

## **The Eucharist and the Heart of Jesus in the Apostleship of Prayer** **Charles Searson SJ - Dar-es-Salaam Sat May 16<sup>th</sup>**

Welcome fellow delegates to this Pan African Meeting of the Apostleship of Prayer! I feel humbled and honoured to be asked to share a few thoughts with you on the topic of the Eucharist and the Heart of Jesus in the Apostleship of Prayer. (We begin by making our offering together)

I see the Apostleship of Prayer as a school of prayer, of service and of mission especially here in Africa in our own context as we prepare for the African Synod and when the Church is called again to "The Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World".

The Pope's intention for May 2009 is, as you know, is that the AoP members pray that lay people and Christian Communities may embrace their responsibility for promoting vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life.

The Pope's letter for the 2009 world day of prayer for Vocations is entitled: "Faith in the divine initiative – the human response."

The Holy Father quotes Mt 9.38 which says: "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest". The Pope comments 'The Christian community can only really "have ever greater faith and hope in God's providence" if it is enlivened by prayer.'

Isn't this beginning with God's initiative true of all genuine Christian faith? And the purpose of prayer in general and of the AoP in particular is to stress that divine initiative. Prayer reminds us that it is God who starts the relationship and will bring it to completion.

Over the years I have learned two very important "rules" about prayer.

Rule no. 1: "Come as you are". We may come as saints or sinners, we may come from a Church that is torn apart or living in the Peace of the Gospel. Whatever: come as you.

Rule no. 2: Come into the presence of the Lord. Use some means to remind yourself that you are in the presence of the King of the Universe: The empty Chair, the tabernacle Light: Let the King sound the trumpet as the Prince/Princess comes into his presence. You can tell that you are aware you are in God's presence if you are using the word "You" "Lord: I believe you are with me. You are my Lord and my God".

These two simple but profound "rules" are the basis for all our prayer.

Into whose presence have we come? In Deuteronomy 6.4 we read: "Shema, Israel! Listen, Israel! You must love the Lord our God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." The words "Shema Israel..." are important. They remind us that our love of God is a response to his prior love of us.

It is even clearer in John's Gospel: "As the Father loves me so I love you. Remain in my love" (John 15.9). And in the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John 4.10: "This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away."

Eucharistic Faith is very aware of God's initiative in this relationship we call faith. God loves us first. Eucharist means "thanksgiving". It means being grateful to God for every moment of our existence, from the wonder of our conception and birth to the beauty and adventure of each new day, for each person we meet and for each event of our day.

The AoP is a school of prayer and mission entrusted by the Church to the Society of Jesus founded by Ignatius of Loyola. Central to Ignatian spirituality is a great sense of gratitude to God for all the gifts of Creation and for the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Each evening Ignatian Spirituality also invites us to make a prayer called "The Examen". Central to that prayer is thanksgiving: it consists of a review of that particular day and noticing, with deep gratitude, all the ways God has been present to the pray-er through the people and events of that particular day. Our God is not a God in Heaven but God who is actively at work on earth among his people.

This sense of God at work in our our day and in our world comes to its climax in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, especially the Sunday Eucharist in our Parishes. The Eucharist is the special way the Christian community remembers the presence of the risen Lord Jesus and celebrates his ongoing work of salvation: "Do this in memory of me".

The prayer of thanksgiving both in the Sunday Eucharist and in the daily Examen brings a person to a deep sense of God at work in the world and in the individual's life. Both prayers, one in community one done on one's own, help us to notice the love of God in action in our day and in our lives. The examen in particular helps us "to find God in all things".

At a deeper level the examen invites us also to notice how this active love of God calls us to a life of love and service and to allow our lives and our decisions to be shaped by that love of God.

We find that we allow God to shape and direct our lives when we move towards what makes for more peace, love and joy and when we move away from the opposite.

The Examen prayer made faithfully each evening together with the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays, or even daily, helps us to realize that "It is no longer I that live but Christ lives in me". 'This is what is central to the Spirituality of the Heart of Jesus. Stronger and more important than our desire to live in his heart is Jesus' longing to live in our hearts.'

This is neatly captured in an old hymn which was popular in the Ireland of my childhood: "Heart of Jesus burning with love for me inflame my heart, inflame my heart with love, with love for thee."

The morning offering in the Apostleship of Prayer is also Eucharistic. It is a response of love to the love of God already experienced both in the life, death and rising of his Son and in the life, laughter and tears which have made up our day.

Knowing that we are tenderly loved by God we are guided by that love, through his holy Spirit at work in us, to make a response of love in return. As St Ignatius says: 'Love consists of an exchange of gifts between the lover and the beloved.' He adds 'Love is shown more in deeds than in words'.

Knowing that I am loved personally by God I am lead by that divine initiative to my response of love. This is the central meaning of the Morning Offering. It is truly Eucharistic: I offer my day and ultimately my life in a gesture of love to God who loves me first.

Here we move from the Mary level to the Martha level: from the intimacy of being with in the simple presence of love to the intimacy of being with Jesus as he labours for the salvation of the world.

This second level of Christian faith of self offering leads to the whole arena of service, of doing for others whether it is work at home, in the field or in the city, whether it is visiting a hospice or a prison, whether it is social or even political action. It is the doing of one's job or one's profession in a way that is honest and filled with Christian values.

What started as a school of prayer has lead us to loving service in the Church for the sake of a world that is broken but being redeemed in Christ Jesus our Lord and in the love of his heart.

The intentions of the Apostleship of Prayer each month help us to situate our prayer and our response in the context of a Church sent on mission throughout the world. Moving us from our own personal and family concerns we embrace, month by month, the concerns of the Holy Father, of the Church and of the world.

