



## **ABIDE IN MY LOVE**

---

by Sister Mary Charles  
August 2005

Dear Friends of the Heart of Jesus,

Once again we gather together desiring to hear words which we trust will deepen our union with the Sacred Heart and the hearts of our brothers and sisters, words that will nourish our prayer, words that will strengthen our faith life. That is your intention in coming here and it has been mine also as I prepared this little sharing. As I have said before, in preparing these talks, I am the one nourished; I am the one who receives more than I give! For once at least I had but a single topic in my heart as I pondered what to speak about today. I knew I would focus on the Eucharist during this grace filled “Year of the Eucharist”. Therefore I have thought it beneficial to begin this talk by quoting a beautiful passage from our beloved, ever to be remembered Holy Father, Pope John Paul’s Encyclical “Ecclesia de Eucharistia”, written for this Eucharistic year. The words are profound, intense, deep, yet oh so poetical in their faith enlivening expressions. Let us listen with our hearts to his heart as he masterfully unfolds the heart of our faith.

“At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are spiritually brought back to the paschal triduum: to the events of the evening of Holy Thursday, to the Last Supper and to what followed it. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.” Let me repeat that sentence:

*“The Church draws her life from the Eucharist.”*

Awesome! So much is expressed in that one sentence! And the Holy Father explains why. “This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but captures the heart of the mystery of the Church. The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life’. For the most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself, our Passover and living Bread. The sacramental re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass involves a most special presence which, in the words of Pope Paul VI, ‘is called Real not as a way of excluding all other types of presence as if they were not real, but because it is a presence in the fullest sense’.

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others but as the gift par excellence, for it is the gift of Himself, of His person in His sacred humanity as well as the gift of His saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past but transcends all time. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and the work of our redemption is carried out. The Mass is at the same time, and inseparably, the sacrificial memorial in which the sacrifice of the cross is perpetuated and the



sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood. The sacrifice of the Cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. It is in the reception of Holy Communion that the saving efficacy of the sacrifice is realized fully, for we receive within us the very One who offered Himself for us. Before this mystery of love human reason fully experiences its limitations. Truly the Eucharist is a *mysterium fidei*, a mystery which surpasses our understanding and can only be received in faith." (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II)

How blessed are we to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. How blessed!! For, "Jesus chose the Holy Eucharist as the means to sacramentalize the inner reality of salvation history." Pope John Paul also expressed this concept in the fifth luminous mystery when he said that the institution of the Eucharist is the sacramental expression of the paschal mystery. In proclaiming October 2004 to October 2005 as the "Year of the Eucharist" Pope John Paul the Great wanted to stress the Eucharist as the heart, the center, the culmination of all salvation history, all that went before the institution of the Eucharist on Holy Thursday and all that is to be. All is summed up in the Eucharist. And our present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has called us to live the "Year of the Eucharist", rediscovering the friendship of Christ and making it the key of our existence.

One of the many graces we here on Mont Deux Coeurs have received during this "Year of the Eucharist" was the great joy and privilege of having a mini-workshop on the Eucharist given to us by Abbot Marcel Rooney OSB, former Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Order and the composer of the music we sing at the Divine Office. All of Abbot Marcel's words were captivating! He guided us through the Old Testament's foreshadowing of the Eucharist, then into the upper room and the institution itself. Then, how the celebration of the Mass developed with the emphasis always on the actual consecration and transubstantiation ("the crossing over of the substance"). One of the many things that really impressed me was Abbot Marcel's focus on the importance of the anamnesis prayer, "anamnesis" meaning "calling to mind". The Abbot's point being that for the Eucharist to transform us, we personally need to enter into the remembering, the offering, the transubstantiation. We need consciously to enter into the reality and willingly open ourselves up to grace. We must "call to mind" our own self-gift together with Jesus'. We as Catholic Christians are invited to live the Mass not simply to attend Mass. It is a grace-laden invitation that can transform our everyday living into food for eternity. *Living the Eucharist can really change our lives!*

I was deeply taken by this invitation and explanation and it all became one piece when soon after I read an article from "The Word Among Us" from which I will be quoting extensively because I believe strongly that the more the Mass becomes the true nourishment for our souls that it is meant to be, the deeper will our love for the Heart of Jesus become. For the sacrifice of the Cross, the Sacred Heart pierced, and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice. "They are inseparable," writes our beloved Pope John Paul. And Pope Benedict XVI echoes this concept saying, "In the Heart of Jesus, the center of Christianity is set before us. It expresses everything. This Heart calls to our heart". Therefore the more we live and love the Mass, the more we love and live Jesus!



The article I spoke about from “The Word Among Us” entitled: “Become what you receive ” is as follows: “Think about the way we celebrate the Mass. For all the ways we are encouraged to sharpen our spiritual senses and focus on heaven, our physical senses are constantly being engaged just as much. We sit, kneel, and stand. We sing, pray out loud, and embrace one another. With our eyes, we gaze upon the Host and drink in everything that takes place on the altar. With our ears, we listen to God’s Word in the scriptural readings. We smell the incense. Even our sense of touch is vital as we reach out to our brothers and sisters around us, offering them a physical sign of the peace and warmth of God’s love.

