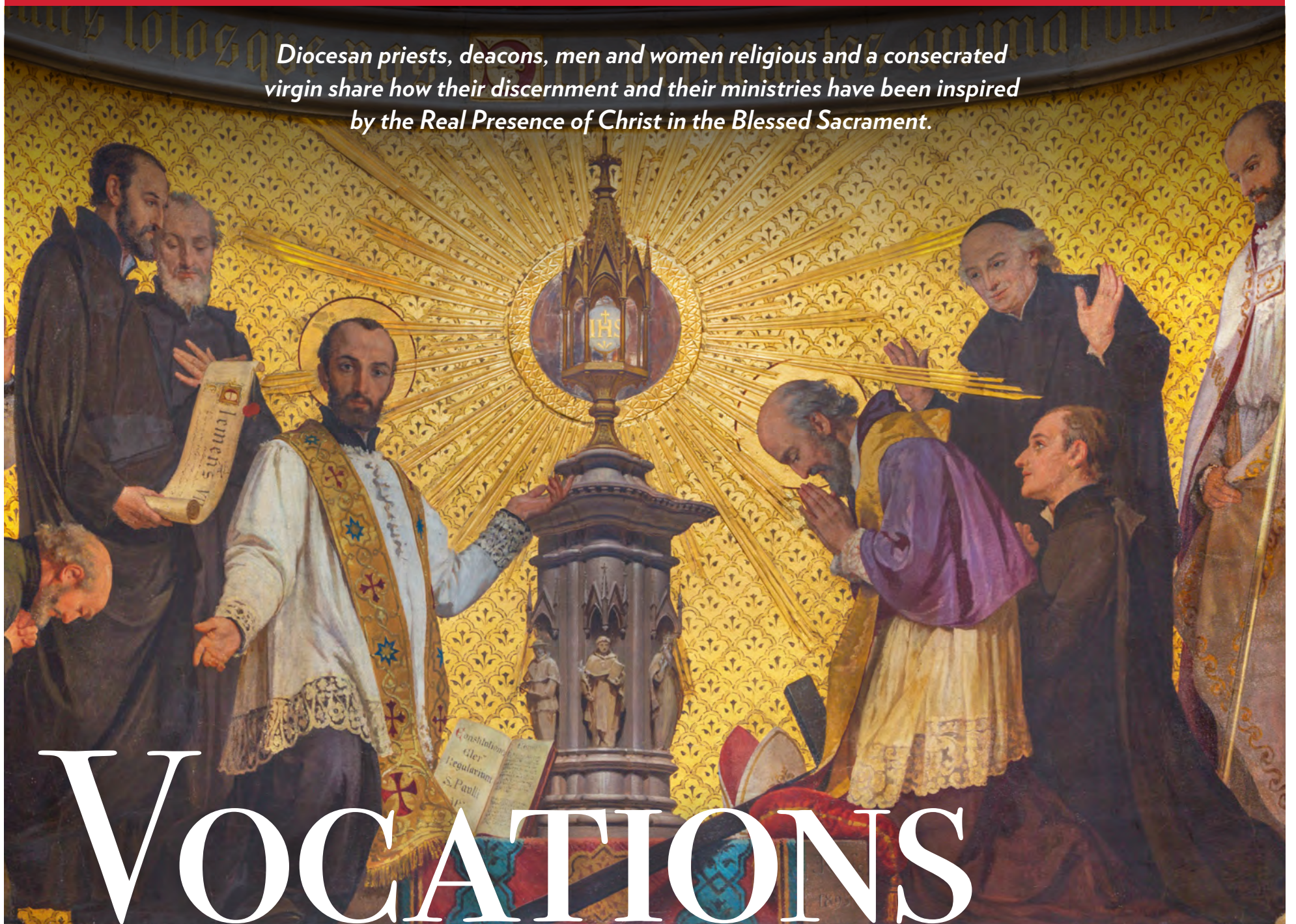


Diocesan priests, deacons, men and women religious and a consecrated virgin share how their discernment and their ministries have been inspired by the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.



VOCATIONS

and the EUCHARIST



Sister Josephine Garrett writes that regardless of our struggles, God is always there for us in the Blessed Sacrament.

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Father Luke Spannagel invites the faithful to fall even more in love with Christ during the National Eucharistic Revival.

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Deacon Bob Rice writes that God continues to be physically present among us in the form of the holy Eucharist

> **PAGE 23**

RELIGIOUS PRIEST

How partaking in the Eucharist daily changed my life



Father Robert J. Spitzer

By Father Robert J. Spitzer

The holy Eucharist has been integral to my priestly vocation. My mother was a devoted daily communicant, so I was predisposed to the graces of this sacrament throughout primary and secondary school. When I went to Gonzaga University, a friend asked what I was going to do for Lent. I responded, "I am not really sure, but I think I will give up meat on several days — or something." He said, "Not me; I am going to go to daily Mass." I thought to myself, if he can go to daily Mass, perhaps I should consider it. After all, it's just for Lent.

I carried out my resolve, and after Lent, I was hooked — unexpectedly drawn to the homilies, the commu-

nity and, above all, the holy Eucharist. When Lent first began, I was counting down the days when I would get my lunch hour back, but toward the end, I felt regret about leaving the sacrament behind after the season ended, so I just kept going.

Slowly but surely, a transformation began to occur in my life. Fellow students started telling me that I seemed more peaceful, considerate and faith-filled than before — "not like your old utilitarian, uncaring self." I protested that I really had not changed that much, but after several people told me, even I had to admit something was happening to me with which I was cooperating — but not controlling. If I were to put it in a phrase, it would

be John Henry Newman's *cor ad cor loquitur* — the heart of Christ speaking to and transforming my heart.

The connection with Christ continued to increase my peace of mind, trust in God and transformation of heart throughout the next two years of university studies. I began to sense a conflict between my original plan to go to law school (then to join my father's law firm and businesses) and a new, increasingly strong desire to work for the Kingdom of God. My participation in daily Mass (particularly receiving the holy Eucharist) as well as my philosophical studies led inexorably toward the conviction that my religion was the most important dimension of my life. What was truly shocking

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was that my former desire for money, influence and power no longer seemed to be important. I became very interested in everything theological — from Scripture to Church history to doctrine — and I could not help but think that being a priest would be a much better use of my time on earth than my prior plan.

I still wanted to be married, have a family and join my father's law firm and businesses because I did not want to disappoint my father, and I had built up an expectation that I could not be happy without these things. I called my mother and explained my quandary, to which she responded, "I just read this article in Time magazine, and it says that you can be a permanent deacon and have it all — marriage, family, career and service to Christ in the Church. All you have to do is get married before applying to the diaconal program." I thought to myself, "That's it — the solution!" Finally, I could wrest the priesthood from my mind and go on with my pre-law studies in peace.

