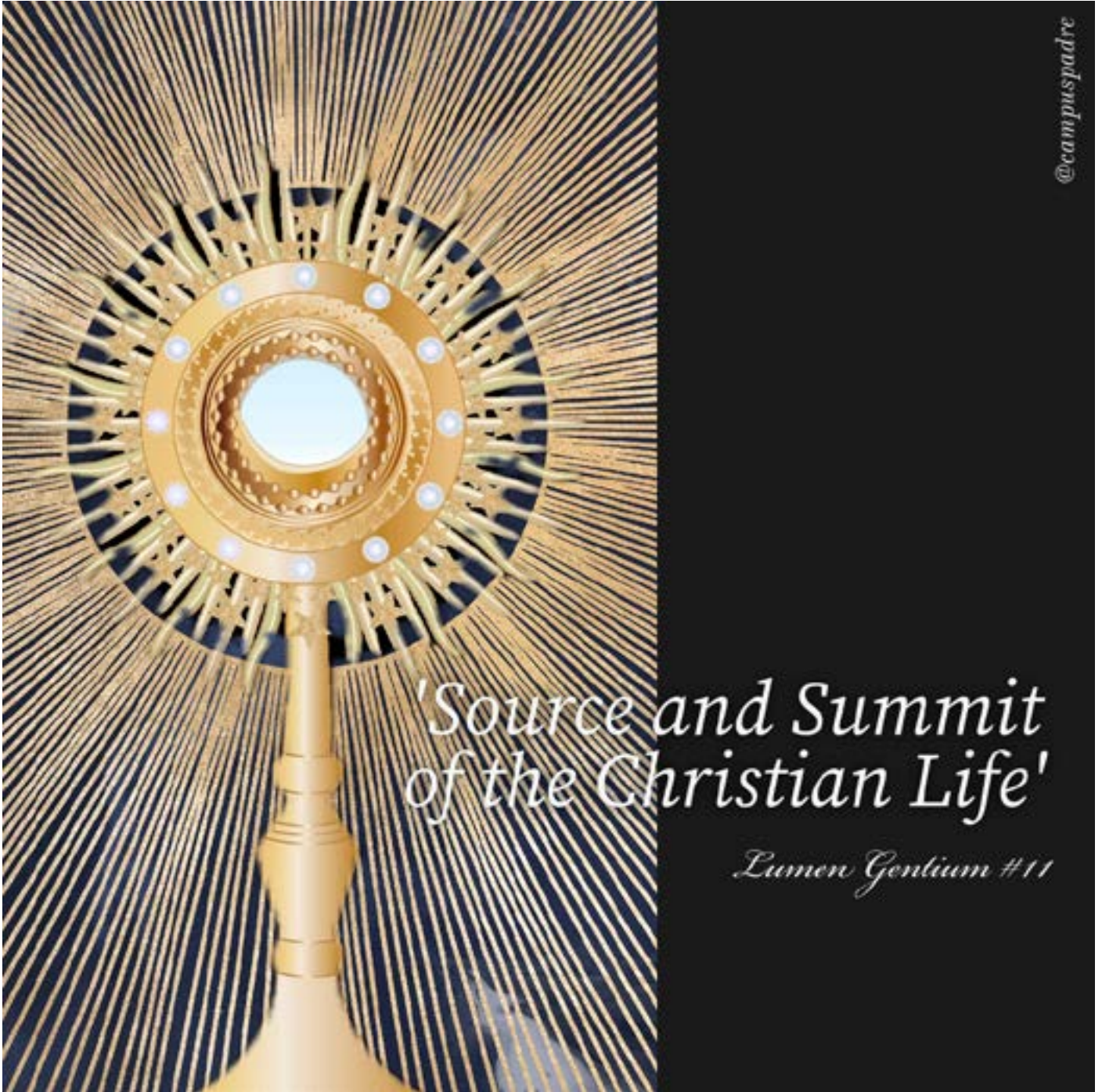


October 2023

# EUCCHARIST

body, blood, soul & divinity



@campuspadre

*'Source and Summit  
of the Christian Life'*

*Lumen Gentium #11*

## **One Priest & the Eucharist: A Personal Story**

*"Be aware of what you are doing; imitate what you hold in your hands."  
Roman Pontifical*

