



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of March 27, 2016,
Easter Sunday

Dear Friends,

IN modernity, [the light of faith that] might have been considered sufficient for societies of old... was felt to be of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality and anxious to explore the future in novel ways. Faith thus appeared to some as an illusory light, preventing mankind from boldly setting out in quest of knowledge. ... Faith was thus understood either as a leap in the dark, to be taken in the absence of light, driven by blind emotion, or as a subjective light, capable perhaps of warming the heart and bringing personal consolation, but not something which could be proposed to others as an objective and shared light which points the way" (Pope Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, nos. 2-3).

Yet recent Eucharistic miracles, subjected to modern technical analyses, shine a light that confirms the fundamental precepts of the faith and remind science that it cannot provide explanations for all of reality. These miracles provide proof of the objective real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

A bloody substance

On August 18, 1996, Father Alejandro Pezet celebrated the Mass in the church in the center of the commercial district in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He had finished distributing Holy Communion, when a woman alerted him that someone had discarded a host in the back of the church. Going to the spot, the priest found the defiled host. He placed it in a little container of water that he then placed in the tabernacle of the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. On Monday, August 26th, on opening the tabernacle, he saw, to his great astonishment, that the host had become a bloody object. He informed Bishop Jorge Bergoglio, the future Pope, then auxiliary bishop of Cardinal Quarracino. Bishop Bergoglio gave instructions to have the transformed host be professionally photographed. The photographs, taken on September 6th, clearly show that the host had become a piece of bloody flesh, and had significantly grown in size. For three years, it remained in the tabernacle, and the entire matter was kept secret. But, observing that the host suffered no visible decomposition, Bishop Bergoglio decided to have it submitted to scientific analysis.



Lanciano miracle monstrance

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In October 1999, analysis began on samples of the host. This analysis led to the declaration in 2005 by Doctor Frederic Zugiba, an expert in cardiology and forensic pathology: "The analyzed material is a fragment of the heart muscle found in the wall of the left ventricle, close to the valves. This muscle is responsible for the contraction of the heart. The left cardiac ventricle pumps blood to all parts of the body. The heart muscle is in an inflamed state and contains a large number of white blood cells. This indicates that the heart was alive at the time the sample was taken. I affirm that the heart was alive, since white blood cells die outside a living organism; they require a living organism to sustain them. Thus, their presence indicates that the heart was alive when the sample was taken. What is more, these white blood cells had penetrated the tissue, which further indicates that the heart had been under severe stress, as if the owner had been beaten severely about the chest."

Two Australians, the journalist Mike Willesee and the lawyer Ron Tesoriero, witnessed these tests. After the doctor had submitted his findings, he was informed that the substance from which the sample had been taken dated from 1996. Doctor Zugiba asked: "You have to explain one thing to me: if this sample came from a dead person, how could it be that while I was examining it, the cells of the sample were moving and pulsating? If the heart came from someone who died in 1996, how could it still be alive?" Only then did Mike Willesee explain to Doctor Zugiba that the analyzed sample came from

a consecrated host that had mysteriously transformed into bloody human flesh. Stunned by this information, the doctor replied, "How and why can a consecrated host change its nature and become living human flesh and blood? This will remain an inexplicable mystery to science—a mystery totally beyond her competence."

Difficulty believing

In Lanciano, in the Abruzzo region of Italy, a similar miracle took place around 750. A Basilian monk was having difficulty believing in the real presence of Our Lord JESUS CHRIST in the Eucharist. He prayed constantly for relief from the uncertainties that caused him such pain. One morning, still assailed by doubt, he began the celebration of Mass before the habitants of a neighboring village. Suddenly, after the consecration of the bread and wine, what he saw on the altar made his hands tremble, and he remained completely speechless for a moment that to the parishioners seemed an eternity. Then he gently turned towards them and said: "O happy witnesses to whom the Blessed Lord, to refute my disbelief, willed to reveal Himself in this Blessed Sacrament and make Himself visible to our eyes. Come see our God so near to us: behold the Flesh and the Blood of our Beloved JESUS CHRIST!" The host had become flesh, and the wine blood! That very day, the rumor of the miracle traveled throughout the village like a fire sets a forest ablaze, and just as quickly, reached the neighboring villages and spread all the way to Rome.

This miracle remains visible for us today: the host become flesh, and the wine become blood, have remained perfectly intact for more than twelve centuries. In 1970, the Archbishop of Lanciano and the Provincial Superior of the Conventual Franciscans at Abruzzo, with permission from Rome, asked Professor Edoardo Linoli, director of the hospital in Arezzo, to conduct a thorough scientific examination of the relics from the miracle that had occurred twelve centuries before. On March 4, 1971, the professor presented his conclusions: 1. The "miraculous Flesh" comes from the muscular striated tissue of the myocardium (heart). 2. The "miraculous Blood" is real blood, as indisputably proven by chromatographic analysis. 3. The flesh and the blood are human, and immunological tests show that both belong to the blood type AB—the same blood type as that of the man of the Shroud (of Turin) and the type most characteristic of Middle Eastern populations. 4. The proteins in the blood are distributed in the identical percentages found in normal fresh blood. 5. No histological analysis found any trace of salt infiltrations or preservative substances used at the time for the purpose of embalming.

