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Love Says Go: The Eucharist and the Christian Life



The ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is that every Christian would become another Christ, sent into the world to love as He loves. This workshop will explain how you can live the Mass to the fullest by becoming a living tabernacle, bringing the healing presence of Christ into a lost and wounded world.

Before I begin this talk, I first have to confess that I have stolen the title, “Love Says Go”, from the wonderful book of that name by my friend Jason Chin, a Protestant charismatic and founder of Love Says Go Ministries. Although he didn’t intend it this way, I think that short phrase beautifully sums up the whole purpose of the Eucharist. The very word “Mass” comes from the Latin phrase spoken by the priest at the end of the liturgy: *Ite, missa est*: “Go, she is sent.” Who is sent? We are! The “she” is of course the Church, all of us, sent into the world to share with it the gift we have just received. At the Eucharist we receive divine love – the inexhaustible, unconditional love of God that was poured out in the passion and death of Jesus Christ – into our hearts and our very flesh. That love is not static; it is filled with a divine energy that propels us outward into a world that so very desperately needs it. As St. Paul wrote, “The love of Christ impels us, because we are convinced that one has died for all” (2 Cor 5:14). Love says “go”.

So the ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is *mission: Ite, missa est*. In the United States, there are some churches that have signs posted at the exits to the parking lot, so that you see them every time you leave the church on Sunday morning: “YOU ARE NOW ENTERING MISSION TERRITORY.” They have the right idea! In the Eucharist, the whole pattern of Christ’s redemption is made present to us: he emptied himself of his divine glory and entered fully into this world with all its joys,

sufferings, and burdens; then he gave his own body to be broken and his blood to be poured out, so that we might be saved and healed and raised up to share in his own divine life. In the Eucharist we are taken up into this reality of Christ, so that we can in turn extend it into the world.

The Eucharist is therefore meant to form the pattern for our whole life; we are to live a Eucharistic life. If we read the gospels carefully, we discover that they reveal this truth in a hidden way. The gospels describe numerous meals that Jesus ate, with his disciples, with friends like Mary and Martha, with Pharisees, and with sinners and tax collectors. Each of these meals in its own way leads up to and sheds light on the climactic meal in the life of Jesus: the Last Supper, when he instituted the Eucharist. In a hidden way, these other meals teach us what it means to live a Eucharistic life. I would like to focus on two gospel meals in particular: the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:30–44) and the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11).

“You give them something to eat”

Let us look first at the feeding of five thousand. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, word spread that he healed the sick, and huge crowds began to gather around him. We can imagine what these crowds were like. Some were ordinary peasant families with young children; some were tax collectors, prostitutes, or other disreputable people. Many of them were deformed or sick. Some were in rags, some were mentally disturbed, some were lonely. Some of them didn’t smell good. Jesus was trying to bring his disciples away for a much-needed rest and retreat. But the crowds followed them. When he saw the crowds, “he was annoyed”? No, “he was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd”. The Greek word for “moved with compassion” (*esplanchnisthē*) is very strong; it literally means that Jesus’ stomach churned with compassion; he was viscerally moved by their need.

According to Mark, Jesus’ response to the need he compassionately recognized was that “he taught them many things” (Matthew tells us that he healed the sick, and in Luke he both taught and healed). Jesus perceived that their deepest need was for truth, for the knowledge of God

that comes from hearing the word of God. They were spiritually malnourished. As Amos had prophesied, there was “a famine for hearing the word of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). The people were hungry for the gospel Jesus preached – the good news about forgiveness of sins and the kingdom that has become present in him. Such is also the case today, for so many people around us: they are famished for knowledge of God. People may look successful and prosperous, but if we had spiritual x-ray vision we might see that they actually have bloated bellies, and arms and legs like sticks. This is the case even for many Catholics who go to Mass regularly, but who do not know the One they receive. They are famished for knowledge of God.

At end of this long day of teaching, during which Jesus was satisfying that profound spiritual hunger, the disciples decided they had to help him think of practical matters. So they told him, “This is a deserted place, and it’s getting late. Send them away, to go to the villages round about and buy themselves something to eat.” In other words, let the sheep fend for themselves – as if by leaving Jesus the people could get something they could not get *from* him!

Jesus’ reply was simple: “*You* give them something to eat.”

The disciples were a bit shocked. “Where are we going to get all that food? Are you expecting us to spend 8 months of wages to feed this crowd?”

