

The Eucharistic Response

Fr. Pierre Toussaint — 2024-10-24

With a warm and gentle spirit, Fr. Pierre Toussaint gave a talk entitled, “The Eucharistic Response.” As a priest within the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, part of his mission is to do works with the poor in their neighborhood. Related to this, he shared biblical and personal stories of: 1) human desires, 2) God’s love for humanity and His Eucharistic response, and 3) our response to God.

HOMELESS — Father’s community in the Bronx supports a youth center for kids and ministers to the homeless and other people in need. This past summer, they hosted a summer camp for ~80 kids. When items began to disappear, they learned that a homeless man made his way into their complex and was taking random items. When they approached him, Frankie said that he just wanted to be with someone and simply desired to be seen, known, and loved. This is a fundamental need that we all have.

ABIDE IN ME — Jesus said “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in My Love.” The heart of the Father is Jesus and Jesus invites us to be caught up in the love shared between them. As Catholics, we have a place to be and that is abiding in this love. Throughout salvation history, God desired an abiding presence with people and He is rebuilding this relationship with us by revealing Himself in Covenants, in the Blessed Sacrament, and in the Pascal Mystery. God’s response to every human desire is to present Himself in the Eucharist so that we can encounter the Heart of God and His Love.

IN PROCESSION — This past summer, Father Pierre participated in the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage by walking from NY to Philadelphia. As they processed through a rough part of Philadelphia, they saw people on drugs and others just tired from the weight of life. While the Blessed Sacrament was passing by, a mission group told these people “Jesus is here right now.” Some people cried, others hid in shame, and others screamed out “Jesus have mercy on me.” Clearly, Jesus made an appointment to be with them in that place. When He makes a Eucharistic appointment with us, what is our response?

SAMARITAN WOMAN — Jesus had an encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, which was known to be a meeting place of the beloved with the lover. In this story, Jesus comes as the the Beloved to meet His lover — a woman who is in a place of shame and thus goes to the well during the day to avoid others. Jesus approaches her, sits down, and asks for a drink. She has no desire for an encounter since letting someone in causes her pain. He responds with compassion and tells her about her life since He knows her past, her shame, and her struggles. He allows her to know that He sees her, knows her, loves her, and is with her. He desires to pull her out of this prison of condemnation, shame, guilt and self-hatred. It was as though Jesus was saying to her, “You do not have to listen to those lies or to the shame. I will protect you and if you stay with Me, those lies can never hurt you again. Jesus wants her to stay in the present moment where true worship is with Him and where He can tell her of the Father’s Love for her. After she encounters Jesus, she is no longer ashamed and says “Come, see the One who told me everything about my life.” The apostles come back because they had gone to get food and Jesus says “My food is to do the Will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His Work.” By uniting His Will and Obedience to the Father, Jesus shows us how the Father desires to love us and in turn Jesus offers Himself as Food for us in the Eucharist. We too can be obedient to the Father through Jesus. We can experience His Sacred Heart and tenderness for us so we can not be overcome by shame, but instead know that shame has no hold over us. The beautiful thing is that He meets us with a Divine appointment at a place where we need Him most.

ABUNDANCE — Traveling back from California, Father Pierre and another brother were sitting at the back of the plane and did not have any money to buy whatever was being offered. A generous flight attendant named Chuck gave them an over-abundance of food and drinks. They asked Chuck to stop because they were concerned that he would get in trouble. But Chuck said that he wished someone would notice and say something about his generosity. The gift was embarrassing because they were sitting with all this stuff and were filled to capacity and still more was being given to them. Similarly, the Father’s Heart gives us an abundant amount of riches and goodness that we desire and He exclaims to all eternity that He wishes someone would say something about His (God’s) generosity because He will give His Son over and over again for us and He will never stop. This is the joy that we have that we can encounter in the Eucharistic response in Jesus. The Father never tires of providing His Son for us; Jesus never tires of giving Himself up for us; and we are drawn by the Holy Spirit to be with Him.

