

Stop and Adore: Visit to the Blessed Sacrament

This practice is a profound expression of faith and love for Christ in the Eucharist. Amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, it offers us an opportunity to encounter God personally, to rest in his presence, and to find comfort and guidance for our daily lives in Him.

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St. Josemaría liked to recall how the angels perpetually adore Christ, especially in his sacramental presence. This reflection moved him to try to join their worship through a variety of Eucharistic devotions, among them the visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Since the first centuries, Christians have sought ways to express their faith through practices of piety apart from the sacraments, including the veneration of relics, tombs of martyrs, and sacred places. Although the Eucharistic species have always been honored even beyond the celebration of the Mass, in the Roman liturgy, they did not become an object of particular veneration outside of Mass until the beginning of the second millennium. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) reaffirmed the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, condemned the teachings of

Berengarius of Tours, who denied this presence, and emphasized the need to worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Some religious orders, particularly the Cistercians, promoted this devotion, and theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas helped develop the doctrine of the Real Presence of the Lord in the Eucharist. Liturgical innovations emerged as ways of deepening in Eucharistic piety. The elevation of the host after the consecration in the Mass, reserving the Eucharist, and the practice of spiritual communions were all manifestations of a growing desire to honor the Blessed Sacrament.

With the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi (first celebrated in Liège in 1246 and extended to the entire Church by Pope Urban IV with the bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo*), the first testimonies of the practice of

visiting the Blessed Sacrament appeared. During this period, the Beguines, a group of women living in cells built around the church apse with an opening towards the altar, began reciting a greeting to the Blessed Sacrament on their knees upon rising, from their cells. Over the centuries, devotion to the Eucharist was strengthened, partly thanks to the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in churches and chapels, facilitating access for the faithful. The Council of Trent reaffirmed the practice of Eucharistic adoration and promoted the worship of the Blessed Sacrament.

The first Tabernacles

"The Tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist

deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species."^[1]

Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament played an important role in this growing consciousness, ensuring that the Eucharist was reserved in churches. They spread throughout Europe during the Late Middle Ages, with a notable proliferation in Italy, and were responsible for promoting the active participation of the faithful in Eucharistic adoration, particularly supporting Corpus Christi processions. The Barnabites and St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria, in particular, promoted Eucharistic worship, and organized the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

The devotion of the Forty Hours emerged later. As its name suggests, the practice consisted of the

continuous exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for a full forty hours, with invitation to meditate on the Passion of Christ and prayers of intercession and reparation. It began in Milan and was promoted by figures like St. Charles Borromeo, spreading across Europe until the year 1592, when it was consolidated by Pope Clement VIII, who instituted Perpetual Adoration in Rome, thus contributing to the practice of visiting the Blessed Sacrament.

The creature's adoration of the Creator

When the Magi arrived in Bethlehem, St. Matthew recounts: "They entered the house, saw the child with Mary, his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped Him" (Mt 2:11). This gesture reveals the proper attitude of human beings who, recognizing themselves as a creature, bow before their Creator.^[2]

Adoration is more than an external act: it is a surrender of body and soul, a profound acknowledgment of our total dependence on God, before whom we bow with absolute respect and submission, aware that our existence only finds meaning in Him.

[3]

Bishop Javier Echevarría expressed it by saying, "Before this mystery of faith and love, we fall down in adoration. Only thus can we adequately show that we believe that the Eucharist is truly Christ, really and substantially present: his Body, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity."^[4] St. Josemaría invited us to approach the Blessed Sacrament in this way: "Build up a gigantic faith in the Holy Eucharist. — Be filled with wonder before this ineffable reality! We have God with us; we can receive him every day and, if we want to, we can speak intimately with him, just as we talk with a friend, as we talk with a

brother, as we talk with a father, as we talk with Love itself."^[5]

Certain gestures help us express adoration with our bodies as well. One such gesture is genuflection. "Made by bending the right knee to the ground, [genuflection] signifies adoration, and therefore it is reserved for the Most Blessed Sacrament."^[6] In Pope Benedict XVI's words, "genuflection or kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exactly expresses the attitude of adoration in God's presence and also with the body. Hence the importance of not doing this action out of habit or hastily but rather with profound awareness. When we kneel before the Lord, we profess our faith in him, we recognize that he is the one Lord of our life."^[7]

It may seem like people today have lost the sense of adoration and the need for silent worship, but Pope

Francis remarks that "the Eucharist is God's response to the deepest hunger of the human heart, the hunger for authentic life, for in the Eucharist Christ himself is truly in our midst, to nourish, console and sustain us on our journey."^[8] In the Eucharistic bread, we find what our hearts ultimately seek but only God can give: an unconditional love that fully satisfies our desire to love and be loved. In Eucharistic adoration, we can lean on the Lord's chest, like the beloved disciple, and let ourselves be embraced by Him. For by remaining with us in the Eucharist, God shows that "is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men — their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving

Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts."^[9]

The first devotion

St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori recommended the practice of visiting the Blessed Sacrament for all Christians: "Among all devotions, this of adoring Jesus in the sacrament is the first, after the sacraments, the most appreciated by God and the most beneficial for us."^[10] Other saints have also stood out as examples of souls in love with the Lord in the Eucharist. The Curé of Ars used to say that if we knew what the good Jesus is in the Tabernacle, we could not separate ourselves from Him.

