

YEAR *of the* EUCHARIST

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle



Encountering the Father -
Participation



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Introduction to the Year of the Eucharist

Right Reverend Robert Byrne, CO, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Year of the Eucharist – *Blessed are Those Called to the Supper of the Lamb*

I am delighted to invite you to join me in this Year of the Eucharist. This time of grace aims to celebrate the Eucharist at the heart of the life and mission of the Church, and to gather people back to the Mass and the Sacraments. We are invited to grow as a Diocese in our love and appreciation of Jesus in the Eucharist. We are invited to deepen our appreciation of the celebration of the Eucharist through the liturgy. We are invited to revitalise and renew our faith through a deepening prayer and devotion of the Eucharist. And we are invited to go out and serve the world through the nourishment of the Eucharist.

This will be celebrated in Episcopal Areas, Partnerships and Parishes and Schools at a time of great challenge as we continue to emerge from the Covid-19 Pandemic and adjust our lives and communities. It is also a time when the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is asking us to walk together in pilgrimage to seek where the Holy Spirit is pointing us for the future.

I hope you will find the resources being produced helpful as you seek to deepen your love of Jesus Our Lord in the Eucharist. Your own Parish will be arranging Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament throughout this special Year to be quiet and still in the Real Presence of Jesus. I pray that we will find the healing and hope that only Jesus gives, and that renewed in our love of the Eucharist we will walk together for the proclaiming of the Gospel and the celebration of the Sacraments.



Introduction to the Year of the Eucharist

Monsignor Andrew Faley, Episcopal Vicar for the Vicariate for Faith & Mission

The first part of the diocesan Year of the Eucharist - '*Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb*' - is wrapped in the theme: '*In Communion with the Father*' and follows the Synod called by Pope Francis. The Holy Father tells us that by his gracious will, God gathers us together as people of one faith. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the faith that we share. We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God's call for his people. (Synod Vademecum, 2021)

This diocesan Year aims to celebrate the Eucharist at the heart of the life and mission of the Church and to gather people back to the Mass and the Sacraments. We are to grow as a Diocese in our love and appreciation of the Eucharist. We are to deepen our appreciation of its celebration through the liturgy. We are to revitalise and renew our faith through a deepening prayer and devotion of the Eucharist. And we are to go out and serve the world through the nourishment we receive.



Year of the Eucharist and Synod

As the Year of the Eucharist is launched on October 17th by Bishop Robert, a Synod which has been called by Pope Francis will also begin in our Diocese. We are invited to journey together, listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the lives of the people we meet. This prayer, the 'Adsumus Sancte Spiritus' invites the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we may be a community and a people of grace.

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path
nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever.
Amen.



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Lord Jesus,
in your gift of yourself in the Eucharist
you look at me as I look at you.
My eyes are deceived,
I see bread wrapped round with gold and silver.
But this small fragile piece
is more valuable than gold,
more precious than all the world.
So easily broken it can mend the world,
joining together every human heart.
So light an object, it outweighs the greatest treasure,
surpassing the mightiest power.

Lord Jesus,
In your gift of yourself in the Eucharist
You receive me as I receive you.
My senses are deceived
I taste simple food and drink
But this little morsel, a tiny sip
is the greatest banquet ever eaten
It is you, my God, entering within me.

So quietly it heals a broken life
curing all humanity
So gently it rescues the feeble sinner
restoring lost innocence.

Fill me and nourish me
that I may drink deep of your strength.
Stay with me in my journey through the world
Satisfy me in my hunger for fulfilment.

Touch me with your power
and enter the depths of my being
as I look at you and you look at me
as I receive you and you receive me.

*Blessed be the Holy Eucharist
in which Christ's sacrifice is offered
and the salvation won for all is given to me!*

Prayers before the Blessed Sacrament



Bless us, Lord Jesus, with the desire to praise you.
Bless us, Lord Jesus, as we return praise for the gift of life itself.

Bless us, Lord Jesus, as we come before the fountain of life and love.

Amen.

Lord Jesus, you draw us into the light of your presence.

Lord Jesus, you have the power to overcome darkness.

Lord, Jesus, your Rising from the dead points the way to perpetual light.

