

## MY THREE LOVES - THE EUCHARIST, THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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It is an honor and a privilege to be here tonight - back in my Alma Mater and speak to all of you about my three loves, because by the grace of God - the Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Catholic Church have become what I consider my three true loves of my life. Three Loves - which I cannot even begin to imagine what my life would be like without any of them.

### *THE EUCHARIST*

To speak about the Eucharist will take a lifetime, therefore, for the sake of time, I will only be sharing - some important aspects - of the Most Holy Eucharist. Specifically what it is - or better yet - Who He is ? and some of the effects of the Eucharist in our lives.

When we speak about the Eucharist, we are speaking about Jesus, Himself, in His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The Eucharist is GOD. Whenever we look at the Eucharist, we are looking at GOD, Himself.

This is why going to Mass is so important, because it is where we receive Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist. When the priest - at the words of consecration - says: *“This is my Body, this is My Blood”*, at that precise moment - in front of our very own eyes, Jesus becomes Present - He comes down from heaven to be with us.

The species of bread and wine - still remain - so they still look like bread and wine - they even taste like bread and wine - however, after those holy words of consecration pronounced by the priest - it is no longer just bread and wine, it is JESUS, Himself.

He is the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. On the night He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said: *“Take, eat: this is my body.”* He took the cup, gave thanks and said: *“Take, drink, this is my blood.”* Therefore, since it was Christ, Himself, who declared the bread to be His Body, and the wine to be His Blood, who can have the audacity to doubt His words? Since He, Himself, said, this is my Blood, who would dare even question it and dare to say that this is not His blood ?

Therefore, with complete confidence, we, Catholics, at every Mass, receive the bread and the wine - as the Body and Blood of Christ. We are not receiving just anybody’s body and blood, but the body and blood of the One who laid down His life for us. We are receiving the One who died for our sins. We are receiving the Living God.

Therefore, don't ever doubt that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ - it is not a symbol (as some of our Protestant brothers and sisters believe and want us to believe), for us, Catholics, the Eucharist is GOD, Himself, in its entirety.

This is why the Holy Mass is not an optional part of our Catholic faith, but the most important part of our faith, because it is precisely during the Holy Mass - where we meet Jesus, Himself in His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity - once the priest pronounces those sacred words of consecration. And, we need to approach the Eucharist in - humility. We need to be grateful for the gift of the Eucharist - which is God's Supreme Love for us.

To put it in simple words - without the Eucharist - we are dead spiritually. Christ laid down His life for us, so that we in turn, should laid down our lives for others - if God ever asks us to. If we understood this, brothers and sisters, we would LIVE the Mass with all of our hearts, we would live it to the fullest and with profound gratitude.

At the Last Supper, on the night He was betrayed - Holy Thursday - our Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church the memorial of His Death and Resurrection, to be celebrated for ever and ever - this is the Most Holy Mass

If people would know all the effects of attending One Holy Mass - they would run to receive the Eucharist- This is why we must never take it for granted either. The Eucharist must be treasured, and defended at all costs - because we are speaking about GOD.

Now, you can probably understand a little more as to why the Eucharist is my First Love - since I am married to God, and He chose me from all eternity to be His - who am I to say 'no'.

The Eucharist is my ALL, my true love, my Savior and my Redeemer. Without God, I am nothing. With God, I am everything. I am fulfilled as a Religious Sister, I belong entirely to Him, and I would not change it for anything in the entire world.

God wants all men to be saved, and all men are in need of God's grace. God has a sincere desire to save you. Whoever wants to be saved, will be saved. He suffered death to give us life. He gives us all the necessary means to be saved. The mercy of God is great. Jesus' total abandonment to the Father - or better said - his offering of his life to the Father is the nourishment that sustains our human lives. In other words, without the most Holy Eucharist, we are dead spiritually.

Some of the effects of the Eucharist in our lives:

- 1) It gives the strength that we need to continue on this journey of faith.
- 2) It nourishes us, it cleanses us, and it liberates us.
- 3) It strengthens our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls.

- 4) It transforms us, and gives us the necessary graces that we need in order to become holy.
- 5) It sanctifies us - both in body and soul.

He knows we cannot make it on our own. God always forgives us. We need to remove from our eyes whatever is blinding us with self-love, whatever is keeping us from truly loving our Lord with all of our hearts.

For the sake of our own spiritual growth, we, as Catholics need to go to Sunday Mass every week. And, if possible, daily. One of the biggest challenges we have in today's society is to bring people back to Mass, to help them see the importance of receiving Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist.

