



## THEOLOGY CORNER

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*Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation*

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### “How Can I Grow in Devotion to the Eucharist During Lent?”

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We all know that the season of Lent is quickly approaching. There are many reasons to increase our devotion to the Lord during this season in which Catholics all over the world commit themselves to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. But in light of the recent mission of the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) to revive devotion to the Eucharist among the faithful, I believe that it would be wise to consider this as you are discerning the ways in which you can spend the Lenten season. It is common practice to “give up” something for Lent, so that one can draw closer to Christ by imitating his time in the wilderness, praying and fasting, in preparation for the accomplishment of his mission on the cross and beyond. This practice of “giving up” something during Lent can either be approached negatively (by subtraction), such as giving up something *physical* that you love in order to fit Jesus into that space, or it can be approached positively (by addition) by proactively *doing* something that you haven’t done before (or that you very seldom do). This year, there are things that you can both remove and add to your schedule each week which can bring you closer to both a desire and a love for the Real Presence in the Eucharist.

This mission was established in order that the faithful can come to realize the unfathomable gift that we have been given by Jesus, as he leaves us with not only the Holy Spirit, but his very body and blood to nourish us in our spiritual journey. Yet, many of us fail to truly appreciate just how great a gift this is. It is easy to get too comfortable in the practice of going up for communion at every Mass which can cause us to take it for granted. In fact, there are millions of Catholics who do not even know that the Eucharist is the literal body and blood of Christ! But even for those of us who do acknowledge this divinely revealed truth, we tend to get so caught up in the habit of receiving communion, that it starts to seem ordinary. But it is far from it! How ordinary is it to have God himself come down from heaven, making himself present for us to consume him and quite literally have him reside in our body, giving us spiritual food to keep us going? It is quite extraordinary, and we should treat it as such. Imagine a world where every Catholic has a beautiful devotion to the Eucharist. Imagine how many non-Catholics would flock toward our churches wanting to know what the hype is all about! Imagine how many of the world’s problems could be solved if people would realize that the Lord our God, the King of the entire universe is in our midst at every Mass. Unfortunately, many people in the world do not respond this way because we Catholics tend to make it seem like it’s just not that big of a deal. But in fact, as Pope St. John Paul II said, “The Eucharist is the heart of the Church. Where Eucharistic life flourishes, the life of the Church will blossom.”

So, what do we do about it? The USCCB is doing something about it right now, but the bishops can only do so much. It is *our* responsibility to carry out the mission on which we have been sent out. Here are two fundamental practices that you could adopt during Lent:

- 1) **Visit the Lord in his Eucharistic presence.** Participate in a Eucharistic adoration service, where the faithful gather together for hymns and prayers, meditating on the mystery of the Eucharist, and simply spending time with Jesus, asking him for your needs and to align your will with his. If, for some reason, you cannot make a formal adoration service, you can go into the church on a lunch break, or before or after work to spend time with him as he is reposed in the tabernacle. Even better, you can try to make an extra daily Mass during Lent! If the 8am Mass conflicts with your work schedule, then you are in luck! In Lent, there are two evening Masses offered every week (Tuesday at 6pm and Friday at 6:30pm). Do not waste this opportunity to allow God to become more present in your life. Doing this is literally what you were created for.
- 2) **Approach the Eucharist with greater reverence.** When you walk into the church, be *intentional* when you make your genuflection as you enter the pew. This is not just something Catholic like to do. This is done in order to pay respect and bow in genuflection before the King of the Universe present in the tabernacle on the high altar. Another way to approach him with greater reverence is to receive him worthily. When you go up for communion, are you in a state of sin? If so, go to confession. The worst thing you can do is to profane the body and blood of Christ by receiving him in an unworthy manner, as St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:27. Moreover, you can change up the manner in which you receive the Lord in the Eucharist. Do you receive in the hand? If so, that is okay because the Church has given permission to receive outside the usual way (on the tongue). But do so with knowledge that your second hand stays under your first hand, forming a throne for the King. You are encouraged also to go out of your comfort zone and receive on the tongue or by kneeling. Why? Because receiving on the tongue and kneeling are very humbling actions. If we want to increase devotion to the Eucharist, then changing our *exterior* actions when receiving him can impact our *interior* disposition.

Ponder these things in your heart as the Lenten season approaches and marvel at what the Lord can accomplish through you. Some of these things might not be comfortable at first, but as the late Pope Benedict XVI said, “You were not made to be comfortable, you were made for greatness.”