



Mary in America

Sunday, June 7, 2026

Our Lady of the Eucharist



“Ours is the spirit of the Eucharist: the total gift of self.” So said St. Katharine Drexel, who founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, leaving her wealth behind to serve the underprivileged in our country. Self-giving love is at the heart of the Eucharist. Holy Communion is a gift-exchange in which God gives Himself to us and we give ourselves to Him. A lot prepares us for this gift-exchange with our Lord: who we are as individuals, as well what we have recently been doing. This gift-exchange with God is meant to bear fruit in Christian mission: at the end of Mass we are sent to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.”

This evening we will look at Eucharistic, self-giving love and the three movements of preparation, gift-exchange, and mission. Jesus modeled this total gift of self in his earthly life: preparation for his public ministry, giving the gift of Himself in the Eucharist, and fulfilling his mission to save us by his death and resurrection. Throughout the centuries and around the world, God has called Christians to receive and imitate his total gift of self in the Eucharist. This evening we will ponder this mystery in Mary at the Annunciation, in our participation at Mass, and in the lives of saintly Catholics in American history. Let’s look first at Our Lady.

God prepared Mary to be the Mother of our Savior in Israel. Our Lord created Mary in his image, preserved her from original sin, and filled her with grace. He gave Our Lady a unique personality, a particular family, and a specific social context. Mary also prepared herself before her encounter with God by her habitual disposition (Hicks 50-52). Scripture tells us Mary pondered and reflected in her heart. Mary’s Magnificat, her hymn of praise, reveals something of her interior thoughts. The Magnificat is like a patchwork quilt of Old Testament Scripture verses about God’s promises and providence; this indicates that she set aside time to pray with Scripture regularly.

After this preparation, the Annunciation was the context for a tremendous gift-exchange. God had already given Mary the gift of the Immaculate Conception, preparing for her vocation as the mother of Jesus. At the Annunciation the angel Gabriel arrived and greeted Mary, bringing the gift of a message from God. Mary gave the gift of her attentiveness to God, listening to his word in a posture of receptivity. She pondered the greeting of the messenger. She heard the proposal



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of a relationship: she was invited to become mother to the Son of the Most High; this would occur by the gift of the Holy Spirit overshadowing her. In response to this marvelous self-gift of God, Mary offered the gift of herself to Him: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Finally, after the Annunciation Mary made haste on a mission of charity. The angel Gabriel informed Mary that her kinswoman Elizabeth was with child, and Mary went forth to visit her. Mary knew Elizabeth was elderly and now expecting her first child. Elizabeth would probably appreciate help. Mary, full of grace and overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, allowed herself to be moved by love of God and neighbor. At the Annunciation Mary became a living tabernacle, carrying the presence of Jesus within her womb. She went forth to love and serve the Lord and others in his name, continuing her total gift of self. After the Resurrection Mary would have gone to Mass with the apostles, experiencing these same elements of preparation, gift-exchange, and mission in a Eucharistic context. Now, 2,000 years later, God calls us to experience the same thing in union with Our Lady.

First, God prepares us to be faithful Catholics who encounter Him at Mass and witness to Him in America. Our Lord creates us in his image and gives us the grace of Baptism. He gives us each a unique personality, a particular family, and a specific social context. All of this shapes who we are and affects the way we approach Our Lord. God prepares us, and we also need to prepare ourselves before encountering God at Mass. Like Our Lady, are we deliberate in forming the disposition of our hearts? We can learn from Our Lady to make time for silence, to ponder God’s Word, to allow space for reflection on God’s promises and providence. Preparation is also built into the beginning of Mass. In the introductory rite we call to mind our sins, obstacles, and attachments; we ask God for mercy and ask our companions for prayers (Hicks 36-37).

After this preparation Holy Mass is the context for a tremendous gift-exchange. God has already given us the gift of Baptism and the gift of Mass every Sunday—or even every day! Like Mary, in the Liturgy of the Word we hear the message of God’s own words in Scripture. Like Mary, we offer God the gift of our attentiveness, listening to his word in a posture of receptivity. Like Mary, we are called to ponder God’s word: we do this during the readings, homily, and moments of silence. Like Mary, we hear the proposal of a relationship: individually, to live as disciples who follow Our Lord; together, to live as members of the one Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Then in the Liturgy of the Eucharist there are more gifts: bread, wine, and monetary donations represent God’s many gifts to us, now the work of our hands that we give back to God; we can place our hearts and intentions on the altar as we ask the Father to send the gift of the Holy Spirit, changing the bread and wine into the gift of God the Son; then we offer the Eucharistic Jesus back to the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Along with him we are meant to offer ourselves as a

gift to God (Carstens 74). We receive Jesus' total gift of self in Holy Communion, and He welcomes our total gift of self in return.

Finally, at the end of Mass we are similar to Mary, going forth on a mission of charity. Like Mary, we are not told exactly how to serve, but can rely on the Holy Spirit to help us discern. Like Mary, we become living tabernacles when we receive Holy Communion and carry Jesus tangibly within us. Like Mary, we go forth to love and serve the Lord, and others in his name. We are called to be missionary disciples, living out our total gift of self.

