

CONFERENCE FOUR

EUCCHARISTIC SPITITUALITY

The subject of this conference is Eucharistic spirituality. Eucharistic spirituality teaches us abandonment and detachment and the virtues dear to the Heart of Jesus. The Eucharist is more fruitful when we approach it with these dispositions. We receive from the Eucharist as much as we are open to receive. We offer it in union with Jesus Christ in the degree of our union with Him.

All the virtues work together and grow together, and each has its special role to play in the unfolding of our potentialities. The Eucharist teaches us the obedience of Jesus Christ, and it teaches us how to respond with the response that Jesus gave. He always did the will of His Father, and He was obedient unto death even the death of the Cross. Supernatural obedience is obedience to God and His will as perceived by a right judgment, that is, by prudence, and offered through the love of God. It is distinguished from an undue and unthinking dependence, from an indiscriminate desire to please, and from a wish to win someone's favor.

Supernatural obedience and humility go together. One can be obedient only if one is humble, and if one is humble one will be obedient. The Old Testament tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Now this fear of the Lord is a filial reverence for Him. And this reverence is at the root of supernatural obedience.

The monk and the diocesan priest are in different situations. The monk is in a situation where his Abbot and the Rule govern the details of his life. St. Benedict says the monk wishes to live under a Rule and an Abbot. His response is obedience. On the other hand the diocesan priest is in a situation where he must exercise a great deal of independence. As a pastor, or as a pastor's associate, he is not only a teacher and dispenser of the sacraments, but also a leader. This is expressed in the documents of Vatican II by calling the priest a prophet, priest, and king. Of course as a ruler he is a Christian ruler, following the Lord's instructions, "The gentiles make their importance felt, but with you it shall not be so. He who is greater must be the least." The priest is a servant of his people, but he must exercise much judgment. St. Thomas compares the diocesan priest and the monastic priest by saying that the monastic priest is like a pilot on a ship in the harbor, whereas the diocesan priest is like a pilot in mid-ocean. There are storms in mid-ocean. The diocesan priest must exercise much more prudence and virtue than the monastic priest.

Nevertheless, the necessity of obedience and humility holds for all states of life. It is a Christian imperative and the bedrock of the Christian life. Ultimately it is always God that is being obeyed, and there is no lessening of human dignity in submitting to an infinitely wise, all-powerful, and all-good God. Faith shows God acting through the Church, through superiors in the Church, and through the discipline of the Church.

The laity, in addition to obedience to the teaching and precepts of the Church, may consider as an obedience rendered to Jesus Christ their fidelity to the duties of their state of life, including the work they do in keeping with their contract with their employer. It is Christ's will that we be faithful to the duties of our state of life. St. Paul says that all authority is from above. Where this authority enjoins sin, then one obeys

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God rather than man. St. Peter and St. John said to the Sanhedrin when instructed not to preach in the name of Jesus, “Consider whether it is good for us to obey you or God.”

In our obedience as priests we unite ourselves with Christ in His obedience and we offer this obedience to the Father in every Mass. We must teach the people to do likewise. Thus, we will have the humility of Christ.

Humility is not the first of the virtues, but it is a virtue especially enjoined upon us by Christ. “Learn of me,” He tells us, “for I am meek and humble of heart.” He adds, “and your hearts will have rest.” St. Paul explains in his letter to the Philippians that Jesus, being in the form of God, humbled Himself taking on the form of a slave and was obedient, even to the death of the Cross. Now humility and obedience are found in true greatness of character in all cultures. In the ancient Greek high culture that produced Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle humility appears as the virtue that offsets hubris, which is pride. But I think you will agree that neither humility nor obedience has a good press today.

Jesus lived in a more pastoral setting than ours, but nevertheless He had a very sensitive nature and was keenly aware of resistance to grace, unjust opposition, the oppression of the poor, and the hardness of heart of those around Him, traits which are not absent from our contemporaries. His senses and emotions were assailed. The gift of integrity by which his emotions were obedient to his will did not mean that they were not aroused, and even at times aroused to a disturbing extent. It is my opinion that when He prayed “the prayer of God,” sometimes all night, as the evangelists tell us, His consciousness was filled with the presence of His Father. Jesus realized that He and the Father were one, yet also that His human nature, like ours, was a gift. “What have you,” St. Paul asks, “that you have not received?” Jesus knew that of Himself in His human nature He was nothing, and I believe that in the “prayer of God” He abided before the Father in His nothingness, like St. Francis who spent the night exclaiming, “My God and My All.” Abiding in this prayer, there was nothing in His human emotions or imagination, nothing of the day’s sensations and emotions, to hold Him back from being totally present to His Father. His emotions could subside, together with the memories, as clouded water standing still for some time becomes clear water.

