

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament

The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me an offering; from every man whose heart makes him willing you shall receive the offering for me.... And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." ~ Exodus 25:1-2, 8

THROUGHOUT SALVATION history God teaches us with "shadows of the good things to come" (Heb 10:1) called "types." These types may be people, places, events, and things that have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, that is, the realities suggested by the types have come to pass. For example, the crossing of the Red Sea is a type of Baptism, because just as by faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and were set free, so too, those who pass through the waters of Baptism are set free (see Ex 14; Mt 16:4; Heb 11:29).

Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence

The Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence are types that God used to prefigure the practice of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, which is the keeping of some of the consecrated bread (hosts) in the tabernacle for purposes outside of Mass.

While on Mount Sinai the first time, Moses received not only the Ten Commandments but also the Lord's command to receive an offering for him "from every man whose heart makes him willing" and to make the Lord "a sanctuary ... a tabernacle with all its furniture" according to the pattern given to him, so that he "may dwell in their midst" (Ex 25:2, 8-9). Then the Lord tells Moses the "pattern" (Ex 25-31). As part of the pattern of the sanctuary, the Lord also commanded Moses to "set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always" (Ex 25:30; see also Nm 4:7; 1 Kgs 7:48). For the Israelites, bread was a sign of what the Lord had done for them both when he freed them from the Egyptians (see Ex 13:6-9) and when he gave them "bread

"Christ is present as long as the consecrated bread and wine exist."

from heaven" for forty years in the desert (see Ex 16:4-15, 35). In the giving of the pattern, the Lord also tells Moses, "There [in the ark of the covenant] I will meet with you...and I will speak with you" (Ex 25:22). Moses told the pattern to the people of Israel, and they did as the Lord had instructed (see Ex 35:8-39:32).

Thus, the Lord was present among the People of Israel, and traveled with them throughout their many wanderings, until the time of King David. King David "had it in his heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord" (1 Chr 28:2), but it was actually his son Solomon who the Lord chose "to build a house for the name of the Lord," the first Temple (2 Chr 2:4; see 1 Chr 28:6), which was built according to the same pattern as was given to Moses, except that the Temple was stationary. After Solomon had built the Temple, moved the Ark of the Covenant and the Bread of Presence inside, and prayed a prayer of dedication, "fire came down from heaven ... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple" (2

Chr 7:1). "When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement, and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever'" (2 Chr 7:3).

Then the Lord appeared to Solomon and said: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice... if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in



A tabernacle, for the safe and reverent reservation of the Eucharist

this place. For now I have chosen and consecrated this house that my name may be there for ever" (2 Chr 7:12-16).

Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament

The practice of the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament has been given its full meaning in Jesus. Because the consecrated bread is Jesus, really present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, there is a tabernacle for its reservation in every Catholic Church. Furthermore, this tabernacle must be in a most worthy place with the greatest honor, to honor Jesus even by its location and to foster adoration by others.

The tabernacle is a place where Jesus will *"meet with you... speak with you,"* just as he did with Moses (Ex 25:22). Here is the place he has chosen to hear our humble prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land.

Lastly, because the consecrated bread is Jesus, there are several outward signs and gestures that are customarily seen near or directed towards Jesus who is in the tabernacle. These signs and gestures include: **1)** A lighted candle called a sanctuary light which is kept burning day and night near the tabernacle as a sign of Christ's constant presence (see Lv 24:1-4); **2)** Sometimes the tabernacle may be surrounded by flowers or lighted votive candles as symbols of prayers and offerings (gifts) for Jesus; **3)** Those who enter a Catholic church genuflect or bow toward the tabernacle and make the Sign of the Cross; **4)** Some people stop by a church "to make a visit" to Jesus in the tabernacle, similar to stopping by a friend's house; and **5)** Some people make the Sign of the Cross whenever they pass by a church.

Function in the Ministry of the Church

Because Jesus is the center of our lives, the Blessed Sacrament must be the center of our lives. The reservation of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the ways the



*Jesus is taken down from the Cross,
by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962*

Church keeps Jesus central and it is one of the ways that Jesus fulfills his promise to be with her always (see Mt 28:20). Bl. Teresa of Calcutta said, "When we look at the sacred host, we see how much Jesus loves us now."

The Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle is often used in the ministry of the Church, for example, to take Communion to the sick and shut-ins who were unable to attend Mass, to lead Eucharistic processions held on special feast days or in times of great trouble, to pray holy hours with exposition (showing) and benediction (blessing with the Eucharist), and to have perpetual adoration.

Pope John Paul II urged parishes to start perpetual adoration, a practice that he reinstated at the Vatican in 1981. Perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is accomplished when a group of people takes turns adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament that is exposed perpetually (twenty-four hours a day).

Along with his urging for parishes to start perpetual adoration, Pope John Paul II taught: "The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease"¹ (CCC 1380). The Church, the family of God, who is commanded to *"pray constantly"* (1 Thes 5:17) can never spend too much time with Jesus in the Eucharist.

Pope Paul VI taught that to visit the Blessed Sacrament is "a proof of gratitude and a pledge of love and a display of the adoration that is owed to Christ the Lord who is present there" (*Mysterium Fidei*). By our adoration, we resemble St. Mary of Bethany, *"who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching"* (Lk 10:39). In this way love will grow in our hearts and

strength will grow in our spirits as we draw nearer and nearer to Jesus.

(CCC 1378-1382)

"A sanctuary light is kept burning day and night near the tabernacle as a sign of Christ's constant presence."

¹ John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenae*, 3