

Eucharist

Salvation of souls



Thematic meditations

For Guardian Angel pilgrims

41st Pilgrimage of Notre-Dame de Chrétienté - 27th, 28th y 29th May 2023

Saturday 27th May - Vigil of Pentecost

The Eucharist, God truly present amongst us.
with Saint Thomas Aquinas

St Thomas Aquinas and the Eucharist

MEDITATION 1

As a hook

It is no coincidence that traditionally we represent Saint Thomas with a pen in his hand, and with a large Eucharistic sun, shining like a monstrance on his chest. Saint Thomas, glory of the Order of Preachers and prince of theologians, is indeed the Eucharistic Doctor *par excellence*. He spent his life scrutinizing this mystery of the real presence of the Lord under the Eucharistic species, and his Eucharistic piety shines from all the pages of his work and at every moment of his life.



Major Ideas

- Saint Thomas composes the Office of the Blessed Sacrament
- A single question torments him: What is God?
- Saint Thomas comments on both Aristotle and the book of Job
- He is formed by the Benedictines and then is captivated by the Order of Preachers and goes to the school of Saint Albert the Great
- He is a model of tenderness for Jesus in the host
- Charity is, for him, a friendship with Jesus
- The sacrament of the Eucharist is the sign of God's love and the comfort of our hope

Saint Thomas composes the Office of the Blessed Sacrament

Saint Thomas was not only an admirable theologian of the Eucharist, he was also its unequalled poet. We know that Pope Urban IV, wanting to reward Saint Thomas for his commentary on the Gospels based on quotations from the Fathers, which bears the name Chain of Gold, offered him the Archdiocese of Naples. For this offer, Saint Thomas wished to have substituted another: to institute a feast in honour of Jesus present in the Host.

Urban IV then asked him to compose the Mass and the whole Office for the new feast. From there were born these treasures which have never ceased to inspire composers of sacred music, and which the Church will sing, pray and probably meditate on until the end of time: the *Tantum ergo*, the *Lauda Sion*, the *Ecce panis angelorum*, the *O Salutaris Hostia*, the *Adoro Te*... If this young teacher, barely 40 years old, taken up with the lessons he was giving to his brothers, and absorbed by the problems of the most arduous theologians, was able to compose, in record time, in an excellent Latin, which respects all the rules of metre, such an admirable poetic work, it is because he wrote from the depths of his heart, and that the Eucharist was the centre of his whole spiritual life. That same year, he finished the *Summa* against the Gentiles and also wrote the Commentary on the book of Job.

Important dates in his life

Saint Thomas was born in 1224 or 1225, in Roccasecca, 125 km southeast of Rome. At the age of 5, his parents offered him as an oblate to the Benedictine abbey of Montecassino, in the hope, no doubt, that he would become its Abbot. From 1230 to 1239, Saint Thomas was formed in the Benedictine spirit, and showed great intellectual qualities. Pierre Calo, one of his first biographers,

reports that the young Thomas “began to seek the Lord his God, questioning his master with anxious care and frequently: 'What is God (Quid est Deus)?'” In 1239, Thomas was sent to continue his studies at the University of Naples.

A decisive meeting

It was there, in Naples, that he came into contact with the brothers of a new order, founded some twenty years earlier by Saint Dominic: the Order of Preachers, in other words the Dominicans. Captivated by this ideal of a poor life, entirely oriented towards the contemplation and preaching of divine truth, Saint Thomas asked to receive the habit of the Order. This choice was not to the taste of his parents, who sought to divert him from his project, and went so far as to put him in house arrest in the family castle. They even introduced a woman of wickedness into his room, whom Saint Thomas chased away with a burning ember. He took advantage of this time of forced retirement to read the Holy Scriptures. Seeing that they could not bend their son's determination, the members of the Aquinas family released Saint Thomas and let him go to Paris. He went to the school of Saint Albert the Great, whom he then accompanied to Cologne.

Back in Paris, Thomas followed the steps that led him to the master's degree in theology, in 1256. From that moment, and until his death in 1274, Thomas wrote, taught, preached, both in Paris and in Rome. He wrote commentaries on Holy Scripture, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonist authors. He engaged with the disputed questions on the most pointed subjects, that were fiercely debated in the 13th century. A few years before the end of his life, he undertook the writing of his monumental *Summa Theologica*, which presented all of Catholic doctrine.