A more recent example is that of St. Manuel González, a bishop known for promoting Eucharistic devotion

to abandoned tabernacles, to the extent that he requested to be buried next to a Tabernacle, "so that my bones, after death, like my tongue and my pen in life, will always be saying to those who pass by: There is Jesus! There He is! Do not leave Him abandoned!"^[11] Saint Josemaría wanted to include in a point of *The Way* the plea that Fr. Manuel made to some priests who had just been ordained by his hands: "'Treat him well for me, treat him well!' Words, mingled with tears, of a certain venerable bishop to the priests he had just ordained. Would that I had the power, Lord, and the authority to repeat that same cry in the ears and in the hearts of many, many Christians!"^[12]

Recent popes have also encouraged the practice of visiting the Blessed Sacrament. When recalling the Eucharistic piety of the Curé of Ars, St. John XXIII, said that "lengthy

prayer [...] before the adorable Sacrament of the Altar has a dignity and an effectiveness that cannot be found elsewhere nor be replaced;" when anyone "adores Christ our Lord and gives thanks to Him, or offers satisfaction for his own sins and those of others, or finally when he prays constantly that God keep special watch over the causes committed to his care, he is inflamed with a more ardent love for the Divine Redeemer."^[13] St. John Paul II writes: "How can we not feel a renewed need to spend time in spiritual converse, in silent adoration, in heartfelt love before Christ present in the Most Holy Sacrament? How often, dear brother and sisters, have I experienced this, and drawn from it strength, consolation and support!"^[14]

St. Josemaría encouraged us to make the Eucharist the center of our lives: "Keep struggling, so that the Holy

Sacrifice of the Altar really becomes the centre and root of your interior life, and so your whole day will turn into an act of worship — an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life... ^[15] He often spoke about the need to see the Blessed Sacrament as a refuge in which the soul finds comfort and strength. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament are a reflection of that desire for a personal encounter with God in the middle of the day. Sometimes it is enough to approach the Tabernacle for a few moments — if only through our imagination — to tell our Lord that we love Him and trust in Him.

The founder of Opus Dei nurtured this devotion from his youth. During

his time at the seminary in Zaragoza, the schedule included a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament in the church after lunch, as an act of thanksgiving. However, in the seminary chapel, the Blessed Sacrament was not permanently reserved until 1926, except on certain feast days.^[16]

During some recreation times, St. Josemaría would sneak away to visit the Blessed Sacrament from a gallery overlooking the church, a behavior that did not go unnoticed and caught the attention of his fellow seminarians.

Following the new directives of St. Pius X regarding frequent communion, this practice was encouraged among the seminarians, along with a greater Eucharistic devotion outside of Mass. They made visits of reparation, communal visits upon entering and leaving the house, and even ensured that the Blessed

Sacrament was accompanied by one of the students during breaks.

In Opus Dei, this ancient custom is concretized in the daily practice of making a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament, preferably at midday, after lunch. This visit consists of praying three Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory Bes in dialogue, concluding with a spiritual communion. Before each set of vocal prayers, the person leading the prayer pronounces, as an act of faith and reparation, *Adoremus in aeternum Sanctissimum Sacramentum* ("Let us forever adore the Most Blessed Sacrament"), and everyone responds by repeating the same acclamation.^[17] Naturally, the faithful of Opus Dei also strive to visit the Lord at other times of the day, even briefly, when entering or leaving a center, passing a church, etc.

A milkman and a countrywoman

St. Josemaría saw the Tabernacle as the place where Jesus is always waiting for us, ready to listen and help. He considered visits to the Blessed Sacrament privileged moments to reciprocate the Lord's love, showing our gratitude for his presence among us. He sometimes used anecdotes or stories to inspire these devotions quite naturally. One such story is about a man who, passing by a church every day, would enter for a moment and say, "Jesus, John the milkman is here."^[18] The visit is an invitation to pause in our day, enter a church or oratory, look at Jesus, and speak to Him from the heart. Moreover, these pauses can be a moment for God to renew our strength and lighten the burdens of the day.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, a Jewish intellectual who was drawing near to the Christian faith, recounted a similar experience. One day, she observed a village woman entering the Frankfurt cathedral with her shopping basket, pausing for a moment to pray. "This was something completely new to me. In the synagogues and Protestant churches I had frequented, believers attended services. Here, however, a person entered the empty church as if to have an intimate conversation. I have never been able to forget it."^[19]

In a fast-moving world, the Tabernacle is a refuge, a space to we find peace and solace in the Lord. "For me the Tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as

Martha, Mary and Lazarus."^[20] Visiting the Blessed Sacrament, we can develop the ability to listen to what God wants to tell us, often through those around us. "Taken up with haste, by so many things to say and do, we do not find time to stop and listen to those who speak to us. (...) Let us ask ourselves: how is my capacity to listen going? Do I let myself be touched by people's lives? Do I know how to spend time with those who are close to me in order to listen?"^[21] Visiting Jesus in the Tabernacle is an opportunity for Him to heal our senses and free our hearts from the restlessness of haste.

