.

## GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The lives of the biblical people are always dominated by the experience, the memory or the hope of the divine presence. The Bible reveals that God desires to be with us so that we can be in the right relation-

ship with God. The Old Testament describes several ways that the invisible God freely chooses to be present with us through something that is “sense perceptible” so we can experience it.



For example, God makes God’s mysterious presence known to persons in a kind of bodily form (angel), in dreams, to Moses in the burning bush, to the exodus

community in the pillar of fire and cloud, to the worshippers in the temple, to the prophets in God’s word and to the covenant people in their social and personal situations.

### GOD’S PRESENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the primary revelation of God’s presence is in Jesus himself. He is the incarnation of God’s very being in human form and, as such, is the model for what God invites us all to become. Through his faithfulness to death and his resurrection, Jesus brings about the final reconciliation between God and humanity. At the Last Supper, he promised to be present with us in the bread and wine to nourish, heal and comfort us when we remember him and his death and resurrection (Mt 26:26-29; Mk14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25).

## JESUS' CONTINUING PRESENCE AFTER HIS DEATH & RESURRECTION

Each Gospel also shares the belief in the risen Christ's continuing presence to the community of disciples. Only Luke describes the Ascension of the Risen Christ to heaven (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:6-11). The other Gospels identify Jesus' continuing presence with us here on earth:



- **Matthew:** the risen Christ promises to be with the disciples in their mission (28:16-20)
- **Mark:** angels in the tomb tell the disciples that they will meet the risen Christ in Galilee as he promised (16:7)
- **Luke:** the risen Christ will be with us hidden in the scriptural word, the eucharistic meal and in others who share our journey (24:13-35)
- **John:** the risen Christ will send the Holy Spirit who will continue the presence and work of the absent Jesus (16:5-11).

Paul, whose letters are the oldest writings in the New Testament, also identifies several ways that the risen Christ continues to be present after his resurrection:

- **in the community**, which is identified as the

new earthly “body of Christ” and so the place where the risen Christ continues to reveal and realize God’s work of salvation;

- **in individual Christians**, who through grace (God’s life in us) and through the gifts of Holy Spirit (God’s power at work in us) continue Jesus’ forgiving and healing mission;
- **in the eucharistic meal** in which the community experiences the unique presence of Jesus who promised to be with us as the bread and wine when we do this action in his memory.

## JESUS’ CONTINUING PRESENCE

### IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

A sacrament is the visible sign of an invisible spiritual reality. And the most important spiritual reality



is our relationship with God. The Church’s seven sacraments are ritual celebrations through which we actually experience the power of God present and working in us. Through the sacramental

words and actions, God acting in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit actually brings about what the signs represent.

The sacrament of the Eucharist (Greek *eucharis-*

*tia*, thanksgiving) is the ritual way that we nourish our relationship with God and deepen our communion with God and one another. Our communion grows through the ritual of receiving and giving, gathering to immerse ourselves in God's Word, sharing a sacred meal and eagerly accepting the commission to carry on Christ's work for the world.

## THE MANY FORMS OF JESUS'

### EUCCHARISTIC PRESENCE

Franciscan theologian Fr. Kenan B. Osborne explains that:

"Today, the Church has asked us to understand this eucharistic presence of Jesus in a richer way than ever before. Jesus is present in the gathering of the community, in the proclamation of the word, and in the banquet of bread and wine. Beyond this we must find the Lord not only in the table of the eucharist, but in the table of the world around us. If we do not see Jesus in this table of the world, we will really not find Jesus in the table of the eucharist; and if we do indeed find Jesus in the table of the eucharist, we should leave the eucharistic celebration



with eyes of faith that allow us to find Jesus throughout the table of the world” (*Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction*, p. 133).

Among these various forms of presence, Jesus presence in the bread and wine has traditionally been called his “real presence.” The word *real* comes from a Latin word, *res*, *realis*, which means *thing*. So to identify this presence as real, “thinglike,” is meant to convey the sense that it is the presence of one “thing” to another, not just a fleeting change in appearances but a substantial or enduring reality, like the thing rather than its changing features or appearances.

Pope Paul VI explained the Church’s use of the term this way. “This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, divine and human, makes himself wholly and entirely present” (*Mystery of Faith*, 1965).

What happens with the bread and wine through the act of consecration is a change in their substance brought about by the action of God’s Holy Spirit. After the consecration, the bread and wine are no longer the same *things* (substances) they were before. Before the consecration, their substance was that of bread and wine, after it their substance is the person

of Jesus Christ which we take into ourselves by receiving Holy Communion.

The celebration of the Eucharist or Mass is the true origin and purpose of all of the various forms of adoration or worship which we show to the eucharistic bread outside Mass (traditionally referred to as the Blessed Sacrament). To lose sight of this is to lose sight of their purpose.

## THE BLESSED SACRAMENT: RESERVATION, EXPOSITION, BENEDICTION

### RESERVATION IN THE TABERNACLE

The principal reason for reserving the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass is the belief that the risen Christ is really present in the eucharistic celebration, first in the sharing of the meal and then, by extension, in the consecrated bread and wine. Reservation of the sacrament in the early Church became customary in order to permit the reception of communion to those who could not attend the sacred meal because of sickness, travel, imprisonment, nearness to death or some other reason. In this way although absent, they also could receive the graces



and benefits of nourishment, healing and comfort derived from participation in the Lord's Supper. In turn, eucharistic reservation, which became customary in order to permit the reception of communion, led to the practice of adoring this sacrament and offering to it the worship which is due to God alone. In the 13th century special eucharistic reservation near or on the altar in the church tabernacle (Latin: *tabernaculum*, "a tent, dwelling place") inspired devotional visits to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

### PERSONAL PRAYER BEFORE THE TABERNACLE

Since the consecrated hosts or Blessed Sacrament are reserved in the tabernacle in churches, this of-



fers a more personal opportunity for individuals to make a visit to spend time in Jesus' presence through prayer or to participate in structured "holy hours" with others. Holy hours are the Ro-

man Catholic devotional tradition of spending an hour in Eucharistic Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The U.S. bishops have created a variety of holy hours that focus our prayer to Jesus Christ on healing, peace, life, vocations, and other topics that are at the heart of the life of the Church and the world. (See online: [uscbb.org/prayer-and-wor](http://uscbb.org/prayer-and-wor)

*ship/prayers-and-devotions/eucharistic-devotion/index.cfm* ).

