

# SEEKING CHRIST'S PEACE: ON CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Talk 14 (04/20/24)

Following up on the teaching of the Catechism (n.2711) about the connection of contemplative prayer with the Eucharistic liturgy, I want to take up the connection between Eucharistic adoration and contemplative prayer.

In our journey into mature charity, we are to seek Jesus in the many loving ways he personally gives himself to us, and makes himself present. These include in the Mass, in adoration, and in contemplative prayer.

The first point to make is about the connection between adoration and the Mass. Since the Mass is "the source and summit of the Christian life," as the council fathers taught (SC n.11), the instructions on worship and adoration of the Eucharist since Vatican II have been to assist and direct the faithful to see in them the way to increase their participation in the Mass, with a greater esteem of the Mass, itself. [This is very clear in the instructions *Eucharisticum mysterium*, 1967 (n.3) and Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside of Mass, 1973 (nn.1-2).] And so the goal of adoration is in the Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. This is a very important point to keep in mind for our adoration and contemplative prayer are directed to a Eucharistic life, into Christ's Paschal mystery.

With that dynamic in mind, we can begin with the truth about the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In the monstrance or in the tabernacle, is the body and blood of Jesus, as faith tells us. By way of concomitance, that which is existentially linked with his body and blood is locally present also: his human soul, and the very divinity of Jesus. In adoration, we open our hearts to him in this unique sacramental presence.

The graces of eucharistic adoration are graces of worship. They draw us into participating more fully in the Mass, where, in a sacramental way, he graciously allows us to offer with him, his unique sacrifice on the cross, as our worship, and to enter into its deep mysteries of his *agape/caritas/love*. Because we are united to him in baptism and its graces, we are called to offer ourselves with him, to the praise of the Father and for the good of the Church. Through him, with him and in him, be all glory to God the Father!

This offering of ourselves with Christ in love and receiving him in Holy Communion draws us into the transcendent love of the Son for the Father. This involves the opening and offering of our hearts to receive the transcendently magnificent goodness of God for us in Christ. Contemplative prayer is also such an offering of adoration, of reverence for the divine reality, its interior silence and hope.

Eucharistic adoration deepens our participation in the Mass, and draws us into contemplative prayer.

One of the frequent graces of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is a wonderful inner tranquility. This tranquility, we should note, is surprisingly rich with mysterious *invitations*: firstly, we usually note in it the goodness of God, for whom our souls were made; then, this peace invites us into the rich mysteries of the Mass, as was said above; and then into the depths of our hearts where he also invites us to meet him taking us to

himself.

Tranquility and peace from God is always an invitation to something more, for us wayfarers. As a consolation alone, his gifts of tranquility and peace remind us of God's perfect goodness and mercy, a taste of things to come, and also of mercy's help on the way. They are an invitation to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength—seeking union with the beloved as is love's nature, especially this ultimate love. Tranquility and peace are a taste of heaven, beyond restlessness and strain. We love them very naturally and want to enjoy them forever. Contemplative prayer often simply seems to be a way of peace into deeper peace, inviting us now, and forever into enjoying God as much as possible, and even welcoming dryness, so that that capacity in us may increase.

Adoration, of itself, has a bit of heaven's simplicity in it; it is us and God, apart from anything else to do, but for us to be there and be divinely loved. But that we see Jesus sacramentally present is a reminder that we are not yet seeing him face to face; there is more of the journey before us: sacramentally, and in the Church's mission.

Contemplation has that simplicity, also; it is us and God ... Yet, instead of a visible sign of the divine presence, there is an interior darkness where the mystical declaration is that God who exceeds our vision now, is drawing us creatures forth, raising the horizons of our hearts from the dimness of creation.

Silently present in a monstrance or the tabernacle, sacramentally destined to enter us in Holy Communion, it should be no surprise that Jesus wants us to receive his friendship with increasing depth, in graced silence and in our depths, in contemplative prayer.

The noblest loves of our hearts do draw us into their most interior realms as we find ourselves wondrously 'fit' for them. One only has to reflect briefly on our loves for beauty or wisdom or truth or justice to see this. We are persons made for and called to a communion of life with the Trinity, in the Son.

It is a teaching of the faith, that by the Holy Spirit, Christ indwells in us. This the Venerable Pope Pius XII taught in *Mystici corporis christi* (n.76) in 1943, building on the teaching of Pope St. Leo XIII in *Divinum illud munus* (n.9) in 1897. And so at the center of our souls, as the mystical Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila taught, the bridegroom of our hearts resides, calling us to the most profound friendships with Him, through the graces of the Holy Spirit, who is the fire of the Paschal offering of Jesus, joining God and mankind.

So the tranquility and peace we experience before the Blessed Sacrament is an invitation into the depths of the Mass, and into the depths of our hearts—places where that Sacred Heart makes himself present, audaciously and generously giving himself to us, and taking us to himself.

What, then, to be practical, should we do if either eucharistic adoration or contemplative prayer is possible at the same time and place, as in a chapel with perpetual adoration? One could ask God, for you might have a need or calling for one path over the other at a given moment; seek the Spirit's prompting. It seems to me there is nothing wrong with choosing the indwelling Lord, mindful that he gives himself to one in the Mass, and that that Sacrament and one's contemplative prayer are his loving gifts to prepare the Church for the inexpressible joy of seeing him face to face in glory.