However, the Lord did not leave me in peace. He kept deepening his presence to me through the holy Eucharist, and the same set of thoughts began to recur. I felt his presence, peace, healing power and consolation even hours after I had left Mass, which provoked the question, "Why wouldn't I want to give my life to being his representative as his alter

My participation in daily Mass ... as well as my philosophical studies led inexorably toward the conviction that my religion was the most important dimension of my life.

Christus?" The ensuing mental debate went unresolved for several months, and then one day, as I was leaving St. Aloysius Church, I caught a glimpse of a booklet on the priesthood sitting on a rack at the entrance. Half of me said, "Don't look at that book!" and the other half said, "Look at that book!"

To this day, I still attribute my decision to look at the book to an irresistible desire inspired by the Holy Spirit. I stood there in the back of the church and read the booklet closely, observing all the pictures. I left thinking not only that I wanted to be a priest and that this would be the best use of my life, but most importantly, that the Lord was calling me to the priesthood. I had one other confirmatory experience before I definitively made up my mind, and when that happened, I decided to contact the vocation director for the Jesuits and went full speed ahead. Ever since I made that decision, I have been more

joyful as well as more peaceful, trusting, faith-filled and loving.

I am absolutely certain that this was initiated and inspired by daily Mass — particularly the holy Eucharist. Jesus' interior presence, combined with the Holy Spirit's conspiracies of providence, drew me into this life of joy, ultimate purpose and deepening relationship with him.

So what was the influence of Christ in the Eucharist?

A deep connection with him — especially awareness of his ongoing presence.

A sense of security, peace and trust, especially in times of suffering and challenge.

A heart toward his Sacred Heart.

An inspired sense to "seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else will be given you besides."

Jesus' declaration in the Gospel of John continues to be consummately realized in my life and heart: I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him ... whoever eats this bread will live forever" (Jn 6:51, 56, 58).

Father Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, Ph.D., is president of the Magis Center and the Spitzer Center for Visionary Leadership.



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RELIGIOUS SISTER

Jesus Christ: 'An ever-fixed mark'

Despite our challenges or circumstances, God is always there in the Blessed Sacrament

By Sister Josephine Garrett
"Love ... is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken."
— Shakespeare, Sonnet 116

It was 2010, I was not yet 30 years old, and I had just been promoted to vice president — a huge achievement. I had spent most of the day tearful — not the happy kind, which had me rattled and confused. At this point in my life, I was in the throes of discerning religious life, and part of that included being inspired one day while sitting before the Blessed Sacrament to include the help of a counselor in the journey of discernment. A recent topic of conversation with my counselor had included forgiveness.

The vocations director with whom I was regularly meeting challenged me — I was adopted at the age of 8 by my aunt and uncle after my father's suicide and mother's struggle to care for us — to find my birth mother (who I knew was not too hard to find) and extend forgiveness to her. I found the suggestion to be ridiculous and had been processing it and discussing it with my counselor for a few weeks. Why on earth would I extend forgiveness to a woman who didn't ask for my forgiveness?

It was a Wednesday, I was running around for work, and we were celebrating a birthday at the weekly Catholic study group I attended, so balloons were floating around in my car as I drove through torrential rain, while crying, for no apparent reason. What did I have to cry about? I was a vice president! I needed to stop. My car almost drove itself off the exit ramp to the adoration chapel that I frequented. I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament and began to pour my heart out, my mind full of words for the Lord, my journal full of more, talking and talking, the Lord waiting for a word, waiting for me to remember that he is the Word. The challenge to forgive my birth mother had not even been on my mind that



Sister Josephine Garrett

This is who Jesus in the Eucharist has been for me; an ever-fixed mark in a world full of words and activity, with busyness and complexities. ... Before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, there is ... the opportunity to see and know God.

day, but somehow my ramblings arrived there, and the words in my mind and in my journal only increased. And then, in prayer, I finally said to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, "Fine. OK. Say it: Have I been unforgiving — not just to my mother, but to my father as well?"

Then the stillness came. I finally stopped with the noise in my mind and in my journal, and I perceived just one simple question from Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that was loving and also utterly convicting at the same time: Why don't you pray for them? There, in an adoration chapel, with just a simple inquiry, the Lord revealed my own heart to me (a heart locked up with unforgiveness that left me without even prayers to say for my own parents) and brought me another step along on the path of conversion.


This is who Jesus in the Eucharist has been for me; an ever-fixed mark in a world full of words and activity, with busyness and complexities. An

ever-fixed mark for my own heart full of even more words, activity, busyness and complexity. Before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, there is simplicity, clarity, stillness and quiet — the opportunity to see and know God, in truth. The opportunity to rest and abide in transformative love. It was before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that I heard the first whisperings of a call to religious life; it was before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that I agreed to follow Jesus down a path that was unknown to me. The only reason I could agree was because he had made himself known to me, so I knew on a journey full of unknowns that he would never change; he would remain fixed and constant. It was before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that I came to understand Christ as King, to understand his reign of love, the constancy of it and the presence of his reign in the most ordinary moments of life. It has been before the Blessed Sacrament that I have come to understand that Jesus is really present among us, God's definitive Word; he is the last say in all things.

I recently gave a talk to some teens, and it didn't go well. I just struggled to land the plane in the time allotted to me to do so. I retreated to the adoration chapel afterward to remain with Jesus until it was time for him to be brought out for adoration with the teens. I followed back out to the retreat area as they went to place the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance, and I saw about 150 teenagers encircled around the altar with a monstrance in the middle. I knelt and joined them all in prayer, and I was reminded yet again, like he has reminded me so many times in our Eucharistic relationship: He is the ever-fixed mark we gather around — not our circumstances, not the pastor, not the bishop, not the various personalities or ministries in the Church.

In the end, we, over and over again, gather and adore an ever-fixed mark of God's love for us: the Eucharist.

Sister Josephine Garrett is a member of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. She writes from Texas.



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RELIGIOUS PRIEST

Heart-to-heart with Jesus

A full conversion to the Church came about by taking questions, concerns to Christ in adoration

By Father John Anthony Boughton

What is the importance of the Eucharist to a friar? For this friar, EVERYTHING! He who is truly present in the Eucharist, Jesus, is everything. To me, it's as if it were yesterday when I realized that Jesus was truly present in the consecrated host and that he had a plan that was well beyond my understanding for my life. I am the first Catholic in my family in 500 years. As a 28-year-old squarely in the world and on my way to medical school, I began to ask the big questions in life: Does God really exist? Is the Bible true? If the Bible was real, why don't we really see prophets and miracles? I thought if God exists, he must have a plan for my life. But does he?

