

Kneel: A Eucharistic Healing

by *Michael Forrest*

1. The following is my personal account of a day I will remember for the rest of my life. It occurred in the late spring of 1996. I have endeavored to be as plainly factual and objective as possible, while also conveying my subjective reactions at the time and in retrospect. While no one is obliged to believe what I am about to recount, I would only ask that one keep an open mind.

During my conversion from Baptist Protestantism to Catholicism, I underwent many challenges, and welcomed most of them. However, one difficulty I faced was particularly troublesome. In the process of my initial catechesis, I had not been sufficiently instructed in the Sacraments. As a result, I suffered unnecessarily in trying to comprehend these profound mysteries.

As a Baptist, I had been taught that the Lord's Supper (what Catholics call Holy Communion) was strictly symbolic. I was referred to Christ's words: "Do this in *remembrance* of me" (Lk. 22:19). I was assured that this scriptural passage was proof that the purpose of the Lord's Supper was only to remember what Christ had done for us on Calvary. This was my belief for almost 30 years. And as an analytical / rational sort, it certainly made sense. Why would anyone believe differently? The first time I heard that Catholics believe that the Eucharist is Christ's body, blood, soul, and divinity, I thought it was absolutely bizarre and idolatrous...

...Rational explanation alone could never hold a candle to the reality of the Eucharist or Divine Providence any more than it could ever approach the reality of the love between a husband and wife or a parent's love for his child. It is a mystery, and we have to disabuse ourselves of the notion that we can understand everything as though it were a math problem. It should also humble us, making us grateful that we have been given the gift of faith.

2. So, with that as a backdrop, let me return to the story.

Although I had officially come into the Church through Confirmation, I was still unsettled regarding the Eucharist. Yet, I "willed" myself to believe because I had done enough self-study to know that the Catholic Church was the only Church that could reasonably claim to have been established by Christ.

In a nutshell, after doing some self-study on the earliest years of the Church, I realized that the Church was very Catholic from the start in her beliefs and practices. The early Church clearly believed that the Eucharist was no mere symbol, but rather, the Real Presence of Christ in her midst. I could not reasonably accept that either the Apostles were incompetent teachers or that the Holy Spirit has so miserably failed in His job within the first generation or two after Jesus (Mt. 16:18; Jn. 14:16). Additionally, all of the Protestant Churches were created by self-appointed human leaders between the mid-1500s to the present day. Essentially the Catholic Church *was* Christendom until then. Unless I was prepared to believe that *no one* really got it right until after the Reformation, I knew that the Catholic position was the only reasonable one. Catholics can trace every pope, bishop, and priest back through the laying on of hands (Holy Orders) to the Apostles and Christ.

Yet, I admit that I was still torn. Thirty years of reinforced belief do not easily give way. In my "gut," I still struggled. I was told the Catholic understanding was dangerous in my youth. My heart and my head were at war with each other. So I prayed that God would resolve and heal my interior division. My wife knew and prayed for me as well (she is a "cradle Catholic").

3. One Sunday we were preparing for Mass. My wife was in the rear seat, buckling our youngest child in our Dodge Caravan, and I was buckling our oldest son in the front seat. I was holding on to the center beam of the Caravan in order to balance myself as I leaned over to buckle him in. Unfortunately, my wife didn't see my hand. I suspect you're already cringing. Yes, you guessed it. From the inside she slammed the heavy sliding door shut across my fingers. And she slammed the door hard enough to lock it in place!

I immediately dropped to my knees and began yelling. I can recall almost "hearing myself," thinking, "Who is yelling like that?" Then I realized it was I!

My wife was so distraught that she was unable to open the door from the inside, and so I was forced to pull myself up and open the door with my other hand. The very tip of my pinky had been caught, my "ring finger" was caught about halfway to two-thirds of the way up, and the top quarter of my middle finger had been injured as well. My ring finger seemed to have suffered the greatest brunt of the blow.

Blood had been ejected through the skin, and was dripping down my palm from both my ring finger and my middle finger. All three fingers had been "flattened" from where they had been caught, up to the tips, and my ring finger and middle finger were about twice their normal width. Additionally, there was a deep crease on the back of the fingers from the edge of the door, and my ring finger, in particular, had been noticeably bent into the shape of the doorjamb.