Our prayer is both personal and ecclesial: our prayer is concerned for our own well being and that of our world. Experience shows too that such prayer inevitably leads to action as the Spirit, living in our hearts, prompts us to pray and to act in his name. The school of prayer has become a school of action, of service and of mission. The school begins and ends in the Heart of Jesus – in the personal love of our saviour who leads us to love as he did, to dream the impossible dream and to live a life of self-giving love for other. We are called to live our Eucharist by receiving the love of God in the Sacrament and by giving that love to others in our daily morning offering, especially to those in pain, offering our own joys and even our pain in union with the offering of Christ, for the salvation of the world.

The words of a very modern saint, St Alberto Hurtado from Chile who lived from 1901—1952, are very helpful:

He writes very movingly in a talk to University Students on the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus:

*But do not let this love of ours be speeches, books, precious pages. Nor must we be content with flourishing encyclicals and pastorals: their truths are very beautiful and nobody will demean them: what demeans them is their not having been accomplished.*

*What the world needs is works, like those of Francis of Assisi, of Peter Claver, of Damian of Veuster... And what, concretely, must these works of charity, of love, be?*

*Awaken in us a hunger and thirst for justice. Hunger and thirst for total truth. Hunger and thirst for Christ: to know him, to know his doctrine, to study it in its social consequences. To allay social unrest, we must work for the suffering, in particular that of the poor. To increase social sense. Not to rest when we see evil; being non conformist... not satisfied with offering the sky to others while we comfortably possess the earth, for this is the most brutal and bitter of ironies.*

*Give something which is very necessary: love, charity, understanding. We are so divided and we so need to love one another, understand one another, end this suspicion, this mutual lack of trust. Let us embrace Christ. And if the problems are contingent why shouldn't we give our opinion? Respect for the human person is something basic in Christianity. Provided that we obey the hierarchy and remain united in what is essential.*

*United in Christ, united with Christ. More united among ourselves. The measure of our union will be that of our union in Christ and with Christ. Let us unite in the only One in whom we can remain united, in Christ. Tomorrow, all in the Heart of Christ. To place all human beings in Christ's Heart in the Mass.*

I conclude with a short quotation from the African Synod Document which reflects the very essence of the Offering Prayer of the AoP in response to the overflowing, forgiving and reconciling love of Jesus which we celebrate daily in the Eucharist and then invite you to pray the Synod Prayer together:

*147. The need for reconciliation on the continent is today more urgent than ever. The reconciliation which will regenerate the human family, sought so much by Africa, is obtained in a justice which is more than human and a peace which is more profound than the absence of war or the silence of arms. The Holy Father, [Pope Benedict XVI](#) has invited the faithful to implore the Holy Spirit, who is the source of reconciliation in the Son and who works in people's hearts. "The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son."<sup>165</sup> Convinced that "in the midst of conflict and division, we know it is (God) who turns our minds to thoughts of peace," people make an offering of their suffering and activity so that "those who were estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together"<sup>166</sup> (cf. [2 Cor 5:18](#)). Building the civilization of love is everyone's responsibility.*

*149. With Mary, the Church in Africa is open to the action of the Holy Spirit so that, in and through her members on the continent, the face of the earth might be renewed:*

Holy Mary, Mother of God, Protectress of Africa,  
You have given to the world the true Light, Jesus Christ.

Through your obedience to the Father and the grace of the Holy Spirit  
You have given us the source of our reconciliation and our justice,  
Jesus Christ, our peace and our joy.

Mother of Tenderness and Wisdom,  
Show us Jesus, your Son and the Son of God  
Guide our path of conversion  
So that Jesus might shine his glory on us  
In every aspect of our personal, familial and social lives.

Mother, full of Mercy and Justice,  
Through your docility to the Spirit, the Counselor,  
Obtain for us the grace to be witnesses of the Risen Lord,  
So that we will increasingly become  
The salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Mother of Perpetual Help,  
We entrust to your maternal intercession  
the preparation and fruits of the Second Special Assembly for Africa.

Queen of Peace, pray for us!

*References: Claudio Barriga: Gazing Upon Jesus with a Pierced Heart  
Living the Eucharist of AoP Website*

## **The Examen Prayer**

An outline of the Examen

This outline is based on the Examen Prayer as found in The Spiritual Exercises (no. 43) of St Ignatius of Loyola. The prayer is made each evening. It is a way of finding out what God is doing and saying in your life.

- Transition: I become aware of the love with which God looks upon me as I begin this examen.
- Step One: Gratitude. I note the gifts that God's love has given me this day, and I give thanks to God for them.
- Step Two: Petition. I ask God for an insight and strength that will make this examen a work of grace, fruitful beyond my human capacity alone.
- Step Three: Review. With my God, I review the day. I look for the stirrings in my heart and the thoughts that God has given me this day. I look also for those that have not been of God. I review my choices in response to both, and throughout the day in general.
- Step Four: Forgiveness. I ask for the healing touch of the forgiving God who, with love and respect for me, removes my heart's burdens.
- Step Five: Renewal. I look to the following day and, with God, plan concretely how to live it in accord with God's loving desire for my life.
- Transition: Aware of God's presence with me, I prayerfully conclude the examen.

Source: © *The Examen Prayer; Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today* Timothy M. Gallagher OMV: Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2006. Permission for publication sought.  
Fr Charles Searson SJ, Apostleship of Prayer, Catholic Secretariat, Kapingila House P.O. Box 35391, Lusaka, Zambia 0979-413 111 01- 26 13 13 Residence: Luwisha House: 01-291 606  
[aop@jesuits.net](mailto:aop@jesuits.net)