



## **A Eucharistic Retreat**

*by Father John A. Hardon, S.J.*

We know adoration is due to God alone because He alone is worthy of veneration as the source and destiny of our being. We have also seen that since God became man in the Person of Jesus Christ, our adoration of Jesus is really the adoration of God in human form. Since Christ in the Blessed sacrament is here on earth in the fullness of His Divinity united with the humanity He received from Mary, we are to adore Him in the Holy Eucharist. This is the highest form of worship we can render to God and the most powerful source of grace we have on earth in our journey to a heavenly eternity. On all these counts, the Blessed Virgin is our model of what our adoration of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament should be.

### ***Origin of the Holy Eucharist***

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Our Lady and invited her to become “the mother of the Most High,” she accepted the invitation, and as a result, she gave us the Holy Eucharist. Except for Mary, there would be no incarnation, and thus, there could be no Eucharist. Why not? Because the Eucharist is the incarnate Son of God now on earth in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

We are saying much more than our words might seem to imply. To say Mary is the origin of the Eucharist is to say that she, by the voluntary acceptance of her divine maternity, was (past tense) the origin of the Incarnation. And since the Eucharist is the Incarnation continued on earth today, Mary is (present tense) the origin of the Holy Eucharist. This tells us volumes on the power of Mary’s free will. We are so aware of the devastation man’s free will can perpetrate: nations destroyed, millions of babies killed in abortion, etc. We can be so overwhelmed by the awful power of the human will to perpetrate evil that we need Our Lady to see how much that same human free will can achieve or accomplish when the human will submits itself to the divine will. The greatest power in God is His free will. The greatest power in man is his free will. This is power to do evil and power to do good. Mary’s voluntary acceptance of God’s will made the Incarnation and thus, the Holy Eucharist, possible. The Real Presence is a reality because Mary used free will. She chose to do what was more pleasing to God.

### ***Model of Faith***

The Blessed Virgin lived in such physical proximity and loving intimacy with her divine Son as no one ever has or can hope to experience. She carried Him in her womb for nine months. She nursed Him. She bathed Him. She clothed Him. She took care of Him in His infancy. She was with Him, near Him and close to Him physically and emotionally as only a loving mother can be close to the child whom she brought into the world. Mary was always thinking of Jesus.

Yet, all the while, what did she see in Bethlehem? A helpless infant. A growing child. A young man. That's what she saw with her bodily eyes. But what did she believe? She believed that this Infant, this Child, this young Man was no mere human being. She knew He was human, but she believed in His divinity because her mind penetrated beyond the veils of what her eyes and ears and hands could experience. Faith penetrates. Faith sees. Faith knows what the senses cannot perceive and even the human reason cannot comprehend. The Church speaks of the *Lumen fidei*, the light of faith. Mary saw. It cannot be too strongly emphasized or too often insisted that Mary had to live by faith. She saw only a helpless, speechless baby, yet she believed He was the almighty Word of God.

This then is the first foundational lesson we learn from Mary in our veneration of the Holy Eucharist. Like her, we must come before the Blessed Sacrament with total undiluted faith. We believe that which the pagan, sophisticated, over-educated world tells us is a dream. When we come before the Blessed Sacrament, we need to break through the crust of what the senses perceive and what the mind rationally would tell us, believing more than we can see, believing more than we can touch, believing more than we can experience with our senses or even fathom with our minds. This is why we speak of Our Lady as the model of our faith. "Oh Mary, Virgin most faithful, pray for us that our faith may become more and more like yours."

## *Model of Humility*

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the pattern of our humility through the Holy Eucharist. If there is one virtue that Mary practiced to an eminent degree, it was the virtue of humility. At the Annunciation, she told the Angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." In the *Magnificat*, she repeated the same term except she spoke of the lowliness of His handmaid to make sure nobody misunderstood what she meant by "handmaid." She told of how the Lord scatters the proud and exalts the lowly.

There are two kinds of exaltation: self-exaltation and divine exaltation. The greatest danger on earth is self-exaltation, because then we call down on ourselves the curse of God. But the condition for divine exaltation is lowly, Marian humility. She declared that the Lord fills the hungry with good things. Those who admit their emptiness hunger, and in the Bible, hunger means emptiness not only of the body, but a symbol of the admitted emptiness of everything. By ourselves, we are empty. We are a vacuum. But we must admit that we are a vacuum, or we shall not be filled by the goodness of God. We must admit and constantly confess our emptiness, which is another word for humility.

Mary declared how grateful she was that the Lord had done so much for Israel and His servant. Humility serves. Humility waits on others. Humility responds to the bidding of the one whom it serves. This is the mother of God, but only because she is also the lowly handmaid of the Lord. The more gifted a person, the more prone that person is to pride. Possession of anything naturally generates pride. And not only does possession generate pride, but the greater the possession the more pride it generates. Wealth of any kind inflates the human heart. The more a person has of physical or mental or moral or even spiritual riches, the harder it is for that person to be humble. How are we to be humble? How can we possess without being proud? Only through being in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this Eucharistic Retreat, we have looked at the unspeakable humility of God not only as in the Incarnation when He appeared as man, but also in remaining on earth in the Holy Eucharist. This is double humility: the humility of hiding His divinity as He did during His visible stay on earth and the divine humility in hiding even His humanity in the Holy Eucharist. He not only gives us the example of how humble we should be, but through Him, we receive the most fundamental grace we need in life: the grace of humility.

Remember what we have said. No matter what we possess, it tends to induce us to pride, and the more we have the more tempted we are to be proud. But it's not just quantitative possession; it is qualitative possession that inclines to pride. And the highest possession we can have is sanctity. Dear God, how can I stay humble and grow in sanctity? This was the greatest temptation of the mystics. You don't possess the close union with God that saints like Catherine of Siena or Theresa of Avila or John of the Cross enjoyed without being tempted by pride. It's tempting to look down on "those lower mortals."

But Mary's humility is a paradox. The most gifted creature ever produced by the Creator was also the lowliest in her own eyes. That is the key to humility: seeing everything we are, everything we have, everything we hope to become, everything we hope to achieve or possess – seeing everything as a free, undeserved and totally gratuitous gift from God. But this is possible only by the grace with which the God who became man provide us. The same grace He provided Mary by His Real Presence with her, He provides by His Real Presence with us today. There's no more basic reason for the Real Presence on earth of Jesus Christ than to provide us with the humanly impossible grace of humility.

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