

## **SESSION THREE: Eucharistic Belief and the Witness of the Saints**

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.” (ref. Mt. 13:45&46)

Our Catholic saints embraced the struggles of earthly life in the gift of faith and holiness. They increased in virtue and energy to serve through devotion to the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist by prayerful attention to Holy Mass, by hours of prayer before the tabernacle, by worthy receptions of Holy Communion, and by teaching a true understanding and firm knowledge of the Sacrament in word and deed. The grace of the Holy Eucharist embraced their souls and infused their lives with dedicated service. For the Saints of God, their ultimate attainment of Heaven was the fulfillment and perfection of every worthwhile aspiration in their faithful lives of hope and love!

### **St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386A.D.)**

As Bishop of Jerusalem, this scholar and shepherd suffered deeply for the Faith. He was the sworn enemy of the heretic, Arius, who denied Christ’s divinity. St Cyril’s most important writing was the catechetical compendium, which has become the standard for all catechisms since the end of the fourth century. He wrote extensively on the Holy Eucharist as Sacrifice, Communion, and Real Presence. His writings are not only clear and uncomplicated, but show how unqualified was the faith of the early Church in the priestly powers of changing bread and wine into the living person of Jesus Christ: “The bread and wine of the Eucharist before the invocation of the holy and adorable Trinity were simply bread and wine. But after the invocation the bread becomes the Body of Christ and the wine becomes the Blood of Christ.”

### **St. John Chrysostom (d. 407 A.D.)**

These quotes illustrate his unbreakable faith in the grace of the Holy Eucharist and the gift of the Priesthood of the New Covenant:

“When you see the Lord IMMOLATED and lying upon the ALTAR, and the priest bent over that SACRIFICE praying, and all the people empurpled by that PRECIOUS BLOOD, can you think that you are still among men and on earth? Or are you not lifted up to heaven?” (Priesthood 3:4:177)

“Reverence, therefore, reverence this table, of which we are all communicants! Christ, slain for us, the SACRIFICIAL VICTIM WHO IS PLACED THEREON!” (Homilies on Romans 8:8)

“Christ is present. The One [Christ] who prepared that [Holy Thursday] table is the very One who now prepares this [altar] table. For it is not a man who makes the SACRIFICIAL GIFTS BECOME the Body and Blood of Christ, but He that was crucified for us, Christ Himself. The priest stands there carrying out the action, but the power and the grace is of God, “THIS IS MY BODY,” he says. This statement TRANSFORMS the gifts.” (Homilies on Treachery of Judas 1:6)

### **St. Jerome (d. 420 A.D.)**

With tremendous genius and linguistic skill, St Jerome translated the entire Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin for the benefit and use of the Church in his day and beyond. As the Faith spread throughout the Roman Empire, this translation, known as the Vulgate (Common edition), entered into the lectionary of the Western Church as the official version of Sacred Scripture for the Sunday readings. Out of his hours of studies, he affirmed the doctrinal teachings of the Catholic Church, including the Real Presence of Christ in the holy Eucharist:

"The flesh and blood of Christ is understood in two ways; there is either the spiritual and divine way, by which He Himself said: 'My flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink' and 'Unless you shall have eaten my flesh and drunk my blood you shall not have eternal life.' Or else there is the flesh and blood which was crucified and which was poured out by the soldier's lance." (Commentaries on Ephesians 1:1:7)

### **St Augustine of Hippo (d. 430)**

As a Catholic bishop and man of wide education, St Augustine taught the Catholic Faith through writings, commentaries, and homilies. He covered a tremendous amount of subjects and topics on every aspect of Christianity and its authentic belief. Among his addresses to the catechumens of the Church, we find his explanation of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist:

"That Bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God IS THE BODY OF CHRIST. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, IS THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. Through that bread and wine the Lord Christ willed to commend HIS BODY AND BLOOD, WHICH HE Poured out for us unto the forgiveness of sins." (Sermons 227)

