

the Holy
Hour

the Holy Hour

Meditations for
Eucharistic Adoration

Edited by Matthew Becklo

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Could you not watch
with me one hour?

—MATTHEW 26:40



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Foreword

Bishop Robert Barron

Fulton Sheen deserves credit as the great prophet of the Holy Hour—a sustained, uninterrupted hour of prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Sheen was a revered retreat director, especially for priests, and he closed every one of these spiritual exercises with the same practical recommendation: spend a Holy Hour. Many of Sheen’s colleagues confirmed that, his whole life long, he remained faithful to this practice. I can personally testify that this teaching, which had been largely forgotten for a generation after his death, has been massively embraced by younger Catholics. The Holy Hour is now a staple spiritual discipline in most seminaries and in an increasing number of rectories and parishes around the country. The Holy Hour has also become a key part of my own spiritual life. When I’m home, I begin every day going to my chapel and spending an hour in prayer. That is because of Fulton J. Sheen.

What Sheen was intuiting about the importance of the Holy Hour is that it is about cultivating our relationship with Jesus. He once wrote, “Even when it seemed so unprofitable

and lacking in spiritual intimacy, I still had the sensation of being at least like a dog at the master's door, ready in case he called me." He was deeply sympathetic with the description of prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament once offered by a parishioner of the Curé of Ars: "I look at him and he looks at me." The Christian life is not about studying or drawing inspiration from a figure from the distant past; rather, it is about being in a personal relationship with Christ. This is realized, very powerfully, in the Holy Hour.

Once, when he was asked what one is supposed to do exactly in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Sheen answered: in a way, anything you want! There is no official, formalized way to spend a Holy Hour. You can pray the Liturgy of the Hours or the Rosary; you can read Scripture or spiritual works; you can prepare for teaching or preaching; you can thank God for the blessings in your life; you can bring the petitions of all those who have asked for your prayer; you can bring a pad of paper and a pencil, ready to write down the ideas and inspirations that come. You can even just sit in front of the Blessed Sacrament and do nothing at all, simply basking in his presence and undergoing a kind of "radiation therapy."

Whatever you do during the Holy Hour, the most important thing is to commit to it. Thomas Merton was once asked, "What is the best thing I can do to improve my prayer life?" His answer was simple: "Take the time." Maybe you are new to the Holy Hour and need to start small or start slow. If

you're a morning person like me, do this prayer right after you wake up; if you're better in the evening, do it before you go to bed. But take the time.

I hope this collection of meditations on the Eucharist—a mix of hymns, poetry, prayers, reflections from some of the great heroes of Word on Fire, and some of my own writings on the Eucharist over the years—might inspire you to stay close to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The Master is waiting for us; let us watch an hour with him and listen for his call.

Introduction to the Holy Hour

from Fulton J. Sheen's *Treasure in Clay*

On the day of my Ordination, I made two resolutions:

1. I would offer the Holy Eucharist every Saturday in honor of the Blessed Mother to solicit her protection on my priesthood. The Epistle to the Hebrews bids the priest offer sacrifices not only for others, but also for himself, since his sins are greater because of the dignity of the office.

2. I resolved also to spend a continuous Holy Hour every day in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

In the course of my priesthood I have kept both of these resolutions. The Holy Hour had its origin in a practice I developed a year before I was ordained. The big chapel in St. Paul's Seminary would be locked by six o'clock; there were still private chapels available for private devotions and evening prayers. This particular evening during recreation, I walked up and down outside the closed major chapel for almost an hour. The thought struck me—why not make a Holy Hour of Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? The next day I began, and the practice is now well over sixty years old.

Briefly, here are some reasons why I have kept up this practice, and why I have encouraged it in others:

First, the Holy Hour is not a devotion; it is a sharing in the work of redemption. Our Blessed Lord used the words “hour” and “day” in two totally different connotations in the Gospel of John. “Day” belongs to God; the “hour” belongs to evil. Seven times in the Gospel of John, the word “hour” is used, and in each instance it refers to the demonic, and to the moments when Christ is no longer in the Father’s Hands, but in the hands of men. In the Garden, our Lord contrasted two “hours”—one was the evil hour “this is your hour”—with which Judas could turn out the lights of the world. In contrast, our Lord asked: “Could you not watch one hour with me?” In other words, he asked for an hour of reparation to combat the hour of evil; an hour of victimal union with the cross to overcome the anti-love of sin.

