

## 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 – Sacraments II – The Blessed Sacrament – Wednesday Prayer Meeting

As we start I must tell you from where we have started and where we are heading. Most of us have come to know the Lord through the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which is really the charism of the renewal of the 21st and 20th century. God poured it out into the Catholic Church from 1967 onwards, and all of us have had an experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Through the experience of the Holy Spirit, Jesus became alive, His love became an experience, His voice became a reality and His leading became alive for each of us in our lives.

But what we see is, people who touch this experience deeply, sometimes very quickly fall away into their old life or they go back to a traditional form of walking in a religious way that they have done from their small days with little change. Then you have to ask the question: After having a touch of God, why did we fall back? Over the years, the answer that I have gleaned through this is that we need to learn how to live in the spirit. Not just to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit but we need to learn how to live in the spirit. To do that, what we have done is, we have identified 10 topics that we need to know and experience, in order that anyone who is baptized in the Holy Spirit can actually live a life in the spirit and mature.

So we have been working through this in the last couple of weeks and the first direction or instruction we received is to live 24 hours. That's our goal. Everything else will take care of itself. Holiness will take care of itself, the mission will take care of itself, the building of the kingdom will take care of itself and life with God will take care of itself. So you can't do anything unless first of all we live 24 hours in the spirit. For that God has given us a gift and it is part of our charism. We bring the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the four step retreat. It's amazing how, when the retreat finishes, people have begun to touch God, know God, hear God, experience God. That's truly a grace God has given us and has poured out into our lives.

After that we have also found out that through these very four steps, we can continue to live in the spirit. That's why the four steps as an opening to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the four steps as a way to live 24 hours in the spirit. That's what we have been learning in the first presentation.

The first step of the first presentation is come as you are, I love you. If you don't come to the Lord, everything else is academic and it's only thoughts. It won't work. "Come as you are, I love you." Returning to the Lord from wherever you have fallen, wherever you have lost your way is the beginning of the spiritual journey. So how many times? Even a thousand times doesn't really matter. We keep returning to the Lord, into His mercy and into His loving arms.

Then we do the second step which is to give the truth of your heart. When you give the truth of your heart you admit your brokenness, you accept your sinfulness. In fact it's like opening up your wound to be healed and to be ministered to. It's like going to the doctor and opening up your wound so that the doctor can actually cleanse it. The medicine for the woundedness of our sinful nature is the blood of Jesus Christ. We are cleansed by His blood in the second step as we give Him the truth. Sometimes at the beginning of the journey we have to keep on giving the truth because we so easily lose the life in the spirit and we fall back into our human nature. So we give this and we return to it.

Then we do the third step. In the third step we surrender ourselves to Him. Romans 12:1 is the key to this. In Romans 12:1 it is said to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. When you offer your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, God in Jesus Christ comes to live inside us. That's the majesty and the miracle of Christianity. God in Jesus Christ comes to live inside us, and then He begins to guide us with His voice. Not

only does He guide us with His voice but if you offer Him the throne of your life or the decision making place He will take it and He will guide us in the right path. Not only that, but something beautiful will happen. When we are connected to Him we begin to live into the life of the Holy Trinity. The love of the Father is continuously coming down to Jesus and the love of Jesus is continuously returning to the Father and this love is the Holy Spirit. When Jesus is living inside us, the Holy Spirit of God, that communion between the Father and the Son begins to move through our life and the energy, the power, the anointing of God is flowing in our hearts. We have life now and without even thinking about it we are enjoying the peace, the love, the joy of our God.

Then of course we are renewed in the Holy Spirit and we begin to experience newness, walking in the spirit 24 hours.

