When we sit in adoration of the Holy Eucharist, we witness the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament and the Sacrifice he made for us under the appearances of bread and wine. The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides profound teachings on the Eucharist and explains that it occupies a unique place as “The Sacrament of Sacraments” (1211).

On Holy Thursday of 2003, Pope John Paul II published his encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, which is an explanation of how “The Church Draws Her Life From the Eucharist.” This document serves as the clarion call for all of us to celebrate “The Year of the Eucharist” (October 2004 October 2005). Why is the Eucharist so important and why are we as Catholics in celebration of it? Because, the Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian Life” (1324), the entirety of the Church, namely Christ himself, is embodied in the Eucharist. When we participate in the Holy Mass, we witness Christ's Perfect Sacrifice for us, and in Holy Communion, we are united with Christ in his true Body and Blood. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we recognize that God is Love. God created humankind out of love for us and, fundamentally, calls us to love him and each other. This unique authority and gift allows us to perfectly love as our Creator intended. Love leads to Christian Holiness. This is a call to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity. This spiritual progress “tends toward evermore intimate union with Christ”(2013 2014).

Love extends beyond our love for each other to everything in the universe. We need not look further than The Apostles’ Creed to recognize that God created both the Heaven and the Earth. Creation is, therefore, “the beginning and the foundation of all of God's work” (198). We, as followers of Christ, have been commanded to tend to the garden that God created (Genesis 2:15). We are to be stewards and demonstrate our love for God by preserving his Creation. Pope John Paul II clearly understands this and perfected the teachings of the Church by issuing his landmark statement The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility on December 8, 1989. It is a comprehensive, logical, insightful, and spiritual proclamation that reverberates with urgency.

As Franciscans, we have both a theological and historical connection to nature. It is not coincidental that our namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, is the Patron Saint of Ecology. Even though we are all flawed and are sinners, we can demonstrate our love for God and his Creation by honoring nature. It’s is not a task that is beyond the ability of any of us. When you go for a walk bring a trash bag and pick up cans, papers, and other refuse. Recycle, use public transportation or carpool. Buy organic, compost or perform manual labor instead of employing motorized conveniences. The list goes on-and-on and stems from common sense and simplicity in all things. God simply loves us more than any of us will ever realize. Your simple selfless acts are a testament to the love of God and his Creation.
to love not only those who hurt us or that we don’t care for, but also those people we don’t even know. He would later go on to give a good example of His words. He would die a horrible death to save sinners and would forgive all those who crucified Him. What a tremendous example of “unconditional love.” The life of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jewish woman exterminated by the Nazis at Auschwitz in 1943, at the age of 29, is another example of unconditional love. Although she was of the Jewish faith, you will be able to see the love of the Eucharist at work in her heart and words. An Interrupted Life is the title of the diary she kept the last two years of her life. In one entry, she wrote to a Jewish friend who was understandably embittered and hateful of the Germans. “Kaas, we have so much work to do on ourselves that we shouldn’t be thinking of hating our so-called enemies. Each of us must turn inward and destroy in himself all that he thinks he ought to destroy in others. And remember, every atom of hate we add to this world makes it still more inhospitable.”

In another entry she wrote, “All disasters stem from us. Why is there a war? Perhaps because now and then, I might be inclined to snap at my neighbor. Because I and my neighbor and everyone else do not have enough love. Yet, we could fight war, and all that grows out of it, by releasing each day, the love that is shackled inside us and giving it a chance to live.

Let me close with a thought from Leo Buscaglia, the noted educator, author and lecturer, “You find love by reaching out to people, especially lonely people. You reach out to them not only with love, but with patience, trust and understanding.” I believe this and know that you find love because LOVE BEGETS LOVE. In my humble opinion, this is what “The Transforming Power of the Eucharist - the Power to Love” is all about.

