

# MONDAY EUCHARIST

Connecting Sunday Liturgy  
with Daily Work and Relationships

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A word about terminology: *Eucharist, Mass, communion, liturgy, Eucharistic spirituality, Eucharistic devotion, Real Presence, and Mystical Body of Christ*, though certainly related, are not synonymous. This book will clarify their differences as warranted.

## Introduction



T.S. Eliot's 1941 poem, *The Dry Salvages*, is a meditation on time and on our true destination. It contains this poignant line: "We had the experience but missed the meaning."

Most of us, most of the time, live episodically—event to event to isolated event and we usually don't have the time to weave those events into a narrative, a poem, or a story to discover the deeper meaning of those experiences.

Our dominant culture is also episodic. Everyone has fifteen minutes of notoriety. Each news story has a 24-hour (or possibly one-week) cycle. Internet postings or photos circulate for a day at most. Clichés are delivered in passing. Neighbors and colleagues come and go. We are inundated with factoids and bombarded with one-liners. We flit from one task to the next. Beneath it all, however, we may suspect there is overarching purpose to our harried existence. Although our hyper-connected world may leave us wandering in an existential daze, we occasionally sense a story line, a deeper meaning. Maybe we have this sense during a time of loss. At a moment of joy. In moments of doubt or frustration. During sex. Or maybe we sense it while

looking at family photographs. We may be aware of these hints of ultimate meaning, but then we just move along.



Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* addresses this search for meaning. After praising accomplishments in science, technology, commerce and culture, the Vatican II document asks: "What is the meaning and value of this feverish activity? How should all these things be used? To the achievement of what goal are the strivings of individuals and societies heading?"

I contend that the Eucharist can provide a perspective, a lens, a pair of glasses, a map, even an engine to give order and meaning to the seemingly isolated and routine events of life.

My claim, of course, is invalid if *Eucharist* is synonymous only with *Sunday worship*. The Eucharist, as used here, is a Sunday-carried-through-to-Saturday dynamic—what I call Monday Eucharist. Perhaps more importantly, the Monday part of Eucharist informs the hour of Sunday worship by providing it with a necessary context drawn from our everyday work and relationships—on the job, around the home, and in the community and civic affairs. Thus, work and relationships provide the raw ingredients that make Sunday worship more than a morning respite from real life.

To understand and to live the Eucharist as a weeklong reality, we have to be sensitive to the meaning embedded in the daily routines and institutions of the world. Living and celebrat-

ing Monday Eucharist means discovering and creating stories—of our individual lives, of our families and heritage, of the world as it is, and of the great story of God’s revelation. The Eucharist (Sunday worship and Monday work) can give us the framework for these stories and—just as importantly—prompt us to carry out our great mission in life: to make the world more like God would have things.



This book will discuss how to discern and tell our stories by attending to memory (chapter one), respecting our heritage (chapter two), engaging our imagination (chapter three), cultivating virtues, especially social justice (chapter four), and building solidarity with one another (chapter five).

In discussing Eucharistic spirituality, it is necessary at times to address individualism, that strong current in our present culture. While rugged individualism has motivated some people to do remarkable things, it has serious implications for economics, politics, careers, lifestyles, and even spirituality. In the spiritual realm, extreme individualism has driven some individuals to set aside family and community commitments in the pursuit of the gospel of individual wealth and success. A mega-church pastor, for example, preaches about the road out of poverty, advising members of his congregation to avoid the temptation of assisting extended family members with loans or significant investment of personal time. “It’s a sin to spend money on anyone else until you have it made,” he preaches.

Monday Eucharist, in contrast, considers extreme individualism to be sinful. Eucharistic spirituality does not force people to lose their individual identity, but it does foster healthy self-regard and self-actualization only through interaction with others. Eucharistic spirituality draws upon images of one body with many parts or of one loaf broken into many pieces. What a liberating and empowering alternative for a world of unconnected, anonymous individuals. Eucharistic spirituality counters individualism with *personalism*, a philosophy that espouses personal freedom while calling individuals to life in and responsibility for community.



How can we foster a holistic Eucharistic spirituality? There is no magic pill. No single rubric, sermon, official proclamation, app, or book can take the place of a slowly cultivated sacramental imagination coupled to effective action.

Eucharistic spirituality flows from the Incarnation—God walking the streets, God going to the carpenters’ hiring hall, God conversing with teachers and lawyers, God falsely accused, God suffering abuse, God in death and in resurrection. In short, it flows from God embracing the material world. It contrasts with today’s preference for virtual reality over matter and flesh. The Incarnation does not depend on satellites and TV. It demands touching and seeing and hearing nature, fabricated objects and especially people, physical face-to-face encounter.

