

# THE EUCHARIST IN THE LIFE OF SAINT MARIA FAUSTINA

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## INTRODUCTION

When you mention the word "Eucharist", some immediately think of the bit of bread, small and round, known as the "Host", which Catholics receive and eat when we come to "Communion", that is, to receive from the minister, during the celebration of Holy Mass, that piece of bread that has ceased to be bread.

Others think of the Mass, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that: ***"The Eucharist is a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father, a blessing by which the Church expresses her gratitude to God for all his benefits, for all has accomplished through creation, redemption and sanctification. "Eucharist" means, above all, thanksgiving "***(CIC 1360)

Reflecting first on "Communion", we can say, by way of introduction, that in the moment we are receiving communion, what we eat and drink are the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The essence of the elements or substances which are bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the mystery of transubstantiation that takes place at the time of the consecration when the priest pronounces the "words of consecration." These words of consecration are pronounced for the first time in the Cenacle or the upper room by Jesus on Holy Thursday during the celebration of the Last Supper. These words are:

***"While they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks to God, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take, eat, this is my body. "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it, saying, "Drink this, all of it, because this is my blood, the blood of the covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins"***

(Mt 26:27- 28)

We can also find them in the Gospels of St. Mark and St. Luke, and the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-26, Mk 14:22-25 and Lk 22:19-20). The Gospel of John speaks of the Eucharist in chapter 6, beginning in verse 25 - "Jesus the Bread of Life", and ending at 68 - "Words of eternal life", especially in verses 54 and 55 – ***"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed"*** (Jn 6:54-55)

Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated Host - that the whole person of Jesus is present, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. We remember that St. Paul tells us in his Letter to the Philippians, that Jesus: ***"Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing***

***to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men”***

(Phi 2:6-7)

## **SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT FAUSTINA**

The spiritual life of St. Faustina was expressed in particular: 1) By her love for Jesus in the Eucharist, which occupied the center of her spirituality, 2) Her devotion to the Blessed Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, 3) Her absolute trust in God and 4) Her availability and consistent dedication to the works of mercy towards others.

However, when her name is pronounced, she is recognized worldwide as the Apostle of Divine Mercy and, immediately, references are made to the image of Merciful Jesus and her diary; little is talked about her extraordinary love for the Eucharist and her deep devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Her love for Christ in the Eucharist, led her: First to be very much loved by Jesus who, among innumerable favors, spiritual and mystical in nature, appears to her in person and gives her instructions to paint a picture, with He himself being the model, and to be signed, "Jesus I trust in You"; second to discover a rational or intellectual, and also mystical understanding that the Eucharist at Mass is the reenactment of the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, that it is reenacted bloodless or without bloodshed on the altar; third to have absolute and total trust in Him, learning to discover His will and thus be able to please Him by doing His will. Santa Faustina imitates Jesus, pleasing Him as He pleased the Father; and fourth, her love for Christ in the Eucharist teaches her, and she comes to understand, how Holy Mass and daily Communion help her in her ministry of service to others, and gave her the strength she so desperately needed in the midst her sickness – tuberculosis, which often prevented her from making or offering the works of mercy towards others, as she always longed to.

The Holy Eucharist was her soul mate. Jesus gave her all her strength to live the state of grace with passion and fighting spirit, and the humility to face the many difficulties caused by her sisters of the convent who mortified her with doubts, criticism, jealousy and even false accusations toward her. She would find in Holy Communion the strength of mind to offer her daily sacrifices:

*"I am myself so weak that were it not for Holy Communion I would fall continually. One thing alone sustains me, and that is Holy Communion. From it I draw my strength; in it is all my comfort. I fear life on days when I do not receive Holy Communion. I fear my own self. Jesus concealed in the Host is everything to me. From the tabernacle I draw strength, power, courage and light. Here, I seek consolation in time of anguish. I would not know how to give glory to God if I did*

not have the Eucharist in my heart" (Diary 1037)

## **EUCCHARISTIC SACRIFICE**

Santa Faustina begged Jesus to give her a great intelligence, enlightened by faith, to understand the divine things and thus be able to know more to love Him more. Jesus answered her prayer.

