

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

This Month's Reading: *Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen*

Dear Father,
Among all the books written by Fulton J. Sheen, *Treasure in Clay* is probably one of the best. The book is Sheen's autobiography and was completed shortly before his death in 1979. For this month's bulletin, I selected a chapter called "The Hour That Makes My Day", in which the good Archbishop tells us the secret of his perseverance and wisdom: the daily hour of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

Our own experience tells us that many times it is very difficult for us to find "one free hour" to spend with Jesus in the tabernacle. There are so many things to do in our parishes, that it's very easy

to find excuses and leave Jesus alone. Instead, according to Fulton J. Sheen, the hour of adoration is the source from which everything else flows, and our priesthood and parishes will flourish and be blessed with abundant graces if we give Jesus the time He deserves.

When Jesus called his disciples, the Gospel says that he asked them "*to be with him.*" And that is what Eucharistic Adoration means: to be with Jesus. How can we preach about Jesus, if we don't spend time with Him and consequently don't know Him? Books and theological treatises are not enough to obtain a deep knowledge of Jesus. Fulton J. Sheen says: "The purpose of the Holy Hour is to

encourage deep personal encounter with Christ." We must, as Jesus asked, "*be with him.*" To spend one hour in front of the tabernacle is not a waste of time, but the very opposite! We become like the apostles in Gethsemane, and we fulfill Our Lord's desire: "*Could you not watch one hour with Me?*"

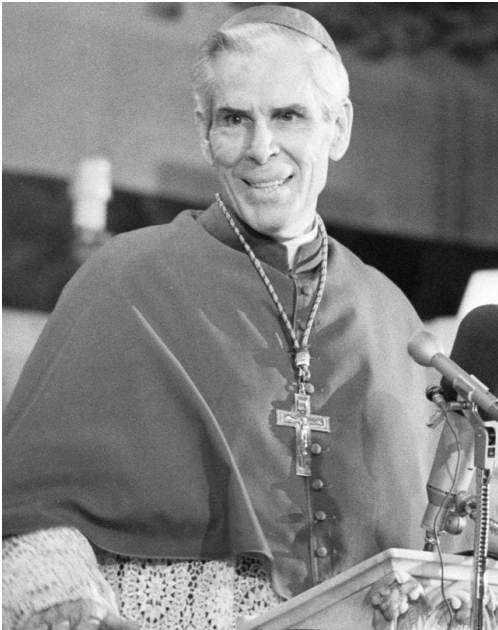
It is not by chance that great saints like Padre Pio, Mother Teresa, John Paul II and Fulton Sheen used to pray one hour in front of the tabernacle every single day. If they could do it, should we not try?

God bless you!

Fr. Tomás Ravaioli, IVE
LCI Director

Author: Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Fulton John Sheen (May 8, 1895 - December 9, 1979) was an American bishop (later archbishop) of the Catholic Church known for his preaching and especially his work on television and radio. Ordained a priest of the Diocese of Peoria in 1919, Sheen quickly became a renowned theologian. He went on to teach theology and philosophy at the Catholic University of America as well as acting as a parish priest before being appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York in 1951. He held this position until 1966, when he was made the Bishop of Rochester. He resigned in 1969 as his 75th birthday approached, and was made the Archbishop of the titular see of Newport, Wales.



For 20 years as Father Sheen, later Monsignor, he hosted the night-time radio program *The Catholic Hour* on NBC (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting *Life Is Worth Living* (1952–1957). Sheen's final presenting role was on the syndicated *The Fulton Sheen Program* (1961–1968) with a format very similar to that of the earlier *Life is Worth Living* show.

The cause for his canonization was officially opened in 2002. In June 2012, Pope Benedict XVI officially recognized a decree stating that he lived a life of "heroic virtues" – a major step towards beatification – and he is now referred to as "Venerable." On July 5, 2019, Pope Francis approved a miracle that occurred through the intercession of Archbishop Sheen, clearing the way for his beatification.

The Hour that Makes My Day

By Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

On the day of my Ordination, I made two resolutions:

1. I would offer the Holy Eucharist every Saturday in honor of the Blessed Mother to solicit her protection on my priesthood. The Epistle to the Hebrews bids the priest offer sacrifices not only for others, but also for himself, since his sins are greater because of the dignity of the office.