Secondly, the only time our Lord asked the Apostles for anything was the night he went into his agony. Then he did not ask all of them . . . perhaps because he knew he could not count on their fidelity. But at least he expected three to be faithful to him: Peter, James, and John. As often in the history of the Church since that time, evil was awake, but the disciples were asleep. That is why there came out of his anguished and lonely heart the sigh: “Could you not watch one hour with me?” Not for an hour of activity did he plead, but for an hour of companionship.

The third reason I keep up the Holy Hour is to grow more and more into his likeness. As Paul puts it: “We are transfigured into his likeness, from splendor to splendor” (see 2 Cor. 3:18). We become like that which we gaze upon. Looking into a sunset, the face takes on a golden glow. Looking at the Eucharistic Lord for an hour transforms the heart in a mysterious way as the face of Moses was transformed after his companionship with God on the mountain. Something happens to us similar to that which happened to the disciples at Emmaus. On Easter Sunday afternoon when the Lord met them, he asked why they were so gloomy. After spending some time in his presence, and hearing again the secret of spirituality—“The Son of Man must suffer to enter into his Glory”—their time with him ended and their “hearts were on fire” (see Luke 24:26, 32).

The Holy Hour. Is it difficult? Sometimes it seemed to be hard; it might mean having to forgo a social engagement, or rise an hour earlier, but on the whole it has never been a burden, only a joy. I do not mean to say that all the Holy Hours have been edifying, as for example, the one in the church of St. Roch in Paris. I entered the church about three o'clock in the afternoon, knowing that I had to catch a train for Lourdes two hours later. There are only about ten days a year in which I can sleep in the daytime; this was one. I knelt down and said a prayer of adoration, and then sat up to meditate and immediately went to sleep. I woke up exactly at the end of one hour. I said to the Good Lord: “Have I made a Holy Hour?” I thought his angel

said: "Well, that's the way the Apostles made their first Holy Hour in the Garden, but don't do it again."

One difficult Holy Hour I remember occurred when I took a train from Jerusalem to Cairo. The train left at four o'clock in the morning; that meant very early rising. On another occasion in Chicago, I asked permission from a pastor to go into his church to make a Holy Hour about seven o'clock one evening, for the church was locked. He then forgot that he had let me in, and I was there for about two hours trying to find a way of escape. Finally I jumped out of a small window and landed in the coal bin. This frightened the housekeeper, who finally came to my aid.

At the beginning of my priesthood I would make the Holy Hour during the day or the evening. As the years mounted and I became busier, I made the Hour early in the morning, generally before Holy Mass. Priests, like everybody else, are divided into two classes: roosters and owls. Some work better in the morning, others at night. An Anglican bishop who was chided by a companion for his short night prayers explained: "I keep prayed up."

The purpose of the Holy Hour is to encourage deep personal encounter with Christ. The holy and glorious God is constantly inviting us to come to him, to hold converse with him, to ask for such things as we need and to experience what a blessing there is in fellowship with him. When we are first ordained it is easy to give self entirely to Christ, for the Lord

fills us then with sweetness, just as a mother gives candy to her baby to encourage her child to take the first step. This exhilaration, however, does not last long; we quickly learn the cost of discipleship, which means leaving nets and boats and counting tables. The honeymoon soon ends, and so does our self-importance at first hearing the stirring title of “Father.”

Sensitive love or human love declines with time, but divine love does not. The first is concerned with the body which becomes less and less responsive to stimulation, but in the order of grace, the responsiveness of the divine to tiny, human acts of love intensifies.

Neither theological knowledge nor social action alone is enough to keep us in love with Christ unless both are preceded by a personal encounter with him. When Moses saw the burning bush in the desert, it did not feed on any fuel. The flame, unfed by anything visible, continued to exist without destroying the wood. So personal dedication to Christ does not deform any of our natural gifts, disposition, or character; it just renews without killing. As the wood becomes fire and the fire endures, so we become Christ and Christ endures.

I have found that it takes some time to catch fire in prayer. This has been one of the advantages of the daily Hour. It is not so brief as to prevent the soul from collecting itself and shaking off the multitudinous distractions of the world. Sitting before the Presence is like a body exposing itself before the sun to absorb its rays. Silence in the Hour is a tête-à-tête with

the Lord. In those moments, one does not so much pour out written prayers, but listening takes its place. We do not say: “Listen, Lord, for Thy servant speaks,” but “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9).



Opening Prayer and Hymn

Prayer

Roman Missal

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle
in them the fire of your love.

Amen.

Hymn

St. Thomas Aquinas

Verbum Supernum Prodiens

(with *O Salutaris Hostia*)

Latin

*Verbum supernum prodiens
nec Patris linquens dexteram,
ad opus suum exiens,
venit ad vitae vesperam.*

*In mortem a discipulo
suis tradendus aemulis,
prius in vitae ferculo
se tradidit discipulis.*

English

The Word of God proceeding forth
yet leaving not the Father's side
and going to his work on earth,
had reached at last life's eventide.

