

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION, EXPOSTION AND BENEDICTION

In a television interview, Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta was asked how religious order of sisters (the Missionary Sisters of Charity) possessed the strength and boldness to undertake such difficult work as the care of the poor, sick, and dying of the huge city of Calcutta— she answered that they spent many hours of quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, for in the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, they gathered courage and virtue for this work of sacrifice and love. The interviewer asked, “But what would you say to someone who doesn’t believe in the Real Presence?” “Pray,” she answered, “I would tell them to pray. If you have a loving relationship with Jesus, he will help you to understand and to believe that He is truly there.”

A simple and beautiful answer that gets to the heart of the matter: the prayer of adoration nourishes belief and confirms the truth. Another question also comes to mind: What specifically is the pray of adoration? The answer: Adoration is the highest form, the supreme form, of worship and prayer reserved exclusively to God and only to be given to God. In Greek, it is called *latreia*, and in Latin, *latria*, and is distinguished from veneration or honor or respect, which is offered to the Holy Virgin and the Saints. They may never be worshiped since they, like us, are created creatures subordinated to the true and supreme God, for in Catholic theology, God alone is worshiped as demanded by the First of the Ten Commandments. Thus, adoration is defined as acknowledgment of God for who God is: existence itself, the origin of existence, and the sustainer of our existence. By divine revelation, the Church proffers adoration to the Triune God: for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the object of our worship and exaltation. We praise God Himself in awe and reverence for His nature as God, and to remind ourselves that the Father is the almighty creator of the universe, that the Son is our Redeemer, Savior, King, and Lord forever, and that the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier and Progenitor of Virtue and Grace.

Many examples are found of adoration in the New Testament, particularly, of adoration and worship of Christ:

“They [the Magi] prostrated themselves and did him homage.” Mt 2:11

“And then a leper approached, did him [Jesus] homage, and said, *Lord...*”
Mt 8:2 (Recall that ‘Lord’ *Kyrie, Kyrios* is a title of God from the Greek Old Testament and when applied to Jesus is a sincere profession of faith in His Divinity.)

“Those [the Apostles] who were in the boat did him homage saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God!’” Mt 14:25-33

“But the woman [a Canaanite] came and did him homage, saying, ‘Lord help me!’” Mt 15:25

“The mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage...” Mt 20:20

In the aftermath of the Resurrection, the holy women [Mary Magdalene and the other Mary] at the tomb “approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage” and likewise the disciples when they see in Galilee (“When they saw him, they worshipped...”). Mt 28:9,17

“He [the man born blind at the pool of Siloam] said, ‘I do believe, Lord, and he worshiped him.’” John 9:38

Of most significance too is the homage paid to Christ, exalted in Heaven, as heard in the vision of heavenly worship from the last Book of the Bible: “...by every living creature in Heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea, everything in the universe...” in the words, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise!” Apoc. 5:13

So, where did Eucharistic adoration begin, and find its origin, as an expression of that same worship and homage to the divine person of Christ as recorded in the Gospels? Clearly and obviously it started as part of the action of the Mass!

In a commentary on Psalm 99, quoting the 5th verse, “Extol the Lord our God and worship at his footstool... holy is he!,” St Augustine ponders, “How can we adore the earth, the footstool of God, without idolatry? Because God took flesh from the earth, from the flesh of Mary... and because he walked here in the flesh itself, and gave his flesh to eat for

our salvation; nobody now eats this flesh if he does not before adore it [the Body of Christ]: so, we have found out how the footstool of the Lord is adored, and we not only do not sin by adoring it, but sin if we do not it!" In no uncertain words, St Augustine here and elsewhere admonishes his newly-baptized Catholics to recognize the power of the consecration to make bread and wine into the Sacrament of the Body and Body of Christ, not simply as *per formative* art but as *de facto* reality!