Many saints have also lived this pattern of preparation, gift-exchange, and mission according to their vocations and cultures. In every case, Our Lord created them in his own image and gave them the grace of Baptism. God prepared them each for discipleship with a unique personality, a particular family, and a specific social context; He called them to encounter Him at Mass, with the gift-exchange of self; and He sent them each forth on a special mission for his glory and the benefit of others, to live out their total gift of self. Now, 250 years after our nation's foundation, it is timely to reflect on saints who lived a Eucharistic, total gift of self in America.

Our Lord prepared some of his priests to leave their native land and provide Mass for people who would not otherwise have access to Mass and the Eucharist. Saint Junipero Serra, a Spanish missionary, went forth to spread the Catholic faith in California in the late 1700s, establishing nine new missions. Because of his self-giving, thousands of converts were baptized and able to receive the Eucharist. Saint Damien de Veuster, a missionary priest from Belgium, served in Hawaii from 1864 to 1889. He voluntarily served among the lepers exiled to the island of Moloka'i and built a chapel to offer Mass among the suffering people. Like Jesus who took on the burden of our suffering, St. Damien became a leper, giving his life to bring new life and hope to those suffering with leprosy. "His strength came from the Eucharist as he himself wrote: 'It is at the foot of the altar that we find the strength we need in our isolation'" ("Saint Damien of Moloka'i"). Venerable Emil Kapaun gave his life as a priest in Kansas and an army chaplain in Korea, serving from 1940 to 1951. In the army Chaplain Kapaun offered Mass on the battlefield, often using the hood of his Jeep as the altar, and risking his life to administer sacraments to soldiers. Blessed Stanley Rother gave his life as a priest in Oklahoma and a missionary in Guatemala, serving from 1963 to 1981. He traveled in rugged conditions to offer Mass in the people's local dialect, and he remained among them even when it resulted in his martyrdom.

Our Lord prepared other priests to offer Mass and Catholic formation to people enduring racial or religious persecution. Saint John Neumann of Bohemia served as a priest in New York and a Bishop in Pennsylvania from 1836 to 1860, working to improve the conditions of Catholic immigrants. He also built numerous churches and schools, coordinating ongoing formation and access to Mass and the Eucharist. Father Michael McGivney, born of Irish immigrants, served as a priest in

Connecticut from 1877 to 1890. He established the Knights of Columbus to strengthen and support families. This organization gave men a Catholic fraternal community as an alternative to anti-Catholic secret societies of the time, and also financially supported families who lost the husband and father of the household. Father Augustus Tolton was born into slavery, and after the Emancipation Proclamation served as a priest in Illinois amid racial discrimination from 1886 to 1897. He served as a priest generously, undeterred by the prejudice he encountered, finding strength in the example of Jesus. A later bishop of his diocese reflected, “Worship at the altar is always a commemoration of Jesus Christ as victim. [...] We believers try to make sense of our own experience [...] by gazing back at what happened to the Savior in his own mistreatment” (“Augustus Tolton: Biography”).

God prepared other saints to demonstrate the value of Eucharistic Adoration. Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne started schools for Native American children in Louisiana and Missouri in the 1800s. She could not communicate in the native language of the people she served, but she often spent long periods of silent prayer in the chapel praying before the tabernacle. The Native American Catholic converts witnessed this and nicknamed her “the woman who prays.” Venerable Fulton Sheen became a priest and later a Bishop, serving in Illinois, New York, and Philadelphia, as well as evangelizing around the country, from 1919 to 1979. He promoted the benefits of a Eucharistic holy hour throughout his ministry. He himself made a Eucharistic holy hour every day for 60 years, from the day of his priestly ordination to the day of his death. Certainly this practice enhanced his tireless evangelization. This year Archbishop Fulton Sheen will be beatified in September, in this 250th anniversary of our country’s foundation. What a witness he offers to strengthen Eucharistic devotion and missionary discipleship in our nation!

Our Lord prepared some women to start religious orders which formed the youth in the Catholic faith. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, a Catholic convert drawn to Jesus in the Eucharist, founded the American Sisters of Charity in Maryland in the early 1880s. She helped girls and young women prepare for their total self-giving as Catholics, and going to Mass was part of that formation. Saint Katharine Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Pennsylvania, serving Native Americans and African Americans from 1891 to 1955. She grew up in a wealthy Catholic family who regularly helped others in need. She discerned a call to give up everything and start a religious order dedicated to serving the underprivileged minorities of her time. Saint Katharine wrote of her community, “Ours is the spirit of the Eucharist: the total gift of self” (“Eucharistic Spirituality – Total Gift of Self”).

Our American heritage is rich with saintly men and women nourished at Mass and living a Eucharistic, total gift of self like Our Lady did. Like Mary and all of us, each one of them had a unique background to prepare them, and cooperated with God’s grace; each one faithfully went to Mass where they encountered our Eucharistic Lord; each one lived out the particular mission God entrusted to them. How

fascinating that we are united with them as one Body of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy, and meanwhile so diverse in living out our total gift of self!

How beautiful is this self-giving love, manifested in our unique preparation, gift-exchange with God, and mission. Thank you, Lord, for calling us to receive and imitate your total gift of self in the Eucharist. We will conclude with a prayer to Our Lady, Queen of the Most Blessed Sacrament: "I am all yours, dear Jesus, and all that I have I offer you through Mary, my Mother. Reveal your divine Son to me, O Mary. Help me to love Him as you did and inspire me to live for Him. Amen." Our Lady of the Eucharist, pray for us! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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