The next topic we dealt with was what do we do when we get into the spirit, because it's so easy to get out of it, so easy to lose it. We received the second instruction. The second instruction was praise. Praise is the special manifestation of the renewal of the 20th century right across the world. When you study the other renewals and revivals of history, a lot of manifestations are there but the powerful manifestation among us is praise. That's why we have praise and worship. Praise we saw, keeps us in the spirit, takes us out of ourselves, deals with our enemies, brings the blessings of God. So many things happen to us through praise. I'm not going to dwell there because I dwelt two weeks on praise.

The third teaching we looked at was not only do we return to the Lord, not only do we remain with Him in praise, but the Church has given us powerful gifts to touch God and grow in maturity in our journey. That's what we started last week. The gifts the Church gives us are called sacraments. Therefore, through sacraments we are nourished, we are nurtured and we are matured in the journey.

Ralph Martin - one of the pioneers in the renewal - in the early part of the renewal when he was reflecting on what was happening said in one of his writings: In the world there are many people who have experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and have a spiritual awakening. Then he identified and said that most of them are infants in spiritual journey and they remained children in spiritual journey. Because of their infancy and remaining as children, they lived like that and died. But he said the difference in the Catholic Church is you get from time to time, spiritual giants -- giants of God that come in such a way because if you look at these giants whom we later identified as saints, you would see they are nourished almost without exception through the sacraments. Sacraments is the way God's deeper, mature journey is brought into our lives.

So, what is a sacrament? I explained it last week but this week I want to bring it back quietly so that it is clear for us. I explained it in a different way. I told you how our brain is locked inside our skull. Because of that, if you really study how your brain is working inside your skull, you would be shocked to know your brain is floating in liquid and in absolute darkness. So how does the brain interact with the world outside?

The brain interacts with the world outside through the senses. How does that happen through the senses? In the senses that we have, the beautiful thing is with our eyes we give information to our brain that is hidden in darkness, through our ears we give information to our brain that is hidden in darkness. So when you hear the sound, the brain will say run and off we run, because the ears give information. The nostrils give information and say this is a bad place to be because the smell is terrible. The taste will say it is tasty or to spit it out because it is no good. The brain instructs through the senses. Of course through the touch

in our hands and feet and skin we interact with the world outside. The world comes to us through our senses. We interact with reality through our senses.

But God is Spirit. For God who is Spirit to interact with human beings who are primarily sense oriented, God designed a beautifully creative way. What is that? That's called sacraments. So if you ask what or who is a sacrament, the most relevant way to explain it is Jesus Christ is the greatest sacrament of God. Why is that? Because God is Spirit, and God who is Spirit manifested Himself as a human being. That's what Christmas is. The beauty of Christmas is God manifesting Himself as a human being so that He could begin to interact with people through their senses. So we hear the voice of God through our ears, we see His face with our eyes, we experience His love through a touch, we hold Him in our life. God coming to us through our senses and through the material world is Jesus Christ, is the sacraments. You must remember He comes to us through our senses to lead us to the life in the spirit.

I want to show you a beautiful passage that explains this for me most beautifully. There is this Samaritan woman whom Jesus had a chat with at the well. In the TV series Chosen, this is absolutely brilliantly done. Jesus stages the encounter. He know it's going to happen, he sends away his disciples and he is waiting for the encounter. In this encounter there is a major theological discussion.

What is the discussion? This woman is a Samaritan and Samaritans were rejected by the Jews. The Jews said, "You are not chosen. You are not God's people. We are God's people." Who are these Samaritans? Samaritans were people who were actually mixed race. In the 7th century BC when Israel was taken captive by Babylon, they took away all the powerful people, all the rich people, all the traders to Babylon but they brought poor people from other countries and planted them in Israel. These people and the poor who were left behind, the Jews, intermarried and the Samaritans were formed. So for the Jews they were really impure and they were people who were contaminated. That's why they say that even when a Jew from Galilee had to cross Samaria to go to Jerusalem they went in the night so they do not have to meet any Samaritans. No one spoke with them.

