

From This Holy Mountain

A Publication of the Dominican Nuns of St. Dominic's Monastery - Linden, Virginia - Summer 2023 Issue

"With great delight
I sat in his shadow,
and his fruit was
sweet to my taste."

(Song of Songs 2:3)

FEATURED INSIDE:

*Pange Lingua:
The Mystery & the Man*

*Fruit amid Thistles:
Daily Offering, Daily Bread*

*Friends Spotlight:
The Presence of the Good Shepherd*

*Contemplata Aliis Tradere:
The Eucharist & the Trinity*



*D*ear Friends in Christ,

We are in a year of anniversaries and a year of renewed thanksgiving. June 24th will mark the fifteenth anniversary of our arrival on Blue Mountain. As we look back over the decade and a half that we have spent here—wholly given over to the worship of God, for the praise of His glory—we marvel at God’s many blessings. The seeds we have planted over the years to make our land bloom remind us of how He has been cultivating our community and each heart. As St. Paul says, it is truly God who gives the growth.

*It is God who
gives the growth,
but in His mercy
He uses human hands
to till the soil—ours
and yours.*

We are also celebrating a double jubilee of our Dominican brother, Saint Thomas Aquinas. July 18th marks the seventh centenary of his canonization and March 7, 2024 will be the 750th anniversary of his birth into eternal life. The Holy See is granting a plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions, to all the faithful who visit Dominican churches or chapels in a spirit of pilgrimage, attending Masses for the jubilee or devoting time to prayer. We invite you to join us as we give thanks for our beloved brother and ask him to intercede for our Church!

We have entered, too, into our nation’s three-year Eucharistic Revival. What more appropriate or fruitful way could we offer thanks than in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, where we participate in Jesus’ own act of thanksgiving to the Father? “The Eucharist,” says Saint Thomas, “is the sacrament which expresses Christ’s love and causes our love.” This is the mystery we are so blessed to contemplate and live each day.

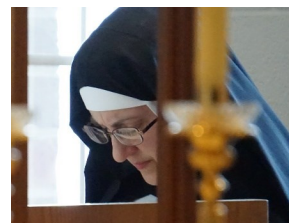
Finally we are delighted to share with you a tremendous gift we have received from a closing chapel: exquisite Mayer Studio stained-glass windows of the Mysteries of the Rosary and Dominican saints. We are now working with our architect to redesign our chapel to incorporate these beautiful windows. The completed chapel will indeed be a place of worship worthy of the Lord. We pray that it will also be a sacred space of beauty, silence, and tranquility where our faithful laity may encounter the Lord whom they seek.

It is God who gives the growth, but in His mercy He uses human hands to till the soil—our hands and yours. Our thanks to God thus overflows in deep gratitude for each of you. Be assured that our community remembers you and your families and all the needs and concerns entrusted to our prayers. May God bless you abundantly and pour out His grace upon you, sowing in your hearts the seeds of His glory.

With our grateful prayer,

Sr. Mary Fidelis, OP

Prioress



PANGE LINGUA

The Mystery & the Man

AMONG THE *LEGENDA* of our saints, not every tale is entirely true. There is, for instance, the story of Saint Bonaventure hearing the Corpus Christi hymns of Saint Thomas Aquinas and promptly tearing up his own. (As a modern biographer notes, the Franciscan couldn't tear up what he had never written down; though perhaps this presumes the point.) Admittedly, the story does have a fabulous air. Yet like most fables, it memorably communicates a deeper truth: not just the Dominican origin of the hymns nor the brilliance of their author, but the divinely inspired gift that these canticles are for the whole Church.

In this vein, a seventeenth-century drama playfully depicts a music festival among the doctors of the Church. Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory, and so forth each sing in turn, but Thomas Aquinas triumphs with his *Pange Lingua* and receives the prize of a golden sun. Iconography has long awarded him the same: a sun ablaze over his heart, signifying that his radiant wisdom comes from the God he loves.

