

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist



Power to Forgive

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I don't remember where I was when I heard a priest say in his homily, *Be what you see and believe that you are, the Body of Christ*. He was, of course, referring to Eucharist. His statement startled me. I was fairly young, and my understanding of the Eucharist was not comprehensive. I did believe in the "true presence" of Christ in the Eucharist, but his statement opened my eyes to the possibility of deeper truths. I knew at once that I did not completely understand Eucharist or its power to change me. The priest's words challenged me, yet I focused on only the first part of his statement, "Be what you see..." I was neither ready to explore the commitment attached to Eucharist, nor surrender my individuality. It would take time to be willing.

Years later, I attended a lecture given by Fr. Eugene La Verdere, SSS, a Scripture scholar, who spoke on the communal aspect of Eucharist. He used two simple portions of Scripture verses to support his teaching. The two phrases he used were from First Corinthians 11:17 and 11:25, "*when you assemble as Church,*" and "*do this in memory of me.*"

At the time of the lecture, the Church did not discourage Masses in private homes. I liked them. They were warm and hospitable. I saw nothing

exclusive about them. Fr. LaVerdier did not agree. He said that assembling for the *Lord's Supper* in a setting that excludes some of God's children is not assembling as Church, but as a select group of family and friends.

Basically, this is St. Paul's rebuke to the church in Corinth—that they had separated into factions *when they assembled*, and further, they embarrassed the poor, who went hungry, while others had plenty to eat. Paul says it would be better for them to eat at home because these meals clearly were not the *Lord's Supper*.

But when all are welcome, then the assembly becomes Church and authentic mission and ministry flow from this union. This Eucharistic Church serves and preserves God's creation, both animate and inanimate, "*in memory of Christ.*" (1Cor. 17-34)

Recalling our Baptismal identity helps us to function as the Body of Christ. Since all have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, and all are clothed with Christ, our "doing" (mission and ministry) flows from our "being" (Body of Christ) and celebrating Eucharist in radical equality. Our gene pool may be different, but our creator is the same. When we form Church, there is no distinction between Western European and Asian, learned and illiterate, rich and poor, etc., because no distinction exist (Gal 3:26-28 paraphrased).

The transforming power of the Eucharist is real! All we have to do is accept it and be willing participants in the transformation process. As Catholic, Christian, Franciscan, we are called and sent – one in body, one in Christ – into the world. May we see

what is ours to do and have the courage to do it. Saint Francis would require nothing more and would expect nothing less. *Think of a valued relationship that has been lost because of conflict or misunderstanding. What can you do to rebuild it? Take responsibility for your part in the rift. If you cannot repair the damage, pray for the relationship and stay open to reconciliation.*

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Power to Forgive

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In Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus, 1st edition copyright 2005, a synonym for the noun *penance* is FORGIVENESS. If we are indeed Brothers and Sisters of Penance, forgiveness is not an option. Forgiveness is a large part of who we ARE!

Ratherius of Verona (887-974) *spoke to the penitent to be attentive to the command of Christ concerning pardon – Besides all these ways of meriting the pardon of God there is another way that was instituted by the Lord himself "...Forgive and you shall be forgiven."*

Yet daily, we journey in an environment of rudeness and hostility – opinionated, stiff-necked co-workers, angry drivers, school violence, child abuse, neglect, wars and rumors of wars. We read or listen to stories of kidnappings, rape, murder, and car bombings. We are involved in or know those

who have had their children, your friends, killed in drive by shootings, drug overdoses, and suicide. On a smaller scale we have neighbors whose animals eliminate in our yard, young people skateboarding and bike riding on the lawn. As students we have had our lockers sabotaged, term paper ideas stolen and library books taken leaving us to pay the fines. Parents divorce; younger siblings borrow and break our things. College student gets their laptops, Ipods, and bikes stolen on campus, while trying to concentrate on that next term paper or project that is due.

SO – where do we get the strength and courage to forgive, move on and start over? *At the table of the Lord!* “Whoever wants to persevere (in the way of the Lord) let him receive our Lord. He is the bread that will nourish your failing strength, that will sustain you...” St. Peter Julian Eymard, SSS.