Seeing a near-miraculous conversion of a friend through Medjugorje opened my eyes to the Catholic world of Marian apparitions and to Catholicism in general, and thus, to the ongoing miracles within Jesus' Church. My Protestant friends and I couldn't explain the radical transformation of this man except as an act of God. I can say that we were, for the first time, faced with the possibility that heaven does speak throughout the centuries after the time of Jesus. So we decided to put our toes into Catholic waters to see what it was about. We went on a pilgrimage.

There, I met Catholics who showed me their active and vibrant relationship with Jesus, which was evident in their lives. They knew their faith and where to find answers in the Scriptures. I came to see, for the first time, John Chapter 6, where Jesus says 12 times — in 12 different ways — that his body is true food and his blood is true drink, and that without receiving it, we have no life. It was the first time I'd really seen that in Scripture.

Mary's supposed messages and these Catholic friends kept pointing me to the Mass and to the adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. They



Father John Anthony Boughton

showed me how the literal understanding of Jesus' true presence had been the constant teaching in Christianity for 2,000 years. They knocked down every argument I had heard as a Protestant about what I thought the Church teaches. I remember thinking that if all this about the Eucharist is true, it changes everything, because he is there.

I was convinced that there was no Church that had the authority to interpret Scripture outside the Catholic Church. But intellectual knowledge of the presence of Jesus isn't enough to make such a radical change in a man's life to go from being a Protestant and leaving a medical career and a family life to the life of a friar and a priest. It took a heart-to-heart encounter with Jesus.

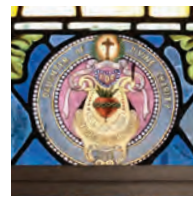
Spending time with Jesus in adoration, I threw all my questions to the Lord. I told him of all my confusion, my struggles, my desire to be a doctor and a husband. At some point, I began to really listen to him from the heart. He gently led me. I heard him say he wanted me to heal souls not bodies — meaning, to become a priest. I tried to arm wrestle him on that. I thought I could be an Episcopalian priest, have a wife and point people to the Catholic Church. He smiled and said simply and clearly, "John, you know what the truth is; now act on it." So I joined the Catholic Church, with no regrets.

If you meet Jesus heart to heart, he will be everything to you. Let him lead you! You will not be disappointed.

Father John Anthony Boughton is a member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. He writes from New York.



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seeing the face of
Christ in the Eucharist**

By Sister Lucia Marie of the
Visitation

The day I walked through the doors of the public chapel of our monastery years ago as a teenager visiting a cloistered monastery for the first time, I was struck. While the entire chapel was beautiful, the focal point was a gleaming monstrance enthroned above the altar, built into the grille separating the nuns' choir from the public side. I was instantly drawn by the sight.

The Eucharist is placed at the center of our chapel, and the chapel, in turn, is located in the center of our monastery. Our day is arranged around it, with daily Mass and the hours of the Divine Office which flow from it, and the daily schedule of sisters assigned to keep guard before the Lord as adorers. The physical centrality reflects a deeper spiritual one: The Eucharist lies at the heart of our vocation as cloistered Dominican nuns.

As contemplative nuns, we are called to seek the face of God. Many of the Dominican monasteries in the United States have the privilege of perpetual adoration. Here, before the monstrance, we gaze on his hidden face, bringing before him the sufferings and trials, needs and petitions, the joys and thanksgiving of all the world. Continually, we receive phone calls, letters and messages asking, "Sisters, would you please pray for ...?"

Daily Mass forms the life-spring of every nun's spiritual life. While all Christians are called to a spousal relationship with God, the nun is called to embody this in an even more radical way, leaving behind earthly marriage in order to choose Christ as her only spouse, passing over the figure to seek the reality. We have the custom of reciting a prayer each day as we place the veil on our head: "He has placed a seal upon my brow, that I might admit no other lover but him." It is in the Eucharist



Sister Lucia Marie

that we receive "him whom my soul loves" (Song 3:4) The One who gave himself for me on the cross now comes to me, makes his abode in me.

As the re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the Eucharist shares with us the graces which that sacrifice merited. Like every sacrament, the Eucharist contains both sign and reality. As the forms of bread and wine signify replenishment and nourishment, so in the Eucharist we find forgiveness for our daily faults, our failings in sisterly charity, our distractions and sloth, restoring what was lost in us by our venial sins. It nourishes growth in the spiritual life, giving increase to virtue, most particularly to charity.

But the reality under these signs is Christ himself. When we consume normal food, it is changed into us. But in this spiritual food, we become what we receive, being transformed into Christ until we can say, "yet I live, no longer, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20) This transformation into Christ, this growth in charity, loving God and neighbor with the love that he himself has poured into our hearts, is the goal of the monastic life — in fact, of every Christian's life.

And so, as we seek the face of God in silence, set apart for him alone by enclosure and consecrated to him by our vows, it is the Eucharist that feeds us on our journey toward him, that unites us to him and that promises us the joy of final union with him in heaven.

Sister Lucia Marie of the Visitation is a Dominican nun of the Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary in Summit, New Jersey.

DIOCESAN PRIEST

A life with Jesus, the great High Priest

Bringing the Eucharistic Lord to the People of God is a unique privilege

By Father Craig Vasek

I remember my first year of seminary formation. I would regularly fall asleep at our daily Holy Hour. It was because it was at a bad time (at 5-6 p.m., who wouldn't fall asleep?), so it wasn't my fault! All joking aside, I think I was falling asleep because I didn't know yet that it was really Jesus who was present in the Blessed Sacrament. I remember one day, as I was coming to adoration late (because it was at a bad time, not because I was immature at age 19), I turned the corner and froze. As I looked into the chapel through the open doors, and as I saw the golden monstrance on the altar, and the host resting in the monstrance, all I knew at that moment was that I was face to face with God.

I didn't fall asleep in the chapel that day.

The Eucharist is Jesus, and Jesus is God. He is the savior and leader of the Church that he himself founded. He is the model of Christian life, since Christians are to become another Christ, and he is the model of the priesthood, since he is the great High Priest (cf. Heb 2:17). He is the exemplar for all, and the exemplar for the priest. To be before him in the Blessed Sacrament is to be before the One whom I am to imitate and become. Everyone knows that they are supposed to place before them the people, the ways and the attributes of what they would like to become. So, a priest does.

In prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I am regularly bathed in his light and presence. I am strengthened by his heart beating for me from the host, either in the tabernacle or in the monstrance on the altar. Even if there is no sense of the divine presence, faith tells me that he is there. From time to time I am aware, without any feeling at all, that there is something like radioactive activity beneath the surface of sense, something like electromagnetic currents of divine grace pulsating from the host into my being. Sorry for the



Father Craig Vasek

In prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I am regularly bathed in his light and presence. I am strengthened by his heart beating for me from the host, either in the tabernacle or in the monstrance on the altar. Even if there is no sense of the divine presence, faith tells me that he is there.

poor analogies, but suffice it to say that there is a powerful and great exchange that takes place, whether it is felt or not.

In the stillness and quiet before him, mysteriously, he brings up everything that he needs to speak about with me (not with audible words but with promptings that arise in my mind and heart), and as I become aware of them, I become drawn to them by grace. He reveals his goodness in being so near to me, his humility in making himself present in such an approachable way, his purity in taking ground wheat up into his appearance, his peaceful resting in the Father, his zeal for souls, and everything else along with it.

My meditation on the holy Gospels before him brings me into a present participation of his ministry, still at work as he

was in Israel, working for the salvation of the world, and of me. I can cry to the heavens in petition for the People of God and for the people of the world who do not know God, but when I am in the chapel, I can cry out directly to the One who is enthroned in the heavens, since he is in the chapel with me.

In the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, I am drawn into his sacrifice on the cross. I am allowed to participate in his suffering love, given strength to suffer in love and confidence that he is with me in my suffering. It is the supreme privilege of the priest to offer to the Christian people that which Jesus wants to give them — himself — in the holy Eucharist. It can be said that this is why the priest exists. I exist for the holy Eucharist just as I exist for the people, since I bring Jesus in the holy Eucharist to them.

I know that my identity doesn't come from what I do, but it is shaped by what I do, and I am continually reminded of who I am as a priest by what I do, which is to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. This is what I was told at ordination: "Accept from the holy People of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, imitate the mystery you celebrate, model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross."

Because I know that the Eucharist is Jesus, and Jesus is God, I know exactly where I am to draw people. I am drawing everyone to a living relationship with Jesus, marvelously with us in the Most Blessed Sacrament, introducing them to him and fostering the deepening of their love of God through their love of Jesus in the Eucharistic host.

As a final thought, it is exceedingly liberating and strengthening to know that the power of my ministry is not based on me but on the divine activity of God radiating from the host. He is indeed drawing all to himself (cf. Jn 12:32).

Father Craig Vasek is a priest of the Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota, and was recently appointed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to serve as a specialist for the National Eucharistic Revival.

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offers an opportunity to
reconnect with the
Real Presence of Jesus*

By Father Luke Spannagel

One of my favorite pictures was taken May 6, 1984. I am standing in front of the altar with my great-great grandmother ... and with my glasses, dress shirt and little brown tie, I have the biggest beaming smile. It was the day of my first Communion. My preparation for the event was excellent and instilled in me a true sense of the sacred and the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. I was so excited to receive the Eucharist for the first time, and I remember feeling so light and joyful that day. All these years later, I look forward to the first Communion for our young people each spring. Seeing their sometimes nervous smiles and encouraging parents, I think about how life-changing that day was for me and how that first union with Jesus in the Eucharist deepened my life in Christ — and how that joy is wonderfully renewed at each Mass.

Whenever I share my vocation story, I always include how important the Mass was to my family. Growing up, I don't remember us having many rules, except one expectation that my dad was very clear about: the Sunday Mass at St. Mary's was at 8 a.m. — and our family was to be there together in the pew by 7:50 a.m. I don't think I fully appreciated it at the time, but looking back now, I see how clearly my dad was instructing us that Sunday Mass together was the most important part of our family's week. We had a wonderful routine of having a nice breakfast together after Mass



Father Luke Spannagel

as a family, and then we spent time together really striving to make it a day of refreshment. That weekly commitment to Sunday Mass stayed with me in my college years and, along with interest in a

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certain young woman at the time who was regularly in prayer, developed into a habit of daily Mass and regular prayer with Jesus in the tabernacle. In spending that time with Jesus, I realized how much stronger and more peaceful I felt, and how my heart grew in conviction of knowing that he really is there! It was through spending that time with Jesus in the Eucharist that I ultimately came to clarity of how God was calling me to serve in the Church as a priest. What happened to that young woman? I know she still prays for me; I joyfully served as a deacon at her wedding and later baptized one of her children!

During my seminary years at Mount St. Mary's, the daily Holy Hour became part of my regular prayer. I am joyful to say that time in adoration has continued to be part of my daily prayer life as a priest. Being with Jesus in the Eucharist is where I feel most at peace and where I feel most myself. I never wonder

if I should be doing something else — I always feel the peaceful conviction that there is no better place I can be at that moment. Being in his presence helps me see clearly that I am loved and that he has given everything for me. It is where I am renewed in strength when I falter and where I receive the strength to do whatever he asks of me each day. On days when I am not feeling well or under some burden, I am always thankful that I finish the time of Mass or prayer feeling better and more energized. My time with Jesus in Mass and in adoration is always the best part of my day.

If you also have been blessed by time with Jesus in the Eucharist, I encourage you to continue to enjoy the fruits of that encounter as often as you can. Remind yourself that he is really there. Challenge yourself to keep that time as a priority. Know in confidence that our loving Lord will continue to bless and strengthen you through that time. If you haven't been able to experience this wonderful gift, or haven't been as consistent as you would like, I invite you to begin by renewing commitment for Sunday Mass and a little time with Jesus in the tabernacle or at adoration.

For me, one of the great gifts of the Eucharistic Revival is an invitation to rediscover the gift of Jesus truly present. He really is there, and he really does love us perfectly. Spending time with Jesus in the Eucharist helps us to see him more clearly, both in the sacrament and in one another out in the world. Joining with Jesus in the perfect worship of the Father brings peace to our hearts, helps us to know that we are loved and never alone, and deepens our desire to share his love with those around us. Jesus in the Eucharist helps our hearts to be more like his and helps us be ready for one more great gift he wants to give us — the life of perfect love and peace in heaven.

Father Luke Spannagel is a priest of the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, and serves as a National Eucharistic Preacher to serve as part of the National Eucharistic Revival.

PERMANENT DEACON

The diaconal vocation and the power of the Eucharist

How I found a place at the altar through the witness of those before me

By Deacon Mel Tardy

In thinking about how the Eucharist has helped to inspire and direct my discernment, my vocation, my prayer life and my ministry, I start with those who have inspired me — particularly other Black Catholics whose faith lives hinged around Eucharistic devotion.