Being a rational / scientific-minded person, I quickly assessed the damage (amid moans of pain) and asked my wife to call my brother and sister-in-law in order to drop our children off before heading to the emergency room. I was convinced that at least my ring finger was broken and possibly my middle finger as well.

After I had wrapped a paper towel and a red-and-white checkered face towel around my hand to stop the bleeding, a sudden "peace" and clarity came over me. Though I was in great pain, I could still think clearly somehow. I soon felt what I could only describe as a "compulsion" to pray. This may not seem unusual to many of you who pray very easily. But I assure you that at this point in my life, prayer was far from a typical response for me in such an emergency. And I felt that I needed to ask my wife to come pray with me as well.

When I asked her to pray with me, she gave me a mild look of disbelief and said, "What?" I repeated the request and gently took hold of her arm and knelt to pray in our family room.

I prayed first that God would take away my wife's agony over causing my injury. As much pain as I was in, I could see that she was suffering tremendously. Then I prayed that God would heal my hand and make sure that I could continue to play the piano (I am a professional pianist / keyboardist).

Almost as soon as I stood up, I blurted out, "We're going to Mass anyway." I can still remember thinking to myself, "We are? O.K., fine." At this point, I remember the look of dismay on my wife's face. Her expression conveyed that she thought I'd thrown a blood clot from my finger straight to my brain. She said, "Michael, what is *wrong* with you? We have to get you to the hospital. Your fingers are broken!"

I told her that I didn't really understand either, but that I was convinced that we needed to go to Mass regardless. After a milder protest, we returned to the van and dropped off the kids at my brother and sister-in-law's house. (I might add that they held their tongues very well when we told them we were running to Mass, not to the hospital. We didn't take time to explain, partly because I

didn't understand myself. I'm not sure I would have been as understanding in their place. Sure, dump the kids on us just so you can go to Mass!)

4. We were the very last people to arrive at church. We sat in the back. Keeping mild pressure on the wounds to stop the bleeding, I noticed that the pastor was speaking very forcefully and eloquently on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In fact, I recall thinking that he sounded rather "Baptist" in his passion that day, which was very unusual for him. As I sat there in pain, my wife leaned over and said, "Isn't this what you've been praying about, Michael?"

All of a sudden, I understood why I needed to be at this Mass. Somehow, I understood that God intended me to hear this timely, impassioned sermon in order to dispel any lingering doubts and discomfort. I remember being thankful, telling God that I believed completely now. I also asked forgiveness for my stubborn doubt.

When the time came, my wife, Paula, and I stood in line for Communion. I was the last person in line, with hand still wrapped up and in pain. As we moved forward, I experienced something I had never experienced before or since. I "heard," almost as if the word was implanted in my consciousness, "Kneel." I remember thinking, "Did I just think that?" At which point, the word repeated more forcefully, "Kneel." I got goosebumps.

There was no beatific vision, yet I cannot explain away the experience as self-induced. In fact, I recall that I didn't understand initially. I thought, "Am I supposed to kneel right here?" Finally, I understood somehow that I was to kneel when receiving Communion.

At this point, I leaned forward to my wife and whispered, "I think I'm supposed to kneel." Unfortunately, she thought I had said, "I think I'm supposed to yell!" And she responded, "Oh, no, don't yell!" Even in my discomfort, I couldn't help but to laugh a bit and said, "No, I said, 'kneel!'"

To this, she sighed with relief and said something to the effect of, "Well, hardly anyone kneels, Michael, but you can if you want to." I remember continuing down the aisle nervously, thinking, "I hope no one thinks I'm trying to be 'Mr. Pious and Holy' or something."

When I finally arrived in front of the pastor, he looked down with concern and curiosity at my red-and-white-towel-wrapped hand, as if to say, "What happened to you?" I sheepishly asked, "Is it O.K. if I kneel, Father?" He replied, "Sure."

I knelt and received Communion. When I stood, I noticed a vague sensation of warmth, almost as if I had consumed the Precious Blood. Yet, I had only received the Sacred Host. On my way back to the pew, I kept my head bowed and eyes down. I assure you it was not out of piety, but rather out of mild embarrassment, not wanting to meet eyes with anyone who might be glaring at me.