Then, sadly, to a death accursed,
by a disciple he was given,
but, to his twelve disciples first,
he gave himself, the bread from heaven.

*Quibus sub bina specie
carnem dedit et sanguinem,
ut duplicis substantiae
totum cibaret hominem.*

To them, beneath a two-fold sign,
he gave his Flesh, he gave his Blood,
that man, of two-fold substance blent,
might know the fullness of the good.

*Se nascens dedit socium,
convalescens in edulium;
se moriens in pretium,
se regnans dat in praemium.*

By birth, our fellow man was he,
our meat, while sitting at the board,
he died our ransom to be;
and ever reigns, our great reward.

*O salutaris hostia,
quae caeli pandis ostium,
bella premunt hostilia,
da robur, fer auxilium.*

O saving Victim, opening wide
the gate of heaven to all below,
our foes press hard on every side,
your aid supply, your strength bestow.

*Uni trinoque Domino
sit sempiterna gloria,
qui vitam sine termino
nobis donet in patria.*

To your great name be endless praise,
Immortal Godhead, One in Three,
O grant us endless length of days
in our true fatherland with thee.



I. Real Presence



“This
is





my
body.”

—MARK 14:22

1.

Christ Is Here

My Lord and my God!

—JOHN 20:28

Poem

St. Francis of Assisi

“Let the Whole of Mankind Tremble”

Let the whole of mankind tremble
the whole world shake
and the heavens exult
when Christ, *the Son of the living God*,
is present on the altar
in the hands of a priest.
O admirable heights and sublime lowliness!
O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
That the Lord of the universe,
God and the Son of God,

so humbles Himself
that for our salvation
He hides Himself under the little form of bread!
Look, brothers, at the humility of God
and *pour out your hearts before Him!*
Humble yourselves, as well,
that you may be exalted by Him.
Therefore,
hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves
so that
He Who gives Himself totally to you
may receive you totally.

Scripture

Mark 14:22–25

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Reflection

Bishop Barron

Catholicism

At the very beginning of her career, Flannery O'Connor, who would develop into one of the greatest Catholic writers of fiction in the twentieth century, sat down to dinner with Mary McCarthy and a group of other New York intellectuals. The young Flannery, clearly the junior member of this sophisticated circle, was overwhelmed and barely said a word all evening. McCarthy, a former Catholic, trying to draw O'Connor out, made a few nice remarks about the Eucharist, commenting that it was a very powerful symbol. Flannery looked up and in a shaky voice said, "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it." I can't imagine a better summary of the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence.

Catechism

1373–1374

"Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us," is present in many ways to his Church:¹ in his word, in his Church's prayer, "where two or three are gathered in my name" (Matt. 18:20), in the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned (see

1. Rom. 8:34; see *LG* 48.

Matt. 25:31–46), in the sacraments of which he is the author, in the sacrifice of the Mass, and in the person of the minister. But “he is present . . . most *especially in the Eucharistic species*.”² The mode of Christ’s presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as “the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend.”³ In the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist “the Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained*.”⁴ “This presence is called ‘real’—by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be ‘real’ too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”⁵

Reflection

Flannery O'Connor

The Habit of Being

I believe what the Church teaches—that God has given us reason to use and that it can lead us toward a knowledge of him, through analogy; that he has revealed himself in history and

2. SC 7.

3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 73, 3 c.

4. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.

5. Paul VI, *MF* 39.

continues to do so through the Church, and that he is present (not just symbolically) in the Eucharist on our altars. To believe all this I don't take any leap into the absurd. I find it reasonable to believe, even though these beliefs are beyond reason.

Prayer

St. John Henry Newman

Meditations and Devotions

I place myself in the presence of him, in whose Incarnate Presence I am before I place myself there.

I adore you, O my Savior, present here as God and man, in Soul and Body, in true Flesh and Blood.

I acknowledge and confess that I kneel before that Sacred Humanity, which was conceived in Mary's womb, and lay in Mary's bosom; which grew up to man's estate, and by the Sea of Galilee called the Twelve, wrought miracles, and spoke words of wisdom and peace; which in due season hung on the cross, lay in the tomb, rose from the dead, and now reigns in heaven.

I praise, and bless, and give myself wholly to him, who is the true Bread of my soul, and my everlasting joy.

Amen.



**“It is the center
of existence for me;
all the rest of life
is expendable.”**

—FLANNERY O’CONNOR



2.