He once said to her that when clock announces and she hears the hour of three, the hour at which Jesus commends His Spirit to the Heavenly Father, to ponder His Passion immersing herself in it:

***"At three o'clock, implore My mercy, especially for sinners; and, if only for a brief moment, immerse yourself in My Passion, particularly in my abandonment at the moment of agony. This is the hour of great mercy for the whole world. I will allow you to enter into My mortal sorrow. In this hour, I will refuse nothing to the soul that makes a request of Me in virtue of My Passion"*** (Diary 1320)

Saint Faustina, always obedient, pondered deeply the Paschal Mystery – the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church on the day of Pentecost. She would do it not just when the clock struck the hour of three, but in every opportunity, especially when she was in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. Closeness to the Eucharistic Jesus prepared her soul to receive the promptings of the Holy Spirit that allowed her not only to immersed herself in the Passion of Christ, but to understand and explain man's redemption in light of the Divine Mercy of God:

*"God you could have saved thousands of worlds with one word; a single sigh from Jesus would have satisfied Your justice. But You Yourself, Jesus, purely out of love for us, underwent such a terrible Passion. Your Father's justice would have been propitiated with a single sigh from You, and all Your self-abasement is solely the work of Your mercy and Your inconceivable love. On leaving the earth, O Lord, You wanted to stay with us, and so You left us Yourself in the Sacrament of the Altar, and opened wide Your mercy to us. There is no misery that could exhaust You; You called us all to this fountain of love, to this spring of God's compassion. Here is the tabernacle of Your mercy, here the remedy for all our ills. To You, O living spring of mercy, all souls are drawn; some like deer, thirsting for Your love, others to wash the wound of their sins, and still others, exhausted by life, to draw strength. At the moment of your death on the Cross, You bestowed upon us eternal life allowing Your most holy side to be opened. You opened an inexhaustible spring of mercy for us, giving us Your dearest possession, the Blood and Water from Your Heart. Such is the omnipotence of Your mercy. From it all grace flows to us"* (Diary 1747)

What about it! dear reader, how wonderful! In a few well articulated and expressed words, this Saint, who as a child could only reach a third grade of elementary school education, could explain to us, in a simple and easily understandable way, the greatest and most extraordinary deed of mercy that God has done for mankind. How did she achieve this?, Well, by the works and grace of the Holy Spirit, through her trust in the Eucharistic Jesus that nurtured her soul every day in Holy Communion.

Saint Faustina tells us that trust in Jesus is the path that eventually leads to holiness, but not something that you receive in one moment, but gradually unfolds in our spiritual life.

I can understand it when I think how trust develops between a person and his friends. Generally, friends at the start of their friendship are just acquaintances. There is a need of a more frequent contact in order to develop a friendship. However, there could be several degrees of friendship. We have some friends with whom we have shared in the past, for example, friends from our childhood and our adolescent years; friends we had or have at our place of work; friends whom we also call brothers, as they are friends from Church. Yet, when we are asked how many friends we have, the question makes us carefully think about it, and many of us reply: "Are you referring to the true friends, the most intimate friends?, because, if that is the case, I can count those with the fingers of one hand".

So, intimate friends are very few. These are the friends in which you really can trust. This is the friend that sometimes, when we go on not seeing each for a while, it does not matter, because when we meet again, it is just like we had seen each other just yesterday. This is the friend on whom I can count on without embarrassment in case of a problem, because I know that if he can help me, he will, and if he cannot, he will try doing so some way. This is the friend of whom I am sure, will never raise a false testimony against me and much less betray me.

This is the friend that will take what is his away from him to share it with me. The one that defends me when people speak bad about me when I am not present, he is the one with whom I can share the closest things since I trust him. He is Jesus, my intimate Friend, with whom I can always share and that never, ever, will fail me.

Jesus once told his disciples:

***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you"*** (Jn 15:12-15)

These words were also received by St. Faustina and she became an intimate friend of Jesus. Jesus made known to her “All which He heard from the Father” What could be closer or more intimate than a conversation between The Father and The Son?

That is how Saint Faustina comes to know the Will of God, and knowing His Will she tries to please Him at all times. She herself tells us that when the soul reaches such an intimate relationship with God, the soul begins to receive inspirations of the Holy Spirit, that allow the soul each day to know, love God more and more and wish to please Him in all of what He requires from her.