## In his 2013 letter to pilgrims for World Youth Day Pope Benedict XVI said,

*“Many young people today seriously question whether life is something good and have a hard time finding their way”.*

**THAT** is not only true for youth and young adults coming of age in this 3rd millennium but was also for many of us who came of age in the 2nd, and no doubt for some in the 1st. I was one of those who came of age as the tumultuous and divisive 1960's gave way to the me generation of the 1970's and the advent of social, moral, and political decay that would set the stage for the decades of difficulties to come – both in my own life and that of the western world. If not for the grace of God throughout those years and the later powerful encounters with the living God, I might well have become a permanent casualty. If not for those whom God called to speak the gospel truth into my life and the ever-echoing phrase ‘you are loved’ I would not have been drawn to and seduced by “the light of faith [that] illumines this darkness.” I would not have come to know for my self that “every human life is priceless because each of us is the fruit of God’s love.” I could not have “accepted Christ’s love” and never have become myself one of “the witnesses so needed by our world,” to believe that, As Pope Francis said, “to make Christ known is the most precious gift that you can give others.” I can attest as well, to these words of Pope Benedict XVI, that “If we choose to follow him, he will faithfully

guide us, walk with us, and never leave us alone.”

*Pope Francis asked the young people to “be revolutionaries, to swim against the tide.”*

In the course of my adult life filled with prayer, reflection, healing and epiphanies, I came to be certain that God created me with a hungry heart to give and receive love, a searching mind for truth, and a thirsty soul for communion. During the first quarter century though, I did not know what I was so desperate to encounter. I couldn't find what I so deeply desired to live. My heart became hardened and unable to recognize the love my soul groaned to receive. I wasn't prepared for the war that would rage within and around me, but I know now that the God I did not know then was with me always. At World Youth Day in 2013, Pope Francis asked the young people to “be revolutionaries, to swim against the tide.” As a young man in the 1970's, I desired this, I desired as he said, “to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes that you are incapable of responsibility, that you are incapable of true love.” Yet, in the midst of the storms of family, school and culture – that still small voice was silenced, and the wound-

ed restless heart found its salve in the excesses, lies, and false freedoms of the culture. I was increasingly on “the fringes of society, who seem farthest away, most indifferent,” and in desperate need of the Cross, that “treasure that no one else can give: the certainty of the faithful love which God has for us.”

Unlike so many of my generation, I never became closed to God; I just didn't care. If anyone wanted to argue the existence or necessity of God, I just wasn't interested. Yet, there was never a time that I wasn't dying to live. In the final hours of WYD 2013, Pope Francis said,

*“I expect a revolution...! I want you to go out. I want the Church to go out into the streets!”*

*“Where does Jesus send us? There are no borders, no limits: he sends us to everyone... Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society.”*

Unfortunately for us, the first latch key kids born into a widely increasing number broken homes and growing disillusionment with authority and institutions, we were on our own and woefully unaware of the God who created us and the dignity and value we possessed. The Church, it seemed, didn't really care about us, society only wanted to use us, and no one was at home to help us. But, it was also a time of reawakening among Christians of the sister churches who were already

responding to the work of the Holy Spirit that would unfortunately take the Catholic Church sometime to respond to. It was a time for revival. Fifty years ago, the Holy Spirit inspired revival at Asbury College and it spread to college campuses across the country. The Jesus Movement gathered young people, and the churches grew exponentially. All of them on fire and impelled to set the world ablaze for Christ.