Jesus did something worse. He spoke with a Samaritan woman and that was even worse than anything else. This woman who seemed pretty sharp, she asked him a very relevant question. The moment she recognized that he is a spiritual leader, she asked, "Tell me where God is?" Today people ask, "Tell me in which church God is. Let me tell you where God is." Everyone is super confident where God is. She asked, "Where is God to be worshipped? Is He going to be worshipped on the mountain in Jerusalem, because that's what you all are saying, or on this mountain in Samaria where we are saying? Where is God?" Then Jesus answered:

*John 4:23*

*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.*

You have to connect with God in the spirit. Then in the next verse he explains why we have to connect in the spirit.

*John 4:24*

*God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.*

Ultimately God is Spirit, our worship of God is a spiritual act but from where does it grow? Where does it start? From where do we have the encounter? I never saw it before but this woman explains it.

*John 4:25*

*The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

Sacrament of God. The Messiah or Christ, they thought was a Jewish leader who will fight the Romans, but this woman discerns and says this Messiah will reveal God to humanity. How does he reveal Him? Through his life, through his senses he will reveal God to humanity. Through that revelation he will lead them into the spirit, into the spiritual realm.

So God is Spirit and our spiritual journey has to be into the kingdom. But where does it begin? It begins in our senses. The sacraments open the door to this journey and deepens it. Look at the next verse beautifully said by Jesus:

*John 4:26*

*Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he."*

He spoke like a king. Those days they used to say that kings used to talk in plural. They used to call themselves "we" and not "I". In the same way, Jesus says, "I who speak to you am he." Jesus, the great sacrament of God, coming to us through our senses and taking us into the life of the Spirit.

Last week we looked at the sacrament of reconciliation, and we looked at the second chapter of Mark and we saw how this paralytic was lowered from the roof. Nobody tells us what the house owner thought about it when you lower a man through the roof and the damage caused. 6heb Jesus looks at him and says, "Your sins are forgiven, take up your mat and walk." Then the Pharisees complain about what he said and I tend to think that what they were saying is absolutely true. Only God can forgive sins. Only He can free us. The beautiful difference is the Pharisees didn't know that Jesus was God, the sacrament of God. You can see it in the gospel:

*Mark 2:10*

*But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic...*

The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. That's why the sacrament has power. It is backed by the authority of God Himself. This authority of God, that only God can forgive sins, I told you last week that we always remember that when we are forgiven, we are forgiven of future punishment and we are freed of the burden that we can go to heaven with no problem because we have been forgiven - and that's true. But there is something more from the paralytic we glean: that true forgiveness from God frees us from the past. That's why people who were depressed are lifted out of depression and they are freed from the past. People who were broken and wounded and unable to have a relationship are healed from their brokenness because God is able to take away the repercussions of our past. That's why forgiveness of sins is so important. So only God can forgive, and God in Jesus brought that forgiveness among us, and then we saw last week, he handed that power over to the apostles. We saw it in the gospel of John how Jesus

said, "Those whom you forgive will be forgiven and set free. Those whom you don't forgive will not be forgiven." It was like a warning to us saying, "If you don't do your job, if you don't carry the forgiveness of God into the world, people will live and die in their sins and in a way, you will be responsible because you didn't share my forgiveness with the world."

So he handed the authority over to the apostles and we saw from the letter of James how this authority was handed over by the apostles to the elders, and this authority always linked forgiveness of sins and healing. It's so beautifully linked together. After that, we saw how they were asked to confess their sins to one another. Why is that? Because when you sin, you not only sin against God but you sin against God because you sin against your brother or sister. So you can't just reconcile with God by yourself privately without reconciling with your brother and sister, and repairing the damage.

For that in the early church, in the community gathering, people confessed their faults and their sin against the community and they were forgiven. This was handed down through the ages, from these elders to the priesthood that was established over time. In the priesthood, who is a priest? Consecrated, set apart to bring God into our midst through the sacraments; to take people to the heart of God through the sacraments. The priesthood is dedicated to bring the presence of God in a sacramental way through our senses, into our life and take us into the life of the spirit.