Saint Thomas, man of prayers

But Saint Thomas was not one of those desiccated intellectuals with cerebral piety. He was first of all a religious, a man of prayer, given to contemplation. When he was toiling over difficult issues – and St. Peter and St. Paul did not come down directly from Heaven to explain them to him, as they did when he had to write his commentary on the prophet Isaiah – he would go to the chapel, and placed his head in the tabernacle to obtain solutions. And, to all appearance, God was giving them to him.

In his monastery, every morning, unless prevented by illness, Saint Thomas said his Mass, and he heard a second, that of his secretary and friend, Brother Reginald. And each served the other's Mass in this way.

His biographer, William of Tocco, relates that at the time of the elevation of the body of our Lord, Thomas used to recite these words from the *Te Deum*: "You are the King of glory, O Christ, you are the Eternal Son of the Father..." until the end, with great devotion and shedding tears. The angelic Doctor felt an immense tenderness for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. There is a lot of effusion and joy in the hymns he composed in honour of the Blessed Sacrament and the term "sweetness" is the one that comes up the most in his pen to evoke Jesus in the Host.

His brothers, and also the lay faithful, testified that Master Thomas sometimes went into ecstasy after the consecration and that he was then as if overwhelmed under the weight of the sufferings of the God-made-man whose Passion he seemed to re-live, shedding many tears. It was then necessary to pull him strongly by his clothes so that he could continue the holy mysteries and finish his Mass.

Nothing but you, Lord!

In Naples, at the monastery of San Domenico Maggiore, he received from the miraculous Crucifix – which is still venerated today – this beautiful word of approval: "*Bene scripsisti de me, Thomas*" "You wrote well of me, Thomas. What do you want as a reward for your labour?" And we know his simple and beautiful answer: "Nothing but you, Lord!"

Saint Thomas lives with Christ as with a friend

Christ was everything to him. And first, his friend. He who, a brilliant proponent of Aristotle, defined charity as a friendship between God and man, explained the real Eucharistic presence by the need for friends to be present to each other: "What is quite proper to friendship," he writes, "is to live with one's friends..., and this is why Christ promised us His bodily presence as a reward... However, while we are waiting, He did not want to deprive us of this bodily presence during our pilgrimage, but, by the truth of His body and His blood, He joins us to Him in this sacrament... Also this sacrament is the sign of greater love and the comfort of our hope because of this union - so intimate - of Christ with us."

Saint Thomas aspires to heaven

But the moment came when this real but veiled presence of the Friend was no longer enough for Thomas. Because it only increased his desire. This veil must be torn, he must see Jesus face to face, he must be satisfied with the vision of his glory. Saint Thomas couldn't take it anymore. After the famous ecstasy of December 6, 1273, which occurred while he was celebrating Mass, he understood that his pilgrimage was coming to an end and that his work was over. At Fossanova, his last words were for the Blessed Sacrament: "I receive you, O salvation of my soul, I receive you, viaticum of my journey. It is out of love for you that I have studied, that I have watched whole nights and that I have exhausted myself. It is you that I have preached and taught. I never said a word against you. Nor do I cling stubbornly to my own meaning; but if ever I have expressed myself badly on this sacrament, I submit myself to the judgment of the Holy Roman Church, in whose obedience I die."

O great Saint Thomas, doctor and cantor of the divine Eucharist, teach us "to venerate the ineffable mode of the divine presence in this visible sacrament; to praise the power of God who, in a single sacrament, works so many wonders; and to give thanks for such a salutary and sweet benefit."

The Dogma of the Real Presence: Transubstantiation

MEDITATION 2

As a hook

Dear pilgrims, the theme of our pilgrimage is: "the Eucharist, salvation of souls." But for the Eucharist truly to be our salvation, and our nourishment, we have to understand what we are talking about: and therein lies the difficulty. For the Eucharist is a great mystery, the "mystery of faith" (*mysterium fidei*) as we say in the words of consecration. My eyes see the appearances of bread, but my faith tells me that it is the body of Christ.