The disciples of Christ who were saved through and enlivened by this maturing community of faith were among the first to go out into that newly post Christian world to seek the lost. I owe thanksgiving for the missionary disciples of my young adult life who were formed in the revival. I also owe thanksgiving to those formed in the renewals eventually experienced in the Catholic Church. The Holy Spirit had been moving deep within her for close to a century before the fruits of the spirit being nurtured could be seen.

*“For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” [2nd Cor 5:14-15](#)*

Having been fed of the milk necessary in spiritual infancy and woundedness that was offered by those born again in the sister churches, I would soon be able to feast on the meat of the faith becoming

increasingly visible and available to me because of that new springtime in the Catholic Church. There were those who accompanied me on that part of the journey, those who did exactly what Popes Francis, Benedict, John Paul II and Paul VI had encouraged the youth of the Catholic world to embrace.

It is odd that today there are so many amazing opportunities for young people to encounter God, and yet, there is so much more alienation, confusion, and disaffiliation. Unlike the 1960's through 1980's, I think the opportunities of encounter are in fact hard to miss, although they seem to be exceedingly easy to avoid. Consider, we didn't have World Youth Days, NCYC, Steubenville and Lifeteen conferences. There were no young missionaries from the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, Saint Paul's Outreach, and Evangelical Catholic. No cool youth ministers, relatable lay evangelists, etc, etc, etc!

It was by the grace of God and the love and mercy expressed through missionary disciples of Christ, that my conversion was

powerful. In so many ways it was immediately healing and transformative. It was freedom and peace like I'd never known, and it felt like a coming home. Since the earliest months of that experience, as the seeds of faith took root, so did an awareness of the abiding presence of God well up from deep within me. A presence which I began to realize was the same as had abided with me always and which I had been searching to find in the world around me, in friendships, in family, in myself. As this developed, I began to desire to find myself in community, in communion with others and to worship in unity. I began to understand the meaning of being part of the mystical body of Christ, the Church and to be drawn into its source and summit. Of course, I didn't have the language to describe all these movements within me until much later, beginning with the night of the Easter Vigil during which I was baptized, confirmed, and received the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament – The Eucharist. My conversion was rooted in surrender. My ongoing transformation, branches of that initial surrender.

God desires us to surrender ourselves fully and completely. This is at the heart of conversion and makes possible transformation. Although it is at the heart of our nature to give ourselves completely to God, in love, sadly, this can be difficult because of the interior walls built by the loss of our original innocence and the consequences of sin that can leave us deeply wounded. I believe

***We must...  
die unto ourselves and become  
empty so that Christ may unfold  
His holy life within us.  
Likewise, our surrender to Christ...  
must be an integral surrender  
of self, such as is possible and  
proper in relation with the absolute  
Lord only..."***

that this is the greatest obstacle for young people today. Having been so thoroughly disillusioned and wounded by every kind of human relationship, they are debilitated by hardened hearts and deeply disinclined to surrender of this sort. Difficult yes, impossible, no.

The words of St. Ignatius, who was no more inclined to surrender than I was, were mine also my own;

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.*

The famous prayers of St. Ignatius of Loyola and Blessed Charles de Foucault are radical prayers of total self-giving, that clearly articulate the nature of surrender, for a Christian. The prayers are the fruit of their self-reflection and of their openness to God's love. These two men were inspired to completely surrender to God in response to God's complete surrender to them, hanging on a cross, Christ crucified. These same prayers, though unknown to me at the time, were my own prayers of surrender.

Powerful encounter with the authentic love of God breaks through the walls we've built to protect our fragile hearts and moves us

to give to the one we love. For some, this is more immediate and for others, more like a constant rain that slowly softens the hardened ground of the soul and makes new life possible. Throughout the spiritual exercises St. Ignatius encourages us to contemplate the life of Christ in the Gospels as one who was there and to reflect on what the Holy Spirit inspires within.

In contemplation during the fourth and final week of the Exercises, we are called to ponder God's love. God loves you, and you know this because of all he has given you—from earthly life to eternal life. There is no doubt that the Lord had crafted within me a hermitage for encounter into which I was increasingly drawn to retreat and take rest.

