

These words were important reminders to be faithful to the daily Holy Hour. It is interesting that at St. John Vianney Hospital, when the psychiatrist there heard this story, he had what he thought was a good, rational explanation. He said, "Well, of course the woman who cleans the church knew you were not making your Holy Hour everyday as she was there every day herself". There is a problem with his rational explanation. I made my Holy Hour at night when she was at home.

Several years ago, I returned to my first assignment for the anniversary of my former pastor. It had been seven or eight years since I had seen many of the parishioners. I was amazed how many of them came to me at the reception to tell me in detail how I had helped them. My heart was full of gratitude when I left. I had had no idea that the Lord had touched so many people in that parish through my ministry. I am convinced that that was the fruit of my Holy Hour.

During my illness, I had many people call and write to find out how I was. Soon, I became aware that there were hundreds and hundreds of people praying for me here in San Francisco and throughout the country. Some of my friends would tell me that wherever they went, people were talking about me and saying they were praying for me because I had helped so very many people. This, too, was the fruit of the Holy Hour.

Twice in my priesthood, I was very hurt by a decision of the Archbishop and the personnel board when I did not receive an assignment where I felt God was calling me. The second time the hurt was especially painful because it reinforced my perception that the placement or the type of assignment that I was given did not depend on how hard I worked, how good a job I had done, or on a particular special gift God may have given me. Rather, the placement seemed to be linked solely to the diocesan need to fill an open slot.

When this happens once, it is difficult. When it happens a second time, it can be devastating--especially if the placement means being taken from a place of work that you put your heart and soul into. Some priests never recover from that type of experience. Even though it was hard, I did recover. That is the fruit of the Holy Hour.

By now, you know that I like to use stories to make my point. I must tell just one more. It clearly shows the fruit of the Holy Hour.

When I was stationed as an associate at St. Anselm's in Ross, one particular Sunday I was tired and in a bad mood before a baptism. It bothers me when a couple whom I do not recognize from Sunday Mass brings a child to church for baptism. I feel like they are just using this great sacrament of initiation for nothing more than a birth ritual. Such was the case on this particular day. To make matters worse, the godmother was a woman that really did not like me. And, to make things even more stressful, the party was at least fifteen minutes late for the baptism.

In the sacristy, I was mulling over all of this and realizing that, for a priest who is supposed to be representing our loving Lord and His church, my attitude was terrible. So I prayed, "Dear Lord, give me your heart to love these people." As I walked out to greet the baptismal party, I felt Christ's love come over me. I realized that it was now Christ doing the baptism in His love and kindness, and not I who was in a bad mood. I could not believe

how nice I was, and moreover, how much I was enjoying being nice to these people, whom I felt were just using me.

When it came time to bless the mother, I silently prayed to Jesus, asking Him to touch her. During the prayer, and as I laid my hand on her forehead, her eyes began to well up with tears. She was deeply moved, not by me, but by the Lord's loving touch working through me.

There have been many, many times during my priesthood that these wonderful, powerful exchanges have taken place between my Lord and me. They absolutely would not have happened without my practice of making the Holy Hour. All of these experiences make the practice of a Holy Hour more than worth the effort. But there is one more fruit that, in my mind, makes the practice of the Holy Hour not just a good choice, but an imperative practice.

As the years go by, the practice creates a special intimacy with Jesus. When I was so very sick, some who knew how much I was suffering were worried that I might take my life. They did not know what was in my heart. At night when I went to bed, my ears would be ringing and I was worried that my life was ruined. My future seemed to hold only suffering. Despite this, I felt Jesus in my heart. He was with me, and I was not alone in my suffering. That intimacy with the Lord is what saved me. It is also what makes my priesthood such a joy, and makes it possible to thank Him for the grace of the daily Holy Hour.

Your priesthood is part of the unknown future. You do not know what it will bring, but you do know that you want your house built on a rock-solid foundation. Right now, you are working hard to prepare yourself in such a way that your priesthood will be the best possible offering of your gifts to the Lord. I am sure that every part of the formation here at St. Pat's is excellent and will pay rich dividends after your ordination. Yet, as good as all this is, and as well-motivated as you are, I can tell you that the best thing you can do is right now, starting this very day, to make your priesthood a great one, is to begin the practice of spending one continuous hour each and every day praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

It is not easy and you will find a myriad of reasons not to do it. But it is God's will for you. To His closest friends, He says, "Can't you spend one hour with me?" You are one of His closest friends. How will you answer?

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Pamphlet 330

The Daily Holy Hour

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Much of my work as a priest has been devoted to the ministry of healing. For five years, I served full-time as director of the healing ministry in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. For more years than that, I would fly once or twice a month to some part of the country to give a three-day parish mission. God healed many people during the masses at those parish missions. He also blessed me by feeding me with Himself. I want to share some of what I learned during those years by drawing upon specific experiences from my daily Holy Hour.

Five or six years ago, I was driving from Philadelphia to New York City while on my way to give a mission in Connecticut. There is a church in Staten Island, just off the freeway, which I knew would be open during the day. I planned to break the trip by making my Holy Hour at that church. On this particular day, the lawn in front of the church was being mowed. The noise was too much for my tinnitus. So, I decided to continue on and stop in Brooklyn.