This whole scenario is a lesson for their future ministry as apostles and evangelists, and for our life as well. How often do we think, “Lord, I don’t have what it takes to meet the needs of the people I encounter – their spiritual hunger for the gospel; or their need for healing; or for food, shelter and clothing; or simply for compassion, love, and understanding. I don’t even have what it takes to be kind, patient and forgiving with my own family. Sometimes I have trouble just getting up in the morning!”

Jesus asks the disciples, “What have you got? Go and see.” They answer, “Five loaves and two fish.” In other words, practically nothing! But in the hands of Jesus, who takes, blesses, breaks, and gives it to them to give away, it is multiplied to provide more than enough to fill and satisfy five thousand men (perhaps twenty thousand people). Jesus reveals the secret: “Just come to me with the little you’ve got – the paltry, inadequate resources you have. Come to me, let me love you, let me fill

you, let me satisfy you. Then give it away. Let your heart be moved with the compassion with which my heart is moved. You are my answer to the spiritual hunger of this world!” If we learn this secret, then the more we give away, not counting the cost, the more superabundantly he provides. There will always be enough, because infinite Love has emptied himself for us.

“You give them something to eat”: it is Jesus’ charge to all his disciples for all time, the template for the Eucharistic life. It calls to my mind a woman named Loretta whom my parents came to know some years ago. Loretta was of mixed race and grew up in difficult circumstances in a rough neighborhood in Steubenville, Ohio, USA. One day when she was about 14 years old, she was walking by the Catholic church and saw that the door was open. She felt mysteriously drawn to walk in. Inside, she was overwhelmed by a sense of the presence of God. She stayed for a long time. After that experience, she began to go to Mass all by herself. Her family was not Catholic. But all on her own as a young teenager, Loretta became Catholic.

Years later, as an older woman, Loretta began to take in children who needed a home. It started with two of her grandchildren, then a young boy whom she rescued off the street when he was being harmed by his mother. Then others. After a while became evident that the kids who lived with Loretta flourished; she was strict with them, but they knew they were loved. Even the child welfare agency and the police began to send her abandoned or abused children. There were times when she was caring for as many as 17 kids. She loved to tell the story of how she once had to potty-train nine children at once! Every Sunday, she would bring them all to St. Peter’s church in downtown Steubenville and line them up beside her, filling two pews.

Loretta was so poor that sometimes at night she had to unscrew the lightbulb in the living room and bring it upstairs to screw into the bedroom lamp. She also suffered from a heart condition and diabetes. In fact, she needed someone to take care of her! Yet she somehow she managed to feed, clothe, and raise all these children. Ultimately, Loretta took in more than one hundred children, some temporarily and some until they reached adulthood. A large number of them became well educated and prosperous adults. Loretta died about five years ago, and the last child

she raised has just entered university. Where did she find the wherewithal to provide for so many when she herself had so little? She had found Love himself, the source of all strength and all love. She let herself be filled and satisfied and replenished by him, she gave him her loaves and fishes, and let him multiply them.

“You give them something to eat.” Jesus does not ask us to give from our surplus, but from our substance, and sometimes it is costly. One time in an intimate moment of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament I felt moved to tell Jesus that I loved him so much I would be glad to be chopped up in a million pieces for him. Sometimes people in love say crazy things. I soon forgot all about it. Years later, when I was serving in leadership in a lay community, I felt pulled in all directions by many people – there seemed to be endless needs, complaints, and demands upon me. In frustration one day I prayed, “Lord, I feel like I’m being chopped up in a million pieces.” Instantly I remembered the prayer I had prayed years before. Be careful what you pray for! I realized that if I tried to meet all these need on my own strength, I was headed for burnout. But if I let the Lord be first in my life and kept my eyes fixed on him, I could keep handing over to him my loaves and fishes, and he would ensure that I never ran out.

“Do whatever he tells you”

A second gospel passage that points to the Eucharistic life in a hidden way is the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11). There the mother of Jesus noticed a most embarrassing predicament: the hosts had run out of wine! Ancient Jewish wedding celebrations lasted a full week, and running out of wine mid-week would put quite a damper on the celebration. Wine symbolizes the “more” beyond ordinary sustenance; it represents joy, abundance, and festivity. No host at a wedding serves the guests with water alone.