### The Transforming Power of the Eucharist

**Power to Love**

By Dale Anesi, SFO

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Celebrating the Year of the Eucharist can be an occasion to reflect, not only on what receiving the Eucharist means to us personally, but also how we can take what we receive and bring it to the rest of the world. This is a time, as Pope John Paul II says, for “starting afresh in Christ.” It is a time for us to bring the “Transforming Power of Love” to all whom we meet. This corresponds to the origins of the Eucharist, when, during the Last Supper, Jesus pledged His love and promised to never leave His people. What does this mean to us now? How can we pledge our love and use it to transform the youth of today? Think back to your own childhood. Was there someone who had an influence on your life? It could be your parents, grandparents or another relative. How about a teacher? Someone from the church you attended? These people had a positive effect on your life. The lessons taught by them helped you be-come the person you are today.

In my youth, it was my grandfather who influenced me most. He is a very quiet man, but his actions and the way he carried himself was, and is, a very good example for me. I do not remember his ever telling me that he loved me, but I do know that he wanted the best for me and he always tried to help me in any way that he could. I remember the time he came to see me in a Christmas play. He and my grandmother were the only two family members to come and see me perform in the play. Nothing was said, but the fact that he was there was powerful to me. The reason is, that was the day my sister and I were going to visit him for Christmas. He drove from Pennsylvania to pick us up. That was the “Power of Love” for me.

What can you do for a young person in your life? Know that it is your presence in their life that’s important to them.

Besides that, here are some things for you to try: Go to our web site at www.franciscanyouthusa.com and check out our Lenten 2005 “H2O Project” and participate.

**Life Teen -** this is an international Catholic ministry that serves the Church and leads teens closer to Christ. Perhaps your parish is currently running a Life Teen program. If so, volunteer to help. If not, maybe another parish close by is. Better yet, start one yourself.

**Youth Conferences –** attend a Youth Conference in your area. These conferences allow you to meet others interested in providing programs specifically for our Youth. Check on-line or with your local Diocesan office.
Big Brother/Big Sister – this organization helps children reach their potential through professionally supported, one-to-one relationships. This is one of the premier mentoring programs around today. There are other things going on at the parish level. Perhaps the youth group is putting on a play that needs attendance. Parties can be given for the altar servers. Some parishes dismiss some of the youth for the special scripture readings during Mass. Some have an affiliated school.

How can you bring the Transforming Power of Love to our youth? You are only limited by your imagination. The most important thing is that you do something.

Like the saying attributed to St. Francis, “Preach the Gospel always; if necessary use words.”

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist

Power to Love

By Pauline Cahalan, SFO
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I don’t know about anyone else but when I contemplated writing an article about the power to love, the Eucharist, work, and Franciscan Spirituality, of these deep, broad, profound and dynamic subjects, the task seemed really daunting for me, a Secular. However, as has happened every time I’ve had to write anything for publication amongst Franciscans (you’d think I’d get trusting enough that nagging thoughts about how to do this would not come as often), the Holy Spirit just moved right in. At our SFO meeting last night, I mentioned to Deacon Sean that I was about to do this and could use some suggestions. Turns out he has actually preached about this. One of his first sentences was the inspiration for what follows.

We have all heard the saying, “You are what you eat.” At no time in our lives is that more appropriate saying than when we consume the body and blood of Christ. Of course, we don’t literally become Christ, but we are God’s earthly daughters and sons. We are the hands, hearts, and physical presence of a Christ no longer on earth but still needing the work of our hands done. For many of us, we receive the Eucharist into our own hands, those same hands with which we do God’s work.

We receive Christ each time we receive the Eucharist. This is one of the joys of the Catholic Church. We don’t just receive representations or symbols. We actually receive Christ! What an amazing gift! Along with that gift come responsibilities.

No matter whether we put out our hands to receive the host and handle the cup, or open our mouths for Christ to be placed on our tongues, this realization gives one pause about the conditions of our hands and mouths if they are going to receive Christ and be Christ to others as we go about our lives.

What loving things are we doing with our hands? Is our touch always a loving touch? When we handle anything do we say a quick prayer for those folks whose hands toiled to make possible what we have, whether in an industrial, farming, or commercial setting? Do we take care of our hands so they may continue to receive Christ and do the work we were put here to do?

