

Trinity House Community
2022 Little Taste of Heaven Celebration
The Eucharist and the Future of the Family

I am so thankful to this Trinity House Community for its great work in striving to strengthen our families so that the “domestic church” will be fruitful in our homes and communities. This evening, we are reflecting on the importance of the Eucharist for the future of the family. It is a fitting topic as the Diocese of Arlington prepares for our Golden Jubilee in 2024 with a year focused on the Eucharist and on Christ’s command to “Do this in remembrance of me.” It’s also fitting as the Church in the United States begins a Eucharistic Revival, inviting us to bring our brokenness as a society and as persons to the very source of our life, our healing, and our strength—Jesus Christ! As we read in 2 Peter, Our Lord is present and active in the Eucharistic celebration, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to join us to Himself in glorifying God the Father and to make us more fully “sharers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). As the Trinity House Community knows well, this is what is at the heart of the family: to share in the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Ever and Soren have grounded Trinity House’s approach to finding “heaven in your home” on two profound truths. These are explained beautifully in the first *Heaven in Your Home Workshop* video, and if you have not already watched the four free videos, I certainly recommend them. The first truth is that “God, the Holy Trinity, is a communion of Persons.” God is one in three Persons, a communion because of the total gift of each Person to the other. God the Father eternally pours out His life to the Son, and in their mutual self-gift, the same divine life eternally pours out to the Spirit.

The second truth is that the family is also a communion-of-persons. So, as Ever and Soren suggest, “maybe if we look at God’s way of life, we’ll see how a family should live.” How true this is! Once more, they have done a wonderful job in describing the life of the Triune God. Through a beautiful reflection on the icon of the Trinity, they explain how God’s life is one of *welcoming*, *listening*, and *servicing*. We can see these three features of God’s life by reflecting on who God is, and these three become like guideposts on a “map” to “finding heaven in our homes”!

What is more, we can actually encounter and live in the Triune God. Through Baptism, we are truly and really made “sharers of the divine nature.” In the baptismal font, the eternal pouring out of Father, Son, and Spirit floods into our innermost selves. We personally encounter and live in the Triune God who *welcomes*, *listens*, and *serves*. From that point forward, we begin actually to *take part* in God’s own *welcoming*, *listening*, and *servicing* so that they live in us!

We can see, encounter, and live in God’s way of life through every authentic expression of Christian discipleship: family life, personal prayer, works of mercy, and more. At the same time, God invites us to regularly climb a holy mountain. Far above the

fog and trees of our busy lives, He invites us to take a high vantage point. From this outlook, we can see with unique clarity and focus the three guideposts of our map to heaven in our home: *welcoming*, *listening*, and *servicing*. However, we do not only see, we also encounter and live in God in a unique way on this mountaintop. There, we find that the Trinity's outpouring of self breaks forth anew for us—here and now, today. As from a mountain spring, we are refreshed and strengthened before descending the mountain to proclaim what we have seen and to live what we have encountered.

You may have guessed what this imagery of a mountain “summit” and a spring “source” is all about. The fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught that “*taking part* in the Eucharistic sacrifice” is the source and summit of the true Christian spirit and of the Church's activities (LG 11, cf. SC 10, etc.). “*Taking part* in the Eucharistic sacrifice,” then, is the summit of strong and fruitful Christian families. Therefore, the future of the family is intimately connected with how we *take part* in the Eucharist.

This evening, then, I would like to lead us in a reflection on that point. We can reflect on how Eucharistic participation shows us with clarity the life of God as *welcoming*, *listening*, and *servicing*. We also reflect on how Eucharistic participation plunges us into that divine life so that we can better manifest and live it in our homes. To start these reflections, however, we need to first consider how Eucharistic participation overcomes forces that prevent us from fostering true bonds of communion within our families.

To begin, *Eucharistic participation* breaks the chains that hold us back in our efforts to live in communion as families—to have, like the Trinity, inter-personal and other-centered lives. Ever and Soren identify many of these chains in their videos and newsletters: for example, the omnipresence of “things” of this world that distract us from our relationships.

The Eucharist, by its very nature, is inter-personal and other-oriented. *Taking part* in the Eucharist breaks us free from our impersonal and self-centered ways, and it brings about true bonds of communion. When we sing as an assembly, we give ourselves over to something outside of us: to God, to those gathered with us, to the song of praise itself. When we say, “And with your spirit” to the priest, we express a relationship of trust and belonging in the Church and her ministers.