2. I resolved also to spend a continuous Holy Hour every day in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

In the course of my priesthood I have kept both of these resolutions. The Holy Hour had its origin in a practice I developed a year before I was ordained. The big chapel in St. Paul's Seminary would be locked by six o'clock; there were still private chapels available for private devotions and evening prayers. This particular evening during recreation, I walked up and down outside the closed major chapel for almost an hour. The thought struck me - why not make a Holy Hour of adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? The next day I began, and the practice is now well over sixty years old.

Briefly, here are some reasons why I have kept up this practice, and why I have encouraged it in others:

First, the Holy Hour is not a devotion; it is a sharing in the work of redemption. Our Blessed Lord used the words "hour" and "day" in two totally different connotations in the Gospel of John. "Day" belongs to God; the "hour" belongs to evil. Seven times in the Gospel of John, the word "hour" is used, and in each instance it refers to the demonic, and to the moments when Christ is no longer in the Father's Hands, but in the hands of men. In the Garden, our Lord contrasted two "hours" - one was the evil hour "this is your hour" - with which Judas could turn out the lights of the world. In contrast, our Lord asked: "*Could you not watch one hour with Me?*". In other words, he asked for an hour of reparation to combat the hour of evil; an hour of victimal union with the Cross to overcome the anti-love of sin.

Secondly, the only time Our Lord asked the Apostles for anything was the night he went into his agony. Then he did not ask all of them, perhaps because he knew he could not count on their fidelity. But at least he expected three

to be faithful to him: Peter, James and John. As often in the history of the Church since that time, evil was awake, but the disciples were asleep. That is why there came out of His anguished and lonely Heart the sigh: “*Could you not watch one hour with me?*” Not for an hour of activity did He plead, but for an hour of companionship.

The third reason I keep up the Holy Hour is to grow more and more into his likeness. As Paul puts it: “*We are transfigured into his likeness, from splendor to splendor.*” We become like that which we gaze upon. Looking into a sunset, the face takes on a golden glow. Looking at the Eucharistic Lord for an hour transforms the heart in a mysterious way as the face of Moses was transformed after his companionship with God on the mountain. Something happens to us similar to that which happened to the disciples at Emmaus. On Easter Sunday afternoon when the Lord met them, he asked why they were so gloomy. After spending some time in his presence, and hearing again the secret of spirituality - “*The Son of Man must suffer to enter into his Glory*” - their time with him ended and their “*hearts were on fire.*”

The Holy Hour. Is it difficult?

Sometimes it seemed to be hard; it might mean having to forgo a social

engagement, or rise an hour earlier, but on the whole it has never been a burden, only a joy. I do not mean to say that all the Holy Hours have been edifying, as for example, the one in the church of St. Roch in Paris. I entered the church about three o'clock in the afternoon, knowing that I had to catch a train for Lourdes two hours later. There are only about ten days a year in which I can sleep in the daytime; this was one. I knelt down and said a prayer of adoration, and then sat up to meditate and immediately went to sleep. I woke up exactly at the end of one hour. I said to the Good Lord: “Have I made a Holy Hour?” I thought his angel said: “Well, that’s the way the Apostles made their first Holy Hour in the Garden, but don’t do it again.”

The Holy Hour helps to grow more and more into his likeness. We become like that which we gaze upon

One difficult Holy Hour I remember occurred

when I took a train from Jerusalem to Cairo. The train left at four o'clock in the morning; that meant very early rising. On another occasion in Chicago, I asked permission from a pastor to go into his church to make a Holy Hour about seven o'clock one evening, for the church was locked. He then forgot that he had let me in, and I was there for about two hours trying to find a way of escape. Finally I jumped out of a small window and landed in the coal bin. This frightened the housekeeper, who finally came to my aid.

At the beginning of my priesthood I would make the Holy Hour during the

day or the evening. As the years mounted and I became busier, I made the Hour early in the morning, generally before Holy Mass. Priests, like everybody else, are divided into two classes: roosters and owls. Some work better in the morning, others at night. An Anglican bishop who was chided by a companion for his short night prayers explained: "I keep prayed up."

