



CONSECRATION
TO THE
Sacred Heart of Jesus
AND THE
Immaculate Heart of Mary



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The Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Eucharist

One of my favorite lessons to teach is the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6. I go through the exact same lesson for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Those students who get me all three years might get bored with it, but I don't really care. I've had many, MANY juniors, who have gone through eleven years of Catholic education, and are surprised that Jesus is present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament. I've even had students whom I taught as freshmen, where we cover the Mass in depth, who as juniors say that the Eucharist is just a symbol. Every mother of teenagers knows this feeling of utter dismay and all you can do is just stare of them...in silence..."Really?" And you hear that word which twists the dagger in your heart a bit more: "What?" So I always preach John 6 when given the chance and I want to start with that tonight, but I'll give you the sweet and condensed, non-teenage, version.

The Bread of Life Discourse in John 6 is most familiar to us with phrases like: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:51) or "I am the bread of life...whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (John 6:48;54). What we might not be as familiar with is the setting. Thousands of people have been following Jesus, listening to him preach for several days, and they were hungry. So he multiplies the loaves and the fish that they have and all eat. The people are amazed and want to make Jesus their king. Remember the culture of the time. Food was hard to get.

Their agricultural lives revolved around the basic necessities. There were no Dillons or McDonalds. And here is a man who can just say “Bread” and there is bread. Of course they are going to want Him as their king. But He’s not satisfied with this, so this dialogue ensues about the true bread and as a result we have the clearest teaching on the True Presence in the entire New Testament.

However, before Jesus told them that they have to eat his flesh and drink his blood, He prepared them for such drastic words. The people, in an attempt to get on Jesus’ good side, said “What can we do to accomplish the works of God” (John 6:28)? And Jesus says “This is the work of God, that you believe” (John 6:29). “I’m getting ready to say something’s going to sound kind of odd. Just believe.” And they are all ready to do this if Jesus continued to give them bread. This is when He said it is not bread that He is talking about, it is Himself. We must eat his flesh and drink his blood, not bread. Well this is too much, for practically everyone but the apostles, and they leave. They refuse to do the work of God: believe in Jesus’ words. And I find this a scary part in scripture because Jesus doesn’t stop them from leaving. Belief in the Eucharist and the Lord’s words is a standing or falling point for a follower of Jesus. And the choice is ours. Elizabeth’s words to Mary at the Visitation were “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Luke 1:45). Jesus asks of us, of those people so long ago, what He had already asked of his Mother and her answer was Fiat - belief.

There are four key elements to the Eucharist that I want to look at tonight through the lens of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: sacrifice, offering, presence, and communion. Mary’s role is always the quiet often overlooked, motherly role, but the wise person who can stop and take notice grows in union with Christ. And so tonight we stop and take notice of Mary’s role in the Eucharist as sacrifice, offering, presence and communion.

The Eucharist is first and foremost a sacrifice. It’s a re-presentation of Calvary, of the entire Paschal Mystery actually, Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection. It is because of his perfect, infinite sacrifice, that the

gates of heaven, closed by sin, are opened. I have been redeemed and He paid the price. But that's not all, He established a way for me to be united, most intimately to this sacrifice so I can not only be redeemed but made whole. Sin hurt us, wounds us. And Jesus doesn't just take us to heaven still hurt, broken, and disordered. He heals us through his grace...as He wounds...sacrifice.

There's a scene in Mel Gibson's *Passion of Christ* that I'm sure you are all familiar with, Mary meeting Jesus on the way to Calvary. In the movie she hesitates, knowing that whatever she encounters is going to tear at her Immaculate Heart. She has a flashback of Jesus as a little boy falling down and she is there to pick Him up and make sure He's ok. This is the impetus she needs to meet Jesus in this most extreme place of sacrifice. That's what moms do. They meet us in our wounds. We've all been wounded, hurt, disordered because of sin. And it takes grace and sacrifice to set these hurts straight, my sacrifice united with Jesus' in the Eucharist...but I also want to show somebody. I want a mom, a mother, to see my wounds, to see me and say "It'll be ok. I'm here."

