



Fr Paul Churchill's talk at the 50th Eucharistic Congress in Dublin 2012.

The Eucharistic presence of the crucified hero. With Mary we adore him.

The Eucharist: the presence to us of our crucified and Risen Lord

At the heart of what we are celebrating is the person of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is Jesus. This Eucharistic Lord is that same Lord who met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and who broke open for them the Scriptures and who broke the bread with them at the table (Lk 24:13ss). On that journey with them he used a phrase, which he was to repeat to the disciples in the Upper Room later that evening: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory" (Lk 24: 26,46).

The Lord Jesus we meet in the Eucharist is this same Lord who has been through the horror and trauma of the crucifixion but is now triumphant over his death. This is he whom the women met at the tomb. When his disciples fled after his arrest these women remained with Mary and St. John and persevered through the pain of the Cross in solidarity with Jesus. They witnessed an extraordinary event, horrible yes, but also uplifting as they witnessed his utterly heroic act in which he never said one bad word but carried it all with a nobility and dignity unparalleled. They nodded in agreement with the Centurion at the end when he said, "This truly was a good man, this was a Son of God" (Matt 27:54; Mk 15:39; Lk 23: 47).

Disciples rejoice in their Lord

We can understand why the women were so astonished, yes thrilled, at what they met outside the empty tomb. Once they met and knew him they bowed low and grasped his feet (Matt 28: 9) or sought to embrace him (Jn 20:16-17). Of course they did. They were just thrilled. They were overcome with joy, not so much for themselves but for Jesus himself, that he had not been destroyed but had conquered. It was more than the joy of finding a child who has been missing or getting miners alive out of a tomb when it was feared they were dead. Their joy was unbounded. The apostles were so slow to accept their word but when they met him eventually they too were overcome with joy.

And our worship of this Lord must also be full of joy for him. He is that noble Lord who took on our sins and suffered cruelly because of them, yet has conquered. And we too rejoice over Jesus' triumph and know that our sins didn't destroy him. In the Eucharist we meet him, as the one who endured the Cross but also triumphed, triumphed not only over suffering and death but also over our sins.

Eucharist creates communio since it is Jesus.

What united those early disciples was their crucified and risen Lord. More than anything else they were drawn to him by their love for him and their delight in his victory. He became a uniting force for them. Let us be honest. We see so many broken relationships and see so many communities divided and nations at war. We can even be broken and divided within ourselves and we seem unable to create unity on our own terms. In fact we cannot create communion without Christ. We see Europe trying to unite so that the divisions of the past may not visit us again, but what a struggle! However go to Lourdes for example and see so many people there from so many nations of Europe united as true brothers and sisters gathered around Mary's Son. It is only the person of Christ who can be the source of unity, of communio.

How well St. Paul spotted this. Christ reconciled all things in himself making peace by the blood of his Cross, breaking down the dividing walls that separate Jew and Gentile (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:12ss). The crucified and risen one who wins our hearts draws us to one another; he is the cause and creator of communion in the Church and in the world. And our gathering around him in the celebration of the Mass or in eucharistic adoration is a real expression of communio.



Eucharist speaks to us of the Cross as the way to the glory

“Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory!” These are deeply eucharistic words. They are what we celebrate at Mass. The separation of his Body and Blood symbolised by the two separate species on the altar represent sacramentally his brokenness on the Cross. In St. John’s Gospel the great sign of contradiction is presented forcibly in the moments after Jesus spoke of the Eucharist when the crowds found his teaching intolerable (Jn 6: 53-66). St John saw in him, as is represented to us in the vision of Knock, the Lamb of God.

And when we come before him in adoration it is the same. Before us is He who went through the pitiful Cross and now lives in glory. We worship him as the Lamb who is worthy to receive honour and glory and blessing. And from his Eucharistic throne he says to you and me, “If you want a crown of glory treasure your sufferings. If anyone wishes to be my disciple, let him take up his cross. The measure you give out is the measure you will get back”. Yes, our crown of glory is directly related to the level of sufferings we go through. Is that not why he said to the crowds, “Blessed are you poor: yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when you suffer so much on my account, for your reward will be great in Heaven” (Lk 6:20-23). And blessed are we in our present trials; they are the making of a new crop of saints.

We can never do justice to the Eucharist without also grasping the challenge of the Cross. St. Paul had a great sense of that too. “We preach Christ crucified ... I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2). “Far from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14). “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rm 8:18).

