

12/24/23 - Eucharistic Adoration: What is the difference between Adoration, Exposition, and Benediction?

Last year I shared my deep conviction that Eucharistic Adoration is an essential element for a parish community to grow in holiness and evangelical charity. If we seek to follow Jesus as his disciples, to be on fire with a desire to witness to Christ in the world, and to heed the Great Commission to make disciples of all the world, then it begins with prayer and in particular a personal encounter with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

In the second part of our series, I reflected on the way in which Jesus is present in the Eucharist, noting that through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the simple elements of bread and wine are substantially changed into the Body, Blood, Soul and divinity of Jesus.

And so Jesus is truly present to us in the Eucharist that we celebrate. That real presence of Jesus **remains**, it does not simply fade away when the celebration of Mass is done. And that is why we reserve the Eucharist in the tabernacle after Mass with great reverence. For Catholics, the Eucharist is not just a symbol that we receive during Mass. The Eucharist is the eternal presence of the living God in our midst.

In order to reserve the Eucharist appropriately, the Church requires that each parish church and chapel have a tabernacle. In our parish, the tabernacle is constructed in the shape of the Ark of the Covenant, which I mentioned in a previous reflection, and which draws our attention to the living God 'abiding' with us. In any church or chapel where there is a tabernacle, a sanctuary light (usually a candle in a red cover) is placed nearby to indicate that the Eucharist is being reserved there. In those instances, there should be profound respect for the space and also a gesture, usually a genuflection, that should acknowledge the real presence of Jesus.

The Eucharistic devotion of the Church invites us to spend time with Jesus so that our hearts can be encouraged, exhorted, consoled, and ultimately transformed. But there are a number of terms associated with Eucharistic devotion that are important to know so that we can truly appreciate and be grateful for all that the Lord gives. And so, what is the

difference between adoration, exposition, benediction, and reposition?

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is something we can do in any church or chapel. It is the prayerful disposition on our part, a disposition that says: “I’m intentionally adoring the Lord, worshiping the Lord, giving praise to the Lord.” Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament can happen anytime we place ourselves in the presence of Jesus in a church or chapel where He is reserved in the tabernacle (more on this below). And there is no limit to the hours we can spend with Jesus in prayer! **Exposition** of the Blessed Sacrament, though, is a specific rite of the church when the Blessed Sacrament is brought forth from the tabernacle specifically for adoration. Exposition is a special opportunity of grace through which the church intentionally sets time aside for adoration in a communal way. Exposition requires a priest, deacon, or acolyte to bring the Eucharistic forth, and there must always be someone present, in the spirit of Psalm 130 (my soul looks for the Lord, more than a sentinel waits for the dawn) during the period of exposition. The Church has a clear set of norms for how exposition should be done in order to safeguard the Eucharistic and maintain solemnity. And finally, there is Benediction and reposition. **Benediction** is the specific act of blessing over the people with the Blessed Sacrament. All blessings are efficacious and fruitful, but to be blessed by Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament has primacy of place among all blessings, and so is reserved for these moments within the rite of exposition. And when the time of exposition has concluded, the priest, deacon, or acolyte ‘**repose**’ the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

These rites of the church are such a gift, and in order to promote a lively and authentic devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, it is important to understand these terms that are used so often.

Why is it important to show reverence to God?

How do I reverence God in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist when I enter the church?

What has been my experience with Adoration, Exposition, and Benediction throughout my life? Has my desire to adore the Lord grown?

Resources

For additional reading, please see Ecclesia de Eucharistia (the Church

from the Eucharist) an encyclical letter written by Pope St. John Paul II in 2003 on the gift of the Eucharist, that the Church draws her life from the Eucharist. In paragraph 25 he writes:

The worship of the Eucharist outside of the Mass is of inestimable value for the life of the Church. This worship is strictly linked to the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It is the responsibility of Pastors to encourage, also by their personal witness, the practice of Eucharistic adoration, and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in particular, as well as prayer of adoration before Christ present under the Eucharistic species.

It is pleasant to spend time with him, to lie close to his breast like the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 13:25) and to feel the infinite love present in his heart. If in our time Christians must be distinguished above all by the "art of prayer",⁴⁸ how can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!