



A selection of poems relating to the Holy Eucharist

#Adorate2021

We asked a number of priests who are poets, or who have a particular interest in poetry, to choose a poem or two which inspired their thought or prayer in relation to the Holy Eucharist. Here are the responses we received. Members of SCP Europe are invited to share their own suggestions in the SCP Facebook Group.

Canon Mark Oakley's choice was [The Agonie](#) by **George Herbert**. He comments: *For me, the Eucharist is the food that makes us more hungry for God. Herbert's poetry is layered with his restless longing for God as well as his propensity to be distracted from it. 'The Agonie' beautifully brings together the poet's parched thirst with God's costly grace.*

Canon Rachel Mann's choices are both by **Christina Rossetti**. Rachel writes; Firstly, [Goblin Market](#).

This long poem, a fantastical account of temptation and redemption, was considered a children's fable by Rossetti. However, its story of Lizzie and Laura and their encounter with 'goblin men', presents an extraordinarily embodied account of the offering of one body for the salvation of the other. It has been read as a feminist and queer account of Eucharistic feeding in which a Christa figure offers herself for the sake of her sister: 'Eat me, drink me, love me; Laura, make much of me'

Secondly, [A Better Resurrection](#).

In some ways, this poem seems far from a meditation on the Eucharist. However, in her longing to become a 'royal cup for Him, my King' and in her request, 'O, Jesus, drink of me' I am drawn deeper into the Eucharistic mystery. It is a profound poem which longs for Jesus to sanctify a broken life.

Revd Dr Manon James writes; **St David** by **Gwenallt** (It is available in Jim Cotter's Pilgrim Prayer and is bilingual, Welsh and English)

This poem (there are only excerpts in the book) speaks about both the tradition and the ordinariness of the Eucharist. God with us in the kitchen and (other) workplace(s). The Eucharist is both ordinary and extraordinary.

I would also point to:

From Counterpoint by RS Thomas

When we are weak, we are strong.
When our eyes close on the world,
then somewhere within us the bush burns.
When we are poor and aware
of the inadequacy of our table,
it is to that,
uninvited,
the guest comes.

For me, this poem speaks about the experience of both presiding at and receiving the Eucharist, and the comforting and powerful sense of God's presence.

I'd also suggest this poem by **Euros Bowen**, in translation.

Reredos

The reredos was not
an ecclesiastical adornment
of symbols,
but plain glass,
with the danger of distracting the celebrant
from
the properties of the communion table
for
in the translucence
the green earth
budded in the morning view,
the river was in bloom,
the air a joyous flight,
and the sunshine
set the clouds ablaze,
and I noticed
the priest's eyes
as it were unconsciously
placing his hand
on these gifts
as though these
were
the bread and the wine.

Miggy Scott replied on behalf of her husband **David Scott**, priest and poet, who was not well enough to respond. Miggy writes; In *Beyond the Drift*, published by Bloodaxe Books, [A Long Way from Bread](#) is a favourite. *It was written for the Eucharist at Hilfield Friary. In that book you will find a couple of poems in which David is wrestling with his loss of language.*

Canon Michael Burgess (President of the Hopkins Society) chose this poem by **Gerard Manley Hopkins**

Godhead, I adore thee fast in hiding; thou
God in these bare shapes, poor shadows, darkling now:
See, Lord, at thy service low lies here a heart
Lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art....
Jesu whom I look at veiled here below,
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,
Some day to gaze on thee face to face in light
And be blest for ever with thy glory's sight.

We know this hymn by St Thomas Aquinas with the words,

Thee, we adore, O hidden Saviour, thee.

The translation by Gerard Manley Hopkins is not so well known. (The first and last verses are printed above).

The four drafts he produced are undated, but we have a letter from Hopkins written when he was at Balliol in 1864 to a friend, E H Coleridge. There he writes, 'The great aid to belief and object of belief is the doctrine of the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Religion without that is sombre, dangerous, illogical, with that it is - not to speak of its grand consistency and certainty - loveable. Hold that and you will gain all Catholic truth.' It is the word loveable that speaks to me as I read his translation.