The Lord Himself told us: *“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have life everlasting”*. We have the most precious gift in the Eucharist !

Jesus did not say: ‘If you follow me, you will have everlasting life, or if you see me performing miracles, you will have everlasting life, no, He didn’t, but what He did say was: *“ Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have everlasting life”*’.

If we want to be alive spiritually, if we truly want our souls to be quenched and satisfied, we need to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is Jesus gift of unconditional love. We should desire the Eucharist. He is truly present in the Eucharist as the Son of God in human flesh.

The truth is the world does not care very much about salvation. The world does not care very much about God - in general.

So, what must we do? Strive to become saints. It is time to change our lives. It is time to come back to the Lord. Cast yourself at the feet of Jesus and ask Him to forgive you. Ask him for His Mercy.

Jesus needs brave soldiers for His Church. He desires courageous men and women who are willing to be his true followers, who are willing to risk it all to follow Him wherever He may lead us. He is our role model.

What better example, than Saint Paul - who was more than willing to die and suffer for Christ’s sake. He said that for him to live was Christ. The one - whom- before his conversion was persecuting Christians - and once he encountered Christ, he wanted everyone to follow the Lord. And, he had such a great zeal. We ought to imitate His zeal for souls. With Saint Paul’s example, we should be moved to know that only the grace of God is enough for us.

We need to have confidence in the goodness of God. God wants to form disciples, the question is will you let Him?

In order to become Christ's disciples, we need to follow the Master, who was humble and pure of heart. We need to allow the Eucharist to shape us and mold us. We need it to strengthen our own frail humanity. We must never forget that it is Christ's Real Presence that we are receiving in the Eucharist.

Pope Francis during his Easter message said- The mystery of Easter cannot be understood - and the Christian faith cannot be fully lived - without humility.

To enter into the mystery of God's love, he said, "we need to bend down" to abase ourselves. Only those who abase themselves understand the glorification of Jesus and are able to follow Him on his way.

Obviously, that often involves being countercultural. Instead of putting ourselves first, he said, "Christians, by the grace of Christ, dead and risen, are the seeds of another humanity, in which we seek to live in service to one another, not to be arrogant, but rather respectful and ready to help.

"This is not weakness, but true strength" said the Pope. "Those who bear within them God's power, his love and his justice, do not need to employ violence; they speak and act with the power of truth, beauty and love".

We cannot live Easter without entering into the mystery. It is not something intellectual, something we only know or read about," he said, "It is more, much more!"

Entering the mystery means being able "to wonder, to contemplate; the ability to listen to the silence and to hear the tiny whisper amid great silence by which God speaks to us."

The EUCHARIST is The Lord's gift of Himself. When we receive Him in the deepest recesses of our hearts, let us in silence tell Him everything we are yearning for. Our desires, our dreams, our worries, our challenges, our achievements, our goals, our joys, our sorrows, our needs, etc.

Every human person has an unquenchable thirst for true love, we were made for love, to love and be loved - and we can only find true love in the Eucharist.

We need to open our hearts, and ask the Lord to give us His infinite love. We need to be quiet - to be in silence with God - so that He can speak directly into our hearts. Our daily lives are very noisy, so it is very difficult for us to listen to God.

Allow Jesus in the Eucharist to be your love, your truth and your life. He desires to be your All. Let Him fill you with his immense love, so you can in turn, give His love to others. He said it Himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life".

It is important for us to find a perfect time, a perfect place - to be in silence - to be able to listen to God's voice.

### *THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY*

My second love - the Virgin Mary. There is so much to speak about Our Lady that we would never finish in our lifetime. So much to be grateful for - such a loving Mother. She is the woman 'per excellence'.

Like Mary we must ponder God's word in our hearts.

In the book "The World's First Love - Mary, Mother of God", we read how Archbishop Fulton Sheen often referred to Our Lady as the "Woman I love". It seems this special relationship with our Lady began at his baptism when his own mother placed him on the altar of our Lady and consecrated Him to his heavenly mother. This book is a treasure for all those who want to grow in a deeper relationship with the Blessed Mother.

There is a part in the book called: "The World the Woman loves" and here he gives us great insights into how Our Lady assists us in dealing with the world of today. It is amazing to see how relevant this is for all of us today, especially in the times that we are living in.

Mary was thought, conceived and planned beautifully by God alone. She is God's greatest masterpiece. He created her as the most beautiful woman in the entire world. After all, She is His Mother.

God chose His own Mother. None of us got to choose our mothers. But God did. He not only thought of her in eternity, He thought of her since the beginning of time.

