

# The Importance of the Holy Hour

By: Father George Staley

People often ask me, “What is your favorite part about being a priest?” Sometimes, it’s hard to pick because the priesthood is full of things that I enjoy doing: celebrating the sacraments, teaching, preaching, visiting the sick, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, youth ministry, etc. The priesthood is ordered to pastoral charity, and I find so much life in being able to bring the life of Jesus to others.



But perhaps my favorite part about priesthood is my personal prayer life with Jesus, especially the daily Holy Hour. I have often said that the joy of priesthood is friendship with Jesus, and getting to spend daily an hour of quality time with my Best Friend, Jesus in the Eucharist, is essential to my priestly life.

I received this love firstly through a profound encounter with the Eucharistic Lord when I was a junior in high school. I was on the Luke 18 Confirmation Preparation Retreat as a group leader, and we had Eucharistic Adoration on Saturday night. I heard Jesus speak so clearly to me, not in an audible voice, but in my heart, “George, if you want to be happy in life, I need to be the center of your life.”

Jesus gave me that night the grace to desire to pray every day. That grace led me to pray more in front of the Blessed Sacrament and to discover there more deeply a desire for priesthood that God had planted in me. When I entered seminary formation, I then learned to pray a daily Holy Hour which was instrumental in cultivating a deeper love for and friendship with Jesus in the Eucharist.

But what is a Holy Hour? The USCCB defines a Holy Hour as “the Roman Catholic devotional tradition of spending an hour in Eucharistic Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.” The Holy Hour flows from the encouragement of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to keep watch with Him for one hour (see Mark 14:37) and was made popular especially in the last century through the preaching of Venerable Fulton Sheen.

What does one do in a Holy Hour? A Holy Hour is a place where many different forms of prayer can take place: Rosaries, litanies, novenas, chaplets, etc. But at the core of the Holy Hour, I believe, is relational prayer. “Being,” I think, is even more essential than “doing” in a Holy Hour.

I can share my experience. When I get in front of the Eucharistic Jesus, either in the tabernacle or Eucharistic Adoration for my Holy Hour, I first become aware of His presence, that He is looking at me and loving me so deeply. I thank Him and ask Him for the grace to enter into prayer and conversation with Him. I then tell Him about what’s going on in my life: joys, struggles, fears, desires. I tell Him about things relating to priestly ministry, my vocation, my family, my friends. I relate all these to Him and try to listen to what He says in response.

Sometimes there is a word or intuition that He gives me. Sometimes the Scriptures or another spiritual reading book help me to hear His voice. But oftentimes it’s just a simple “be-ing” in His presence and Him quietly telling me, “I love you.” I’ve come more to accept that I may not get insights or inspirations or direction, though I still ask and sometimes receive clearly. I don’t have to “get” anything out of prayer other than the simple joy of being in His Eucharistic presence.

And that Holy Hour, even though it may have felt dry or difficult or “useless,” is the nourishment that helps to sustain me through my day. In fact, if I don’t pray my Holy Hour in the morning, I feel more drained as I go through my day. I have grown to hunger for my Holy Hour and always try to have it at the beginning of my day.

But why should I do a Holy Hour? A great temptation in our age is to reduce the priesthood to service only, the accomplishment of tasks and duties. As M. Eugene Boylan in his work *The Spiritual Life of the Priest* writes, Jesus “has no need of our services. He has many other instruments that He could use for His work if He so wished. But although He appoints priests for the good of souls, His choice of you and me to be priests arises from His desire to make us His friends for all eternity.”

At the Last Supper, when Jesus instituted the sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders, He said, “I no longer call you slaves...I have called you friends” (John 15:15). He said that to His first priests, the apostles, and I believe He continues to say that to priests down through the ages. While Jesus of course calls all believers His friends, He has a particular love in His Heart for His ordained ministers and wants to spend time with them.

The Holy Hour is where I can “waste time” in the very real presence of my Best Friend, Jesus. I could do it elsewhere, but nowhere is He more present than in the tabernacle or in the monstrance. I let Him love me there and from that love He gives me the strength to do the tasks and duties of priesthood. Because of that fact, the Holy Hour is a non-negotiable part of my day. When things get busy, I’ll let some things go, but the Holy Hour does not fall out. I can try to operate apart from Him, but I don’t think it’ll turn out well for my people or me!

As I mentioned at the beginning, there is so much I enjoy about priestly life, but maybe my favorite and certainly one of the most essential parts is the daily Holy Hour. As we enter into this time of Eucharistic Revival, let us take up or recommit ourselves to the Holy Hour and spend time with our Best Friend, Jesus in the Eucharist.

#### **Endnotes**

1 USCCB Holy Hour.

2 M. Eugene Boylan, *The Spiritual Life of the Priest* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1949), 12.

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**About the Author:** Father George Staley is the associate pastor at Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Oakville in the diocese of St. Louis MO. He grew up in Saint Clement of Rome Parish and graduated from Saint Louis University High School in 2010. He then entered Kenrick-Glennon Seminary and graduated from Cardinal Glennon College in 2014 and Kenrick School of Theology in 2019. During his time in seminary, Father Staley spent a year on pastoral internship at Holy Rosary Parish in Warrenton and his diaconate year at Ascension Catholic Church in Chesterfield. He was ordained for the Archdiocese of St. Louis in 2019 and Saint Francis is his first assignment. He has a love for the liturgy and spiritual theology and enjoys accompanying people on their spiritual journeys.