

EUCCHARISTIC WISDOM

**Homily by Fr Andrew Ekpenyong, at Holy Rosary Cath. Church, Buckhannon, W. Virginia, USA.
18th August 2024, 20th Sunday, Yr B. (8 minutes instead of my usual 5).**

1. Blaise Pascal. "How I hate this folly of not believing in the Eucharist. If the Gospel be true, if Jesus Christ be God, what difficulty is there?" Sisters and Brothers, those are words of wisdom, from Blaise Pascal, (1623 –1662), a French mathematician, physicist, inventor of calculating machines that were precursors of computers, philosopher, author of classic literature, and Catholic spiritual writer. Today's 1st reading (Prov 9:1-6) eulogizes wisdom and invites us to share in its sustenance. The 2nd reading (Eph 5:15-20) poignantly invites us to live wisely. It is a wisdom that is open to mystery, including the Eucharist. It is a Eucharist-affirming wisdom. It is Eucharistic wisdom. It embraces nature and grace, reason and faith.

2. Eucharistic Miracles. Continuing our Lord's teaching on the Eucharist, today's Gospel reading (John 6:51-58) goes from bread to flesh to eternal life: "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world". As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) explains, "At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood" (CCC 1333). However, throughout history, there have been several documented cases of a consecrated host transforming into living piece of flesh, and the wine becoming blood in every respect. These phenomena are known as Eucharistic miracles. As Catholics, are we required to believe Eucharistic miracles? No. As Catholics, are we required to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, as contained in the teachings of Christ Himself, contained in today's Gospel? Yes. Of course, authentic Eucharistic miracles can deepen our faith. Out of 132 miracles documented within the Vatican Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles of the World, I like to consider just two, owing to scientific tests conducted on the species. One happened long ago in Europe, the other recently in South America. Here is a summary of both. (i) Around 750 AD, a monk from the Order of St Basil, was celebrating Mass in the small church of St. Longinus in Lanciano, Italy, but had doubts about the Eucharist. At the words of consecration, the monk saw the bread change appearance into living flesh and the wine change into blood which coagulated into five globules. The Lanciano sample is over 1250 years old and are still in the church there today. Dr Odoardo Linoli, professor of anatomy, pathological histology, chemistry and clinical microscopy, and his colleagues, examined the Lanciano sample and verified that it is real flesh and blood, from a human heart! Their report was published in an Italian medical journal in 1971. Later in 1973, the WHO appointed a scientific commission to verify the Italian doctor's conclusions. Their work was carried out over 15 months with a total of 500 examinations. The conclusions of all the researchers confirmed what had been stated and published in Italy.

(ii) In 1996 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, someone discovered a consecrated host on a candleholder after Mass and brought it to Fr. Alejandro Pezet. As standard practice in such circumstance, Fr Pezet put it in a container of water to dissolve and placed it inside the tabernacle of the chapel. A few days later, upon opening the tabernacle, the priest was astonished to find that the host had become a bloody substance. He immediately notified his Bishop. The strange bloody substance was kept in the tabernacle for a few years. Shockingly, it did not decompose. So, the Bishop decided to have it scientifically analyzed. In 1999, in the presence of the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires (now Pope Francis), Dr. Ricardo Castanon, an atheist at the time, sent a fragment to New York for analysis. Dr Castanon did not inform the team of scientists of its origin so as not to prejudice the study. One of the lead scientists, Dr. Frederic Zugibe, a cardiologist and forensic pathologist, determined that the substance was real flesh and contained human DNA. He found evidence that the sample came from a heart that was alive at the time the sample was taken. He further concluded that white blood cells had penetrated the tissue, indicating that the heart had been under severe stress. DNA tests on the sample showed it to be that of a male, AB positive blood type. What is

extraordinary about this is that the blood type and DNA of the Buenos Aires sample and the Lanciano sample are an exact match, and testing confirms that both samples came from the same person. Remember one sample came from Mass celebrated around 750 AD and the other in 1996, about 1250 years apart in time, but the same DNA, the same person. The former atheist, Dr Ricardo Castanon, is now a Catholic. Of course, Eucharistic miracles were featured at the just concluded 10th National Eucharistic Congress and 1st National Eucharistic Pilgrimage. I saw amazing pictures in your parish bulletin of 11th August 2024, taken by participants from Holy Rosary Parish. Thank you so much for your lively faith, hope and charity.

3. Practical Eucharistic Wisdom. Sisters and Brothers, while we thank God for sometimes strengthening our faith through miracles, including Eucharistic miracles, let us remember the words of our Lord: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (Jn 20:29). Our Lord’s words are echoed in another familiar saying: “For those who believe, no explanation is necessary; for those who don’t, no explanation is possible.” Put differently: “For those who believe the words of our Lord, no miracle is necessary.” Finally, I pray that we all be guided by wisdom, a wisdom that is open to mystery, a Eucharistic wisdom. It is the type of wisdom that Blaise Pascal demonstrated, a wisdom that embraces simplicity and humility as eulogized in today’s 1st and 2nd readings. As Saint John Paul II noted in his encyclical on the relationship of faith and reason, “philosophers such as Pascal” are outstanding for their rejection of all presumption, as well as for their stance of humility and courage. They came to realize that “faith liberates reason from presumption”. (Encyclical Letter, *Fides et Ratio*). Pope St Paul VI, in his encyclical on human development, *Populorum Progressio*, quotes Pascal’s spiritual classic, *Pensées*: “True humanism points the way toward God and acknowledges the task to which we are called, the task which offers us the real meaning of human life. Man is not the ultimate measure of man. Man becomes truly man only by passing beyond himself. In the words of Pascal: ‘Man infinitely surpasses man.’”

Sisters and Brothers, Pascal not only believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also in the special presence of Christ in the poor, taking seriously our Lord’s words: “When I was hungry, you gave me to eat...sick, you cared for me...” (Mt 25:35ff). I call this practical Eucharistic wisdom. Just last year, June 2023, Pope Francis, in his apostolic letter, dedicated to Blaise Pascal, titled “*Sublimitas et Miseria Hominis*,” that is, “The Grandeur and Misery of Man” recalled events in Pascal’s life that illustrate practical Eucharistic wisdom: “Gravely ill and at the point of dying, he asked to receive Holy Communion, but that was not immediately possible. So he asked his sister, ‘since I cannot communicate in the head [Jesus Christ], I would like to communicate in the members’. He ‘greatly desired to die in the company of the poor’. Sisters and Brothers, here we are at this Holy Mass, able to receive Christ in the Eucharist and able to care for Christ in the less privileged. Let’s keep doing both. It’s a double privilege! This is how to live wisely to the glory of God. Amen.