5. When I arrived at our pew, I slid over and asked my wife for some clean tissues for my wounds. As I was taking the cloth towel and old paper towel off my hand, I leaned toward her, whispering how strange it was being told to "kneel" and how it seemed almost unreal.

As I finished speaking, I noticed Paula's jaw drop and eyes grow wide. She exclaimed in a whisper, "Oh my goodness, look at your hand!" I looked down, and to my amazement, my fingers were perfectly back into shape. When I looked over at her again, she said, "Look at the blood. It's disappearing!" Again, I looked down, and the blood that had collected under the surface of my skin appeared to be receding back into my fingers before our eyes, to the point where it was barely visible anymore.

I thought, "This is a miracle!" Then I thought, "If my fingers are really healed, I should be able to bend them without pain." I hesitated very briefly and then bent them. *There was no pain.* I felt only

a bit of a strange sensation, as if something had happened, but nothing that could be described as "pain." (Looking back, I can't pinpoint exactly when the pain ceased.)

After almost everyone had left the Church, the pastor came down toward the rear of the Church, and Paula and I walked over to him. After I explained what had happened, he said, "You know, before Mass, I had a strong feeling that this homily was very important, and I wasn't exactly sure why. Now I know!" I thought I noticed his eyes watering a bit.

Shortly after, two older women from the parish came toward the three of us, and one gave me a hug. They said, "That was beautiful dear." I was rather sure they hadn't heard what I had said to the pastor, so I asked, "What was beautiful?" One responded, "When you knelt, that touched our hearts."

I told them that I didn't do it for show or anything like that, to which the other replied, "Oh, no, dear, we could tell you were quite nervous! But we thought it was a wonderful gesture."

As the two ladies walked away, I noticed the pastor standing in a certain way, looking at me as if something was on his mind. I said, "What?" To which he said, "Don't you see what's going on here?" I said, "I know my hand was healed, Father."

The pastor then asked me if I knew what the day was. I admitted that I didn't, other than that it was Sunday. He said, "This is the feast of Corpus Christi, Michael. It's all about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist!" Then he continued, "What are the chances that you would have this happen right before Mass, that you would be the last one in line so that everyone would see you with that towel around your hand kneeling to receive? And what are the chances that this would all happen on Corpus Christi? This isn't just for you, this is for the Church, Michael."

We all hugged, and then Paula and I went to pick up our children. You see, we had a bit of explaining to do to my brother and sister-in-law.

6. As a final note, I would like to offer a few comments. First, I am not claiming to be saintly or anything of the sort. I sin every day to one degree or another (which my wife, Paula, can readily verify). Although I do sincerely try to improve with God's grace (most of the time), I don't delude myself for a second into believing that God gave me this gift because I'm a great guy. I believe he saw His child sincerely struggling, in need of some "remedial spiritual help," if you will.

Also, I did not speak about what had happened to anyone except my pastor and family for quite some time because I didn't want to give the impression that I thought I was "special" or any such nonsense. However, with time, others convinced me that I was still reacting as though it was "about me." In trying to be "modest," I had hidden a wonderful work that God had done. The fact is, it *really isn't* primarily about me. I know that. And just maybe, God knew that once I worked through that false humility, I would be the type who would be bold enough to let people know what He had done.

Last, I do not assert that everyone *must* kneel to receive Communion. The Church has allowed another choice at this time, and therefore I have no authority to say otherwise. Nevertheless, I am convinced that God intends for *me* to kneel when receiving. Furthermore, the Church has always taught that physical postures are very important, both in what they convey and in that to which they predispose the individual. Kneeling (traditionally either on both knees or on one's right knee) conveys worship and adoration and predisposes one's mind and soul to a spirit of humble thanksgiving, while standing conveys honor and respect. One may honor and respect many things, yet there is only One to Whom worship and adoration are due. The Scriptures tell us, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bend before me" (Rom. 14:11; Isa. 45:23).

Especially in these days, when belief in Christ's true presence, body, blood, soul, and divinity, are doubted by so many Catholics, I believe we must all thoughtfully and prayerfully consider our approach to the Eucharist, always reflecting on His infinite generosity to us. It is my fervent desire that we approach all of the Sacraments with a spirit of awe and thanksgiving. If this story helps toward that goal in any small way, it would be a great source of joy to me.

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