

## A gift of presence and unifying love

Did you know that when you attend Mass you are present — actually present— to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross? Though you can't see it, it's as if you were standing right there at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion.

In his encyclical letter, "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," ("On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church") Pope St. John Paul II wrote: "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.' This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. ... What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes "to the end" (cf. Jn 13:1), a love which knows no measure." (EE, n. 11; cf. LG, n. 3)

Each time we go to Mass, right before receiving Communion, we hear the words: "Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb." How often do we pause to contemplate how blessed we truly are to be receiving Jesus? I heard it said once that if the angels could be jealous of anything it would be of humans' ability to receive the Eucharist. To be sure, the angels worship constantly at the heavenly altar, and each time we go to Mass, whether we realize it or not, we are joining them in their praise. We are participating in the heavenly banquet!

As sojourners in this place of exile, the Eucharist is the strength and nourishment we need as we journey toward our heavenly home. The Church constantly draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist "not only through faith-filled remembrance, but also through a real contact ..." (EE, n. 12). The Blessed Sacrament is the reason why, no matter how dark things get, our days are marked with confidence and hope. The Eucharist stands at the center of all that we do and through it we find meaning, mercy, healing and protection.

We learn from Scripture, that the devil's work, demonic power, is always about division, scattering and separation — and then destruction. The first mark of the Church is that we are *One*. In the Eucharist we are in communion — union — with God and each other. It is the Eucharist that makes the Church one with Christ.

Everlasting life is to be in "common union" with God, to be one with him. We are one with him by receiving his body and blood, just as he taught us: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them." (Jn 6:56)

God loves us and calls each of us to perfect and everlasting communion with him. He gives us our time on earth as an opportunity to either cooperate with him in achieving this goal or to reject his offer of salvation. In the center of the word "Eu-charis-t," we find the word "charis," which, in Greek, means "grace." It is by the grace of God — a freely given gift — that participation in his divine life is possible and we are truly saved.

The Eucharist also commits us to others, especially the poor. Jesus sacrificed himself for us and we are to lay down our lives for others. At Mass we pray that he makes of us a sacrifice, a holy offering, to God and to others. We read in the first chapters of Genesis that the world was originally created to be in communion with the divine life. Now, through the sacraments, Jesus unites himself to us and makes us all temples of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the fallen world. The Church, the Body of the Christ, in union with Christ the Head, continues his incarnate presence on earth. We grow in sacramental living as Christ lives in us and through us. We are to let God's love flow through us. We are conduits of his love, sharing it through our humanity.

— David Cooley, Co-director and Office Manager,  
Office of Catechesis and Evangelization



This mural, found in the Blessed Sacrament chapel of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, portrays the Trinity.

## The Eucharist: The Source and Summit



**10 Out of shadows and into truth**  
*Msgr. William Neuhaus*

**The Eucharist and  
our longing for God**  
*Father Michael Hennigen*

**11 Sacred treasure, sacred space**  
*Father Britton Hennessey*

**12 The Eucharist: how we should  
receive this gift**  
*Father Andrew Young*

**Study Questions**

## Out of shadows and into truth

Msgr. William Neuhaus

I enjoyed watching recently an interesting and even somewhat charming British documentary in which Queen Elizabeth II (who even managed a rare joke) handled, examined and talked about the St. Edward Crown, with which she was crowned over sixty-five years ago and which she apparently has not seen since (I suppose she doesn't keep these things in a dresser drawer), and the newer Imperial State Crown, which she dons on a regular basis to open the British Parliament. She spoke with some knowledge of the history of the great Cullinan "Star of Africa" diamond which adorns the latter crown, and the program featured commentary on the circumstances of its discovery, cutting and placement in the crown (the priceless gem was sent years ago from South Africa to London by regular mail!), as well as a lengthy discussion on the stone's characteristics, colors, flaws and so forth, which was all news to me and rather beyond anything I know (which is more or less nothing) about diamonds.