Some time ago, John Flynn, OSA, conducted a tour of

my church for boys from a nearby high school, taking great care in showing them all the artifacts, symbols, precious vessels, and holy books. At the conclusion of the tour, he asked the boys, “Now, what is the most important object in this church?”

One boy replied, “The exit sign.”

Flynn, presuming the boy was a smart aleck, retorted, “Can you tell the whole class why you say that?”

“Because,” the boy said, “it shows us where to live the gospel.”

## Chapter One



### Do This in Memory

All of us who worship in the United States have been influenced by the Protestant ethic. That is, we usually think of faith as an individual matter: God and me. Thus we participate in the Eucharist as if it is an individual conversation with God. Eucharist then is often an event unconnected with our daily life on our jobs, with our families and loved ones, and in our community and civic involvements.

Certainly we can briefly feel a spiritual connection to family members who accompany us to Mass or maybe to friends or colleagues we see there. And worship can even be an occasion to feel attached to the concerns of the world if, for example, there is a sale of Fair Trade coffee or chocolate in the lobby that weekend. And now and then we become aware that a particular Mass is related to a larger tradition, maybe during Advent or Lent or on a major feast. But most of the time we presume



that the proclaimed passages from Scripture, the homily, and the other prayers of the Mass are meant to speak individually to us.

“Monday Eucharist,” as I call it, is not for individuals. It comes attached to a lot of people and things. It is connected to our weekday work and to our place in the world. It is connected to a great story that goes back to the Garden of Eden and forward beyond today. Finally, we are connected not only to the people in “attendance” with us but with everyone who shares, has shared, or will share the mission to bring about the kingdom of God on Earth “as it is in Heaven.”



Monday Eucharist is connected to who we are as relational persons (not as solitary individuals); to where we came from, to where we are now, and to where we are going. To foster a week-long Eucharistic spirituality means to frequently *re*-member; to put disparate parts of our lives back into meaningful order. In fact Jesus, during the first Holy Thursday Eucharist, tells his disciples that they are to break the bread and share the wine precisely for the purpose of remembering *him*. (See Matthew 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24.)

Jesus well understood that his community of faith—his Jewish community of faith—was built on the preservation of a corporate memory, one that at that time went back at least two millennia. Judaism’s basic premise is that the *present* is only understood through the lens of the preciousness of the *past*.

Another two millennia later, Sholem Aleichem’s (1858-

1916) character Tevye the Dairyman, a Russian Jew, knows his family will endure political turmoil only to the extent that they remember their “Tradition!”—the opening song from the 1964 musical adaptation of Aleichem’s Tevye stories.

One of the many things that Christianity has retained from its Jewish roots is respect for the value of remembering. We Christians reject the notion that each passing day is lost forever. For us, nothing of real value is ever lost.

Here is where the Eucharist comes in. *Anamnesis* is an obscure term used in psychology and also used by some academics to explain what is going on when we participate in Eucharist. It refers to a full sense of remembrance—a psychological or spiritual moment in which the past becomes truly present again. According to Christians who celebrate the Eucharist, the entire collective memory of God’s revelation is present in and possible through the Eucharist.



Most of us sitting around a backyard or living room have little trouble remembering delightful or startling incidents in our lives. We are capable of recounting an incident to family, neighbors or friends—each time with more or less embellishment, drama, hilarity, pathos or accuracy. When it comes to faith, however, many of us modern people want exactitude in our prayer formula, unambiguous clarity in dogmatic statements, chronology in revelation, predictable outcomes, singular Scripture narratives, and continuity in worship. In a modern age character-

ized by seeming randomness and absurdity, we are disposed to a *literal faith*. Yet, a literal faith is an oxymoron. It is so in every major religious tradition.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote five Christmas-themed stories about the spiritual power of memory, including *A Christmas Carol*. Professor Redlaw is the protagonist of the last one, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, Redlaw, haunted by attachment to his past, gradually learns humility. As the story begins, he bitterly nurses past unpleasantness and so his ghost offers the loss of his memory. Redlaw accepts without comprehending the ghost's warning: "The gift I have given you, you shall give again."

Others in Redlaw's life have likewise experienced hardship, yet they seem happy enough. But as Redlaw interacts with them, they too lose their memory and become bitter over everyday disagreements and disappointments. Contemporary novelist Jane Smiley explains the lesson that Redlaw eventually learns: "Memories of both pleasure and suffering are the source of forgiveness and, indeed, the source of our capacity to live with one another in toleration and happiness. Without memories, only the present inconveniences of life can assert themselves, breaking connections and driving people apart."



The Eucharist is a community of memory, but is not about precision recall. It is not about making exact copies of documents using a flash drive to retrieve an intact document.