When Mary brought this need to her Son, he seemed at first to refuse: “My hour has not yet come.” But she, understanding the heart of her Son better than anyone else, and moved by tenacious faith, would not take

“no” for an answer. She turned to the servants and said to them – in her last recorded words in Scripture – *“Do whatever he tells you.”*

Jesus could not refuse such faith. He turned to the servants and said to them, “Do you see these six huge stone jars for the rites of purification, each with a capacity of about 150 gallons? Fill them to the brim.” If we consider the viewpoint of those servants, we can imagine that what Jesus said seemed to make no sense. The problem was a lack of wine, not of water! Moreover, it was no small task he had given them. They had to carry heavy jugs out to the village well, let down the jugs and pull them up, haul them back to the wedding venue, then go back to the well for more – probably numerous times. They might easily have thought to themselves, “What is the point of all this? What a waste of time!” They might have said, “Surely halfway filled will be enough.” But they remembered what the Lady had said: “Do whatever he tells you.” And they filled those jars to the brim.

But then Jesus asked of them another act of obedient faith: “Now draw some out and bring it to the steward of the feast.” Bring a ladleful of water to the steward? He might not think the joke is very funny! Nevertheless, once again they obeyed. And somewhere along the way, when no one was looking, that water became wine. Indeed, it became the “good wine” – the wine of divine life that Jesus, the true Bridegroom-Messiah, lavishes on his people. Once again, the Lord provided enough and more than enough to satisfy all. It was because of the obedience of those servants that abundant wine was supplied, the wedding festivities were saved, and Jesus did his first miracle, revealing his glory. Like the miracle of the loaves, it was a foreshadowing of the Last Supper, when he would provide the cup of his blood, an inexhaustible source of forgiveness and divine life.

How often the Lord tells us to do something that doesn’t make sense to us. How often the Holy Spirit gives us little promptings that we ignore because they don’t fit our own plans, or they seem a waste of time. At those moments we must remember the wise advice of the mother of Jesus: “Do whatever he tells you.” He may tell us to do something very simple, like “Call your cousin whom you haven’t spoken to in five years.” “Strike up a conversation with that man standing at the bus stop.

He is lonely and needs to hear of God's love for him." "Ask that woman who is hunched over in pain if you can pray with her for healing." If we obey, Jesus will take the "water" of our obedient faith and turn it into the "wine" of divine life.

My friend Tim Green experienced this truth. He was a lawyer who had an important job at Ford Motor Company. For twenty years he suffered from a brain tumor, enduring many rounds of chemotherapy. Nevertheless, several times a year he traveled to Mexico City with a team to serve the poorest of the poor who lived in a garbage dump, bringing them food, clothing, medical care, friendship, and prayer ministry. Many times, Tim and his team saw the Lord do miracles, multiplying food or instantly healing people who had serious medical conditions.

Tim learned to listen to the Holy Spirit. One time he was at a store in the U.S., buying flowers for his wife. He struck up a conversation with the woman behind the counter, and she told him that she was suffering from a bad headache. In fact, she said, she had had continuous headaches for months, ever since she had fallen and hit her head on the floor, sustaining a concussion. The fall had also badly damaged her vision in one eye. As she was speaking, Tim felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to offer to pray with her for healing. So he obeyed. He took a risk in faith. He said, "I've often witnessed that Jesus heals people. Can I pray with you for healing?" She hesitantly agreed. Tim extended his hand toward her, and the moment he began to pray, the woman felt the power of God. She told Tim that her pain had suddenly disappeared, and then she said, "I can see!" She covered her good eye, and was amazed that she could read labels on shelves in the distance that she could not read before. Tim explained that it was Jesus who had healed her, and in a simple way he shared the good news of how Christ died for us to reconcile us with God. By the end of their conversation, the woman had begun a new relationship with the Lord, and said that she planned to start going to church on Sunday. Jesus had turned the water of Tim's obedience into the wine of new life in Christ for this woman.

The two mysteries of the Upper Room

These two gospel passages, the feeding of five thousand and the wedding at Cana, reveal much about what Jesus would do at the Last Supper and what it means to let our lives take the form of the Eucharist. But there is one more element that is essential to living a Eucharistic life. It is the other great mystery of the Upper Room: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We don't know with certainty that the Upper Room of the Last Supper was the same Upper Room in which the disciples were gathered at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came, but it is certainly plausible (see Luke 22:12; Acts 1:13). In an Upper Room in Jerusalem, God gave the human race his two greatest gifts, the unfathomable proofs of his love: his Son Jesus in the Eucharist, as the memorial of his saving passion for all time, and his Holy Spirit, his own divine life.

