

Holy Thursday
April 6, 2023

Dear All

Christ's peace!

"My Jesus, please deepen my belief that You are present in the Blessed Sacrament."

We have prayed those words before receiving Communion at every Mass since Ash Wednesday. Those same words have rooted my reflections at every Lenten Mass. The phrase has guided our experience of Lent.

Why? Because Lent is a season when we recommit to inspired habits. The habit of cultivating deeper belief in His presence is a supremely inspired habit. It invites us to walk further into the experience of His presence. That walk leads us further into truth, into peace, and into the love He wants us to feel and to share.

Our effort to walk into deeper Eucharistic truth has nothing to do with dogma for its own sake. Neither is it about the type of quest for privileged knowledge that has divided the church for 2,000 years. We strive to move further into the truth of His presence because we are made for His love. It is all about His love.

The Sundays of Lent, including Palm Sunday, have offered six very helpful insights about our pursuit of deeper Eucharistic truth. Tonight's gospel offers a seventh. All seven gospels have named an obstacle that might block our movement into a deeper understanding of what happens when we receive Communion. Awareness of those obstacles puts us on our knees, facing God, asking for the grace we need to surmount whichever of those obstacles happen to be impeding our individual paths.

The names of those obstacles have been distraction, doubt, depth, doubling back, disappointment, and dilettantism (i.e., the habit of being a dilettante who has a shallow commitment to Jesus). Tonight's d-word is "devotion". Some of the associated pleas ask God to reduce something – i.e., distraction, doubt, disappointment, and dilettantism. Other pleas have us asking God for more of something (i.e., depth, doubling back, and devotion).

Holy Thursday, when we recall the night He gave us the gift, is an ideal moment to consider my ways of receiving the gift of Eucharist and Communion. It is a perfect time to wonder about what helps me move into deeper Eucharistic truth, peace, and love, and what gets in the way. It is an ideal night to ask God for the graces that will help me cooperate with God's effort to answer our prayer, "My Jesus, please deepen my belief that You are present in the Blessed Sacrament."

I encourage you to make a Holy Thursday "Eucharistic Examen." Take the better part of an hour to wonder about obstacles that might be blocking your way into deeper connection with Jesus in Communion. If it helps, great. If not, know that it has been offered in a spirit of genuine care.

And if you come to name a few special graces that you need to make a next step, remember you are in very good company. Every Catholic Christian has a next step to take into Eucharistic truth, peace, and love. God invites the pope and every church leader to take a next step. God does the same with those who consider themselves to be the world's worst sinners. God invites all of us to take that next step.

God bless you. God bless your Holy Thursday prayer. And, above all, may God bless your Eucharistic adventure, your way of moving into deeper connection with Christ in Communion and everything that deeper connection supplies and demands.

Blessed be.

HOLY THURSDAY EUCHARISTIC EXAMEN

I – THE PREPARATION

As I prepare to ask God for extra graces and blessings, I try to remember what I am doing, the night on which I am doing it, and the Savior to whom I address my prayer.

Hence, I imagine Jesus in front of me on the night before He died. Perhaps you see Him at the Last Supper. Maybe you visualize Him in the Garden of Gethsemane or while He is in jail as the Sanhedrin deliberates. Choose a moment, focus on it, look directly at Him and pray, very slowly, several times (8-12):

Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God

*Help me to know what You want, to want what You want, and To do what You want
When I receive Communion.*

As you wrap up your preparation prayer, remember you are doing the asking tonight and there is no guarantee about when the answers will come. Trust that they will.

After getting centered, read slowly through the following seven reflections, giving a few moments to each. Notice, which ones get your attention? Which bother you? Which console you? Go back and spend a longer time with the few to which you have the strongest reaction.

For the three or four that invite you most strongly, reflect on the questions for a few more minutes and the pray, a few times over, the “Thank You Jesus Prayer” and the “Help Me Jesus Prayer.”

When you have concluded your three or four focused reflections and petitions, compose the thank-you note you want to write to Jesus tonight.