The Purpose of the Holy Hour

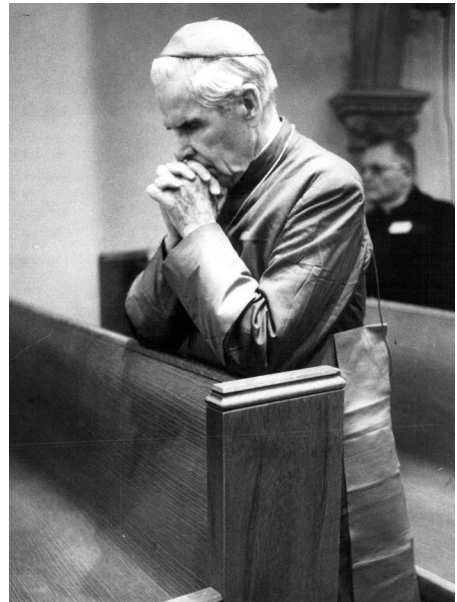
The purpose of the Holy Hour is to encourage deep personal encounter with Christ. The holy and glorious God is constantly inviting us to come to Him, to hold converse with Him, to ask for such things as we need and to experience what a blessing there is in fellowship with Him. When we are first ordained it is easy to give self entirely to Christ, for the Lord fills us then with sweetness, just as a mother gives candy to her baby to encourage her child to take the first step. This exhilaration, however, does not last long; we quickly learn the cost of discipleship, which means leaving nets and boats and counting tables. The honeymoon soon ends, and so does our self-importance at first hearing the stirring title of "Father."

Sensitive love or human love declines with time, but divine love does not. The first is concerned with the body which becomes less and less responsive to stimulation, but in the order of grace, the responsiveness of the divine to tiny, human acts of love intensifies.

Neither theological knowledge nor social action alone is enough to keep

us in love with Christ unless both are preceded by a personal encounter with him. When Moses saw the burning bush in the desert, it did not feed on any fuel. The flame, unfed by anything visible, continued to exist without destroying the wood. So personal dedication to Christ does not deform any of our natural gifts, disposition, or character; it just renews without killing. As the wood becomes fire and the fire endures, so we become Christ and Christ endures.

I have found that it takes some time to catch fire in prayer. This has been one of the advantages of the daily Hour. It is not so brief as to prevent the soul from collecting itself and shaking off the multitudinous distractions of the world. Sitting before the Presence is like a body exposing itself before the sun to absorb its rays. Silence in the Hour is a tête-à-tête with the Lord. In those moments,



one does not so much pour out written prayers, but listening takes its place. We do not say: "Listen, Lord, for Thy servant speaks," but "*Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.*"

I have often sought some way to explain the fact that we priests are to know Christ, rather than know about Christ. Many translations of the Bible use the word "know" to indicate the unity of two-in-one flesh. For example: "Solomon knew her not," which meant that he had no carnal relations with her. The Blessed Mother said to the Angel at the Annunciation: "I know not man." St. Paul urges husbands to possess their wives in knowledge. The word "know" here indicates two-in-one flesh. The closeness of that identity is drawn from the closeness of the mind with any object it knows. No knife could ever separate my mind from the idea it has of an apple. The ecstatic union of a husband and wife described as "knowing" is to be the foundation of that love by which we priests love Christ.

Intimacy is openness which keeps back no secret and which reveals the heart open to Christ. Too often friends are just "two ships that pass in the night." Carnal love, despite its seeming intimacy, often can become an exchange of two egotisms. The ego is projected onto the other person and what is loved is not the other person, but the pleasure the other person gives. I have noticed throughout my life that whenever I shrank from the demands that the encounter made on me, I would become busier and more concerned with activities. This gave me

an excuse for saying: "I don't have time," as a husband can become so absorbed in business as to forget the love of his wife.

How Helpful the Holy Hour is

It is impossible for me to explain how helpful the Holy Hour has been in preserving my vocation. Scripture gives considerable evidence to prove that a priest begins to fail his priesthood when he fails in his love of the Eucharist. Too often it is assumed that Judas fell because he loved money. Avarice is very rarely the beginning of the lapse and the fall of the ambassador. The history of the Church proves there are many with money who stayed in it. The beginning of the fall of Judas and the end of Judas both revolved around the Eucharist. The first mention that Our Lord knew who it was who would betray him is at the end of the sixth chapter of John, which is the announcement of the Eucharist. The fall of Judas came the night Our Lord gave the Eucharist, the night of the Last Supper.

