

EUCHARIST

Video of priest in tears during consecration goes viral

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In his final encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), Saint John Paul II sought to rekindle 'Eucharistic wonder' in the face of the 'living Sacrament' of the Body and Blood of Christ, for which 'the Church has not feared to "spare" the best of her resources'. This sense of

wonder can be found in the meticulously prepared celebrations at the Church of St Gabriel the Archangel in Hopkins, Minnesota. In fact, during one Mass there, on Monday 14 September, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, something extraordinary manifested itself, not a visible miracle but a sign that burst forth from a 'part' of the liturgy, the part that faces the Mystery.

The unwitting protagonist, literally overwhelmed by the event, was Father Brent Bowman, the chaplain at Chesterton Academy, a Catholic school situated next door to the church. At the moment of consecration, the young priest was overwhelmed, both physically and spiritually, by a vivid perception of the sacrament being performed on the altar in his hands. It was so vivid that his reaction continues to impress the many people who participated and who **watched the celebration** via the parish's social media channels.

At the moment of consecrating the wine so that it might become the Blood of Christ, Father Bowman was unable to continue after the opening words, 'Take and drink from it, all of you. This is the cup...' From this point onwards, the priest, his voice breaking, struggled to utter the following words: '...of my Blood for the new and eternal covenant, etc.' He remained bowed for what seemed like an endless minute, his trembling hands struggling to raise the chalice, which seemed as heavy as the whole world, while he gave free rein to his tears under the bewildered gaze of the altar server kneeling beside him. Only after a deep sigh did he manage to control his tears and begin the '*Mysterium fidei*'.

'During the prayer of consecration over the wine at the altar, while I was saying the words, I had what I believe to be an inner realisation of the power of those words and their effect. I found it so powerful that I could hardly speak.' In a statement published on 16 September on the website of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Father Bowman recounted his experience 'for the glory and praise of God' and also out of a need to clarify and correct inaccuracies circulating on the matter. The first point he wishes to clarify is that this experience 'is not what the Catholic Church considers a "Eucharistic miracle". Throughout the experience, the forms of bread and wine retained their accidents (i.e. their appearance and taste). I never saw actual blood or human flesh with my own eyes.' Nonetheless it is a sign that is not visible but no less striking in its effects.

"With every word, I became more and more overwhelmed, as can be seen in the video. At the same time, I sensed the weight of God's power descending upon the altar and felt the substantial presence of Jesus in the chalice I was holding. The chalice

became too heavy to hold, and I felt it being drawn downwards until it rested on the altar. I felt my hands were pinned to the chalice of the Most Precious Blood and I was physically unable to move it. In short, the chalice was not merely heavy; it was heavy. It was not merely a physical weight."

"In my attempt to lift the Most Precious Blood, which I was unable to do for some time," continues Father Brent, "I believe I received the grace to understand more deeply the sweet and bitter Passion of Our Lord, and just how much blood Christ shed for the immense weight of all our sins." I believe I experienced this weight in the chalice. This spiritual experience overwhelmed me emotionally and physically, as can be seen from the recording of the Mass." Father Brent certainly does not regard what he experienced as a privilege, and he warns against viewing such events as 'signs of holiness'. On the contrary, he speaks of 'entirely undeserved gifts and signs of God's immense love for all his people', and prays that 'this brief testimony may move our hearts and prompt us to contemplate more deeply the mystery of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and in the Most Precious Blood'.

It was that very mystery that made the Masses celebrated by Father Pio of Pietrelcina seem interminable, requiring even greater effort and tears. Not because he added anything of his own, as is customary today, but because he was overwhelmed by what he experienced at the altar, just as happened to Father Brent. Neither the length of the service nor the pre-dawn start time deterred the ever-increasing numbers of people who flocked to San Giovanni Rotondo from far and wide. In the years leading up to Padre Pio's death, there was a push to 'liven up' the Mass under the illusion that this would make it more accessible. Instead, as is well known, churches have emptied, and more creative or strummed celebrations have certainly done nothing to stem the tide of secularisation, which has even penetrated the temple of God. Yet, in this technological age, which was supposed to consign the sacred to the past, the internet with its frenetic activity has paused on a video of a priest celebrating Mass in tears, overwhelmed by the weight and cost of Redemption.