Our Heavenly Father chose Mary to be the Mother of His Incarnate Son. How can we not turn to Mary, if God did? How can we not choose her as our Mother, just like He did?

Wherever Mary is present, Jesus is there, they are inseparable. She held him in her very own womb for 9 months, and Jesus lived with Mary for the first 30 years of His life. Mary will always take us to Jesus, and Jesus will always take us to Mary.

One of Mary's role is to take as many souls to Her Son, Jesus. She freely accepted the plan of salvation, and when she did, she was doing it on our behalf. Without Mary's 'Yes', we wouldn't have Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

When we think of Jesus' way of the cross, it was also Mary's way of the cross. Mary was the first Christian, His first follower. We can say that our Blessed Mother is set apart from other mothers - precisely - because of who Her Son is. We did not choose

Mary - God did. And, He is no ordinary Son, He is the Son of God, therefore, She is no ordinary Mother, She is the Mother of God.

Our Beloved Lord has giving us the Blessed Virgin Mary to be our Mother. His very own words, at the Foot of the Cross - to John - who represented all of us at that moment - *“Behold your Mother”*. *If we truly ponder these words in our hearts, they are healing words and very powerful - when it comes to our relationship with the Blessed Mother.*

When we pray the ‘Hail Mary’, the last words we say to the Blessed Virgin Mary are: *“ Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death”* Amen. These are powerful words !

It is Mary, who is also the Mother of the Church, the One who guides and protects the Church with Her motherly love. She is the One who protects us all, since we are the Church.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, in the year 1981, when Ali Agca tried to assassinate John Paul II, it was our Lady who intervened and saved His life. He was such a Marian Pope.

We must be Marian too. We must have a deep devotion to the Blessed Mother. If we keep ourselves close to the Heart of Mary, we will never perish.

How many pictures and sculptures have we seen of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the child Jesus in Her arms throughout our lives ? What assurance do they give us? It definitely reassures us - of how Our Lady has each one of us - in Her loving arms all the time. Just like Jesus was in her arms, not only at the time of His birth, but also at the time when She held his dead body. That is what we should all desire - to live and die in the arms of our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This is my daily prayer - when it is my time Lord - and You decide to take me - let it be in the Arms of Jesus and Mary. This is how I want to die, in their loving arms.

If we love our Lady with all of our hearts, we need to remember important Marian Feast Days - just as we remember any important day in our lives, such as our birthdays, anniversaries, etc.

January 1 is the “Solemnity of the Mother of God” - The first day of the year is dedicated to the Blessed Mother.

February 11<sup>th</sup>, Our Lady of Lourdes - when She appeared in 1858 in France.

March 25<sup>th</sup> - The Annunciation - celebrates the visit of Angel Gabriel announcing to Mary she was going to be the Mother of God.

May 13<sup>th</sup> - Our Lady of Fatima - when She appeared in 1917 in Portugal.

July 13<sup>th</sup> - Feast of the Mystical Rose

September 8<sup>th</sup> - Birth of Our Lady

September 19<sup>th</sup> - Our Lady of La Salette in France

November 27<sup>th</sup> - The Miraculous Medal

December 8<sup>th</sup> - The Immaculate Conception

December 12<sup>th</sup> - Our Lady of Guadalupe

The creature of God whom Satan fears the most is the Blessed Virgin Mary, because She is the One who has been crushing his head since the beginning of time.

### *THE CATHOLIC CHURCH*

We cannot claim to be Catholic and publicly deny- with our actions - the teachings of our faith. We cannot contradict, reject, or betray what we believe.

This is why it is so important to form our consciences - to what the Church teaches - and be faithful to her teachings. Unfortunately, we live in a world that does not agree with what the Catholic Church teaches. Or better yet, a world that strongly and wrongly believe what they think the Catholic Church teaches.

Remaining Catholic is so important -in a society which is so anti-Catholic. It is crucial to understand that it is the Church the one who decides in matters of faith and morals,

not us. This is such a relief for our hearts, because we know that we don't have to figure out every - single theological issue which may come our way - or every faith question, we can totally rely on the Church for that. The Church is our Mother, and as a Mother cares deeply for her children, it is the same with our Church.

The Church teaches us, nurtures us, guides us, and protects us. In order to remain Catholic, you must be in love with the Church which Jesus Christ founded over 2,000 years ago. No other church, no other denomination can claim that God, Himself founded their Church. We, Catholics, on the other hand, are the Only Ones who can claim this truth, that Jesus Christ - who is God - founded our most Beautiful Catholic Church.