Yet, in teaching about the Eucharist, I have often found myself mentioning diamonds — they are proverbial for being (pun intended) multi-faceted, a term which comes to mind when one reads this beautiful quote on the Eucharist from the Second Vatican Council, to be found (n. 1323) in the wonderfully comprehensible and accessible "Catechism of the Catholic Church," which should have a place in the home of every committed Catholic:

"At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.'"

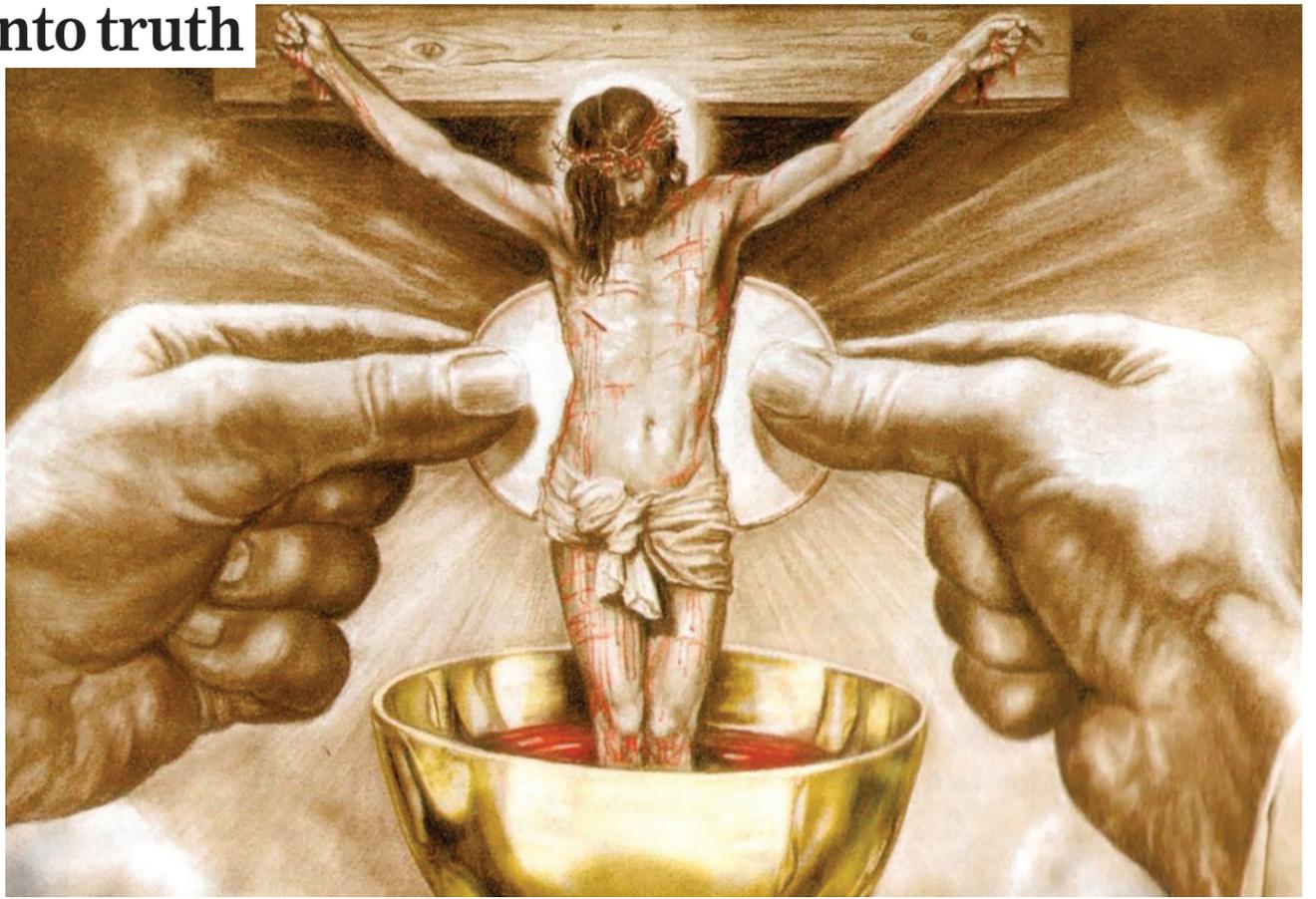
Sacrifice, memorial, sacrament, bond, banquet ... how wonderfully bright is this shining "source and summit," as the Council calls it, of the Christian life.