That's difficult! So difficult that sometimes, some prefer to refuse the dogma of the real presence and reduce the Eucharist to a simple symbol: and then one moves away from the faith.

Fortunately, the Church has meditated on this mystery for a long time, and following the great theologians, she explains part of it to us, with important words, such as the word "Transubstantiation" for example. To live from the Eucharist, we must have faith in what the Church tells us, and pay close attention to the words she uses, without changing them: this is the objective of this meditation. Let us engrave all this in our hearts, the better to meditate on it, during our march to Chartres.

Major Ideas

- Closeness to God in the Old Testament
- Jesus announces His mode of presence after His death
- The Church explains the mystery of the Mass
- Protestants turn away from the true presence of God
- Some ways to understand this great mystery better
- How God is present in the Eucharist
- Transubstantiation reveals God's infinite love

Presence of God in the Old Testament

God's great project is a project of love: he created men and angels in order to invite them to enter into a communion of friendship with him.

Already in the earthly paradise, God "walked in the garden in the breeze of the day" calling man to communion with Him. But man wanted to be self-sufficient, to *take* the divine good instead of *receiving* it. He wanted to know good and evil, to eat of this mortal fruit which deprived him of the fruit of truth and life, of the fruit of friendship with God.

Since that original sin, God has never ceased to propose His presence to fallen man: by listening to His word, in the prayers and the sacrifices of communion, and especially around the Temple of Jerusalem, the place of the presence of the Lord, about which God had made this promise: "If you walk according to... my commandments, then... I will dwell in the midst of you."

Presence of God in the New Testament

But this Temple was too small, and the human heart too unfaithful for true worship in spirit and in truth. So the Father sent His Son in the flesh, to offer a sacrifice which repairs all our sins, and

to become Himself our food of eternal life: to be present with us, God will give Himself to us through the Eucharist.

Jesus announced this gift during the multiplication of the loaves: "I am the living bread, come down from heaven... the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... it is not like that which your fathers ate and died; whoever eats this bread will live forever."

Jesus *realises* this gift, by instituting the Eucharist and the sacrament of Holy Orders on Maundy Thursday, at the Last Supper. The words: "This is my Body, this is my Blood," *realise*, that is to say "make real," the presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus under the appearances of bread and wine. This time, the love of the Lord is fully satisfied: He can remain with us until the end of time, hidden under the appearances of bread and wine which are called the sacramental species, but visible to the eyes of loving faith.

This is also what Saint Paul tells us: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord." We can see that it is not just a symbolic presence: it is really the Body and the Blood of the Lord, and everyone in the Church has recognized this presence as real for long centuries. As the Fathers of the Church already explained, "the Lord did not say: this is the symbol of my body and this is the symbol of my blood...", "so that you do not imagine that what appears is a simply a symbol."

The Church clarifies the mystery of the Mass

In the 11th century, the first great negation of the real presence occurred, with Bérenger de Tours († 1088), who reduced the Eucharist to a pure symbol. But his heresy led theologians to better specify how the appearances of bread and wine can remain, while the substance of bread and wine is changed, converted into the substance of the Body and Blood of the Lord. This distinction between "appearances" (also called accidents) and "substance" is fundamental.

Let's start with a concrete example: if we show a child a tree for the first time, he will ask: what is it? If you tell him it's big, tall, green and leafy..., he won't be satisfied: his intelligence wants to go further: he will then have to be told that it's a tree. There are thus two levels of depth in reality: the first, more superficial, is the level of accidents or sensible appearances (it is big or small, hard or soft, green or red...), and the more depth of substances, that is to say: what the thing is. It is bread, it is water, it is a tree...

Well, what is prodigious in the Eucharist, and it is a unique case, is that, through the divine power, at the word of the priest repeating the words of Christ at the Last Supper, the substance of the bread is converted into that of the Body of Christ, but the appearances of the bread remain unchanged. The host appears like bread, but it is no longer bread, it is the Body of Christ; the substance changes, the appearances remain.