Mouth-to-Mouth

I love you, O LORD, my strength.

—PSALM 18:1

Poem

Pope St. John Paul II

From “Shores of Silence”

I adore you, fragrant hay, because in you
no pride ripens as in ears of corn;
I adore you, fragrant hay, because you cuddled
a barefoot baby, manger-born.

I adore you, rough wood, because I find
no complaint in your fallen leaves;
I adore you, rough wood: you covered His shoulders
with blood-drenched twigs.

And you, pale light of wheat bread, I adore.
In you eternity dwells but for a while,
flowing in to our shore
along a secret path.

God has come as far as that,
stopped but a step from nothingness,
so near our eyes.
It seemed to simple hearts,
to open hearts it seemed
that He was lost amidst the ears of corn.

And when the starved disciples husked the grains of wheat,
He waded deeper into the field.
Learn from me, my dear ones, how to hide,
for where I am hidden I abide.

Ears of corn, lofty in your sway,
tell, do you know his hiding place?
Where should we look, tell the way
to find Him in these fertile fields.

God and the universe dwelt at the heart,
but the universe was losing light,
slowly becoming the song of His Reason,
the lowest planet.

I bring you good news of great wonder, Hellenic masters:
it is pointless to watch over existence
which slips out of our hands,
for there is a Beauty more real
concealed in the living blood.

A morsel of bread is more real
than the universe,
more full of existence, more full of the Word—
a song overflowing, the sea,
a mist confusing the sundial—
God in exile.

Scripture

Psalm 63:1–8

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
 my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
 as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

Reflection

Bishop Barron

Arguing Religion

Adoratio in Latin is derived from two words, *ad* and *ora*, meaning “to the mouth.” The sense is that the stance of adoration is a lining up of our powers to God, literally being mouth-to-mouth with him. When we are so aligned with God—taking in “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4)—all the elements that make us up fall into harmony, and the world around us finds its proper harmony as well. And by implication, false worship—aligning oneself to something or someone other than God—results in a disintegration of the self and a falling apart of the wider world. The theologian Paul Tillich once

commented that all you need to know about a person can be discovered through asking and answering a simple question: What do you worship? Everyone, religious or otherwise, holds something of highest value, places something at the center of his or her life. From that grounding move, everything else follows.

Catechism

1378

Worship of the Eucharist. In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the Real Presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. “The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of Adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated Hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession.”⁶

Reflection

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Elucidations

There is such a thing as “spiritual communion,” which is not intended to replace sacramental communion but which, as it

6. Paul VI, *MF* 56.

were, flows out from the latter onto all those who desire to share in the great banquet which the Father gives. And consequently there is, too, such a thing as the “veneration of the holy of holies” wherever bread and wine from the celebration of the Mass are reserved, whether visible to the faithful or not. Such veneration is the act of the heart as it meditates on and thinks itself toward that point where the eternal love breaks into time and where time is broken open to the approach of eternal love. . . . For what God is has been made known to us and given to us in his Eucharist.

Prayer

St. Faustina Kowalska

Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament

I adore you, Lord and Creator, hidden in the Most Blessed Sacrament. I adore you for all the works of your hands, that reveal to me so much wisdom, goodness, and mercy, O Lord. You have spread so much beauty over the earth and it tells me about your beauty, even though these beautiful things are but a faint reflection of you, incomprehensible Beauty. And although you have hidden yourself and concealed your beauty, my eye, enlightened by faith, reaches you and my soul recognizes its Creator, its Highest Good, and my heart is completely immersed in prayer of adoration.

My Lord and Creator, your goodness encourages me to converse with you. Your mercy abolishes the chasm which separates the Creator from the creature. To converse with you, O Lord, is the delight of my heart. In you I find everything that my heart could desire. Here your light illumines my mind, enabling it to know you more and more deeply. Here streams of graces flow down upon my heart. Here my soul draws eternal life. O my Lord and Creator, you alone, beyond all these gifts, give your own self to me and unite yourself intimately with your miserable creature.

O Christ, let my greatest delight be to see you loved and your praise and glory proclaimed, especially the honor of your mercy. O Christ, let me glorify your goodness and mercy to the last moment of my life, with every drop of my blood and every beat of my heart. Would that I be transformed into a hymn of adoration of you. When I find myself on my deathbed, may the last beat of my heart be a loving hymn glorifying your unfathomable mercy.

Amen.



**“If, in the presence of
this mystery, reason experiences
its limits, the heart, enlightened by
the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly
sees the response that is demanded,
and bows low in adoration and
unbounded love.”**

—POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II