Human memory cannot really imitate these electronic devices. A perfectly reliable memory is a distortion of memory's real purpose, which is to tell a story that resonates with the listener. Our memory—as opposed to a computer's—is selective in what it stores and in what it retrieves, often rearranging things and sometimes mixing the trivial with the important.

While the process of human memory can be confounding, it is not actually random. In fact, claims memoirist Patricia Hampl of the University of Minnesota, “we store in memory only images of value.” Of course, she points out, “the value may be lost over the passage of time” or be only partially clear at any given time.



In addition to storing and retrieving, there must be a third dynamic of memory. Something must help us recognize relative value as things go into our memory storage, and simultaneously something must allow our consciousness to retrieve the valuable things we need to recall.

In the Christian practice of storytelling, it is the soul that creates value among our many memories. A well-ordered soul helps us discover meaning in our lives by changing the isolated incidents we all experience into a body of digested and prioritized memories. Without soul, life is at best a series of episodes. The soul takes events and refashions them into a drama, a story, a meaningful existence. It is the soul—while wrapping details in color, humor, drama, and embellishments—that ties details

from the past to lessons for the present and hopes for the future.

Here is Patricia Hampl explaining her approach to writing a memoir:

My desire was to be accurate. [But that turned out to be] very different from transcription. I am forced to admit that memory is not a warehouse of finished stories, not a gallery of painted pictures. I must admit that I invented... I don't write about what I know, but in order to find out what I know... My narrative self (the culprit who invented) wishes to be discovered by my reflective self, the self who wants to understand and make sense of a half-remembered moment... Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past. Created: That is, real in the sense of tangible, made of the stuff of life lived in place and in history. And the downside of any created thing as well: We must live with a version that attaches us to our limitations, to the inevitable subjectivity of our points of view. We must acquiesce to our experience and our gift to transform experience into meaning... The truth of many circumstances and episodes in the past emerges for the memorist through details...but these details are not merely information, not flat facts. Such details are not allowed to lounge. They must work. Their labor is the creation of symbol. But it's more accurate to call it the recognition of symbol. For meaning is not attached to the detail by

the memorist; meaning is revealed... You tell me your story....



Insert the idea of *living a Monday Eucharist* for the idea of *writing a memoir*. Hampl's reflection is just as profound.

During his final illness, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (1928-1996) of Chicago wrote a memoir in which he demonstrated how events from someone's past spiritually inform the present and the future. Early in the book he mentions a photo album:

One of my favorite memories from childhood is the hours I spent leafing through the photo album my mother brought with her from Italy. She used to sit down with me and tell the stories of the people and places on each page. Later on I would flip through the album by myself and study all the details in each photo. When I finally made my first trip to Tonadico with my mother and sister in 1957, I was 29 years old. What surprised me was that I instantaneously felt right at home. Because of the photos I felt as if I had been there before!

Later in the book Bernardin returns to his experience with a photo album to show how it is possible to remember a place he has never been:

[During my battle with cancer] many people have asked me to tell them about heaven and the afterlife. I sometimes smile at the request because I do not know any more than they do... Yet the first time I traveled with my mother and sister to my parents' homeland of Tonadico di Primiero in Northern Italy, I felt as if I had been there before. After years of looking through my mother's photo albums, I knew the mountains, the land, the houses, the people. As soon as we entered the valley, I said, "My God, I know this place. I am home." Somehow I think crossing from this life into life eternal will be similar. I will be home.

Immigrant literature is intriguing because, while drawing upon the past, it always looks forward. Bernardin, a first-generation Italian-American (i.e., born in the United States of Italian-born immigrant parents), draws on his heritage to move forward in the United States and also to look forward to heaven. Second-generation and third-generation immigrants are sometimes forced to reclaim their forgotten family stories. In doing so, they often refashion the events; telling things differently or at least reemphasizing certain aspects of their family experience. The purpose of the later generations is the same as it was for the first generation—to tell their family stories—but a meaningful present and a hope-filled future sometimes require fresh versions of the literal stories.



Actually, all good stories are set in all times. They are *existential* in the sense that the whole story, though it makes references to historical reality, is freshly present for both the storyteller and the audience. A good story is not so much a looking back as it is an expansion of truths stored in memory into the realm of expectation and imagination.

All truth is an interpretation. To highlight interpretation is not to succumb to the post-modern plague of relativism. It is to say that truth, though eternal, is not totally grasped by any single community at any point in history. Bringing incidents and phrases forth from memory's recess by mulling them over, by telling and retelling a story, by reflecting on the story and then perhaps refashioning it and mulling it some more—through this soul-conducted process truth emerges. And all the small-t truths over time are directed to the capital T Truth, which is the Truth that lies only in God.