To express this conversion, a special word is then used, the word "transubstantiation," a term that was quickly adopted by the Magisterium of the Church at the beginning of the 13th century, and then explained in the magnificent synthesis of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the middle of the 13th century.

Protestants turn away from the true presence of God

But in the 16th century, the Protestant crisis occurred, with the rejection of the notion of transubstantiation by all the reformers: Luther in Germany, Zwingli in Switzerland, Calvin in Geneva and following that in France (and England). The Council of Trent in its 13th session (in 1551) then solemnly defined that the whole of Christ (body, blood, soul and divinity) was contained "truly, really and substantially in the Eucharist", and "not simply as in a sign, or figure, or by its virtue. And the same council will say that the word "transubstantiation" is "very apt"

(*aptissime*) to designate this mystery. In a way, this word is “canonized” by the Council of Trent, and we cannot do without it to present the Eucharistic mystery.

Subsequently, the magisterium will tirelessly reaffirm transubstantiation, often referring to Saint Thomas; thus Saint John Paul II in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, which concludes as follows: “Let us make our own the sentiments of Saint Thomas Aquinas, theologian *par excellence* and at the same time a passionate champion of Christ in His Eucharist...”

A few details to understand the mystery more fully

Transubstantiation is a mystery of faith: but we can provide, following Saint Thomas, some details to understand it a bit more fully.

First, the substance of the bread is not destroyed to make way for that of the Body of Christ, because God does not annihilate anything He has made. The right word is: “conversion”; the substance of the bread is “converted”, it becomes a new substance, that of the Body of Christ. Such a “conversion”, such a “transition” is not impossible, for divine omnipotence gives things their very existence, and it can mould this existence as it pleases, here to achieve the transition from one substance to another.

Second clarification: why did God want the accidents of bread to remain? Two reasons can be given. The Lord wanted His real Presence to remain hidden under the appearances of bread in order to:

- Make our Faith grow: blessed are those who believe without having seen!
- But also because He wants to be food for our souls, and bread is food: “Take, eat, this is my body.”

So yes, He hides Himself: “Truly you are a God who hides Himself, God of Israel, Saviour!” we read in Isaiah; He hides Himself, but while giving Himself, to support us on the way, and at the same time to make us desire a more total union, which will come one day, at the end of our journey.

How is God present in the Eucharist?

This is the next question; and it’s a bit complex. But it is important, to shed some light on the mystery of the Eucharist. Let us try to ask ourselves, looking at a consecrated host: where is Jesus? Did Jesus leave Heaven, His Mother and the angels, to come into this host? Did Jesus duplicate Himself, increase His number, to be both in Heaven and in each host? The answer requires making a small distinction. On the one hand, Jesus is always present in Heaven, since the Ascension and for evermore, according to His natural being, with His substance and the accidents of His body, in all His beauty, near the Virgin Mary, angels and saints. And we must not imagine that at the moment of the consecration, Christ “leaves” heaven to come in bread and wine: in reality, it is rather the opposite: it is bread and wine which are “raised” up to the Body of Christ, not locally, but according to their substance: the substance of the bread is as it were transported up to the substance of the Body of Christ and converted into it. Thus, Christ does not change place, but the species “come” in a way to Him, without however changing place themselves.

One last clarification, which may seem a little strange but which is very important: yes, Christ is really present under the accidents of the bread and the wine, but we cannot say that these accidents of bread and wine are accidents of Christ. In other words, Christ, present in the host, is not round, he is not white, he does not measure the size of the host, etc... What concerns the accidents of bread and wine does not reach the body of Christ, which in Heaven has its own accidents.

One important consequence of this, is that if we cut the consecrated species in two, we do not cut the body of Christ in two: on the contrary, when a host is broken into multiple fragments, the Body

of Christ remains intact. Saint Thomas says so in the *Lauda Sion*, "*Nulla rei fit scissúra: Signi tantum fit fractúra*: only the Eucharistic species is broken, but there is no break in the reality that it signifies.

This is also why we treat the smallest fragment of a consecrated host with the greatest reverence: small as it is, it truly contains the entire Body of Christ, whatever its size. The Eucharistic fraction therefore only multiplies, in each portion, a presence of Christ which was already realized there. This is to say the value of the smallest Eucharistic particle, is more precious than gold flakes, according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem. This is because the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of the Lord, indissolubly united and substantially present is in each particle.

