

Mrs Mary Kean

Ireland

Mary Keane is a Member of the Secular Institute Servitium Christi. A native of Dublin, Ireland, she is a retired Civil Servant.

She made her first Profession of Vows in Servitium Christi on 9th January 1994 and her Final Profession on 9th January 2000. She served as a General Council Member from 2002 to 2010, and as General Directress from 2010 to 2025.

At present, she serves as General Treasurer of the Institute. She is a volunteer worker at the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Dublin and holds a BA in Theology and a MA in Applied Spirituality.



Celebrating Eucharist outside of Mass: Why and How I pray before the Blessed Sacrament

original in English

***O God, You are my God for You I long
For You my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for You
Like a dry weary land without water.
So I gaze on You in the Sanctuary
To see Your Strength and Your glory. (Psalm 62)***

My earliest recollection of awareness of the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, at Mass, or in receiving Holy Communion lies in a story my mother told me as a very young child – probably about three years old. Many versions of the story abound, but as Mam told it to me, there was once a man named Jim who called into a church on his way to work each morning. On entry he would genuflect, doff his cap, and say “Jesus, Jim is here” and then leave again to proceed to his day’s work. Years passed, and eventually Jim became gravely ill and was in danger of death, so the priest was called to administer the “Last Sacraments”. As the priest entered the room carrying the Blessed Sacrament with him, a voice was heard saying “Jim, Jesus is here”.

The wonder and amazement that this simple little story engendered in me has never left me. Jesus is here! The Acts of the Apostles tell us that at the Ascension “a cloud took Him from their sight”. He hadn’t gone away. They just couldn’t see Him in human form any more. His departure from human visibility in effect, unleashed the power of the Eucharist instituted at the Last Supper, and is still happening among us today. This has mesmerised me all my life. My First Communion Day is etched in my memory as a day of total joy and well-being, and Mass and Holy Communion became a natural part of life, and a tower of strength and comfort through all life’s ups and downs.

I was a teenager in the years when the Vatican II reforms of the Liturgy were being introduced, so it was an exciting time to be attending weekly Mass, but opportunities for adoration outside of Mass were limited to short visits.

After I finished my schooling I joined the school’s Past Pupils’ Union. One of the activities of the Members was participating for one night a month in overnight adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed, at a convent Chapel in Dublin city centre. One month I volunteered to participate to oblige the organiser, who had become a friend of mine. I must admit that I found little of spiritual uplift in either the uncomfortable beds, or the middle of the night arousal from sleep, but

I dutifully went to the Chapel to “do my hour”, still sleepy, and relying on my loyalty to the organiser to motivate me to remain until the next person listed came to take over. However, as the night moved on, I found myself being drawn towards the Monstrance and to Jesus present there and the hour passed by very quickly. A month later, I got another plaintive request from the organiser to fill in for someone who could not attend, and again I obliged. The pattern continued for a few months, and eventually I found that I was listed among her “Regulars”.

This practice continued for some years until the Convent re-located to a distant suburb and the practice of perpetual adoration was discontinued. By then, I had come to appreciate the hour of quiet time with Jesus - gazing at Him in the sanctuary - and I was disappointed when the facility ceased.

It was not long after this that in God’s providence I found that my job location was changed to an office building right next door the where the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Dublin was then located, and I went there daily continuing my practice of daily Mass attendance. I also found myself slipping in for a few moments of quiet prayer before the Blessed Sacrament during my lunch break. Jesus just seemed to be drawing me closer every day. In time, I became a Minister of the Word at the lunch-time Mass, and got to know the Blessed Sacrament Community. My curiosity about their Founder was aroused, and I was very impressed and touched by his life story, especially his spiritual journey.

When Holy Thursday came around, I attended the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper at the Chapel for the first time. When it came to the Gospel, the reading was interrupted for the washing of feet, and five people, including a Blessed Sacrament Congregation Scholastic, presented themselves to the Community’s superior. The dynamic between the Student and the Superior seemed to me to reflect exactly the dynamic between Jesus and His apostles at the Last Supper, and I became totally drawn into the scene. I could feel the Presence of Jesus with great clarity, and I wanted to capture that Presence and spend the

rest of my life holding on to it and telling others about It. I even felt envious of the Superior and Student who had clearly found a way to do this, and I wondered how I could respond to this calling.

I found myself in a great dilemma. Because of a family situation (a vulnerable sibling who could not live alone) it was not feasible for me to leave home and enter a Convent, as I felt drawn to do. The sensation of being called to total commitment to Jesus in the Eucharist was incredibly strong, but I could not identify any way in which I could adequately respond to this, given my particular circumstances. For almost a year, I prayed, and wept, and pleaded with Jesus to show me what He wanted of me. To my amazement, I eventually found the answer – the Secular Institute *Servitium Christi* – right on my doorstep at the Blessed Sacrament Chapel. This was mentioned in the Chapel Newsletter one week, and I immediately made enquiries to the Institute’s Spiritual Assistant – none other than the Community Superior whose participation in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper had triggered my year of turmoil.

A Secular Institute is a way of living Consecrated life at the heart of the world, rather than in a convent or monastery, and *Servitium Christi*, founded by a Blessed Sacrament Father, follows the Eucharistic Spirituality of St. Peter Julian Eymard. If I had tried to invent a way to follow God’s call, I could not have done a better job! Following three years of Devotional Commitment in the Institute, I made my first Profession of Vows in January 1994, and my Perpetual Profession in January 2000.

