

Thirsting daily for the presence of the Lord

BY GILLIAN GIRODAT
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Every day of the work week, from eight in the morning until eight at night, the chapel of Our Lady of Grace in small town Angus, Ont., never stands empty. From teachers to farmers, elderly widows to young couples, person after person comes with a purpose and an old friend to see.

"This is a small community where everyone knows each other," said Fr. Elias Chachati, pastor of Our Lady of Grace, of both the town and the parish. "And people like to come to adore the Lord."

For more than five years, the chapel of Our Lady of Grace has been the welcoming spot for prayer, holding daily adoration of the blessed sacrament. In a town of about 5,000 people and a church community of 300 families, the commitment and time and devotion to adoration is nothing if not humbling and remarkable.

For churches from small town to big city, the centuries-old tradition of eucharistic adoration remains an integral part of prayer life and church leaders are reporting that both frequency and attendance are anything but dying.

"Perpetual adoration is a phenomena for anyone thirsting for the presence of the Lord," said Fr. Mike McGourty of St. Augustine's Seminary. "When we pray, we want to be lifted up to God to encounter Him. What better way than before Him in the body."

The tangible element of eucharistic adoration plays an undeniable role in the draw



Taking part in daily eucharistic adoration at Toronto's St. Alphonsus parish has enriched the spiritual life of parishioners.

(Photo by Gillian Girodat)

to chapels and churches around the world and across the centuries. In his 1990s essay "The History of Eucharistic Adoration," Fr. John Hardon, S.J., cites the Council of Trent in the 16th century as saying that Christ should be worshipped now in the Eucharist no less than He had been in first-century Palestine because "in the Blessed Sacrament it is the same God whom the apostles adored in Galilee."

That physical presence, then, makes Christ in the Eucharist not only adorable but entreatable. Whether praying for family, friends or grace and strength to handle particular situations, McGourty says that prayer before the Lord in the Eucharist prepares individuals for what lies ahead.

"The Lord often called people to be away with Him to be strengthened," he said in reference to the disciples. "The time we spend with Him is to strengthen us for our mission."

St. Alphonsus parish in Toronto has long been offering a place to worship and pray. There, St. Gaspar's Chapel hosts eucharistic adoration Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and has been doing so for 18 years.

"It has become another part of daily parish life," said Fr. James Reposkey.

Jacqueline De Franco says there is a special connection between the Eucharist and the chapel, which is dedicated to St. Gaspar, found of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. St. Gaspar proclaimed God's saving love through the precious blood of Jesus, a belief which De Franco says is echoed by adorners of the Eucharist.

The Union of Precious Blood, a lay group attached to the missionaries at St. Alphonsus, ensures that at least one person is present with the Blessed Sacrament throughout the day. Many times, however, the chapel may have more than 10 people at a time, gazing toward the altar and finding their own prayerful solitude.

"I'm here and there's nothing to distract me. I'm here for this reason and this reason only, whether it's for five minutes or half an hour," De Franco said. "It is like my vis-

it with Jesus."

The response of St. Alphonsus, Our Lady of Grace and hundreds of other churches around the world to offer daily adoration for their parishioners is indicative of the church providing for the needs of its people. And, according to McGourty, this is the very reason adoration became a part of the Catholic tradition, starting in the 11th century.

"Many of these devotions and extensions of church for worship come from people themselves," McGourty said. "The church responds to demands because humanity reaches for Christ."

There was nothing startling then when Pope Urban IV instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1264. The Pope emphasized that "Christ is with us in His own substance," comforting the people "with the gracious promise that He would remain and be with them even by His bodily presence."

This presence, priests insist, isn't hard to see.

"I witnessed some ladies who come who do not sit in the back of the chapel but approach, approach, approach and kneel at the altar," Chachati said. "And they are gazing at the sacrament. Their eyes are gazing. That tells me they are expressing devotion to Jesus."

And the return of individuals day after day to this form of prayer is testament to its validity and power.

"Through adoration, they have enriched their own spiritual lives," Reposkey said. "And through that, worked together to enrich the spiritual life of others and pray for continued success of the parish."