Pange, lingua, gloriosi

Corporis mysterium.

Sing, my tongue, the Savior's glory,

Of His flesh the mystery sing.

The history of this hymn and the Corpus Christi liturgy can be sketched in few words. In 1210, the young Belgian Sister Juliana receives a vision revealing that our Lord desires a special feast for His Body and Blood. Soon Corpus Christi is celebrated locally, and through the Dominican preacher Hugh of Saint-Cher its popularity spreads. When Hugh dies at the Orvieto priory in 1263, Thomas Aquinas is residing there. The following year, at the request of Pope Urban IV, the Angelic Doctor—or *Doctor Eucharisticus*, as Pope Pius XI will call him—begins composing a Corpus Christi liturgy for the universal Church. It is these very hymns that we still sing on this Solemnity and on Holy Thursday and before the



Blessed Sacrament throughout the year. In liturgy and devotion, then, the prize is awarded even now to Thomas. Or better put, his gift still shines upon us today.

Christ's benediction of our brother in his later years is well known and well attested: "You have written well of Me, Thomas. What reward would you have?" – "*Domine, non nisi Te.* O Lord, nothing but You." Less familiar is an earlier vision he received in Paris, after beseeching God's blessing on his texts about the Eucharist. Jesus appears over the altar, the primitive biographers record, and Thomas hears Him declare, "You have written well of the Sacrament of My Body." Then at last there is the famed vision on the eve of his earthly life. Compared with what he has seen, Thomas confides to Friar Reginald, all that he has written seems but straw. The prolific friar does not tear up his work, yet in humble awe he takes up his pen no more. And this very silence brings to perfection what he has begun. For the silence that seals his life and mission—like that of the liturgy itself—points beyond the man and our human words, however luminous, to the mystery of the God we love.



Fruit amid Thistles

Daily Offering, Daily Bread

“
BLESSED ARE YOU,
Lord God of all creation,
for through Your goodness
we have received
the bread we offer You:
fruit of the earth
and work of human hands.
”

<The Gleaners by Jean-François Millet, 1857

“BLESSED ARE YOU, LORD GOD of all creation, for through Your goodness we have received the bread we offer You: *fruit of the earth and work of human hands. . . .*” So familiar that they’re almost forgotten, these words are rich in biblical roots. They stretch back to the eldest son of Adam and the first act of worship told of man:

*Now Adam knew Eve his wife,
and she conceived and bore Cain, saying,
“I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”
And again she bore his brother Abel. . . .
In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD
an offering of the fruit of the earth.
And Abel brought one of the best firstlings of his flock.
And the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,
but on Cain and his offering He did not. (Gen 4:1–5)*

It is a thorny resonance, to say the least, and a discomfiting beginning.

Hearing this story as a child, I drew two conclusions: fauna outranks flora, and God desires and deserves our very best. No metaphysical or theological studies were required here. After all, wouldn’t it cost more to give away my pet rabbit

or the biblical choice lamb than to bring to church a plate of biscuits or a basket of fruit? Especially if I knew a consuming fire awaited there.

As commonsense philosophy, I suppose my intuition was true enough. But, of course, it is far from the Scriptures’ final word. For from the bread and wine blessed by Melchizedek through the first-fruits and cereal offerings of the Mosaic Law, the Chosen People continue sacrificing the fruit of the earth to God. To what avail, though? Are fruit and grain really worthy of the Lord? Alongside the animal sacrifices with their thunder, flames, and sprinkled blood, these vegetal gifts seem rather paltry and mundane. Everyday matters—daily offerings, daily bread—far from the pyre of Mount Moriah and the flesh and blood of the unblemished lamb.