On the other hand, if the alteration of the accidents of the bread is too great, so that they are no longer accidents of the bread (for example, if the host is totally corrupted because of humidity, or if the precious blood is mixed with a lot of water until the whole thing is nothing more than water), their link to the substance of the Body of Christ disappears: the real presence ceases.

Transubstantiation Reveals God's Infinite Love

The Eucharist is therefore a mystery of Faith, which appears to the eyes of the believing soul; and the more we meditate on this beautiful mystery, the more we will give thanks for this incredible gift that God gives us: "It is the Lord who is there," faith tells us. But the Lord has sometimes come to the aid of our incredulities, through certain Eucharistic miracles, as in Lanciano (Italy, 8th century), where the species of bread were transformed into flesh; the real presence then ceases, because there are no more species of bread, and we can analyse the new substances that have appeared: in Lanciano, the analysis revealed a heart muscle! The Lord thus reveals an image of His Heart, to show us how much He loves us by giving Himself to us in the Eucharist. It is up to us to match such a gift with our own love!

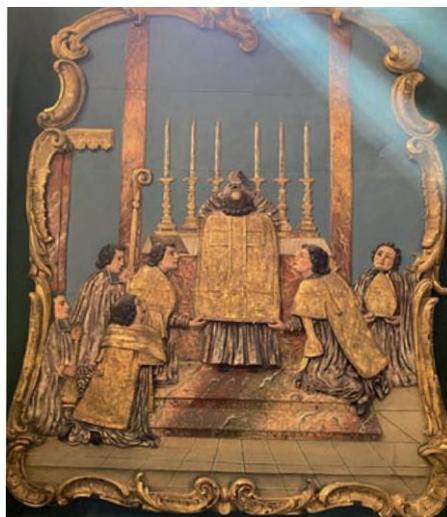
Let us end with Blessed Carlo Acutis, who attended Mass every evening, without his non-practicing parents knowing it. One day, he said to his mother: "The Eucharist is my highway to heaven." It was there that he acquired the patience that everyone admired in the terrible suffering of the short but devastating illness that ended his life at 15. He had learned to imitate Jesus in His sacrifice made present on the altar.

The Real Presence Manifested in the Liturgy

MEDITATION 3

As a hook

Dear pilgrim, you know, God is pure spirit, and our relationship with Him is through inner prayer, "in spirit and in truth." But man is body and soul, and his prayer also passes through the body; this is the beauty of the liturgy to help us, through gestures, rites, and bodily movements, to better grasp these invisible things of faith, and thus to pray better. In this meditation, we are going to try to understand how the liturgy helps us to better live this immense and invisible mystery which is the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.



Major Ideas

- The importance of liturgical gestures
- These gestures show us the two meanings of the Mass: Real Presence and Sacrifice
- A very expressive rite: elevation
- Some examples of gestures of veneration of the Eucharist in history
- The liturgy is a treaty of virtues and a maternal pedagogy

Liturgical gestures manifest the presence of God

When he enters a church, the Christian performs certain very concrete gestures: with his finger he takes a few drops of holy water; his gaze is then attracted not only by the beauty of the place, but even more by the red candle which shines beside the tabernacle, and recognising the real Presence of Jesus Christ, he kneels before Him and traces on himself the sign of the cross: the sign of redemption and of his baptism.

These bodily gestures are very important. For the father or mother, accompanied by a very young child, they have a pedagogical significance, they are like a first spiritual initiation, one of the most expressive perhaps, through which the sense of God will forever permeate the soul of the young Christian.

Seeing this example, which we know well, we understand the purpose of what the liturgy proposes: by postures and gestures, by ceremonies and by sacred objects, the Church seeks to attract our attention, to sustain or revive our faith. These outward gestures are also a way of uniting us to one another, and each one to God; and by performing them, it becomes possible to awaken within our souls interior acts, those of the virtues particularly ordained to God: acts of adoration, of thanksgiving, of sacrifice. Thus the gestures of the body support the acts of the soul, because that is what we are: bodies and souls.