These two gifts are inseparable from each other. It is because of Christ's passion that the Holy Spirit could be poured out (cf. John 7:39; 16:7; Acts 2:33); and it is by the Holy Spirit that Christ's passion becomes an efficacious reality for us, by which we are forgiven our sins and adopted as sons and daughters of God (cf. Romans 8:15). As St. Ephrem of Syria wrote, "*When you eat this bread [the Eucharist], you receive the fire of the Holy Spirit.*" The fire of the Holy Spirit is God's love, which we receive into our hearts and our bodies in the Eucharist, so that we may be conformed to the pattern of Christ – baked into the bread that is his body. The Holy Spirit makes possible the Eucharistic life.

The two mysteries of the Upper Room are reflected in the Eucharistic Prayer spoken by the celebrant at Mass. The Eucharistic Prayer includes the epiclesis, a prayer calling on the Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. But it is not only the bread and wine that the Holy Spirit changes. There is also the "epiclesis of communion", a prayer calling on the Holy Spirit to come upon the people as well, so that by receiving Christ's body and blood we too may be transformed into Christ. We see this, for example, in the Liturgy of

St. Basil, celebrated in the Eastern Churches: *May it please your goodness that your Holy Spirit come upon us and the gifts here offered, in order to bless and sanctify them and to consecrate this bread as the adorable body of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ and this cup as the adorable blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ that was shed for the life of the world. Grant, too, that all of us who share in the same body and the same cup may be united to one another in a sharing of the one Spirit.*

We also see it in the Third Eucharistic prayer, used in the Western Church: *Grant that we, who are nourished by the body and blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.*

These prayers show that the purpose of the Eucharist is that, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we might become what we eat: we become Christ's very flesh, his presence to one and other and to the world.

Fr. Andrea Santoro was an Italian priest who served as a missionary in Turkey. In 2006, while praying in his church, he was assassinated by a young Muslim fanatic. Shortly before he died, Fr. Andrea wrote a letter in which he said, *"I am here to dwell among these people and enable Jesus to do so by lending him my flesh... One becomes capable of salvation only by offering one's own flesh. The evil in the world must be borne and the pain shared, assimilating it into one's own flesh as did Jesus."* What a beautiful way to express the Eucharistic life: we *lend Jesus our flesh*, so that he can be present in the world through us. If we are willing to "bear the evil and share the pain" as Jesus did, he can bring his healing, forgiveness and salvation into the world through us. Sometimes that means even being willing to pay the ultimate price, to have our blood poured out as Jesus' was. This is the fullest expression of the Eucharistic life, as the second-century bishop St. Ignatius of Antioch understood. On his way to martyrdom in the arena in Rome, he wrote: *I am God's grain, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ... My love has been crucified, and there is no yearning in me for any earthly thing. Rather within me is the living water which says deep inside me: "Come to the Father." I no longer take pleasure in perishable food or in the delights of this world. I want only God's bread,*

which is the flesh of Jesus Christ... and for drink I crave his blood, which is love that cannot perish.

Dear friends, the purpose of our life on earth is not just to get to heaven someday. It is *to make heaven present on earth*. Wherever Jesus is, heaven is present. What a privilege the Lord has given us! When he said at the Last Supper, *“Do this in memory of me”*, on one level he was commanding his apostles and their successors to celebrate the Eucharist throughout all time. But on another level he is speaking to us: *“Do this in memory of me.”* Do what? Your whole life! As we feed on him, through the Holy Spirit we *become* him. Then we can say in effect to others, *“Take, this is my body – my time, my gifts, my love and attention, my life.”* Our whole life becomes a share in the mission of Jesus.

Every Mass, then, is to be an Upper Room experience. At every Mass we can ask him, especially after Communion, “Lord, where are you calling me to make heaven present on earth? How are you asking me to bring healing, or to share the gospel, or to give a word of forgiveness to someone who has offended me, or to provide for someone’s material needs?” Then we listen to him, with the Mother’s words echoing in our ears: *“Do whatever he tells you.”* Then, filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, we go out from the Upper Room as living tabernacles, ready to bring Christ into the world as the disciples did on the day of Pentecost.