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Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP, Director    Nov. - Dec. 2020, Vol 73, No 6    Western Dominican Province

## KNOWING JESUS THROUGH THE LUMINOUS MYSTERIES PART FOUR: THE INSTITUTION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

By Fr. Joseph Sergott, OP

*"Then, taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: 'This is my body to be given for you. Do this as a remembrance of me.'" (Luke 22:19)*

The Institution of the Holy Eucharist is one of the most profound mysteries of the Rosary. In the Fifth Luminous Mystery, the Lord Jesus, while at the Last Supper, gave Himself to us in his Body and Blood as food for our earthly journey to sustain us both in body and soul. This "Manna from Heaven" is a sacrament and a sublime mystery given to Christians, and as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated, it is "the source and summit of the Christian life."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, "the other sacraments, as well as with every ministry of the Church and every work of the apostolate, are tied together with the Eucharist and are directed toward it."<sup>2</sup> So, the very life of the entire Church is linked to the Holy Eucharist and flows from it.

Pope St. John Paul II says that each of the Luminous Mysteries is "a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus."<sup>3</sup> [His emphasis] Nowhere is this statement more apropos than in the Institution of the Holy Eucharist, when on the night before he was to suffer and die on the cross, Jesus gave his Body and Blood to the Church as an everlasting remembrance. It was to be both a true meal and the living memorial of his sacrifice on the cross.

The Holy Eucharist perpetuates Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Jesus died once for all time, and left his Church a memorial of his death and resurrection as "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."<sup>4</sup> So, when we participate in the Mass, we are brought to the Last Supper, to the holy sacrifice of the cross.

But what was in the mind and heart of Our Lord when he gave us this tremendous gift? To uncover this mystery, we need to look at the Paschal Mystery in its fullness to see it. The Holy Eucharist is inextricably bound to the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Though, we need to back up even further and look at the mystery of the Incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas to see where the foundations of the Holy Eucharist lay.



*Inmaculada Concepción*  
Bartolomé Murillo circa 1675

We begin to uncover our mystery where it all began—at the crib. The Eternal Word, the divine Person who had no beginning and will have no end, took upon himself our human nature, body and soul, and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and placed himself under the obedience of Mary and Joseph to begin his journey to Calvary. In making himself vulnerable to mere human beings, God humbles himself and empties himself as he chooses an impoverished life on earth. So begins the ascent to the cross and our redemption.

St. Paul says it wonderfully: Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross! Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name ... JESUS CHRIST IS LORD! (Cf. Phi 2:6-11)

So, in the person of Jesus, we see vulnerability and sacrifice. As an infant, he understood what it meant to be hungry and thirsty—as we experience it. For the rest of his life on earth, he would experience these basic human needs; however, as he hung upon the cross, and cried out, "I thirst," (John 19:28) his emptiness would reach its apex where his experience of real human hunger and thirst intersected with his thirst for the redemption of the world. Fittingly then, with his impending sacrifice in mind, Our Lord proclaims, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Mary: Icon of Hope

By Fr. Luke Buckles, O.P.

[Fr. Luke Buckles, OP entered the Order of Preachers through the Western Province in 1972 and was ordained in 1978. After receiving his doctorate in theology, he taught at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology (DSPT). In 2003, he began teaching at the University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome where he had done his doctoral studies. In Fall of 2020, he returned home to the Western Province where he began teaching again at the DSPT.]

One of the titles in the Litany of Loreto for Mary is “cause of our joy”. We, the members of the Church, are called to live a life of faith, hope, and charity, and the fruits of charity are joy and peace. Now we are a pilgrim people in the Church moving from age to age in faithfulness to our Lord, the Good Shepherd. When our pilgrimage in hope is complete, we will live forever in charity and the deepest longing of our faith will be fulfilled in seeing the Lord face to face, our deepest hope will be realized and in this we will know eternal joy. During this pilgrimage as we continue to grow in charity, we need to be renewed each day in faith and hope. Taking the inspiration from Pope Benedict in his letter *Spes Salvi*. “Hope is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words “faith” and “hope” seem interchangeable.”<sup>1</sup> Hope saves because it brings what faith teaches and promises into the present moment.