Saint Faustina fully understood why Jesus before saying the words of consecration during the Last Supper, gave thanks to God: **“Jesus took the bread, and giving thanks to God, he broke the bread and gave it to His disciples”**

She perfectly understood, that the wish of Jesus is to please the Father, to do the Will of the Father, whose maximum expression is: Let all men be saved!; She perfectly understood why Jesus thanked the Father, for allowing Him to offer himself in sacrifice for all of us. This constant disposition of pleasing and thanks to the Father is what gives Jesus the strength to be able to endure the pain and suffering of the Cross. Saint Faustina also experiences this spiritual strength that overcomes pain and suffering.

In her Diary, Saint Faustina tells of a vision she had about the Last Supper (please, read Diary 684) and observes that Jesus takes the bread in His hands and gives thanks to God, at that moment the Lord made a pause, having all noticed that what He did at that moment would be known in eternity. When I read this quote, I was deeply moved with this last comment, and it came to mind that in that pause Jesus was anticipating the pain and suffering he was to endure from this evening of the Holy Thursday on. It seems that Saint Faustina, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, observed that the sacramental sacrifice of Jesus, that takes place in the altar without blood being shed, is the same sacrifice of the cross in which the Lord offers his life by shedding up to his last drop of blood to give us life, and life in abundance. From His pierced Heart, after shedding the living blood, sanctifying water poured.

**“Oh Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fountain of mercy for us, I trust in You”** (Diary 187)

In another quote from the Diary, Saint Faustina has another vision during Holy Mass. She often saw the Child Jesus during the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, but this time she saw Jesus crucified:

*“February 2, 1937. Today, from early morning, divine absorption penetrates my soul. During Mass, I thought I would see the little Jesus, as I often do; however, today during Holy Mass I saw the Crucified Jesus. Jesus was nailed to the Cross and was in great agony. His suffering pierced me, soul and body, in a manner which was invisible, but nevertheless, must painful” (Diary 913)*

Saint Faustina also understands that she, a member of the Mystical Body of Christ, can participate in the Mystery of Redemption, becoming herself a co-redeemer with Christ Jesus, as St. Paul tells us, that offering our sufferings we can add them to those of Christ for the salvation of souls:

*“During the Holy Mass I saw the Lord Jesus nailed upon the Cross amidst great torments. A soft moan issued from His Heart. After some time, He said: **(I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the Heavenly Father for sinners”***

*(Diary 1032)*

She understands perfectly the profound meaning of the prayer that Jesus teaches her to pray and of its power of spiritual intercession, especially in these words:

***“Eternal Father, I offer you the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of your dearly beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.”*** (Diary 476)

Through the meditation of the Pascal Mystery, wanting to love Jesus who offers Himself in sacrifice for the salvation of souls, wanting to love Him more and more, Saint Faustina begins to develop also an attitude of sacrifice that leads her to offer herself as host, meaning, as a victim soul, along with Jesus for the salvation of souls. Her desire to please Jesus, to do His Will, humbly leads her to humble herself, for the salvation of sinners. We read in the Diary:

*“I accept joy or suffering, praise or humiliation with the same disposition. I remember that one and the other are passing. What does it matter to me what people say about me? I have long ago given up everything that concerns my person. My name is host – or sacrifice, not in words but in deeds, in the emptying of myself and in becoming like You on the Cross, O Good Jesus, my Master!”* (Diary 485)

*“Oh my Jesus, I understand the meaning of “host”, the meaning of sacrifice. I desire to be before Your Majesty a living host; that is, a living sacrifice that daily burns in Your honor”* (Diary 1826)

Saint Faustina, through her experiences shared with us in her Diary, helps us to better understand our participation in the sacrifice of Thanksgiving that is celebrated in the Holy Eucharist.

## **EUCCHARISTIC BANQUET**

In our corporal or physical life, we need to feed ourselves because if do not, our organs cease to function little by little until the lack of food leads us to the death of the body. The same happens with our spiritual life, we must feed ourselves, if we do not, we can become sick and even die spiritually. The Holy Eucharist is the sustenance of the soul that we eat during the banquet of the Holy Mass where Jesus offers himself to us as food for the soul. Eating His Body and drinking His Blood we receive the necessary strength to maintain the presence of God in our lives.