Like John the milkman or that woman in Frankfurt doing her shopping, visits to the Blessed Sacrament do not always require long prayers or elaborate ceremonies. It is enough to be there, to look at Him and let Him look at us. This personal encounter transforms

us because it places us before the greatest love: the God who has chosen to remain with us in the Eucharist. "The holy Eucharist gives the sons of God a divine newness and we must respond "in the newness of your mind," renewing all our feelings and actions. We have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord. We must not return to the old leaven, for now we have the bread which lasts forever."^[22]

Pausing before the Tabernacle is more than an act of piety: it is a declaration of faith. In the silence of the temple, away from the world's clamor, Jesus invites us to rest in Him. Time dedicated to adoration not only helps us strengthen our relationship with God but also transforms us, making us more aware of his love and our mission in the world.

"Jesus has remained in the Sacred Host for us! So as to stay by our side, to sustain us, to guide us. —And love can only be repaid with love. How could we not turn to the Blessed Sacrament each day, even if it is only for a few minutes, to bring him our greetings and our love as children and as brothers?"^[23] In Opus Dei, this ancient custom is expressed in a brief visit to an oratory, chapel, or church, reciting some vocal prayers and a spiritual communion before the Blessed Sacrament as a sign of Trinitarian adoration. "Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications."^[24]

This custom is also an opportunity to remember that Christ is always nearby, waiting for us, ready to listen and accompany us every step of the way. Moreover, each time we visit the Blessed Sacrament, we can bring the intentions of those we love, as

well as our own concerns and joys, with us. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Jesus' words can become a reality in each visit to the Blessed Sacrament. There, in his presence, we find the relief and peace that only He can give, and we find strength to move forward and light to face the challenges of each day.

In the Work, the visit usually concludes with the spiritual communion that St. Josemaría learned from a Piarist priest during his school years. He considered this small prayer an inexhaustible source of grace and an effective means to live in the presence of God.

Furthermore, spiritual communion is also a preparation to receive the Lord in the Eucharist each time we participate in the Holy Mass. This is, in fact, the purpose of the visit and

other Eucharistic devotions: to prepare, give thanks, remember... and, above all, to enter once more into the Eucharistic Communion we received in the holy sacrifice of the altar. The saints have always highlighted the connection between the visit, spiritual communion, and sacramental Communion.

During the confinement of the recent pandemic, due to restrictions on in-person Masses and limited access to the Eucharist, many faithful turned to spiritual communion as an expression of their desire and love for the Eucharist; their longing to receive Jesus in their hearts when they could not do so sacramentally.

"Mary can guide us towards this Most Holy Sacrament, because she herself has a profound relationship with it."^[25] Our Mother, who carried the Lord in her womb for nine months and was with Him for much

of her life, can help us diligently care for our visits to the Blessed Sacrament and thus continue to adore Him along with all the angels.

^[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1379.

^[2] Cf. *Ibid*, no. 2628.

^[3] Cf. *Ibid*, no. 2097.

^[4] Javier Echevarría, Pastoral letter, 6-X-2004, no. 6.

^[5] *The Forge*, no. 268.

^[6] *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 274.

^[7] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 27-VI-2012.

^[8] Pope Francis, Address, 19-VI-2023.

[⁹] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 84.

[¹⁰] St. Alphonsus de Liguiori, *Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.

[¹¹] Epitaph on the tomb of St. Manuel González, Chapel of the Tabernacle, Palencia Cathedral.

[¹²] *The Way*, no. 531.

[¹³] St. John XXIII, *Sacerdotii nostri primordia*, part II.

[¹⁴] St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 25.

[¹⁵] *The Forge*, no. 69.

[¹⁶] Cf. R. Herrando Prat de la Riba, *Los años de seminario de Josemaría Escrivá en Zaragoza, 1920-1925: el Seminario de San Francisco de Paula*, Rialp, Madrid 2002, pg. 53.

[¹⁷] *De spiritu* (35). In English, the person who leads the visit usually

say, "O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine," and the others respond, "All praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine."

^[18] He recounts the story in this video.

^[19] E. Stein, *Dalla vita di una famiglia ebrea e altri scritti autobiografici*, A. Ales Bello-M. Paolinelli (eds.), Città Nuova-OCD, Roma 2007, pg. 467-468.

^[20] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 154.

^[21] Pope Francis, Angelus, 5-IX-2021.

^[22] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 155.

^[23] *Furrow*, no. 686.

^[24] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2628.

^[25] St. John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53.

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