

Reflection #1: Purified Hearts

*“As soon as is possible... we must return to the Eucharist with **a purified heart**, with a renewed amazement, with an increased desire to meet the Lord, to be with him, to receive him and to bring him to our brothers and sisters with the witness of a life full of faith, love and hope.” - Cardinal Robert Sarah, “Let Us Return to the Eucharist with Joy”*

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promises that our stony hearts will be transformed into purified, natural hearts (see Ezekiel 36:26). This promise is fulfilled in Jesus, whose pierced heart is a furnace of molten Eucharistic love melting the clotted residue of sin within us. God knows us from our mother’s wombs (see Psalm 139:13). And God wants to reveal to us the paths and possibilities that will lead to peace, joy and happiness. Jesus is the one and only way who rings true, who pulses with Spirit life (John 14:6)

Much like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, breaking bread with Jesus on our pilgrim way sparks the Spirit, setting our hearts afire within us (Luke 24:13-35). Contact with Jesus and the words he speaks restores the hope, trust, and peace stripped away by sin. The truth is that God delights in us, and never stops loving us. Jesus alone satisfies. When we commune with Jesus even once a spiritual hunger is awakened in us that cannot be pacified by anything that online marketplaces offer us.

Yet still there are moments when we forsake our spiritual destiny—including times when we try to find satisfaction in wealth and comfort, accolades from others, or in the futile attempt to control and understand all that transpires in life. Indifference to God’s invitation of friendship drains our spirit and ignores our own heart’s deepest desires. Our sometimes fickle faith diminishes light and intimate company with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Only God’s love, encoded in the Eucharist, will fulfill us.

Christ’s Death and Resurrection, anticipated in the Last Supper and re-presented each time we take up the bread and cup at Mass, doing “this” in memory of him, offers us mercy, the sip of compassion that softens our own harsh self-contempt. Our guilt and self-loathing are too readily spun outward and unleashed upon others through rash judgment, sarcasm and detraction, or by simply ignoring people we pass on the street. Our conscience readily convicts us of being unkind, impatient, proud and possessive. Despite our unworthiness, Jesus still longs to come and dwell “under our roof,” refreshing and renovating our hearts. Jesus’ meek and humble heart (Matthew 11:29) lightens the weighted yoke of self-loathing we have pulled down upon ourselves.

It takes honesty, self-knowledge, and courage to admit the nagging ache of our loneliness. Loneliness can be self-induced, or can be visited upon us by the pandemic or other experiences of loss or setback. Loneliness is not a result of God's turning his face from us, for Jesus is always turned toward us, as the Eucharist attests. In the midst of this predicament, conversion cannot be a self-help project, but must follow the promptings of grace--God's love tugging on our hearts and minds, helping us make peace with our own vulnerability.

Jesus stirs us to turn our faces to behold him, the beautiful Savior, through eyes of faith. He transforms us so we have eyes that see, ears that hear the same "follow me" call that roused Andrew and Peter, Matthew and Mary Magdalene, to look beyond themselves and their own banal sinfulness. Unlike the Pharisees, they were wise enough to recognize their need for healing and purification.

Trappist monk Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis observes that "disciples are made by their own need." The Eucharist is the remedy tailor-made for each person's needs for healing, for no one can save himself, herself. And this is good news! Jesus' very name indicates that he has come on a mission of mercy on behalf of his heavenly Father. The love of this prodigal Father moves him to send us his Son, knowing the price to be paid.

We love to give the best of ourselves, for then we can bask in the light of our own excellence. Jesus' self-offering on the cross testifies that he prefers our need, our spiritual poverty. His wide-ranging appetite includes even our contrition for sins, a sacrificial offering consumed in the crucible of his burning love for us. St. Ephrem of Syria, one of the great Eastern doctors of the Church, speaks often of the Eucharist as the Medicine of Life. This is the most affordable healthcare policy imaginable, for Jesus himself has paid the premium for us.

◆ Reflection Questions

- *How has my guilt and lack of self-love been unleashed upon others?*
- *Where do I meet Jesus "in my need"—my own vulnerability--seeking healing and peace? Do I need to ask Jesus to help me desire him above all else?*
- *Where do I most need to seek forgiveness? Whom do I need to forgive?*

◆ Petitionary Prayers

- *For a renewed purity in our Eucharistic devotion, that we might truly give the best of ourselves, repent of a self-absorbed inward vision, and recognize our need for communion with the Eucharistic Lord of Life, we pray...*
- *For reconciliation in our hearts, homes, communities, and Church, that the healing balm of the Spirit might draw together those once separated by judgment and contempt, we pray....*