"The Lord Jesus wanted those whose eyes were held lest they should recognize him, to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread. The faithful know what I am saying. They know Christ in the breaking of the bread. For not all bread, but only that which receives the blessing of Christ, BECOMES CHRIST'S BODY." (Sermons 234:2)

"What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that THE BREAD IS THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE CHALICE [WINE] THE BLOOD OF CHRIST." (Sermons 272)

"Was not Christ IMMOLATED only once in His very Person? In the Sacrament, nevertheless, He is IMMOLATED for the people not only on every Easter Solemnity but on every day; and a man would not be lying if, when asked, he were to reply that Christ is being IMMOLATED." (Letters 98:9)

### **St Francis of Assisi (d. 1226)**

St. Francis of Assisi spent many hours in prayer before the tabernacle and offered all his labors and undertakings to Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament as these passages illustrate: "What wonderful majesty! What stupendous condescension! O sublime humility! That the Lord of the whole universe, God and the Son of God, should humble Himself like this under the form of a little bread, for our salvation," and...

"In this world I cannot see the Most High Son of God with my own eyes, except for His Most Holy Body and Blood."

He admonished the priests of the Franciscan order to celebrate Holy Mass with supreme reverence and wrote, "Humbly beg the clergy to revere above all else the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . They should hold as precious the chalices, corporals, appointments of the altar, and everything that pertains to the sacrifice." And he urged priests of his order to treat all vessels and liturgical items, including the books that contain Christ's holy words, with the reverence due them.

### **St Anthony of Padua (d. 1231A.D)**

He was a Franciscan friar and priest who often sent to preach to heretics to bring them to repentance and back to the Church. He proclaimed: "Upon the Altar there takes place the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. That Body which the Virgin begot, which hung upon the Cross and was placed in the sepulchre, which rose again the third day, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, this Body the Church today and everyday presents and distributes to her faithful. When the priest speaks the words: *This is My Body*, the essence of the bread is changed into the Body of Christ."

St. Anthony was also known as a great miracle worker who loved the poor and sick and, in the manner of St Francis, humbly served their needs. He performed many miracles to help feed the poor, heal the sick, and care for the needy, yet is known as a great Doctor of the Church and invoked to find lost things.

Recorded in his life is the miracle of the mule, in which the animal adored Christ in the holy Sacrament rather than, despite the animal's hunger, did not eat it!

### **St Claire of Assisi (d. 1253A.D.)**

In art, you will find St. Claire depicted with a monstrance in hand, because of a miracle in which she repelled a horde of invading Saracens by showing them the sacred Host! Here is a prayer attributed to her:

"I come, O Lord, unto Thy sanctuary to see the life and food of my soul. As I hope in Thee, O Lord, inspire me with that confidence which brings me to Thy holy mountain. Permit me, Divine Jesus, to come closer to Thee, that my whole soul may do homage to the greatness of Thy majesty; that my heart, with its tenderest affections, may acknowledge Thine infinite love; that my memory may dwell on the admirable mysteries here renewed every day, and that the sacrifice of my whole being may accompany Thine."

### **St. Thomas Aquinas (d.1274)**

In the thirteenth century, the golden age of saints and scholars, the pope asked St. Thomas Aquinas to compose the hymns for the Divine Office of the newly-instituted feast of Corpus Christi, from which he wrote, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem*, which is a treasury of faith. Here is a summary of its teachings:

"Christ's followers know by faith that bread is changed into His flesh and wine into His blood. Man cannot understand this, man cannot perceive it; but a lively faith affirms that the change, which is outside the natural course of things, takes place. Under the different species, which are now signs only and not their own reality, there lie hidden wonderful realities. His body is our food, His blood our drink. And

yet Christ remains entire under each species. The communicant receives the complete Christ - uncut, unbroken, and undivided. Whether one receives or a thousand, the one receives as much as the thousand. Nor is Christ diminished by being received. The good and the wicked alike receive Him, but with the unlike destiny of life or death. To the wicked it is death, but life to the good. See how different is the result, though each receives the same. Last of all, if the sacrament is broken, have no doubt. Remember there is as much in a fragment as in an unbroken host. There is no division of the reality, but only a breaking of the sign; nor does the breaking diminish the condition or size of the One hidden under the sign."

