

Recently, England's Queen Elizabeth gave a rare televised address to the nation in response to the Coronavirus crisis. In her remarks, in which she called for unity, she recalled a speech she and her sister gave nearly eighty years ago in 1940. At the time, she was only fourteen years old and still a princess. She said, "We as children spoke from here at Windsor castle to children who had been evacuated from their homes and sent away for their own safety". It is worthy of note that the so-called London Blitz, the German bombing of London and other cities, occurred later in the year.

While employed as a bank teller for two summers of my college years, I met a middle aged woman and native of England, who was a mere child in 1940. She recalled the unrelenting bombings of the German military and her understandable fear and dread. She hid under her bed until the bombings halted. She told a compelling story.

As we commemorate the institution of the Eucharist this Holy Thursday, let us remember with admiration the Catholic priests who, exposed to grave danger, celebrated the Holy Mass. The priest honored his sacred duty to make the Eucharist available to his people, who only wanted to have their Lord near to them in the midst of death and destruction. During the Second World War and later conflicts, priest celebrated mass in war zones, concentration camps, field hospitals and bombed buildings. One of most iconic photographs of the period was taken in the bombed cathedral of Cologne, Germany, in which American soldiers are depicted kneeling amidst the rubble and debris as the priest celebrates mass.

On the night of the Last Supper, Our Lord celebrates a farewell meal with the twelve apostles. It was likely a sorrowful meal. Jesus knows what is coming. He will leave the upper room to be arrested. Within eighteen hours he will be tortured to death. A dark cloud must have hung over the gathering of Jesus and the twelve.

Yet on this very night Jesus gave his disciples, including each one of us, a parting gift: the Eucharist. He gave himself in the form of bread and wine. For two millennia, it has been the greatest single source of spiritual joy and consolation. He has drawn near to us. He gives us himself. He offers his own body and pours out his blood. Linked to his Passion and death is Christ's body broken for us and his blood shed for us. According to one biblical scholar, the words of Christ "This is my Body" means the whole person. It is as if Christ had said, "I myself am this bread with my whole history and life. My life will be broken like this bread. I give it to you that you may share in it"

It is a mind=blowing revelation!

It is a mystery of faith.

Nowadays, too many unbelievers scoff at the Church for her teaching on the Eucharist. They dismiss the teaching of the Real Presence of Christ as absurd. To speak of the Eucharist as a "mystery of faith" remains unconvincing to the materialist, and is to be totally rejected as absurd.. But not all who do not share the Catholic faith are so easily dismissive of the Church's perennial teaching. The following is a quote from a twentieth century scientist of great repute. He once wrote the following words: "If a person can look at the great universe and not have a surge of awe and wonder, he might as well be

dead". This man also expressed utter fascination with the Eucharist, and made a request of a Catholic priest that he send him books in his native language, German, on the mystery of the Eucharist. His name: Albert Einstein. A mystery is a reality that you can see but never fully understand.

In this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic, The Church draws her strength from the Eucharist. Even in dangerous times, the priest has a solemn obligation to offer mass and make Our Lord present to his people in the sacrament of his body and Blood. There can be no greater consolation for the anguished and fearful.

In the aftermath of World War II, The English Mystic and author Caryl Chessman, offered a profound reflection on the mass in post war England. Her words are stunning. "Now in the wells of our bombed churches wild flowers grow.. There is a purple flower, so delicate that it looks like drifts of cloud in the grass. It has come to be known to Londoners as the 'flower of the ruins' and a symbol of Resurrection. Now when I pass it on my way to mass I am reminded of the courage and the suffering that many endure today that mass may be offered from sunrise to sunset everywhere, and of the missionaries and martyrs all through history, in their long journeys on sailing vessels over bitter seas, through overgrown, trackless country, over vast plains, into deep forests, journeys made with the same object as my easy one today, that Christ be adored, that Christ be received everywhere".

Because of the virus darkness covers the earth today. But a light is illuminated on the altars of our churches, Christ, the Light of the world, giving hope and strength to all people of faith, Whenever and wherever mass is celebrated we are assured of his presence. He is the one to bring us relief and the strength to persevere in the difficult days ahead.