The new evangelisation must include the cross as central

Any true evangelisation must not evade or shirk the import of these words of our Eucharistic Lord, “And so you see, it was necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter his glory” (Lk 24:46). Yes, he is the risen Lord and his victory lifts all hearts and gives humanity hope in our struggle. But a denial of the way, the way of the Cross, would distort the deep truth Christ brought us. The modern world is into glitter, good feeling, the buzz, instant gratification, and things superficial. But in this world which will never be perfect and in which suffering and disappointment and death occur for us all it is the Gospel that gives hope in the face of troubles of all sorts that must be proclaimed unadulterated. People speak of the value of true love. That is good. We believe in a civilisation of love. But true love is proved in times of suffering. As Mother Teresa of Calcutta, now Blessed, says, “If you haven’t suffered you really haven’t loved.”

All true evangelisation must preach Christ crucified with its implications. As individuals and as a Church we will be attacked and accused of evil we do not believe in nor condone. People will not understand our faith and subject us to the judgement of mentally deficient or mad. But borne with Christ with nobility and dignity it will lead to the glory of God and our own crown of glory.

If we join Christ, brothers and sisters, in the struggle with evil we must take on board his words: “Was it necessary for the Christ to suffer and so enter his glory”. There are those who want a comfortable religion where everything runs smoothly and there are no pains. They look for consolations always, the good buzz and feeling, what John of the Cross would call the spiritual sweet tooth. But life always brings its troubles and for Christians it has never been smooth. From the start the Christians found themselves



rejected by Jew and gentile, accused of scandal and folly. And it will never be different. Any movement that would try to sell the Gospel superficially would have no substance. Any authentic evangelisation must explain this and help people to bear their crosses following Christ.

We must find strength and go out bravely and with courage to proclaim the Gospel. We can all be mediocre, neither hot nor cold, like those criticised in the Book of Revelation (Rev 3:15). And today when so many want to water down values and allow behaviour and life-styles that really do no good we must, with Christ in the cause of humanity, proclaim the best. We talk, for example, about the protection of children; and rightly so. We should give our children the best of starts, with a proper home of a loving and united family. That has proven itself as the best environment for children. But how square this vision for children in a modern world which is prepared to legalise the killing of children or which tolerates so many single families or facilitates family breakdown or permit that a some sex couple adopt a child. All these are clearly not the best. And we Catholics should unashamedly say that we are on the side of what is best. If at times we have to say “No” it is because we will settle for nothing less than the best. We must be a part of the sign of contradiction.

Let me add something here not in my script. We live in a world contaminated by sin and often things fall less than perfect. Once this happens we have to take care that the best does not become the enemy of the good. A dreadful temptation is to reject because something is less than perfect. Small faults become an excuse to abandon ship; a spouse is dumped because they turned out less than the original image suggested. That was not God’s option when we sinned. If God sent his Son among us while we were yet sinners our task is to work that something good should come out even of impossible situations. That I think was Frank Duff’s thinking when he set up the Regina Coeli hostel and helped mothers keep their children born out of wedlock against the prevailing attitude of those times when children were given away. The Cross involves staying with what is not perfect but working to draw good fruit out.

Christ’s own suffering

Let’s be honest with ourselves, the Gospel of the way of the Cross as the way to glory is uncomfortable. We really do not like it; we rebel and recoil from it. Our Divine Lord himself struggled with it. When they first took up stones to throw at him he retreated across the Jordan to escape the threat (Jn 10:31ss). Even when he heard of Lazarus illness he held off for a few days (Jn 11:6). He kept close to the crowds who came into Jerusalem when he went back and always went out to Bethany each evening since he was safe there. The one night he risked staying in Jerusalem to celebrate the Last Supper he planned to retreat quietly to the garden of Gethsemane. But Judas betrayed him. In the Garden he knew well the danger. And his frame trembled at the thought of what could and was to come. “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me ...” (Mk 14:36). His bloody beads of sweat witness to the incredible pressure he was feeling. He had predicted it often but faced now with the reality almost on top of him his soul was sorrowful unto death (Jn 12:27ss).

But his great soul trusted in God no matter what. “Not my will but yours be done” (Mk 14:36). When Judas arrived he had his soul ready. “It is over, the hour has come, my betrayer is here” (Matt 26: 45-46; Mk 14:41-42). And then began the most noble journey we humans have ever seen. A man submitting himself to a series of betrayals, injustices, degradations and death but doing so with a dignity and goodness, heroism and love that is unparalleled in human history. And I believe that if you glance across human history you will find no other act as glorious as his.

Peter and Pilate buckled before the Cross



Now let us turn to Simon Peter. When first challenged he said, “I do not know the man” (Matt 26:72,74). What a slap in the face for Jesus! If you look at St. John’s version of Peter’s denial you cannot miss this message (Jn 18:15-27). John inserts someone slapping Jesus’ face in the middle of Peter’s denial. Peter, who let Jesus use his boat, who travelled with him to Caesarea Philippi, who was on the Mount of the Transfiguration, crumbled before the threat of the Cross. “I don’t even know the man!” (Matt 26:72,74; Mk 14:71). Stand in Jesus’ sandals and feel that denial by his Pope! But also see how Jesus looked at Peter (Lk 22:61) and in his eyes see a deep compassion for your human weakness and notice the love and the hope in you that still remains and is not mistaken.

