

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

PART 3: ADORATION AS PRAYER

Often during a rainy day little children may ask their parents, “What should I do?” It seems with time on their hands and not having available the vast treasures of the outdoors, little ones grow tired of their store-bought toys quite quickly. Sometimes a response is that parents will find some way for the children to be creative—perhaps draw and color their family at some activity, or bake cookies and decorate them, or challenge them to a specific building project with their blocks.

“What should I do?” is a worthy question to ask of adoration. The first obvious answer is that we pray. But what kind of prayer? What is appropriate? At issue is the *content* of the prayers that are appropriate during Eucharistic adoration, especially a concern during exposition. Not all prayers are appropriate. So, what do we creatively do during our time of adoration that renews us in God’s grace?

Adoration Prayer While before the Blessed Sacrament

Since adoration of the Blessed Sacrament when it is not exposed is not regulated by the Church in the same way as during exposition, our prayer before the Blessed Sacrament can take many forms. Spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving for the many blessings received, prayers of petition for our family and other loved ones, prayers of praise for God’s goodness are all appropriate and fairly easy for most people. Here we can be as creative with our prayer as the Spirit prompts us.

Reading and praying Sacred Scripture is always a fine way to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament. Perhaps we choose one psalm (those prayers of Christ himself!) and read a few words then pause to hear what God might be saying to us or pour out our hearts to God. Perhaps a gospel passage on forgiveness might lead us to a good examination of conscience and a firm purpose to do God’s will more faithfully, as well as lead us to express sorrow for the times we have failed in our Christian commitment. Or maybe we take a passage from one of the letters of St. Paul and hear how the issues and challenges of those early Christian communities are also in many ways our own issues and challenges and prompt us to make good Gospel-value choices for our daily living.

Not to be discounted is taking a good devotional prayer book and using some of our favorite prayers from there. Litanies are always a good prayer because they are so clearly a liturgical form (for example, at baptisms we always sing the Litany of the Saints). If we choose to use these prayer formularies, it is always good to remember that we do not become a slave to them. If we are praying and our hearts are turned to God to listen, then we surely do that! Our time of Eucharistic adoration is less a time for getting through a number of prayers as it is a time to be attentive to God’s loving presence.

Adoration Prayer during Exposition

While any kind of prayer is appropriate during Eucharistic adoration, when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed there are some limits to appropriate prayer. A thumbnail rule is that the prayers ought to focus on Christ and his saving mystery. Having said this, we have much leeway in our prayers!



Often people wonder whether it is appropriate to pray aloud the Rosary during adoration with exposition. If the focus of the rosary is on contemplation of the mysteries (after all, the mysteries of the Rosary are the mysteries of Christ's life), then this prayer would surely fit the criteria of focusing on Christ. If, however, the Rosary is quickly prayed without due attention to these mysteries, then perhaps this prayer needs to be questioned in terms of appropriateness.

The matter of appropriate prayer during adoration before the exposed Blessed Sacrament does bring into question some of the devotional prayers that currently are available in prayer books and other sources that have little to do with Christ, the gift of the Blessed Sacrament, or even worship of God. Surely intercessory prayer for our own needs and the needs of the world is always appropriate because Eucharist always leads us outward to others. But intercessory prayer simply as "gimme a better life," as opposed to intercessory prayer out of genuine unity and solidarity with humanity, needs to be reexamined. Scripture is always appropriate (the Rite for Exposition includes a Liturgy of the Word) with accompanying meditation that leads to praise and thanksgiving to God. During exposition, however, the particular Scripture passages chosen for prayer might be ones that draw us to a greater appreciation of this sacramental Gift, for example, one of the Last Supper gospel accounts, the section on Eucharist from 1 Corinthians 11, or some verses from the Bread of Life Discourse from John 6.

There is no exact rule to follow, except that the prayer is centered on Christ who gives himself to us as food and drink. No prayers (as in "said" prayers) at all are even necessary; simple communion with our Lord who is Gift and Offering is desirable. This kind of prayer is called "contemplative prayer" and doesn't need words at all. It is the simple joy of sitting in silence before our Lord, uniting ourselves with his presence, and not doing a single thing except allow God to be with us and in us.

Another important consideration about prayer during exposition (especially when we are led to contemplative prayer) is the relationship between the silence in which adoration unfolds and the silences that occur during the Eucharistic celebration itself. In other words, for all of our (rightful) insistence that adoration flows to and from the Eucharistic action, might not also adoration help us celebrate liturgy itself better? Our Eucharistic adoration might be a kind of pre-conditioning ourselves to meet the Lord during Mass. If this is so (and it is!), then adoration is essential for a liturgical community to grow in their fruitful celebration of liturgy. This is especially important if Eucharist is to bear fruit in our violent and broken world.

Our Catholic community rightfully spends time in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It is one way we can concretely express gratitude for this greatest of mysteries: Christ continues to give himself to us in the Eucharist. Perhaps this is a most important question to which we ought give our utmost attention: Why don't we spend *more* time in adoration of this great mystery of the Blessed Sacrament?



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