

DOMINUS EST:

Bishop Schneider Reflects on the Holy Eucharist

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DURING THE COMMUNIST Soviet regime, which lasted about 70 years (1917-1990), a light shone in the midst of its relentless, smuggling darkness. This mystical sort of light was hidden from the towering rulers of the regime; it was as a kindling ember, keeping Catholicism burning in the souls of those who sought Christ with blazing courage, despite the onslaught of persecution. Essentially, this light was the light of love, a love for the Divine Victim; Our Lord, truly present in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Holy Eucharist. And this light of love made the Catholic Faith radiantly alive, forming saintly souls and sanctifying all who were illuminated by it.

“During those dark years, the Church, in the immense Soviet empire, was forced to live underground,” the Most Reverend Athanasius Schneider writes in his book, *Dominus Est*. “But the most important thing was this: the Church was alive, indeed very alive, even though she lacked visible structures, even though she lacked sacred buildings, even though there was a tremendous scarcity of priests. The Church was most alive because she did not completely lack the Eucharist; even though it was rarely available to the faithful.”

Throughout *Dominus Est*, a gem-packed little masterpiece, Bishop Schneider shares awe-inspiring stories about whom he calls, “Eucharistic women,” and recounts the testimony of Blessed Alexij Saritski, an exiled Ukrainian bi-ritual priest who died a martyr in 1963 near Karaganda.

Known as “God’s Vagabond,” Fr. Alexij Saritski would secretly leave his place of exile and travel to visit the Ural Mountains, where thousands of German Catholics had been deported by the Stalinist regime and made to engage in forced labor. Putting his own life at stake, he would clandestinely hear their confessions day and night, going without eating or sleeping for days. He was a priest who recognized the crucial importance of the faithful receiving the Sacrament of Confession before they receive Almighty God Himself in the Most Holy Eucharist. They came to love him immensely, and were touched by the way in which he surrendered his entire life to Christ Crucified, spreading fervent love for the Holy Eucharist like wildfire.

As Bishop Schneider explains in *Dominus Est*, “The faithful begged him, ‘Father, you must eat and sleep!’ But he would reply, ‘I can’t, because the police can arrest me at any moment, and then people would be left without confession and, therefore, without Communion.’” In 1958, Fr. Alexij suddenly and secretly left his place of exile to bring the sacraments to the Schneider family and many other Catholics in

the “underground church” under the Soviet regime. Bishop Schneider shares a profoundly moving account of one of these “Eucharistic Women,” his mother, Maria Schneider:

“After everyone had gone to confession, Fr. Alexij began to celebrate the Holy Mass. Suddenly a voice resounded, ‘The police are coming!’ Maria Schneider, who was attending the Mass, said to the priest, ‘Father, I can hide you; let’s flee!’”

Maria then hid him in a room and gave him a meal, allowing him some rest. Bishop Schneider explains, “Father Alexij was sad, because, though all had made their confessions, they could not receive Holy Communion, because they Holy Mass, which had just begun, had been interrupted by the police raid.” Clearly, Fr. Alexij’s one main concern was not that the police wanted to take his life – it was simply that the faithful hadn’t been able to receive Christ in Holy Communion, the one goal of his labors.

Bishop Schneider’s mother then helped Fr. Alexij escape by bringing him 12 kilometers to the bus station in –30-degree weather in the middle of the night, risking her own life. Thanks to her intervention, Fr. Alexij lived on, and was able to bring the sacraments to many famished souls in the underground church for many days to come.

Further, Bishop Schneider recounts the reverence with which his mother gave Holy Communion to her dying mother, out of extraordinary necessity due to the banishment of priests. He writes, “In order to do this, Maria put on new white gloves, and with a tweezers gave Holy Communion to her mother. Afterwards, she burned the envelope in which the consecrated hosts had been kept.”

Maria’s devotion and audacity planted the heartiest of seeds in his soul, which would someday bloom and bring forth beautiful fruit for the Kingdom of God. Bishop Schneider presently serves as a pillar of the Church and a sort of commander-in-chief of those who “fight the good fight” for the cause of Sacred Tradition. By doing so, he benevolently nourishes the remnant in the Church which remains in the midst of its current crisis.

Bishop Athanasius Schneider wrote the profound reflections in *Dominus Est* as a faithful servant to Truth and Tradition, having been enriched by the authentic Catholicism of his youth. Inspired by this fidelity, he admonishes that Catholics receive Holy Communion in accordance with Sacred Tradition, and provides examples explaining what that means. Regarding the use of the paten and reception of Holy Communion on the tongue, he writes:

“The extreme care and veneration for the fragments of the Eucharistic Bread was a phenomenon characteristic of the Christian communities of the third century and known to Origen: ‘You are accustomed to take part in the divine mysteries, so you know how, when you have received the Body of the Lord, you reverently exercise every care lest a particle of It fall, and lest anything of the consecrated gift perish. You account yourselves guilty, and rightly do you so believe, if any of It be lost through negligence.’” He further expounds, “The Church prescribes the use of the paten for Communion to avoid having any particle of the Sacred Host fall to the ground (see *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, no. 93) and that the bishop wash his hands after distribution of Communion (see *Caeremoniale Episcoporum*, no. 166).”

Bishop Schneider then explains that in some Eastern Liturgies, the consecrated Host is given the name, ‘pearl.’ “Thus the *Collectiones Canonum Copticae* (Coptic Collections of Canons) reads: ‘God forbid that any of the pearls of the consecrated fragments should adhere to the fingers or fall to the ground!’”

He also speaks out against the horrors of the practice of receiving Holy

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Communion in the hand, expressing that, “The Sacred Host is not just some *thing*, but some *One*. ‘He is there,’ was the way that St. John Mary Vianney synthesized the Eucharistic Mystery. Therefore, we are involved with nothing other than, and no less great than, the Lord Himself: *Dominus Est!* (It is the Lord!).”

Beckoning the faithful, he explains what a powerful witness it can be to show due reverence to the Holy of Holies by receiving Holy Communion properly. He writes, “The gesture of receiving the Body of the Lord in the mouth and kneeling could be a visible testimony to the faith of the Church in the Eucharistic Mystery and even something that heals and teaches our modern culture, for which kneeling and spiritual childhood are completely foreign phenomena.”

Ultimately, as “radical” as Most Reverend Athanasius Schneider’s views on Holy Communion may appear to be many modern-day Catholics, the fact is, they are simply orthodox, and find their origin in the very roots of Christianity. For in 1 Corinthians 11:29, St. Paul writes, “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.” And St. John Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century, once preached, “If you were to put your hand or tongue into molten gold – if that were possible – you would make your hand or tongue golden. In much the same way, the Mystery [of the Holy Eucharist] lying before us here affects the soul.”

Even St. Francis of Assisi, who people enjoy painting as a dreamy, “politically-correct” buddy of the birds,

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