

Mane Nobiscum Domine

(“*Stay with us, Lord*” [Lk 24:29])

A reflection on the Holy Eucharist, from the Carmelites in Pittsford, NY

Praised be Jesus Christ!

As you know, here in our Country, the Catholic Church is in the midst of a “Eucharistic Revival” which is having a profound effect on the renewal of faith in the Presence of our Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament among so many of our brothers and sisters in the Church. And in just a few days the National Eucharistic Congress will take place in Indianapolis. This is a moment of tremendous grace for our Catholic family here in America.

In light of this special moment of “Eucharistic grace”, I thought it would be opportune to share a reflection on the Presence of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. We know, with the certainty of faith, that Jesus is “really, truly, substantially, personally present” in the Holy Eucharist. He is present with the full reality of His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. We have His word for it in the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, in chapter 6 of St. John’s Gospel, as well as in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. The teachings of Jesus have been handed down to us from the Apostles and their Successors (the Bishops), all through the centuries right to our own day, and this teaching is kept and taught with great love by our Holy Mother the Church. What an ineffable Treasure we have in the Blessed Sacrament! Jesus is there in our Churches, day and night He remains with us, He longs for us, He loves us! What happy memories I have of my parents who cultivated in my sisters and brothers and myself, a deep faith in and love for the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus!

For this reflection, I would like to focus on a particular aspect of the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist that perhaps we do not often consider. We know by faith that Jesus is in the tabernacle of our Churches. But do we ever think that Jesus remains within us, in the “tabernacle” of our hearts, as one of the fruits of our reception of Holy Communion? Here is what Jesus says in His “Bread of Life” discourse in chapter 6 of St. John’s Gospel: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood **remains in me and I in him**” (Jn. 6:56). When we leave the Church after Mass and Holy Communion, we don’t leave Jesus and He doesn’t leave us, He remains within us. We walk out of Church as “living tabernacles”! So often after Mass we are quick to “get on” with our daily activities and, of course, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. However, do we ever avert to the beautiful Presence of Jesus within our hearts from time to time throughout the day?

Now you may have a question arising in your minds about this: doesn’t the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus within us after Holy Communion last only about fifteen minutes? Yes, this is true. As long as the Sacred Species of the Consecrated Bread and Wine are not absorbed by our bodies, the Sacramental Presence of Jesus remains. Yet even though the Sacred Species are absorbed by our bodies, the powerful grace of the *spiritual Presence* of Jesus remains within us. With every worthy reception of Holy Communion, we become more and more intimately united with Jesus. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: *He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him*. Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: *As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me* (CCC n. 1391). Again, the Catechism says: “What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life. Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh [that was] given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit, preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism. This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to

us as viaticum” (CCC n. 1392). In a word, the “life of grace” that is increased by Communion with the Eucharistic Jesus, means that Jesus lives in us and we live in Him more and more deeply.

Our Carmelite Saints can help us appreciate this mysterious Presence of Jesus that is the fruit of Holy Communion. Our Holy Mother St. Teresa of Jesus referred to Jesus as “our companion in the Most Blessed Sacrament”, and she loved to “live in His presence” not only when she was before the tabernacle, but through every moment of the day. She loved to think of Him as a companion and a true friend who was always with her, at her side. In the *Book of Her Life* chapter 22, she writes: “What more do we desire than to have such a good friend at our side, who will not abandon us in our labors and tribulations, as friends in the world do? Blessed are they who truly love Him and always keep Him at their side!” When she received Holy Communion, she liked to think that Jesus was coming to her soul as into “her house” and she prepared herself to give the Lord hospitality desiring that the Lord remain with her (cf. *Spiritual Testimonies* n. 22).

In her commentary on the “Our Father” that is found in her work *The Way of Perfection*, she offers these insights on the phrase “Give us this day our daily bread.” In St. Teresa’s mind when we pray “give us this day our daily bread” we are asking the Father that His Son would “be ours every day”, that is always, and not just for a few moments after receiving Holy Communion! She writes: “He, in fact, doesn't remain with us for any other reason than to help, encourage, and sustain us in doing this [God’s] will that we have prayed might be done in us. (...) He asks again for no more than to be with us this *day* only, because it is a fact that He has given us this most sacred bread forever. His Majesty gave us, as I have said, the manna and nourishment of His humanity that we might find Him at will [any time we want] and not die of hunger, save through our own fault. In no matter how many ways the soul may desire to eat, it will find delight and consolation in the most Blessed Sacrament” (cf. *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 34).

St. Therese of Lisieux is another Saint of Carmel who is a great lover of the Holy Eucharist. Here are a few of her thoughts. In her autobiography *The Story of a Soul* she writes: “It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes down each day from heaven, but to find another heaven, the heaven of our soul in which He takes delight.”

Also, in her *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*, St. Therese makes an extraordinary petition. She writes: “...my Beloved Spouse told us in the days of His mortal life: *Whatsoever you ask the Father in my name he will give it to you!* I am certain, then, that You will grant my desires; I know, O my God, that the more You want to give, the more You make us desire. I feel in my heart immense desires and it is with confidence I ask You to come and take possession of my soul. Ah! I cannot receive Holy Communion as often as I desire, but, Lord, are You not all-powerful? **Remain in me as in a tabernacle** and never separate Yourself from Your little victim.” What is Therese asking for in this extraordinary petition? With childlike confidence she is asking for a miraculous permanence of the Sacred Species within her soul. In a word, that the Real Presence of Jesus remain in her as if she just received Holy Communion. This prayer is the fruit of a deep inspiration given by the Holy Spirit to St. Therese. Not everyone is given this inspiration.

However, in these words of St. Therese, every devout soul can catch a glimpse of the stupendous grace of the *spiritual* and *abiding* Presence of Jesus who dwells within us. As long as we are in the state of grace, Jesus is in the depths of our soul, together with His Father and the Holy Spirit. St. Therese helps us to fathom the full reality of the Lord’s words in the Gospel: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood **remains in me and I in him.**” May we never leave Jesus alone. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves, for He lives within us and desires to transform us into His very Self! This is the greatest fruit of the Holy Eucharist!