The Catechism with great clarity references the centuries of scriptural and Church teaching on the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, including that "summary" which was presented in the sixteenth century by the Council of Trent:

"Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God ... that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation." (n. 1376)

It sometimes happens that faithful Catholics encounter people objecting to what we believe about the Real Presence by claiming that the Church's use of that medieval, philosophical term, "transubstantiation," as well as the development over the centuries of how the Church has sought to honor that Presence, means that what we believe about the Real Presence is some kind of a medieval innovation or exaggeration remote from what the early Church believed about how Christ is present in the Eucharist.

In 1968, in his beautiful yet relatively brief "Credo of the People of God," and like his successors in many subsequent papal teaching documents, Pope St. Paul VI tried to address that and other modern errors concerning the Eucharist, and perhaps especially concerning adoration of the Eucharist, by describing the use of "transubstantiation" as appropriate while, at the same time, emphasizing that whatever kind of language we may use in describing the change which occurs on the altar, we must always understand that "in the reality itself, independently of our mind, the bread and wine have ceased to exist after the Consecration, so that it is the adorable body and blood of the Lord Jesus that from then on are really before us under the sacramental species of bread and wine, as the Lord willed it, in order to give Himself to us as food and to associate us with the unity of His Mystical Body. ... And this existence remains present, after the sacrifice, in the Blessed Sacrament, which is, in the tabernacle, the living heart of each of our churches. And it is our very sweet duty to honor and adore in the blessed Host which our



eyes see, the Incarnate Word whom they cannot see, and who, without leaving heaven, is made present before us."

"Our very sweet duty." Pope Paul appreciated and loved the Catholic impulse quietly and reverently to express our wonder and gratitude for what happens before us at Mass, and for what — for whom — we receive in holy Communion. And so we have, among many other hopeful things in the life of the Church, and shiningly standing out in a troubled and confused world, the phenomenon of parish programs of Eucharistic adoration, including here in our own diocese. It's always a great and often a moving pleasure, and a reaffirming one, to see how such expressions of our belief in the Real Presence strike converts to our faith.

Msgr. Ronald Knox (preacher, apologist, Bible translator and mystery writer) was a 20th-century English convert, and in a powerful Corpus Christi homily recalled the epitaph of

St. John Cardinal Henry Newman, the great 19th-century convert (himself very frequently cited in the Catechism), "Out of Shadows and Appearances into the Truth":

"When death brings us into another world, the experience will not be that of one who falls asleep and dreams, but that of one who wakes from a dream into the full light of day. Here, we are so surrounded by the things of sense that we take them for the full reality. Only sometimes we have a glimpse which corrects that wrong perspective. And above all when we see the Blessed Sacrament enthroned we should look up towards that white disc which shines in the monstrance as towards a [crack] through which, just for a moment, the light of the other world shines through." ("Pastoral and Occasional Sermons," 304)

Msgr. William Neuhaus is a retired priest in the Diocese of Covington.

## The Eucharist and our longing for God

Father Michael Hennigen

One of my favorite places to go ever since I was young is the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. My family and I would always stay in Gatlinburg, and we still go down as a family every year in the summer.