We must not forget that the Church is the house of the Good Lord: we do not speak aloud there, we do not run into a church, we attend services in decent dress, we do not kiss each other, (just a discreet gesture to mark a greeting), we do not cross our legs like in a living room...

And the summit of the liturgy is of course the sacrament of the Eucharist: for the liturgy is "the exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ, in which the sanctification of man is signified... and realised." The highest form of that is the Eucharist. This is why the Mass is, *par excellence*, a "forest of symbols", a liturgy so rich in signs and gestures to support our faith in the Real Presence.

The Liturgy Reflects the Real Presence and Sacrifice of Christ

We must first remember that the Mass is a true sacrifice, by which the merits of the sacrifice of the Cross are applied to us. If Jesus Christ makes Himself present when the priest, acting *in persona Christi* (in the very person of Christ), changes the substance of the bread into the substance of His Body, and likewise the wine into His Blood, it is to give Himself to us in food, but it is also to offer Himself to God His Father in sacrifice, for His Glory and our salvation. And thus, all the gestures of the Mass have the aim of expressing these two dimensions of the Mass, which are inseparable: the Real Presence on the one hand, and the Sacrifice on the other.

The gesture of Elevation

One of the clearest moments in this respect is the elevation that immediately follows the consecration. The Roman Missal indicates that after having pronounced the words of consecration, "the celebrant adores while making a genuflection... Then, getting up, he raises the Host as high as he can comfortably and, with his eyes fixed on it with reverence, he shows it so that the people adore it." At this moment, the priest's adoration is manifested by genuflection, prolonged in the reverence with which he raises the host, a gesture which calls for the adoration of the faithful. We clearly understand what is wanted: the more the gestures of the priest are signs of adoration and reverence, the more they will dispose the faithful to the same virtues: the ringing of the bell at this moment, the hand of the deacon or altar server who lifts the bottom of the chasuble so that movement is not impeded, etc.

This reverence that one seeks to express in the elevation is more than a certain respect; it is also a participation in the reverence of Jesus Christ offering Himself in His Passion. Thus, if the elevation of the host has as its primary goal the adoration of the faithful before the Real Presence, it also signifies the elevation of the Saviour on the Cross offering Himself as a perfect sacrifice to God His Father. Thus the two aspects of the Mass, Real Presence and Sacrifice, are indicated in a single gesture: and for the faithful, the invitation to adoration is coupled with a pressing call to self-offering.

This is what this magnificent prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi expresses, which moreover inspired the now well-known (in France) song: *Regardez l'humilité de Dieu* (Look at the humility of God)."

"All humanity trembles, the whole universe trembles, and the heavens rejoice, when on the altar, in the hand of the priest, Christ, the Son of the living God, is present. O admirable height and staggering value! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, should humble Himself to the point of hiding Himself, for our salvation, under a small semblance of bread! See, my brethren, the humility of God, and open your hearts before Him; humble yourselves, too, in order to be lifted up by Him. Hold back nothing of yourselves, so that you may be received in everything and for everything by Him who offers Himself entirely to you."

Elements of the history of Eucharistic worship

Thus, throughout history, the Church has sought, through new gestures, to better infuse into the hearts of the faithful the respect that it is necessary to have for this extraordinary gift that Christ had given her: the Eucharist.

Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, already describes the care that must be taken in the celebration of the Eucharist:

1. By recalling the separation to be made between liturgical celebration and secular meals;
2. By exhorting to the dignity, both exterior and interior, of the faithful;
3. By enjoining that no one show up drunk;
4. But above all by requiring that those who are not in a state of grace do not receive communion;

5. And finally by affirming the importance of precisely observing the rite of consecration: that is the story of the institution of the Eucharist: "What I transmitted to you, I myself learned from the Lord."

As the centuries passed, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the rules of Eucharistic worship developed and became clearer, either to accompany a greater understanding of the greatness of the Eucharist, or to fight against heresies. Thus the ancient rite of communion on the tongue was imposed in the Latin Church: by this gesture, one better manifests the adoration and respect which must surround the holy host.

