

Manna 3 – Ninth Session

Bread Which Earth Has Given & Human Hands Have Made: Eucharist and Work

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God has loved man with an eternal love, with the love of a father, with a tender love:

Dilexi te (I have loved you).

All of creation has been a preparation of God's love for the benefit of us,

whom God created only on the sixth day,

when everything was ready to receive and serve him.

-March 14, 1865

Great Retreat of Rome, Saint Peter Julian Eymard

Preface

Near the end of his “great retreat of Rome” in 1865, Father Eymard at long last experienced a profound sense of God’s love. He says at the beginning of this meditation,

At last, after passing through the desert, I have reached the mountain of love. What a difficult journey! What a laborious cruise! Here I am before the throne of love; God be praised!

Father Eymard had looked back over his life during this retreat and saw the hand of God in all the major stops and experiences on his spiritual journey. He talks about loving God during his whole lifetime and through “all the power of my *works*.”

It is curious how he referred to so much of what he started and accomplished as a religious and as the founder and leader of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament: the “work” of First Communion of adults and young vagabonds (a “work” of compassion); the “work” of ministering to priests; the “work” of establishing a new Cenacle in Paris. He wrote on that day in March, all of God’s creation was “a preparation of God’s love for the benefit of [humanity]” so that through a [our] “works” we might serve the LORD.

Introduction to the Theme

In the 1990's, a common sight for residence in Manila, the Philippines, was during lunch breaks in business establishments or government offices, a Eucharistic celebration held on the premises. The employees form themselves into prayer groups or covenanted communities. They spend their free time gathering together in prayer or faith sharing.

It was during one of those noon time Eucharistic celebrations that I overheard a lady employee comment, "How blessed I am! We are going to use my desk as an altar table for our celebration." The working table as a table of the Eucharist; the work of human hands as bread to be blessed and broken!

Taking a look at the biblical and church understanding of human labor, we will see how in our Eucharist it is and must be celebrated for work making our whole life an offering to God.

Opening Prayer

*Inspired from the prayer of **Blessing of Office, Factory, and Place for Buying and Selling**
in the Collection **Rituum**, Manila, 1983.*

LORD God,
your Son brought forth the dignity of human labor
by working with his hands,
and granted to our labor companionship beyond all human telling
by associating us to the work of redemption.
Strengthen with your blessing
the desires of your working people
so that by assuming the task
of transforming through their effort
the things you have created
they may recognize their dignity
and find joy in being providers of the needs of the human family
to the praise of your glory
through Christ our LORD
together with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen.

Song:

- "LORD of All Hopefulness," by Jan Struther

Work Exercise

1. How do you feel about the work/job with which you are involved or employed right now?
 - a. How does it help you grow as a person?
 - b. How does it help you develop your talents?

2. What image of God at work in the Scriptures, especially in the parables of Jesus, touches you most and why?

3. How are you able to mirror the loving presence of God at your workplace?

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

*Blessed are you LORD God of all creation,
through your goodness we have this bread to offer,
fruit of the Earth and work of human hands,
it will become our bread of life.*

- a) This prayer for the preparation of the gifts in our Eucharistic celebration is an invitation for us not only to thank God for the bountiful blessings he has bestowed upon us but also for allowing us to participate in the work of creation – in transforming this world through the works of our human hands.

This prayer was included only in the *Ordo Missae* of Pope Paul VI when the liturgy was reformed after Vatican II. It follows very closely the Jewish form of prayer of blessing given in the book of benedictions (*Berakhot*). The effect of such a blessing is not only to make the bread holy but to hallow those around the table who share and eat the bread.

1. In the Old Testament, the chosen people valued all forms of work as good and worthy of the human person. This is rooted in the teaching in Genesis that portrays God as working in bringing the universe and humankind into existence. But God did not stop there. God allowed that human work be inserted into the framework of God's activity as something ordered to the perfection of the universe. "As yet, there was no field shrub on Earth and no grass in the field . . . There was no one to till the soil" (Genesis 2:5). The human person was entrusted the task of subduing and having dominion over the whole of creation (Genesis 1:27-28). In time people were to bring the produce of their toil as an offering to God (Genesis 4:3-5).

But like all human activity, work is ambivalent: if it leads human persons to become self-centered, it is idolatrous; but if it is realized in accordance with God's plan, it forms part of the goods proper to God's kingdom (Isaiah 2:2-4).

In the Eucharist, not only do we present to God our offerings of bread and wine but in a true spirit of thanksgiving we continue to participate in God's work of creation – transforming ever anew the human person that he has created us to be.

2. In becoming human, Jesus assumed all the conditions of human life, including work. He was referred to as ". . . of the carpenter" (Mark 6:3)). Christ spoke of human labor in his parables and preaching, revealing for us a person who has great experiences of work. The Risen LORD referred to God as a vine dresser and himself as the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd sees God as always at work just as God is constantly working (John 5:17).

The great message of the New Testament is that the whole of human existence is now transformed because of Christ and our union. The specific "work" now entrusted to each

Christian is to believe in Christ and to live in accordance with this faith, to be co-workers with God (1 Corinthians 3:9; Mark 16:20) and to participate in Christ's redemptive work, making up in his or her own life what is lacking in Christ's affliction and body, the church, can be built up (Colossians 1:24). However, Christians are to do this in the midst of their ordinary lives. "Everyone ought to continue as he was when he was called" (1 Corinthians 7:20).