All these elements work together to make the Mass a celebration that involves our whole person – spirit, soul and body. Our contact with Jesus doesn’t take place only at Communion. Rather, He is with us, pouring out grace, wisdom, and His presence during the whole time we are together. This broad focus also tells us that God doesn’t intend for us to put aside our earthly lives and ‘escape’ this world to commune with heaven. Rather, just as Jesus became flesh and blood and walked on this earth, so too at Mass He invites us to find Him in the flesh-and-blood realities of everything that surrounds us.

Why is this so important? Because God wants to do something in us at Mass that goes beyond simply sustaining our spiritual life at Holy Communion. He wants to invite us into a give-and-take relationship that leaves us transformed. To borrow a phrase that Saint Augustine loved to use, God’s deepest desire at Mass is that we become the very thing that we receive, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the Heart aflame. Some of the elements of this are rather clear and simple. For instance, as Vatican II teaches, it is Jesus Himself who speaks to us during the Liturgy of the Word, not only the human being who proclaims the Word. We can listen to the readings confident that we are hearing Jesus’ voice as He pierces our hearts with His love, speaks to our specific situations, and guides us in the decisions we face.

Another example of course is that we all know that when we receive Holy Communion, we are receiving Jesus Christ. Still there are other ways that God wants to work in us during Mass – ways that involve our bodies and our spirits equally – and He is waiting for us to accept His invitation. At every Mass, we remember and celebrate the promise that Jesus is still giving Himself to us. But at the same time, we also embrace the fact that Jesus is inviting us to give ourselves to Him over and over again. And just as so many other spiritual realities are given bodily expression at Mass, the same is true here as well.

There are two places in the Mass in particular when we have the opportunity to hand our lives over to Jesus, and to receive them back again transformed and renewed. The first time is during the Offertory, and the second time is during Holy Communion. It can be very tempting to look at the Offertory as a kind of ‘break in the action’, a time between the readings and the Eucharistic Prayer. In most parishes, it’s the time when we sit down and place our envelopes containing our monetary gifts into the baskets that are passed around, compared to listening to the readings and homily, and compared to kneeling and fixing our eyes on the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. This time can seem quite passive. But something very important is happening here, right before our eyes.



What would happen if we began to consider our offering as something more than money; as a symbol of our whole lives instead? What if we were to consider it as intimately connected to the gifts of bread and wine? What would happen if we imagined that we too were being taken to the altar? The next time you are at Mass imagine yourself being offered to God as an 'acceptable sacrifice'. Imagine that you, along with all the brothers and sisters around you, are included when the priest prays: 'Father, we bring You these gifts. We ask You to make them holy by the power of Your Spirit. We offer You in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice'. This is more than just a fanciful exercise. This is a way of prayer that transforms us and lifts us up. This is a way of prayer that can change us from spectators in the pews to an integral and necessary part of the whole celebration of the Mass. We know that God wants us to give Him our hearts so that He can fill us with His spirit and send us, transformed, back into the world as His servants. What better place than at Mass to make this kind of offering to Him? What better place then in the midst of a sacrament that is filled with divine grace and mercy? Just imagine how much more grace and power are poured out when we offer Him our lives in the course of the Mass, and how much more healing and hope!

But the gifts don't just stay on the altar. There comes a time when we approach the altar and receive in faith the bread and wine, now transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. There comes a time when we receive back from the altar the very gifts we placed upon it, only now they are no longer ordinary, physical gifts. This is the heart of the mystery of the Eucharist! Simple bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. And right at the heart of this mystery is the possibility of transformation just as wonderful, the mystery that Saint Augustine marveled at so long ago. We can become the very thing we receive. At every Mass, we can be made a little bit more into Jesus Himself, until we become so filled with His life and spirit that we begin to think, pray, hope and feel just as Jesus does.

There is one crucial difference between these two mysteries. In the first, we believe that the bread and wine are always transformed when an ordained priest offers the Eucharistic Prayer. No matter what the state of the priest or the congregation. But in this second mystery, we are transformed only as we join ourselves to the offering upon the altar. In fact, the more fully we offer ourselves on the altar, the more fully we will experience God's power and grace when we receive Holy Communion!" How blessed are we to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. How blessed!!

This ends the part of the article I wanted to share. Yet this concept, this reality is put forth in so many other ways. I believe these words of Pope Benedict XVI also beautifully express this ever renewed invitation calling us to active and prayerful participation in the Mass. The Holy Father says: "It is not possible to receive the Risen One, present under the sign of bread, as if it were a simple piece of bread. To eat this Bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the person of the living Lord. This communion is truly an encounter between two persons; it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer.



The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the assimilation of my life with His, my transformation and conformation into He who is living Love. Therefore, this communion implies adoration, it implies the will to follow the One who goes ahead of us, always present to us". In concluding his brief message our Holy Father turns our gaze to our Lady, as did his beloved predecessor saying: "Our Lady, called by the dear Pope John Paul II, 'Woman of the Eucharist', truly teaches us what entering into communion with Christ is. Mary offered her own flesh, her own blood to Jesus and became a living tent of the Word, allowing herself to be penetrated by His presence in body and spirit. Let us pray to her, our holy Mother, so that she may teach us to open our entire being, always more and more, to Christ's presence; so that she may help us to follow Him faithfully day by day".

Yes, we are invited to enter into the Offering, the Transubstantiation, the Anamnesis, the 'calling to mind' so as to abide in Jesus' love. Let us do just that! Amen.