In the 12th century, the rite of elevation appeared, of which we have already spoken, a liturgical response to counter the heresy of Bérenger de Tours, who taught that the consecrated host is only a symbolic presence of Christ. This rite was imposed at the end of the 12th century, following the request made by Eudes de Sully, bishop of Paris, to his priests, so that the Body of Christ could be seen by all: "*ut possit ab omnibus videri.*"

A few decades later, the feast of the Blessed Sacrament was instituted; the apparitions of Our Lord to Saint Julienne of Mont-Cornillon were the providential trigger.

At the same time, Eucharistic theology was developing, and we became aware that the Lord is present not only in the host but also in each particle or each drop, no matter how small: hence the special attention of the priest to purify the sacred vessels, and to keep his fingers joined from the consecration to the ablutions so as not to let a particle of host escape.

When at the Council of Trent, it was a question of whether or not to keep the sacred Hosts outside the Mass, the force of Tradition imposed itself (against Protestant heresy): formerly reserved for the communion of the sick, this custom favoured indeed the development of Eucharistic worship, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and popular processions.

There are many other gestures in which the respect of men for this gift of God which is the Eucharist is manifested. Do you know, for example, how to clean the sacred cloths (purificator, corporal) which may still contain some particle of host? Before being washed, they are first deposited, by a cleric who is at least a sub-deacon, in three different basins of water, in order to dilute the holy particles, and this water is then thrown into the ground.

Finally, one of the most striking gestures of our liturgy is perhaps the one that takes place when, by misfortune, a host happens to fall on the ground. At this moment, everything stops: the priest, and he alone, picks up the host with respect, then we go and get a purificator, a little water, and the priest on his knees wipes the place where the host fell.

Thus, from a Eucharistic accident, a greater love of the Eucharist was born, through the gestures accomplished.

How, in these rapid historical sketches, could we not stop for a moment with Saint Tarcisus? This young Christian, who died as a martyr at the age of 12 under the Emperor Valerian, preserved the Blessed Sacrament unscathed, while he was under the jeers and quickly the blows of former comrades. Honouring the holiness of the Hosts intended for the prisoners, he united himself, by the gift of his life, to Jesus Christ and to His sacrifice. Saint Tarcisus is the patron saint of mass servers, whose function is so important for the dignity and beauty of worship: their silence, their seriousness, their application in the gestures to be performed are so many aids in bringing the faithful to prayer and worship.

The liturgy teaches us the virtues

Thus, the traditional liturgy implements and manifests to a supreme degree the love and veneration of the Eucharistic Jesus. It does so through the precision and richness of its ceremonies

which are like a "treaty of virtues": recollection, adoration, devotion, piety, humility, thanksgiving, all of this is awakened in our souls through these concrete gestures of the liturgy, down to the smallest details. For example, the Church's preference for the altar to be adorned with cut flowers and lighted with wax candles clearly expresses the gift without return made to God which is sacrifice: the flowers are offered, the candles are consumed by burning, as an image of the gift of self which can be, by the sacrament of orders or religious consecration, that total sacrifice which is called holocaust.

Conclusion: the maternal pedagogy of the Church

The liturgy, through these gestures, also manifests the maternal pedagogy of the Church: firstly because man is body and soul and the senses are the first mode of knowledge; but also because God wants everyone to be saved: everyone, that is to say learned or ignorant, little child or adult. These concrete signs, the meaning of which is learned from childhood, are the best catechism lesson there is: they speak for themselves and teach us the greatness of God, the depth of the mystery of His Presence, the meaning of sacrifice.

Everyone can find food there: For some the words of the *confiteor*, for others simple kneeling and the beating of the chest three times; but all will recognize themselves as sinners. For some the elaborate rhetoric of the Mass collects, for others the shimmering splendour of priest and altar ornaments: but all will open to "the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God," to the beauty of heaven in the liturgy. Remember this story of the Curé d'Ars, when he was looking for an ornament in a store: "It is not beautiful enough, nothing is too beautiful for the Good Lord!" and who added, back home, for the benefit of his parishioners marvelling at the objects used for worship: "How beautiful! But in heaven, everything is even more beautiful."