The Eucharist is so essential to our one-ness with Christ that as soon as Our Lord announced It in the Gospel, It began to be the test of the fidelity of His followers. First, He lost the masses, for it was too hard a saying and they no longer followed Him. Secondly, He lost some of His disciples: "*They walked with Him no more.*" Third, it split His apostolic band, for Judas is here announced as the betrayer.

So the Holy Hour, quite apart from all its positive spiritual benefits, kept

my feet from wandering too far. Being tethered to a tabernacle, one's rope for finding other pastures is not so long. That dim tabernacle lamp, however pale and faint, had some mysterious luminosity to darken the brightness of "bright lights." The Holy Hour became like an oxygen tank to revive the breath of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the foul and fetid atmosphere of the world. Even when it seemed so unprofitable and lacking in spiritual intimacy, I still had the sensation of being at least like a dog at the master's door, ready in case he called me.

The Hour, too, became a magister and teacher, for although before we love anyone we must have a knowledge of that person, nevertheless, after we know, it is love that increases knowledge.

Theological insights are gained not only from the two covers of a treatise, but from two knees on a priedieu before a tabernacle.

Finally, making a Holy Hour every day constituted for me one area of life in which I could preach what I practiced. I very seldom in my life preached fasting in a rigorous kind of way, for I always found fasting extremely difficult; but I could ask others to make the Hour, because I had made it.

Sometimes I wished that I had kept a record of the thousands of letters that

I have received from priests and laity telling me how they have taken up the practice of the Holy Hour. Every retreat for priests that I ever gave had this as a practical resolution. Too often retreats are like health conferences. There is a general agreement on the need for health, but there is lacking a specific recommendation on how to be healthy.

The Holy Hour became a challenge to priests on the retreat, and then when the tapes of my retreats became available to the laity, it was edifying to read of those who responded to grace by watching an hour daily before the Lord. A monsignor who, because of a weakness for alcohol and consequent scandal, was told to leave his parish went into another diocese

The holy and glorious God is constantly inviting us to come to Him, to hold converse with Him, to ask for such things as we need and to experience what a blessing there is in fellowship with Him

on a trial basis, where he made my retreat. Responding to the grace of the Lord, he gave up alcohol, was restored to effectiveness in his priesthood, made the Holy Hour every day and died in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

As an indication of the very wide effect of the Holy Hour, I once received a letter from a priest in England who told me in his own language: "I left the priesthood and fell into a state of degradation." A priest friend invited him to hear a tape on the Holy Hour from a retreat I had given. Responsive to grace, he

was restored again to the priesthood and entrusted with the care of a parish. Divine Mercy wrought a change in him, and I received this letter:

We had our annual Solemn Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament last week. I encouraged enough people to come and watch all day and every day, so that we would not have to take the Blessed Sacrament down because of a lack of a number of people to watch. On the final evening, I organized a procession with the First Communicants strewing rose petals in front of the Lord. The men of the parish formed a Guard of Honor. The result was staggering: there were over 250 people present for that final procession and Holy Hour. I am convinced that our people are searching for many of the old devotions which many of the parishes have done away with, and this is very often because we priests cannot be bothered putting ourselves out. Next year I hope that our Solemn Exposition will be even better attended because now the word is getting around. These last couple of weeks I have started a Bible study group; this is to encourage our people to read the Word of God. I start with reading of Scripture which we meditate on that evening; we then have a short Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and meditation on the text until the time of the Benediction.

I have also started going around the parish and saying a Mass in one house in every street each week, and inviting all people in that particular street to come and take part. The response has been quite

good, especially since I am only starting. I do not wish to become an activist priest, so I rise early and make my Holy Hour. I still have my own personal problems to contend with, but I have taken courage from your words: "you will have to fight many battles, but do not worry because in the end you will win the war before the Blessed Sacrament."

Many of the laity who have read my books and heard my tapes are also making the Holy Hour.

A state trooper wrote that he had my tapes attached to his motorcycle and would listen to them as he was cruising the highways: "Imagine," he wrote, "the bewilderment of a speeder being stopped by me while from the tape recorder was coming one of your sermons about the Eucharist." He found it difficult at first to find a church that was open during the day at a time he could make his Hour. Later on, he found a pastor who was not only willing to open the church, but willing to make the Hour with him.