First and foremost, my mother, JoAnne Tardy, had an exceptional devotion to the Blessed Sacrament throughout her life. Small wonder, since she attended Xavier Prep High School and Xavier University of New Orleans. Both schools were founded by St. Katherine Drexel in order to make Catholic education more accessible to African Americans. Indeed, Drexel founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in order to share the Gospel with the poor, which in her day especially meant Black and Native American peoples.

My African American mother, benefiting from such opportunities, developed quite a devotion to Drexel. Later in life, my mother suffered from acute, dementia-like symptoms. Ironically, her final breath came on March 3, 2022, the feast day of St. Katharine Drexel. While serving on the altar for my mother's Mass of Christian burial, I found myself giving thanks to Jesus with a grateful heart. Because of his willful suffering and sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, I now hope in joy for my mother's resurrection in Christ. Such faith was inspired and nurtured by her own faith and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, of which I am now servant as a permanent deacon for Christ.

A place at the altar

My 2011 class of permanent deacons in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South



Deacon Mel Tardy

Bend, Indiana, was the first in 25 years. I myself knew little about the permanent diaconate. I also was the only African American and person of color in formation (and, once ordained, I would become the only African American clergy ordained for our diocese). Up until then, I had rarely witnessed Blacks on the altar. I wondered: Will I belong? Am I "holy" enough to be behind the altar? I tried to resist the notion that "holy enough" meant "white enough." In other words: Would I be accepted as a Black man on the altar? I took solace in the vocations of two U.S. Black Catholics: Venerable Father Augustus Tolton and Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman.

Tolton's enslaved Catholic parents wanted freedom and a Catholic education for their children. His widowed mother's Catholic faith inspired her to lead her children on a daring escape across the Mississippi River into the free state of Illinois. In Illinois, the overt racism of students and parents regularly threatened little Gus; so the parish

pastor, Father McGirr, had him serve at daily Mass so he could watch over and protect him. Yet, he noticed a devotion to the Eucharist, which convinced him that young Gus had a priestly vocation. At age 16, on the feast of Corpus Christi, Tolton received his first Communion with joy. The path from first Communion to becoming the first recognizably African American priest involved many disappointments and wondrous acts of God. No one of his day could fathom his trials and tribulations. In my early diaconate years, I often sought prayers from Father Tolton. I knew he understood the occasional loneliness, doubt and even racism I was experiencing.

When Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman was 9 years old, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration founded a school for Blacks in her hometown of Canton, Mississippi. She converted to Catholicism and, at age 15, joined their religious order. As such, Eucharistic adoration would certainly have characterized her prayer life. For her, however, embracing the Eucharist did not mean abandoning her heritage; it meant coming to the Church "fully functioning." She could be at once Black and Catholic with no compulsion to choose. She could draw upon and share the gifts and wisdom of our Black heritage as well as those supernatural gifts of our faith, including the precious gift of grace in the Blessed Sacrament. Her example encourages me to likewise use and share all of my gifts and experiences.

My own experiences

During formation, we occasionally had classes or retreats at the convent of the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration in Mishawaka, Indiana. In truth, I always looked forward to such days because I knew I would have occasion for silent prayer before the Eucharist. When I experienced doubt about the path ahead, such time in prayer

helped me re-center and gave me the grace and peace to continue. I did not realize until later in formation that, as a deacon, I would be called upon to lead Eucharistic adoration! It is a wonderful blessing I did not anticipate, and I embrace such opportunities. Adoration is an opportunity to hit pause on our worldly routines to spend time in prayer with the Lord.

As deacons we are privileged to spend much time with the Eucharist. We bear the chalice, the blood of Christ. We cleanse the vessels after Mass. We bring the Eucharist to the sick. Even so, sometimes I seek extra time with the Lord, particularly when ministering to those facing difficult circumstances including relationship difficulties, addictions, racism, etc. Relying upon my own resources, I may run into an impasse. That is when I humbly acknowledge my own weakness and seek out the Eucharist for grace and wisdom. I have found that, in times when hearts seemed immovable and all seemed lost, intimacy with the Eucharist before setting out can make a difference.

In recent years, I have come to know many African American clergy, religious and seminarians, primarily through my involvement with the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Association of Black Catholic Deacons, the National Black Sisters Conference and the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association. Serving with them at various liturgies and bearing witness to faith among such folk have affirmed for me our place at the altar.


When we think of the prayer life of holy Catholic men and women, we should not overlook the impact and connection between the Eucharist and the grace to live lives in service and witness to the Gospel in spite of potential impediments to the flourishing of faith, such as racism. In each example, the Eucharist played a central role in their call to faith, their call to bear witness to the Gospel, their call to serve (especially those most in need) and their call to communion with all peoples of God regardless of difference.

We, like our ancestors in faith, are a Eucharistic people; not only because we partake of the body of Christ, provided to us by our wonderful priests and bishops, but also because of our desire to become what we eat — one Body in Christ, one people living in communion and right relationship with God and all of God's people.

Deacon Mel Tardy is a permanent deacon who serves in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana. He is president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.




Students from St. Anthony Catholic School in Washington, D.C., are seen near a poster of Sister Thea Bowman. Sister Thea, who died in 1990, is one of six Black Catholics who are candidates for sainthood. CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn



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RELIGIOUS SISTER

It is the whole world I meet before the tabernacle

A Daughter of St. Paul is called to be a light to the world, for the life of the world

By Sister Kathryn James Hermes

It was evening, and the chapel was already shrouded in darkness. I knelt in the back pew as I waited for a sister to turn the lights on. I had just flown in from Falls Church, Virginia, to Boston to enter the candidacy of the Daughters of St. Paul, and the very first place the sisters brought me was here, to Jesus the Divine Master, to the heart of the community. I heard the lights switch on, and suddenly the sanctuary was flooded with light.

"Jesus, I am finally here," I said.

"Kathryn, I am always here," Jesus said.

I knew I was home.

Around the tabernacle were the words that Blessed James Alberione, our founder, had received from Jesus, a covenant that Lord had made with him and with all who would follow Christ: "Do not fear. I am with you. From here I will cast light. (Jesus pointed to the tabernacle when he said these words.) Be sorry for sin."

Do not be afraid. You are never alone. I am always with you, in you, for you. It was in prayer before Jesus in the Eucharist that I learned the extreme lengths of his love that would assure all of humanity of his continual presence to the end of the ages. It was in conversation with him before the tabernacle that I found my strength to continue when I had a stroke at 21 and, in those times of difficulty, where I had to break open my heart and learn to give and forgive with a love greater than my own heart could muster. It is to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, that I daily bring the needs of people carrying burdens that are too heavy for them, asking for them strength, comfort, care and faith as they walk their path in life seeking also to love like him.