Visiting the Great Smoky Mountains is spiritually uplifting, a kind of retreat for me. Every morning we go to Mass at St. Mary's in town and then spend the day out in nature. Nature is God's "first word" to us, showing us that he created us, he loves us and he sustains us. In the Gospels it is mentioned many times that Jesus would go off alone to pray, to be with his Father, out in the wilderness, up on the mountain alone to pray. Mountains in Scripture are often the place of encounter with God. Psalm 144:5 says, "Lord, incline your heavens and come down; touch the mountains and make them smoke."

It was about 10 years ago on one of our family trips to the "Smokies" we decided to buy huge inner tubes called River Rats at the Walmart in Pigeon Forge. We went tubing in the Greenbriar and Elkmont areas of the park. We fell in love with this activity and now do it every year. I notice the beautiful mountain streams — the cool, clear, crystal water — and how they keep flowing, they never dry up. The water is refreshing to see, to listen to, and to get in

(Continued on page 11)

In this *Messenger* file photo, Father Jordan Hainsey, administrative assistant to the Bishop, prays the Divine Mercy chaplet on Divine Mercy Sunday at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, April 19, 2020.



THE EUCHARIST: THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT

# Sacred treasure, sacred space

Father Britton Hennessey

To me, one of the most moving aspects of the Easter Triduum that accompanies and accentuates the sublime celebration of the Paschal Mystery has always been the dramatic changes that happen in the interior of the church. After the conclusion of the Holy Thursday liturgy,

at the dedication Mass, and when reposed after Communion, the Lord's Real Presence dwells there.

The tabernacle in each church building serves various functions. As a repository for the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, a treasure worth more than any amount, it's often constructed with costly metals and may be adorned with jewels, like at our Cathedral Basilica. For

Ark of the Covenant. In these chapters from Exodus, construction plans are given for the ark and for various other elements of the Lord's dwelling. The ark was to be made of acacia wood, have every surface covered in gold, and was to be adorned with angels. In later chapters, after the construction was complete, the Lord descended to his dwelling place in the form of the glory cloud, the Shekinah. It was here that bread was placed in the Lord's presence in sacrifice and was only able to be eaten by the priests, an early prefiguring of the Eucharist. Later in salvation history, Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem and the Lord dwelt there in the Holy of Holies, an area separated by a large veil. Sacrifices were offered to the Lord day and night.

It was important for the people of every generation to know of the Lord's presence among them. But also, the Meeting Tent was where Moses met with the Lord *panim-al-panim* ... that is, face to face. No one else had such an intimate friendship with the Lord to be able to meet him face to face, only Moses, the people's intercessor. One element of Moses' interactions with God that has always fascinated me is the fact that Moses' face became radiant from being in the Lord's presence — so much so, that it frightened the people and he was forced to wear a veil.

Despite the many years that have passed since the time of Moses, several things are still the same. First, the Lord still desires to be present to us and to accompany us on this journey through life, and as such, is still very present to us in the most holy Eucharist. Veiled in the outward appearances of bread and wine, Jesus Christ becomes present to his people at each and every Mass. Second, as in the Old Testament, the Lord's dwelling is still a sacred vessel (the tabernacle) made of precious elements and centrally located in many churches. The sanctuary lamp, a specific and conspicuously placed candle, denotes the presence of the Lord. Finally, like Moses, any amount of encounter with the Lord reserved in the tabernacle (or especially during Eucharistic Adoration) leaves a radiance within our souls. Our faces may not glow as Moses' did, but our hearts, our minds and our actions cannot help but radiate Christ to the world if we continually place ourselves before the Lord, face to face.

In this life, we face many challenges each and every day that might seek to close our hearts and minds to the Lord's Real Presence among us. But in each and every Catholic Church, the Lord is reserved in the tabernacle and waits for us to come before him ... to speak to him whatever may be on our minds ... to show his love to us and transform our souls. Humanity's most intimate desire is unity with our Lord and Creator because we are made in his image and likeness and can only be truly fulfilled through unity with him. He continues to sustain us at every Mass through the reception of his very Body and Blood, and he makes himself available to us in a real way in every tabernacle in the world. He does this not because he needs us — he does this because he desires us, and he loves us. May we always remember that when the world faces us with adversity, the Lord waits to show us his love face to face.