In the minds of some, total surrender to God is possible only for those who are Saints. The truth that we all must come to understand and believe, is that God calls each of us to become Saints. God pours out grace upon grace, desiring us to freely avail ourselves of these graces and in the power of God to become the more that we were made to be. Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit. All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily. We must come to appreciate and make use of all the gifts of God, as righteous stewards of God's Kingdom. Our primary desire and our fundamental orientation, as Christians, should be this:

I want to know, love, and serve God in this world and be with God in the next. This is our innate desire, and it was becoming my conscious desire. In that humble submission, I like many young people today would have understood the truth of the words of Bishop John J. McRaith of the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky.

*“We can make this a much better place in which to live— not just for us, but for everyone. I am convinced of this because I am convinced that it will attack the selfishness that besets all of us. It turns the mine to ours; it turns self to others. It turns us from just loving ourselves to loving others as Jesus loves them.”*

As I said, it was also the prayer of abandonment of Charles de Foucauld that expressed my own heart.

*“Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you, with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so, need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.”*

The increasing battles against authority, institutions, and social mores of six decades ago set the stage for the culture wars of today. The internal battles for our hearts and minds, our souls, began to be manifested in public as more and more people sought escape from such inner tensions and the only true source of healing, rejected the faith, politics, and social norms – increasingly giving themselves over to base passions and removing any obstacles to indulging self-serving desires. The freedoms we demanded forged the chains that now enslave the bodies and souls of young people today. Neither the secular nor the religious leaders were ready this. Although they were equipped to meet the challenge, if only they had not traded authentic faith and action rooted in relationship with God for empty exterior religious observance.

Young people today live in the world we created for them. We have much to apologize and atone for. Now, within so many religious and non-religious communities and families the young are taught to be first and foremost self-referential as regards identity, love, sacrifice, suffering, justice, peace – truth. In many ways we are living in the world of Ayn Rand’s ‘Atlas Shrugged’. Although the world of my youth, as volatile and barrier breaking as it was, was still saturated with the tenets of faith and at least surface level adherence. I’ve heard it said that now the language of the faith is nearly foreign to so many young people as to be ridiculous

in its propositions and neanderthal in doctrine and practice.

Those of my generation who remain committed to what I've come to know as the path paved by concupiscence and mal formed conscience, are growing more powerful in every part of society. Those of us who emerged from the cave of shadows, now united with the ones who never fell in line with the mob; many of them have lost hope that anything can be done to 'fix this', and some have pinned their hope on political movements. Others, such as myself, fully trust that the answer for today is the same as it was yesterday, fifty years ago, and since the fall of man – Repent and believe, the kingdom of God is at hand. Only full surrender can achieve the ecstatic, eternal happiness that will satisfy our deepest desire for communion in this world.

It is no coincidence that the inability to surrender freely to each other in friendship and marriage is exactly mirrored in the way we hold back from fully giving ourselves to Christ in his Church. Yet, if we hold back, if we play it safe, we will never attain the fullness of infinite life and love that we so deeply desire. We will never be able to fully receive the love, mercy, or forgiveness of God. This is the secret of the saints. They held nothing back. They surrendered everything and received everything in return. The proposal that the Father offers to each one of us is this: if we surrender in this way to a life with

Christ in his Church, we will most fully be ourselves—alive, in love and free—capable of amazing union with other people. Free surrender is always about love. Our surrender to Christ allows us to approach each person with love. We will be able to share in the eternal surrender of love that makes up the interior life of the Holy Trinity.