Let us note again that when liquefied, the Eucharistic blood of Lanciano (which is normally dried) retains all its chemical and physical properties without deteriorating in any manner whatsoever. Whereas normally,

fifteen minutes after ordinary human blood is drawn, all the biological activities cease irreversibly.

The medical report, published in the *Sclavo Notebooks* (Collection #3, 1971), aroused great interest in the scientific world. In 1973, the chief Advisory Board of the World Health Organization appointed a scientific commission to verify Professor Linoli's conclusions. Their work lasted fifteen months and five hundred examinations were carried out. The commission declared that it was living tissue showing all the clinical reactions found in living beings. Since the 8th century, the flesh and blood of Lanciano have remained as if they had just been taken that very day from a living being. The summary of the commission's work, published in New York and Geneva in December 1976, acknowledged that science, aware of its limits, was confronted with the impossibility of providing an explanation.

Other experts have compared the lab reports written following the miracle of Buenos Aires with those produced for the miracle of Lanciano. These scientists, who did not know where the samples had come from, concluded from the reports that the two samples had come from the same person.

The search for a great light

In the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis writes, "Slowly but surely, however, it would become evident that the light of autonomous reason is not enough to illumine the future; ultimately the future remains shadowy and fraught with fear of the unknown. As a result, humanity renounced the search for a great light, Truth itself, in order to be content with smaller lights which illumine the fleeting moment yet prove incapable of showing the way. Yet in the absence of light everything becomes confused; it is impossible to tell good from evil, or the road to our destination from other roads which take us in endless circles, going nowhere." (no. 3). To avoid this evil, we need faith: "There is an urgent need, then," the Pope declares, "to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God Who calls us and reveals His love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfillment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time" (*ibid.*, no. 4).

A new proof

In confirmation of the faith of the Church, the Lord wished to give the world a new proof of His love with another Eucharistic miracle in 2008, a miracle with features quite similar to those of the miracle of Buenos Aires. On October 12th of that year, Father Jacek Ingielewicz celebrated Mass at the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Sokółka, Poland, in the presence of two hundred people. During the distribution of Communion, a host fell to the ground. Father Jacek picked it up and placed it in a small silver liturgical vessel filled with water so that the host would dissolve, and put it in a safe in the sacristy. For after a host is completely dissolved, the body of Christ is no longer present.

Informed by Father Jacek, Father Stanislaw Gnidziejko, the pastor, left the vessel in the safe for two weeks. He then observed that not only had the host not dissolved in the water, but a shape resembling a bloodstain had appeared. "Stunned, I did not know what to think of it," Father Stanislaw later stated, "my hands were trembling when I closed the safe again. I could hardly speak." He decided to refer the matter to Archbishop Edward Ozorowski, the Metropolitan of Białystok, the neighboring city. When the archbishop came to Sokółka, he was shown the host, which had been placed on a corporal. On the host he saw not only a bloodstain, but something that resembled an organic material. Father Jacek pointed out that it looked like the tissue that "many of us analyzed in our biology classes."

On January 5, 2009, the bishop asked two professors of medicine at the University of Białystok, Maria Elizabeth Sobaniec-Łotowska and Stanislaw Sulkowski, to conduct an analysis of a fragment of the host. Both of the researchers had worked in the field of histopathology for over thirty years. Father Andrzej Kakareko, the Chancellor of the Metropolitan Curia of Białystok, gave each of the experts a sample of the host. The study was conducted at the University's Institute of Pathology. When the samples were removed, the fragment of the host that remained connected to the tissue stayed closely united with the tissue to be analyzed, without having lost any of its whiteness. After working separately, the two specialists arrived at the same conclusion—what they had been given came from human heart muscle tissue that was still alive, but in agony. Professor Sulkowski stated that he had observed the presence "of many typical bio-morphological indicators of heart muscle tissue", as well as visible damage in the form of tiny ruptures to fibers of the tissue. He added, "Such changes can be observed only in living fibers, and they show evidence of rapid spasms of the heart muscle in the period just before death."