This paper is a meditation upon Our Lady’s life as a series of ascending ever higher steps in hope in God’s promise which I am calling “icons of hope”. Each step invites her and ourselves with her, to move forward beyond what the human circumstances of that moment, our understanding, or previous experiences would be able to support with just ordinary human optimism. Mary is making these steps with a deep humble “fiat” let it be done to me. At each step this is her response in hope.

*The first Icon of Hope: The Annunciation.* This is our first meeting with the Blessed Virgin Mary (Luke 1: 26-38) At the mysterious encounter with the angel Gabriel and his greeting we read that: “She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean.” (Lk 1: 29) The angel Gabriel tells her not to be afraid and that she will conceive and bear a son. (Lk 1:31,32) Naturally not being married, Mary wonders how can this come about? “How can this be?” The angel tells her that the power of God will come upon her and her Son will be the Son of God. (Lk 1:36) This is our Lady’s first great step in hope. There is nothing in her life experience or the immediate human circumstances of her life which would permit this to happen. It is only in the power of Almighty God that this miraculous conception and birth will take place. In great hope she answers: “I am the handmaid of the Lord...let what you have said be done to me.” *Fiat*

Her hope in the Lord was confirmed in the most intimate manner. The first time she felt the baby Jesus move within her womb she knew in a profoundly personal way that she is a virgin and now she is with child. *Magnificat* “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour.... the Almighty has done great things for me.” (Lk 1:46,49) Imagine the joy and the peace at the moment of her Son’s birth, the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

*The Second Icon of Hope: Nazareth.* However, her steps in hope would take her even further into the mystery of divine love and Providence. From the witness of Sacred Scripture there followed the thirty years in Nazareth, the ordinary years, the day-by-day years. Living in a small village the Son of God, the Savior, the Eternal Word, learned how to speak, and the Way, the Truth, and the Life, learned how to walk. The Word “...through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him...” (John 1: 3) learned how to be a carpenter. How can this be?

Our Lady must have made so many acts of hope regarding the meaning of these thirty hidden, humble years in the life of her Son, the long-awaited Messiah. She lived these thirty years of ordinary life in a solitary hope which dwelt in her Immaculate Heart. Eventually, after these hidden thirty years she witnessed her quiet hope to be realized in a great and remarkable manner for all to see. When Jesus began his public ministry, His mother, Mary, surely heard of the wondrous signs and miracles: the sick were healed, the blind were seeing, the lame were walking, bread was multiplied to feed thousands and she herself witnessed when her son transformed water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Even the dead were revived. *Magnificat* “My souls proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour.... the Almighty has done great things for me.” (Lk 1:46,49)

*The Third Icon of Hope: The Cross at Calvary.* We know that the journey of Hope in the life of our Lady would bring light to illumine the darkest moments of human life: moments of suffering unbearable physical pain, injustice, the grief of a young mother standing by the excruciating slow and painful death of her Son. What must have been the thoughts of this young mother. Mary surely and painfully remembered times when her son fell learning how to walk, on this day when she saw him fall three times on his way to the Cross, she was not able to help him up. Maybe she remembered those times as a young boy Jesus wanting something to eat or drink when she was able to nourish his hunger and thirst. Now he thirsts desperately and she is not able to assuage his thirst. Maybe she thought of another widow whose son had been revived. Now, she is the poor widow and Jesus who brought life to the other widow’s son is himself now dying.

What must she have felt when she cradled the crucified and dead body of her son in her maternal arms? How many times she had held him as a baby and a young boy. *How can this be? How can this be?* Where is his Heavenly

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Father of whom Jesus spoke “who clothes the lilies of the field and takes care of the birds of the air...” (Mt. 6:25-34) There was no answer. Imagine the darkness surrounding Our Lady the painful first Good Friday night. The silence of the heavy darkness and sorrow of the first Holy Saturday. We do not know what was happening in the hearts of the disciples who fled in fear before Calvary, the sorrow crushing John and Mary Magdalene, but through this long darkness there still burned a small and gentle light of hope in Mary’s heart. Although every human support had been taken away except, the light of hope, which continued to bring to the incomprehensible darkness, the light of God’s promise to save His people through her crucified and buried Son.