Our imagination and emotions, as well as our sense of who we are, can place obstacles in the way of the presence of God. If we recognize that we are nothing before God, then there is nothing in the way of His being entirely present, invading every cranny of our consciousness. This is the prayer of humility. From it easily arises the prayer of Gethsemane, “Father not my will but Thine be done.” So humility is the basis of obedience which allows the human will to become one with the divine will for the divinization of the human nature.

Such dispositions make it easier to see our attachments. We readily attach ourselves to persons, things, places, to what gives us pleasure and bolsters our self-esteem. Attachment unites its object to us in the same way that our limbs are united to our body. To detach ourselves it is like severing a limb. But detachment is not lovelessness, it is not indifference. The holy indifference of St. Ignatius is an ardent love of God which brooks no interference. Detachment is simply getting rid of the disorder of our love so that our love may be complete. We detach from that to which we are inordinately attached. Such attachments can be the love of sin or of occasions of sins – persons, places, or things that we know if we frequent we will fall into sin. Like the Irishman, and

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it happens to all races and peoples, who went by the tavern without so much as a glance. When he reached the bridge ahead of him he looked back and said, “Any man who can do that, deserves a drink.” Or like the panhandler who said to the passerby, “Have you got a quarter? I’m sober and it’s terrible!”

By detaching ourselves from the occasion of sin, hard as it is, we have more security of soul, more peace. It is hard, because to the attached person occasions of sin look like opportunities, and who wants to give up an opportunity? But this apparent opportunity leads us in the wrong direction and we will have to reverse our path.

Each daily Mass reminds us to join our lives with Christ and to teach the faithful to join their lives with Christ. He laid down His life for us that we might have the fullness of His peace and joy and an increase of eternal life. Our attachments provide us with the opportunity to offer something finite in exchange for the infinite – an increase of eternal life, of a life that begins now and, if we will, lasts forever.

St. Thomas Aquinas prayed, “My God, grant me to ardently desire all that is pleasing to you, to prudently examine it, to truthfully acknowledge it, and to faithfully fulfill it.” There is no moral virtue, neither humility, nor fortitude, nor patience, nor justice without prudence. Humility empties us of all the obstacles to God’s grace, and prudence directs the use of God’s grace which fills us. It is because no one is a good judge in his own case that we lay out our attachments in confession or spiritual direction and receive advice. Scripture says do everything with counsel and you will not regret it. But first of all, let us seek advice in prayer and be open to the impulse of the Holy Spirit and the example of Christ. What good advice does is to second and support the instinct within us. This light and impulse within us to do what is right and pleasing to God often has to contend with opposing desires and thoughts. But it is strengthened and clarified by sound advice. St. Benedict repeats Scripture, “Do everything with counsel and you will not regret it.”

There is the prudence of the flesh, the prudence of the world, and the prudence of Christ. Christ exhorts us, “Be simple as doves and clever as serpents.” The prudence of Christ is not weakness, laxity, or compromise. Prudence is discernment, it discerns the origin of our impulses, whether they are from above, below, or just from human nature. Another name for prudence is discretion. Discretion chooses moderation but not a compromise. It chooses a restraint from going to unhealthy extremes. The beauty of human actions lies in their being done in accordance with right reason and faith. We should love God without measure, but we need to act with measure and with common sense. St. Benedict’s Rule is noted for its discretion and moderation. He exhorts the Abbot to so do all things that the strong have something to strive for, and the weak are not discouraged by being overburdened. He also advises the Abbot to respect the difference in temperaments and capacities of his monks, and to treat them accordingly. The spiritual director must avoid imposing his own devotions and views on those he directs, but regard their attractions, capacities, and bent.

Detachment is a term that emphasizes the giving up of what hinders abandonment and conformity to the divine will. Disorder in our love depreciates it, and to some extent negates it or directs it wrongly, so that our love of God is impaired. This blinds us, weakens us, fatigues us, whereas detachment frees us, gives us new energies, opens our eyes to the truth, and puts our life in harmony with the will of God who wills our truest and longest lasting happiness.

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Attachments often flow from the seven capital sins, which are tendencies rooted in our nature. But because of the fallen state of our human nature, they are disordered. But as unconscious tendencies they affect our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Depth psychology has as its purpose to expose these unconscious tendencies. God's psychotherapy does this better.

These tendencies arise from human nature itself and are initially good. For example, nutrition is important to us and God has attached a pleasure to eating to facilitate our nourishing ourselves. Likewise, the propagation of the race is important to the survival and growth of the human race, and to it God has attached the pleasure of sex. It is important that we understand our worth as human beings, as persons, and so we have a natural esteem for ourselves. But because of our fallen human nature these tendencies are disordered inclining more or less to our detriment. When chosen they are sins, the capital sins.

As unconscious, these tendencies are the matter of depth psychiatry. For example, Karen Horney's *Neurosis and Human Growth* is an extended analysis of the pride system. Freud focused on the sexual and the aggressive instincts, anger as well as self-destruction which he considered anger turned against oneself. Other psychiatric systems have centered on the analysis of envy.