Amen.



Lord Jesus, you valued rest and loved the company of your friends.

I have come to you as you asked.

I bring my burdens and my busyness and ask that you help me to lay them aside for this time, so that I may find rest in your presence and find restoration, refreshment and renewal.

Amen.



The Eucharist is a blessing as food for the journey.
The Eucharist is a blessing and a Sacrament of healing.

The Eucharist is an experience of the closeness of Christ to the broken-hearted.

Amen.

Encountering the Father

In this section, a young person, a member of the clergy, a diocesan group representative, a member of the laity and an academic, all drawn from our diocesan community, share a personal reflection on their relationship to the Father and the call to participation.

Through the diversity of their experience, we get a clear sense that, although the Father can feel like the most elusive person of the Trinity, he permeates everything with his everlasting presence.

Fathers make our worlds, fixing the things we break and fixing us when we get broken. Always watching, always loving, patiently waiting with open arms for us to make our way back home, God the Father is the sure foundation from which we can step out and make his love manifest to each other and to the world.

Roshan Sanchez, Chapter Head, YFC North Tyne

It goes without saying that the past 15 months have been hard for all young people, regardless of religion. But being a member of the faith has helped me to picture the pandemic as a blessing in disguise. Lockdown has been the most transformative, and eye-opening period of my life.

The importance of things that we truly need often shine in times when we are deprived of them the most. Before March of last year, I had fallen into a lull; I went to Church as if it meant nothing. The Eucharist had become what most people outside the faith see, a bland wafer that holds no significance. I was slowly losing a connection with Christ, even though he was right there.

Then lockdown arrived, and it completely shook my world. Everything that I had known was gone and I felt cut off from all of my friends. I found that I needed to focus my heart, mind and soul on something that was always important to me- of course, that thing is God.

I realised that I love God so much because He is, as we see in the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas, the First Cause of all things. He is not caused by anything else, and so He is always there. But I simply forgot that the Lord is present in so many ways. Looking back on the past year, God was definitely there for me. Whether it was by participating in Mass online, or engaging with Youth For Christ, any small thing that made me smile reminded me of God.

The Lord's blessings in lockdown were a catalyst for my personal growth. Despite my age, I feel that any work that I do as a Catholic is still important. God taught me that, because He has reached out to me in love, I am enabled to reach out: to God, to my friends and family, towards a better version of myself. And I look forward to a future where I experience and share God's blessings wherever I go.

Amen.

Encountering the Father

Fr David Coxon, Parish Priest, St Joseph, Ushaw Moor

My dad was always a quiet man. He was a joiner by trade, but he could turn his hand to almost anything. I can't remember him telling me very much that he loved me, yet I knew it because of the things that he did. He fixed my toys and my bikes. He made me a bookcase and a toy fort. We dug up potatoes together and picked blackberries, and sometimes went down to the coast to look into the rockpools. He sometimes used to say 'Watch!' as he quietly constructed something very practical from useless bits of old wood. He would smile as I watched his creation gradually taking shape. As an adult, I think back to how creative he was and how he showed his love through what he did rather than in what he actually said. I'm afraid I never really learnt how to fix things because I always took things to my dad to sort out. I enjoyed watching him working, and I think he liked to have me there with him as he worked.

Twenty years after my dad's death, I often think of how, without him realizing it, he gave me a lasting image of what God the Father is like. I know that, in the Scriptures, we have God's word but, day by day, God never seems to say very much! I never hear God 'speak' or tell me in actual words that he loves me, yet I feel I know of God's love because of what he does. There's a whole lot of things in everyday life that don't seem able to understand, or fix, or get sorted, things that can sometimes be overwhelming. But I suppose I can take them to God the Father since God, of his nature, is very creative and can, as St Paul says, 'turn all things to the good'. God may still not 'say' much when I bring my troubles to him but, just being able to bring them, is a help.

I'm guessing that I am not alone in that most of us don't much 'hear' God speak to us. It is more to do with looking at what is around us, really noticing it, seeing its significance for us, and interpreting its relevance to our lives. We note the compliments and the gratitude of others for little things we have done and, in that, hear God's praise. We take others' criticism and, in that, there may be some correction or advice from God.

