

National Catholic Prayer Breakfast
Most Reverend William D. Byrne
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As a thought exercise, have you considered what superpower you would like to possess? If invisibility comes to mind, you're creepy. Flying would be very useful. Having experienced a childhood where THE device was a television and the choices were channels 4, 5, 7 and 9, *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Genie* offered some options, a twitch of my nose or a blink of an eye bringing a fulfilled wish. As the thought exercise continues, I come to realize that besides all the good one could do, the powers would inevitably have me putting people in stockades for not picking up after their dogs or wearing yoga pants in church. This thought exercise is simply today's version of Eden's fall.

"You will be like gods" was the promise of the evil one to our first parents. They bit the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, and we have been munching away ever since. "Control freaks" all are we. Even if you prefer to be a yes-man, a go-with-the-flow gal, every fear springs from a place where we do not, cannot surrender to God.

Dr. Anthony Fauci in a recent interview with the BBC said, "First of all, I think my own personal ethics in life are I think enough to keep me going on the right path. And I think that there are enough negative aspects about the organizational Church, that you are very well aware of. I'm not against it. I identify myself as a Catholic. I was raised, I was baptized, I was confirmed, I was married in the Church. My children were baptized in the Church. But as far as practicing it, it seems almost like a pro forma thing that I don't really need to do."

If some wonder why we need a Eucharistic revival, Dr. Fauci explains it perfectly.

Now I don't mean to target Dr. Fauci, rather he succinctly articulates the voice of the majority of Americans who will identify as Catholic but do not recognize the beauty and power of their baptism. From that gift of incorporation into the Body of Christ comes a duty to live in right relation with our Creator and Redeemer. Living in right relation with God is the only way to true joy.

"Be it done according to your word." These seven words began to unravel the knot tied in Eden. The knot of self-sufficiency imprisons us. "Be it done according to your word." Our Lady's response to the request of the Angel Gabriel reversed the course of human history. Obedience, trust and docility became the force that foiled the ancient Foe.

At that moment she began to bear her son Jesus, our Lord Jesus. In her womb was the Christ – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Mary became and is our dignity and our destiny.

Firstly, the Eucharistic Revival is a time of following Our Blessed Mother in receiving Jesus and bringing Jesus into our world.

We gather this morning to reflect on the Eucharist, as Vatican II taught is the source and summit of the Christian life. We pause to "Be of Good Cheer" as we people of the Eucharistic banquet

seek to live ever more fully and joyfully in the presence of our Lord and Savior, Body Blood, Soul and Divinity at every Mass. This Eucharistic Revival will culminate in a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis this summer.

This is not the first time the Church has paused to reflect and renew ourselves in the Gift. Pope St. Pius X did so just a little over a century ago. Known as the Pope of the Eucharist, he is the reason why most of us began receiving the Eucharist in second grade. His insights then can help guide us now.

St. Pius X's pontificate left an indelible mark on the history of the Church and was characterized by a notable effort for reform, summarized in his motto: *Instaurare Omnia in Christo* (Renew All Things in Christ). His efforts indeed touched upon all aspects of the Church. The Pope sought to renew the Roman Curia, the liturgy, liturgical music, seminary formation. But the Pope of the Eucharist was seeking to renew the faithful spiritually through an encounter with Jesus Himself in Reconciliation and Communion.

In 1905 he issued a decree entitled *Tidentina Synodus* which called for frequent, even daily communion. He was combatting the errors which he said stemmed from Jansenism, rigorist ideas that had discouraged frequent Eucharist reception because it expected Christian perfection.

However, Pope St. Pius X knew that the Eucharist was a means of attaining such perfection not the prize for those who are perfect

Five years later another decree was issued entitled *Quam Singulari*. "Quam Singulari" meaning "how special" was the love which Jesus showed for children. This remarkable pastor of souls lowered the age of First Confession and First Communion to about the age of seven or "when a child begins to reason."

Quam Singulari states:

Such is the injury caused by those who insist on extraordinary preparations for First Communion, beyond what is reasonable; and they doubtless do not realize that such precautions proceed from the errors of the Jansenists who contended that the Most Holy Eucharist is a reward rather than a remedy for human frailty. The Council of Trent, indeed, teaches otherwise when it calls the Eucharist, "An antidote whereby we may be freed from daily faults and be preserved from mortal sins."

This holy Pope understood the Eucharist was a right to live in Christ given in our Baptism.

Pope St. Pius X was advocating that the graces given by Jesus in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Most Blessed Eucharist not be delayed. A child needs to understand the difference between right and wrong in order to be able to receive the Graces offered by the Eucharist.

Saying that the Eucharist is a remedy for human frailty does not mean that we needn't prepare for worthy reception of Holy Communion.

Matthew 22, 10-14 tells us of the banquet of the King.