There are many ways to have a limited but seemingly sufficient relationship with God. But I know there is only one path to abundant life in Christ. That path is walked within a Catholic Church, down the aisles to the sanctuary where Christ is truly present and says,

*Take this all of you, and eat it:  
this is my body  
which will be given up for you.  
When supper was ended,  
he took the cup.  
Again he gave thanks and praise,  
gave the cup to his disciples,  
and said:  
Take this, all of you, and drink from  
it: this is the cup of my blood,  
the blood of the new and  
everlasting covenant.  
It will be shed for you and for all so  
that sins may be forgiven.  
Do this is memory of me. Matt 14:22-25*

Of all the transformations wrought from the earliest days of my conversion was this powerful knowledge of God with us. I was blessed with an abundance of grace that informed my soul about being a man

of communion and the centrality of the Eucharist to effect that communion with others and God. I attended gatherings of Christians for Sunday worship in various sister churches. Most, if not all, had included some form of symbolic ritual celebration of the Lords Supper. For some of these communities it was regular and for others it was more occasional. I never partook of the meal during these services and without fail, those friends or family with whom I attended would assure me that I should participate in this sharing of bread and wine or grape juice. I always politely declined. It wasn't that I didn't respect what they were doing. It wasn't that I thought they were wrong or misguided. I didn't really understand why and certainly couldn't give any explanation to them, about how I was restrained by a force within me. A kind of not now, not yet gentle restraint but also of such a strength that ignoring it was not an option. I knew it was somehow and for an unknown reason, God strongly asking me to wait. Surrender may take the form of great sacrifice at times, but more often it's required in little moments such as these.

As I continued to converse with God about

many things, I was also firmly engaged in discerning the path which God was calling me to walk. Despite my initial objections, I was Holy Spirit led to find my home in the Catholic Church and in the late 1980's I received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. I should add that the initial movement toward the Catholic Church was prompted by an answer to my prayer, 'now that I know you, what do you want from me and in what Church do I belong'. The answer was, "be my priest". The prospect of finding communion in the Catholic Church was never a consideration for me. Although, I was firmly intent on following the will of God, I was also innately aware of the need to discern the spirits. My mind said, this cannot be the voice of God since as we all know, Catholics are not Christian. My soul rebelled against the judgement, and I was humbled spiritually but not yet convinced in my mind. I went on to enter a protestant evangelical Bible College, pursuing at least some path toward pastoral service, and there I vigorously engaged in studies in such a way as to learn about the Catholic Church. No such authentic study of God and search for truth, guided by the Holy Spirit, ever leads anywhere but to the Catholic Church.

### *The Holy Spirit*

*“prepares men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. The Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his words to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his Death and Resurrection. He makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, to reconcile them, to bring them into communion with God, that they may ‘bear much fruit’ Jn 15:8,16” CCC 737.*

On the occasion of the Easter Vigil celebration during which I received the sacraments of initiation from the Bishop, I also received a clear answer to the mystery of why God asked me to refrain from partaking in the symbolic celebrations of communion. When I received the Eucharist that night, I understood. Yes, in the preceding months of research, preparation, and participation in RCIA I had come to believe as the Church teaches about the Eucharist, but no I did not in the least understand the depth of the beauty and mystery. However, I knew in my soul that the Blessed Sacrament was without doubt Emmanuel, God with us; truly, really, and fully present.

*“Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.””*

*Matt 28:18-20*

I knew what I needed to do.

During the intervening years between the call to priesthood and ordination, I experienced spiritual, philosophical, and theological education and formation in the Bible College, public colleges, the Society of Jesus, Diocesan Seminary and of course in the school of life. I was growing in

understanding as well as deep reverence and desire for the Eucharist. Fulton Sheen once said, “A priest can give only what he possesses. To give Christ to others, one must possess Him.” I have come to understand this beyond the bounds but necessarily inclusive of, having a transformative encounter with God and living faith authentically. It became ever clearer what it means to ‘possess Him’.