I wonder if you too ever detect the presence of God, the 'voice' of God, and feel God's love for you in what you see and hear in the course of an ordinary day. It can be good to get into the habit of taking note of what God may be trying to convey. I wonder if you might ever dare to share with others your own experience of God in your life. In sharing our experience of God's presence, we can encourage others to look for God, active in their own lives. And they, of course, can help us in the same way. Our journey of faith is then much more than just keeping the Church's rules or learning its doctrines. Our journey of faith is a shared awareness of God's presence in our day to day lives, something in which we participate together and share together as the People of God. Our journey of faith is an ongoing journey of discovery.

Encountering the Father

Jeannie Hardy, Care for our Common Home, Bishop Auckland

Being a Christian requires both prayerful reflection and action. I understand that we each have different personal relationships including our own with God. Belonging to a church community is important to me, because it helps me to regularly check in and reflect on my own 'values' and what is important to me in life. The word of God listened to or read, on a regular basis, gives food for thought and time to consider my own thoughts and actions as a Christian.

Practical actions are an important part of showing how we follow Christ. Most recently the importance of caring for our earth and caring for people and how they are interlinked has been brought to our attention. Pope Francis' writing in the *Laudato Si* encyclical encourages us to take practical actions both personally and collectively as people of faith, to help reduce the effects of climate change. A growing number of Catholics across the world are responding to this call now and sharing experiences of climate change which is experienced differently around the world. Known now as the *Laudato Si* movement, I attended the course for 'Animators' earlier this summer. On completion of this course with others around the world, we were each asked to complete a project to take forward and share our learning with others using our own talents and skills. For my part the start was sharing thoughts and reflections, which then raised awareness about caring for both the earth and other people, with others in my parish.

As a parish we bought *Laudato Si* books and considered what we could do as a community. We have now formed a group in our parish and recently celebrated a 'Season of Creation' event. A number of our group and parishioners came together recently to display the four seasons - Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Each person brought their own talents and enthusiasm resulting in a great community effort enjoyed by others who came and spent some time in some quiet contemplation of nature and creation. What was also great was how we were able to share and enjoy some refreshments, the first time since our Covid lockdown, a symbol of our coming back into our community church base.

I believe that Jesus gives us a model of living and through that some understanding of God. When I am at my best and most receptive I feel able to use the talents and skills given to me, which I can then use in service of my community. Jesus gives us many stories to help our understanding. The story of the mustard seed links to creation as many of His stories did. The tiny seed when sown in fertile ground is nurtured and helped to grow to be something huge. Small actions can have major results not always intended or known. Being part of and nurturing each other in our own faith communities, I think that we too can develop and grow into our best selves, the fruits of which can be shared and enjoyed by all.

Encountering the Father

Andy Doyle, Catechist, St Cuthbert, Durham

In preparation for the year 2000, Pope John Paul II wrote “The whole of the Christian life is like a great pilgrimage to the house of the Father, whose unconditional love for every human creature, and in particular for the “prodigal son”, we discover anew each day. This pilgrimage takes place in the heart of each person, extends to the believing community and then reaches to the whole of humanity.” (The Third Millennium Draws Near, 49).

The revelation of the fatherhood of God permeates the entirety of the Scriptures. The first chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy has Moses say to the assembled people of Israel after their forty years in the desert: “In the wilderness you saw him: how the Lord God carried you, as a man carries his child, all along the road you travelled on the way to this place.” This is a delightful image of a father cradling a tired and weary child in loving arms along a difficult journey.

In the life and teaching of Jesus, the only-begotten Son, we are led deeper into the mystery of the fatherhood of God which is fundamental, unique and transcendent whilst also intimate, life-giving and open to all.

It is dangerous folly to project our own actions and experiences on to God but nevertheless I am going to dare to be foolish for a moment. As a father myself, I believe I can glimpse something, albeit partial and painfully incomplete, of the fatherhood of God. I have found quiet and lasting joy in walking, talking and being together with my children. Their first steps were unsteady as they clung to furniture and frequently stumbled, looking surprised as they fell to the ground. But they soon found their feet and could explore their surroundings whilst my wife and I suddenly became aware of the perils of sharp corners, hot surfaces and the toxic contents of floor-level cupboards! A father cares with deep concern.

