

Maronite Monks of Adoration

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some people have toward the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy written words which consecrate [His] body” (1).

St. Francis saw very clearly the necessity of the Holy Eucharist in our spiritual life. In order to have eternal life, in order to enter the kingdom of God, we must heed our Lord’s words: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn 6:53-54). In his *First Letter to the Custodians*, St. Francis tells the superiors of his order, “And in every sermon you give, admonish the people concerning [the need of] penance, and [tell them] that no one can be saved unless he receive the Body and Blood of the Lord” (6).



Saint
Francis

of Assisi is well known as a friend of animals and a lover of holy poverty; yet, how many people realize that he is a great Eucharistic saint?

It was the awesome reality of the mystery itself which fueled St. Francis’ devotion to the Blessed Sacrament: what we see as bread and wine is truly the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. With simple faith he believed our Lord’s words: “this is my body... this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mk 14:22, 24). Again and again we find him proclaiming this awesome reality in his writings. Pretty basic we might say; but as St. Francis wrote in his *Letter to the Clergy*, “All of us who are clerics should be aware of the great sin and ignorance which



“Let the whole of mankind tremble the whole world shake and the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God (Jn 11:27) is [present] on the altar in the hands of the priest.
O admirable heights and sublime lowliness!
O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under the little form of bread!
Look, brothers, at the humility of God and pour out your hearts before Him! (Ps 61:9)
Humble yourselves, as well, that you may be exalted by Him (cf. 1 Pet 5:6; Jn 4:10).
Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves so that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally.
(Letter to the Entire Order, 26-29)

Two of the most beautiful Eucharistic meditations in the history of the Church are found in the writings of St. Francis [see sidebars]. In these lines St. Francis contemplates the great mystery of the humility of God and His real presence in the Sacrament. God lowers Himself to such a state for love us in order to exalt us. God comes down to us even daily in order to be with us always, as truly present to us in the bread and wine as He was to the holy apostles in the flesh. Is this not the root of St. Francis' love of poverty? For as God made Himself poor in order to come down to man to be with him, so St. Francis chose to be poor in order to rise up to God to be with Him.

From St. Francis' devotion to the Holy Eucharist flowed his devotion to the Holy Scriptures, priests and all that pertains to the external needs of the Sacrament.

St. Francis preached that special reverence should be shown to the Holy Scriptures, for it is by the Word of our Lord spoken by the priest at the consecration that simple bread and wine become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his *Letter to the Entire Order*, he writes: "Therefore, I admonish all my brothers and encourage [them] in Christ that wherever they come upon the written words of God they venerate them so far as they are able. And if they are not well kept or if they lie about carelessly in some place, let them, inasmuch as it concerns them, collect them and preserve them, thus honoring the Lord in the words *which he spoke* (3 Kgs 2:4). For many things are made holy by the words of God (cf. 1 Tim 4:5) and in the power of the words of Christ the Sacrament of the altar is celebrated"(35-37).

St. Francis also preached that special reverence should be shown to priests, for without priests there

"See, daily He humbles Himself (cf. Phil 2:8) as when He came from the royal throne (Wis 18:15) into the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father (cf. Jn 1:18) upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as he appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: Behold I am with you even to the end of the world (cf. Mt 28:20)." (Admonitions I, 16-22)

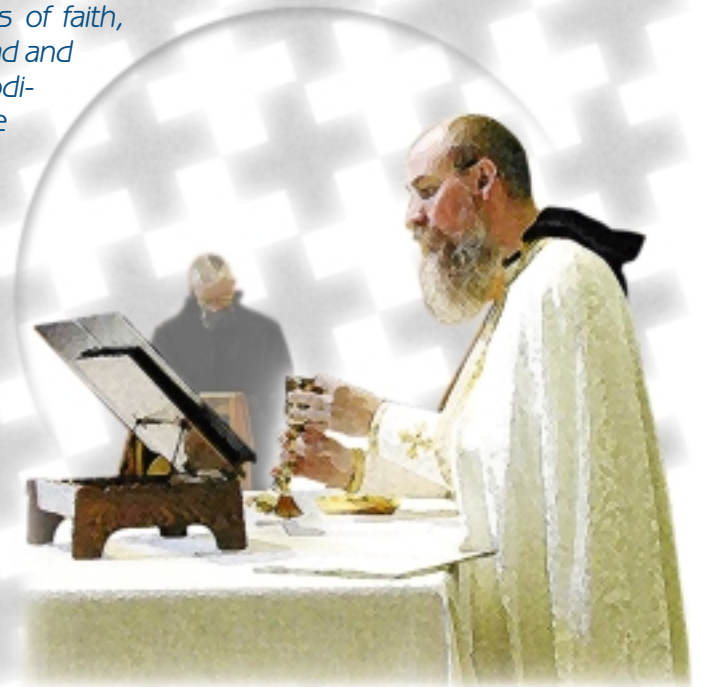


Illustration by Maronite Monks

is no Eucharist. He writes in his *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*: "We must also visit churches frequently and venerate and show respect for the clergy, not so much for them personally if they are sinners, but by reason of their office and their administration of the most holy Body and Blood of Christ which they sacrifice upon the altar and receive and administer to others. And let us firmly realize that no one can be saved except through the holy words and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which the clergy pronounce, proclaim and minister. And they alone must administer [them], and not others"(32-35).

Furthermore, St. Francis showed great reverence to all that pertains to the Sacrament. Time and again he reminds his friars as well as the secular clergy to see that churches be clean, the Blessed Sacrament be reserved in a "precious place,"

sacred vessels and linens be clean and worthy of the Holy Sacrifice. Everything is to be in accord with the reality we believe. "Are we not moved by a sense of piety concerning all these things, since the good Lord offers Himself into our hands and we handle Him and receive Him daily with our mouth? Or do we forget that we must come into His hands (cf. Hebr 10:31)?" (*Letter to the Clergy*, 8)

St. Francis of Assisi is truly one of the Catholic Church's great defenders and promoters of the Holy Eucharist. If you wish to read more of his writings...all the quotations we cited are from *Francis and Clare: the Complete Works*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M. (Paulist Press, 1982). ❖