

ALLOCUTIO JUNE 2015 – Fr. Justin Ford, Spiritual Director



This feast of Corpus Christi is an opportunity to speak about Our Lady in relation to this supreme gift of the Eucharist.

A great source of reflection on this theme is St John Paul II's last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* ('The Church draws her life from the Eucharist'). The theme of the Encyclical is the Eucharist in its relationship to the Church. I do thoroughly recommend the whole Encyclical to your personal reading. Sometimes people find encyclicals heavy going, but this one is a bit easier than most of Pope John Paul's others, as well as being a bit shorter; in many parts it's a beautiful piece of writing and very heartfelt. It came out when I was in the seminary, and certainly greatly affected the way I think about the Eucharist.

As has become the custom for Church documents, it finishes by looking at the theme of the document in the light of Mary. So the final chapter of the Encyclical before the conclusion is entitled, 'At the School of Mary, Woman of the Eucharist'. (*see p.11*)

The Pope writes, 'If we wish to rediscover in all its richness the profound relationship between the Church and the Eucharist, we cannot neglect Mary, Mother and model of the Church...Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist...If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.'

For me, the most striking part of the whole chapter was this amazing analogy the Pope makes:

'At the Annunciation Mary conceived the Son of God in the physical reality of his body and blood, thus anticipating within herself what to some degree happens sacramentally in every believer who receives, under the signs of bread and wine, the Lord's body and blood.'

'As a result, there is a profound analogy between the *Fiat* which Mary said in reply to the angel, and the *Amen* which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord. Mary was asked to believe that the One whom she conceived "through the Holy Spirit" was "the Son of God" (*Lk 1:30-35*). In continuity with the Virgin's faith, in the Eucharistic mystery we are asked to believe that the same Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Mary, becomes present in his full humanity and divinity under the signs of bread and wine.'

So, what a wonderful way the Pope is giving us to think about our reception of Holy Communion. The Angel asks Mary to receive within her the body of the Lord, and Mary says, 'Yes, Amen, let it be done' – and immediately God becomes incarnate in her womb. The minister asks *us* to believe, and to accept within us the Body of the Lord, and we say, 'Amen, we believe, let it be done'. And Christ becomes incarnate within *us* in a new way. As members of his body, the Church, we already extend the Incarnation in space and time, making Christ present in our own era and place. And every time we receive the Eucharist, we're empowered to deepen this reality, to make Christ present within us in a new way, and then to show that presence to the world around us.

And just as it was only by faith that Mary knew this was the Son of God within her, so it's only by faith that we know Christ is present within us when we receive him in the Sacred Banquet of Holy Communion.

Pope John Paul then goes on to speak of the Visitation with another Eucharistic analogy. He writes, 'When, at the Visitation, [Mary] bore in her womb the Word made flesh, she became in some way a "tabernacle" – the first "tabernacle" in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary.'

And then, the Nativity: 'Is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparalleled model of love which should inspire us every time we receive Eucharistic communion?'

This brings to mind a way that St Louis de Montfort suggests for our receiving Communion in a Marian way. Instead of directly speaking to Jesus ourselves, he suggests after Communion to imagine ourselves in the presence of Jesus and Mary speaking to each other, as we silently listen to them. And so we imagine the words of intense devotion and love that Mary would say to Jesus – words we might hardly dare to say ourselves, because we might think it insincere to profess such a depth and ardour of love, knowing our own lukewarmness, our weakness and sinfulness.

So instead, we imagine Mary saying to Jesus everything in her heart. But in the very act of our imagining that, Mary's sentiments start to become our own sentiments. And then we hear in our imagination the words of love Jesus would speak to his Mother, and we begin to realise he speaks similar words of love to us. And when we do that, I think we learn very profoundly some of what it means when we say, 'To Jesus through Mary'.