Prayer is the communication with God that leads to greater friendship to keep the relationship going and growing. Every relationship depends on communication. We need to spend time listening and talking with one another to discover who we are and who our friend is. Prayer is our time to listen to God and learn about God. We do this by reading and meditating on God's Word in the Bible and making God's message and the example of Jesus the guideline for our lives.

Prayer is also the time when we respond to God's goodness and love. Our prayer takes on all of the characteristics of good communication: attentive listening, patient understanding, then properly responding with praise, thanks, petitions and intercessions. The goal is to bring our whole self and our whole life into our relationship with God.

Like a good conversation partner, God is also attentive to us as we pray, even offering God's own Holy Spirit to help us pray when we might not know how. There is no magic formula for prayer, just as there is none for a relationship. The goal is just to do it, to bring our whole self into the relationship and let the relationship grow through daily contact.

## EXPOSITION WITHIN THE MASS

Exposition or showing of the Blessed Sacrament, either in the ciborium containing the reserved hosts or in a monstrance (Latin: *monstrare*, “to show,” an ornate container designed to display the sacred host for viewing as shown on the cover of this booklet), is intended to acknowledge Christ’s marvelous presence in the sacrament. Exposition invites us to the spiritual union with him that culminates in sacramental communion. Thus it fosters very well the worship which is due to the divine and human Christ.

From the 4th century onward, as the eucharist ceased being a meal and became a stylized ritual using Latin that the uneducated did not speak or understand, lay participation and regular communion diminished and the eucharistic bread gradually became the primary object of devotion associated with the humanity of Christ, which explains



the great desire to see the host. The earliest form of showing the eucharistic bread and wine was just before communion when the people were invited to gaze upon the sacred species (“Behold the Lamb of God”) and reverence them. With the introduction of their elevation immediately after the words of “consecration,” which in the 14th century came to be

regarded as the supreme moment of the celebration, the people were invited to adore our Lord in a kind of “ocular communion.”

### EXPOSITION OUTSIDE THE MASS

**Eucharistic Processions** in public appear as early as the the 11th century, at least in England. On the continent, in 1261 the bishop of Liege approved the feast of Corpus Christi (Latin: “Body of Christ,” celebrated today on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday) which was extended to the whole Church by Pope Urban IV in 1264. In many cities especially on the feast of Corpus Christi the Blessed Sacrament was carried through the streets in a solemn procession, which became a public way to honor Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, demonstrate one’s faith and gaze at the host even longer.



### BENEDICTION: THE CHURCH’S RITUAL FOR EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

The ritual of Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament originated within the Church’s daily Liturgy of the Hours and of the feast of Corpus Christi. In the early 13th century it became popular to sing Marian hymns at the end of evening Vespers or night Com-

pline. In the 14th century the trend was to do so in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament which popularized this practice even more. On Corpus Christi as early as 1301, there were stations or pauses where the priest would stop and bless the people with the Blessed Sacrament.

Today Benediction is usually an afternoon or evening devotion consisting the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar in a monstrance.



Then follows a suitable time for adoration consisting of various songs, readings of the Word of God, a homily, vocal prayers, litanies and silent prayer. At the end of this adoration the presiding priest or deacon takes the monstrance and with it in silence makes the sign of the cross (hence the name *Benediction*, Latin: “a blessing”) to bless the kneeling congregation.

## ADORATION LEADS US BACK TO SERVING GOD IN THE WORLD

Eucharistic adoration flows from the celebration of the Mass and serves to deepen our hunger for greater communion with Christ and the rest of the Church. The exposition of the eucharistic bread reminds us of Christ's real presence and invites us to deepen our communion with him in worship and prayer. But whether our prayer may be silent and personal or vocal and communal, we must always remember that it is not an end in itself. Like Jesus, who prayed alone to God through the night (Lk 6:12) and then plunged into his daily activity of proclaiming, healing and bringing God's love to others, we must do the same. Genuine adoration always includes serving God in our daily lives by working to realize God's "ruling presence" or kingdom "on earth as in heaven."



Our faith in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist leads to our public expression of that faith in our eucharistic adoration. And this devotion, by nourishing our spiritual union with Christ, must lead us back to the Mass with a renewed and deepened

spirituality and then from the Mass to our daily task of witnessing to God's presence in our world and building God's kingdom on earth.

Pope Francis reminded us on World Mission Sunday (January 6, 2023) that "in order to bear fruit we must remain united to Jesus (Jn 15:4-9). This



union is achieved through daily prayer, particularly in Eucharistic Adoration, as we remain in silence in the presence of the Lord, who remains with us in the Blessed Sacrament. By lovingly cultivating this communion with Christ, the missionary disciple can become a mystic in action. May our hearts always yearn for the company of Jesus, echoing the ardent plea of the two disciples of Emmaus: 'Stay with us, Lord!'” (Lk 24:29).