Just across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, is a large Redemptorist Catholic Church, *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*. I tried the door, but it was closed. So I went to the rectory, identified myself as a priest, and asked if I could be let into the church to make my Holy Hour. The secretary asked me to wait while she went looking for a priest.

While waiting, I noticed that there was a private chapel inside the rectory and thought that the priest might offer me to make my Holy Hour there. After about five minutes, I heard a loud voice ask, "Where is he?" I could tell by the sound of his voice that the priest was none too happy about being interrupted. He introduced himself to me not by his first name, but as Father X. This formal greeting let me know he was not about to invite me into his kitchen for a cup of coffee. But, it was his reaction to my request to make a Holy Hour that really surprised me.

He stated that my request was an unusual one, and due to difficulties the church had had with crime, he asked if I would withdraw my request. That I did, but I told him again that I had only wanted to make a Holy Hour. The priest said that I could make the Holy Hour anywhere. I said yes, but that I wanted to make it in front of the Blessed Sacrament. In a very condescending voice, the priest told me that was not necessary as Jesus is everywhere. So, feeling let down, I returned to my car, and began looking for a church that might be open.

The first church that I came to that was unlocked was an hour away on Long Island. While making my Holy Hour there, a priest came in for a visit. I was extremely grateful that his church was open and walked over to thank him. He appeared to be in his late seventies about the same age as the priest in Brooklyn.

This Long Island priest told me that he was on his way to teach religion and that he had stopped by the Blessed Sacrament to ask Jesus to help him bless the children. His eyes were bright and he looked holy, happy, and alive; unlike the priest in Brooklyn, who looked bored and tired. I thought to myself, "What a contrast". Too bad the priest in Brooklyn was duped somewhere along the way into thinking that prayer with the Blessed Sacrament

is no different than prayer without the Blessed Sacrament. If the Brooklyn priest had had the same devotion to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament as this lovely priest from Long Island, his eyes would be bright and alive too.

Another reflection came from an experience that I had in Moore, Oklahoma. Remember that terrible tornado there about seven years ago? A parish mission was scheduled in the Moore parish the Sunday immediately after the tornado hit. On the Wednesday before the mission was to begin, and the day after the tornado struck, the pastor called to cancel. He said that the destruction was beyond belief, and that everyone--including himself--was in a state of shock. The next day though, the pastor called to ask if he could change his mind. Upon reflection, he had decided that a healing mission was exactly what his parish needed at that time. I agreed with him and traveled to Moore.

When I arrived in Moore, the devastation from the tornado was more than could be imagined. I could not believe what I saw. The news coverage of the damage did not come close to conveying the real devastation that had taken place. There were blocks and blocks of homes completely destroyed or severely damaged. I met people who were severely injured or had lost love ones or had themselves been saved only by a miracle. It was the most difficult and emotional week of my entire priesthood.

The day after I returned home from this, I went for a walk in Point Reyes National Seashore. Point Reyes is one of the most beautiful, if not *the* most beautiful--park in the whole country. It has more than one hundred and fifty miles of idyllic hiking trails. I took the Bear Valley trail out to about a half a mile from the ocean. There I stopped at a green meadow that was surrounded by tall pine trees. It was early May, and the weather was perfect, the sun was warm and there was not a cloud in the bright blue sky. The air was cool and fresh, having been purified by the near-by Pacific Ocean, just perfect.

The peace and beauty of the moment drew me into an extraordinary time of prayer. With the beauty of God's creation unfolding around me, I could not imagine a more idyllic circumstance and place for prayer than this setting, particularly in contrast to the emotional and physical destruction I had experienced in Oklahoma the past six days.

After my walk and my beautiful period of prayer in nature, I still made my daily Holy Hour in the church. Why? Because all the beauty in God's creation cannot produce the intimacy with the Divine that prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament offers.

A few months before I got sick, a Buddhist monk came to my parish to visit me. At that time, I was well known in the healing ministry both inside and, to some degree, outside the Catholic Church. This monk was very well known as a healer in Buddhist circles in the Bay Area, as well as in Burma and Japan. He had come to discuss healing and other spiritual matters with me.

We made our way to the church. Upon entering, the monk immediately went to the tabernacle, fell to his knees and bowed his head. He remained in that reverential posture for almost two minutes. This Buddhist monk was showing greater respect for the Blessed Sacrament than is shown by Christians, Catholic or non-Catholic.

When the monk rose from his knees, he looked around the church and asked me why there were not others praying there. That was an excellent question. If we Christians really understood that

Jesus Christ, body, soul, and divinity, is present in our churches, every Catholic church in the world would be occupied every minute of the day. Pastors would no longer have reason to lock us out of our churches. (The only place where I can remember seeing this was in Rapallo, Italy. The Catholic Church there in the center of town always had four or five people praying at anytime during the day.)