II) THE PETITIONS

1. Distraction

How easy is it for me to get distracted during Mass itself, especially during some of the key Eucharistic moments, such as the Offertory (“Blessed are you God of all Creation”), the Consecration (“Taking bread, He broke it”) and the Doxology (“Through Him, with Him, and in Him”). Just as real focus enhances my participation in the moment, distraction dilutes it. You have surely made progress in this area and surely have next steps to make.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Help me to see how You have helped me to focus during Mass
And help me to thank You for those graces*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Help me to see what keeps me from focusing at Mass
And help me resolve the distractions.*

2. Doubt

Can anyone truly feel worthy to receive the Body of Christ? Not if they are paying attention. Every one of us has reason to pray sincerely “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.” But each of us can go overboard. Each one of us can succumb to the temptation to indulge extreme and uninspired self-doubt, to think that God couldn’t possibly be making Himself available to me. Inspired humility keeps me connected to Christ. Excessive self-doubt is not of God and keeps us from seeing the Eucharistic truth.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,

*Thank You for giving me the grace to move beyond
The uninspired self-doubts that make it hard to feel Your presence in Communion.*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Help me to name and overcome the self-doubts that make it hard
To feel your presence when I receive Communion.*

3. Depth

Remember eighth grade biology and the distinction between “genotype” and “phenotype”? “Phenotype” refers to the observable characteristics while “genotype” refers to the deeper truth. God invites us to see the corollaries of both when we go to Mass, especially in the key Eucharistic moments including the Offertory, The Consecration, and the Doxology. God invites us to recognize the observable action (e.g., the priest holding the big host up in the air). God also invites us to recognize the deeper reality (e.g., a recurrence of what happened at the Last Supper).

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Thank You for helping me to see the deeper truth
Of what happens at Mass*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Please help me to see the deeper truth
Of what happens at Mass.*

4. Doubling Back

Who ever gets it all on the first bounce? Did you immediately grasp the facts about complementary interior angles in geometry class? Did you remember to lean back the first time you tried to water ski? Of course not. And so it is with Eucharistic Truth. God sometimes gives us moments of noteworthy peace and awareness and we fly right by them. We sometimes tend not to imitate Mary in recalling the great things God has done for us. “Doubling back” to those moments of Eucharistic light is an inspired move. It helps us to trust in the truth of the deeper reality that unfolds when we receive Communion.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Thank You for giving me the wits to double back
To contemplate moments of Eucharistic light*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Please help me to double back and recall clearly and gratefully
The moments of Eucharistic light.*

5. Disappointment

Pretty much every saint must deal with it. There come moments when we wonder why God did not intervene. We ask why God allows certain evils to unfold and we wonder why God does not cause certain goods to happen. Those moments of disappointment put me at a fork in a spiritual road. I need to choose whether to renew my dependence on God, despite the disappointment, or to plot a new way. Increased dependence on Jesus renews my availability to Eucharistic truth, peace and love. The choice for the other road, which it is hard to condemn, leads to less passion for Jesus and less availability to Eucharistic truth.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,

*Thank You for the graces that have enabled me to choose You and Communion
In the face of great disappointment*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Help me to see and to overcome the obstacles
That disappointments put in my walk with You and Communion.*

6. Dilettantism

We cannot maintain deep and abiding commitments to every person and every cause that enters our lives. Shallow commitment is sometimes advisable (e.g., my commitment to practice croquet 52 weeks a year). But some commitments are meant to be deep and abiding. Deep commitments to God, loved ones, and the to-do list that God gives me are all appropriate. Circumstances sometimes give me a shallow commitment to Jesus or a shallow commitment to experiencing deeper truth, peace, and love when I receive Communion. I sometimes need extra grace to keep a deep commitment to Jesus, to avoid becoming a Eucharistic dilettante.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Thank You for the graces to keep You and Communion
Front and center in my life.*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Help me to see what steers me away from You
And help my commitment to You to deepen*

7. Devotion

Saint John reminds us so beautifully “He always loved those who were His own in the world and He loved them to the end.” His devotion to you and to me and to every human is infinite and incomprehensible. Still, we can always grow in our grasp of His devotion to us. We can always become more aware of the devotion He expressed at the Last Supper, when He described what would happen and how He would obtain our salvation. His devotion to us kept Him from disappearing into the Jordanian Hills where agony and execution would not find Him. Our appreciation of the Last Supper and the choices He made on that last night deepen our appreciation of His devotion to us, a devotion that is very much alive today, a devotion that He expresses each time we receive Him in Communion.

The Thank-You Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Thank You for the ways you have helped me to appreciate your devotion to us
As it was then, as it is now*

The Help Me Jesus Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, Living Son of the Living God,
Please lead me to a deeper appreciation of Your perfect devotion to us
As it was then, as it is now.*