

REJOICE in the LORD

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

Archbishop of Newark



July 2, 2021 / Vol. 2, No. 20

Celebrating the eucharistic mystery

*Sing, my tongue, the Savior's glory,
of His Flesh, the mystery sing;
of the Blood, all price exceeding,
destined, for the world's redemption,
from a noble Womb to spring.*

"Pange Lingua Gloriosi Corporis Mysterium" is a hymn text written by St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) for the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. It is also sung on Holy Thursday during the procession from the church to the place where the Blessed Sacrament is kept until Good Friday.

The last two stanzas, called separately "*Tantum Ergo*," are sung at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The hymn proclaims the eucharistic mystery in which, according to our faith, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, and we who partake of this sacred meal become what we receive, the Body of Christ.

We think of Thomas Aquinas as a brilliant thinker who taught philosophy and theology, and so he was. But St. Thomas was also a man of fervent prayer and intense devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. His early biographers wrote that this great scholar, who was also a popular preacher, would lean his head against the Tabernacle, as if to feel the throbbing of Jesus' divine and human heart!

For Aquinas, all knowledge comes through the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Could it be that he was trying to know the Lord more intimately by feeling his presence more intensely? Pope Francis would call this "closeness," the kind of intimacy that each of us is called to have with Jesus and with one another.

St. Thomas believed that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the Lord's Passion because it contains—really and truly—the person of Jesus Christ who suffered and died for us. Thus, Aquinas taught that whatever is an effect of our Lord's Passion (especially our liberation from sin and death) is also an effect of the holy Eucharist because this sacrament is nothing other than the application of our Lord's Passion to us. St. Thomas believed this so completely that he was known to celebrate Mass with tears of joy and gratitude!

This is no stuffy academic coldly and dispassionately thinking "great thoughts." This is a great lover, a man who has grasped the truth about our Lord's Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament and its implications for those who are transformed by our communion with him. How can he not respond

with an open and joy-filled heart to the One who has given everything for our salvation? How can he fail to sing of the Savior's glory, of the mystery "all price exceeding" that is present to us—here and now—in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood? How can he fail to shed tears of joy and thanksgiving at the sacrificial gift we have been given "for the world's redemption"?

Reflecting on the teaching and personal witness of this great saint, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once wrote, "Let us fall in love with this sacrament! Let us participate in Holy Mass with recollection, to obtain its spiritual fruits; let us nourish ourselves with this body and blood of our Lord, to be ceaselessly fed by divine grace! Let us willingly and frequently linger in the company of the Blessed Sacrament in heart-to-heart conversation." Jesus Christ invites our intimate communion with him through this great sacrament of his flesh and blood.

No wonder the familiar words of the "*Tantum Ergo*" urge us to "fall down in adoration" before the sacred Host. It is right to feel overwhelmed by the power of the Lord's presence—not in an oppressive or fearful way, but with hearts full of amazement and joy!

In the end, as St. Thomas Aquinas knew, the divine mystery defies all understanding. Faith alone fills in the gaps "where the feeble senses fail" and allows us to know, love and serve God—in partial and preliminary ways here on Earth, but fully and perfectly in the everlasting joy of heaven.

In my pastoral letter *Returning to Grace: A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist* (see selection below), I make this observation:

During the celebration of the Eucharist, there are two moments of *epiclesis* when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit, first to transform the bread and wine, then to transform those who will receive the Gift.

Our transformation Into the Body of Christ is every bit as mysterious ("where the feeble senses fail") as the transformation of ordinary bread and wine into the Real Presence of Our Lord. It is a sacred action accomplished by the Holy Spirit who infuses our minds and hearts with the fire of God's Love. This makes the Eucharist a divine instrument of the sanctification of the world. By transforming us into the Body of Christ, this great sacrament makes it possible for us to transform everything we touch.

Let us fall in love with this most precious sacrament. Let us allow ourselves to be fed by divine grace, so that we will have the strength to become what we receive in the Holy Eucharist and, then, to transform the world.

Sincerely yours in Christ the Redeemer,



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.
Archbishop of Newark

A Selection from *Returning to Grace: A Pastoral Letter on the Eucharist* by Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., Archbishop of Newark

I use "grace" or "graciousness" to describe the Eucharist in two senses: First, I have in mind the gratuity, the "gifted-ness" of the Eucharist. That Jesus "loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (Jn 13: 1). We don't participate because of an obligation to do something for God, but rather, our participation permits God to do something unimaginable for us. St. Alphonsus Liguori says that for God, "paradise is the human heart." Jesus gives the gift so that God can go where God really wants to go. *All is grace.*

