



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we continue looking at the Eucharist as Presence, I want to share some of my own experience of basking in the Eucharistic Presence of Christ.

While I grew up very involved in the Church – I was an altar boy shortly after my First Communion, and even, for a time, served the 7am daily Mass before going to school – my parish did not have set adoration times. I don't remember ever experiencing Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament until I was in seminary. However, I was given the gift of love for the Eucharist, especially through the ministry of Bishop Sheen.

When I was in high school, my parents gave me some tapes of a retreat that Bishop Sheen gave in 1973. I listened to them over and over again throughout high school and college (and occasionally go back and listen even now). While he spoke on many things, at the heart of the retreat was a call to all the priests and religious to make a daily, continuous holy hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament. That stirred my imagination and drew my heart. It was not possible while I was in high school, but in college I began this practice. There was a Catholic Student Center on campus that had daily Mass at 12:10pm, in a little chapel. I began going every day (when I didn't have class), and I began to spend extra time with the Lord, leading up to a daily holy hour. When I was home on vacations, I was able to continue this practice by getting to one of the four churches in town (or to the Carmelite Monastery).

I won't say that this practice was always filled with Divine lights. In fact, like the Apostles, I sometimes fell asleep, kneeling at my seat in front of the tabernacle. However, the constant exposure to Christ had its effect. Over time, my prayer deepened. I was able to pour out my heart to God in my brokenness, to rejoice with Him for His gifts, and to cry out to Him for the needs of friends and family. This practice strengthened me in my resolve to become a priest. It also helped me discern becoming a Diocesan priest... which was NOT my plan (I had wanted to be a Vincentian, much like Fr. John and Fr. Anthony).

When I went to seminary in the Fall of 1998, I was determined to make a daily holy hour. With four chapels around campus and a set schedule, it was easy to schedule time with Jesus into my day. It was in seminary that I experienced Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the first time. A few seminarians arranged for two hours of this adoration time on Sunday night, and asked me to sign up for some time. And so, I was there before the Lord in all His humble glory, visible in His hidden form, shown to us in the monstrance. I found it exhilarating ... even though I didn't know the Latin hymns! Over time, the newness wore off, but I still found myself drawn to this special time with our Lord, exposed for us to adore.

I found out in my first few weeks as a priest that I could not count on my schedule being stable: a call to anoint at the hospital or nursing home, a parishioner needing to talk, or any number of little duties that would arise would throw off my planned time for a holy hour. I realized I needed to spend that time with the Lord first thing in the morning. With that, I began getting up earlier (certainly, earlier than I would have liked) to spend time with Lord. This consistent decision to enter the Presence of the Lord, to sacrifice my time (and my sleep) to be with Him, has molded me over the years. When I become tepid in my Christian walk, the fidelity to the Holy Hour has allowed me to reignite the fire of love for the Lord (though not always as quickly as I should!).

I encourage you to set aside regular time to be with the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Maybe you can only give a few minutes a week right now. Okay – begin. Make it an appointment. Choose to give something up so that you can spend a little time with the Lord. I promise you... I PROMISE you: it will bear fruit! The Lord will welcome that little sacrifice and draw you to Himself. You will find over time that while the world sees this as wasted time, it is, rather, the most precious time you have, and the Lord will not let it go unrewarded.