



LET US PRAY – REFLECTIONS ON THE EUCHARIST

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During this Year of the Eucharist, I offer a series of articles on Eucharistic Spirituality: Source of Life and Mission of our Church. Article #7, *Eucharist and Reconciliation*.

Eucharistic dining helps us appreciate how we need reconciliation in our personal lives and invites us to be agents of reconciliation in our world.



I think of the meal Jesus had with tax collectors and sinners, hosted in his home by Matthew, tax collector and nefarious crook turned into a follower of Jesus – described in Matthew's gospel (9:13). The text says *many* tax collectors came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. You may recall the guests had unsavory reputations, they were reviled by Jews because of their perceived greed and collaboration with the Roman occupiers.

Yet, it's in just such dining practice that Jesus shows his solidarity with these people, and makes the point, as well, that eucharistic dining – and its enactment in life - is inauthentic unless it is as inclusive and welcoming as was Jesus' own dining practice.

The Pharisees, in the gospel story, who, in fact, may really have been Christians in the eighties when the gospel was written who harbored pharisaical attitudes, complain.

Jesus responds with the presumption that *everyone* is in need of healing. *No one* is righteous. *All* need to repent. "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

It's good for us to hear this when we reflect on Eucharist, for Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation are closely related.

Clearly, our church's tradition holds firmly that *THE* sacrament of reconciliation is eucharist. Eucharist is the primordial sacrament of forgiveness. So much so that church discipline prohibits the celebration of this sacrament within a eucharistic liturgy.

At the same time, our tradition sees a close relationship between eucharist and this sacrament. John Paul II referred to this in his Encyclical on the Eucharist: "Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the cross..., it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, and for a personal response to the appeal made by St. Paul: 'We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.'"(No. 37)

The whole purpose of Vatican II's reform of this *Rite of Penance*, as it is technically called, was that in it we might experience Jesus' healing and love more effectively.



In the sacrament of reconciliation we encounter Jesus, the risen Lord, Jesus who heals and is compassionate. We come with humility and openness, with transparency and honesty. Our hope is that this encounter may generate in us the energy to proclaim and live more fully the mercy and reconciliation of our compassionate God.

We come aware of our personal fragility, our dark side, our sinfulness. God embraces us, most especially, in this condition. We come aware that we are not as righteous as we can be. That we need Jesus' healing. We need to repent.



We would have been welcome guests at Matthew's dinner party!

How fortunate we are to be so loved by our God!

All that being true, let us remember, also, that Eucharistic dining empowers us to become agents of reconciliation in our world.



The experience we had for more than two weeks as a country last Spring in the wake of George Floyd's monstrous death by white police springs to mind. Protests erupted globally, as well.

College leaders called for societal change and urged their communities not to turn to violent protests against racism and police brutality. Activists gathered for more than two weeks to express outrage at racial inequality and injustice.

Pope Francis spoke out: "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." A day or so later, the Vatican stated bluntly that racial injustice is as much a moral offense as abortion.

In his Trinity Sunday homily (June 7, 2020), Cathedral pastor, Fr. Michael G. Ryan, preached: "At this time when our nation is being torn apart by the gaping, unhealed wound of racial prejudice, racial inequality, and racial injustice, our embrace of the other must not only be one of love – it must also be one of justice, it must be an embrace that affirms the unique value and equality of each and every human person, an embrace that says passionately and unequivocally that Black Lives Matter, an embrace that is just as passionately committed to **making** Black Lives Matter! And, you know, my friends, this is not an option. If we are to call ourselves Christian, it is an imperative."

Eucharistic dining moves us to embrace this conviction, and resultant action, in the power of non-violent love, healing, and reconciliation - whether the issue is racist or otherwise demeaning and discriminatory.

May we find our eucharistic dining strengthened in encounters with the risen Jesus in the sacrament of reconciliation. And may our encounter with the risen Jesus at the table of eucharist deepen our commitment to justice making, unity, peace and reconciliation in our broken world.



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