When we listen to the Word of God, we recognize that “I” do not have all the answers but learn and are transformed by Another. When we join in the Prayer of the Faithful, we take on the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of our brothers and sisters. When we spiritually unite ourselves to the Eucharistic Prayer and receive the transubstantiated bread and wine—which is truly and really the Body and Blood of Christ—, we live our conviction that our source of life, healing, and strength is none other than God Himself, and we express our desire to be “one body, one spirit” with our brothers and sisters in Christ, with our spouses, our children, our parents.

While the Eucharist does nourish us as individual persons, it constantly reminds us that we are always persons-in-communion because we are members of the Body of Christ. When liturgy transforms us, it transforms us as persons-in-communion. So, it also transforms our Church as Church and the relationships that unite us. **This is why participating in Mass as a family is so important.** The Eucharist transforms us as persons-in-communion, it transforms the domestic church itself, and it transforms our familial relationships. When we *participate* in Mass as a family, we do not so much go back home as individuals trying to bring our individual transformations to a spouse or a child. Rather, our family is itself transformed. Our family as a communion-of-persons then strives to continue a life in God's.

We can turn now to God's *welcome*, considering how it is seen, encountered, and lived in the Eucharist. Even before we arrive at the church building for Mass, God is at work in our lives inviting us to ascend the mountain, and He guides us as we go. However, how often in our lives do we (to adapt the well-known saying) miss the mountain for the trees? During the week, our attention to the "trees" of busy work schedules, getting kids off to school and extra-curricular activities, and so many other appointments—all in the midst of northern Virginia traffic!—can make us miss the fact that, all the while, God is gently inviting us and guiding us to the Eucharistic celebration. Our first encounter with God's welcome is experienced well before the entrance procession of Mass; it is found in the opening of His life to us and the invitation to live in Him. This, then, continues in the Eucharistic gathering itself, through liturgical actions such as the priest's greeting, "The Lord be with you."

Taking part in the Eucharist requires paying attention to this action of God in our life. It also requires a response: our own act of openness by welcoming God and His People into our lives. In fact, the Mass presupposes that we are responding to God's openness by allowing Him to open our hearts. As we enter the church and take our place before Mass, we do well in offering a few moments of silent thanksgiving that God has invited us into His life, and we humbly ask that we might be given the grace to open our lives more fully to Him and to others, especially our spouse, children, and parents. As the liturgy begins, we sing a song of praise as an assembly, witness the procession of ministers, and respond "And with your spirit" to the priest's greeting. All these require that we have already allowed God to open our hearts to Him and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. In other words, by *taking part* in the Eucharistic celebration we see and encounter God's welcome, but also, we already begin to make God's welcome a part of our life. That is, we begin to live God's *welcome in* our hearts, minds, and bodies as persons-in-communion. That is, **we already live in God's *welcome* as the domestic church.**

Next, we turn to God's *listening*. God listens; but importantly, we listen first. In the Eucharist, God speaks to us through the words proclaimed and through the ministers who proclaim them. Vatican II teaches that when the scriptures are proclaimed in the Church, it is Christ Himself who speaks (cf. SC 7). And when Christ speaks—when God speaks—

something happens. The words proclaimed in the Eucharist are not mere words of instruction, though they do have an educating value. More deeply, they are words of transformation; in them the Word of God is present, He who heals us in our brokenness, strengthens us in our weakness, and illuminates us in our darkness. As one saying goes, the more we learn to hear God's Word, the better we are able to speak! And in the Eucharist, we do speak, too, and God listens to us. We speak the desires of our hearts and the desires of the Church. Sometimes we speak with our own voices, and other times we speak to God by uniting spiritually to a prayer said by a minister. By *taking part* in the Eucharist, we see that God speaks and listen, and we also encounter and enter into the dynamic of mutual listening.

