

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

PART 4: ADORATION AS SENDING FORTH

NBC Nightly News has been ending their evening news broadcast with a segment entitled “Making a Difference.” The network introduced this uplifting series of stories to counteract all the “bad” news that usually dominates the airwaves, newspapers, and Internet. Positive stories about people doing out-of-the-ordinary good for others are aired as an antidote to the dismal economy, faltering stock market, rising unemployment figures, unfettered violence, and more-than-occasional natural disasters. As an offshoot, it is hoped that the stories will motivate others to do something extra for someone, no matter how large or how small. The general name for doing good for others is “philanthropy” (from two Greek words meaning “loving humankind”).

One of the many advantages of such broadcasts is that they remind us that, by nature (after all, we are created in the image of God), most of us are generous. We often hear of people who put themselves in danger to save another’s life or limb. Charitable organizations abound. Grant foundations do untold good. Scholarship programs have helped many a student through college. If a disaster strikes, not only responsible agencies respond but many, many volunteers as well. For all our not-so-good deeds, we humans can be rightly proud of all the good we truly do for others.

It would be a preposterous assumption to think that *Nightly News* would ever air a story on Eucharistic adoration as an all important motivation for others to do good. But that is exactly what adoration is—a motivation to do good. Or even put more strongly, adoration not only compels us to care for others, it connects us to others in a way that we cannot ignore.

As with all devotional prayer, even Eucharistic adoration can become too privatized, not grounded enough in sound theology, subject to distortions and possible abuses, and not lead us to generous actions undertaken for the good of others. Authentic Eucharistic adoration always leads us back to more fruitful celebrations of the liturgy, as well as leads us to do good for others. God’s generosity in continually giving us the divine Son calls forth from us a response of generosity toward each other. And this is perhaps our greatest act of adoration: care for others, members of the Body of Christ. Rather than turning in on ourselves in solitude, adoration always takes us beyond ourselves to appreciate the wonder and awe God has created and given us in our world and in each other. Both Mass and adoration lead to spending self in charity for the sake of others; they lead to unity with Christ and solidarity with each other.



Adoration and Solidarity with Others

Adoration is an enduring attentiveness to God’s presence. Adoration draws us into God, into the mystery of God’s love, mercy, and compassion. Adoration brings us to a oneness with God that is pure grace. Our unity with God, however, is more than just a two-way relationship between God and us. Matthew’s gospel records for us a telling story about the end times. Jesus tells a parable about separating sheep from goats (Matt 25:31-46). The “sheep” are surprised that they enter heaven because they did not think they saw Jesus hungry or thirsty or a stranger in need of welcoming or naked or imprisoned and needing a visit, and responded to him. Jesus easily clears up the mystery: “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (NRSV translation).

Is it so far fetched that Jesus identifies himself with humanity? After all, the second Person of the Trinity took on human flesh and became one like us in all things except sin. At our baptism we are plunged into the mystery of Christ and become members of his Body (see Rom 6:3 and Eph 4:4-6). We become, in a unique way through grace, members of the *one* Body of Christ. Part of the work of adoration as enduring attentiveness to God's presence is to come to a greater appreciation of our own identity as members of the Body of Christ, of our being united with him and each other in a solidarity based on shared identity.

As we become more and more aware of our baptismal identity, we become more and more aware of all others who share that same identity with us. In Christ we share a singular dignity: union with Christ and each other. This dignity is none other than God's love poured forth in each of us, a love so intimate that we, the Church, have often in spiritual writings been referred to as the spouse of Christ. The kind of unity that God desires to have with us is a challenge for us to nourish and strengthen that same unity and love with each other. The Sacred Writer sums it up nicely for us in pretty strong words: "We love because [God] first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:19-20). We express our love for God through adoration. We also express our love for God by caring for others as God has first cared for us.

Unity and Care for Others

One of the last activities of Jesus before he ascended into heaven was to *send* the disciples forth to continue his saving work in his name (see, for example, Matt 28:18-20). Because we are one in Christ, we are to take up his ministry of doing good. We are missioned (Latin: *missio* = sending off, being sent) to live the unity we have strengthened through Eucharistic adoration. Christian living, then, continues our attentiveness to God's presence by our daily attentiveness to others.

Our Christian philanthropy—our loving humankind—does not derive from any motivation of simply doing good, but derives from the common love and unity we share in Christ. To see another in pain is to experience the pain ourselves. To see another lacking in life's necessities is to lack them ourselves. To see another as victim is to be victim ourselves. The attentiveness of Eucharistic adoration heightens our own attentiveness to the bonds that cement us, and brings us to reach out to others with the same care as Christ. And this makes all the difference in the world!



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