

## A CALL TO EUCHARIST

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.*

*2 He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.*

*3 You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you.*

*4 Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.*

*5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*

*6 Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.*

*7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you.*

*8 By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

*9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.*

*10 If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.*

*11 “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*

*12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. (John 15:1-12)*

I really love this passage; yesterday I have already shared with you that this is an important passage and we can say that is Jesus' will for us. When someone is about to die we really pay attention to their last words: I still remember when my father passed away his last words for me were, “Michela, may the Lord bless you!”. I will never forget his farewell.

In the same way Jesus wanted his apostles to remember that His last will for them, his last desire was for them to remain in Him and love one another. Jesus' desire is that we, along with the apostles, may choose to remain in a deep communion with Him and with one another.

What means has Jesus chosen to maintain this Communion? Yesterday we talked about mental prayer and today we want to look at the awesome gift of the Eucharist.

I would like to offer you three words to understand the Eucharist:

Sustenance, Sharing, Solidarity

## **Sustenance**

*“...Without me you can do nothing”*

The most obvious reason for Jesus to institute the Eucharist was to make sure we had the strength to get to Heaven. In the words, “without me you can do nothing”, there is a sense of powerlessness that might be compared to the weakness caused by lack of food. No physical food, no strength. Without eating we surely die. Jesus chose to remain among us to provide the spiritual food we would need to go about our earthly lives to face all the challenges of life and to grow in the maturity of our spiritual being that is, the maturity of love. Therefore the Eucharist is in the form of bread to signify the desire of Christ to be our sustenance. The wine represents the joy that this food provides that makes our burdens light and sweet.

St. Augustine says that while we eat an earthly food, our body assimilates it and makes it part of itself, since our body is stronger than food. However, when we consume the Eucharist, it is the Body of Christ that assimilates us into himself, since He is stronger than we are. When we consume the Eucharist we are transformed by Jesus into Himself: we are divinized! Think about it: that is awesome; but we might wonder why, despite all our holy communions we are still the same. Well, going back to the analogy of food: if we eat a big meal, it is common sense not to have a very intense physical activity right after; that will only lead us to feel sick. I would say that in a similar way when we receive the Eucharist we are participating in the greatest banquet we can ever attend and we need some time afterwards to assimilate that food and to receive all its beneficial effects; we cannot jump right away into our routine and hectic lives!

This time with Jesus after receiving Him in Holy Communion is what the tradition of the Church has called along the centuries, “Thanksgiving after Communion”.

But that leads us to the second meaning of the Eucharist.

## **Sharing**

*“...Remain in my Love”*

Jesus instituted the Eucharist as our spiritual food, but also as a way for Him to share with us not only what He had but even more everything He was and is. It is proper of Love to desire intimacy and communion. As a matter of fact in the Eucharist the Lord can reach us in the very depths of our beings both physically and spiritually. We use the word Communion at times without realizing what actually that means: union with. When we receive the Host we do a real communion only when we try in the silence of our hearts to unite ourselves with our minds, souls and hearts, to our Creator and Savior. In that moment we can entrust Him our thoughts, feelings and desires so that He may transform them into His own; we can ask Him to help us live out the suggestions received in the readings at Mass or in father’s homily...

Jesus has so much to give us and in those moments He desires us to ask Him for everything He wants to share with us. Also, we might just decide to rest as if lying on His chest like St. John during the Last Supper and letting Him do His job of granting us all His blessings. In the life of St. Philip Neri there is a funny and inspiring story: St. Philip had in his congregation a lady who used to leave the Church right after receiving the Eucharist. One day he asked his altar servers to follow the lady as soon as she would leave and carrying the candles that were on the altar. When the lady realized she was followed by two altar servers still in their vestments and with the candles lit, she asked for an explanation; to that the boys replied, “Father Philip asked us to do this because we are in the procession with the Blessed Sacrament since you are still carrying Him within yourself”!

Also, there is another important aspect of the Eucharist as sharing:

Jesus said: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)  
In the Eucharist Jesus has found a way to remain with us in our physical reality until the end of times.

Therefore another way to prolong the sharing time with Our Lord is what we call “Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament”. My professor of Sacramental Theology used to say that the Eucharist is the apparition of the Risen Lord in the very moment in which He is giving himself to us in sacrifice. It is the wounded heart of Christ that is pouring out his blood into the souls of those who come to adore Him. The Blood He is mysteriously pouring out is His very life in us, His Holy Spirit, His Love that consoles us, strengthens us and heals us. The miracles of healing that this powerful sacrament can perform for those who spend time in front of Him are numberless.

In Italy there is a famous Eucharistic miracle in the little town of Lanciano: there, in the VII century while a priest was celebrating Mass he started having doubts about the real presence of Jesus in the species of the bread and wine; in that moment the bread changed suddenly in human flesh and the wine in human blood. Still now you can see the miracles exposed in the Church. After much studying in recent years scientists have discovered that the flesh tissue is actually a slice of a human heart that is still alive and the clogs of blood are of the same blood type of the blood on the Sacred Shroud.

## **Solidarity**

*“...This is my commandment: love one another as I love you”*

When we receive the Eucharist we are all partaking of the same food, and we are all assimilated in the same Body of Christ. The Eucharist creates unity. How can we build up this unity? I would like to leave with you five words of love: love everybody, love first, love always, love right away and love with joy.

- 1) LOVE EVERYBODY: we might have preferences and love some people more than others; that is totally normal; but we should not close the doors of our hearts to some people because we don't like them or because it is difficult to live or interact with them. Of course, prudence tells us that there are some relationships that are not healthy for us, but in our hearts we need to learn how to love and pray for these people as well.
- 2) LOVE FIRST: it means to take initiative in caring for others; especially when there are tensions or things to forgive we want to be the ones taking the initiative at crossing the bridge; there is a beautiful prayer that says: "Lord, help me to build bridges that would take me to my brothers and help me to let the fences that I have built out of fear fall down"
- 3) LOVE RIGHT AWAY: it means that if I can love now, I want to take advantage of the time I have been given; I might not have tomorrow.
- 4) LOVE ALWAYS: it means that love is not subordinated to my whim or my feelings; love whether the sun is shining in your heart or the tempest is raging.
- 5) LOVE WITH JOY: it is the cherry on the cake; I love and I want to find joy in it. It is not always easy; sometimes we do not experience any joy while we love, but later we will see the blessings. Let's do like St. Therese that made such a beautiful effort at smiling at that sister in her convent that she didn't like at all, that this sister thought she was Sr. Therese's favorite!