

The Life of the Blessed Virgin in the Cenacle¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament,
Paris, Friday, May 3, 1861

Let us reflect on the life of the Blessed Virgin in the Cenacle. Everyone has a center of life that gives stability. For example, a child's center of life is the affection of its mother, its family home. A merchant's center of life is his business, he thinks only of that, and dwells there. A scholar's center of life is knowledge, etc. Every person has a center of life, in which to rest, recreate, and find pleasure. A young man may work the entire day far from his family; he is happy to return at night to be with his family.

The Blessed Virgin's center of life after the Ascension was the Cenacle. Since Jesus, her divine Son was there, her mind, heart, and will could not dwell anywhere else. Everything in her life focused on the sacramental state of our Lord and on the sacred Host which veiled Jesus' presence. **Her mind** thought of nothing but the Eucharist, since the mind is necessarily occupied with what **concerns the heart**. Her heart dwelt in the Cenacle, where Jesus remained in the Holy Eucharist. **Her will** also centered on the Eucharist, since the will is nothing other than the action of the heart and of faith. All her activities flowed from the Blessed Sacrament and returned there. As a result, the Blessed Virgin did not have a single thought, affection, or desire that did not center on the Blessed Sacrament, object of her love. Since her Son remained in the first tabernacle, she needed to remain with him. As far as she was concerned, everything flowed from there.

How then was the Blessed Virgin able to make the sacramental state of our Lord her own center of life? First of all, my Sisters, you must understand that **the center of life flows from love**. When our Lord was in her virginal womb, Mary remained with him. She was with him at his birth in a stable. As he grew, she was with him in Nazareth. During his public life, she centered on all his activities. And finally when he was crucified, she stood beneath the cross. Her love followed our Lord in all of these phases. As each phase changed, the Blessed Virgin's love adapted in form, while remaining the same.

After the Ascension our Lord's love changed form, becoming Eucharistic; and the Blessed Virgin followed him into this new state. Formerly our Lord lived through many diverse stages, now he will remain always the same, since he has taken on a state that is constant and unalterable. He will always have the same form in the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Virgin's center also never again changed in any way or form. From the time of the Ascension until her death her center is totally Eucharistic. In fact, her entire life became fully Eucharistic. Had it been possible to externalize the Blessed Virgin's thoughts, affections, and love, a host would have emerged. Everything in her was saturated with and lived of the Holy Eucharist.

The Eucharist was the center of the life of the Blessed Virgin not only when she was in the church, in the Cenacle. There, of course, we understand that she was in her real, permanent, actual and physical center, close to him. She spent half of her life there, coming to spend the night near that little wooden tabernacle. She was adoring for those who did not adore, and keeping her son company. The Blessed Virgin also had her center in the Cenacle when she was in her little room, or when she went out into the world. **Tradition** says that she went to Ephesus to visit St. John, her adopted son. You can well imagine that, although far from the Cenacle, her heart, mind, and will still lived there. The Eucharist was her center. A royal love is

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characterized by being always in touch with its object; nothing can break this spiritual union. Clearly nothing distracted the Blessed Virgin, nothing kept her from the presence of the adorable Eucharist. Imagine the sun following the Blessed Virgin everywhere, as she lived always in the rays of love of this sun, namely, the Eucharist.

My poor Daughters, if only we could share a little in the center of the life of the Blessed Virgin! We should share it, since the Eucharist is our grace, our vocation, our end. Could we always remain elsewhere, with someone in the world, our parents, our friends, the rich, the king, anyone at all? We would be too miserable, as though in prison. Now, nothing but the grace of our Lord can satisfy us.

My poor Daughters, when I am required to travel, as sometimes happens, you'll never believe how much my heart suffers. Even when I am honored and praised, I have a heart that is always uneasy. I used to enjoy nature, beautiful forests, mountains and flowers, everything the Good Lord made that was lovely and beautiful. Now I can no longer enjoy these things. They seem empty because **I don't find the Cenacle in them.** All seems miserable as the cold of exile. Nothing seems beautiful any more. The last time I passed through the Alps, I looked at these mountains of my youth and said, this is not worth our little Cenacle! When I see beautiful things, I say, this does not compare with my little room, where I feel at home. We have a king, a very powerful friend, and we live in his house. This is why I feel so uncomfortable anywhere else.

To attain this goal the Blessed Sacrament must truly be the center of our desires, our thoughts, our affections, and our sorrows. All of this must be confided to him and left at his feet. Share with him the crosses that arise, whether flowering or thorny. The Eucharist must become the center of our entire life, as a sort of holy attitude. Surely it is possible to attain this habitual presence. This may not yet be possible because of our frailty, but we can develop this habitual presence both in our thoughts and in relation to our activities.

Surely the Blessed Virgin lived in this actual presence, since she was at least as perfect as the angels and saints in heaven who dwell in God's presence. Try to imitate the Blessed Virgin, to live in God's presence as she did. Surely she loved but one place, the Cenacle, because this is where her Son dwelt. When approaching a place where Jesus once worked, one can kiss his footprints, thank him, and go forward in his light. However, he is no longer in this place. If one can say, he is here, then all is different. The Blessed Virgin remained in the Cenacle between twenty-three and twenty-five years. No one tells us how she spent that time, but she kept company with her Son and became the first to adore him. Imagine the joy of the apostles, other disciples, and the holy women, as they watched her in the Cenacle!

Imagine her simplicity as she fell on her knees. There was nothing artificial about the Blessed Virgin; everything in her reflected beauty and simplicity. The Cenacle became the first church – this large room transformed into a church. Surely the Blessed Virgin entered it with modesty and poise, full of the joy and love directed towards her beloved! She knelt directly on the ground, not on a kneeler, for this was not the custom of Jews and Arabs. Nowadays Orientals kneel and prostrate themselves on a rug. The Blessed Virgin came to adore the Holy Eucharist in all modesty, with her heart afire. She must have been beautiful when in adoration. God did not allow us to see her then, for he was ever so pleased with her. She shared in our Lord's sacramental state with a great awareness. Surely our Lord would have become bread solely for her, for such was her merit.

Imagine the Blessed Virgin in her tiny room, next to the Cenacle, her interior spirit always inclined toward the Cenacle, abiding in the Eucharist. Our Lord said, **Whoever eats me remains in me** (cf. Jn 6:56). She dwelt in him better than anyone. All these things, these miracles, this beautiful tableau will be revealed to us only in heaven. There all the graces of the saints will become visible in the goodness of God, a living tableau of God's goodness and the holiness of the elect. In heaven we will see all this alive

and glorious. This is what faith already teaches. Meditate on these things during the month of Mary. By your devotion, let it be a Eucharistic month as well.

Point of Reflection:

Based on tradition and on the Acts of the Apostles 2:42, this meditation is developed with ideas that are greatly enriched by the imagination. However, Fr. Eymard gives them a particular importance since he writes in the Constitutions of 1859, and 1863 that we should “live the life of Mary in the Cenacle”. What practical applications can we draw from it?