

Living Eucharistic Spirituality Without the Eucharist

By Brother Michael Perez, SSS and George Peko

Our world is experiencing tremendous suffering due to the coronavirus pandemic 2020. In their deep concern for the safety of the citizens placed under their care, the local governors have ordered the closure of all public places of gathering. Our Catholic bishops in concert with civil authorities have requested that the faithful not gather publicly for the celebration of the Eucharist, as a means to contain the virus. However, in these difficult times, where there is fear, sickness, and even death, the faithful have a heightened desire to attend Mass and be nourished by the Eucharist. These events are unprecedented, startling, and leave us wondering what to do. Watching Mass on television or listening to Mass on the radio never seemed a meaningful option for many of us. This begs the question, "Why would Christ allow for a time without our ability to receive his eucharistic presence?" Reflecting upon this question during this difficult time, we find that the answer is to bring us closer to those who have not been able to receive the Eucharist, past and present.

O GOD COME TO OUR ASSISTANCE - *Reflection by Brother Michael Perez, SSS*

As this pandemic began to unfold, I started to recall all the church history and lives of the saints I have read and taught over the years where Christians had been forced to fast from the Eucharist. The first was the martyrdom of sixteen Carmelite nuns living in their monastery in Compiègne, France, in 1794. Due to the events surrounding the French Revolution, they were forced to leave their enclosure, remove their religious habits, wear lay clothes, and live in separate apartments. They were forbidden to attend the celebration of Mass and receive our Lord in the Eucharist. Their feast day is July 17.

A second example are the heroic Japanese Christians during Japan's isolation that occurred for over two hundred years from 1639-1853. These brave Christians kept themselves in hiding. Without the missionary priests, they were forced to fast without the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist. They were able to pass on the faith by their example of prayer and acts of charity when possible. The hidden Christians kept the faith alive until the missionaries were able to return.

Writing down these two accounts brings to mind the lives of the Ugandan martyrs, Charles Luwanga and twenty-two young catechumens preparing for the sacraments of initiation. The king expelled the missionaries so they continued instructing each other. They were called "the praying ones." This took place in the years 1885 - 1887. This place is special to me because my religious congregation has a mission in Uganda in the neighborhood of these martyrs. Their feast day is June 3rd.

LORD MAKE HASTE TO HELP US - *Reflection by George Peko*

While not being able to receive the Eucharist seems foreign to us, we can look to these strong Christians from the past who never let obstacles stand in their way as an inspiration for our current situation. Presently, we all are unable to attend Mass because of the coronavirus. These events have deepened my awareness of our brothers and sisters who are not able to receive Communion for other reasons, such as not being able to drive themselves to Mass and concurrently not having someone available to bring them the Eucharist. This also

includes those who live in rural areas who do not have a regular Mass schedule, and those who live in areas riddled with war and poverty. I also think of the people who are ill, taking care of loved ones, having to work, and everyone else who wants to be at Mass but simply cannot. We are not always able to receive the Eucharist, and when this occurs, we are called to deepen our spiritual communion: a communion with all those who have not been able to receive the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, past and present. We are to pray for those who need a spiritual communion just as much as a sacramental communion. Why would Christ allow for a time without our ability to receive his eucharistic presence? The answer to this question reminds me of three Bible passages as well as an old adage.

The first passage is Matthew 22:37-38: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The reason for the removal of the Eucharist in the form of the Body and Blood is to bring us closer to God and each other. No matter the circumstance, everything that happens in our lives is meant to deepen and perfect our love. This is simply another opportunity for us to allow God into our lives.

The second biblical passage is Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." The third is Matthew 7:7: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." The difficult situations in life make us Christians work harder spiritually to search and encounter Christ. We must work to continue to be the Body of Christ as a Church and community despite not being able to attend liturgies, receive the sacraments, or gather in church buildings. We are called to experience and find the Eucharist in other forms such as the Word of God, prayer, and each other. Jesus has taught us that if we seek him with all our heart, we will find him. Christ will patiently wait an eternity for us to find him in any form that he presents himself to us. Not having the opportunity to attend Mass and receive the sacraments also helps us to appreciate what we are missing and deepens our desire for the Mass and the Eucharist. As the old adage states, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL COMMUNION
Bishop Centene, Bishop of Vannes, France

Lord Jesus, I firmly believe that You are present in the
Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist.
I love you more than anything and desire you with all
my being.

"O God, You are my God, for You I long! For You my body
yearns, for You my soul thirsts like land parched, lifeless
and without water." Ps. 63

May this Eucharistic Fast, help me enter into communion
with the sufferings of your Mystical Body, the Church
in whatever part of the world where there is persecution
or lack of priests, that hinders a sacramental life."

MARANATHA, COME LORD JESUS

Translated by Michael Perez, SSS