St Thomas Aquina also wrote: "The Eucharist is the sacrament of love: it signifies love, it produces love. The Eucharist is the consummation of the whole spiritual life."

### **St Catherine of Siena (d. 1380)**

One of the great mystics of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century or of any century, she lived for weeks on the holy Sacrament, receiving no food except the Bread of Angels. On one occasion when she was unable to receive Holy Communion, Christ appeared to her and personally placed the consecrated host upon her tongue to satisfy her profound desire for Eucharistic union with the Heart of the Savior.

### **St. Francis Xavier (d. 1552A.D.)**

This Jesuit priest found refreshment in the midst of his many missionary labors in India and the Orient, for he employed his days in toiling for souls, and his nights in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. With poetic zeal, he wrote: "We must visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament a hundred thousand times a day."

### **St. Teresa of Avila (d.1582)**

The founder of the reformed Carmelites, St Teresa of Avila was a staunch defender of the Catholic faith and advocate for proper discipline in religious life. As a contemplative nun and mystic, her writings span the whole gamut of the church teaching and spirituality; the following passage describes what God revealed to her about the Holy Eucharist: "Once after receiving Communion, I was given understanding of how the Father receives within our soul the most holy Body of Christ, and of how I know and have seen that these Divine Persons are present, and how pleasing to the Father this offering of His Son is, because He delights and rejoices with Him here - let us say - on earth. For His humanity is not present with us in the soul, but His divinity is. Thus the humanity is so welcome and pleasing to the Father and bestows on us so many favors."

One day, someone said to St. Teresa of Avila: "If only I had lived at the time of Jesus... If only I had seen Jesus... If only I had talked with Jesus..." To this she responded: "But do we not have in the Eucharist the living, true and real Jesus present before us? Why look for more?"

### **St. Margaret Mary (d. 1690)**

She is the apostle of the modern devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. From early childhood she was intensely devoted to the Blessed Sacrament. After four years of

suffering from paralysis, our Lady miraculously cured her. Having vowed to consecrate herself to the religious life, she entered the Visitation convent at Paray-le-Monial, where she was distinguished for obedience, humility, and love. Among the many visions she received of Christ, the most important were those in which Our Lord told her she was to promote devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These apparitions took place before the Bl. Sacrament in the convent chapel and included the admonition from Christ that on the First Friday of the month, one must make a good confession, attend Holy Mass, and receive Holy Communion for nine months in a row and thereafter be assured of the presence of a priest for the last rites in the final days of life to attain a happy and grace-filled death.

### **St Isaac Jogues (d. 1646)**

In the course of his missionary work among the Hurons (native Americans) of upper New York, the young Jesuit priest was captured by the Iroquois and held in captivity for over a year. Due to extreme torture in captivity, his right hand was mutilated, and he was left without the “canonical digits” (thumb and index finger). An unexpected chance for escape came to Fr. Jogues, and he eventually returned to France, relieved at last to have the consolation of Holy Communion. Pope Urban VIII gave him permission to offer Mass with his mutilated hands: “It would be shameful that a martyr of Christ not be allowed to drink the Blood of Christ.”

Welcomed home as a hero, Father Jogues remained firm in his resolve to return to the missions and his zeal led him back once more to the Americas to minister to the Hurons. In 1646, he and Jean de Lalande, who had offered his services to the missionaries, set out for Iroquois country in the belief that a recently signed peace treaty would be observed. They were captured by a Mohawk war party, and on October 18, Father Jogues was tomahawked and beheaded, receiving the crown of martyrdom and heavenly reward.