I find forgiving others difficult, therefore, I find meditating on the Lord’s Prayer a powerful tool to keep me on the right track. Hearing and saying the words, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” compels me to embrace forgiving others, if I expect to be forgiven by Our Lord. This beautiful prayer is recited communally at each and every celebration of the Eucharist. At Mass I listen, participate in and get fed with the Words and Body and Blood of Jesus, which infuse me with the power to forgive.

Without eating the Body and Blood “you do not have life within you”...the life that gives me the strength to forgive.

As a young person, you might not be going to Sunday Mass because your parents do the

driving and they are not going. Confide in them your need for strength in this area of forgiveness and your need to receive the nourishing food of the Lord. If you don’t tell them that the Eucharist is important to you, they will never know. If you are able to drive yourself, recommit yourself to weekly, if not daily Mass and Communion.

1. Who or what do you need to forgive?
2. How long has it been since your last celebration of the Eucharist?
3. How long has it been since you received Communion?
4. Do you need to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
5. Do you need to leave your gifts at the altar and ask your brothers and sisters for forgiveness? Or to tell them you forgive them?

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Power to Forgive

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As this article is being written, the world once again witnesses an act of terrorism in the bombing of the public transportation system in London. We are reminded, in this act, of all that has come before it: the devastating attacks of September 11th, the bombing of Afghanistan, and the continuing bloodshed taking place in Iraq. Let alone the violence that comes to us within our own local

communities and, perhaps, even within our own selves. In February 2003, I was living in Washington, DC. It was a time of one of the high terrorism alerts when “Home Depots” within a hundred mile radius of the 495 beltway were out of stock of black plastic sheeting and duct tape. Everywhere you went the conversation centered around the heightened security alert. Then on the morning of February 27, I read the morning news of the death of children’s television host Fred Rogers in Pittsburgh. If the word *spiritual* has meaning in any living person, Mister Rogers embodied it. In the midst of the “conflict and division” that is a part of our everyday world, in his death, as he did for countless numbers of children and adults in his life, Mister Rogers had us stop, and reflect. For the first time in days or weeks, we stopped talking about terrorism and “dirty bombs” and talked about this “gentle” man who first asked us to be his neighbor.

In an interview Mister Rogers gave in 2001, he talked about a professor he had in the seminary and how this man changed his way of thinking. Many years after the seminary, Mister Rogers would visit this professor in a nursing home. Once, after they were finished praying, Mister Rogers asked Dr. Orr about a line in the hymn “*The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. For, lo, his doom is sure. ... one little word will fell him?*” Dr. Orr, what is that one thing that would wipe out evil?” The old professor stated: “Evil simply disintegrates in the presence of forgiveness.

When you look with accusing eyes at your neighbor, that is what evil would want, because

the more the accuser - which, of course, is the word Satan in Hebrew - can spread the accusing spirit, the greater evil spreads." Dr. Orr said, "On the other hand, if you can look with the eyes of the Advocate on your neighbor, those are the eyes of Jesus."

The man who dedicated his life to teaching us how "to be neighbor" had me stop and reflect on what it means to have the eyes of the Advocate. As Catholics, we center so much of our faith on this that we do weekly or daily. We share the bread, the cup. We bring ourselves to the table of the Lord and we share in the gift of life. We hear the stories from Scriptures that tell us that our God is not a vengeful God; our God is a loving God. Genesis tells us that we are created in the image of God. The image not of a God who is a dictator, but of a God who is constantly beckoning us to come. To realize that we have within us the power of scripture, the power of the Eucharist. As the bread and wine are transformed, so we are changed. We are called to become what we eat.

St. Francis in his writings would tell his followers that in the Eucharist we find a God who is always offering us love. Both Francis and Clare will tell us that in the Eucharist the work of the Incarnation is ever-happening. And that the Eucharist is our main source of reconciliation. In this celebration, we are intimately invited to take part in the Incarnation (God's offering of love to the world). We are called not to hoard this gift jealously, but as we take leave of our celebration, we are called to have within us the eyes of the Advocate, the eyes of Jesus. Realizing that God sees the

world through human eyes. If we spend our lives accusing, whose work do we do?