*“just as the food of the body does not nourish, sustain or develop our life unless, after being digested and assimilated, it be changed into our own substance, so the priest cannot acquire dominion over himself and his senses, cannot purify his spirit, cannot strive for virtue as he should, cannot, in brief, fulfill faithfully, generously, or fruitfully the duties of his sacred ministry, unless his life becomes one with the life of the Lord through assiduous and unceasing meditation on the mysteries of the Divine Redeemer, the supreme model of perfection and the inexhaustible source of sanctity.”* [\*Pope Pius XII ‘Menti Nostrae’ 46\*](#)

Study and reflection were important aspects of coming to know Christ in the Eucharist. But they weren’t the driving force of my devotion. Going to Mass and to an even greater degree, offering the

Mass – this was where it all happened and continues to happen. Having said this, it also has to be said that this understanding unfolded progressively! I did not immediately become a faithful worshipper at every Sunday Mass, and I definitely did not regularly attend daily Mass. And yet, God faithfully accompanied me, and Mass was where the Holy Spirit taught me that the Church, the Eucharist, the Priest are inseparable. Our incarnate Lord, as both priest and sacrifice, offers his body and blood as real food at the last supper and commands his apostles ‘to do this in memory of me’. In so doing he instituted the priesthood, ensuring the means by which he would literally be with us to the end of the age. The Council of Trent defined the following doctrine:

*“Our Blessed Lord, was about to offer Himself, once and for all, to the Father on the altar of the Cross where His death would accomplish the eternal redemption of men. But His priesthood was not to end with His death. Therefore, at the Last Supper, during the night of His betrayal, He willed to leave to His beloved Spouse, the Church, a visible sacrifice, necessary as such to our human nature.... Therefore, in His quality of Eternal Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, He made the oblation of His Body and of His Blood, to God the Father under the species of bread and wine. Then, He gave that Body and that Blood to the Apostles who were constituted at that point priests of the New Testament, and lastly, with the words: “Do this in memory of Me,” He commanded the Apostles themselves and their successors in the priesthood to repeat that same oblation. [Session, 22, chapter I](#)*

Christ, who is really present in the Eucharist, is from whom I draw life and the hope of holiness. I would not be able to overstate the degree to which Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is at the center of my entire life and ministry. I believe firmly with Pope Pius XII who said,

*“It is not enough for him [the priest] to celebrate the Eucharistic sacrifice, but in a very deep sense, he must live it; for in this way, he can draw from it the heavenly strength that will enable him to be profoundly transformed and to share in the expiatory life of the Divine Redeemer Himself.”*

[Menti Nostrae, 65](#)

Every Mass that I’ve celebrated since the first, is unique. Every single Mass is a new encounter with God. Every time I celebrate the Mass, I learn something, I see something new and sometimes God allows me a mind-blowing epiphany! Entering the sanctuary,

no matter from what point in the Church, is always an experience of entering into a most sacred place, a most sacred experience suspended in time. I am no less myself, and yet I am more – the same, but different.

At every Mass I hope those present will be inspired to desire to fully respond to the universal call to holiness. I desire to draw the faithful and curious who are present, into this extraordinary mystery of encounter where heaven and earth are united. To draw each of them into the symphony of worship at the heart of the Kingdom of God which is the heart of Christ in his mystical body the Church. To fan the flames of the Holy Spirit within them, who fuels an ever-increasing desire, an undeniable hunger and thirst for Christ, in the Eucharist.



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*Fr. Blair has been serving in the diocese since 2008 and was ordained a Priest for the Diocese of St. Augustine at Christmas 2012 by Bishop Estevez. From 2011-2023 Fr. Blair served as the founding chaplain / director of Catholic Campus Ministries in the Duval County and surrounding area. During that time he also served as parochial vicar at Blessed Trinity Parish Jax and Resurrection Parish Jax. In 2017, in addition to Campus Ministry, he was appointed as the Pastor of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Jacksonville. Fr. Blair has over 35 years experience in youth and young adult work in social services, education, parish and campus ministry fields. As well as extensive experience as a spiritual director, retreat master. As of July '23, Fr. Blair is the pastor of St. Augustine Catholic Church and Director of the Student Center, at University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.*