The night of Jesus' resurrection, He appears to the apostles in the upper room and John makes a point to tell us that Jesus showed them his wounds. Scripture does not tell us about Jesus' first encounter with Mary after the resurrection, but I bet He did the same, that He showed her his wounds. And it's not too much to picture Mary kissing those wounds with her motherly tenderness. But it's not just sentimentality. Mary knows what these wounds mean. Jesus kept five when he didn't have to keep any. Mary's motherly heart zeros in on these wounds right away and she wants to take us, her other children, to the wounds as well. At the Mass she takes us and our woundedness to the sacrifice. "Look at his wounds" she says. And to Jesus she says "Look at their wounds for they too are hurt."

The Eucharist is also an offering. I'm the second oldest of seven children so growing up our house was always busy with babies and toddlers and scathingly brilliant ideas of what to do when Mom and Dad weren't looking. There was never a dull moment, and someone always seemed to get hurt. Without fail, whenever

the crying started, whosever scathingly brilliant idea it was would immediately go to the injured party: "Don't tell Mom. Pleeeeeeease?! I'll do the dishes for a week." And sometimes your attempt at bribery would be successful and sometimes not, and you'd get in trouble for your harmful ingenuity. But my Mom always said the same thing to the person who got hurt: "Offer it up."

"Offer it up."

"Offer it up."

"Offer it up!"

We heard 'offer it up' a lot. In fact, as one of the more accident prone children in my family, I heard 'offer it up' so much that I remember thinking, "Gosh it'd be nice to hear something else once in a while. Maybe get a band aid or something." But as a teacher I find myself saying the same things to my students when they complain. "You don't like my homework assignment? Offer it up." They like it about as much as I did as a kid. But I'm so thankful for that because my first response as an adult is to offer it up. A few years ago I had a 100 lb. window break and crash down on my hand breaking my thumb in four places and my first thought was offer it up. I had a particularly big intention I was offering it for too. I also find that my students don't know how to offer things up. People have to be taught that. And I'm so happy that I was first taught that by my Mom.

I'm sure Mary taught Jesus how to offer it up. I wonder what little household phrase Mary had and if Jesus used it as He hung on the Cross. "Offer it up," could He hear her voice in his head?

At the Offertory of the Mass, the people take bread and wine, the work of human hands, give them to the priest, who offers it to God for the sacrifice. Bishop Jackels used to preach the importance of the Offertory, saying it's not just the half time show where we get to sit and sing a song. It's the offering. This is our 'offering it up.' I also think of Mary at the offertory. She too was asked to 'offer it up.' Yes at the foot of

the cross, but also years before at the Presentation in the temple. Like all Jewish mothers she had to take her first born son to the Temple forty days after his birth and offer Him to the Lord. It was a true act of offering through the ritual of sacrificing two turtledoves. It was at this time that her worst fears were confirmed: the Messiah would die, would offer his life for the people and a sword would pierce her heart at the same time.

The offertory is a great time, as you are singing or placing your check in the basket or walking the gifts up with your family, to remember Mary. With our Mother we can offer our entire life on the paten alongside the bread. I find the offertory a uniquely Marian time in the Mass as we offer our lives as a holocaust like those two turtledoves long ago. It's our Mother who best teaches us to offer it up.

The priest takes this bread and wine and at his word, Jesus Christ Savior of the world becomes present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Before He ascended into Heaven Jesus said: "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Presence is our third Eucharistic element. Jesus is present with us on our altars and in our tabernacles.

At the beginning of the Mass we pray "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will." These words were said to the shepherds on the first Christmas night. The shepherds were considered a motley crew, not allowed to enter the temple, and were for the most part rejected by society. But God chose them to first reveal his presence and He sent the good news with a whole host of heavenly angels. Now time has not been good to angels. We've turned them into at best, cute decorations to be collected or at worst, good luck charms to be collected, but let's remember that those who in Sacred Scripture saw angels wanted nothing to do with collecting them. In fact, most of them thought they were going to die after the encounter and the angelic first words were often "Be not afraid." One angel is enough to put the fear of God into anyone but those poor shepherds had to deal with a whole Heavenly host! Now I don't know how much a host is, but it is taken from the word for army. I don't think I'd want to meet an army of angels. Especially on a hillside, in the middle of a dark night.

“Behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a Savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:10-12). These outcasts go, they believe the angels, and what do they find? They find a young virgin holding in her arms the true Bread of Life. It is no coincidence that Bethlehem means House of Bread and that Jesus is laid in a feeding trough. Long before those hungry people from John 6, the Shepherds were able to do the one thing asked of them: believe. We are the Shepherds. The wounded outcasts who have been invited to worship before the True Presence with Mary offering her Son to us. May we respond like them and not like those 30 years later who “returned to their former way of life” (Jn 6:66) because of the enigma of the Eucharist. I love thinking of this in Eucharistic Adoration. The creche is an image of the first Adoration Chapel and Mary is the first Eucharistic Minister.