What would it take for Christians to act in accord with this spiritual reality? Well, no amount of study, analysis, reasoning, or persuasion will change our minds if we do not believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The only way we will appreciate the truth that Our Lord Jesus Christ, God and Savior, body-blood-soul-and-divinity, is present in the tabernacles of our churches is for us to do it; that is for each of us to spend long periods of time in silence before the Real Presence. Then we will know better than we know our own name that Jesus is truly there.

During the five months that my tinnitus was the most severe, I spent most of my time in the rectory wearing ear plugs and ear muffs. Maybe you can imagine the isolation that this suffering caused. I was not able to turn the heat on in my house because the heater made too much noise. Archbishop Levada had given me permission to keep the Blessed Sacrament in my house. At three in the afternoon when the house began getting cold, I would turn a portable electric heater on in my bedroom. While the bedroom was warming up, I would go to the guest bedroom, where the Blessed Sacrament was kept, and make my second Holy Hour of the day.

After the Holy Hour, I would take the heater to the guest bedroom and retire back to my nice, warm bedroom. By eleven or twelve at night, the temperature in my bedroom would have dropped to an uncomfortable degree, forcing my retreat back to the guest bedroom where the Blessed Sacrament was kept. In a few hours, the guest bedroom would have cooled down and I would be tracing my steps back to my bedroom where the heater was busy warming.

I can remember the first time waking up in the guestroom, and noticing that my heart was all warm with the Presence of Christ, just as though I had been praying for two hours or more before the Blessed Sacrament. But, I had not been praying, only sleeping. After that, no one could tell me that the host was only a piece of bread or a symbolic presence. My heart knew, without a doubt, that Jesus' body, blood, soul and divinity--was truly present in my home. Again, when we spend a long period of time before the Blessed Sacrament, then we know - we really know!

Earlier I mentioned my time in a treatment center in Pennsylvania. While there, the husband of a friend left me a message that his wife, my close friend, had died. It was only a week before that Mary Ann and I had spoken by phone. The last thing Mary Ann said to me was, "Dick, I love you so much, and I feel so close to you." Mary Ann and I were never in love, but we did love each other. Even though we only saw each other two or three times a month; when she helped at the healing masses, we were very close.

News of her death was very difficult for me. But what made her death even more difficult was the fact that we had taken sick at the same time. I would always tell her, "We are both very bad off now, but we are both going to get better and work together again in the ministry." I really believed that. So when she died, I began to doubt that I would get better.

The night of Mary Ann's death, I did something that I have never done. I asked for a sign. I prayed, "If you are OK, Mary Ann, and if there truly is life after death, let me know." At the time that I prayed this prayer, I was on medication that helped me sleep in spite of the ringing in my ears. The effect of the medication would wear off about two in the morning. At that time, I would have to go to the nurses' station to get another pill.

As I awoke in the middle of that night, I was immediately aware of a song that was playing in my mind. It took me time to get the melody and the words. Finally, it was clear. "*Oh Sacrament most holy, oh Sacrament divine, all praise and thanksgiving, be every moment Thine. Oh Jesus we adore thee, who in thy love divine conceals, thy mighty God-head, in forms of bread and wine.*"

All friends share something in common uniquely to themselves. For Mary Ann and me it was a shared love for the Blessed Sacrament. Mary Ann also made a Holy Hour every day, and often we would talk how special that was. So, when I heard that song in my head, I knew it was Mary Ann giving me a sign. It was as though she were saying, "Dick, we were right about the Real Presence. The Jesus who we adored in the tabernacle in church is the same Jesus who I am adoring in heaven now". Wow!

I have been making what is called a Holy Hour almost every day for more than thirty years. I began to do this after a holy priest said something that touched me. At the time I did not know the practice was called a Holy Hour.

When I came to St. Patrick's Seminary, a year or so after beginning the practice, I came across an audio tape by the late Archbishop Sheen. In the talk, Bishop Sheen was encouraging priests to spend one continuous hour each day praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. He called this a daily Holy Hour. He said that it was important to do this every day, despite the sacrifice it sometimes may require. He said it was the only thing Our Lord asks of his priests: "Can't you spend one hour with me?"

While a seminarian at St. Patrick's, every evening I would make my Holy Hour without fail. If I had a difficult exam the next morning, I might have been tempted to skip it, but I always concluded that the prayer would do me more good than the study. And it did!

As a parish priest, it was more difficult to make the Holy Hour every day. There were times when it would be late at night and I would be very tired, and just go straight to bed. There was no sense in praying when I was so tired. As time went on, this began to happen more and more, and even sometimes twice a week. Bill, a friend of mine who would sometimes receive words in prayer for me that usually were right on, came to me about this.

The Lord told him that I was not making my Holy Hour every day and that it was important that I not miss one day. He shared this with me, and that got me back on track for some time. But, as the years passed, I slipped back into the old pattern of missing the Holy Hour once and sometimes twice a week. Again, Bill came to me and said that the Lord wanted me not to miss my Holy Hour. Within a day of that, a woman who cleaned the church came to me. She was very holy, and could often be found in the back row of the church praying. She too told me that the Lord had told her that I was missing my Holy Hour and that I must not miss one day.