

of the Real Presence | BY RONALD J. RYCHLAK



THE REAL PRESENCE ASSOCIATION



hundred eucharistic miracles, many of which occurred during times of weakened faith in transubstantiation.

One of the earliest was recorded by the Desert Fathers in Egypt, who were among the first Christian monks. One of these monks had doubts about the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated bread and wine. Two of his fellow monks prayed for his faith to be strengthened, and they all attended Mass together. According to the account they left behind, when the bread was placed

on the altar, the three men saw a small child there. When the priest put out his hand to break the bread, an angel descended with a sword and poured the child's blood into the chalice. When the priest cut the bread into small pieces, the angel also cut the child into pieces. When the men drew near to receive Communion, the skeptical man alone received a morsel of bloody flesh. Seeing this, he became afraid and cried out: "Lord, I believe that this bread is your flesh and this chalice your blood."

Immediately the flesh became bread, and he took it, giving thanks to God.

The other monks then had a great insight into the miracle that takes place at each Mass. They explained, "God knows human nature and that man cannot eat raw flesh, and that is why he has changed his body into bread and his blood into wine for those who receive it in faith."

Bloodstained Cloths

In 1263, a German priest known as Peter of Prague was struggling with

the doctrine of transubstantiation. While he was saying Mass in Bolseno, Italy, blood began to stream out of the host and onto the corporal at the moment of consecration. This was reported to and investigated by Pope Urban IV, who concluded that the miracle was real. The bloodstained linen is still exhibited at the cathedral in Orvieto, Italy. Many eucharistic miracles are like the one experienced by Peter of Prague, in which the host turns into flesh and blood.

Pope Urban had already associated with a eucharistic miracle. Years earlier, Bl. Juliana of Cornillon, in Belgium, had a vision in which she saw a full moon that was darkened in one spot. A heavenly voice told her that the moon represented the Church at that time, and the dark spot showed that a great feast in honor of Corpus Christi was missing from the liturgical calendar. She reported this vision to a local Church official, the archdeacon of Liège, He later became Pope Urban IV.

Remembering Juliana's vision as he verified the bloody miracle reported by Peter of Prague, Urban commissioned St. Thomas Aquinas to compose the Office for the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours for a new feast dedicated to devotion of the Eucharist. This liturgy of Corpus Christi (more fully defined in 1312) is pretty much how we celebrate it today.

At Mass on Easter Sunday, 1331, in Blanot, a small village in the middle of France, one of the last people to receive Communion was a woman named Jacqueline. The priest placed the host on her tongue, turned, and started walking toward the altar. He did not notice that the host fell from her mouth and landed on a cloth covering her hands. When he was alerted to it, he went back to the woman, who was still kneeling at the railing. Instead of finding the host on the cloth, the priest saw only a spot of blood.

When Mass was over, the priest took the cloth into the sacristy and placed it in a basin of water. He washed the spot numerous times but found that it became darker and larger, eventually reaching the size and shape of a host.

He took a knife and cut the part bearing the bloody imprint of the host from the cloth. He then put it in the tabernacle along with the consecrated hosts that remained after the Mass.

Those consecrated hosts were never distributed. Instead, they were kept in the tabernacle along with the cloth relic. After hundreds of years, they were still perfectly preserved. Unfortunately, they were lost during the French Revolution. The bloodstained cloth, though, was preserved by a parishioner named Dominique Cortet. It is solemnly exposed in St. Martin's Church in Blanot every year on the feast of Corpus Christi.

A Bright Light

With some eucharistic miracles, the host emits a bright light. In 1247, for instance, a woman in Santarem, Portugal, was concerned about her husband's faithfulness. She went to a sorceress, who promised the woman that her husband would return to his loving ways if the wife would bring a consecrated host back to the sorceress. The woman agreed.

At Mass, the woman managed to obtain a consecrated host and put it in a kerchief, but before she could return to the sorceress, the cloth became bloodstained. This frightened the woman. She hurried home and hid the cloth and host in a drawer in her bedroom. That night, the drawer emitted a bright light. When her husband saw it, the woman told him what had happened. The following day, many townspeople came to the house, attracted by the light.

The people reported the events back to the parish priest, who went to the house. He took the host back to the church and put it in a wax container where it continued to bleed for three days. The host remained in the wax container for four years. One day when the priest opened the tabernacle door, he saw that the wax had broken into numerous pieces. In its place was a crystal container with the blood inside.

The house where the miracle took place was converted into a chapel in 1684. Even today, on the second Sunday of April, the incident is re-enacted in

the Church of St. Stephen in Santarem. The reliquary that houses the miraculous host rests above the tabernacle in that church, and it can be viewed year-round from a set of stairs behind the main altar.

A similar phenomenon took place in the 1300s in the village of Wawel, near Krakow, Poland. Thieves broke into a church, forced their way into the tabernacle, and stole the monstrance containing consecrated hosts. When they determined that the monstrance was not made of gold, they threw it into nearby marshlands.