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist



Power to Forgive

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We have lots of verbs that have to do with work—to dig, to build, to serve, to compile, to research, to compute, to study, to run, to organize, to compose, to bake, to clean, to raise children, to farm, to pray, and a host of others. To forgive, repeatedly, is part of the work of our spiritual journey. Sometimes it is an easy thing to do. Other times, when hurts are very deep and/or have profound affects upon our lives, this process is a very difficult one involving lots of time, prayer, and grace.

Who among us has not experienced situations that have wounded us emotionally? Sources of these perceived injuries to our personhood could be family (birth, adopted, &/or Franciscan), friends, co-workers, parishioners, clergy, religious, neighbors - really any person with whom we interact, even if it is only for a moment. Our pride and our attitude about how people who respect us *should* treat us seem to be at the root of whether the words or actions of another are perceived as positives or negatives by each of us.

Christ is our most powerful model as we seek spiritual guidance for the forgiveness process. He asked God to

"forgive them. They know not what they do," as he was being crucified. Frequently people who have hurt us emotionally have not done so deliberately and may not even know their words or actions caused us emotional or spiritual pain. Each time we pray the "Our Father," we are asking God to forgive us as we forgive our brothers and sisters. Scripture assures us that God's forgiveness is total and unconditional. So, it would seem, our forgiveness needs to be total and unconditional. That is an amazingly difficult process, at times, depending on what happened and given that our pride gets our mind racing very rapidly to help us rationalize how the other person was wrong and we were right. And, often, this may all be about expectations and perceptions. We have an expectation of how some interaction should play out so that our dignity and self-respect will be preserved. And then things don't go that way.

Okay, now what?

Perhaps some examples of how Francis handled circumstances involving peace making and pardon will give us some guidance. Henri d'Avranches writes Francis was "Compassionate and lenient to everyone...swift and prompt with pardon...Slow and cool when it came to anger." Once Francis and some of the brothers approached a bishop for permission to preach in his city. The bishop became angry saying, "Brother, I preach to my people and that is enough!" Francis bowed his head and went outside but came back later. When the annoyed bishop asked what he was doing back, Francis answered, "My Lord, if a father throws his son out by one door,

he should come back by another.” The bishop recognized the humility of Francis and gave permission to preach.

Francis prayed for the salvation of Brother Elias, despite the fact that Brother Elias did not conduct the affairs of the Order the way Francis had planned and expected.

Article 16 of the Rule directs us to “esteem work as a gift.” To help us progress through the process of forgiveness, no matter how much or how little time it takes, we have gifts from God. We have the complimentary sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Our God, in infinite wisdom, knew, given our human condition, that the process of forgiveness would be some of the most difficult work we ever do here on earth. So we are given the gift of graces as we repeatedly become reconciled in right relationship with God, our earthly sisters and brothers, and receive our heavenly brother, Christ.

Examples taken from [Francis of Assisi 3 volumes](#)

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist



Power to Forgive

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After making a few Fraternal Visits, I was musing about how dysfunctional some fraternities seem to be. Then I started to think about how God in his gentleness uses the dysfunctional to build bridges of graces and forgiveness. Peter was a bit hot tempered; Paul was in poor health; Martha worried a lot;

Thomas had doubts; John the Baptist was eccentric, to say the least; Timothy was timid; James and John, sons of Zebedee, had an intrusive, overbearing mother; Matthew was a hated tax collector; Simon belonged to a terrorist party and they, along with others, they were all a part of God’s plan of redemption through His son Jesus. In a way – this group/family was basically the first Fraternity. Not much different from some of what we come across on Pastoral and Fraternal Visits - with one exception. The exception was that the twelve apostles, chosen by Jesus, were about to bring something into the world that would redefine a sin offering. At their last supper together they had the “Real Presence” of Christ before them. How awesome it must have been when Jesus took some bread, said a blessing, broke it, and giving it to them said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.” The “Real Presence” left all of mankind the “Real Presence” in the Eucharist and redeemed all of mankind before their eyes.