Therefore, in that confessing to a priest, we are confessing to God and when the priest says, 'I forgive you,' I'm hearing the voice of Christ. But not only that. I'm also kneeling before my brothers and sisters I have wronged. When I confess my sins, I'm not only forgiven but I'm also given guidance and penance. What is penance? It means I've been given a task to do. This is how you make amends. When you take that step, it is painful sometimes, it is hard sometimes but when you take that step through your penance, things are put right by God.

I'll share a testimony of my own before we go on. There was this elderly leader of the renewal who was the top leader with whom I worked for many years, and then he retired. When he retired we were so busy serving that we forgot about it. I remember once I was in this programme abroad, and when we were in that reflection, suddenly I realized that after we left I had neglected my relationship with him. In that neglect we had lost contact. So when I went to confession I said this and I explained what had taken place, and I was given this guidance to reach out to him. That was my act of penance. So I came back, I really didn't know how he would deal with me because several years had gone and I hadn't spoken with him. So I took a mutual friend who was friendly with him and me as a go-between and went to his house. I still remember, this gentleman who was so close to me and I to him, he ignored me totally. He only spoke with the other person and made it so clear that he was hurt. So I came back like a dog with the tail between the legs and I felt I'll never go back. I had done my best. I reached out, I obeyed God and now it's his problem.

But in my prayer time I was deeply challenged to reach out. I realised he was so deeply hurt, his expectations were shattered and that's why he did this. I called my friend again and I said, "Let's go again." He was there when it happened and asked me if I was sure and I said yes. We went again and this time when he saw me his resistance shattered because he realised I had seen my mistake, I had repented and I had truly come to reconcile, and until he died he was my friend. I saw that penance is paying the price to put things right in your life. That completes the forgiveness of God and the grace comes from the sacrament of reconciliation.

Let's go to the topic of today. The sacrament of sacraments is the Eucharist. The recurring sacraments of the Church which nourishes us throughout our life is the sacrament of reconciliation and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Of course you can receive the anointing of the sick several times but I hope we won't have to.

In the Second Vatican Council, which is the guidance of the Church for the modern age, the Eucharist was described as the source and summit of Christian life. Source means it's life-giving. It is the life-giving sacrament. Summit means it is the highest praise you can give God. So in the Eucharist, you get the life of Christ and also in the Eucharist, you give the highest praise to God.

Why? The answer is, all the other sacraments bring the power and the energy of Christ but in the Eucharist, the Eucharist brings Jesus Christ Himself. We have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Actually He is not in the bread - He is the bread; He is not in the wine - He is the wine. That's the difference.

I can still remember, something that really shook me and began my conversion in 1976 is, I went to the first talk of the Pubuduwa in the charismatic renewal, and in that talk this nun said, "Christianity is not a religion." I had been in a Christian family, I had gone to a Christian college and I always thought Christianity was a religion. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. She said, "Christianity is not a religion, Christianity is not a system. Christianity is a person, and a Christian is one who has an encounter with this person." I will never forget that and the effect it had on me when I realised this. This person of Jesus Christ who is God come to us 2000 years ago, continues to come to us through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

How does this happen? I am not going the normal route like last time as well. I can explain the theological terminology and you have been listening so far but you will stop listening after that. I'm going to go a different route.

*Genesis 1:3*

*And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

God's word is creative. When He says something it will happen. I was listening to this lecture on religion and science, and this lecturer was speaking and she said, right up to the 20th century, most scientists were convinced that the universe did not have a beginning nor does it have an end. Most of the scientists believed that. They laughed at the Christian explanation that it had a beginning and before that, there was nothing. But today, most self respecting scientists agree on something called the Big Bang Theory, where in a moment, in one micro second, the whole universe came into being. If you ask them how did that happen, they say, "We can't explain it to you because the laws of physics or any other natural law didn't exist to explain it." The Bible will tell you God spoke and it happened. That's the power of God's word. When God says something it happens, it moves. God's word is powerful.

