Eucharistic Spirituality

The starting point for eucharistic spirituality is the table of the Lord Jesus, a truth affirmed at the Second Vatican Council and underscored in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.' 'The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the church, namely, Christ himself, our Pasch'" (1324).

The risen Lord gathers, teaches, and nourishes his followers at the table of his body and blood through the ages, and sends them forth to continue his mission of proclaiming the Good News and building the reign of God. The table is central to our faith as Christians because it is at the table, as for the disciples journeying on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), that Christ makes himself known to us in "the breaking of the bread."

A comprehensive eucharistic spiritually encompasses three aspects: celebration, contemplation, and mission.

Celebration—Gathered at the Table

"The celebration of the Eucharist joyfully proclaims the marvels God has accomplished in our history. Daily we give thanks for the new covenant which God has sealed once for all in the blood of his Son, and which he renews in his ever faithful love" (Rule of Life, 24).

For Christians, the paschal mystery—the dying and rising of Jesus Christ—is God's greatest act of salvation. By our union with Christ in this sacrament, we die

to sin and rise to new life with him. Thus, we experience the power of the Eucharist to renew and transform us as "we offer to the Father our own lives along with the hopes and sufferings of all those with whom we are working to build a society based on justice and love" (Rule of Life, 25).

Contemplation—Remaining at the Table

"We internalize the celebration of [the Lord's] Passover by a prayer that makes our whole life a prolongation of our Eucharists." "Our response to this presence of Christ is to enter into the dynamism of the Eucharist with a prayer of adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, of reconciliation and intercession, as church and for the world" (Rule of Life, 28, 30).

The Passover of the Lord Jesus is at the center of God's redemptive plan; it is also the source of contemplation of that mystery. Christ's presence in the sacrament calls for a prayer of presence and reflection on all that God has wrought in salvation history. It makes us increasingly more aware of and grateful for God's faithfulness and love.

Mission—Sent from the Table

"We seek to understand all human reality in the light of the Eucharist, source and summit of the life of the church. We discern in this sacrament a call to share in the life and mission of the Lord, and we give priority to activities that manifest the riches and demands of the eucharistic mystery in all its dimensions" (Rule of Life, 34).

The final act of the celebration of the Eucharist is the dismissal, the sending. The table of the Lord inevitably leads to mission. The two disciples of Emmaus ran from the table of their encounter with the risen Christ back to Jerusalem to announce that they had seen him in the breaking of the bread. The apostles, filled with the fire and power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, left the Cenacle, where they had shared the Last Supper with Jesus, to begin the church's universal mission.

In every place and circumstance across the centuries, the followers of Jesus have found inspiration at the eucharistic table to go forth in his name to preach the Gospel, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, clothe the naked, and encourage all on the journey of life. We who gather at the table, who meet Christ in his word and sacrament, and in each other, are called to bring his life and love to those around us through committed lives of witness and service. Saint Peter Julian Eymard exemplified this in his own life, as he lived the fruits of a rich eucharistic life and faith in service to the poor.