

THE HOLY HOUR

The spiritual values of the Holy Hour are countless. Living in an age of indifference and materialism, the Holy Hour will serve to draw our thoughts from worldly cares and anxieties and fit them on that more lasting city where we shall dwell in endless adoration of the Most High. In becoming an adorer of Jesus Hostia the faithful Catholic is permitted to be enrolled among Jesus' friends. What greater gift than a friend? But to have God for our friend! Who can fathom this immeasurable prodigality! "You are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God" (Eph. 2, 19).

The fruits derived from an hour's communion with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament are numerous. Just as we cannot be near a fire without feeling its warmth, so when near the altar we receive an increase in faith, hope, charity and all the graces and gifts which are necessary for our spiritual life. A few considerations on that period of adoration, more familiarly known as the Holy Hour, will form the burden of this article.

To seek the origin¹ of this devotion, one must look back through the vista of nineteen centuries and picture four men climbing up the heights of Olivet which lay over against the city of Jerusalem. Christ has just consummated the first Mass. He, the first priest of the New Law, has just distributed to the faithful eleven and alas, to that faithless one, the Holy Communion. Arriving at Gethsemani's olive-garden Christ opens the first Holy Hour with prayer and asks Peter, James and John to join with Him. "Watch and pray with Me." Surely they will watch with Christ for He seems to have chosen them advisedly to comfort Him in His hour of anguish. They had been with Him at the Transfiguration; are they unmindful of the generous outburst of enthusiasm: "Lord, it is good for us to be here?" Have they broken their promise: "Rabboni, let us make a tabernacle for Thee?" On Tabor Peter, James and John beheld Christ in His glory (Luke 9, 29); but on Mt. Olivet they beheld Christ in His agony.² Alas! too soon the three disciples forgot the scene of

¹ Tesniere, Albert, "Somme de la Predication Eucharistique," Paris 1896, p. 596.

² O'Rourke, John, "Under the Sanctuary Lamp," New York, 1909, p. 156.

Mt. Thabor in Galilee, for when the Master returned after the hour's vigil He found His disciple-priests asleep. "What! could you not watch one hour with Me?" (Matt. 26, 40).

Similar conditions obtain today. Throughout the preceding centuries, Christ invited countless Christians to watch with Him but the sleep of worldliness overtook them. Hence from time to time, offices³ were instituted to propagate devotion to our Eucharistic Lord and thereby rouse the dormant faith of many to gather around the altar. Thus in 1264, Pope Urban by the bull, "*Transiturus de hoc mundo*," instituted the feast of Corpus Christi, the result of the inspiration of St. Juliana of Liege and the persistent endeavors of the first Dominican cardinal, Hugh of St. Cher.⁴ In great measure it was owing to the Eucharistic propaganda of the archconfraternity founded by Father Dominic Stella in the Church of the Minerva, Rome, 1539, that the devotion of the Forty Hours was spread. It was reserved to the great Dominican Pope, the fifth Pius, to extend the celebration of the Forty Hours to the entire Church. Another friar, Fr. Anthony Le Quien in 1639 founded the first sisterhood whose life-work consisted in the perpetual adoration of the Hidden King. Thus in every century the wearers of Dominic's white wool have been fervent adorers of the Eucharistic Emmanuel.

It had long been the earnest wish of Catholics, prior to the thirteenth century, to behold Christ in Eucharistic state. This desire culminated in the festival of Corpus Christi.⁵ It would be interesting indeed to trace the development of the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Suffice it to say that some form of this popular devotion existed from the earliest times. In the Middle Ages, the Sacred Host was reverently taken from the ambry and placed on the altar, and here salutations and hymns were chanted by the people.⁶ But one is unable to trace the blessing of the people with the Blessed Sacrament beyond the early years of the sixteenth century.⁷ The devotion of the Holy Hour, that spontaneous outburst of adoration to Jesus Hostia, is of compara-

³ Vigourel, Adrian, "A Synthetical Manual of Liturgy," Baltimore, 1907, p. 149.

⁴ Schwertner, Thomas M., "Dominican Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament," Dominican Year Book, 1909, pp. 64-71.

⁵ Hedley, John, "The Holy Eucharist," London, 1911, p. 261.

⁶ *ibidem*, p. 270.

⁷ Thurston, Herbert, "Benediction" in "The Month," Vol. 97, p. 587, and "Exposition," 1. c., Vol. 98, p. 58.

tively recent date. There are three different practices of the Holy Hour, all of which have the sanction of the Church and are richly indulgenced.⁸

The first, which is strictly Eucharistic in character, consists in consecrating to prayer, either publicly or privately, one hour on Holy Thursday, Corpus Christi, and any Thursday of the year, in memory of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. Among the pious societies which observe this Eucharistic Holy Hour may be numbered: The Archconfraternity of the Most Blessed Sacrament (People's Eucharistic League) under the spiritual guidance of the sainted Père Eymard's sons;⁹ the Archconfraternity of Perpetual Adoration and the Work of the Tabernacle, whose central office is at the Church of St. Thomas Aquinas, Paris;¹⁰ the Archconfraternity of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the Work for Poor Churches, founded in 1848 by a pious lady, Anne de Meeus at Brussels;¹¹ and the Confraternity of Priest-Adorers, established in 1858 by Père Eymard, better known as the Priests' Eucharistic League. It is to be noted that the Archconfraternity of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, established by Pope Leo XIII in the Church of St. Joachim, Rome, and confided by the same Pope to the Redemptorists, prescribes a weekly half-hour watch before the Blessed Sacrament.¹²