What about our mouths? What comes out of them in the way of words, tone of voice, openness, and ability to close the mouth, be still, and really listen to others? Depending on the topic and our thoughts about it, it may be major, but loving, work to keep one’s mouth shut at times. At my job or in fraternity, am I one who unites or divides during discussions, meetings, lunch times, emails, etc.? Do I spread gossip or stop it and verbalize my rationale to those who think I should be the recipient of such goings on?

Carol Gentile, SFO, is quoted as saying, “When the image of Christ in you meets the image of Christ in me, the Word of the Lord is made flesh and together we can form the perfect Body of Christ.”

As Francis lived his life, after hearing his calling from God, he worked really hard to see the image of Christ in everyone he met and strove to be of such countenance that others would see the image of Christ in him. This is fundamental to the spiritual journey we each walk.

I am truly grateful that God could see how much we would continue to need the presence of Christ in our daily lives, long after the Ascension, and gifted us the Eucharist. To me the Eucharist is truly God’s love for each of us made visible. May the grace of this wonderful Sacrament continue to sustain us as we make our daily journey doing whatever of God’s work we are led to do in that moment.
“Through the new life that Christ has bestowed on us, we can recognize one another as brothers and sisters, despite every difference of language, nationality and culture. In a word, by sharing in the one bread and the one cup, we come to realize that we are “God’s family” and that together we can make our own effective contribution to building a world based on the values of justice, freedom and peace.” (John Paul II World Day of Peace Message 2005 #12)

When we recognize all persons as brother and sister to us, we are practicing the virtue of solidarity that John Paul II defined as love going outward to embrace all persons in all nations. Solidarity is a Christian virtue since love of others, even enemies, is required of Christ’s disciples. (Matthew 5:43-48)

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive, in truth, the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest." (#1397)

Our Seraphic Father, Francis, as a result of his conversion, was able to look on all persons in the same loving, merciful way that God looked upon them. His further understanding of God’s love included all created things.

The Transforming Power of the Eucharist

Power to Love

By Carolyn Colburn, SFO
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Our Rule expresses it this way: "As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.” (Rule XIII)

Who are the “lowly,” and where can they be found? In the US, the working poor can be called “lowly.” The working poor work full time but do not earn a large enough wage to cover expenses for food, clothing and shelter in the area in which they live. They must turn to charities for the necessities of life. The statistics for the United States are shocking. Almost 35 million Americans, 12% of the population, live below the poverty line of $18,810 a year for a family of four, $12,000 for a family of two, $9,000 for a single person. A full-time worker earning the national average minimum wage of $5.15 an hour earns about $10,712 a year. Many minimum wage workers are single parents and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.” (Rule XIII)

Our Seraphic Father, Francis, as a result of his conversion, was able to look on all persons in the same loving, merciful way that God looked upon them. His further understanding of God’s love included all created things.

Among workers in the US, the working poor are truly “the least of these.” (Matthew 25:40)

How do we place ourselves on an equal basis with the “lowly?” We are present to them when we meet, and we advocate for them. SFOs can join with the US Catholic Bishops in their program of legislative advocacy. If the program is in place in your parish, join in it. If it is not, you can join with other Secular Franciscans in our SFOPJNet, which is an SFO peace and justice information and advocacy network. Send an e-mail to me, and I will help you get started.

Want to Give your Fraternity an Epiphany Party next Jan?

What is needed? A place: A fraternity member’s home. Gifts: Everyone brings homemade of inexpensive gift marked for man, lady, either. Scriptures: One for each person on colored paper. Put in a box. Franciscan Saints Names: One for each person on different colored paper. Put in another box. Blank paper strips: For each member in two different boxes for everyone attending to write their name on one blank and the name of a deceased person on the other blank. Prayer and Song to Holy Spirit: To be said and sung by all. As each person arrives: Write their name on a sheet of paper. You will use this sheet to call up each person to receive a scripture, a saint for the year, the name of person to pray for, a deceased person to pray for. These are picked from the boxes and each read out loud by four different people. Each person picks their own gift. Serve potluck dessert and beverages.