



# SHARING IN THE CHARISM OF THE

*Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*  
*of Wichita*

**June 1, 2016**

## **Centrality of the Eucharist**

When our new chapel was under construction and the steel frames started to go up, we heard some interesting comments from passers by regarding what they thought this new building was destined to be. One individual speculated that it was going to be a barn. A farmer's dream building maybe, but not quite what we had in mind. Another man, who did not know that we were the ones who were building, was somewhat dismayed, because he thought someone was raising up a Protestant church in what he called "Catholic country" between St. Marks and Colwich. Despite the many guesses that missed the mark, the final outcome was our lovely new chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. And it is quite beautiful! The chapels in each of our convents especially our new chapel, point to the very heart, soul, and center of our lives as religious and as Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. That center is the Eucharist. Our chapels are the places where we gather most frequently in community. This witnesses to how the Eucharist is the source of our unity and communal charity.

Considering the magnitude and sublimity of the Eucharist, I would like to limit our considerations to just three areas for this talk. First, we will reflect upon the Eucharist as gift and mystery. Next, I would like to share with you how we as IHMs have received this gift and cherish it through our charism and communal life. Lastly, I would like to offer ways for you to share in our charism and strive to live this out in your daily lives.

A few years ago, a Gallup Poll was taken. One of the questions asked was, "If you could meet one person in all of human history and sit down with that person for just one hour, who would it be?" The number one answer of the majority of the people that were surveyed was Jesus. The overwhelming response of the people

questioned really caused me to consider: haven't we as Catholics been doing this for the last 2000 years every Sunday at Mass, and for the last 800 years through Eucharistic Adoration. We don't have to imagine being with Jesus. We already are. Doesn't this make you stop and think? Do we really recognize the gift that is before us? Maybe at times, we fall into the trap of approaching Jesus like a dead president or another past figure from history. Many of us have learned about Jesus, but do we really know Him? How aware are we of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist and how often do we give thanks for this gift? Do we let the Eucharist change us and lead us to love others more deeply? These are all questions that we should ponder.

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus stated, "I will be with you always..." His words were not symbolic or even just spiritual. One of the most profound ways He continues to fulfill this promise is through His Real Presence. I would like to take some time to revisit this mystery and its meaning for us. We believe that Jesus is really, truly, substantially present in the Eucharist. Have you taken time lately to let your mind and heart relish in this reality? Jesus is really present. He is not just present in my mind or in your mind, but objectively, outside of our knowing or believing. He is truly present. He is not present figuratively or symbolically or as a sign. He is substantially present. What does that mean? Christ is indivisible. His body cannot be separated from his blood or from his human intellect and soul and will. Nor can his humanity be separated from his divine personality. The whole Christ is present with all the attributes of his divinity and all the physical parts and properties of his glorified humanity.

Our minds and our senses are humbled by this great mystery. What we see and touch and taste looks like bread, feels like bread, breaks like bread and tastes like bread. But with undying faith we believe that when Jesus said, "This is my body...This is my blood..." He meant it. When the priest acting in the Person of Christ says the very words of Christ at the consecration, the bread and wine cease to exist. The very substance of the Person of Christ comes to us to be our food. Christ holds the accidents of bread and wine into existence so that we may approach Him and receive the gift of His self, total and free. May we never tire of pondering the profound depths of this mystery.

This great reality immediately leads us to ask the question, “Why?” Why did He do this? Upon consideration, the only answer that satisfies is love. Benedict XVI in his document on the Eucharist said, “In the Eucharist, Jesus did not just give us a ‘thing,’ but Himself; He offers us his own body and pours out his own blood. He thus gives us the totality of his life and reveals the ultimate origin of his love.” (S.C. 7) Love does unthinkable things for the beloved. When we receive Him, He receives us. He assimilates us into Himself. We become what we have received. The more open and prepared we are to receive His self-donation, the greater the depths of our union and transformation.

After considering the mystery of the Eucharist, I am eager to share with you how we as IHMs receive and cherish this great gift. I thought it would be fitting to share with you an aspiration we offer throughout the day before we pray the Angelus and in the evening before night prayer: “May the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus be everywhere praised and glorified, and may the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary obtain for us an increase of love for the Blessed Sacrament.” This is just one of the many ways that we keep the Eucharist as a focal point in our lives.

Our Constitutions, which were prayerfully authored by Mother Joanne our foundress, richly unfold for us the primary way we receive and cherish the Eucharist as both gift and mystery. The Constitutions state, “The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the heart of the liturgy, proclaims unceasingly the death and resurrection of the Lord and his coming again in glory. By daily uniting themselves with Christ, the Sisters seek with Him to honor the Father and to strengthen their bond of unity with Him and with one another...The Sisters gratefully and joyfully participate in the communal celebration of the Eucharist” (Constitutions, 44-45). Mother Joanne reminds us that the Mass is not something we approach as routine or ordinary. For us, the Mass is the most extraordinary and important part of our day. May the Lord preserve us from every taking the Mass for granted.