Or see the same problem as faced by Pilate from another angle. Three times he came out and told the crowd: “I can see no wrong in him, he is innocent” (Jn 18:38; 19:4,6). The triple declaration by Pilate signals the divine judgement on Jesus. He is innocent of any evil. Must not the human side of Jesus have hoped this was the end of it, that he would be vindicated? But once again the betrayal of justice and the capitulation to evil in the face of pressure! Let us try and get into Jesus heart at that moment when Pilate condemned him to be snuffed out and feel his human heart sink.

I wish also to note here that these two Gospel characters represent the leadership of Church and State. One expresses human weakness, the other gives in against his better judgement to public opinion. Before this tragic moment of world history, we see the flaws of our own age, and our own reality, and so we must all be humble and ask God for the grace to stand true to what is good and right, what is true and just.

“Father, forgive them”

At the very heart of the nobility and dignity of Our Lord’s great act is his forgiveness. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). These words are presented only in St. Luke’s Gospel. I often wonder to what extent he is sharing with us Our Lady’s recollections. If so these words may tell us what impressed itself in her heart. And with her we are all challenged to take these words to heart. They are at the very heart of the Christian Gospel and badly need to be proclaimed to our world. How many personal disputes, how many marriages, how many divided communities and nations would be better off if these words went right to our hearts and lodged there. You and I must live them day in and day out and be a shining example of them so that they are proclaimed not just as an ideal but as a living witness.

Our Risen Lord of the Eucharist made clear they were at the heart of our mission. “Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and so on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness be preached in his name to all nations ...” (Lk 24:46).

The saints and the Cross

So many saints have asked us to meditate on that Passion he endured. We could look at the Passion from the outside, as if it were a spectacle. But we should ask what is going on in him as he submits and bears it so bravely and with such love. If you and I struggle with visits to the dentist, or even an injection or a stay in hospital for an operation where people are on our side, then what did it feel like for him who was hated and treated abysmally who bore it so nobly? I take an example from one of the great mystics, Teresa of Avila.

“Think often of the weariness of his journey and of how much harder his trials were than those which you have to suffer. However hard you may imagine yours to be, and however much affliction they may cause you, they will be a source of comfort to you, for you will see that they are matters for scorn compared with the trials endured by Our Lord. You will ask me how you can possibly do all this and say



that if you had seen his majesty with your bodily eyes at the time when he lived in the world you would have done it willingly and gazed at him forever. Do not believe it. Anyone who will not make the slight effort necessary for recollection in order to gaze upon this Lord present within her, which she can do without danger and with only the minimum of trouble would have been far less likely to stand at the foot of the Cross with the Magdalene who looked death straight in the face. What must the glorious Virgin and this blessed saint have suffered! What threats, what malicious words, what shocks, what insults! For the people they were dealing with were not exactly polite to them ... yet terrible as the suffering of these women must have been they would not have noticed them in the presence of pain so much greater. So do not suppose sisters that you would have been prepared to endure such great trials if you are not ready for such trifling ones now” (Way of Perfection, Chapter 26).

I am struck by Teresa’s words regarding the effort to recollect in order to gaze on Our Lord. She seems to be speaking of a person who has just received Our Lord in communion for she speaks of the Lord present within her. She may also be referring to his presence there due to the continual indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. But the words can also be applied to those who are in his presence during Eucharistic Adoration. Whichever way we gaze on him, she speaks of an effort to be made. Ah yes. It can be hard to answer the call of God to make time for prayer and then to stay there when our prayer runs dry. It is not just today that this is a problem. In fact every person across time has been in Martha’s shoes (Lk 10: 38ss) with the worries of the world causing distraction from sitting at the Lord’s feet. Or like the disciples, so harrowing to stand at the foot of the Cross that we run away from it and hide!

Mary’s share in the Passion

Teresa speaks of Mary with the Magdalene at the foot of the Cross. It is worth trying to be close to Jesus in his Passion. It is equally good to try and get into the Immaculate Heart of Mary at this moment. It is one of life’s worst trials to lose a child. How much more cruel to be able to do nothing as you see your child butchered to death and when you know the utter enormity of the wrong being done to him who is the Lamb of God. But Mary had an extra suffering that the late beloved Pope John Paul II, now Blessed, pointed out. He spoke of her faith and said it was the same faith that met the angel as now helped her at the foot of the Cross. At the Annunciation she had heard the words of the angel, “He will be great ... and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:32-33). “And now standing at the foot of the Cross Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete negation of these words. On that wood of the Cross her son hangs in agony as one condemned ... How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God’s unsearchable judgements. How completely she abandons herself to God without reserve, offering the full assent of the intellect and will to him whose ways are inscrutable” (Redemptoris Mater, n.17). Mary saw her Son wrongly judged and condemned. She is with every one of us when we are accused wrongly and misunderstood and mistreated for being followers of her Son. But with her and her Son we must also learn to trust totally in God.