What does it mean to die spiritually? That even though we are physically alive, our soul has died because of the mortal sin we have fallen to, as we did not have the needed strength to confront Satan, who constantly tempts us to lead us into committing the sin that will separate us from God. God makes His dwelling in us, that is, He lives within us in our soul when we are not in mortal sin.

Life is a constant spiritual battle where we face the temptations of the evil one, who, through deceit and deception, wants to take away our soul for it to be damned eternally in Hell, separated from God and without any possibility of liberating herself from the claws of the devil. In this life we can still fight the battle and defeat Satan, because we count with the victory that Jesus already won on the Cross for us. Jesus after suffering His Passion and Death, rose from the dead conquering sin, death and the devil. Jesus is alive, and through the Eucharistic sacrifice, He offers Himself in every Holy Mass for us, for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of souls. And, at the same time, in Holy Communion he gives us the sustenance of our souls, the needed strength to reject and defeat the attacks of the enemy. Eating His Body and drinking His Blood, do not let us die spiritually and allows us to live our lives eternally in God's presence while we wait for our resurrection on the last day.

Let us remember the Gospel passage when Jesus goes to Bethany to visit Martha and Maria, immediately after the death their brother, Lazarus, Jesus' good and loved friend:

***"When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and***

***the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*** (Jn 11:20-26)

For Saint Faustina, to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, is the way to maintain and deepen our relationship with Him.

***"But I want to tell you that eternal life must begin already here on earth through Holy Communion. Each Holy Communion makes you more capable of communing with God throughout eternity"*** (Diary 1811)

***"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"*** (Jn 6:56)

Saint Faustina teaches us that it will be very difficult to follow Christ without frequently approaching the sacraments. To her, the Eucharistic Jesus, present in the Sacred Host, is the shield, the defense of the life of the soul. She wrote:

*"December 12, 1936. Today, I only received Holy Communion and stayed for a few moments of the Mass. All my strength is in You, O living Bread. It would be difficult for me to live through the day if I did not receive Holy Communion. It is my shield; without You, Jesus, I know not how to live"* (Diary 814)

In Holy Communion, Saint Faustina also found her strength to withstand the temptations of the enemy and her spiritual and physical sufferings.

*"O Jesus Host, if You Yourself did not hold me, I would not be able to persevere on the Cross. I would not be able to endure so much suffering. But the power of Your grace maintains me at a higher level and makes my sufferings meritorious. You give me strength always to move forward and to gain heaven by force and to have love in my heart for those from whom I suffer adversities and contempt. With your grace one can do all things"* (Diary 1620)

Her physical ailments and sufferings, many times kept her from coming to Communion, and she suffered when she was not able to. But the Lord, who loved her for her faithfulness, humility and commitment to serve her neighbor, many times pleased her, allowing her to attend Holy Mass and receive Communion.

In several instances we read how she asked the Lord to heal her, even if it was just for the needed time for her to get up from bed, go down to the Chapel, receive Holy Communion and return to bed. Following, we read one of her testimonies:

*"January 10, 1937. Today I asked the Lord to give me strength in the morning, so that I could go to receive Holy Communion. My Master, I ask you with all my*

*thirsting heart to give me, if this is according to Your holy will, any suffering and weaknesses that You like – I want to suffer all day and all night – but, please, I fervently beg You, strengthen me for the one moment when I am to receive Holy Communion. You see very well, Jesus, that here they not bring Holy Communion to the sick; so, if You do not strengthen me for that moment so that I can go down to the chapel, how can I receive You in the Mystery of Love? And you know how much my heart longs for You. O my sweet Spouse, what's the good of all these reasoning? You know how ardently I desire You, and if You so choose You can do this for me.*

*On the next morning, I felt like if I were perfectly well; the fainting and the weaknesses ceased. But as soon as I returned from the chapel, all the sufferings and weaknesses immediately returned as if they had been waiting for me. But I had no fear of them at all, because I had been nourished by Bread of the Strong. I boldly look at everything; even death itself I look straight in the eye” (Diary 876)*

Saint Faustina loved the Lord so much, that she longed for holiness, as holiness was the culmination of her life – to go to Heaven in the arms of Jesus.

