



Do you really have a conversation with Jesus or do you just ask and not listen for an answer? Consider spending just one hour at the adoration chapel and get to know him.

He's waiting

Eucharistic adoration: A treasure of the Faith

Spending time with Jesus in the Eucharist is a practice encouraged by many saints and popes

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Suppose you were told that Jesus wanted to meet with you personally for an hour at your parish. Who would say no to such an invitation?

Me, for one. When Eucharistic adoration was inaugurated at our church several years ago, I politely declined to be an adorer, as I didn't feel the devotion suited me. I had come into the Catholic Church late in life and with a lot to learn in a short time, including the finer points of Eucharistic theology. While I believed in the Real Presence, it was mainly an intellectual assent. Its profound implications had yet to settle in my soul. As an evangelical Protestant, I had been quick to quote John 3:7 — "You must be born again" — yet skipped right over the astounding things Jesus said to his disciples only three chapters later about eating his body and drinking his blood. But Jesus made the blind see, and that included spiritual blindness, as I was about to learn. Mainly to get some very persistent women off my back, I finally consented to put in my hour every Thursday in the chapel that had been set aside for Eucharistic devotion. At first it was just another hour in the day for me, with wandering thoughts and frequent checks of my watch. But as the weeks went by, I gradually began to use my Holy Hour more productively. I prayed. I read the Bible. I meditated. And, in time, I began to adore.

The heart of the Faith

The list of notable Catholics devoted to Eucharistic adoration is a long one. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen saw it as essentially an act of obedience: "The only time our Lord asked the Apostles for anything was the night He went into agony. Not for activity did he plead but for an Hour of companionship."

Jesus instituted the Holy Eucharist with his disciples in the upper room. I had often thought of the privilege enjoyed by those who were there that night. Then, while I was praying in the chapel one Thursday, it struck me: There is no difference. The Jesus who was in the upper room is the same Jesus who is in the chapel with me. The Church makes no distinction. He is fully present — body, blood, soul and divinity — in the monstrance. Yes, he is in his Eucharistic disguise, but he is one and the same Jesus nevertheless.

As Pope Pius XII put it, "A Holy Hour of adoration testifies to the fact that the Jesus who died on the cross, is present in the Eucharist and reigns in heaven, are identical."

This understanding constitutes the very heart of the Catholic Faith, the distinctive dogma that sets us apart. It should be the treasure of every Catholic. Sadly, it is not. According to opinion surveys, which can vary widely,

Catholic belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is on the decline, with an average of only around half or fewer holding it to be true.

Much has been written about “cafeteria Catholics” who go down the Church line and pick and choose what to believe and what to pass up. But not believing in the Real Presence isn’t the spiritual equivalent of choosing the apple pie over the cherry. The late Jesuit Father John Hardon, writing on the centrality of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, stated: “If we believe this, we are Catholic. If we do not, we are not, no matter what people may think we are.”

A deepened prayer life

If we lack physical strength or stamina, we can join a gym and begin working out. For those Catholics whose faith is weak in this area, I would recommend spending some time with Jesus in Eucharistic adoration, even if you are among the doubters. Look upon it as a spiritual gym. I discovered that you can be theologically challenged and still reap great spiritual benefits from simply being in his presence one hour a week. Jesus meets us where we are. If we persist, he will deepen our understanding.

Two virtues that are especially needed by those beginning Eucharistic adoration are humility and patience. Set aside all pride and preconceived notions. You are in the presence of the living Lord; conduct yourself accordingly.

The blessings I have received from Eucharistic adoration are many and varied. Some I can define, and others remain more elusive, such as the growing sense that I am changing for the better in some important respects. I began to perceive this change only after I became involved in adoration.

Pope Benedict XV called Eucharistic adoration “the queen of all devotions,” a view shared by numerous popes and saints. However, the practice largely fell into disuse following Vatican II. No one is more closely identified with its revival than Pope St. John Paul II. Here is just a sampling of his observations on the subject:

— “Jesus himself is calling you to spend one special, specific hour with him each week.”

— “The love of God and neighbor, the greatest commandment, is expressed in, and the fruit of, Eucharistic worship.”

— “Priestly, religious and missionary vocations will stem from your Holy Hour.”

The personal spiritual blessings that proceed from Eucharistic adoration are rich and abundant.

Do you wish to deepen your prayer life? The same Jesus who taught his disciples how to pray is there to help you as well, and what better place to contemplate Jesus — the highest form of prayer — than in his presence?

A changed person

The same holds true for Scripture reading. Jesus is the living word, and a finer tutor could not be imagined, as the two men who walked the Road to Emmaus with him testified.

Praying the Rosary, meditating or simply resting in the quiet of his presence, Eucharistic adoration enhances them all. Jesus also is there to hear your petitions, but we should guard against making it all about ourselves. Keep the focus on him and you can’t go wrong.

Father Hardon saw this practice as the centerpiece of devotion, saying that we “should build the whole edifice of our spiritual life around adoration.”

Of course, one does not need to be engaged in sacramental adoration to have access to Jesus. He is always available to those who come to him in faith. But the Church teaches that the manifestation of Jesus in the Eucharist is “unique” and “in the fullest sense,” and therefore worthy of special devotion (CCC, No. 1374).

Just as his disciples were transformed by being in Jesus’ presence, it’s impossible to spend an hour with him in Eucharistic adoration and leave the same person we were when we walked in.

So consider giving it a try. If your parish has adoration, sign up to take a time slot. If the devotion is not in place, look into what can be done to obtain it (see sidebar). You have absolutely nothing to lose and a treasure trove of spiritual riches to gain.

I will give Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata, a daily recipient of the Eucharist, the final word:

“Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the best time you will spend on earth.”