Professor Sobaniec-Łotowska confirmed: "This is living heart muscle tissue." On further reflection, she

was astonished at the fact that the tissue remained alive after having been separated from the organism of which it was an integral part. It was an "extraordinary phenomenon!" As she explained, "The host remained submerged in water for a long time, and then was left on the corporal. Therefore the tissue should have undergone the process of 'asphyxia' [dying out], but we did not observe any such changes during our tests ... according to the current state of knowledge in biology, we cannot explain this phenomenon scientifically." Also very intrigued by the way the heart tissue was connected to the consecrated host, she declared that "this extraordinary phenomenon of inter-absorption of the heart muscle tissue with the host, observed under the microscope and also by electron microscopy, proves that no human manipulation of the sample could have taken place." In fact, the structure of the myocardial fibers and the structure of the bread were so tightly bound that no human intervention could have caused it (cf. Professor M. Sobaniec-Łotowska's statement in the report, "The Eucharistic Miracle of Sokółka," *Lux Veritatis*, 2010). Moreover, the blood from the host had the same characteristics of the blood from the Shroud of Turin and the miracle of Lanciano (group AB).

Devotion increases

After having obtained the test results, the archbishop informed the apostolic nuncio in Warsaw about them. The apostolic nuncio relayed the records to Rome for examination. In September 2009, the public, who had been aware of the two experts' report, began to come to Sokółka from all over Poland, and even from Belarus and Lithuania. Sokółka saw an immediate increase in devotion to the Holy Eucharist. People come to pray at the church for broken families, for children who have left the faith, to obtain cures... After having officially declared that the tissue visible on the host was truly miraculous, Archbishop Ozorowski placed the host in an exposed monstrance for the devotion of the faithful in a chapel in the church of Saint Anthony.

With regard to the Eucharist, the Church calls for the worship of *latria*, "that is, the adoration given to God alone...whether during the celebration of the Mass or outside it" (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 286). "There is a particular need," wrote Saint John Paul II, "to cultivate a lively awareness of Christ's real presence, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass" (Apostolic Letter *Mane nobiscum Domine*, October 7, 2004, no. 18). To this end, "Like the woman who anointed JESUS in Bethany, the Church has feared no 'extravagance', devoting the best of her resources to expressing her wonder and adoration before the unsurpassable gift of the Eucharist. No less than the first disciples charged with preparing the 'large upper room', she has felt the need, down the centuries and in her encounters with different cultures,

to celebrate the Eucharist in a setting worthy of so great a mystery. ... Though the idea of a 'banquet' naturally suggests familiarity, the Church has never yielded to the temptation to trivialize this 'intimacy' with her Spouse by forgetting that He is also her Lord and that the 'banquet' always remains a sacrificial banquet marked by the blood shed on Golgotha" (Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Holy Thursday 2003, no. 48).

Indeed, "The Eucharist ... makes present and actual the sacrifice which Christ offered to the Father on the cross, once and for all on behalf of mankind... The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one and the same sacrifice. The priest and the victim are the same; only the manner of offering is different: in a bloody manner on the cross, in an unbloody manner in the Eucharist" (*Compendium of the CCC*, no. 280). Since all the graces necessary for our salvation ensue from the Sacrifice of the Mass, "The Church obliges the faithful to participate at Holy Mass every Sunday and on holy days of obligation. She recommends participation at Holy Mass on other days as well" (*ibid.*, no. 289).

"One must learn to live the Mass," Saint John Paul II said one day to the youth who were asking him about the profound reverence with which he celebrated (October 18, 1981). Saint Pio of Pietrelcina offers us a wonderful example: "When Padre Pio celebrated the Mass, he gave the impression of such an intimate, intense, complete union with Him Who offered Himself to the Eternal Father as a victim of expiation for the sins of man. As soon as he came to the foot of the altar, the celebrant's face was transfigured... Padre Pio possessed the gift of making others pray. One lived the Mass" (Fr. Narsi Decoste, *Padre Pio*).

The fruit of the Sacrifice that is actualized on the altar is the communion with the Body and Blood of

JESUS CHRIST, the anticipation of the eternal communion of Heaven. So great a gift can be received only by one who is "fully incorporated into the Catholic Church and in the state of grace, that is, not conscious of being in mortal sin. Anyone who is conscious of having committed a grave sin must first receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before going to Communion. Also important for those receiving Holy Communion are ... observance of the fast prescribed by the Church, and an appropriate disposition of the body (gestures and dress) as a sign of respect for Christ" (*Compendium*, no. 291). "Holy Communion increases our union with Christ and with His Church... It fortifies us for our pilgrimage in this life and makes us long for eternal life. It unites us already to Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, to the Church in heaven and to the Blessed Virgin and all the saints" (*ibid.*, nos. 292 and 294).

The supreme accomplishment

Eucharistic miracles are undeniable facts. They place us before the great Reality: God exists, He became flesh, He is present and active in our history, He exposed Himself to suffering and death, to destroy death and give us Life! The happiness we all seek depends on our relationship of love with Him alone! In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Saint John Paul II wrote: "Different philosophical systems have lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master, able to decide their own destiny and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers. But this can never be the grandeur of the human being, who can find fulfillment only in choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of Wisdom and dwell there. Only within this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true self" (no. 107).

Let us draw from the Eucharist the strength we need to follow JESUS on the path of eternal life!

Dom Antoine Haice
— — — D.A.B.

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