ABIDE / MUTUALITY and RECIPROCITY — In John 15:9, Jesus says “Abide in My Love” and in Greek, the word is “MENO” which means to remain, to abide, to stay, and it appears ~10 times within verses 1-11. This verb connotes the sentiment of mutuality and reciprocity, which describes the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father speaks of the Son's Heart and how It gazes always towards the Father and in mutuality and reciprocity flows the Holy Spirit. At the end of this discourse, Jesus says “I no longer call you servants, I call you friends because I have made known to you everything that the Father has made known to Me.” The best place for us to be is caught up in this relationship, specifically in the Eucharist, where we are placed in the Heart of the Trinity. It is there that we are able to be seen, known, and loved in a way that goes far beyond any of our expectations. It is much more profound than anything we have ever experienced because the Father rejoices in us and He sent His Son and they desire to speak about us constantly like gushing proud parents.

OUR RESPONSE — So, what is our response? In the Eucharist, Jesus offers Himself freely into sacrificial love for us to experience His goodness and His care for us. We are caught up in the Eucharistic Mystery to be an offering to the Father with Jesus so that we can experience the Father's favor upon us. There is an actual place where we can encounter Jesus and it is in the Eucharist. But, we have to open our hearts and have an open disposition. The truth is that we all carry burdens and we feel an acute awareness of their challenges. Additionally, we often carry lies like:

1) having to figure things out on our own, 2) not being able to tell anyone about it, 3) thinking no one will understand, and 4) thinking that we are not supposed to say these things to God and even if we did, He doesn't care. If we do not recognize these as lies, we can just stand before the Lord in truth and ask Him if that is His Voice and we will learn the truth.

LISTEN TO JESUS — As Fr. Pierre returned home, a young lady was sitting on the steps of the Friary. He recognized her as one of the girls from the youth center from 10 years earlier. Elizabeth had moved away, but she now returned in tears. He sat down with her and learned the burdens of her life had become too heavy for her to carry and she was at a crossroads in her life. She had a son and was now questioning even if she should continue with life. After listening to her, Father asked if they could go inside the youth center and classroom. She remembered both places and they brought up good memories. Lastly, he asked if he could show her the chapel and she agreed. They went to the chapel and sat down. He asked Elizabeth to share her heart freely with the Lord and he offered to step outside or sit with her. She invited him to stay and out loud she expressed her heart-wrenching struggling while crying. He invited her to be quiet to hear what the Lord would say back to her. After a period of silence, he saw her frown turn into a smile. There was a different presence about her as she sat back in peace. He asked how she felt and she said so much better because she felt seen. It is beautiful to be able to express with our hearts what is happening, but even more so to the Eucharist since the Lord desires us to do that.

CIRCUMSTANCES — Sometimes we fall into the pitfall of desiring our circumstances to be different because our life would be so much easier. The truth is that God is not interested in changing circumstances, rather He is interested in changing the disposition of our hearts. He wants us to know that despite those circumstances, He still loves us and has so much more in store for us besides these circumstances. It is the story of our lives. God does not want to change the scenery, but He wants to change the main characters' heart and the way we look at things. A part of this encounter is in the Eucharist. We come vulnerably before the Lord and say “Jesus this is my heart exactly how it is” and Jesus says “This is My Body given up for you.” Jesus is this eternal outpouring of God who says “I will be with you always.”

TRANSFORMATION — Our life is fragmented; we are poor and in need of a Savior. If we think about the physical bread that is transformed into the Eucharist, it is not the best quality of bread. It is simply a cheap wafer. But the Lord takes what is most cheap and maybe even cast away to make something eternally beautiful and glorious through the simple imposition of hands and a prayer of a priest. Likewise, God wants to take the scraps of our life (our brokenness, things that are difficult, things we want to cast away) to make something eternally glorious, and in a sense, Eucharistic. This takes us giving to Him those things that are heavy and burdensome for us. As much as we have a desire to be saved and to be delivered from these things, God's desire is so much stronger for those things — for us to be delivered, to be free, to be whole. It is our response that can engender healing that is not just momentary, but lifelong.

HEALING — Healing happens in the deepest parts of our lives and hearts. We know well that if we go to the doctor, we can not be general about what is happening. For the doctor to heal us, we need to be specific about what is wrong. In the same way, Jesus desires for us to be specific about the pain that hurts.

- If we say “My heart hurts,” tell God more.
- If we say “My heart hurts because of my relationship with my husband or my son,” tell Him more.
- If we say “I feel like I am not seen by my husband,” we can still go deeper.
- Then we can say “It just hurts whenever he looks past me and looks at that person and doesn't see me.”