The second practice may be termed the Holy Hour of the Passion. Its institution is due to the revelations of Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque.¹³ In the second of the three revelations accorded to Blessed Margaret Mary, our Lord bade her rise between eleven o'clock and midnight on every Thursday and prostrate herself on the ground to appease the Divine wrath for the sins of men and to assuage the sorrow Christ felt at being abandoned by the sleeping Apostles during the first Holy Hour.¹⁴ This hour of the Passion is observed from Thursday afternoon to Friday morning by members of the Archconfraternity of the Holy Hour established at Paray in 1829 by Fr. Robert Debrosse, S. J.¹⁵

⁸ Donnelly, Francis, "Watching An Hour," New York, 1914, p. 235.

⁹ Beringer, "Les Indulgences," Vol. II, Paris, 1905, p. 128.

¹⁰ *ibidem*, p. 130.

¹¹ *ibidem*, p. 133.

¹² *ibidem*, p. 480.

¹³ Cathedral Library Association, New York, 1896, "The Holy Hour," p. 3.

¹⁴ Bougard, L. V., "Life of Bl. Margaret Mary," New York, 1890, p. 170.

¹⁵ Zelle, Joseph, "Paray," in Cath. Ency. XI, p. 477.

The third kind of Holy Hour is an extension of that of the Passion. Those who are members of the Apostleship of Prayer may gain the plenary indulgence accorded to the Confraternity of the Holy Hour by performing the hour of adoration within the designated time. Pope Leo XIII further conceded to members of the League who practice the Holy Hour in common, the privilege of choosing any hour during the week for the gaining of the same indulgence.¹⁶

The purpose of the Holy Hour is to render to Our Eucharistic King fitting homage.¹⁷ "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is King. He is there a living King. Give Him then a royal worship."¹⁸ Though Christ is King, nevertheless, He is a Prisoner. For nineteen hundred years He has resided in His Tabernacle-Prison patiently awaiting to "draw all things" unto Himself. Naturally we loath a prison; to sustain a conversation with a prisoner even for an hour is repellant to our feelings. But surely an hour's colloquy¹⁹ with Our Prisoner-King ought not to prove tiresome. "Thy conversation hath no bitterness, nor Thy company any tediousness, but joy and gladness" (Wisd. 8, 16). For this tiny act of homage God will bless us. Having established the Eucharistic Kingdom in our own hearts we turn to our neighbor,²⁰ instructing him by word and example unto justice. Christ cannot leave His Tabernacle-Prison to awaken His disciples as He did during the Holy Hour in Gethsemani,—this mission He confides to His guard of honor.

As the Holy Hour is not an office strictly liturgical, the Church has not prescribed what exercises are to be followed during the period of adoration. It usually comprehends devotion to the Passion, Sacred Heart and Holy Eucharist. The method recommended by Père Eymard²¹ and his confrere, Fr. Tesniere,²² is that according to the four ends of sacrifice: namely,

¹⁶ Donnelly, Francis, "The Holy Hour in Gethsemani," New York, 1917, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸ Tenaillon, Edmond, "Life of Pere Eymard," New York, 1897, p. 83.

¹⁹ Redemptorist Fathers, "A Voice from the Tabernacle, Boston, 1903, p. 4.

²⁰ Tesniere, Albert, "The Eucharistic Christ," New York, 1897, pp. 23-28.

²¹ Heffernan, J. R., "Manual of the People's Eucharistic League, Memphis, 1909, pp. 23-35.

²² Tesniere, Albert, "The Holy Hour Offered to the Sacred Heart of Jesus Agonizing," New York, 1910, pp. 7-39.

²³ Keiley, Benjamin, "The Holy Hour," New York, 1912, p. 6.

adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition. Another way is the Holy Hour of the Rosary, consisting of the recital of the first mystery of the Rosary, after which an appropriate meditation is read, till the five decades have been completed. The service terminates with Benediction.²³ Again, Fr. Suau, S. J., urges the adorer to meditate on the slighted love of the Saviour during the Hour's watch.²⁴

Since it is the delight of the Eucharistic Prisoner to be among the children of men, we in turn should proffer love for love. Christ has placed His Tabernacle in the midst of Israel that He might be our Eucharistic Sovereign, and we, His faithful subjects. "Oh! my people," a Voice calls from countless ciboria, "be not so unmindful of My condescension." Adorer of the Hidden King, hearken to this cry for consolation from friends: "Ye, at least, try to console Me for all these ungrateful ones."²⁵

As the Most High guarded His chosen people during their sojourn in the wilderness, so today He cares for the adorers of His Eucharistic Christ, satisfying their every "desire with good things and renewing their youth like the eagle's" (Ps. 102, 5). And Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, who was the first sanctuary wherein Jesus reposed, will form in the hearts of the adorers, fitting tabernacles for the Eucharistic Christ.

—Ferrer Keenberger, O. P.

²⁴ Suau, Peter, "The Sacred Heart of Jesus," Philadelphia, 1896, p. 79.

²⁵ Bougard, L. V., *op. cit.*, p. 169.