Another point to bring to light is that our Constitutions call us to partake in a communal celebration of the Mass. To illustrate this, during the school year, since we have many school schedules to work with, we rise at 4:30 a.m. to allow for us to communally celebrate Mass at 6:00 a.m. The early rise time may present itself as a natural

sacrifice at times, but it is a most worthy sacrifice. Isn't it true that we make sacrifices for those we love the most? On both the natural and supernatural level we know that the Eucharist and especially the Mass, is the source of our bond of unity with Christ and with one another. How else could 25 or more women live together in peace and harmony? Some might consider it a miracle of nature, but we know that it is the Lord. We have all been called by the Lord to this common vocation. We come with our differences of personality, opinion, and backgrounds. We bring with us our weaknesses and faults and our gifts and abilities. And with all of this, in the Lord, we become one in mind and heart. In an amazing way, our common life is an icon of the power of the Eucharist in our lives. Through the Eucharist we come to see each other as an image of Christ and to appreciate each of our Sisters as masterpieces in the making. With all of the joys and sorrows of life, we bring them together to the Lord and offer them in union with Him to the Father in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

In addition to the Mass, we are able to extend our communal and individual self-offering to the Lord throughout the day through our participation in Eucharistic Adoration. We have the practice of making a Eucharistic Holy Hour every day. What better way to come to know the Lord intimately and personally than by being with Him. Not every religious is obliged to do this, but we have chosen to do so through our Constitutions. When giving vocation talks and reflecting upon the importance of our prayer life, I have often asked young people what would happen if a man and woman were married and they never talked to each other or spent time together. They usually respond by saying, "They probably would not stay married very long or their marriage would not be a very good one." That is a logical conclusion to draw on the natural level, and it applies to the supernatural as well. As religious, we are truly wedded to Christ. Thus, we need to spend time with Jesus by being in His presence. We need to speak to Him heart to heart so that we may deepen our relationship with Him. The more time you spend with the one you love the more beautiful they become and the more you fall in love with them. Is that not even more true in Eucharistic Adoration when you are in the presence of Beauty itself and Infinite Love?

I would like to share with you a touching example of this tender love seen in the life of one of our Sisters. Sister Giovanni was 84 when she transitioned out of the classroom. She spent her time at the convent doing little tasks here and there, but she spent the majority of her time throughout the day praying. She would often make two, three, or even four Holy Hours a day. Sometimes, when she thought no one was looking, she would get up out of her chair, take her walker and scoot into the sanctuary right up to the tabernacle. Next, she would look to see that no one was around, and then she would kiss the door of the tabernacle and whisper to Jesus that she loved Him. Then she would scoot back to her place in the chapel and continue her Holy Hour. If we happened to be walking by the chapel at just the right time, we might be a witness to this beautiful expression. I cannot tell you what an impact this made on me as a novice and for many of our other Sisters as well.

Another practice related to our daily Holy Hours is nocturnal Adoration. On Fridays, we gather for a communal Holy Hour with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. After our communal Holy Hour, we take turns throughout the night keeping vigil with Our Lord by making individual Holy Hours. Our intentions for this time of prayer are to deepen our love for Our Eucharistic Lord, to make reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and for the sanctification of priests. This beautiful practice was started by Mother Joanne shortly after our Sisters moved to Wichita when we had enough Sisters to pray throughout the night into the next morning.

Outside the times of Mass and our Holy Hours, Mother Joanne counseled us through the Constitutions to make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. We have the greatest treasure ever given to man in our midst, and as religious we have the tremendous honor of living in the house of the Lord. To help us better cherish this gift, we visit the Blessed Sacrament before we leave the convent and when we return. We also make a visit after all of our meals and offer a thanksgiving at this time. Throughout the day, as we carry on our various tasks, we strive to visit Our Lord to remind ourselves of his presence and to invite Him to remain with us throughout the day. This intimacy with Christ truly refreshes and strengthens us. It also unites us with one another. The

Eucharist is the source of our fraternal charity and it leads us to mission and to give to others the gift we have received.

This leads us to the last part of the talk, which is how you can share in this vital part of our charism. You are always welcome to come to our Masses in the convent. During the summer, we have Mass at 7:30 a.m. Monday through Friday and at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday. On the First Saturday of every month, we celebrate the First Saturday Devotions with Mass at 8:00 a.m. followed by a 15 minute meditation, a light breakfast, and the rosary. Attending the Novena and taking advantage of the time for Holy Hour is a wonderful opportunity that many of you have taken advantage of this year. We offer days of recollection for our auxiliary during Advent and Lent and these retreat experiences include time for prayer especially Eucharistic Adoration. Another way that we hope to offer you a share in our charism is by our example and the witness of our relationship with the Lord and our striving to deepen that relationship.