In the pilgrimage of our lives we will also be led by the Spirit into the desert, where we are invited to make an act of hope which is not supported by our physical strength or our limited human understanding. This hope is in the Lord’s infinite love and power hidden in his Providence at that moment of the deserts, the dark nights, in our lives. The saints experienced the most profound spiritual growth not simply by what they accomplished cooperating with the gift of grace, invisibly and freely initiating, sustaining, and completing their good works, but rather in a lived hope through the desert, the dark nights, as St. John of the Cross called them in his writing. There are many examples of this hope in the lives and writings of the saints. Permit me to name three: John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux, and Thomas Aquinas.

One commentator has said concerning the great mystic, poet and doctor that:

John sees the spiritual life as this universal call to search constantly for union with God. It is a personal exodus from our own captivity to the promised land.... a firm, unrelenting, and enthusiastic search for union with God, which John calls a “better love,” that is, a desire for Christ that is greater than all other desires. This growth takes place principally if not exclusively in the nights, the transitions or crisis periods of our lives.<sup>2</sup>

St. Therese of Lisieux demonstrated a life of heroic charity, and great patience in her physical and spiritual suffering. Near the end of her pilgrimage she was brought through a profound dark night, a desert in which all she had was her hope in the Lord. She writes:

everything has disappeared.... when I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I want to believe.<sup>3</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas, as he received the Eucharist for the final time before he completed his pilgrimage of hope, was heard to say by those near him:

O price of my redemption and food for my pilgrimage, I receive you. For your sake I have studied and toiled and kept vigil. I have preached You and taught you Jesus whom I now behold veiled, I ask you to grant what I do thirst for that I may see your face unveiled, and that the sight of your glory may be my bliss.<sup>4</sup>

*The Fourth Icon of Hope: The Empty Tomb at Easter.* Imagine Our Lady’s joy when she saw her Risen Son for the first time. Everything has been brought to completion

in the earthly pilgrimage of her life. All is transformed in the Risen Christ. The light of hope which illuminated her way in ascending each of the great steps enabled her ever more profoundly to offer her *fiat*. The light of hope which was within her heart through the terrible suffering and death of her son and remained with her to illumine the long dark silence of the first Holy Saturday is now joined to the Eternal Light which illuminates the fulfillment of all hope.

Now, after Mary’s glorious Assumption and Coronation as Queen of Heaven and Earth she prays for us, her children still on our pilgrimage. She prays that each of our steps may be illuminated with that hope which will not disappoint us but will be eternally fulfilled in the Eternal light of her Risen Son. Mary pray for us, that in the most challenging dark nights in our lives, with the light of the hope that sustained you, we may say *fiat* with you and know eternal love, in our hope fulfilled. ■

1. Benedict XVI. *Spe Salvi*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice. 2007,4
2. Leonard Doohan, *The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching*. Washington D.C. Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1995, 46-7. 80.
3. St. Therese of Lisieux. *Story of A Soul*. Trans. John Clark OCD, Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1996, 213.
4. Mary Ann Fatula, OP., *Thomas Aquinas: Preacher and Friend*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993, 268.

## Note from the Director

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*Fr. Joseph Sergott, O.P.*

**Knowing Jesus - Luminous Mysteries** (Cont. from page 1)

remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” (John 12:24)

In the Old Testament there is a foreshadowing of the Holy Eucharist when God says to Moses, “I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you.” (Exodus 16:4) Psalm 78 describes this sacred event, “God rained manna upon them for food; grain from heaven he gave them. Man ate the bread of the angels; food he sent in abundance.” (Psalm 78:24-25)

The Prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of Jesus Christ with Eucharistic undertones, when he says, “All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; come, buy grain without money, wine and milk without cost! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what does not satisfy? Only listen to me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Pay attention and come to me; listen, that you may have life. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the steadfast loyalty promised to David.” (Is 55:1-3) In fulfillment of this prophecy, the Lord Jesus says, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” (Jn 6:35)

In John’s “Eucharist Chapter,” Chapter 6, there is a direct correlation with the Holy Eucharist and the manna of the desert received by the Hebrew people on their journey to the promised land. People from the crowd tell Jesus, “Our

ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" (John 6:31) Jesus responds by declaring, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world . . . I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst." (Cf. John 6:32-35)

In addition, Jesus proclaims, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." (John 6:51). When the Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52), Jesus doubles down and says, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him." (John 6:53-56)

Thus, following the Lord's teachings on the Holy Eucharist, it is a sacred truth of the Catholic Church that the Host that we eat and the Precious Blood that we drink, are truly the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—they are not just symbols!

