

"Let us submit to God in all things and not contradict Him" St. John Chrysostom

A Presentation on Transformative Relationship with God

On Keeping the Commandments, Empowered by the Eucharist: Source & Summit of Christian Life

Jesus knowing that His hour was come. This hour, which Jesus called "His hour," was the hour of that night in which his Passion was to begin. But why did he call so sad an hour his hour? Because this was the hour for which he had sighed during his whole life, having determined to leave us in this night the Holy Communion, by which he desired to unite himself entirely to the souls whom he loved, and for whom he was soon to give his blood and his life. Behold how he spoke on that night to his disciples: With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you. By which words he would express to us the desire and anxiety that he had to unite himself to us in this Sacrament of love. With desire have I desired: these words, said St. Laurence Justinian, were words which came from the Heart of Jesus, which was burning with infinite love: "This is the voice of the most ardent charity." Now the same flame which burnt then in the Heart of Jesus burns there at present; and he gives the same invitation to all of us to-day to receive him as he did then to his disciples. Take ye and eat; this is My Body. And to allure us to receive him with affection, he promises Paradise to us: He that eateth My flesh hath everlasting life. And if we refuse to receive him, he threatens us with death: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, you shall not have life in you. Alphonsus de Liguori, The Holy Eucharist, ed. Eugene Grimm, The Complete Works of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori (New York; London; Dublin; Cincinnati; St. Louis: Benziger Brothers; R. Washbourne; M. H. Gill & Son, 1887), 220–223.

Having been reborn of water and the spirit we are united with Christ and drawn into the communal divine life of the Trinity. We are reminded by the above quotation of St. Alphonsus de Liguori, that the initial union is deepened by Eucharistic communion. The salvific plan of God brings humanity back into communion with God as Trinity of persons and with each other. Rejecting everything that is not of God and among the goods between which we must choose, as the priority we must to choose to cultivate within and among us an ever-deeper hunger and thirst for the Eucharist; *"the culmination of all the sacraments in perfecting our communion with God the Father by identification with his only-begotten Son through the working of the Holy Spirit"*. *"It is not by chance that the term "communion" has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament."* Ecclesia de Eucharistia #34

The authentic intentional disciple of Christ desires this Eucharistic Communion and, united with the activity of the Holy Spirit, is empowered to exercise increasing faithfulness to the way, truth, and life of Christ which gives rise from within us, as fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit and the communion we share in Christ, words and actions that testify to the nature of love. For this very purpose Jesus instituted the Eucharist, that he might unite himself entirely to our souls. This *"last degree of love"*, says St. Bernardine of Sienna, *"is when he gave himself to us to be our food; because he gave himself to be united with us in every way, as food and he who takes it are mutually united."* Because Jesus loved us ardently, he desired to unite himself to us in the Holy Eucharist, in order that we might become the same thing with him; *"He mingled himself with us, that we might be one; for this belongs to those who love greatly."* St. John Chrysostom

Although the commandments undoubtedly have a purpose and reflect a wisdom that will shape our lives for the better, Jesus teaches that minimal obedience is beneath our dignity as children of God. He uses the law as the foundation, the minimum requirements of the covenantal relationship between us and God and calls us to cultivate an interior orientation that is rooted in faith, hope and love and which will cause us to observe them from the heart. For this truth to be actualized within us, we must recognize that this mutual relationship of love is not like any other, indeed it must be transformative for us.

Every relationship has the potential to change us, and to some degree ought to change us, but the relationship with God is a union of hearts made one and is one that necessitates transformation if we are to remain in Him and He in us. We cannot be in authentic relationship with God and at the same time refuse to receive or place limits on the love from God which transforms. We cannot receive that *"last degree of love"* spoken of by St. Bernardine of Sienna, in the Eucharist, if we are not in communion with God seeking the holiness to which we are called. *"I beseech, beg, and implore that no one draw near to this sacred table with a sullied and corrupt conscience. Such an act, in fact, can never be called 'communion', not even were we to touch the Lord's body a thousand times over, but 'condemnation', 'torment' and 'increase of punishment'".* St John Chrysostom

Therefore, though popular in some circles of disciples of Christ to say it is the Church which must be transformed by those of us who refuse to be transformed by God, such opinions are not in fact in accord with a church that is rooted in the truth of God, the call of Christ, the apostolic tradition, or any council that has ever taken place in the history of the Church. Such a call and desire for a church in which all find refuge; to be a church devoid of structures and cultures of exclusion which alienate those who find the call to transformative relationship with God, a call to holiness and is fundamentally antithetical to their preferred life choices or comfort in their preferred identity - is not the Church led by the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is a Church proposed by those who are intransigently immersed in sin and its consequences who demand that the mystical body of Christ the Church be remade to tolerate sin and accommodate them. Suffering from a darkened intellect and subsequently mal formed conscience they succumb to preferring life choices or comfort in their preferred identity and so desire a church that is antithetical to the universal call to holiness, to transformative relationship with God.

The logic and language of transformation is not an innovation at some point along the continuum of either Church history or the entirety of the history of creation. So central is it, that St. Paul devotes much attention to it and so inclined are we to be fearful of it that the whole of the living Word of God explains to us what it is and why it's necessary. Recall St. Paul's exhortation, *"If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.*

Colossians 3:1-4 Transformation is a structurally essential thread to the whole fabric of faith and relationship with God. From the beginning it has always been understood to be the fruit of authentically full, active participation in the life of the Church after having died and been born again of Christ's paschal mystery.