So that is my first premise. The second premise is Hebrews 1:3. Genesis 1:3 and Hebrews 1:3 are beautifully matched. Genesis 1:3 is about God's word and Hebrews 1:3 explaining God's word.

*Hebrews 1:3*

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory...*

The radiance of God's glory is in the Son who is Jesus.

*Hebrews 1:3 continued*

*...the exact representation of His being...*

In normal jargon it means Jesus is God.

*Hebrews 1:3 continued*

*...sustaining all things by His powerful word.*

Who is sustaining all things? Jesus. In Genesis 1:3 who brought creation into being? God. The word of God which is the exact representation of His being, when He says something, those words have creative life.

The power of a word depends on the one who speaks it. It looks a very difficult thing to understand but let me explain. We meet our old friends at a party and we have a chat. Then one of my friends tells me, "I will send you to jail for 10 years." When I hear that, that becomes a big joke for me because my friend is telling me he will send me to jail for 10 years. I know it's a joke because he can't send me to jail for 10 years. Now I'm standing before the judge. Now the judge says those exact same words. When he says those words and tells me, "I am sending you to jail for 10 years," that's the moment when everything begins to shake inside of me because the word that the judge speaks has authority behind it. If I say I don't want to go to jail the judge has the power to send the policeman and grab me.

The word you speak has authority according to who speaks it. Jesus is God speaking God's creative word.

The question now is: What did Jesus say? Did he say anything about the Eucharist? I want to share with you what Jesus said. In the gospel of John there is no institution of the Eucharist like in the other 3 gospels. In the other 3 gospels you have Jesus in the last supper saying, "This is my body, this is my blood." In the gospel of John he washes the feet of his disciples. But, there I'd an institution of the Eucharist in John but it's not at the end of the gospel but in the middle, in John 6. These are the words of Jesus who is the word of God, who is God, backing it with the authority of God Himself.

*John 6:50*

*But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die.*

Like the Samaritan woman, these people would have thought they have got a bread factory here. If you eat it your health is complete. You are not going to get a heart attack, you are not going to grow old. So they would have wanted this bread.

*John 6:51*

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

If somebody else said it, it would merely be words. But who says it? God in Jesus Christ Himself. He is saying, "I am the bread you have to eat." The Jews didn't like it. Even today there is a controversy over the Eucharist for 2000 years and there will always be.

*John 6:52*

*Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"*

When they objected, in another place in John it says, "Who can hear these words?" and they were going to walk off. If I was there, and I'm sure I suspect if you were there, we would have said, "Wait wait wait! This is only symbolic. You can't understand I'm only saying nice words to understand that you have to have a relationship with me." Like the interpretation that many are having today -- these are only thoughts and ideas. You have a spiritual relationship with me. You consume me spiritually. After all don't take this literally. He would have said that and he would have had the whole crowd. He would have kept them. But Jesus was no diplomat. What did he say?

*John 6:53*

*Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

That's when they all left. Then he asked the disciples, "Will you also go?" He didn't care because he was having a deeper revelation from God.

Today these words can be explained scientifically and that's what I want to do tonight. There is something called a food chain in evolution. Today scientists have understood this very clearly. In the food chain, the lower lifeforms feed the higher ones. When a deer eats grass or a gazelle eats grass, the energy and cells in the grass is consumed by the deer and is assimilated in the system and transformed into energy and life, and the deer begins to live through the energy and life that the grass is giving the deer. So the grass says, "Eat me and live," and the deer begins to live, consuming the grass. The lower lifeform is sacrificed for the higher one. Now this deer is full and has eaten all the grass and can hardly run and suddenly meets a lion. What does the lion do? The lion consumes the deer and here is the system called the food chain. Through the cells and the energy that is inside the deer, the lion consumes, assimilates, puts inside his system and then begins to live with the life of the deer. The weaker lifeform is consumed by the stronger one and it lives.