If you haven't been able to tell up until now, I've been working my way backwards in the Mass: Consecration, Offertory, Gloria. The last element is Communion and the last part of the Mass is actually two, but I guess most would not even consider them parts of the Mass since...well...they aren't. I want to consider with you the time spent prior to the beginning of Mass and the five or so minutes after. Consider Mary's "First Communion" if you will at the Annunciation. The Angel Gabriel asks her to be the Mother of God, she says "Fiat," "Be it done," or "Amen" and it happens and then "the angel departed from her" (Lk 1:38). Leaving her alone to commune with God while He begins his human life within her. Artists, thinkers, saints, even movie-makers have contemplated this scene. What was Mary doing right before this moment and what did she do right after?

At each Mass we go up, the priest says "The Body of Christ," we give our "Fiat," "So be it," "Amen," and God becomes present within us. What are we doing right before and right after?

Before. I imagine one could talk about Mary's daily duty. She was doing what she did on a daily basis as it is true that God often meets us during those moments if I know how to see Him. Mary saw Him. She

knew it was an angel of the Lord right away. There was fear, yes, the angel even had to tell her “Be not afraid.” But I doubt she was scared for her life. Scripture does not tell us that. I think Mary’s fear was grounded in her virtue, specifically her humility. Mary knew who she was before God. She is a handmaid. A lowly servant. Humility is truth. Before the Mass begins, do I know who I am before God. That I’m about to enter into worship of my Creator. Worship that is due Him. It’s about Him. Not me and my likes. The Church does not ask the people what music they want or which priest they'd like to have preach. It's not about us. It’s about Him. The Liturgy is the public work of the Church. Work is something that is done, and it changes me in the process. Yes, I learn who I am through work, but work is so often done at the command of someone else - the boss. This time, in the Liturgy, the boss is Our Loving God who knows what is best for us so the songs and the priest and the length of the homily are all there for us so we can participate in the work of the Church which is worship. Mary at the Annunciation teaches us the humility and self knowledge that is required to enter into God’s work.

After Mass. I’ve always been intrigued by the brief way the Annunciation account ends “And the angel departed from her.” Gabriel got what he wanted, Mary’s yes, and he was out of there. And there is Mary, alone with her thoughts. And a baby inside her. I remember when my first niece was born. I was at the hospital the day after, marveling at this amazing little girl. And as I was changing her, trying not to rip her arm off (you know how it is putting a newborn in a onesie) and I noticed my sister hovering over and staring intently at my work. I got all self-conscious, afraid I was hurting her baby, and so I said “Am I doing something wrong?”

“No no” she said “I’m trying to figure it out. These things don’t come with instruction books you know.” I look back on that with humor now, but at the time I was like “You’re right. She needs to buy a book or something.” Anyway, I think Mary was like this at the moment the angel left. “Now what? He didn’t leave me any instructions on how to be the Mother of God.”

But Mary knew who this baby was. Her God incarnate in her flesh. Mary was a good Jewish woman. She knew the Messiah was coming, that He was going to save his people and now the time has come. It is starting, not with glorious trumpets and parades, but here. Inside her. Quietly. She and God. And so she turns inward and communes with Him. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). The angel departs and Mary prays. She sits with the one who just came to life within her. For how long? Who knows. She eventually has to go about her business. What do we do after the Lord comes to life within us? The moment after receiving Holy Communion could be so Marian! There is no instruction booklet, but that's ok. What did my sister do for help with her daughter? She asked our Mom I'm sure. And so we do the same thing after Mass. Ask our Mother for help to make a good Thanksgiving with the time that is allotted to us. Communing with Jesus, according to St. John of the Cross, is the pinnacle of the prayer life. And it's nothing fancy. Just being with Him and He with you.

And so we come to the end of our walk with Mary, Mother of the Eucharist. So much more could be said, but I want to end with a quote from St. Irenaeus, a father of the Church and great defender of the Eucharist, "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." When we think about and pray over the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life, like Mary, we will begin to embody sacrifice, offering, presence, and communion. These four things will be what we think about and they will form our actions. And the next thing we know, Mary and the Eucharist will lead us home to Heaven. Let's pray for the grace to continue our journey.