Christians, missionary disciples of Christ, live their communion with each other and God in accord with their nature, loving God, and neighbor in such ways as to be salt and light in the world and help order society such that it is ever more a humanizing community. Our lack of talent or influence or education can never be excuses for not sharing our experience of Christ and of working with others to establish the Kingdom among us. What is the point in getting baptized, joining the Christian community, and then becoming completely invisible to others. *"Those who receive the Eucharist are united more closely to Christ. Through it Christ unites them to all the faithful in one body - the Church".* CCC, 1396 They, formed into the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, will necessarily permeate the world, renew it, and retard its social and moral decay. This truth of our Eucharistic identity prohibits Christianity from being a private or esoteric religion.

God affirms the truth of the communion which is established between us and Christ in the Eucharist, in the letters of Saint Paul, *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"* Corinthians 10: 16 This communion is even more precisely described in John's Gospel as an extraordinary relationship of "mutual interiority": *"he in me and I in him"*. Jesus, in fact, says at the synagogue in Capernaum: *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in*

me, and I in him." John 6: 56 And so with joy and thanksgiving we say, "Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" Eucharistic Prayer III

Christ knows that we can only reach lasting happiness through friendship with God, and he wants us to be happy, so he warns us about everything that could damage or destroy that friendship, leading eventually to eternity spent without God. *"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."* Romans 12:1-2

The Greek word Jesus uses for "Hell" is "Gehenna." It's Jerusalem's garbage dump. An open-air incinerator where the ever smoldering and worm-infested valley was a symbol for the place where people who reject friendship with God suffer eternal frustration: Hell. It is Christ in you, the hope for glory. Following St. Paul, we must never proclaim another gospel. With fidelity and conviction, we must say *"It is he whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me."* Colossians 1:27-29

God wants us to remember that our everyday choices have consequences: either they help grow our friendship with him, keeping us on the path to heaven; or they distance us from him, making us more vulnerable to temptation and eternal disaster. An indescribably painful prospect, because the human person was created to live in union with God; eternity without God is an everlasting existential frustration.

The Eucharist is the sacrament and source of the Church's unity, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is essential for us if we are to remain in union and continually renewed and made worthy to participate in the Eucharistic Communion. *"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."* 2 Corinthians 5:20

The Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth. If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Our longing for the goal of unity prompts us to turn to the Eucharist, which is the supreme sacrament of the unity of the People of God, in as much as it is the apt expression and the unsurpassable source of that unity. Ecclesia Eucharistia 37

St. Paul continuously reminds us of how-to live-in relationship with God, open to our entire being, body, mind, soul transformed. He reminds us of the magnificent wisdom of God's divine plan, which, if we follow it, will bring us to the completion of our union with each other and God. If we choose, we can keep the commandments, they will save us; if we trust in God, we shall live; Before us are life and death, good and evil, whichever we choose we get. We cannot make these choices for the good by our unaided intellect and will, we need the grace of God, the revealed wisdom which cannot be understood if we stand apart from God. So, God makes a way. St. Francis de Sales writes: *"In no other action can our Savior be considered more tender or more loving than in this, in which he, as it were, annihilates himself, and reduces himself to food, that he may penetrate our souls, and unite himself to the hearts of his faithful."*

Every day of new life in Christ we must begin with the end in mind and affirm our desire for that end, our greatest good. How often do we think about the end, the goal of our whole lives? Are we ever mindful of what Jesus said to us:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” John 6:53-57

He remains with us until the end, in the Blessed Sacrament and invites us to realize the fullness of our freedom in Him through the nourishment of His flesh and blood worthily received. *“As two wax tapers, when melted”*, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, *“unite themselves into one, so he that communicates becomes one with Jesus Christ.”*

“There is not a bee,” said our Lord to St. Mechtilde, *“which seeks the honey out of the flowers with such eagerness of delight, as I have to enter into the souls that desire me.”* Every day is a new beginning, a new step towards our eternal destination. But if we don't consciously renew our desire to remain in Him and for Him to remain in us, we will be easily distracted and deceived. Sin and its effects on our integrity of being and understanding of our identity will cause us to choose wrong paths and dead-end roads. Jesus wants us to begin each day with the end in mind and stay focused, so that each day we will hear his voice and be sensitive to the actions of the Holy Spirit so as to make choices that will lead to true, lasting happiness.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite says that the principal effect of love is to tend to union. Relationship in divine union with God necessarily demands a union of hearts which impels a person to strive for perfect love. That union of hearts or ‘my will’ and ‘God’s will’ underlies Jesus’ point in calling us to go beyond the ‘contractual’ or legalistic view of the law. Transformative relationship fueled by Eucharistic communion necessarily results in greater self-possession and increasingly right relationship with God and others. We move beyond following the rules and instead develop a stable commitment to the covenant. This fundamental option / orientation toward God causes us to desire to be authentically reliable and honest, a person of integrity who can be trusted. As St. Laurence Justinian said, *“Thou wouldst that we should have one heart with Thee”*.

In the exercise of our God given freedom we ought to freely choose according to the wisdom of God who created us. *“Before man are life and death, good and evil, whichever he chooses shall be given him.”* *“If you choose, you can keep the commandments; they will save you.”* Sirach 15:15-20 Jesus’ love for us causes him to eagerly desire that we choose life, a life in which our authentic identity is affirmed and further formed. He longs for the salvation of all, that we would all be one in Him as He is one with the Father. Yes, we ought to choose to reject everything that goes against natural and divine law, but our choices shouldn’t be made merely from obligation but rather be borne of love.

The mystery of the Eucharist – sacrifice, presence, banquet – does not allow for reduction or exploitation; it must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass. These are times when the Church is firmly built up and it becomes clear what she truly is: one, holy, catholic and apostolic; the people, temple and family of God; the body and bride of Christ, enlivened by the Holy Spirit; the universal sacrament of salvation and a hierarchically structured communion. Ecclesia Eucharistia 61

United with Jesus in Holy Communion, we are empowered to keep the Commandments.