But here is the miracle. God, who is the highest expression of life, out of love says, "You eat me, you consume me, you take me into your life and I will come inside of you, I will become assimilated by you, but then I will transform you into my nature." The deer can never transform the lion into the deer's nature. The grass can never make a deer grass because it's a weaker lifeform. But here, the stronger lifeform, the eternal God, when we consume Him, He not only comes inside but He transforms us into His nature. That's why the Eucharist is the food through which the life in the Spirit is given to us.

*John 6:54*

*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

*John 6:57*

*Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.*

Because of the problem of time I'm going to skip the gospel part of it. We all know it. Matthew, Mark and Luke has the description of how he established this on the night before he died. He said, "This is my body



and this is my blood. Do this in memory of me." Then, to make it happen he died on the cross and he rose again.

Now what I want to show you tonight is, what he established that day on Maundy Thursday, he intended for everyone to carry on until he comes back. What he started, he intended to carry on until he comes again. Not just for Maundy Thursday, not just a memory but a living experience until he came back. How do you know? There is a passage that St. Paul has written that many people are not aware of. St. Paul is the first writer of the New Testament and Corinthians is one of the first writings. St. Paul is one of the people who didn't have any connection with the historical Jesus Christ. He is from the next generation. I told you how Jesus handed the sacrament of reconciliation over to the apostles and that was handed over to the elders. St. Paul is from the next generation. Let's see what he says about the Eucharist:

*1 Corinthians 11:23*

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you...*

From whom did he receive it? From the Lord. That means the Risen Christ revealed this to St. Paul. What did he reveal?

*1 Corinthians 11:23-24*

*...The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

The moment I read this, our Protestant brothers and sisters will say, "That's what we say. This is only a memory." Let's leave it at that now and go down a little bit.

*1 Corinthians 11:25*

*In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

Then again they will say, "I told you it's only a memory and a remembrance." But there is a little further down you need to read.

*1 Corinthians 11:26*

*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Then again we are told, "That's it. It's a symbol. You proclaim it through this action." But you have to read a little more.

*1 Corinthians 11:27*

*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*

If this is only symbolic, if it is only a memory, how can you sin against the body and blood of the Lord? St. Paul was very clear. In the Eucharist, in the body, in the blood was Jesus Christ Himself - the real presence. If this evidence is not enough, we read the next verse:

*1 Corinthians 11:28*

*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

That's why we do a heart searching before we go to the Eucharist.

*1 Corinthians 11:29*

*For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord...*

If the argument had come directly from the top of remembering, he should have used the words "without remembering the body of the Lord." St. Paul's argument is something else. Can you see how the whole thing flows? That's why you have to look at the whole text.

*1 Corinthians 11:29*

*For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

I looked at the Greek word for recognizing and it also means discerning. You have to discern that this is truly the real presence of Jesus. If not, the next verse explains it:

*1 Corinthians 11:30*

*That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

If it was a memory and a ritual and just a remembrance, why is he saying that if you don't discern the body and the blood you are talking sick and not having life in you and you are dying? Because they didn't discern the living presence of God in flesh and blood in Jesus.

How can this happen? Because Jesus is God and His word has the power to make it happen. By His word He sustains the universe. By His word He comes to us through our senses, through the Eucharist, through the host, through the wine, into our lives.

I can tell you my own experience. From childhood we were taken to mass and we said the prayers and followed daily mass in the school, but I never discerned the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. I only had the ritual. I never discerned it until the Holy Spirit opened my inner eyes to see it. That has happened to many people and tonight we need to pray not only for us but for the others that this great act of love will be discerned. When you discern it and open yourself to it, the same encounter with Jesus that the apostles had and even deeper is available for us today through the Eucharist, and that will take us to holiness, to maturity, to saintliness and to divine life itself.