

Notes from the Liturgist...

The Source and Summit

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The phrase Source and Summit is used frequently to describe the Holy Eucharist. It was first used in the document of the Second Vatican Council regarding the Church, *Lumen Gentium* it says “The Holy Eucharist, is the source and summit of the Christian life” (LG, 11). Since the Christian life is essentially a spiritual life, we might say as well that the Eucharist is the “source and summit of Christian spirituality” too.

To most Catholics, that proposition may seem obvious enough, even if they do not quite understand why. Intuitively, they know that the spiritual life means using every means available to grow closer to Christ. And they know that Christ Himself is present in the Eucharist in the most sublime manner. It makes sense, then, that the Eucharist should be central to the spiritual life of a Catholic.

But what the devout soul knows about the Eucharist intuitively should, where possible, become better known and more deeply experienced through systematic reflection on the Church’s Eucharistic doctrine. The better we understand the Eucharist’s role in Christian spirituality, the better we will be able to love Christ present in the Eucharist. Regular teaching and preaching about the Holy Eucharist is thus strongly encouraged by the Church.

These two dimensions of the Eucharist – its being both the source and summit of Christian spirituality – reveal how the Eucharist, being Christ Himself, brings God and man together in a saving dialogue, a mutually giving and receiving relationship. In short, in a covenant of love. The Eucharist is at once the Father’s gift of Himself in Christ to us and, through Christ, our offering of Christ and, with Him, of ourselves – our minds and hearts, our daily lives – to the Father.

Put in the traditional language of the Christian spirituality, we say that this communion with God is brought about by grace and lived out in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Because the sacraments are instruments of grace and means of growth in the theological virtues, we can say that Christian spirituality entails what Pope St. John Paul II called a “sacramental style of life.” It involves using the sacraments to grow in the spiritual life. And because the greatest of sacraments is the Eucharist, Christian spirituality is above all Eucharistic: coming from the Eucharist as its source and directed to it as its summit or zenith.