

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

PART 1: ADORATION AS ATTENTIVENESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE

When children misbehave or need to learn a lesson or simply need to be settled down, parents often put them in a “time out corner.” Off by themselves and removed from distractions, they are apart and alone less as a punishment than a time to think about their behavior and, hopefully, change it. We might think of Eucharistic adoration as a Catholic “time out corner.” Surely not a punishment for misbehavior, this privileged time is an opportunity for us to become more attentive to God’s faithful presence to us in so many ways, including in the beauty of creation, in the goodness of others, in the fruits of our labors. It is a time to encounter God and come to know who God desires us to be. Adoration enables us to express who we are as the Body of Christ, his risen presence in the world today. During adoration we offer praise and thanksgiving for all God has given us and petition God for our needs and the needs of others. Adoration challenges us to reflect on whether our everyday living reflects our unity with Christ and his Gospel values and, like the child in the “time out corner,” calls us to change.

Adoration comes from two Latin words, *ad* (“to”) and *orare* (“to speak, to beseech, to pray”). While the term has had secular uses, in our time adoration is understood by most people to be reverence, awe, and affection directed to God. Any time we “speak” to God, we can say we are adoring. Indeed the early Church had a sense that Christians pray (adore) always: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess 5:16-18). We can adore God as we are driving to work, fixing dinner, mowing the lawn, helping the children with their homework, taking a few minutes of rest during a busy day. As a people baptized in Christ, our whole life and our whole self is to be an act of adoration—an act of constantly turning ourselves to God, speaking to God through our good actions and holiness of being, raising our hearts and minds to God’s faithful and abiding presence in simple, spontaneous prayer.

Eucharistic adoration is at the core of who we are as Church, as the Body of Christ, as a Eucharistic people. It is so much more than the devotional phenomenon that has been sweeping the Church in an ever growing crescendo during the last couple of decades. Adoration belongs to the very heart of being a Christian united with Christ in love and unity. Adoration is how we are before God in all we do.

The whole impetus for Eucharistic adoration lies in our baptismal call to unite ourselves with Christ. It is our union with Christ that enables our union with God. The whole Christian life is spent deepening this union and growing in our love for the God who saves us and graces us with divine presence. The more we become attentive to God’s presence (another way of describing adoration), the more we choose to live as God wills us to be. The very act of adoration is both union and choice. Adoration is an encounter between persons.



Adoration: Union and Choice

Besides adoring God in and by our daily living, as Catholics we also adore the substantial and enduring presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. This adoration of the Blessed Sacrament presupposes belief in the real presence of Christ. However, this belief must rest on more than philosophical/theological/doctrinal explanations (that is, transubstantiation), as important as they may be. Belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is primarily a matter of faith arising from profound encounters with this mystery in all its awe and wonder. So, a first point to make about Christ's presence is that Eucharistic adoration is a public witness to belief that Christ's risen presence is here among us in this Sacrament. Our time before the Blessed Sacrament is a public expression of our desire to be in union with Christ and a choice to place God above everything else in our life.

The Blessed Sacrament isn't the presence of Christ's historical, humanly enfleshed body; it is the presence of Christ's *risen* body. This distinction takes us to the heart of the mystery: the Eucharist is a sacrament of resurrection. Specifically, Eucharistic adoration immerses us in Christ the risen One and draws us beyond earthly life to union with the glorious Christ who now sits at God's right hand and reigns eternally. When we keep this resurrection perspective at the forefront, we are better able to grasp that Eucharistic adoration is a reminder (to ourselves and others) that this life isn't all there is. The choice to adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, then, is a choice to affirm that all our life is directed to living in such a way that one day we will be in union eternally with God, offering unceasing adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

Often adoration and exposition are words used interchangeably, but in fact they are two very different (but related) activities. Adoration is the broader experience and can be done anywhere and at any time. Exposition is more limited (in both time and space) than adoration, entirely regulated by the Church (because it involves the Blessed Sacrament, of which we can never be too careful), and directed to a more particular activity (focus on the mystery of Christ's self-giving). Exposition means the Blessed Sacrament is visually available for veneration, either by placing a ciborium (the container for holding consecrated Hosts) outside the tabernacle, or by placing a consecrated Host in a monstrance (from the Latin *monstrare*, meaning "to show," the large, ornate receptacle with a center glass space where the Host is visible).

While adoration can take place anywhere at any time, exposition intentionally takes place in a church or chapel (or similar designated area) during a specific period of time (an hour, a few hours, a day, forty hours, perpetually). An official rite is celebrated for exposition, which includes hymns, prayers, proclamation of the word, and time for individual adoration. A period of exposition may or may not conclude with Benediction (blessing with the Host; only an ordained person may give this blessing).



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