In addition to considering your participation in the events that we offer, I would also recommend an examination of your weekly encounter with Christ at Sunday Mass. How can you enter more fully into the Mass? Is there a need for greater preparation for Mass by arriving five, ten, or fifteen minutes early? Maybe it would be helpful to consider the quality of your participation at Mass through active listening and entering into the prayers. This also calls for reflection on how well you prepare your mind and heart to receive Holy Communion with greater reverence and attention.

Another beneficial practice is attending Mass together as a family in order to share in the communal celebration of the Eucharist. Just as we are strengthened and united as a religious community through the Eucharist, so too will your family benefit from celebrating Mass together. In addition to Mass on Sunday, you might consider if God is calling you to attend an extra Mass throughout the week. If you already do that, maybe you could pray about attending daily Mass. If you would like to go to Mass more often, but are unable to do so because of time or circumstances, consider making a habit of offering spiritual communions. This is a highly

recommended practice and would be a wonderful way to cultivate a deeper love for Christ and to share in the fruits of the Mass throughout the day.

Another area for reflection is Eucharistic Adoration. Most parishes in our diocese have adoration chapels, which makes them very accessible to you. Could you stop in and make a visit once in a while on your way to or from work or as a part of a family outing? Could you try making adoration a regular part of your week by signing up for an hour in your parish? It would also be helpful to think about how you spend your time with the Lord in adoration. Sometimes we may feel like we don't know what to do or how to pray during that time. For a helpful guide, look at how you speak to your closest friends or relatives. Could we not apply that same understanding in our relationship with God who has called us His friends and is closer to us than any relative ever could be? In those encounters with Christ, strive to speak to Jesus from the heart and continue forming the habit of spending time with Him.

Regarding the practice of adoration, I would like to share a story with you about a man named John and how the Lord worked in his life. John was a middle aged man who was married, and he had a daughter who was ten. One day, he noticed a spec on his wife's shoulder. She had advanced cancer. There was nothing the doctors could do for her. She went through two years of experimental treatment and then passed away. John was crushed. His wife was his soulmate. He didn't have the desire to go on any more. He was absolutely devastated. He even went to counseling for it. He knew he had to take care of his daughter, but it was so hard for him to go on. Sometimes he would come home at night and just say, "Lord if you want to take me, I am ready." This was going on night after night. One night John decided to turn on the TV and he started flipping through the dials. He came upon EWTN, and he saw Mother Angelica on her live show. A man had called into the show and began to tell his story. This man had just lost his wife, and he said he felt like he couldn't go on. When John heard this man's story, he perched up on the edge of his chair because he could relate so intensely with it. John found himself very attentive and wanting to hear what Mother Angelica had to say to this man. After listening to the man's story, Mother Angelica told the man, "The only thing that can fill a void that deep is the love of Jesus."

John heard her response and found himself impatiently waiting for what she would say next. He was thinking, "Shouldn't there be more?" But Mother Angelica didn't budge. That was her answer. "The only thing that can fill a void that deep is the love of Jesus." Then Mother Angelica told the man to go to a Eucharistic adoration chapel and spend time with Jesus. John sat there for a moment and then decided that he should take her advice. He got up off of the couch and made his way to his parish church. The church was very close to his house so he was able to walk there. He felt like he was walking in slow motion, but he finally made it. He sat down in front of the Eucharist and poured his heart out to Jesus: all of his hurt...all of his anger...all of his fear. He really felt like the Lord had let him down. He found himself saying to Jesus over and over again, "Jesus, you don't understand...Jesus, you don't understand." And then he would complain some more and say again, "Jesus, you don't understand...Jesus, you don't understand." As he was sitting there in front of the Blessed Sacrament, in his heart, John heard the Lord say to him, "No, John, you don't understand. No, John, you don't understand." John then surrendered himself to Jesus, and he meant it with every fiber of his being. He surrendered all of his pain and all of his hurt. Then he said, "Jesus, I give myself and everything, all of my hurt, I give this to you." And he was looking at Jesus face to face when he said it. As soon as he surrendered to Jesus, in the depths of his heart he found himself completely washed over in peace. He said it was unbelievable how grace and peace were just washing over him. He felt in his heart that he was going to be okay and that everything would be just fine with him and that it was time for him to stay and to raise their daughter. He had been in the chapel for quite some time. But when he got up to leave, he said he almost felt guilty that he felt so good. He was practically skipping all the way home again. What doctors and pills couldn't do for him, Jesus Christ risen from the dead had given to him and so much more. John's daughter is now grown and has her own child and John is a grandfather and He is doing just fine.

Christ wants to be with us in the Eucharist, and He calls us to draw near to Him. This story is just one of many examples of how the Lord works in our lives. I pray that everything we have considered tonight will be an inspiration for you as you seek to draw closer to Christ. May you grow in your awareness of the Eucharist as gift

and mystery. I also hope that you may see in us and our charism a guide for how to better know and love the Lord. Lastly, I pray that you may strive to live this out in your daily lives.

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