All other religions and denominations were founded by ordinary men. IF this does not make you proud to be a Catholic, I don't know what will.

Remaining Catholic will represent a huge challenge for you - for each one of us. But we must stay firm. We must stay faithful, and love our Catholic Church - no matter what.

We know in whom we have placed all of our trust - that is why we are confident in His Church and what it stands for.

Unfortunately, so many people - including many of our family members and friends - have misunderstandings and misconceptions of what the Church truly teaches - and this is where our faith comes into play. We have an immense responsibility - not only to know our Catholic faith - but to share it faithfully with others. Especially with those - who don't necessarily understand where the Church stands on some fundamental issues.

If we don't stand up for our Catholic Church, who will ?

If we don't love, respect, and honor our Catholic Church, who will?

If we don't make her known, loved, and cherished, who will?

Catholic beliefs come from the realization that God matters, to the secular world, God does not matter.

By us, standing for our Church, we are sending a message to the world - loud and clear - that God does matter, and not only that He does matter, but that we love Him with all of our hearts, and we are willing to do whatever it takes to make Him known, loved, and honored, as He should.

But don't just take my word for it, do some research, search the history of the Catholic Church, study the Church Fathers, who are so full of wisdom.

Truly take the time to get to know our Church. Once you realize and totally convinced that the Church is God's chosen body to spread His truth, you will see how liberating this is - because you don't have to search anymore. You don't have to look further, to know the truth, it is right here, right now, the Fullness of Truth can only be found in our Catholic Church.

Should anyone ask you as for the reason of your faith and hope, be ever ready to reply to them gently and respectfully. Keep your conscience clear - and show them your faith and - better yet - on who you have placed all your faith. And, if it is God's will for you to suffer for His sake, then consider yourself among the privileged ones - for your reward will be great in heaven.



Knowing that God's Truth lies in the Catholic Church gives you the confidence you need in times of trial. And, throughout history, we have seen - how much our Church has suffered - because of her members - not because of Her Founder. Her Founder is Holy, He is God. Her members, however, are individuals - human beings - who fail - and will fail - because of our own weaknesses. But, Jesus' Catholic Church as a whole will never fail. We have Jesus' own promise, when He told Peter: "You are a Rock, and on This Rock, I will build my Church", and the gates of Hell will never prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

In other words, no matter what happens, no matter which human being - member of the Church fails, the Catholic Church will remain standing - it will endure until eternity, because it is God's Church, and because the Catholic Church is Holy.

When we say the Creed, what are we saying: "We believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church", these are words which weight, these are not mere words. They have meaning, a profound meaning as to what we "Believe". The word 'creed' means believe.

The Church is universal - that is what the word 'catholic' means - it is all over the world. And, we take it upon ourselves to maintain and keep passing on - to generations to come - the message of the Gospel - which is to proclaim Jesus Christ - as our Lord and Savior - to all the ends of the earth. We cannot change the Gospel - but we can allow the Gospel to change us.

In the Catholic Church - we are on a journey to heaven. And, we can never forget this truth. We are called to be "holy", just as the Founder of our Church is Holy. But, this will require so much of us. It will require to renounce to many things - which they may not be bad in themselves - but that will be a deterrent to our growing in the Lord.

We have to fight to transform our culture - which has been so de-Christianized. We must take a stand on our faith and challenge others to do the same. We must be proud to be Catholics - and show it - not only with our words - but most importantly with our actions. We are not going to transform anybody, God will transform them - through us. With the power of God's grace, we can transform the world.

One of the biggest problems we have as Catholics is that we don't speak. We don't stand up for our faith. We are ashamed to show our faith in public.

My question to you tonight is: Why? Why should we be afraid to speak the truth? Why should be ashamed to follow Christ in His Church and let the whole world know it.

Sadly, but true, today, I don't see many people making the sign on the cross anymore in public places, such as at restaurants - or even - on airplanes - as they are taking off to a new destination. We - as - a society - have lost these - and we need to reclaim them.

We need to - if we are not doing it already - start making the sign of the cross - when we pass in front of Catholic Churches - the reason why we do this -is very simple - because Jesus lives in the Eucharist in every Catholic Church.

We need to make the sign of the cross - before meals - we need to pray the rosary and invite others to pray it with us.

Don't be afraid to spread your faith and express your Catholic faith with others, don't be afraid to show your Catholicism. Don't be afraid to show the world - that your faith matters.

We must live in this world - and walk on this earth - but with our eyes fixed in heaven, our eyes fixed on Jesus and on His Church - Our goal is to make it to heaven - how we get there - is our lifetime journey.