Father Britton Hennessey is parochial vicar at St. Timothy Parish, Union, Ky.



the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in a different location, leaving the main tabernacle empty. Quite often thereafter, linens, candles and other items are removed. When entering the church for the Liturgy of Good Friday and seeing the dark, empty tabernacle, I always experience a deep sense of emptiness that drives home the emphasis of the Lord's death for our salvation. But shortly thereafter, on Holy Saturday, the Light of the World re-enters our darkened world after rising from the domain of death. The tabernacle remains empty until after Communion when the Risen Lord is once again reposed and is present for his people. If you've ever been able to attend the dedication of a new church building or chapel, a similar experience occurs when the tabernacle remains empty until the Eucharist is consecrated for the first time in the new place

the protection of such a priceless treasure as the Eucharist, the tabernacle is locked. But despite being secured, it is accessible for Mass, for Communion to the sick, and for reserving the Eucharist for Adoration. Most importantly, though, it is the physical dwelling place where the Lord is always present to his people.

The dwelling place of the Real Presence of Jesus is sufficient enough to define the tabernacle, but to understand more about its role we have to look to the Old Testament, the 24th and 25th chapters of the book of Exodus. Moses and the Israelites have just arrived at Mount Sinai. The Lord God makes himself manifest to his chosen people (whom he had just delivered from slavery), with flashes of lightning, billowing smoke and peals of thunder. But Moses was to lead the people to the Promised Land, and the Lord desired to accompany them by being present in the

body as the Temple — God with us — and from his side came forth blood and water; the sacramental life of the Church. Water and blood are signs of life.

From the side of Christ came forth his bride, the Church, just as from the side of Adam came forth Eve. He gave us his divine life, his body and blood, the Eucharist. The word Eucharist means "thanksgiving," and we are thankful for the gift of his divine life, which is everlasting life, salvation from sin and death. We long for salvation like a deer longing for flowing streams; our souls thirsts for God.

Father Michael Hennigen is pastor at Holy Cross Parish, Covington.

(Continued from page 10)

to. It always reminds me of the verse in Scripture, "As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God." (Psalm 42:1)

We long for God, we thirst for God, we are made for God. We long for his life — eternal life — to be one with him. As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Our Lord thirsts for us. Jesus' words on the cross, "I thirst," demonstrate that he wants to share his life with us. Only in God is our soul — our thirst — quenched, so that we will never run dry.

In the book of Ezekiel, chapter 47, the prophet speaks of water flowing from the temple giving life to the earth. Jesus is the "New Temple," as he speaks of himself, his

THE EUCHARIST: THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT

# The Eucharist: how we should receive this gift

**Father Andrew Young**

“Let the entire man be seized with fear; let the whole world tremble; let Heaven exult when Christ, the Son of the Living God, is on the altar in the hands of the priest.” These words from St. Francis of Assisi should give us pause as we reflect upon the reality of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sublime gift from God that enables us to enter into a union with Jesus Christ unlike any other. When we receive holy Communion, we are not simply receiving bread and wine. We are really, truly and substantially receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ. The awesome nature of this gift is something that should fill us with intense joy and we should be awe-struck every time we are in the presence of the Eucharist — because the very same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, worked amazing miracles, suffered, died and rose from the dead is right there in front of us. All too often, however, we can lose sight of this great reality and we can find ourselves approaching the Eucharist in a routine, nonchalant, way that makes it seem like receiving holy Communion is no different from anything else happening in our day. If we find ourselves falling into this category, a look at how the Church says we should approach the Sacrament can be a helpful reminder of the glory in front of us.