The Resurrection gives hope

The Gospel is not complete without the overwhelming event of the Resurrection. It is the great sign of hope for broken humanity. It gives us hope that all those atrocities, all the wrong done against so many innocent, all the betrayals and cowardly acts are not the final word. To all those who are the innocent victims of abortion, of child neglect and slavery and abuse, to all those who were let die by a world that didn’t care, for all the frightened ones who died in wars not of their desire or making, for all those whose sufferings and deaths are hard to justify, for them all the Resurrection is saying: You will have your victory, you will be vindicated. What is the use to those past victims if we only put our hope in some



future new civilisation that will work for the people of that hoped-for golden future or human-made utopia or new world order? The Resurrection of Christ speaks of a day when the dead will be raised and the whole of history will be judged and the innocent will be restored gloriously. Our gathering around the Eucharistic Lord expresses that hope. The whole world needs this Christ of the Eucharist.

And what for those whose sins and neglect allowed wrong to occur? Like you and me! There is hope there too. All of us who feel guilt or shame following some word that caused harm or even one act of temper that we now regret, for all who regret some decision made which unleashed evil, the death and Resurrection of Christ provides you with a ray of hope. Again let me quote the Blessed Apostle Paul: “Where sin abounded, there even more did grace abound” (Rm 5:20). For those who truly regret and repent of their wrong doings our Eucharistic Lord is saying clearly as he did to those disciples who let him down: “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (Jn 20:21). They are fit for this task because they have come to understand his sheer goodness and have seen the results of his sacrifice. Look at the very Apostle who persecuted Christ and his followers. Christ did not reject him but turned him into a great Apostle. There is hope for the greatest sinner!

The Eucharistic Lamb

In confronting sin Christ, the Lamb of God, had to suffer evil and die. He did so without passing on any evil himself. How well Peter put it years later, “You were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish ...he committed no sin, no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled he did not revile in return; when he suffered he did not threaten, but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree ... By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 1:18-19; 2:22-24).

This extraordinary offering of himself is at the heart of history. We can only really grasp what our Christian faith is about by standing before it and letting it sink into our depths. But it would be something useless were it not also for the Resurrection that shows that it had real value and bore real fruit.

Mary witnesses to our consolation and glory

But let me move towards the end on an up note. As I said the Resurrection, which the Eucharist is the great symbol of, brought joy and hope to those demoralised by the scandal of the Cross. And Christ assures us that in following him, while we will have trials, there will be many blessings for those who persevere (e.g. Mk. 10:28-31)

When we celebrate the 5th Glorious Mystery of the Rosary we are celebrating the crown of victory Our Lady won in Heaven. She shared completely in her own way in the misery of the Cross according to what the will of God allotted to her. There is no doubt that by the time of Pentecost she knew he was risen and now lived with deep peace within her. She would not have been there with the disciples at Pentecost, encouraging them, had she still been suffering post-traumatic grief. Would anyone begrudge her the crown she now wears? Her coronation in Heaven symbolises for us the rewards for those who suffer with and for Christ in the struggle with evil. It is precisely in the context of speaking of those who crucified Christ that St. Paul proclaims, “What no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

But let me point this out. Even before her Assumption and crowning she already received much consolation in this world. Her consolations were to know of her Son’s resurrection, the beginning and growth of his Church and the joyous reports of the Church spreading from place to place. And her story is



our story. For all of us who stay with Christ in the struggle, despite setbacks and betrayals, despite our own human weakness that might cause us to stumble from time to time, even in this life we will see signs of hope. Indeed I do not think it will be too long before we see in our own Church signs of new life; indeed they are already with us.

Conclusion

Let me share my own personal experience. Each morning now for well nigh 30 years I have been rising early to pray. Most of that time I have spent before Christ in the Eucharist. I encounter him who has been through the trauma of his Passion but has conquered. I meet a friend, a hero, someone who understands me, forgives me what I am not, lifts me despite my sins and who keeps encouraging me. And from that place I have gained so much energy that helps me keep going. Please get to know him deeply. He will give you an energy that cannot be had otherwise.

Let us hear the invitation: “Blessed are those called to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). When we celebrate the Eucharist we are already beginning to partake in it. When we worship our noble hero in the Eucharist we are already having some small share in his eternal presence, which Mary has now in full. With Mary let us worship him, she in heaven, we before him in the Eucharist. “Worthy are you who were slain and by your blood ransomed men for God from every tribe and nation” (Rev 5:9). “Worthy indeed is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing” (Rev 5:12). For ever and ever.