In other words, the Eucharistic Body of Christ is the same as the historical Body of Christ, incarnate of the Virgin and arisen to glory. There is an inherent and organic unity between the divine person of Jesus Christ as He stood on earth and Jesus Christ as He now stands at the right hand of the majesty of God the Father. Furthermore, this presence by the mediation of the Holy Eucharist must be acknowledged, as St Paul admonishes the Corinthians, and must be affirmed by adoration of Him before in fact He is received through Holy Communion. It would seem reasonable to assume that such adoration is offered by a profound bow or by the gesture of kneeling on the part of the entire congregation at once before the reception of the Holy Sacrament so as, in a communal manner, to recognize together the certainty of His Real Presence. We accomplish this in the Roman rite when we kneel at the conclusion of the hymn 'Lamb of God' and prepare ourselves to welcome Him by the prayer, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof..."

The 13th Century brought a truly inspiring and remarkable Eucharistic renewal and revival to Christendom. In this era of Catholic saints and scholars, of the illustrious Gothic cathedrals, of the establishment of the great universities of Europe, and of the foundation of new religious orders dedicated to the temporal and spiritual works of Christian life (the Franciscans, Poor Clares, Dominicans, Augustinians, and others), the institution of the feast of Corpus Christ and the approval of its Office and Mass, as composed by the theological genius, St Thomas Aquinas, brought faithful rejuvenation to the Church under the authority of Pope Urban IV. To this day, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ compliments the yearly celebration of Holy Thursday and emphasizes that article of doctrine, which reminds us that the Sacred Host consecrated within the Mass, and kept safe in the tabernacle of every Catholic Church, and contained in the sacred vessel for exposition and

benediction is the Christ of the Gospels and of the Heavens: He is with us! His glory at the right of the Father is not diminished but magnified by His presence in our midst!

Influential saints such as St Francis of Assisi and St Gertrude the Great gave impetus to the 13th century movement of Eucharistic resurgence by their teachings and visions, encouraging the Faithful to stronger and more ardent devotion to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The miracle of Bolsena also infused momentum in that era, increasing faith and respect for the reality of the Body and Blood of Christ in the gift of His presence. In this miracle, during the celebration of Holy Mass at the Church of St Christina in the Italian city of Bolsena, drops of blood poured from the consecrated Host at the words of Institution and stained the corporal and marble floor— to this day, that corporal is kept in the Cathedral of Orvieto as a venerable relic of the miracle. All the more did the People of God wish to view the Sacred Host at the elevation of the Mass and to offer their pious esteem at that moment by using the words of St Thomas the Apostle, “My Lord and my God!”

And what do we do to adore the Crucified and Risen Lord in the Sacred Host? Take note of the name of the vessel in which the Body of Christ is held during Eucharistic Adoration— it is called monstrance or *ostensorium*, from two Latin verbs, *monstare* and *ostendere*, to show or display. It holds and presents to us the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Good Shepherd! Yes, He is with us, He is among us, He is here till the end of the Age!

Declared the Council of Trent (October 11, 1551): “The Only-Begotten Son of God is to be adored in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist with the worship of *latria*, including external worship. The Sacrament, therefore, is to be honored with extraordinary festive celebrations and solemnly carried from place to place in processions according to the praiseworthy universal rite and custom of the holy Church. The Sacrament is to be publicly exposed for the people’s adoration.”

By the public display of the Sacred Host outside of the action of the Mass, the Church invites clergy and laity to spend real time in prayer and meditation, attentive to the significance of the Eucharistic atmosphere thereby produced. So, what should we do during adoration

before the Blessed Sacrament? We should pray and utilize every type of prayer and devotion: traditional prayers like the Rosary and Divine Mercy chaplet, mental prayer and reflection upon the sacred mysteries of the life and legacy of Christ, especially His Passion and Cross, and even silence, pure and simple, inviting our hearts to receive healing from His Divine Heart in heartfelt conversation. To pray is to purify our minds and to clear out the pollution of sin and worldly preoccupations as undue anxieties and concerns. To pray is to allow sanctifying grace and other inspirations to percolate throughout our souls and generate abundant good works for service in the name of God.

Said Pope Francis recently to a group of American priests, “Do not leave the Lord of tabernacle alone. Be on knees before the tabernacle to free your hands to serve the cause of the Lord.”

And, to add, as St Theresa of Avila wrote in her profound wisdom: “How do you win a spiritual battle? God, plus you, is an army.”

The Holy Eucharist always remains, in the words of St Pope Paul VI: “a mystery great and inexhaustible...”

By Fr Burt J Boudoin