Sister Kathryn James Hermes

On the day I entered the convent, my mother said to me, "We will meet each other before the tabernacle." In those first days of homesickness, these words were a lifeline for me. But now it is the whole world that I meet before the tabernacle, all people sharing this planet with me gathered into our chapel, crowding around Jesus.

I am the Light of the world, you are the light of the world. Like a monstrosity, each Daughter of St. Paul is to make Christ present, visible, with his truth, his goodness, his beauty and light, by pointing out and living his way and giving his life. In those early days of my novitiate I learned that Blessed Alberione encouraged us to do our apostolate "on our knees." He meant that we don't have what people need. We don't know what people need to hear. We can't create what will attract people to Jesus. In my early 20s, that was a nice thought I tucked away in my mental folder of quotes from our founder. Very quickly after my profession, however, I realized it was

not just a spiritual concept. It was a lifeline to the only one who knows the hearts of the people who hear me, whether it's through my speaking or writing. Jesus alone is master of their lives, who alone knows every moment and hurdle and happiness that makes up their journey to him. He alone knows what is needed in each case that they may become great saints. I am a Daughter of St. Paul for them, and Jesus is the key to their hearts.

Offer yourself with Jesus as a victim for errors and scandals caused by the misuse of the media, for those who are deceived by the media and led astray from God's fatherly love. Between the two poles of those who would eliminate all media use from their life as an evil and those who mindlessly soak in all they see, read and hear, the Daughter of St. Paul stands as a balance. She attests to the goodness of these gifts of God given to humanity that we might live in greater communion with each other and with God and she offers herself as a victim to make reparation for the sins committed by those who in their use of the media are not mindful of their dignity and call as Christians, indeed as humans. Each day, I kneel before Jesus in the Eucharist to make reparation for sin, my own and the sins caused by the misuse of media.

On the day I entered the convent, my mother said to me, "We will meet each other before the tabernacle." In those first days of homesickness, these words were a lifeline for me. But now it is the whole world that I meet before the tabernacle, all people sharing this planet with me gathered into our chapel, crowding around Jesus. I have learned from Jesus in the Eucharist to live for them, to write for them, to speak for them, to pray for them and, yes, even to offer my life for them.

Sister Kathryn James Hermes is a member of the Daughters of St. Paul. She writes from Massachusetts.

CONSECRATED VIRGIN

Battling the struggle to feel unworthy

A consecrated virgin proclaims that 'there is no one who is beyond the Lord's desire'

By Andrea Polito

On July 22, 2017, the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, I was consecrated as a virgin living in the world. I would love to say that on that day, I was exclusively filled by God's grace and simply bursting with light, love and joy. But as I was kneeling in the sanctuary of the Denver cathedral, looking at our Lord in the Eucharist, elevated in the hands of my archbishop, I was in shock. I had been to thousands of Masses in my lifetime, and this view was not unfamiliar. But today was different. That day, I wasn't just looking at my God, my redeemer, Jesus Christ, body, blood, soul and divinity — I was looking at my spouse. That day, I was offering my whole life to Christ, committing my life to perpetual virginity for him, and, in turn, he was offering himself to me in a new way.

Consecrated virginity is one of the oldest vocations in the Church. We hear of harrowing stories of virgins who were tortured and martyred in the early Church in order to preserve themselves for Christ alone. With the Eucharist at the center, and as virgin, bride and mother, consecrated virgins are a witness to, and an invitation for, the Church and the world to remain with eyes fixed on the heavenly banquet. As brides of Christ, they are a witness to the union with Christ awaiting us. As spiritual mothers, they are committed to receiving all who come to them and placing them at the feet of Christ through prayer. Like other lay consecrated vocations, they don't look any different on an average day and have normal jobs and commitments. But truly, they are the heart of any diocese.

Now, with that beautiful and eloquent description of consecrated virginity, I must admit



Andrea Polito

that there are not enough words to write here in order to make myself sound or feel worthy of the life of consecration. I am overly emotional, prone to drama, would be covered in tattoos if my spiritual director allowed, and solidly believe that my fondest memories of the last five years have been sharing my vocation with people and delighting in the fact that they squirm when they hear the word "virgin." I am faithful to the prayers for my diocese and feel very honored to be given such a responsibility.

But at the heart of this vocation is the Eucharist. Why? Because through it I am reminded that I am not worthy but still am chosen and desired and loved by Christ. He comes in humble bread, through the hands of an unworthy priest, to be given to me, his unworthy spouse. He unites himself with me, a sinner, and sustains me through this Eucharist until I can be united with him for eternity. Through the Eucharist, the distance between us is bridged and the cares and petitions I carry on behalf of the Church are received into his most Sacred Heart. As a consecrated virgin, my life's mission is to remind you, the Church, the world, that there is no one who is beyond the Lord's desire. He wants everyone no matter how unworthy. Christ in the Eucharist can hold the world in its entirety; there is no limit to his love.

Andrea Polito was consecrated to the Order of Virgins in 2017. She writes from Maryland.

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RELIGIOUS PRIEST

Preaching the Incarnate Word

While members of other orders take after the spirituality of their founder, Dominicans focus less on St. Dominic and more on the word of God

By Father Patrick Hyde

"If you want to be a Dominican, you need to start attending Mass every day."

When I attended a Dominican vocation weekend, this advice was given to me at least a dozen times. On one level, it made all the sense in the world to me: If I want to be a priest, I should go to Mass. On another level, it seemed odd, because Dominicans do not have a particular claim to the graces of the Eucharist.

I was left to ponder in my prayer and discernment what special role the Eucharist plays in the vocation of a Dominican friar.

In most religious communities, the spirituality of the founder plays a unique role in the ongoing life of the community and a means by which those attracted to a particular community discern. For instance, the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual practices of St. Ignatius of Loyola are a great means to discern becoming a Jesuit. St. Francis of Assisi lived an austere life in solidarity with the poor. Consequently, living a simple life in solidarity with the poor and marginalized is a great way to discern being a Franciscan.