In the Eucharist, we are invited to take the LORD's work: "Do this in memory of me," referring not only to the ritual celebration of this meal with the disciples but Christ's whole life of working for the establishment of the kingdom. We partake of the bread that Christ offers for the hungers of humanity and take our part in the mission of evangelizing the world as men and women who have become truly the body of Christ.

3. Such a biblical notion of a God at work and that through their work Christians are unfolding the Creator's own work is what we find in the present teaching of the church (*Gaudium et Spes* 34). In his encyclical on Human Work, *Laborem Exercens* (LE), Pope Saint John Paul II writes that:

. . . work is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to human's dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it . . . Work is a good thing for [us] – a good thing for his humanity – because through work [we] not only transforms nature, adapting it to [our] own needs, but humans also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being.' (LE 9).

John Paul II also adds that by means of work humanity participates in the activity of God and thus imitates Christ, the man of work. Furthermore, "We, in a way, collaborate with the son of God for the redemption of humanity" (LE 26-27).

In the modern-day catechism, we find that human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the Earth, both with and for one another. Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It also can be redemptive. By enduring the hardships of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified at Calvary, we collaborate in a certain fashion with the son of God in his redemptive work. Work can be a means of sanctification: animating earthly realities with the spirit of Christ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1217).

In the Eucharist, this is clearly articulated in Eucharistic Prayer IV:

We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great, and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and love. You formed [us] in your own image and entrusted the whole world to [our] care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, [you] might have dominion over all creatures.

This is our way of celebrating our giftedness as a trusted co-worker of the Father in transforming our world into the new heaven and earth that he envisioned for all of us.

4. The Eucharist as the sacrament of God's love is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the continued work of creation and redemption. In our participation, we are summoned to be present as we can in the life of Christ who has offered this sacrifice on our behalf. To the extent that we are open to receive the gift of himself that Christ offers in the Eucharist, we also are able to make our response to the creative power of the Spirit through our work and labor.

The Eucharist reminds us of the one Creator to whom all our efforts and strengths originate and in whom all of these efforts will find their completion. And unless we are able to unite them in the work of Christ, who himself labored for the well-being of humanity, they would be in vain, for apart from Christ, we can do nothing.

Through the Eucharist, our work and labor become a source of sanctification not only for ourselves but for the entire humanity.

5. John Chrysostom summarizes the value that humanity should have towards work in the following words:

Iron that lies unused and consumed by rust becomes useless. But iron used in work is much more useful and beautiful and by its sparkle surpasses even silver itself. Land that lies idle produces nothing good except bad herbs, thistles and thorns and unproductive trees. But land that is cultivated is crowned with sweet fruits. In the Word, everything becomes corrupted by idleness and becomes better by means of the work that is proper to it.

6. For the gift of human labor, "Blessed be God forever!"

Resource helps for this teaching:

- *Praying With One's Work*, by Anthony Buono. *Emmanuel*, September 1997.
- *Work*, by E.C. Vacek. *New Dictionary of Theology*, 1990.
- *Catechism of Catholic Church*, numbers 2427-2433.

Closing Prayer

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, exposition is made during the opening hymn. When the hymn is concluded, the assembly kneels in silence for several minutes. During this silence, the community welcomes the presence of the Risen LORD before them in the Blessed Sacrament and within them as the LORD'S own body

Opening Song:

- “You Are Our Holy Bread,” by Michael Joncas or
- “You Satisfy the Hungry Heart” (Gift of Finest Wheat) by Omer Westendorf

Opening Prayer:

God our Creator,
it is your will that humanity
accept the duty of work.
In your kindness,
may the work we begin
bring us growth in this life
and help to extend the kingdom of Christ.
Amen.

First Reading:

From the Encyclical Letter of Pope Saint John Paul II on *Human Work*:

The Christian finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted [the] Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of the “new heaven and the new Earth,” in which [humans] and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil – and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand, the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.

Period of Silence:

Response: Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Response after each set of two verses:

O LORD, our God, how wonderful is your name in all the Earth!

Second Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

Period of Silence:

Litany:

Our Father, the creator	have mercy on us.
Our Father, the sower	have mercy on us.
Our Father, the vinedresser	have mercy on us.

Jesus, the redeemer	have mercy on us.
Jesus, the good shepherd	have mercy on us.
Jesus, the carpenter	have mercy on us.

Holy Spirit, our advocate	have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, our counselor	have mercy on us.
Holy Spirit, our teacher	have mercy on us.

For the Earth that we toil	blessed by God forever.
For the seas and rivers that we fished from	blessed by God forever.
For the cattle that we raise	blessed by God forever.
For the mineral resources that we mine	blessed by God forever.
For the structures that we build	blessed by God forever.
For the technology that we develop	blessed by God forever.
For the homes that we care for	blessed by God forever.
For the people that we serve	blessed by God forever.
For the communities that we minister to	blessed by God forever.

The Lord's Prayer:

If in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community occurs after the prayers. Consider using the ritual books for Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside of Mass (2024) that provides this ritual texts of prayer, praise, The Lord's Prayer, etc.

Incensing of the Blessed Sacrament and the assembled community: optional

Benediction: optional

Reposition: optional

Closing Prayer:

LORD God,
hear the prayers of those who gather at your table of unity and love.
By doing the work you have entrusted to us
may we sustain our life on Earth
and build up your reign in faith.
To you be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Song: “LORD of All Hopefulness,” by Jan Struther

Dismissal with some sign of peace:

