

We are a Eucharistic People:

Spiritual Communion

by Fr. Nile Gross

We are a Eucharistic people – a Eucharistic Church. The Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the center of our faith and, by extension, our lives. What, then, are we to do, to feel, in the current crisis in which access to the Body and Blood of Christ is limited?

The most important thing that we must do is pray – pray for the mercy of God, for His healing, for His strength in these times. We must also consider what it means to be a Eucharistic people, because this manner of defining ourselves is not limited to being a people who receives the Eucharist at Mass. It is the fuller reality which should be focused on in these times of crisis. For many centuries the People of God did not receive the Eucharist, were not even offered it, but twice a year, and yet, we were still a Eucharistic people. Thanks to the leadership of Pope St. Pius X, who asked that the Eucharistic Lord be offered to the laity at every Mass in his 1910 encyclical, *Quam singulari*, Catholics around the world gained greater access to this beloved gift of the Church. Never would the Church want to return to the days in which the people did not receive the Eucharist frequently.

However, we must remember that many great saints lived and thrived prior to 1910. These men and women recognized the Eucharistic presence in the bread and wine, but understood other dimensions of this great Mystery as well. The word eucharist itself gives a hint to this deeper meaning – “to give thanks”. A Eucharistic people comes together in liturgy not simply to receive something, but to bring something to the celebration as well. To bring to God our sacrifice of praise, our thanksgiving to Him for all the blessings he has bestowed upon us. To be a Eucharistic people means to draw on the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and actively join ourselves, our prayers, with those of Jesus Christ to the Father, as we are members of his Mystical Body. We must remember the sacrificial element of the Mass and our proper role in this sacrament. By joining ourselves to the liturgical prayer, we connect ourselves to the Cross, to the sacrifice of Calvary.

In the present crisis something has been taken from us – direct access to the Eucharist in the Body and Blood of Christ. However, we can still offer ourselves to the Father with Christ, as St. Paul says: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2). In all that we do, especially in times of crisis and suffering, we must present ourselves as “living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God.” This is the fullness of the meaning of being a Eucharistic people. We live a sacrificial life, giving ourselves to others as Christ did for us on the Cross.

Now, this does not alleviate the true pain that we feel in the present moment when access to the Mass and the Precious Body and Blood of Christ is limited. But it should allow us to join more fully in the Eucharistic reality at the heart of the Church. We can continue to offer ourselves for our families, for those who are suffering. We pray for those affected by this terrible epidemic and for its conclusion. We follow the liturgies of the Church and the liturgical year as best we can – reading the daily readings and meditating on them, meditating on our rich Eucharistic prayers, watching televised or streamed masses. We bring the Eucharist, the thanksgiving, into our homes and families. Importantly, we make a spiritual communion. The Church has taught through the centuries that when a person is not able to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus in the Mass, we can still unite ourselves to Him in prayer. It is a beautiful way to express our desire for union with Him and with his Church. This act of spiritual communion was encouraged by many of the great saints of our past – Padre Pio, Alphonsus Liguori, and Josemaria Escriva, to name a few, the latter who said, “What a source of grace there is in spiritual communion! Practice it frequently and you’ll have greater presence of God and closer union with him in all your actions.”

How does one make this act of communion? At the time of Communion in the Mass or immediately after, one would make a prayer expressing their desire to receive Christ and asking him to come into their hearts. St. Alphonsus Liguori provides a beautiful example of such a prayer of spiritual communion:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You were already there, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

This prayer is not a substitute for the Eucharistic Lord but can unite us to him throughout the day and demonstrate our love for Christ and the Eucharist. If reception of communion is not possible for you in these times or at any time, because of sickness, age, distance, this prayer or a personal prayer which conveys the same love of Christ and desire to be with him may be offered. Jesus responds to prayer.

The Church has not abandoned anyone in these times of need. Our churches remain open. Priests are available for confessions and anointing of the sick and desire to bring God’s merciful love to all in need. Priests offer masses daily for the People of God and their needs. Because of the danger of viral infection, large gatherings may not be possible, which may limit access to Mass throughout the world, but the Church continues to beseech God for her people in her time of need.

We are a Eucharistic People. Let us never forget this. Let us extend the graces of the Eucharist into the world by uniting ourselves to the sacrifice of the Lord and offering ourselves for others in prayer and service just as Christ offered himself on the cross. Let us pray that the Eucharistic Lord will be returned to us soon. No greater gift has been given to us! He is the center of our lives. But let us live as a Eucharistic people, as saints seeking Christ in all things, an offering Him to others in our words and actions.

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