

The Eucharist and Evangelical Charity

In this final reflection, I want to offer some concluding thoughts on the profound link between the gift of the Eucharist and our love for our brothers and sisters manifested in evangelical charity, and so I begin with a passage from the Gospel of Matthew.

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’” (Matt. 25: 34-40)

The passage from Matthew comes immediately after the parable of the talents and just prior to the events of his betrayal, passion and death. There is an urgency in the words of Jesus here. The urgency is directed toward those who wish to follow Jesus and enter eternal life, those who are entrusted with the kind of mission and work that has been entrusted to us. A call to be vigilant, to pray and to

work tirelessly for the good of others, because we know not the day or hour of the Lord's coming.

In the context of the teaching, it is clear from the very beginning that Jesus uses the word "I" to connect himself with the 'hungry' the 'thirsty' the 'stranger' the 'naked' the 'ill' and the one in prison, in general the most vulnerable. The connection is both personal and provocative. Jesus is not saying that for those who desire to enter eternal life they need to be good to the poor because they are poor and need help. Not at all. On the contrary, by repeatedly using the word "I", Jesus emphatically presents to the disciples his very presence in the marginalized, in those who are vulnerable, in those who hunger for the truth, and in those who need to be accompanied along the path of holiness.

An essential point for us is the recognition that devoted time in adoration, time spent in prayer with Jesus, forms us as disciples. Jesus reminds us of the important balance between contemplation and action. Prayer that does not lead to evangelical charity and an eagerness to help our brothers and sisters in need represents a lifeless exercise, a privatized relationship that does not move the heart outward. On the other hand, outreach that does not emerge from contemplation and prayer runs the risk of being self-focused and rooted in pride.

In 1980, Pope St. John Paul II wrote a letter to bishops on Holy Thursday called *Dominicae cenae*, and he reflected on the gift of the Eucharist and Charity. He said:

“eucharistic worship constitutes the soul of all Christian life. In fact, Christian life is expressed in the fulfilling of the greatest commandment, that is to say, in the love of God and neighbor, and this love finds its source in the blessed Sacrament, which is commonly called the sacrament of love.” (5)

He then went on to say: “Eucharistic worship is therefore precisely the expression of that love which is the authentic and deepest characteristic of the Christian vocation. This worship springs from love and serves the love to which we are all called in Jesus Christ. A living fruit of this worship is the perfecting of the image of God that we bear within us, an image that corresponds to the one that Christ has revealed in us. As we thus become adorers of the Father “in spirit and truth,” we mature in an ever fuller union with Christ, we are ever more united to Him, and-if one may use the expression-we are ever more in harmony with Him.” (5)

The personal encounter with Jesus in and through prayer, and specifically adoration, forms us men and women of virtue and it strengthens our desire for evangelical charity. As a result, our outreach and discipleship needs to be nourished by the grace provided in a deep devotion to the Eucharist. And our devotion to the Eucharist should naturally enflame within our hearts a ready desire to serve, to accompany, and to imitate Jesus Himself, who in laying down his life for us on the altar of the cross, gives us the Eucharist as the model and paradigm of Love itself.

- 1 How do I worship God in the Eucharist?**
- 2 How is the Eucharist the sacrament of love in my own life? Is it my source of strength?**
- 3 How can I grow in my discipleship and charity through devotion to the Eucharist?**

CHALLENGE

To grow more in my relationship with the Eucharist, what is one practical next step I can take?

- Am I called to assume a Holy Hour during my week?**
- Am I called to seek more opportunities with the Eucharist?**
- To stop by the church on my way to or from work?**
- Am I called to attend one of our monthly holy**

hours at the parish?