For us Dominicans, the personality and spirituality of St. Dominic do not take as central of a role in our lives. Yes, he was a preacher of grace and truth. He lived the evangelical counsels, loved the brethren and immersed himself in the word of God. What he left us, then, was not his own spirituality. He left his sons and daughters a way of life that always pointed the brothers to our mission — preaching for the salvation of souls — our common life, and the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

For St. Dominic (and subsequent Dominicans), our life and ministry became not so much the manifestation of the particular spirituality of one



Father Patrick Hyde

Put simply, the Eucharist provides our life and our mission a purpose and a fundamental orientation.

person. Rather, Dominican life is about continual conversion through grace. Our primary sources of grace are God's word and the sacraments. Therefore, as Dominicans, we immerse our lives in the word of God and in the sacraments so that we can be renewed constantly by the superabundant graces that flow from these sources.

Because the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, the Dominican life of grace and virtue requires the Eucharist, both our fruitful and faithful celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy and our continual meditation on the graces and mysteries flowing forth from the Eucharist.

St. Dominic, for instance, was known to spend his days preaching and teaching the truth, with his evenings spent in the chapel praying and staying close to the Eucharist.

Our brother, St. Thomas Aquinas, combined a brilliant mind with outstanding piety. He was able to write some of the best explications of Eucharistic doctrine while writing poetic prayers and hymns in honor of the Eucharist. He was also known to celebrate a private Mass and attend the community Mass daily, often celebrating or praying through tears.

In the life of a friar preacher, the Eucharist, therefore, is the source of the graces we receive for the study and preaching of the word of God. In order to share fruitfully and faithfully the word of God through our preaching, our lives must be fed and nourished daily by the Eucharist. Additionally, the Eucharist, because it is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, serves as the end toward which all of our study and preaching leads.

Put simply, the Eucharist provides our life and our mission a purpose and a fundamental orientation. We live this life not simply to grow in holiness but also to preach clearly and effectively the Good News.

In the Fundamental Constitution of our order, we are told: "We do our best to live of one accord the common life, observing faithfully the celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist and the divine office, diligent in study and constant in regular observance. Not only do these things contribute to the glory of God and our sanctification, they also bear directly on the salvation of humankind, since together they prepare and impel us to preach; they give our preaching its character, and in turn, are influenced by it."

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Mass is its simple, awesome power. One Mass, one faithful reception of holy Communion, has the power to change our lives completely. Transformed by the graces of the Eucharist, our hearts, minds and bodies become vessels of grace. Every moment is filled with boundless opportunities to share those graces.

God's love for us is such that all of the faithful have this opportunity. God's love for us Dominicans is such that our entire lives are dedicated to the mystery of incarnating and preaching these particular graces. And it all starts with a simple "yes" to attending Mass.

Father Patrick Hyde is a member of the Dominican Order. He serves as a chaplain at the St. Paul Catholic Center at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

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RELIGIOUS SISTER

The Eucharistic is all heart

The Sisters of Life, who defend the most vulnerable in the womb, focus on the heart of Christ

By Sister Catherine Joy Marie

The monitor flickered on, black and white blurs rippling across the screen. The nurse said, "Your baby is only about six weeks old, so there's no guarantee we'll be able to see anything yet." Another sister and I had the gift of being present at the first ultrasound of a young woman. We received her call a week prior and had been speaking with her every day since. She shared with us her fears of telling her boyfriend and parents and of her doubts that she could be a good mom. She feared the loss of her plans and hopes that now seemed impossible. We listened and reflected back to her the goodness and strengths we saw. We accompanied her as she shared the loud and noisy fears of her circumstances and the deep desires and dreams of her heart.

The silence in the small room was broken again by a collective gasp as we stared in awe at the screen. A tiny pulsing light, no bigger than an apple seed, shone in the dark room. There was her little one — so small that all you could see were the



Sisters of Life prostrate themselves during profession of vows. Courtesy photo

strong, flashing beats of his heart. "Look," said Sister, "your little one is all heart!"

The Eucharist is the life of the Sisters of Life. Our faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist helps us to discern his presence in every human life, especially when that life is vulnerable, silent, hidden or diminished in any way. As we process to an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe each night, I often remember the tiny, beating heart from the ultrasound as I gaze on her black sash, indicating that she is with child. In Mary's womb beats the hidden, little heart of Jesus. As our founder John Cardinal O'Connor loved to say, "The Christ that she fed within her womb is

the Christ who feeds us in the Eucharist. It is the same Christ. Mary is the womb of the Eucharistic Christ." Jesus, in the womb of Mary and in the Eucharist, makes himself totally dependent, utterly vulnerable and small enough for us to approach. His love — incarnate, crucified and risen — reveals the truth of the beauty of every human person, created in God's image and likeness. In response to such love, we join Christ in laying down our lives in poverty, chastity and obedience, and vow to protect and enhance the sacredness of every human life.

Our primary mission as Sisters of Life is prayer. All our missions flow from this union with the Eucharistic heart of Jesus. We spend four hours each day in prayer, including adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, periods of meditation, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. Speaking to our sisters, Cardinal O'Connor said, "It seems to me if we have a special devotion to the Eucharistic Infant in the womb of Mary, this ... enhances our devotion, our respect, our sense of the sacredness of the infant in the womb and of the mother." We desire to be in union with him, becoming as vulnerable as Christ in the manger, on

the cross and in the Eucharist, and as vulnerable as the child in the womb.

In each Mass, the priest breaks off a small particle of the host, about the size of an apple seed, and places it in the chalice. This minuscule fraction of the Eucharist is truly the whole of Christ — the tiny host is all heart! There is nothing too small or too hidden for him. Jesus cares about all the broken pieces of our hearts — each is precious and capable of being made new in his merciful love. As we grow in recognizing Christ hidden in the Eucharist, he draws our gaze to other places he is hidden — in the vulnerable pregnant woman, in the searching college student, in someone suffering the pain of abortion. Like Our Lady, we seek to allow Jesus, conceived beneath our hearts and actually received within our bodies in holy Communion, to radiate through us to everyone we encounter, that each person may know they are good, loved and unrepeatable.

You can learn more about the Sisters of Life and their missions by visiting sister-soflife.org.

Sister Catherine Joy Marie is a member of the Sisters of Life. She writes from Toronto.

What do I desire?

Where is God calling me?

What are the needs of the world today?

How do I like to serve others?

How do I like to pray?



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RELIGIOUS SISTER

A charism for life

*Time spent in adoration
is a great way to discern
God's will for your life —
what to do and who to be*

By Sister M. Ignatia Henneberry

The *Ratio Formationis* of our Congregation states, "Perpetual adoration is my way of life." Looking back on the gift of my vocation, I can see how the Lord prepared me to become a Sister of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration from a young age. Discerning a vocation requires noticing God's loving plan and preparation in our life and then having the desire to surrender to it. For me, adoration encompasses these two aspects: preparation and surrender.

