

The Most Holy Eucharist Series

THE REAL PRESENCE AS COMMUNICATION OF GRACE

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

We ask the question, "Why did Christ institute the Eucharist as the Real Presence?" In this pamphlet, we will look at how Christ gave us the Real Presence as a communication of His grace.

The most powerful source of Christ's grace comes from adoring our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Our purpose here is to focus on Eucharistic adoration as this potent fountain of graces. We will discuss how petition is an important part of Eucharistic adoration and then explain how devotion to the Holy Eucharist is "bilateral." We are indeed called to communicate to our Lord in the Eucharist, but He is also communicating with us. In fact, unless He were first communicating His grace to us, we could not even begin to communicate with Him.

So we look at the Church's understanding of Eucharistic adoration not so much from our side, but, if you will, from Christ's side. To do this, we will answer three questions:

1. How does Eucharistic adoration include Eucharistic petition?
2. Why is Eucharistic petition a powerful means for Christ communicating His grace?
3. What is the apostolate of Eucharistic prayer?

PETITIONS AS PART OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION

First, we are not trifling with words when we say adoration of the Eucharist includes petition. Why is it important to know this? Because otherwise, we are liable to deprive ourselves and others of many blessings Christ intends to give us and others through our fervent petitions before Him in the Blessed Sacrament. In technical language, adoration is the act of religion by which God is recognized as alone worthy of supreme honor because He is infinitely perfect and has a right to our total obedience as our Creator and total dedication as our destiny.

Thus we find adoration includes every form of prayer, including the petitions by which we ask God for what we need and for what others need. What are we doing when we ask God for something? We are acknowledging our complete dependence on Him for everything that we have received in the past, that we have now and that we hope for in the future. You can see how we adore our Lord when we humbly acknowledge our utter dependence on Him in our petitions.

Now we can ask how adoration in general differs from Eucharist adoration. Is there any difference? Does it make a difference?

Yes. There is a crucial difference. After all, adoring God in general is not the same as believing the three fundamental truths underlying Eucharistic adoration. Yes, every time we ask God for something we are adoring Him. But it is one thing to adore God in general, and it is something quite distinct to first believe that God became man, that Jesus Christ **is** God become man and that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is really present in the Holy Eucharist, and then adore Him.

Five times a day, almost one billion Muslims throughout the world bow in profound adoration to Allah, turning always in the direction of Mecca. Are they adoring God? Yes, because Allah for them is the one infinite Creator of heaven and earth. But no Muslim in his right mind would ever

bow or prostrate himself before the Blessed Sacrament. So profound is the difference between general adoration of God (no matter how authentic) and Eucharistic adoration that since the middle of the twentieth century, two million Catholics in the Sudan have been starved to death by the Muslims for adoring Jesus Christ as though he were Allah. But *Isa*, which is the Arabic for Jesus, is God.

Here in fact is the basic difference between all Christian and non-Christian religions: Non-Christians may believe in God, but they vehemently, virulently deny that God became man and became the Son of Mary in the person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, here lies the basic difference between Catholic Christianity and the form of Christianity that separated from the Church in the sixteenth century. As Catholics, we believe Jesus Christ is physically on earth in the Holy Eucharist. The inheritors of the so-called Reformation do not believe this. In fact, this difference is so deep that several of my fellow Jesuits who came before me died as martyrs for their steadfast devotion to the Holy Eucharist. They were persecuted because the inheritors of the Reformation considered these devout Catholics "idolators" for adoring our Lord in the Eucharist.

In summary, we ask, when we adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, should we beg Him for His grace? Emphatically, yes! When we ask Him for light and strength for ourselves and for others, are we adoring Christ in the Holy Eucharist? Again, emphatically, yes! This prayer of adoring petition presumes faith in Christ's divinity, and with resounding emphasis, presumes faith in the Real Presence. Thus, our Eucharistic petitions are an important part of Eucharistic adoration.

EUCCHARISTIC PETITIONS AS A SOURCE OF GRACE

Now we need to examine how our Eucharistic petitions are a powerful source of God's grace. In order for Christ to communicate His grace, He wants us to communicate with Him through petitions. If we reflect on those Gospel scenes when people petitioned Christ, two things stand out with luminous clarity:

1. The contemporaries of Christ asked Him for many things. Most of His miracles, we may believe, were the answers to these petitions.
2. Christ repeatedly told His followers (not just His contemporaries, but His followers for all times) to ask for what they needed, and He assured us that whatever we ask for in His name, He will always grant. As we reread the Gospels, there is a close relationship between asking Christ and receiving from Christ. Ask and you shall receive. If we do not ask, we shall not receive. Receive what? What Christ would have given us had we asked Him.

There is another striking feature about these Gospel petitioners as described by the evangelists. The people who asked for favors from Christ made sure they were near Christ. Some of them even shoved and pushed and made a nuisance of themselves to get near their Savior. His presence inspired people to come to Him and ask Him to work some miracle which they believed only He could perform. There was a remarkable nearness of place or space between the petitioner and Christ when the Savior responded favorably to what was asked of Him.

That is why prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is such a potent source of blessings which are communicated by Christ to the one who asks Him and is near to Him. The one who is praying believes Christ is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament. The one praying comes physically close to Christ in the Eucharist as an intimate expression of faith in Christ's power to grant requests which we make in our prayers. The one praying believes there is not a more effective way of

obtaining favors from God than to ask the God-man Himself present in the sacrament of His love.

THE APOSTOLATE OF EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

Christ does communicate His graces to those who come to Him in prayerful petition for His aid. But what needs to be stressed is that Eucharistic prayer is a source of grace not only for the one praying, but also for those for whom the Eucharistic adoration-petition is made.

Call it apostolic prayer to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist or call it the Eucharistic Apostolate. By whatever name you give it, these petitions for others before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament are an essential part of our faith in the Real Presence as communication of grace. I know no one who was more insistent on this than St. Peter Julian Eymard, the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. He asks, "What should the Eucharistic adorers pray for?" He answers:

Eucharistic prayer has an additional merit: it goes straight to the Heart of God like a flaming dart; it makes Jesus work, act, and relive in His Sacrament; it releases His power. The adorer does still more; he prays through Jesus Christ and shares our Lord's role as Intercessor with the Father and divine Advocate for His redeemed brethren.

But what should they pray for? The rallying cry, "Thy Kingdom Come" (*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*), expresses for adorers the end and the law of prayer. They should pray that the light of the truth of Jesus Christ may enlighten all men, especially the Infidels, Jews, Heretics and Schismatics, and that they may return to true faith and charity.

They should pray for our Lord's kingdom of holiness in His faithful, His religious, His priests, that He may live in them by love. They should pray above all for the Sovereign Pontiff, for all the intentions dear to his heart; for their own Bishop, for all that his zeal desires to accomplish, for all the priests of the diocese that God may bless their apostolic labors and inflame them with zeal for His glory and with love for Holy Church (*The Real Presence vol. 1, p. 14*).

That is why over the centuries, the Church has been so insistent that contemplative communities be established in mission lands. Why? Because the most powerful source of grace from Christ comes through the silent prayers of pleading adoration offered to our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

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