From that awesome last supper to our present day, families and fraternities, we are called by our Rule in a special way to, “...seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said, “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood,” should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic

life.” (Rule, Article 5) Within this “Transforming Power of the Eucharist” is an action response to our daily lives, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Jesus left each one of us the “Power to Forgive.” Certainly, he imparted to the Apostles the authority to not only forgive, but to reconcile sinners with the Church – “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:19) But, for us who are of human frailty, it is necessary that this reconciliation, conversion, be carried out daily. With a sense of whimsical wisdom, Jesus leaves us with the prayer to the Father: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Mt 6:12) He then throws us a little hook to think about: “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt 6:14) So, on a daily basis we have the “Power to Forgive” others and indeed free them from anxiety, guilt and apprehension. Caution though: if we fail to forgive others, we should be aware that we are cursing ourselves by praying this prayer – the Our Father. In my life as a Secular Franciscan, I find the workings of Our Father humbling. At this stage of my life, I have taken an inventory of what I have to offer in praise and thanksgiving to my Creator. The only things that I truly have of my own are my sins (which are always before me) and my opinions. Both are truly worthless. (I do believe that some of my opinions are rather cool though. Especially those on pride.) However, any and all good that comes out of any of my actions is truly

nothing but being a part of building a bridge where Jesus could walk across from His heart to yours. As family, individual, fraternity and community, we must always understand that the “Power of Forgiveness” is a decision, not a feeling. It is to be used daily.

In the spirit of Jesus, Francis, Clare and the Sacred Heart may we always keep in mind that - everything will be all right in the end. If it is not all right, it is not the end. So, keep going on your Franciscan spiritual journey!

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist



Power to Forgive

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In the Garden of Eden, mankind was entrusted by God to care for all creation. Our Catechism instructs us that as stewards of creation we have the responsibility to be collaborators with God’s will and divine plan by our prayers, actions and sufferings. However, because of original sin we are imperfect stewards and all of creation is also in need of redemption. But, God’s divine plan is for the recreation of our world through our savior, Jesus Christ.

As Secular Franciscans we look to St. Francis, the Patron Saint of Ecology, as our role model for environmental stewardship. It has been recounted that St. Francis’ many acts of mercy included compassion for nature, such as the following examples:

+ Sparing the extinguishments of fire

- + Walking with reverence over rocks
- + Forbidding cutting down a whole tree as it might sprout again
- + Insisting that portions of the garden be left undisturbed to enable wildflowers to flourish
- + Picking up worms along the road so they would not be trampled
- + Befriending the wolf at Gubbio

Francis is an exemplary model of stewardship of creation based on compassion and mercy, of which a key component is the power to forgive. Because we live in an imperfect world, we, as Francis did, sometimes have to suffer in many ways inconveniences, hardships and dangers of nature. But, Francis was able to forgive these offences and see the good (i.e., the imprint of God) in nature and everyone. He saw the sign of internal life in a flame although he, at times, suffered from the pain of fire. He saw the symbol of Christ in a rock, although he must have been bruised when he was rebuilding God’s house with stones. He empathized with the wolf at Gubbio who needed sustenance to survive, though the wolf was a threat to the village and himself. Francis relished the harshness of the biting wind, snow and other discomforts of the weather.

Yes, Francis was a good steward of God’s creation, even when it required personal discomfort and sacrifice. He saw the world around him through the merciful, forgiving and loving eyes of Jesus. It was Francis’ devotion to the Eucharist that empowered him to see God’s hand in all creation and to respond with love and mercy instead of bitterness.

As stewards of creation, we, also, must be able to forgive all that offends us. This includes forgiving those who exploit natural resources, pollute the environment and otherwise endanger the ecology of the earth by environmental abuse and/or neglect. We should consider again the example of Francis, who showed us how to be environmental peacemakers (e.g., he facilitated compromise and peace at Gubbio). As participants in a society of over-consumption, sometimes referred to as “affluenza,” we must also repent and ask God’s forgiveness for our environmental sins. We should seek the sacrament of reconciliation and pray for the ability to change and become better environmental stewards. This ecopenance process will bear the fruits of universal kinship with all of creation, simple living as well as environmental peacemaking. Such a radical transformation from environmental sinners to environmental stewards, however, can only occur by the empowerment of the Eucharist to forgive and to seek forgiveness. We must follow the example of Francis whose devotion to the Eucharist transformed his heart to see God’s divine plan in all of creation and to live his life in accordance with this sacred vision.

Familiar Quotes

La Rochefoucauld

Nothing is given so profusely as advice.
We frequently forgive those who bore us; but can’t forgive those whom we bore.