Our first conversations were very one-sided and often nonsensical but I could take delight in their smiles and giggles until they found their voices and could begin to articulate their needs, their fears and their joys. A father communicates, sometimes with words and more often with gestures. As my children matured, became independent and moved away, I am still touched that they speak of ‘coming home’ when visiting. A father’s heart is always open and welcoming.

I was not and am not a perfect father (and so, like in so many other ways, am unlike God!) and I am painfully aware that, for many people, their own experience of fatherhood may have been void of affection or may even have been abusive. Hence it is important that, in our ‘great pilgrimage to the house of the Father’ we need to be carried along the road in the arms of that same Father of all.

The forthcoming synod has been described as a process of ‘walking together’. Just as the people of Israel was described by Moses as a single child, so the whole People of God forms one body. We all participate within this body and so no-one should be left behind along the journey, no-one should be silenced, no-one should be evicted. All should find their feet, find their voice and find their place within the life of the Church in our pilgrimage through this world to the house of Father. In our messy, conflicted and complicated times we need to discern the dead ends of division, the oases of harmony and the signposts towards a new way of being Church for our good and for the good of all humanity.

Encountering the Father

Dr Gregory Ryan, Centre for Catholic Studies, Durham University

It's where we begin. "In the name of the Father...". Indeed, as the "creator of all things" it's where everything begins.

I vividly remember first distinguishing the ideas "God" and "Jesus". In my primary school (St Patrick's, Stockton) children were often asked to read the intercessions on Good Friday, and one year I suddenly noticed that the prayer for those who do not know Christ was different to the prayer for those who do not know God, not just an echo with new words. I had a sudden image of all those who believed in, or sensed, the divine but who were not Christians. Not just in the world today, but throughout history (my seven-year old imagination immediately ran to Greeks, Romans and Ancient Britons!). There has always been something about this all-pervasive nature of God which struck a chord with me. I've had to consciously think about belief in Jesus—learning stories at school, and later studying the gospels and letters more critically. But to believe in the Father seemed as natural as breathing.

There is an odd tension here. On the one hand, "no-one has ever seen the Father" (John 6:46) so we need Jesus to show us what God is like. But on the other hand, God's self-revealing—in Creation, in human lives and relationships, in our conscience, as well as in Scripture and Tradition—means the Father's presence is always near at hand. As the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins proclaims, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God". We live, as the Celts used to say, "on the Edge of Glory".

Despite all this, we can sometimes lose sight of the Father. The very nearness of Jesus—in the Eucharist, in the gospel stories, in many personal prayers and hymns—should not result in a faith which plays down the Father and the Spirit. The language we use at Mass shows a more balanced perspective: we pray "to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit". So too the Eucharist refers to more than the real presence of Jesus in bread and wine. Not only is the Spirit invoked in the prayer over the gifts, but "Eucharist" means "thanksgiving"—and it is a thanksgiving to the Father, following the thanksgiving Jesus made on the night before he died. So, in prayer and in the Eucharist, Jesus—spiritually and practically, eternally and historically—helps us to approach the Father. And we can do so because the Holy Spirit is already in us.

Perhaps this way of thinking about the Trinity might be more helpful than trying to solve the mysterious equation that $1=3$! It certainly helps to point towards the synod theme of "participation". In thinking about a synod—or a Mass—it's easy to focus on practical points about how to involve people, and to miss the spiritual sense of participation. Reflecting that we pray through Christ, in the Spirit, to the Father can help to focus on our participation with the Holy Spirit, and it is almost impossible not to think about participation with Jesus in Holy Communion. But early Church theologians also talked of participation with God as Trinity, mind-blowing though that seems. Synod means "journeying together", and the ultimate journey together is with God, along the path that Eastern Christians call "theosis". As St Athanasius says, God became human so that we might "become God". (Catechism of the Catholic Church #460). Participation—not just joining-in but as "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).



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*With sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed to
these wonderful Reflections as part of the Year of the
Eucharist.*

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