

**Homily for Saint Meinrad and Bishop Simon Bruté Seminaries
April 24-25, 2024**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Remember the popular hoopla and media hype earlier this month in anticipation of the solar eclipse that took place on April 8? Some people drove hundreds and even thousands of miles to reach a location where the eclipse could be viewed in its totality. Spectators in the direct path of the total solar eclipse viewed the darkening of the sky in the middle of the day for two to four minutes, depending on the location. News accounts described it as “a once-in-a-lifetime event” generating “awe and wonder” where “crowds cheered” and “people cried.” It was also an occasion for hundreds of couples to get engaged or even exchange wedding vows in public ceremonies.

If all of that already seems like a distant memory, the transitory nature of the event and its brief excitement are illustrations of the phrase *sic transit gloria mundi* (thus passes the glory of the world). I must admit that I had little interest in experiencing the solar eclipse. So the light of the sun will be blocked by the moon for a few minutes. So what? The light of the sun is blocked by clouds at some point almost every day. The light of the sun is blocked by the rotation of the earth every night. Nobody gets excited about that, nor should they.

Some would argue that it is the rarity of the event that enkindles awe. Before this month's eclipse, the last solar eclipse visible in the U.S. occurred on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. The next solar eclipse viewable from the contiguous U.S. will be on Aug. 23, 2044, touching parts of North Dakota and Montana, while a total solar eclipse visible from coast to coast in the U.S. will not happen again until Aug. 12, 2045.

But there are events that are even more rare that do not generate such interest. Some people rarely go to church. Some Catholics have not gone to confession since childhood. A lapsed Catholic returning to the sacraments and going to Mass again is much more meaningful to me!

In his book, *True Confessions: Voices of Faith from a Life in the Church* (Ignatius Press, 2024), Francis X. Maier writes of a different kind of eclipse: "We need to understand that there's a pious kind of 'Catholic atheism' that doesn't recognize itself. An eclipse of God can occur even within the Church; an eclipse whose shadow is so perfect and dark that we don't see it. We're too often not aware of the extent to which we think and act as if God didn't exist, even if we formally acknowledge him."

Then there is the spectacular eclipse that occurs every day in Catholic churches throughout the world during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Rather than the sun being eclipsed by the moon, the Son is eclipsed by what our eyes see as

bread and wine. In other words, when the Son of God, Jesus Our Lord, becomes truly present in the Eucharist during the consecration at Mass, the Real Presence of the Son of God is eclipsed by the appearance of bread and wine that keeps us from seeing Him. Just as the sun continues to shine when the moon blocks our vision of the sun during a solar eclipse, or when when the sunlight is blocked by clouds, or is shining on the other side of the planet during the night, so too does the Son of God, the Light of the World, continue to shine on us even when we cannot see Him in his glory.

As we continue to observe our National Eucharistic Revival and prepare for the National Eucharistic Congress this summer in Indianapolis, it is good to recall the teaching of Catholic Church on the Eucharist, as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 1376), which says that “by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.” Although the whole substance of bread is changed into the substance of the Body of Christ and of the whole substance of wine is changed into the substance of the Blood of Christ, what we see before our eyes retains the appearance of bread and wine, such that the Real Presence of Christ is eclipsed from our sight.

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote that every sacrament has a threefold significance: "A sacrament is a sign that is both a reminder of the past, that is, the Passion of Christ; and an indication of that which is effected in us by Christ's Passion, that is, grace; and a prognostic, that is, a foretelling of future glory" (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 60, 3, c.).

With regard to the Sacrament of the Eucharist specifically, Thomas says, "This sacrament has a threefold significance: one with regard to the past, inasmuch as it is commemorative of our Lord's Passion, which was a true sacrifice, as stated above, and in this respect it is called a Sacrifice. With regard to the present it has another meaning, namely, that of ecclesiastical unity, in which men are aggregated through this sacrament; and in this respect it is called Communion. . . . With regard to the future it has a third meaning, inasmuch as this sacrament foreshadows the Divine fruition which shall come to pass in heaven" (*Summa Theologiae*, III, 73, 4, c.).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

+ Thomas John Paprocki