

The Most Holy Eucharist Series

Prayer Before the Blessed Sacrament

Part Two

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My present purpose is to look as closely as we can at one practice of Catholic piety that represents a real development of doctrine in the history of the Church, namely the practice of praying before the Blessed Sacrament, either exposed on the altar or reserved in the tabernacle. Every believing Catholic should make it a practice to pray as much as he can before the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. Why should prayer before the Blessed Sacrament be specially pleasing to God, fruitful for those who pray in this way, and for those whom they pray for? Why prefer when possible this kind of prayer? I would summarize the answer in a series of five terms, with a brief commentary on each as we go along.

Part One (*see previous pamphlet*)

- 1. Faith in the Incarnation**
- 2. Faith in the Real Presence**
- 3. The Humanity of Christ as a Channel of Grace**

Part Two (*found in this pamphlet*)

- 4. Christ as Food for the Mind and Will**
- 5. Christ the Object of Our Love**

4. CHRIST AS FOOD FOR THE MIND AND WILL

One of the best ways to look at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is to see it as an extension of Holy Communion. Christ Himself could not have been plainer when He called Himself "the Bread of Life" and told us to eat His Body and drink His Blood. What we may overlook, however, is that the spiritual nourishment that comes from the Eucharist does not end with Holy Communion. Of course, there is an efficacy that comes from the actual reception of the Sacrament that is special and distinctive, but we are not talking about that now. There is also a nourishment that takes place in what we may casually call "spiritual communion." How cheap the phrase sounds! But it is neither casual nor cheap. It is profoundly meaningful. As we pray before the Blessed Sacrament our souls are fed by the Person of the Savior in the two faculties of spirit that need to be constantly fed. They are the mind and the will. In the mind we need light; in the will we need strength. And both needs are met in an extraordinary way through earnest prayer before the Eucharist. Remember we said it is still the Blessed Sacrament. It is not the residue of the Sacrament. It is not the remnants after the Sacrament. It is not a memory of the Blessed Sacrament. It *is* the Blessed Sacrament.

We might ask: why not? Is it not the same Christ who taught the multitudes, who gave the Sermon on the Mount and who took time, and a lot of time, to tell His disciples and to further

share with them the secrets that until then had been hidden from the minds of men? It is Jesus and He is here. We would not expect His lips to be sealed. He has a message to give and we have a lot to learn. Did He not say He was the Truth and the Way - the Truth who knows what we should know and the Way who knows how we should serve almighty God? It is this Truth and Way become Incarnate who is with us and near and available to us. All we need to do is to believe sufficiently, to come to Him in the Blessed Sacrament and ask very simply, "Lord, teach me. I'm dumb." And that is no exaggeration! "Your servant is listening and ready to learn."

In the will we need strength to supply for the notorious weakness that by now we are almost ashamed to call our own. How well it is that other people do not know how really stupid and weak we are. What a precious secret! But again, is it not the same Christ who encouraged the disciples, who braced up the faltering Peter and promised to be with us all days? That promise is to be taken literally. He is here. Jesus is here telling us today, "Peace I bequeath to you. My own peace I give you." Thanks, Lord, I sure need it!

"Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." How well you know, Lord, I'm scared. "Have courage; I have overcome the world." No less than then, so now Christ is not merely encouraging us in words, which we appreciate, but strengthening us with grace. His words, being those of God, are grace. And the words and the grace are once more accessible to all who come to Him as He foretold, "Come to me all you who labor and are overburdened and I will give you strength." Jesus, that is me. But we must come to Him, the Emmanuel, in the Eucharist to tell Him what we need. If we do and as often as we do He will do the rest.

5. CHRIST THE OBJECT OF OUR LOVE

The final and in a way most important reason why prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is so important is that when we pray before the Eucharist we have before us in human form the principal reason for our existence, which is the all-loving God. Already in Deuteronomy in the Old Testament the Jews were told, "Listen, Israel, Yahweh, our God, is the one, Yahweh. You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." But, what a difference between the Old and the New Testaments: what God did in the meantime, and that is what made the New Testament new - He became Man. He became Incarnate, which means God became Man and as man He gave us the Eucharist which is the Real Presence. Why? We have seen other reasons; this is the main one: mainly to show us how much He loves us by being with us in order that we might be with Him. There was never a more important prepositional phrase in human language: to be with Him, to tell Him how much we love Him in return.

St. Margaret Mary was chosen by Providence, as Christ told her, principally to restore to a loveless world the practice of the love of God. What was the principal means that she was to tell the faithful to use to restore this neglected love? It was devotion to the Blessed Sacrament where, as the Savior complained, in the greatest manifestation of His love He is most neglected and forgotten, and worst of all by souls who are consecrated to Him by the sacred bonds of the priesthood and religious life. I cannot think of anything that the Catholic Church, especially in our day, needs more than thousands of souls in every walk of life who pray daily before the Blessed Sacrament, telling God who is there in the flesh in the Eucharist how much they love Him and asking Him for the most important favor we can ask of God: to love Him still more.

I would like to close with a prayer composed by St. Margaret Mary's confessor and counselor, Blessed Claude Colombiere, in which he expressed the kind of sentiments of love that we should

express in our own words as we pray before the Blessed Sacrament where Christ our God in human form is near us. Prayed Blessed Claude: "To make reparation for so many outrages and such cruel ingratitude, most adorable and lovable Heart of my lovable Jesus, and to avoid falling as far as it is in my power to do so into a like misfortune, I offer You my Heart with all the movements of which it is capable. I give myself entirely to You, and from this hour I protest most sincerely that I desire to forget myself and all that have any connection with me. I wish to remove the obstacle which could prevent my entering into this divine Heart which You have had the goodness to open to me and into which I desire to enter, there to live and to die with Your faithful servants entirely penetrated and enflamed with Your love."

These sentiments can be our own, believing as we do that the Jesus to whom we are thus speaking is a man like us, but also our God. "I love those who love me; those who seek me eagerly shall find me," was the prophecy foretold by Wisdom in the Old Law. It is fulfilled in the New Law for those who believe literally in the Real Presence and act on what they believe.

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