Looking back on the Lord's loving plan and preparation, I can see how central adoration has been in my life. Jesus' acts of preparation form rather than force. Our hearts start desiring those things that are best for us — that were meant for us all along. A lot of these little acts of preparation for me came through adoration.

My parents met at a Catholic young adult group, and adoration was central to their discernment of marriage together. My dad proposed to my mom in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and I believe Jesus, in a certain sense, gave our family a "little charism" of adoration. Many years later, my parents asked our pastor to have adoration available at our small parish, so they took on the task of organizing it.

My parents would go to



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adoration regularly, and my brother and I would often come along. My mom tells me that I couldn't sit still, so I would make little "processions" around the church during adoration. I would walk up and down the aisles and stop at every statue and picture. Even though I was not totally aware of Jesus' presence at the time, Jesus was aware of my presence. Still, the fact that my parents brought me before his presence and his gaze left a mark on my life and became its guiding principle.

These graces of preparation continued as I went off to college, although at the time I was still unaware of my specific calling to be a religious sister. At college, the Lord prepared a community for me. I met other young people who were following Jesus and who were invested in this mysterious process called "discernment," which I had never heard of before. He also prepared a Eucharistic community for me, as he was present in the Blessed Sacrament in all the dorms and perpetually in the adora-

tion chapel on campus.

As I began to venture into the world of discernment like my friends, I began asking Jesus, "Are you calling me to be a sister?" With this question on my heart, I started spending more time with him in adoration. There he kept forming me. Finally, the Lord prepared an encounter with my future sisters. When I met them, I noticed their joy, which I found was rooted in belonging to Jesus and adoring him in the Blessed Sacrament. Each congregation has a specific charism, which is a gift given for the benefit of the whole Church. It is also a gift given to each sister of that congregation. The charism of perpetual adoration was given to me, and I found a reflection of this spark in the hearts of these sisters. Over time I became more and more convicted that if Jesus was calling me to be totally his, adoration would be the mode of that gift of self. After my sophomore year at college, I sensed Jesus inviting me to enter the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration.

My hours of adoration as a kid and later at college began a formation in adoration that continues to this day. I believe this kind of formation is essential for everyone, but especially for those discerning their own vocation. We go to adoration perhaps at first because we want to know what Jesus wants us to do, but eventually this motivation transforms into wanting to know and be like Jesus. Jesus' posture while exposed in the Blessed Sacrament is full surrender to us. Our desire is to give our full surrender back to him.

Adoration forms us for this surrender in two ways: obedience and presence. In very realistic terms, it's sometimes difficult to be obedient to a scheduled hour of adoration. We have to say no to other things in order to say, "Yes, Jesus, I want to spend time with you." Do we let Jesus inform our decisions about how we use our time? Are we obedient to our commitments? Can we surrender our time to him? We have all had this experience: I feel so busy, and I don't think that I can take the time right now to pray. But once I am there, once I am in that adoration chapel, I know I don't want to be anywhere else. The presence of Jesus is captivating — it's everything.

While at college I spent a semester abroad. By this time, I was seriously discerning religious life and spent a lot of time praying in beautiful chapels across Europe. Although beauty and adventure surrounded me, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament attracted me even more. In obedience, we make external acts of surrender manifesting our interior desire. In giving our simple presence to Jesus, who is fully present to us, we make an interior act of surrender — giving our hearts to him. A vocation is a beautiful gift. Jesus has been preparing it for you and he has been preparing you to make that loving act of surrender and say yes to that vocation with all your heart.

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The physicality of God

Jesus has a body and makes himself present to us in every church where the Eucharist is found

By Deacon Bob Rice

I am often struck by the physicality of God. Perhaps that is because, for so much of my life, I thought my relationship with God was something purely spiritual. Jesus was like Obi-Wan Kenobi. Yes, he once had a body, but now he is present only in spirit, guiding me from the beyond. Yoda taught Luke, "Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter." The message was that our "crude" bodies were temporary, but our "luminous" spirits — who we really are — live on for eternity.

Only half right, Yoda was.

St. John Paul II taught that we are embodied souls. We are not a soul within a body. We are souls that are embodied. Our spirit and flesh were created together and were made to remain together forever. Though there may be a temporary separation of body and soul if we die before Jesus comes again, we profess every Sunday that we "look forward to the resurrection of the dead," a time when our spirit will be reunited with our flesh, living in the new heaven and new earth for all eternity with God.

Two thousand years ago, the second person of the Trinity became an embodied soul. Jesus is fully God and fully man, like us in all things but sin. He didn't just wear flesh, he "became flesh." Jesus' sacrifice on the cross saved us in both flesh and spirit. The infinite mercy he wanted to pour out on all humanity cost him dearly, down



Deacon Bob Rice

to his last breath and last drop of blood. When he rose from the dead, it was in both body and soul. When he ascended into heaven, he didn't take off his flesh like a suit that hangs in the closet. He is still flesh and spirit and will be forever. The Christ that comes again will have the same flesh, now glorified, that was created in Mary's womb at the Incarnation.

Jesus is an embodied soul. So, wouldn't it make sense that he would come to us as he truly is? One who, like us, is both physical and spiritual? This is what he does for us in the sacraments.

The Catechism describes the sacraments as "powers that comes forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving" (No. 1116). The same things that Jesus did two thousand years ago he does today in the sacraments. One need not feel at a loss because they didn't happen to be alive when Jesus did his public ministry. He is as present now as he was then — even more so! When he walked the earth, Jesus never made it to Wintersville, Ohio. But now, every day at my parish, he is made physically present there through the celebration of the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. One cannot separate the "body and blood" from the "soul and divinity." Just as the fruit that Adam and Eve ate brought about humanity's damnation, so now this flesh we consume brings about our salvation. As he did at the Incarnation, Jesus comes to us physically.

As a deacon, I have the best seat in the house for that moment at every liturgy. I am amazed I get to be so physically close to God. I am humbled to hold Jesus in my hands and offer him to my brothers and sisters, with the simple but profound words, "the body of Christ." And as I purify the vessels, I am cognizant that it is not merely a matter of function (cleaning up for the next service) but an act of faith, making sure no piece of flesh or drop of blood remains outside the two places where they belong: the tabernacle and our embodied souls.

St. Irenaeus wrote, "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking." One important aspect of Eucharistic thinking is to reflect on the physicality of God made present to us in the sacraments. Our relationship with God is not merely in our intellect or imagination. We feel his blessing when the holy water touches our head. We hear his mercy through the words of absolution. And we can see and taste his love for us in the most blessed sacrament, the Eucharist.

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