Our *Servitium Christi* Rule of Life provides for daily Mass and a lengthy period of Adoration each day. These devotions are a response to a calling and not an imposition by rule. However, I must admit that given the frailty and lazy tendencies of human nature, I find the provision in our Rule to be an added encouragement and a constant reminder of the place that the Presence of Jesus among us through the Eucharist should have in my life.

That's the **“why”** I pray before the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass. The **“how”** is more complex!

Daily participation in the celebration of the Eucharist is central to my life. My adoration outside of this Mass is guided chiefly by the teaching of St. Peter Julian Eymard. He tells us that exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is, in effect, the Mass in contemplation, and that time spent in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament exposed should therefore be focused on adoration, thanksgiving, reparation and petition – the four ends of sacrifice – in keeping with the Mass itself.

In adoration, I kneel before Him for a few minutes, first praying a joyful greeting, perhaps praying silently the words of some well-known Eucharistic hymn, or a morning offering. In this time, I am conscious of the Church's teaching (Catechism of the Catholic Church) that adoration is the first attitude of a creature in the presence of his Creator. Aging knees dictate that this time is not too prolonged, and seating myself I continue in thanksgiving.

My first thanksgiving is for His very Presence to us, mindful of St. Peter Julian's reflection that He loved us so much, He could not bear to be parted from us, even to be with the Father. This is followed by thanksgiving for my faith, my up-bringing in the faith, my vocation to a Eucharistic charism, my health, my family, my material adequacy, etc. etc. This deliberate effort to think on the positives in my life is helpful in putting problems and worries into perspective, and draws me closer to Jesus.

Reparation urges me to reflect on my own short-comings and wrongdoings together with the many ways in which the world turns its back on Jesus, e.g. the rich/poor gap, wars, persecution, injustices of every kind. This leads me to reflection on how I can improve my own life and bring it closer to what Jesus wants it to be, and also to plead with Him to change other hearts too, so that the injustices that mar our world may cease and be counteracted.

Petition, I'm ashamed to say, too often starts with my own list of needs, or wants. Having cleansed myself of that, I reflect on the needs of others around me, and in the wider world, including the needs of the Church, praying for manifestations of God's goodness in all these situations.

I have always found this structure to be very helpful in maintaining or re-establishing focus. However, despite my best intentions, and my great admiration for St. Peter Julian and his rich Eucharistic spirituality and teaching, I usually drift into a more informal and intimate encounter with Jesus without fully adhering to the structure for an hour of adoration which he proposed to his Religious and associates.

The reality of everyday life is difficult to drop or ignore even when in the Presence of your best friend, and after some cursory "greeting" time with Jesus, I frequently find myself immediately pouring out my troubles to Him, or complaining about unfairness, or pleading for intervention, assistance or strength. Only after such an outburst, can I bring myself back to focus on Jesus Himself rather than on my own self and my problems.

When life is good, and troubles and worries are few, my time of adoration outside of Mass is more likely to be a time of intense intimacy. Reflection on the day's Scripture, or on some other spiritual readings (e.g. the writings of Venerable Francis Xavier Nguyen Ven Thuan) can lead to an openness to Christ's Presence resulting in a more intense feeling of intimacy with Him. We know that Christ is Present to us in His Word, so reflection on His Word, (whether in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament or in some other quiet place), is in itself putting ourselves into His Presence. My awareness of this is intensified however, when in His Sacramental Presence and I find that following the Lectio Divina Pattern of Reading, Prayer, Meditation and Contemplation in the Presence of the Blessed Sacrament can be very fulfilling.

Sometimes, instead of reflecting on the Scripture of the day, I open the New Testament at random, asking the Holy Spirit to guide me to what the Lord wants to say to me on that day. I am frequently amazed by the relevance of the randomly chosen passage to some event, crisis, or dilemma which is occupying my life at that time. This amazement then overwhelms my time of adoration leading to a warmth and intimacy and assurance of His awareness of my Presence to Him.

In this, I also find the structure/practice of Centering/Contemplative prayer as taught by Thomas Keating OCSO to be very helpful. Grasping at some thought inspired by the reading, or simply emptying my mind of any thoughts by focusing on the name of Jesus and gazing at Him on the altar and allowing Him to be present to me while I am present to Him is most restorative.

The recent Covid pandemic, when churches were closed and we felt so deprived, brought home to many, including myself, how important the Eucharistic Presence of Jesus is to us. Again, however, the teaching of St. Peter Julian was comforting. His discovery during his great Retreat of Rome of the Cenacle within, was a turning point for him and an assurance to us that Jesus is indeed present within us at all times.

Now that the pandemic restrictions have been happily consigned to history, my awareness of His constant Presence to me has intensified, and that awareness keeps me in adoration mode in most circumstances, making every task an act of service on His behalf.

With Jesus present within me, having received Him in Holy Communion, I can begin to see Him in others and in His wider creation. This little poem by the Irish Poet Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887 – 1916) has inspired me since childhood, but has taken on deeper significance in my mature years:

The Presence of God

I see His blood upon the rose,
And in the stars the glory of His eyes;
His Body gleams amid eternal snows,
His tears fall from the skies.

I see His face in every flower;
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but His voice; and, carven by His power
Rocks are his written words.

All pathways by His feet are worn;
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea;
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn
His cross is every tree.

And often this awareness of His Presence draws me back to that place
where He is not just present, but is the Host – the Person Who has
invited me into His home. There in His Presence *I gaze on Him in the
sanctuary to see His strength and His glory.*