### **St. Alphonsus Liguori (d.1787)**

During his long and fruitful life as priest and founder of the Redemptorist order, St Alphonsus published books and works on every aspect of Christian morality, devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Catholic spirituality. Among these, the most important for our purpose was that on the Holy Eucharist:

“Our holy faith teaches us, and we are bound to believe, that in the consecrated Host, Jesus Christ is really present under the species of bread. But we must also understand that He is thus present on our altars as on a throne of love and mercy, to dispense graces and there to show us the love, which He bears us, by being pleased to dwell night and day hidden in the midst of us.”

### **St Jean-Marie Vianney (d. 1859)**

When Fr. John Marie Vianney arrived at the out-of-way village of Ars, not far from Lyon, someone said to the new pastor of the parish church, 'Here... there is nothing to do.' 'Therefore,' replied Fr. Vianney, 'there is everything to do!' What did he do? He arose at 2:00am in the morning and went to pray before the Bl. Sacrament. He

prayed intently, offered Holy Mass before dawn, and remained at prayer until noon. Soon, he began to hear confessions and before long he found himself in the confessional for hours and hours with long lines of villagers and visitors from all over the region.

One day, a man asked the holy priest if he should put an ad in the newspaper to raise funds to open an orphanage. Fr Vianney told him to kneel down before the Bl. Sacrament and ask the good Lord to supply the financial means if this was truly His Will. The fellow did so and later came back in gratitude, telling the Curé of Ars that he had secured the funds and would found the orphanage without advisements!

### **St. Peter Julian Eymard (d.1868).**

He organized and founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for men, and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament for women. Not the least of his admirers was the Curé of Ars who knew him personally. St John Vianney wrote of Eymard, "He is a saint. The world hinders his work, but not knowingly, and it will do great things for the glory of God. Adoration by priests! How wonderful! Tell the good Fr. Eymard I will pray for his work every day."

### **St Therese of Lisieux (d.1897)**

She entered the Discalced Carmelite order at the age of fifteen and took the name Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. Remarkable for her humility, simplicity, piety, and patience, she endured acute physical suffering and died at 24 years of age, yet developed her prized 'little way' of serving God in the quietude of the Carmel at Lisieux (France) in her brief lifetime.

Her spiritual autobiography known as "Story of a Soul" has been translated and published in numerous languages and has deeply influenced the spiritual life of priests, religious, and laity. Before entering the convent, she went on pilgrimage with her family to Italy where they visited the Holy House of Loreto. It is a shrine where tradition states angels brought the home of the Holy Family from Nazareth to reside in Loreto. During Mass at this chapel, St. Therese experienced great joy in receiving Holy Communion: "It was a total heavenly happiness, which words cannot express. And what shall our happiness be when we receive Communion in the eternal abode of the King of Heaven? Then we shall see our joy never coming to an end; there will no longer be the sadness of departing, and it will be no longer necessary to have some souvenir to dig fervently into the walls sanctified by His divine presence, for His home will be ours for all eternity."

St. Therese also declares: "The best means to reach perfection is through receiving Holy Communion frequently."

### **St Pope Pius X (d. 1914)**

During his pontificate, St. Pope Pius X approved and promoted the liturgical movement of the day, which sought to improve and refine church music through the use of Gregorian chant in accord with the reforms of the Benedictine order. He also sanctioned the reception of Holy Communion for children who had reached the age of reason, even before their reception of Confirmation, and he authorized more

frequent reception of the Eucharist by the laity as the remedy for sin and errors and the medicine of the Elect.

Wrote the Holy Father: "Devotion to the Eucharist is the most noble because it has God as its object; it is the most profitable for salvation, because It gives us the Author of Grace; it is the sweetest, because the Lord is Sweetness Itself..."

