

A Year with Fr. Brisson



celebrating the centenary of the death of the Servant of God

THE REVEREND LOUIS BRISSON

(1817-1908)

priest and founder of the institutes of the
Oblates and Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

First Friday Reflection (#5)

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by

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The Eucharist (the Mass), is

“the sun of all spiritual exercises...the most holy, sacred, and supremely sovereign sacrament and sacrifice of the Mass, center of the Christian religion, heart of devotion and soul of piety, the ineffable mystery that comprises within itself the deepest depths of divine charity the mystery in which God really gives himself and gloriously communicates his graces and favors to us.”

These familiar words, from the Introduction to the Devout Life, are echoed in our own Constitution 143. They are also echoed in various Chapters and Retreat Conferences of Father Brisson.

Although Father Brisson’s reflections on the Eucharist are couched and expressed in the language, theology and piety of his time (as indeed are ours if we are honest!) there is nevertheless a timelessness to his reflections. What becomes evident in reading Father Brisson is that he is trying to put into words what is clearly an experience of the deepest intimacy for him. In his later writings in particular Father Brisson seems to be captivated by the call to be “another Christ”, “a living image of the Savior”. He challenges us to let this experience of Eucharist go to our heart. He calls on us to allow the Eucharist to “nourishes us, penetrates us, engross (impregnate) us”. He writes, the Eucharist is our “armor, our strength, our life”.

While Father Brisson respects the liturgical and rubric element of liturgy, even to the point of differing specifically with the Directory article on Holy Communion by saying we are not to recite the rosary at Mass, and while he calls for a similar level of liturgical fidelity by his sons, he invites us, indeed challenges us, to try to go to a level of participation that is as deep as the human is possible of achieving. He calls for the level of total identification with the Savior.

He realizes that such a level requires "preparation, recollection, (and) attention". His hope is that we would be "absorbed" in the Mass. He sees what he calls the "secret of priesthood" buried in the celebration of Mass. To those who might find such thoughts much too individualistic, ignoring the communal aspect of the Mass, Father Brisson is quick to make mention, long before the reintroduction of the Prayer of the Faithful to the liturgy, that in every liturgy the Oblate is to pray for the full Oblate community.

In a retreat conference in 1896 dealing with the topic of the real presence Father Brisson notes that we will teach this truth by what we do as much as by what we say. As we reflect on the Eucharist in our lives both individually and as a community perhaps one question that might be asked is this, regardless of the particular liturgical role we play in the liturgy, or even the style with which we celebrate, what would we hope the other would learn about our belief in the Eucharist by observing the way we celebrate.

(see Chapters : January 9, 1895, May 24, 1899; Retreat Instructions 1896.)

+ May God Be Blessed +