The Catholic belief on the Holy Eucharist is well-defined in Sacred Scripture. To my Protestant brethren, I challenge you to look *in your own Bible* to find this sublime doctrine, because you will find it there lucid and clear. Do not be afraid of John 6: break it open and study it, and see how it correlates to other books in Scripture, especially the four Gospels, the miracles of the loaves, the writings of St. Paul, and the foreshadowings in the Old Testament.

In his article, "Unless you eat my body...: Is John 6:53 Symbolic or Literal?" Marcus Grodi, a former Presbyterian minister, speaks of his coming to understand and believe in the Catholic doctrine of the Holy Eucharist. Through the Holy Scriptures, he discerns and accepts the Catholic belief in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he carefully reviews the following texts: 1 Cor 11:17-34, 1 Cor 10: 14-22, Acts 2:42, Luke 24:27-35, Luke 22:19-20, and, of course, John 6:32-71.

We can pour through all the books of Sacred Scripture that teach us about the Holy Eucharist, and reflect especially upon the words of Jesus in the Gospels, but perhaps first we should go back to the beginnings of our own human experience: every person, even from infancy, knows what it means to be physically hungry. We can also experience what it's like to be spiritually hungry, though we don't often recognize the true nature of spiritual "hunger pains" as an emptiness within, which can be a true suffering. On the other hand, many people understand the feeling of spiritual hunger—they just don't know that there is an actual physical food that we can eat that satiates our hunger.

The gift of Holy Communion is God's answer to our spiritual (and physical) hunger. It is a physical food that is ingested and digested by our bodies in the natural way; yet, it is also a unique food in that it feeds the soul. When we partake in it, we participate in the divine and human life of Jesus Christ. Moreover, through the Body and Blood of Jesus we receive from God the grace needed in this life to live, persevere and grow in God's grace. It can be a *daily* remedy that fills our

hunger and satisfies us. Also, receiving the Holy Eucharist in our final hours is the single most valuable thing we can do before we die. It is the "Bread of Angels" that carries us to the next life.

St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the great saints of the Holy Eucharist, says, "Material food first changes into the one who eats it, and then, as a consequence, restores to him lost strength and increases his vitality. Spiritual food, on the other hand, changes the person who eats it into itself. Thus, the effect proper to this Sacrament is the conversion of a man into Christ, so that he may no longer live, but Christ lives in him; consequently, it has the double effect of restoring the spiritual strength he had lost by his sins and defects, and of increasing the strength of his virtues."<sup>6</sup>

This special gift of the Holy Eucharist will remain with the Church till the end of time. So, when we doubt God's presence in the Church and in our lives, we can always remember that Jesus Christ is present to us in a tangible way both physically and spiritually. God has not forgotten his people! He becomes present to us physically each time we celebrate the Mass. God knows our spiritual hunger and feeds us appropriately. He gives us Food for the journey.

As we pray and ponder the meaning of the Fifth Luminous Mystery, we can reflect upon the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and how God called her to enter into the Sacrifice of her Son. "The Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross, where she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, grieving exceedingly with her only begotten Son, uniting herself with a maternal heart with His sacrifice, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth."<sup>7</sup> When we approach the Lord to receive his Body and Blood at Mass, we also turn to Mary, who by her complete fidelity received Christ's sacrifice for the whole Church. She is the model for each of us, who are called to receive the gift that Jesus makes of himself in the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup> ■

1. *Lumen Gentium*, #11, Nov 21, 1964.
2. Pope Paul VI, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Dec 7, 1965
3. Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, #21, Oct 16, 2002.
4. Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #47, Dec 4, 1963.
5. Cf. Marcus Grodi, "Unless you eat my body...: Is John 6:53 Symbolic or Literal?", [chnetwork.org/2015/12/10](http://chnetwork.org/2015/12/10)
6. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Book IV of the Sentences*, d.12.2.a.11
7. *Lumen Gentium*, #58, Nov 21, 1964.
8. Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, #33, Feb 22, 2007

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