Next, we turn to God's *servicing*. Here, Ever and Soren have already made the beautiful and profound connection between God's way of serving and our Eucharistic celebration. In the Eucharist, God serves us by giving to us—here and now, today—the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, His only Son and our Lord. The gathered assembly is led by the priest, by whose hands are taken, blessed, broken, and given the bread become Christ's Body, and the wine become His Blood. The Eucharistic Prayer is the “high point” of the Eucharistic celebration because Christ, who has been present in different manners in the assembly, minister, and word up to this point, is now substantially and personally present in the consecrated bread and wine (cf. GIRM 30, etc.; SC 7). What appears as bread and wine is really and truly Christ's Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

While the Eucharistic Prayer is the “high point,” the U.S. Bishops remind us that Communion is the “consummation” of the celebration (cf. US Norms for Distribution..., 5). In Communion, we encounter that supreme service by which the Body of Christ is broken and given to us, His Blood poured out for us. This is why *taking part* in the Eucharistic sacrifice means, above all, that we *partake* of His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. At this consummating moment, our souls are transformed, healed, refreshed, and strengthened in order to live His *service in* our hearts, minds, and bodies.

This connection between seeing and encountering God's *service* in Communion and our living God's *service in* our lives is often shown in the Prayers after Communion. Not all of these prayers are as direct in connecting our reception of Communion with our lives in this world; especially as we move toward the end of the liturgical year, we will hear a lot about our life in heaven. In any case, I invite families to pay careful attention to the Prayers after Communion and reflect on what they mean for their family bonds and relationships. Here is the prayer for this coming Sunday:

May the working of your power, O Lord,
increase in us, we pray,
so that, renewed by these heavenly Sacraments,
we may be prepared by your gift
for receiving what they promise.

The power that the Lord works in us is his *welcoming, listening*, and especially *servicing*. What the heavenly Sacraments promise is, according to the Eucharistic Prayers, that we will become “one body, one spirit in Christ.” This is both the whole Church and within our ‘domestic churches’. To put it all together, by *partaking* in the Eucharistic sacrifice, we pray that God’s *welcoming, listening*, and especially *servicing* will live in us and strengthen the bonds of our Church in all its forms, including the domestic church of the family. Seeing and encountering God’s *welcoming, listening*, and *servicing* in the Eucharist shows us how our families live as communion-of-persons.

As we conclude our reflections, we recall the foundation of this Trinity House Community, namely, that the future of our families depends on being *welcoming, listening*, and *servicing* in the very way that the Triune God is *welcoming, listening*, and *servicing*. In this reflection, I have been attempting to highlight a simple but challenging truth. It is this: that *taking part* in the Eucharist is the central and essential way of living like the Triune God—indeed, living in the Triune God. The Eucharist is therefore central and essential to the future of families! Through Eucharistic participation, we see and encounter God’s life of *welcoming, listening*, and *servicing*, AND we—as families—already begin to live in this divine life. In the Eucharist, we are freed from those chains that keep us from being truly inter-personal and other-centered so that we might live as a fruitful communion-of-persons in our homes. This truth is simple, but making it happen is challenging in two ways, with which I will conclude.

First, if our future families will be strong and fruitful, we are challenged to seek and foster deeper, more authentic participation in the Eucharist. This past June, Pope Francis wrote a letter “on the liturgical formation of the People of God” that pointed to this precise challenge and articulated a number of “prompts and cues” for reflection. The way forward, he suggests, is the collaboration of all Christians in reflecting on how we can be “formed for” and “formed by” liturgy so that we may better enter into and live out its mysteries. This task is still very much a work-in-progress, but in our context tonight, I would suggest that families reflect on the pope’s letter together. While the whole letter is worth reading, families will benefit the most from sections 1-26, 43-47, and 51-53.

Second, we are challenged to explore ways of linking our liturgical celebrations with family life. For this we already have a great head start because this is exactly what the Trinity House Community is providing! It includes all those practical but ever necessary suggestions about keeping the Lord’s Day holy, setting up quiet places in the home for family meals and prayer times, and living according to the liturgical calendar. My hope for the reflection this evening is that it will allow the work of Trinity House to be more directly connected with our *participation* in the Eucharistic sacrifice. Perhaps, then, I can do little better than close by commending the work of Trinity House in promoting “heaven in our homes,” by expressing my deep gratitude for the sacrifices already made and the fruits already harvested, and by praying for you and your family: that *the blessing of almighty*

God, the Father +, the Son +, and the Holy + Spirit, may come down upon you and your families, and remain with you forever. Amen.