

Reflection #4: To Receive Him & Bring Him to Our Brothers and Sisters

“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”

The abiding Eucharistic presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is a tremendous act of loving kindness tendered by a God who is neither static nor inert. God is moved by compassion to help us come close to his seemingly blinding beauty, his utter simplicity. God's outpoured love is a light guiding us toward him. Our spoken and unspoken prayer and our efforts to live an upright life draw us ever closer to the Burning Mystery among us. God and humans abide in mutually self-disclosing, self-giving love. “O Lord, hear my voice when I call; have mercy and answer me. Of you my heart has spoken, ‘Seek his face’. It is your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not your face from me” (Psalm 27:7-9). Even as we know that darkness and light still mingle within us, we delight in our hearts' fulfillment, beheld in radiant glory.

God the Father takes the initiative in Jesus to “friend” us. This friendship is the foundation of all friendships, human and divine. Our human relationships should reflect God's generosity that is beyond all merit on our part. If we seek the face of Jesus in the Eucharist, our graced next step is to seek him in the faces and lives of those whom God presents to us. The authenticity of our prayer is measured by the extent to which love for God flows from our laps into the lives of others around us. We truly image God when we are habitually moved to be good for our family members, in-laws, for persons with whom we cross paths in stores or on the road. Dorothy Day provides a challenging criterion of conscience for us when she remarks, “I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.”

The injunction of John's First Letter could not be clearer: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Love's opposite undermines any claim to truly know God: “If anyone says, ‘I love God, but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother [and sister]” (1 John 4:20-21).

The wise spiritual guide Fr. Donald Haggerty cuts to the chase: “The most reliable mark of a genuine desire for God is the quick discovery outside prayer of sacrificial opportunities for the sake of others. To give ourselves to God in prayer is to find a door in our heart unlocking and opening to the hearts of other people...People we have not been accustomed to notice suddenly draw our sympathy and interest.” Fr. Haggerty concludes, “This phenomenon that people formerly ignored and avoided would suddenly occupy our attention and desire can only be due to the presence of God in them and in us.”

To know God and his Eucharistic presence dwelling within us confirms we are called and sent to love one another. This is the commission given to us at the end of every Mass, and the basis by which we will be judged as sheep of the Lord and not goats (Matthew 25:31-46). To make a sacrifice of self in prayer is organically connected with the sacrifice of ourselves in good works offered to any person who imposes himself, herself upon us. Both are acts of worship pleasing in God's sight. The convert and mystic Adrienne von Speyr links our mission in Christ with worship and joy: "The worship of those who believe is always the beginning and end of their mission."

At the same time, we should not be misled if we "hit the wall," confronting our own limits in either the ability to sustain prayerful attention, or to remain charitably oriented to others. Again, von Speyr: "The fact that one comes to a borderline where one feels overtaxed is actually the sign that the call is genuine." For then we are faced with the choice either to conceal or to manifest our need to God and to others, in a way that deepens our mutual dependence. We must be willing to be vulnerable before others, to entrust our needs to them, knowing that we cannot orchestrate their responses.

The saints may be unfailingly ready to be charitable; saints-in-the-making become more true, more simple, more trustworthy in the Church and our larger culture where mutual love is exchanged. Even our insufficiency and imperfections are "light" when not intentionally concealed under a bushel basket of pride, fragile egos or hypocritical conceit. Here, Jesus' repeated injunction, "Be not afraid," is relevant; as the late Francis Cardinal George reassures us: "Don't be afraid that your heart may not be able to embrace all those whom God loves—that is to say, everyone."

The Lord, who is not afraid to be "meek and humble of heart," and who commends this beatitude of meekness to us, constantly seeks us and finds us if we allow ourselves to be found. He pours his Spirit, himself into our hearts and minds so that we might do the same for our sisters and brothers. We bear wisdom, love, healing, hope, and new prospects of communion to a world where divisions are sorely real: political divisions, economic divisions, racial divisions, divisions within our Church and parish communities. We are freed from fear to simply love as God wills, for God's will and our own are made blessedly one. Our faces behold one another as we are, and our hearts are filled with the peace, presence, praise and joy that every human being desires.

◆ Reflection Questions

- *Where have I "hit the wall" and failed to love my neighbor?*
- *Where is God inviting me to sacrifice for others, allowing his love for me and my love for him to overflow?*
- *How can I grow in mutual dependence, both serving and being vulnerable with others?*

◆ Petitionary Prayers

- *For growth in charity and communion, that the Eucharist which unites us would confirm us in union with each other and in our common mission to bring others to Christ, we pray...*
- *For a healing of divisions, that political divisions, economic divisions, racial divisions, divisions within our Church and parish communities would find healing in the beauty and simplicity of our Eucharistic Lord, we pray...*