

## ***Absence, Indifference, and the Real Presence***

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We have all heard the phrase, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder!” What we didn’t know is that we would all be living this out for an indefinite period of time as we shelter in place during the current pandemic, especially during Lent and beyond. For many of us it has provided the time for deeper contemplation and meditation on the passion, the resurrection and the real presence.

Just like you, my heart breaks for all those who are suffering and dying in hospitals around the world without a single loved one present as they pass from this life into the next. Of course, I am grateful for all of the doctors and nurses at the bedside of many of these souls who are ill and frightened. Yet they lack the presence of a family member or friend as a result of this contagious virus.

As we pray for all of these beautiful souls it is easy to realize that our Lord Jesus knows perfectly what it is to suffer in loneliness during the time of need. We only have to look at the garden of Gethsemane, as he sweats drops of precious blood while contemplating his impending passion and the future torment to his most sacred heart due to the attitude and indifference and neglect to his presence in every Eucharist and in every tabernacle of the world. This underlies the pain of absence.

I have to admit that as grateful as I am for his real presence, I too have been guilty of indifference and neglect at times in my life toward the greatest gift from God – Jesus’ eucharistic presence. Jesus who only desires to pour his perfect love, grace and mercy into each of our hearts. Remember this: The Lamb of God who is present at every bedside of anyone who is in need of his presence, *he is never absent!*

We can learn so much from his example. We all take great comfort in his real presence in the Eucharist and our hearts grow fonder in the sense of deep desire to the day that we can physically gaze upon his beauty and receive him physically into our bodies again during Mass. I can only imagine that Jesus, the author of love, is just as desirous of our presence always! His communion is the food that leads to community as the way of love and longing for all of us to be physically able to return back together as one.

**Evangelizing and Mission** (Session VI - Initial Formation Program)

This internal need to be one was very evident during our recent meeting that was held over the internet here in San Antonio, Texas, as we covered Booklet VI for those discerning to become Associates of the Blessed Sacrament. (A group of us, under the guidance of our director, Father Anthony Schueller, SSS, are currently facilitating a group of 55 women and men.) I would like to include a few of the beautiful points from our small group sharing that brought to light ideas that helped each of us spiritually.

One of the topics was a comparison of how a palm tree grows roots deeper into the ground during times of storms or stress and how we can also do so in our faith life during this pandemic. Another point mentioned was Saint Therese, the Little Flower, that as she began to notice blood coming from her mouth as she was ill with tuberculosis, she became joyous realizing that she was closer to being with our Lord in heaven; to be in Jesus' presence.

Our eucharistic meditation for the evening related to the topic of religious ignorance and indifference during the time of Saint Eymard toward the most holy Eucharist and the fact that to this day each and every one of our evangelization efforts of the church flow from the Eucharist as the source and the summit of our Catholic faith, Jesus Christ, our Passover and living bread.

### **The Third Apparition of Our Lady of Fatima**

What follows is a recounting of the third and final apparition of our Lady of Fatima during 1919, 49 years after the passing of Father Eymard. The final apparition was from the angel of peace to the three children: Lucia, and now saints Francisco and Jacinta. This vision was explicitly eucharistic. In fact, in this apparition, the angel gave Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia their first Holy Communion. And the angel gave the Eucharist to the children under both species. (It is interesting to note that Sister Lucia, in an interview given years later, stated that this was *the most important of all the apparitions at Fatima*.)

This is a description of the miraculous event from her diary:

*After we had repeated this prayer, I do not know how many times we saw shining over us a strange light. We lifted our heads to see what was happening. The angel of peace was holding in his left hand a chalice, and over it, in the air, was a host from which drops of blood fell into the chalice. The angel left the chalice in the air and bowing down with his forehead to the ground, then told us to repeat this prayer three times.*

(Before you read this beautiful prayer, please realize that this angel is prostrate on the ground before the Holy Eucharist and this is one of the same heavenly angels that is present and beholds the face of God in heaven for eternity. This is an example of how reverent we should be in the presence of the Eucharist. After all, it is Jesus Christ, fully present! Also, please pay close attention to two of the words in the prayer: *indifference* and *ingratitude* and the other words that surround them.)

The angel spoke these words of prayer to teach the children and to teach us:

*Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I adore you profoundly, and I offer you the most precious blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world. In preparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifferences by which he is offended, and by the infinite merits of his most sacred heart and the immaculate heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners.*

Continuing the remembrance of that day, Sister Lucia said:

*After that, the angel arose, took again in his hands the chalice and the host. The host he gave to Lucia and the contents of the chalice he gave to Jacinta and Francisco, saying at the same time, "Eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus Christ, terribly outraged by the **ingratitude** of men. Offer reparation for their sakes and console God." And once more, he bowed to the ground repeating with us the same prayer thrice: "Most Holy Trinity, etc." and then he disappeared. Overwhelmed by the supernatural atmosphere that involved us, we imitated the angel in everything, kneeling prostrate as he did, and repeating the prayers he said.*

Did you notice that *indifference* was surrounded by the words *outrages and sacrileges* toward the Eucharist and that ingratitude of the body and blood of Christ is an *outrage!!!* The Eucharist is the greatest gift that God gives us. The gift of Jesus: body, blood, soul and divinity, present in all the tabernacles of the world and yet as men and women, many of us remain *indifferent* and *ungrateful*.

Saint Eymard spoke of this ingratitude towards the Eucharist about 60 years before the apparitions in Fatima. While we shelter in place and we draw closer to our Lord, please keep this beautiful prayer and meditation in your heart and on your lips to console our eucharistic Lord.

A very interesting side note considering that we are all going through the coronavirus pandemic, two of the children of Fatima, Francisco and Jacinta, passed away within a few years of their visions due to another pandemic, the Spanish Flu.

The beauty of their deep faith is that they evangelized even as they became ill and weak. For months, they still insisted on walking to church to make eucharistic devotions and prostrated themselves for many hours, kneeling with their heads to the ground, as they said, "How the angel had instructed them." They continued to demonstrate their absolute and *unending gratitude* for the most Blessed Sacrament.

Wow! What we can learn from children.

So, for now, we cannot go to a church, but we can pray and adore online through the Mass or live-streamed eucharistic adoration. We can pray the rosary or divine mercy chaplet. We can evangelize our own families and friends.

As a congregation, let us grow as one to rid the world of the pain caused through absence, indifference and ingratitude. We must evangelize today and always the beautiful, glorious and perfect gift that is the real presence of Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity, that is contained in the Most Holy Eucharist. It is the medicine of immortality and the remedy to any and all afflictions in this world. The scourge of an invisible virus will be healed by our ever-present God.

Let us continue to desire Jesus' real presence and pray for the day that we may once again gaze upon Jesus' face in the most holy Eucharist and reverently consume his most precious body and blood as one community.

God bless and be present to each other and to our risen King! Peace be with you!

Cf. Sister Maria Lucia of the Immaculate Heart, *Fatima in Lucia's Own Words: The Memoirs of Sister Lucia, The Last Fatima Visionary*. (Ravengate Press, 1989).