When darkness fell, a light emanated from the spot where the monstrance and consecrated hosts had been abandoned. The light was visible for several kilometers, and frightened villagers reported it to the bishop of Krakow. The bishop called for three days of fasting and prayer. On the third day, he led a procession to the marsh. There he found the monstrance and the consecrated hosts, which were unbroken. Annually on the occasion of the feast of the Corpus Christi, this miracle is celebrated in Corpus Christi Church in Krakow.

The Face of the Christ Child

In some eucharistic miracles, an image appears on the host. The miracle of Eten, Peru, for instance, began on June 2, 1649. That night, as Fr. Jérôme Silva was about to replace the monstrance in the tabernacle, he saw in the host the image of a child with thick brown curls that fell to his shoulders. He held the host up to show the image to those present. They all agreed that it was an image of the Christ Child.

A second apparition took place the following month. During the exhibition of the Eucharist, the Child Jesus appeared again in the host, dressed in a purple habit over a shirt that covered his chest, as was the custom of the local Indians, the Mochicas. It was felt at the time that the divine Child wanted to show his love for the Mochicas. During this apparition, which lasted about fifteen minutes, many people also saw in the host three small white hearts, thought to symbolize the three Persons

of the Holy Trinity. The celebration in honor of the Miraculous Child of Eten still attracts thousands of people to Peru each year.

One of the more recent verified miracles was of a similar nature. It began on April 28, 2001, in Trivandrum, India. Fr. Johnson Karoor was saying Mass when he saw three dots on the consecrated host. He stopped reciting the prayers and stared at the Eucharist. He then invited those at Mass to look, and they also saw the dots. He asked the faithful to remain in

the church, she saw an image of the Virgin Mary. She was overcome with remorse for the life she had led and asked for our Lady's guidance. A voice told her, "If you cross the Jordan River, you will find peace."

The next day, Mary did so. There, she took up the life of a hermit and lived alone in the desert for forty-seven years. As the Virgin had promised, she found peace of soul. One day she saw a monk, St. Zosimus of Palestine, who had come to the desert for Lent. Although they had never met, Mary

Although water around the church was four feet high, a pathway from the doorway to the altar was perfectly dry, and the sacred host was untouched. The water had been held back in the same way the Red Sea had parted. Amazed by what they had seen, the Friars had others from their order come to the church to verify the miracle. The news spread rapidly, and many townspeople and authorities came to the church, singing songs of praise and of thanks to the Lord. Still today, the Gray Penitent brothers reunite at the Chapelle des Pénitents Gris every November 30 to celebrate the memory of the miracle. Before the blessing of the sacrament, the brothers perform a sacred chant taken from the Canticle of Moses, which was composed after the parting of the Red Sea.

Through history, though, many people have reported miracles that brought them back to the truth

prayer, and he placed the Holy Eucharist in the tabernacle.

At Mass on May 5, Fr. Karoor again noticed an image on the host, this time a human face. During adoration, the figure became more clear. Fr. Karoor later explained: "I didn't have the strength to speak anything to the faithful. I stood aside for some time. I couldn't control my tears. We had the practice of reading Scripture and reflecting on it during adoration. The passage that I got that day as I opened the Bible was John 20:24-29, Jesus appearing to St. Thomas and asking him to see his wounds." Fr. Karoor called a photographer to take photos. They can be seen on the Internet at <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/988409/posts>.

Parting the Waters

A totally different type of eucharistic miracle was recorded by St. Zosimus of Palestine in the sixth century. This miracle concerns St. Mary of Egypt, who left her parents at the age of twelve and became a prostitute. Seventeen years later, she found herself in Palestine. On the feast day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Mary went to the church, looking for customers. At the door of

called him by his name. They spoke for a while, and at the end of the conversation, she asked Zosimus to come back the following year and bring the Eucharist for her.

Zosimus did as she requested, but Mary was on the other side of the Jordan. There was no boat for him to cross to her, and Zosimus thought that it would be impossible to give her Communion. St. Mary made the sign of the cross and walked across the water to meet him, and he gave her Communion. She again asked him to return the following year, but when he did, he found that she had died. Next to her corpse was a note asking that he bury her. He reported that he was assisted by a lion in the digging of her grave.

My favorite eucharistic miracle took place in Avignon, France, in November 1433. A small church run by the Gray Penitents of the Franciscan order was exhibiting a consecrated host for perpetual adoration. After several days of heavy rain, the Sorgue and Rhône rivers had risen to a dangerous height. On November 30, Avignon was flooded. The head of the order and another friar rowed a boat to the church, certain that their little church had been destroyed. Instead, they saw a miracle.

The Miracle of Mass

The Real Presence Association is currently translating reports of 120 Vatican-approved miracles from Italian into English. The stories of these miracles will be available at www.therealpresence.org.

Faith, of course, should not be based on miracles alone. Several of the recorded miracles are very old, and it may be possible to dismiss them. There is no doubt, though, that reports of these miracles have strengthened the faith of many in the instructions given by Christ and provided avenues for contemplation of the miracle that takes place at each Mass. The translation of these reports will permit more people to learn of eucharistic miracles and, like others before them, have their faith in Jesus' teachings strengthened. ■



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