It is our experience that we are always discovering something new about ourselves as we pursue the spiritual life. Why does this process of self-discovery take so long? The Freudian concept of repression helps to answer this question. It is a concept which St. Thomas anticipated. St. Thomas taught that the intellect is ordered to know the truth and the will is ordered to seek the good. Is it possible, he asks, to hate the truth? He replies, Yes, if the truth is painful to us. Now pride makes our sins, shortcomings, and limitations painful to us. Furthermore, Thomas says that what is painful we perceive as evil, and we not only hate it but turn from it, we repel it. Now this is the concept of repression.

We might explain what takes place by the analogy of an armed camp with posted sentinels. The sentinels are outside the camp and their function is to alert the camp if the enemy is approaching. When an insight which is painful to us is seeking to gain entrance into our consciousness the camp, the sentinel, gives the alarm and the insight is repelled, that is, repressed. This takes place outside consciousness, or at the periphery of consciousness. We avert our gaze from the unpleasant.

The psychoanalytic method is aimed at gradually bringing to light these repressed insights, a process which has lost its popularity. It is a therapy that requires a long period of time, is expensive, and in many cases is unproductive. God's psychotherapy is free and takes place alongside our normal activities. As we realize fully God's mercy we understand that our shortcomings or sins do not repel Him but rather, acknowledged, draw Him to us. Jesus said, "I came for sinners not for the just" and, "There is more joy in Heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine just." If we are perfect and without blemish there is no opportunity for Jesus to show us mercy. And yet this is His desire. And for this He came. It is only when we acknowledge our defects that He can act through His mercy. A deepening realization of this takes the sting out of the awareness of our defects, limitations, and sins. They are more easily brought to mind, because they are less painful. Then, with the help of God's merciful grace, we can cope

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with them and allow God to heal them. In differing circumstances different attachments occur. Hence, throughout our lives we need to let go of attachments.

These attachments, as we have suggested, are the source of spiritual blindness since they cooperate with our pride and fear of the painful awareness of our limitations. And the worst of these attachments is attachment to our own judgment and will, which St. Francis de Sales calls the last stronghold of self-will. If we were willing to acknowledge and part with our attachments they would soon cease to be such. Our peace and happiness is in our conformity to God's will, and attachments prevent that conformity from being complete.

Abandonment expresses our loving confidence in God and His plan for us. The greater our confidence in God, the more active He is in intervening on our behalf. We see in the Gospels how our Lord desired this confidence, based on faith, as a condition for working a miracle. Jesus is honored by our confidence and responds to it. In order to have complete confidence in God, which leads to complete abandonment, we need to realize that He is concerned about everything that pertains to us. He is concerned about our friendships, our honor, our physical welfare, and our spiritual progress. Spirituality is not a separate plane of life; it is inclusive of all the dimensions of our life. We can see how detailed God's care for us is when we consider the way we are constructed. Imagine what life would be like without fingernails! Every detail of our being is carefully planned. Gray's *Anatomy* tells us that the femur, the leg bone, is made up of criss-crossing trabeculae of bone in such wise that it has the maximum of strength with the minimum of weight, a greater engineering feat than the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge. Once we are fully convinced that God has care of us in all our needs in every sphere, we can trust Him and abandon ourselves to Him completely. Now even when we sin, instead of withdrawing from Him, which is so common, since it is only in Him and through Him that we can be forgiven and our sin repaired, we should throw ourselves upon His mercy confidently with true sorrow and purpose of amendment.

It is to our advantage that we don't use God's love for us to expect instant gratification of every desire and need. God wants to strengthen our resourcefulness, our patience, our ability to wait, and our acceptance of the suffering that comes into our lives as part of the plan of redemption – that is, as expiatory and redemptive. God wants us to love the God who cares for us more than the care that God gives us.

God's plan for us takes into account something to which we are apt, even we priests, not to give sufficient attention or priority, that our life has an eternal dimension. Our faith is already the knowledge of what we will see in the vision of God. Our charity will last forever, if we do not sin, and it is restored in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Besides this present life, there is a real life that extends forever in eternity. There the balance is established which explains the deficiencies that may continue to exist in our present life to our discomfort.

Detachment, confidence, and abandonment lead to a peace and serenity under all circumstances. What is wonderful about the Catholic faith is that it prepares us to profit by and endure whatever occurs. Every cloud has a silver lining in Catholic wisdom. The clouds are the sufferings that original and actual sin bring into this world, including the disturbances of nature. The silver lining is the grace that God has prepared for us to claim in the midst of the cloud, so that it makes our suffering a participation in the sufferings of

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Christ and prepares an increase in love and its attendant virtues such as longsuffering, patience, submission, humility, chastity, and gratitude.

Love works through all the moral virtues according to the circumstances in which we are placed. When we are allured by sensible pleasure, love works through chastity; when we are transacting business, love works through justice. It is love that gives great value to our acts, but love is not love without the attendant moral virtues, nor without detachment and abandonment to the divine will.



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