Most remarkable of all was the effect the preaching of the Holy Hour had on non-Catholic ministers. I preached three retreats to Protestant ministers - on two occasions to over three hundred in South Carolina and Florida, and on another occasion to a smaller group at Princeton University. I asked them to make a continuous Holy Hour of prayer in order to combat the forces of evil in the world, because that is what our Lord asked for the night of His Agony. I addressed them: "You are not blessed with the same Divine Presence in your churches that I believe we possess. But you do

have another presence that we do also, and that is the Scripture. At the Vatican Council we had a solemn procession of the Scriptures into the Council every morning as a form of the Presence of God. You could make the Hour before the Scriptures.” Many came to me later to inquire about the Eucharist, some even asked to join with me in a Holy Hour before the Eucharist.

I know thousands of priests who have not had the practice of making frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, but I am absolutely sure that, in the sight of God, they are a thousand times more worthy than I. In any case, this is the story of the means I chose in my priesthood to be able to keep step with my brother priests in the service of the Lord.

But why make a Holy Hour? Here are ten reasons.

1. Time Well Spent: It is time spent in the presence of Our Lord Himself. If faith is alive, no further reason is needed.

2. Shake Noonday Devils: In our busy lives, it takes considerable time to shake off the “noonday devils,” the worldly cares, that cling to our souls like dust. An hour with Our Lord follows the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). We begin by walking with Our Lord, but our eyes are “*held fast*” so that we do not “*recognize him*.” Next, He converses with our soul, as we read the Scriptures. The third stage is one of sweet intimacy, as when “*he sat down at table with them*.” The fourth stage is the full dawning of the mystery of the Eucharist. Our eyes are “*opened*,” and we recognize Him. Finally, we reach the point where we do not want to leave. The hour seemed so short. As we arise, we ask: “*Were not our hearts burning within us when he spoke to us on the road, and when he made the Scriptures plain to us?*” (Luke 24:32).

3. Jesus Asked: Our Lord asked for it. “*Had you no strength, then, to watch with me even for an hour?*” (see Matt. 26:40). The word was addressed to Peter, but he



is referred to as Simon. It is our Simon nature that needs the hour. If the hour seems hard, it is because *“the spirit is willing enough, but the flesh is weak”* (Mark 14:38).

4. Balance Spiritual & Practical: The Holy Hour keeps a balance between the spiritual and the practical. Western philosophies tend to an activism in which God does nothing, and man everything; the Eastern philosophies tend to a quietism in which God does everything, and man nothing. The golden mean is in the words of St. Thomas: “action following rest,” Martha walking with Mary. The Holy Hour unites the contemplative to the active life of the person.

Thanks to the hour with Our Lord, our meditations and resolutions pass from the conscious to the subconscious and then become motives of action. A new spirit begins to pervade our work. The change is effected by Our Lord, who fills our heart and works through our hands. A person can give only what he possesses. To give Christ to others, one must possess Him.

5. We’ll Practice What We Preach: The Holy Hour will make us practice what we preach. *“Here is an image,”* he said, *“of the kingdom of heaven: there was once a king, who held a marriage feast for his son and sent out his servants with a*

summons to all those whom he had invited to the wedding; but they would not come” (Matt. 22:2–3).

It was written of Our Lord that He *“began to do and to teach”* (Acts 1:1). The person who practices the Holy Hour will find that when he teaches, the people will say of him as of the Lord: *“All were astonished at the gracious words which came from his mouth”* (Luke 4:22).

Our Lord asked for the Holy Hour.
“Had you no strength, then, to watch with me even for an hour?”

6. Helps Us Make Reparations: The Holy Hour helps us make reparation for the sins of the world and for our own sins. When the Sacred Heart appeared to St. Margaret Mary, it was His Heart, and not His head, that was crowned with thorns. It was Love that was hurt. Black Masses, sacrilegious communions, scandals, militant atheism — who will make up for them? Who will be an Abraham for Sodom, a Mary for those who have no wine? The sins of the world are our sins as if we had committed them. If they caused Our Lord a bloody sweat, to the point that He upbraided His disciples for failing to stay with Him an hour, shall we with Cain ask: *“Is it for me to watch over my brother?”* (Gen. 4:9).