There it is! The deeper we go in vulnerability with Him, the more the Lord is able to be with us in this place and we become ready to encounter Him in a way that is restorative. We go to Him not just because we have to, but because we are met by a response in a heart that cares for us, that desires for us to experience His goodness, His love, the Eternal outpouring of love from the Father. Going to Him speaks against pride, self-reliance, and control. This self-protection is where we can not tell Him specifics or we can not open up our heart because it hurts. He knows that and He desires to be there for us. Be assured He will be compassionate and loving.

LIES — When we go to God, we allow Him access to our heart so those lies that we are carrying can be dispelled.

- To the lie that I am unlovable, we can instead hear I love you.
- To the lie that I am alone, we can instead hear I am always with you.
- To the lie that I am worthless or I am not lovable, Jesus says “I give nations in exchange for you.”
- To the lie that I am weak and powerless, we hear “nothing is impossible for God.”

These lies are smashed and disbanded by encountering His Eucharistic Heart and by being vulnerable before Him.

The healing we receive happens co-naturally in the sense that we give it to Him naturally & He heals us in a Divine Way.

MASS — We are also healed at Mass. Right before the reception of communion, we say “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Thus, we acknowledge receiving Jesus under the roof of our heart and allow Him to dwell and heal us where we are most vulnerable and are our truest self. Also, during the fractioning, the priest bows down and says “May the receiving of Your Body and Blood Lord Jesus Christ not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy, be for me protection in mind and body.” The Lord gives Himself to protect us and to heal our minds and bodies.

- What is our disposition? How do we give ourselves to the Lord?
- Do we return from receiving communion and invite Him to those places?
- Can we talk to Him about our desire for Him to see our heart in the place where it is hurting with a relationship?
- Do we give Him those deep matters of our hearts?
- Do we sit with the One who loves us and has come by the well to encounter us in the way in which we are?

During the Eucharistic Pilgrimage, Fr. Pierre was struck with how often people came up for communion crying. He believes that there was a particular grace poured out upon our country during that time which continues to be poured out of God's love for us & we can experience that love especially in the reception of Communion. But if we receive Him with a heart that is cold and distant, then He can not do anything. St Augustine beautifully says “*The God who created us without our permission cannot save us without our permission.*” Thus, we have to allow Him access to our hearts, where He desires to be. Fr. Pierre shared the story of the man who received a blessing instead of Communion, but even with that felt embraced by the Father. How much more for us who have the privilege of receiving Jesus into our hearts?

This is the abiding presence where reciprocity and mutuality exists, where the more we give to Jesus, the more He has in store for us. The “more” He receives from the Father is not for Him to keep, but to be poured out through the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments. We are able to receive more grace if we ask for it and if our hearts are able to be expanded. Jesus desires us to abide with Him and receive the love that the Father has given Him. His love is over-abundant and we have an opportunity to encounter His love every time we receive Communion and come before the Eucharistic in Adoration.

FRANKIE — Recall Frankie was looking for that place to be seen, known, and loved by someone. He sat, hung out, and slept in the church. It is noteworthy that he experienced being with someone in the back of the church. Intuitively, he knew that this is a place where he could be safe, specifically with the Eucharist. We too know intuitively, but more so with our minds (maybe our hearts need to catch up) that this is the place where we can be safe in the relationship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit and that we can come to know the Love that God has for us.

SHE IS BEAUTIFUL — The final image Fr. Pierre had for us is Our Lady of Guadalupe who was painted on the side of their 4-story building about 20 years ago. Since she was faded by the sun and the weather, they recently had an artist restore the painting. When someone walked by afterwards, they exclaimed “She is so beautiful.” We know that she has always been our Beautiful Mother, but now the colors are more vibrant so people are able to see more clearly how beautiful she is. God does this same restoration for us if we Abide with Him. We become a totally different person and the colors with which God paints our lives become more vibrant and parts of our hearts become more full. Then people may exclaim, “She is so beautiful” because we represent that beautiful Love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit where God colors our hearts and our lives especially in those places where we feel sun beaten, weather beaten, and pushed down. He can bring to life those colors and those images so we can beautifully speak of His Love.

CONCLUSION — We simply give our hearts to the Lord as He eternally gives His heart to us. We give thanks for the nourishment that He provides in the Eucharist for us, but more so that we have an access point to know that we are seen, known, and loved by Him.