Jesus confirms to her what she knew, that the answer was in Holy Communion. This we can read in the following quote from her Diary:

***“Talk to Me simply, as a friend to a friend. Tell me now, My child, what hinders you from advancing in holiness? Poor health detains me on the way to holiness, (answered Saint Faustina), I cannot fulfill my duties. I am as useless as an extra wheel on a wagon. I cannot mortify myself or fast to any extent, as the saints did. Furthermore, nobody believes I am sick, so that mental pain is added to those of the body, and I am often humiliated. Jesus, how can anyone become holy in such circumstances? True. My child, (Jesus responds), all that is painful. But there is no way to Heaven except the way of the Cross. I followed first. You must learn that it is the shortest and safer way...But understand that the strength by which you bear suffer comes from frequent Communions. So approach this fountain of mercy often, to draw with the vessel of trust whatever you need” (Diary 1487)***

That is why, Saint Faustina did everything she could to spend the most time possible near to Jesus, her beloved spouse, her intimate friend, her Lord and God:

***“Jesus, when you come to me in Holy Communion, You who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, have deigned to dwell in the little heaven of my heart, I try to keep You company throughout the day, I do not leave You alone for even a moment...” (Diary 486)***

**FOUNTAIN OF MERCY**

From the Eucharistic sacrifice and banquet flow our deeds and acts of Mercy towards our neighbors. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, offering Himself to the Father in for the forgiveness of our sins, constitutes the greatest merciful action that God ever made for man.

Our existence was a work of God's mercy, just as Saint Faustina tells us; man not having been condemned to hell, as were the rebellious angels, was a deed of God's mercy; having saved Noah and his family from the deluge, was a work of the mercy of God; having called Abraham to show him the promised land and to promise Abraham that his descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the skies and the grains of sand of the sea, was a deed of God's mercy; having freed the Jewish people from the slavery of Egypt, leading them to the promised land of milk and honey, was a work of the mercy of God; and we could go on describing the God's deeds of mercy throughout creation up to our times. Every action of the love of God in favor of man has been a work of the Mercy of God.

But, we repeat, the greatest work of God's mercy has been the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus in the sacrifice of the Cross. A Sacrifice that, as we have mentioned, it takes place without bloodshed on the Altar each time a Holy Mass is celebrated; a sacrifice that invites to partake in it, joining our personal sufferings to those of Christ, and in that way, cooperate with Jesus in the salvation of souls.

But, this is not the end of this merciful work of God, rather the beginning. Man needs to know this merciful love of God. But, as Saint Paul says: How are you to know if you do not believe in Him? How can you believe in Him if you have not heard of Him? and, we could also ask: How are you going to believe in Him, if you have not experienced His mercy? We are the ones called to perform deeds of mercy, be it by action, word or prayer, so our neighbor can get to know and experience the merciful love of God.

The closer we come to the merciful Jesus in our participation during Holy Mass and the receiving of Holy Communion, the more we can grow spiritually until we reach the stature of Christ. It is then when we experience the urgency of imitating the merciful Jesus and heed to the calling of being always willing to do deeds of mercy, always and everywhere without excuses or justifications, and, above all, deeds that stem from our love for Jesus, just as the Lord asked Saint Faustina:

***“My daughter, if I demand through you that people revere My Mercy, you should be the first to distinguish yourself by this confidence in My Mercy. I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for Me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it”*** (Diary 742)

This call and at the same time sending, to love and be merciful to your neighbor, can be appreciated in Jesus Himself, who is the first one to give us His example during the Last Supper, when he washed the feet of his disciples.

Saint John the Evangelist, tells us what happened in (Jn 13:2-18). This action of Jesus moves us and makes us identify ourselves with Peter, who could not believe that Jesus, his Master, could wash his feet when he, the disciple, should be the one washing Jesus'. In this we recognize a great gesture of humility in Jesus, however, this is not done out of His humility, but out of His love, as humility sprouts from love, from the mercy of God. What Jesus is doing is giving us the example so that we too can be merciful and humble with our neighbor

Saint John, who does not include the words of the Consecration in his Gospel, written many years after the others were written, is the one that gives us this narration of the washing of the feet within the context of the Last Supper

It seems, though, that it is precisely what Saint John wishes from his fellow men, is for them to be aware that it is the Eucharistic celebration, and the reception of the Holy Communion, that motivate us and give us strength, not just to persevere in our helping our neighbor, but to help our neighbor in knowing and experiencing the love and mercy of God.

***“For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15)***

**JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU!**