Since the Eucharist is the bedrock of our faith, the Church sets certain requirements for one to be able to receive holy Communion. Baptized (or fully received) Catholics who have reached the age of reason (7 years old) and who are not aware of mortal sin and who have observed the Communion fast may receive holy Communion. One who knowingly receives holy Communion while guilty of mortal sin that has not been absolved in confession, receives unworthily and thereby commits the mortal sin of sacrilege. Venial sins do not and should not prevent us from receiving Communion. The grace received in holy Communion forgives our venial sins and fortifies us against temptation to mortal sin. The Communion fast is absolutely necessary as well. All are obliged to not eat or drink for one hour prior to receiving Communion. Water and medicine are always permitted and do not break the fast. Deliberately not observing the Communion fast and still receiving is a mortal sin. Those who are seriously ill, however, and those who care for such persons are not bound by the fast.

Beyond these basic requirements to receive the Eucharist in a fitting manner, we also must make sure our hearts are properly disposed. When it comes to our prayer lives our disposition is of pivotal importance. God hears all of our prayers and answers all of our prayers but how we prepare ourselves for these encounters with God and how we approach God makes a huge difference in how we are able to experience God’s grace in our lives. Think about the last time you received holy Communion. Did you line up, look around the church, wave to a friend, then mechanically stick out your tongue or hand, quickly make the sign of the cross and go back to your pew? Or did you step into the line, try your best to block out any distractions,

bow as the sacred Host was elevated in front of you, and then humbly receive the Lord of the Universe into your very person?

In both cases the same things occurred. In both cases you received holy Communion. One case, however, clearly had a better realization of the true gift that was being received and certainly had a greater impact on the one



In this Messenger file photo, Father Ryan Maher, rector, Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, gives Communion to parishioners on the feast of the Coronation of Mary, May 22, 2020.

receiving the gift. Our preparation for receiving our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament should begin even before Mass begins; hence the need to fast for a while and to confess any grave sins we are aware of having committed. Once we enter the church, we should spend time in silent prayer so that our hearts are ready to fully enter into the Mass. Throughout Mass, we should try to avoid distraction and continually unite our own prayers and petitions to the prayers being offered by the priest. We should especially offer our own petitions at the moment of the Offertory and in that most sacred moment of consecration, we should be so plugged-in to the action of the Mass that we can truly recognize our Lord and God as he is elevated before us in the sacred Host and precious chalice. All of this should lead up to the moment when we step out of our pews and prayerfully approach the throne of God, disguised as a golden ciborium.

St. Therese of Lisieux once reminded us, “Our Lord does not come down from Heaven every day to lie in a golden ciborium. He comes to find another heaven which is infinitely dearer to him — the heaven of our souls.”

When we receive the Eucharist with the proper disposition and having prepared our hearts for the amazing gift that it is, the Lord’s grace is able to flood our souls and provide us with the strength we need to continue our mission of being true disciples of the Lord in the world. May each

of us never lose sight of this precious gift. May we always make every effort to receive the Eucharist in the best possible manner and may we always approach the Eucharist, as St. Francis of Assisi said, with holy fear, trembling and exaltation!

Father Andrew Young is pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Maysville, Ky



**What does the Eucharist mean to you? What people are saying around the Diocese.**

**Beth Schoepf, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at St. Philip Parish, Melbourne**

*I believe the Eucharist is central to our Catholic faith, it's what separates us from most other Christians. I'm actually a convert, so having the Eucharist is very special to me as I've grown in my Catholic faith through the years. It's central not only to our faith but to me — it's what grounds me; it's so important to our life, to be able to receive. When we weren't able to come to church it was very hard for me. Spiritual Communion just doesn't quite take the place of being able to receive the body and blood of Christ.*

## Study Questions



**What are water and blood signs of in Scripture? Name some examples from both the Old and New Testament.**

**How can a tabernacle in every church be compared to the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple?**

**Why is it important to receive the Eucharist with a proper disposition?**

**Is it fitting that Christ's Body and Blood become present in the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine? Why or why not?**