*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread,
on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. . . .
And Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks
He broke it and gave it to them, saying,
“This is My Body which is given for you.” (Lk 22:7, 19)*

Why bread? we might well ask. Why the fruit of our broken earth? If the Eucharist is indeed the ultimate sacrifice,

the source and summit of our Christian life, why do we place such a humble gift upon our altars? With faith-filled simplicity, Saint Thomas Aquinas replies: This is what the Gospels teach for it is what Christ Jesus did. “Such things as arise from God’s will and beyond the creature’s due can be made known to us only through being revealed in Sacred Scripture.” *Do this, Jesus said, in remembrance of me* (Lk 22:19). Then the question emerges anew: Why did Christ do this first? The Passover lamb lay before Him also; why not consecrate it instead?

Here, with the penetrating vision that springs from faith, Saint Thomas ponders the fittingness of what Christ has done. Just as bread is common food, so the Eucharist nourishes and sustains our souls. It also signifies and upbuilds the unity of His Mystical Body, the Church: “As bread is composed of many grains and wine flows from many grapes . . . *we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (1 Cor 10:17).”

At the same time, Saint Thomas acknowledges the profound significance of the Paschal Lamb, the Old Law’s chief foreshadowing of the Eucharist and the Cross. Like the children of Israel freed from bondage by the blood of the Paschal Lamb, so we are redeemed by Jesus’ self-offering and His outpoured Blood. “Behold, the Lamb of God,” Saint John the Baptist proclaims, and gazing on her “true Bread” the Church echoes his words of adoration. *Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed; therefore let us feast . . .!* (1 Cor 5:7)

I can’t help wondering, all the same, at the very lowliness of bread and wine—the poverty of our morning offering transformed into the flesh of Christ. And with that, our inward offering, no weightier than a fragile host: each day’s prayers, works, joys, and sufferings, placed on the altar of His Sacred Heart. “If you do well,” God says to Cain, “will you not be accepted?” (Gen 4:7) To which we might rejoin, Cain’s brethren that we are: Who can hope to do well, this side of Eden, amid our thistles and our thorns? What son of Adam could justly merit the grace and favor of Almighty God? “By the sweat of your brow,” the Lord told

*Truly, in the Holy Eucharist,
the fruit of the new Eve’s womb
becomes fruit for us as well,
and we with our humble offerings
are sanctified by His Blood.*

Adam, “you shall get bread to eat” (Gen 3:19). “I have toiled in vain,” I despond, “for nothing, uselessly spent my strength!” (Is 49:4)

Fruit of the earth and work of human hands—our gift to God, but God’s gift first and last. For in the mystery of the Incarnation, marvels Saint Thomas, “He did not despise the weakness of His own handiwork.” And in the mystery of the Eucharist, we might add, He does not despise the weakness of our own. He asks for our prayers, our pains, our labors—the work of our hands and minds and hearts—not to weigh them and find us wanting, but to join us to the work of His beloved Son. *For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*

(Rom 8:29). Truly then, in the Holy Eucharist, the fruit of the new Eve’s womb becomes fruit for us as well, and we with our humble offerings are sanctified by His Blood.

With Christ and His Church we thus dare to pray: “I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength” (Is 49:5). *Through Your goodness we have received the bread we offer You: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the Bread of Life.*





Grazing sheep of God
 Grazing sheep of God
 Come and eat
 for Jesus will be with you
 He will have a meal with you
 if you ask Him.

— Grace, six years old

Delighting In the Presence of the Good Shepherd

FOR OVER TWO DECADES I have had the great privilege of working with children from 3–12 years of age in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium. In the prayer environment of the Atrium, the Good News of God’s love and His personal invitation to relationship is enjoyed and celebrated. This model was named for the parable of the Good Shepherd and Jesus’ proclamation in John 10, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Decades of attentive observation have shown that this proclamation elicits universally the greatest response of joy in children.