7. Reduces Liability to Temptation: It reduces our liability to temptation and weakness. Presenting ourselves before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is like putting a tubercular patient in good

air and sunlight. The virus of our sins cannot long exist in the face of the Light of the world. *“Always I can keep the Lord within sight; always he is at my right hand, to make me stand firm”* (Ps. 15:8).

Our sinful impulses are prevented from arising through the barrier erected each day by the Holy Hour. Our will becomes disposed to goodness with little conscious effort on our part. Satan, the roaring lion, was not permitted to put forth his hand to touch righteous Job until he received permission (Job 1:12). Certainly, then, will the Lord withhold

serious fall from him who watches (1 Cor. 10:13). With full confidence in his Eucharistic Lord, the person will have a spiritual resiliency. He will bounce back quickly after a falling: *“Fall I, it is but to rise again, sit I in darkness, the Lord will be my light. The Lord’s displeasure I must bear; I that have sinned against him, till at last, he admits my plea, and grants redress”* (Micah 7:8–9).

The Lord will be favorable even to the weakest of us, if He finds us at His feet in adoration, disposing ourselves to receive divine favors. No sooner had Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, humbled himself before his Maker than God sent a special messenger to his relief, telling him that *“even now he is at his prayers”* (Acts 9:11). Even the person who has fallen can expect reassurance if he watches and prays. *“They shall increase, that hitherto had dwindled, be exalted, that once were brought low”* (Jer. 30:19).

The Holy Hour helps us make reparation for the sins of the world and for our own sins

8. Our Holy Hour is Our Personal Prayer: The Holy Hour is a personal prayer. The person who limits himself strictly to his official obligation is like the union man who downs tools the moment the whistle blows. Love begins when duty finishes. It is a giving of the cloak when the coat is taken. It is walking the extra mile. *“Answer shall come ere cry for help is uttered; prayer find audience while it is yet on their lips”* (Isa. 65:24).

Of course, we do not have to make a Holy Hour — and that is just the point. Love is never compelled, except in hell. There love has to submit to justice. To be forced to love would be a kind of hell. No man who loves a woman is obligated to give her an engagement ring, and no person who loves the Sacred Heart ever has to give an engagement Hour.

“Would you, too, go away?” (John 6:68) is weak love; *“Art thou sleeping?”* (Mark 14:37) is irresponsible love; *“He had great possessions”* (Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22) is selfish love. But does the person who loves His Lord have time for other activities before he performs acts of love “above and beyond the call of duty”? Does the patient love the physician who charges for every call, or does he begin to love when the physician says: “I just dropped by to see how you were”?

9. Keeps Us From Seeking An Escape: Meditation keeps us from seeking an external escape from our

worries and miseries. When difficulties arise, when nerves are made taut by false accusations, there is always a danger that we may look outwards, as the Israelites did, for release.

From the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, word was given you: *“Come back and keep still, and all shall be well with you; in quietness and in confidence lies your strength. But you would have none of it; To horse! you cried, We must flee! and flee you shall; We must ride swiftly, you said, but swifter still ride your pursuers”* (Isa. 30:15–16).

No outward escape, neither pleasure, drink, friends, or keeping busy, is an answer. The soul cannot “fly upon a horse”; he must take “wings” to a place where his *“life is hidden away with Christ in God”* (Col. 3:3).

10. The Holy Hour is Necessary: Finally, the Holy Hour is necessary for the Church. No one can read the Old Testament without becoming conscious

of the presence of God in history. How often did God use other nations to punish Israel for her sins! He made Assyria the *“rod that executes my vengeance”* (Isa. 10:5). The history of the world since the Incarnation is the Way of the Cross. The rise of nations and their fall remain related to the kingdom of God. We cannot understand the mystery of God’s government, for it is the “sealed book” of Revelation. John wept when he saw it (Rev. 5:4). He could not understand why this moment of prosperity and that hour of adversity.

The sole requirement is the venture of faith, and the reward is the depths of intimacy for those who cultivate His friendship. To abide with Christ is spiritual fellowship, as He insisted on the solemn and sacred night of the Last Supper, the moment He chose to give us the Eucharist: *“You have only to live on in me, and I will live on in you”* (John 15:4). He wants us in His dwelling: *“That you, too, may be where I am”* (John 14:3).



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