The enemy does not want you to make it to heaven, since he didn't make it. He doesn't want you to be holy. He wants you to continue to live in sin, because He knows sin separates you from God.

In today's world - it is not easy to follow the Lord - but God gives you the grace to follow His footsteps. He gives you the grace- if you allow Him.

***Being Catholic is about who you are - it is your identity*** - No one can take that away from you. Being Catholic defines your actions. We cannot be Catholics only when we go to Mass - and then forget about it - We are Catholics - 24/7 - no matter where we are - or who we are with.

We must be motivated and excited about our Catholic faith - and we must show it. This is why it is so important to fall in love with the Catholic Church - if you love the Church with all your heart, mind, body, and soul, then it will show with your actions and you would want others to share the same faith.

To show your faith with your actions is essential - not so much with words - but with your acts of kindness. ***People will fall in love with the Church - when they see how much you love the Church, how much you honor it, and respect it.***

We need to rediscover the beauty of Catholicism. Let us ask the Lord to ***ignite*** in us the fire of His love for His Church.

The Church needs us to be on fire for Christ, the Church needs truly committed Catholics who are willing to give their lives for the Church if needed it. We need to meet people exactly where they are at, and bring them closer to Christ and to His Church.

We need to learn how to integrate our faith into our workplaces, and into our schools. Think about it, work and school, for most of you, is the place where you spent

the majority of your time. If you start treating people at work and in school as God's sons or daughters, you will begin to see your co-workers, and your fellow students, even your friends, differently. You will begin to see them for who they truly are, God's children, your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pope Saint John Paul II used to say that the most appropriate response to an individual person is love, which means to seek the good of the other, and to practice hands-on what He called the "Personalist Norm", remembering that a person is not merely a means to an end, but an end in themselves.

We are so used to living in a world where everyone - for the most part - although not all of us - treat people as objects. Sadly, this is true. ***If we start treating everyone as we would like to be treated, what a powerful witness to the Gospel this would be.***

We have a noticeable advantage in our favor, and that is our Catholic Faith. We need to be able to form others in our faith. If we are totally in love with our Catholic faith, we can transform the world. We can change the present culture for Christ.

In order to form others, however, ***we must have a profound conviction of the teachings of the Catholic Church and be able affirm them.***

It is essential to have a knowledgeable zeal for the Church in order to evangelize others. We must build each other up in the faith. ***How we live matters, every decision that we make matters, every action that we perform matters.***

If we truly want to be authentic Catholics, true disciples of Jesus Christ, then we must live our lives according to what the Church teaches. Being a true Catholic requires that we have a deep, personal, relationship with Jesus Christ. It means going against the current. ***Nothing or no one can take the place of God in our lives.***

Our hearts were made for God, there is a special place in our hearts which is exclusively reserved for God alone. Once we have established a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, then we are able to share him with others, with our families, friends, colleagues, employers, employees, acquaintances, etc, with everybody.

The Church teaches us that heaven is our goal. What we have to ask ourselves is, how are we walking towards that goal, in our daily lives?

The Church is the One that teaches us and guides us. We are not alone on this journey. We were not called to live in isolation, we were called to be a part of a Body - the Church. This is the beauty of being Christians, God gave us brothers and sisters- to walk this journey of faith together. It can be called an adventure of love.

We are responsible for each other - this is so important to understand. What happens to my brother matters to me, whether he is in Africa, China, or Guatemala. He is still

my brother in Christ. Since we are all One Body in Christ, His suffering affects me - and it should affect me profoundly.

Unfortunately, we live in a world - where we usually don't think about the well-being of our neighbors - but rather - we think more about ourselves. And, whatever, we consider to be worthless or unvaluable, we discard it. This is called "the throw-away culture". The elderly is being discarded, because they don't serve any use anymore, this is not true, the elderly gives us wisdom.

We live in a world which speaks about peace, but does nothing to build it. Peace is not something which can be bought, we work at it everyday of our lives with our daily actions - both great and small alike. We build peace day by day with what we do and what we say.

There are martyrs today, Christian martyrs, says the Pope, Catholics and non-Catholics, but martyrs just the same. In some places in the world, you cannot even wear a crucifix or have a Bible. You cannot teach catechism to the children, and this is happening today, in our very own society!

In one country, it is even prohibited to pray together, it is forbidden. And, sadly the Christians there want to celebrate the Eucharist. Let's face it, it is not easy being a Christian today!

This is why we must rise up - and be courageous - standing up for our faith. Since we do know our goal and where we want to go, If we must die for Christ, it would be an honor and our privilege.