The children delight in hearing of the attentive, self-giving relational love of the Good Shepherd. It is the Catechist’s great privilege to witness what is often a “falling in love” moment for the child with the Good Shepherd, when *these two great loves meet* as heart speaks to heart. In the Atrium, the child is invited to simply *enjoy being present with the Good Shepherd* who knows and calls each by name. How happy those sheep are, the children say! And how *happy the Good Shepherd is to simply be with His sheep!* In subsequent years of work with the parable materials, on their own and to their great joy, the children discover *I am one of those sheep so loved by the Good Shepherd; all His love and care is for me as one of His sheep.*

A few years in the Atrium go by. A slightly older child is invited to consider the most particular *place and way* the Good Shepherd desires to be Present with His sheep . . . at the Holy Mass. When the children understand how Jesus is calling them by name to come and be fed at His Eucharistic table, their desire for receiving Jesus is very great! Children instinctively know that the *Eucharist is a celebration of relationship*—it is the way the Good Shepherd offers to be very, truly, intimately *Present* with His sheep. The children often share how long they have been waiting and desiring Jesus. But they also know with assurance that Jesus, too, *has been waiting with great love and longing.*

The Good Shepherd in His Real Presence delights to give His *full attention* and *whole Self* to us. It is our work to be led by the children and become more fully present to Him. Can we deeply know how much joy we give our Good Shepherd when we come with loving attentiveness to *be with Him* and receive Him? Can we set aside self-focus on our wounds, distractedness, and insufficiencies to come and be *fully present to Him?*

LAURA ACCETTULLO is the Head of Catechesis for John XXIII Montessori Center. She and her husband, Mark, have nine children and are parishioners of St. John the Baptist Parish in Front Royal, VA.

From the Trinity to the Eucharist; from the Eucharist to the Trinity

by Fr. Austin Litke, O.P.

AT THE END OF the Easter Season, the Church completes her meditation on the Paschal Mystery with the Solemnity of Pentecost. But the festal season does not end there. A week later, on the octave day of Pentecost, the Church commemorates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. There is nothing arbitrary about this sequence, of course. The entire point of the entirety of God's work among his Creation, culminating in the Paschal Mystery, is so that we might become "sharers in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). That is, that we might become sharers in the life of the Trinity.

But the sequence of feasts does not end there. In the week after Trinity Sunday, the Church, since the 13th century, has celebrated the feast of *Corpus Christi*, the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord. It is not as if the Eucharist is somehow greater than the Trinity. It is rather that once the proper goal of our spiritual and liturgical life has been brought into focus, the means by which we enter into that life is then set before us.

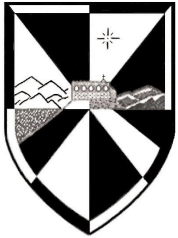
No one understood this better than St. Thomas Aquinas. It was he whom Pope Urban IV asked to compile the liturgical texts for the feast of *Corpus Christi*. The Church has traditionally called him—along with St. John Chrysostom—the

"Eucharistic Doctor," because of his clarity of teaching about the Eucharist and his contribution to the Church's worship of the greatest of the Sacraments. Every time we participate in Eucharistic adoration, for example, and sing the *O Salutaris Hostia* or the *Tantum Ergo*, we are singing texts written by St. Thomas. It is St. Thomas who teaches that the Eucharist is the greatest of the Sacraments because it is "in a manner of speaking, the consummation of the spiritual life" (III, 73, 3). That is, when we receive the Eucharist, and when we adore the Eucharist, we come face to face with the mystery of our salvation and eternal life.

In these years when the Church in our country is undergoing a Eucharistic Revival, we do well to rekindle our own devotion to the Eucharist. This is not for us an optional devotion. It is the very center of our life as Christians. The Dominican nuns of St. Dominic's Monastery spend hours of their day before the Blessed Sacrament not just as an added devotional practice. It is the very center of their life because it is the very center of the Christian life. Their prayer and intercession before Christ in his Body and Blood allows them and all of us for whom they pray to enter more deeply into the life that God has given us so that we might all reach the goal of our Christian life: God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



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