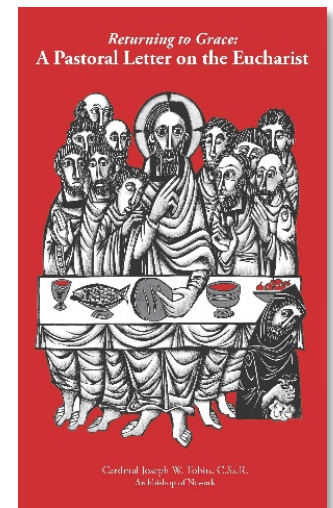
The other sense of "graciousness" is "beauty." Whatever the aesthetic quality of the ritual (which, as Pope Benedict XVI has observed, is not unimportant), the "way of beauty" (the *via pulchritudinis*) may be the way to faith for modern men and women. "Art and the saints are the greatest apologetics for our faith," our retired pope says. "What faith must see is Beauty." St. Alphonsus glimpsed this and wrote the lyrics of a hymn most of us have sung many times:

*"O God of loveliness, O Lord of Heaven above,
How worthy to possess my heart's devoted love.
So sweet Thy countenance, so gracious to behold
That one, one only glance to me were bliss untold."*

To invite our sisters and brothers to return to full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy, we must emphasize the graciousness of this great gift and its incomparable beauty. I have given this pastoral letter the title [Returning to Grace](#) because I firmly believe this is what all of us are called to do after and in response to the Great Eucharistic Fast imposed on us by COVID-19.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has not been silent during this pandemic. He has continually spoken out urging us not to be afraid, to remain spiritually close to God and one another, to call on Mary, Mother of the Church, and all the saints, and to remember those who are most in need—especially the poor, vulnerable and displaced members of the human family. Pope Francis has also warned us that the sin of indifference can be a far more deadly virus than COVID-19.

Our Holy Father reminds all of us who are in positions of co-responsible leadership and service in the Church that we are simple "altar servers" for the Holy Spirit. We are not in control of situations like this pandemic that confront us—often without warning. Our job is to pray, discern, stay close to the People of God, and decide without fear.



As baptized and confirmed Christians, we are called to accept humbly yet confidently the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Beginning with us bishops, we must seek to understand "what the Spirit is saying to the Churches." (cf. Rev. 2: 29). It is the Holy Spirit—not us—who gathers the Church together and makes reconciliation possible. During the celebration of the Eucharist, there are two moments of *epiclesis* when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit, first to transform the bread and wine, then to transform those who will receive the gift. We are servants of the Spirit and of the sacred mysteries which the Holy Spirit makes possible. Returning to Grace means handing ourselves over to the Spirit of God, who makes Christ really present to us, and who transforms those of us who receive Him in the Holy Eucharist into the Body of Christ.

A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope



Each time we receive the Bread of Life, Jesus comes to give new meaning to our fragilities. He reminds us that in his eyes, we are more precious than we think. He tells us he is pleased if we share our fragilities with him. He repeats to us that his mercy is not afraid of our miseries.

The mercy of Jesus is not afraid of our miseries. And above all, He heals us from those fragilities that we cannot heal on our own, with love. What fragilities? Let's think. That of feeling resentment toward those who have done us harm — we cannot heal from this on our own; that of distancing ourselves from others and closing off within ourselves — we cannot heal from that on our own; that of feeling sorry for ourselves and complaining without finding peace; from this too, we cannot heal on our own. It is He who heals us with his presence, with his bread, with the Eucharist.

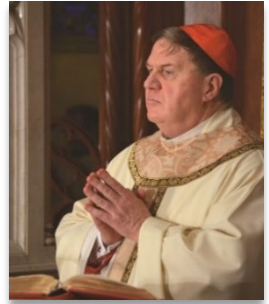
The Eucharist is an effective medicine for these closures. The Bread of Life, in fact, heals rigidity and transforms it into docility. The Eucharist heals because it unites with Jesus: it makes us assimilate his way of living, his ability to break himself apart and give himself to brothers and sisters, to respond to evil with good. He gives us the courage to go outside of ourselves and bend down with love toward the fragility of others. As God does with us.

This is the logic of the Eucharist: we receive Jesus who loves us and heals our fragilities in order to love others and help them in their fragilities; and this lasts our entire life. In the Liturgy of the Hours today, we prayed a hymn: four verses that are the summary of Jesus' entire life. And they tell us this: as Jesus was born, he became our traveling companion in life. Then, at the supper, he gave himself as food. Then, on the cross, in his death, he became the "price"; he paid for us. And now, as he reigns in heaven, he is our reward; we go to seek the One who awaits us [cf. Hymn at Lauds on Corpus Christi, *Verbum Supernum Prodiens*]. (Angelus, Sunday, June 6, 2021)

My Prayer for You

I would like to make my own these words from the Angelus Message of Pope Francis on Sunday, June 6, 2021:

May the Blessed Virgin, in whom God became flesh, help us to embrace the Eucharist with a grateful heart and to make a gift of our life too. May the Eucharist make us a gift for all others.



Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R.