The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment.

He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence.

Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

Many are invited, but few are chosen."

In order to prepare for Communion well, Pope Pius emphasized not only the Eucharist but also the tremendous gift of Reconciliation. Once a child was old enough to understand right from wrong, providing the gift of Confession was the orienting of a child from self-focus to God-focus, and by extension neighbor-focus. This provides one practical observation for this time of renewal.

My second point is that a Eucharistic Revival requires a Confession Revival. Pope Pius X clarified that the "age of reason" could be applied to sacraments as it did to school or today to the internet and television. One need not be able to articulate fully the Articles of the Faith to understand the law of love. In essence, he is recognizing that children are capable of living and comprehending the life of Christ. I suggest that Pope Pius X gives kids more credit than we give to most adults of modern times.

To this point I submit Exhibit A.

Bulletin Announcement: "Confessions are offered Saturdays from 4-4:30pm or by appointment."

These sorry words either mean that the priest is overwhelmingly busy or that confessions are not really that important or that people do not sin any more. My experience, like the Field of Dreams, is that if you build it they will come. If you offer it, preach it, people will allow themselves to be renewed through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Last spring Pope Francis speaking to priests and seminarians said, "there is no shortage of hotbeds of hatred and revenge, we confessors must multiply the 'hotbeds of mercy,'" by making it easy for people to access the sacrament of reconciliation.

"We are in a supernatural struggle with evil," the pope said, "even though we already know the final outcome will be Christ's victory over the powers of evil. This victory truly takes place every time a penitent is absolved. Nothing drives away and defeats evil more than divine mercy."

Pope Pius X's desire to *Instaurare Omnia in Christo* -- Renew All Things in Christ -- is a call to a renewed innocence, a second childhood if you will. This is my final point.

“The child is the father of the man” William Wordsworth famously observed in his poem *The Rainbow*. Often today many think he was saying that how we form our children will affect the next generation. The failure of catechetics for two generations is the proof of this proposition. It’s why we need revival.

Although this is true, it is not exactly what Wordsworth had in mind. He penned:

*My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,*

Wordsworth is speaking of awe and wonder, also known as fear of the Lord, a gift we receive at our Confirmation. The excitement of a kid lying on the lawn looking up in the sky at a rainbow or a cloud that looks like an aardvark. Wordsworth is holding on to this as a man, rekindling the awesome wonder of the child as an adult.

Herein lies my most fundamental point, the Eucharistic Revival requires a new encounter with the Mercy of Jesus Christ. That moment, and every moment of absolution, is a renewal of spiritual innocence. We become like little children again. Only as little children can we approach the Eucharist most honestly, most joyfully. Like a kid dragging his pals to see something “cool,” the enthusiasm of the true encounter with Jesus is transmitted. “Let the children come to me” is Jesus’ invitation for us to become like children, not childish but child-like.

Pope Francis elaborated on this point last year in his Apostolic Exhortation *C’est La Confiance* on the 150th Birthday of St. Therese of Lisieux. Full disclosure: She is one of my heroes.

Our Holy Father explains:

One of the most important insights of Therese for the benefit of the entire People of God is her “little way”, the path of trust and love, also known as the way of spiritual childhood. Everyone can follow this way, whatever their age or state in life. It is the way that the heavenly Father reveals to the little ones (cf. Mt 11:25).

In the *Story of a Soul*, Thérèse tells how she discovered the little way: “I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am, with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.”

To describe that way, she uses the image of an elevator: “the elevator which must raise me to heaven is your arms, O Jesus! And for this, I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.” [24] Little, incapable of being confident in herself, and yet firmly secure in the loving power of the Lord’s arms.

The way of revival is regression to a time and place of awe and wonder.

Finally, I return to our Blessed Mother as our dignity and destiny, our guide along the way of Eucharistic Revival.

I can neither paint nor draw, but that does not stop me from being an art critic. While I marvel at the masterpieces, I take exception to most depictions of the Annunciation. More often than not, Mary is pictured in profound humility, demure and perhaps in shock. However, scripture tells us that she “sets off in haste” to meet her kinswoman Elizabeth. Soon after their meeting, we hear her hymn of praise known as the Magnificat.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name. Luke 1: 46-55

I don't hear demure here, I here ecstatic praise. I hear joy and exultation in the Lord. There is celebration at the lowly being singled out for God's favor. I feel the reversal of human history, and the fulfillment of the ancient promises.

I would paint this as a happy dance! She who is bearing her Son the Savior, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity is rejoicing in every part of her being. This is our dignity and destiny. Renewed in mercy, filled with awe and wonder and celebrating with our whole being that we have been given, despite our unworthiness, the greatest gift of Jesus Himself.

Next time when you receive Holy Communion, perhaps a fist pump is in order.

Praised be Jesus Christ.