### **St. Maria Faustina Kowalska (d.1938)**

As a consecrated sister in religious life, Sr. Faustina shared in her Diary, "Every morning during meditation, I prepare myself for the whole day's struggle. Holy Communion assures me that I will win the victory; and so it is. I fear the day when I do not receive Holy Communion. This Bread of the Strong gives me all the strength I need to carry on my mission and the courage to do whatever the Lord asks of me. The courage and strength that are in me are not of me, but of Him who lives in me — it is the Eucharist" (Diary, 91).

Another time, Sr. Faustina recorded a lengthy litany about the Sacred Host. In it, she said, "O Blessed Host, I trust in You, when storms toss my heart about and my fearful spirit tends to despair" (Diary, 356).

She also revealed: "After Holy Communion, when I had welcomed Jesus into my heart, I said to Him, 'My Love, reign in the most secret recesses of my heart, there where my most secret thoughts are conceived, where You alone have free access, in this deepest sanctuary where human thought cannot penetrate. May You alone dwell there, and may everything I do exteriorly take its origin in You. I ardently desire, and I am striving with all the strength of my soul, to make You, Lord, feel at home in this sanctuary.'" (Diary, 1721).

Our Lord blessed this humble young nun with countless visions of Him at Holy Mass, many times in the form of the Child Jesus. Sometimes, the young mystic saw the Blessed Mother and Jesus, both in His Passion and when triumphant.

### **St Padre Pio of Pietrelcina (d. 1968)**

On the importance of Eucharistic Adoration: "A thousand years of enjoying human glory is not worth even an hour spent in sweetly communing with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament," and "I weep and mourn at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for often I'm consoled."

As a Franciscan priest of the Capuchin order, St. Padre Pio offered Holy Mass at his monastery in San Giovanni Rotunda with the deepest piety and love, praying the words of the Missal carefully and prayerfully. It sometimes took three hours yet no one complained!

### **St Theresa of Calcutta (d. 1997)**

How did she explain her willingness and ability to serve the poorest of the poor and rescue the sick and dying from the streets of Calcutta? "The Eucharist and the poor are inseparable," she said. "This is not anything new for the Church, for 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. Matthew 26:26; 25:35).

A further quote from her heart of wisdom: "When you look at the Crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host you understand how much Jesus loves you now..."

### **St Pope John Paul II (d. 2005)**

The beloved Pope from Poland wrote and delivered several beautiful reflections on the Holy Eucharist, including an encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, and an Apostolic Letter to Priests called, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*.

"The Eucharist is the secret of my day. It gives strength and meaning to all my activities of service to the Church and to the whole world. Let Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament, speak to your hearts. It is He who is the true answer of life that you seek. He stays here with us; He is God with us. Seek Him without tiring; welcome Him without reserve; love Him without interruption: today, tomorrow, and forever!" (Address to young people at Bologna Italy, 1997)

### **St Pope Paul VI (d. 1978)**

A Final Prayer from MYSTERIUM FIDEI, encyclical of St. Pope Paul VI, on the Holy Eucharist, issued September 3, 1965:

May the most blessed Virgin Mary, from whom Christ the Lord took the flesh that "is contained, offered, received" (81) in this Sacrament under the appearances of bread and wine, and may all the saints of God and especially those who were more inflamed with ardent devotion toward the divine Eucharist, intercede with the Father of mercies so that this common belief in the Eucharist and devotion to it may give rise among all Christians to a perfect unity of communion that will continue to flourish. Linger in Our mind are the words of the holy martyr Ignatius warning the Philadelphians against the evil of divisions and schisms, the remedy for which is to be found in the Eucharist. "Strive then," he says, "to make use of one single thanksgiving. For there is only one flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and only one chalice unto the union of His blood, only one altar, only one bishop . . ." (82)

Fortified by the most consoling hope of blessings that will accrue to the whole Church and to the whole world from an increase in devotion to the Eucharist, as a pledge of heavenly blessings We lovingly impart Our apostolic blessings to you, Venerable Brothers, and to the priests, religious and all who are helping you, as well as to all the faithful entrusted to your care.