

# **Christmas Midnight Mass Homily**

**Bishop John Barres**

**St. Agnes Cathedral**

**December 25, 2022**

Merry Christmas to you and your families!

In union with our Holy Father Pope Francis and in a spirit of mercy, humility and charity, I invite everyone present at our Christmas Masses, or watching our Christmas Masses via the *Catholic Faith Network* or CBS, or through you to those not present at all: If your life has been far from the Catholic Mass and the Eucharist, I invite you to return.

I invite you to experience the power and liberation of Christ's mercy and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and to cross the bridge into the full practice of your Catholic faith through a radical fidelity to the Sunday Mass and an ever-deepening love for our Lord's presence in the Holy Eucharist.

Perhaps you are not a Catholic and yet have some mysterious attraction to the Catholic Mass and the Eucharist.

You are not alone! Many saints had the same experience and were drawn to enter the Church through their intuitive experience of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist in our parish churches.

Be open to the Eucharistic movement of the Holy Spirit in your life!

Our celebration of Christmas 2022 occurs this year as every Catholic diocese, every Catholic parish, every Catholic Hospital, University, and Institution in the United States is engaged in an evangelizing *Eucharistic Revival*.

What do we mean by the phrase "Eucharistic Revival" and why is it so important for our celebration of Christmas?

Pope Francis points out the relationship between the Birth of Christ, the Incarnation and the Holy Eucharist and the Catholic Mass. The very word Bethlehem means "house of Bread."

Pope Francis states: “Bethlehem is the turning point that alters the course of history. There God, in the *house of bread*, is born in a *manger*...The Lord knows that we need to be fed daily. That is why he offered himself to us every day of his life: from the manger in Bethlehem to the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Today too, on the altar, he becomes bread broken for us; he knocks at our door, to enter and eat with us (cf. Revelation 3:20). At Christmas, we on earth receive Jesus, the bread from heaven. It is a bread that never grows stale, but enables us even now to have a foretaste of eternal life.”<sup>1</sup>

Eucharistic Revival, in the words of Pope St. John Paul II, is a “rekindling of Eucharistic Amazement.”<sup>2</sup>

It is an understanding that “The Eucharist is truly a glimpse of heaven appearing on earth. It is a glorious ray of the heavenly Jerusalem which pierces the clouds of our history and lights up our journey (19)...The Eucharist is the source and summit of all evangelization...(22)”<sup>3</sup>

Eucharistic Revival means that we grow in our understanding that every Mass has a cosmic significance and every Mass is celebrated on the Altar of the world<sup>4</sup> – the Altar of Ukraine and every war torn and injustice-ridden area of our world.

Eucharistic Revival is a rekindling of Pope Benedict XVI’s insight that every period of Church reform can be traced to a rediscovery of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>5</sup>

This past August 7<sup>th</sup> the Pulitzer Prize winning American historian David McCullough (1933-2022) died.

McCullough was constantly asking us to go deeper in our understanding about how the American pioneering experience, presidential leadership, entrepreneurial and inventive ingenuity and a spirit of hope forged and developed the American character and spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis Homily for Midnight Mass, Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, December 25, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 6.

<sup>3</sup> Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 19 and 22.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pope St. John Paul II’s April 17, 2003 Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 8.

<sup>5</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI’s 2017 Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* 6: “Every great reform has in some way been linked to the rediscovery of belief in the Lord’s eucharistic presence among his people.”

This, in turn, sparks in us a curiosity to go deeper into an understanding of how the Catholic American experience propelled by the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass has impacted the American experience.

The great Catholic evangelization pioneers of this country were contemplative and swash-buckling missionary risk-takers.

St. Isaac Jogues (1607-1646) and Companions, St. Juniper Serra (1713-1784), St. John Neumann (1811-1860), Blessed Fr. Michael McGivney (1852-1890), Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey (1870-1957), Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother (1935-1981), St. Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini (1850-1917), St. Katherine Drexel (1858-1955), St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), Blessed Sr. Miriam Teresa Demjanovich (1901-1927), St. Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853), Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton<sup>6</sup> (1854-1897), Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979), Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman (1937-1990) – the list of holy American Eucharistic missionaries goes on and on to the present day.

Most were short on personnel and short on funds. They had no sophisticated business plans. They were contemplative wheelers and dealers in the best sense who trusted in the Lord and forged ahead by trusting in the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It would do us well to recapture some of that humbly audacious Catholic missionary spirit for these 21<sup>st</sup> century times.

We celebrate at this Midnight Mass the holiness of so many current and future American saints. Each of them experienced a contemplative and missionary rebirth each Christmas as they meditated on the manger (St. Leo the Great).

We remember too that each one of us is called to be a saint in our own unique way with our own unique gifts, family and moment of history.

As your servant, Successor of the Apostles and Bishop, this is my prayer for each one of you at this Midnight Mass.

We pray that each of us could be Divine Mercy instruments of bringing many, many people back to a full fidelity to the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass.

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<sup>6</sup> See Michael R. Heinlein, Editor's *Black Catholics on the Road to Sainthood*, (Huntington Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2021)

We are being called to be intentional, compassionate, understanding and listening Eucharistic missionaries.

Merry Christmas to you and your families!

May the love of the Christ child, the Prince of Peace, and the love of the Holy Family light your remaining steps on earth and light your path to Heaven and Eternal Life.