1.

WHAT IS EUCHARISTIC CULTURE?

Few of us think about it, but the parishes we belong to possess cultures. Here I do not exclusively mean that a parish is made up of African American, Hispanic, or German Catholics. This diversity is part of the culture of a parish, but it is not the only dimension. Culture is a worldview that includes a way of looking at reality and practicing what it means to be a Catholic. Culture forms us into a people.

We may likely presume that every parish possesses a Eucharistic culture. After all, what is the source and summit of a Catholic's life? It is the Eucharist, the memorial of Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection that we celebrate in our parish churches every day of the week. A good deal of our parish's life is dedicated to the celebration of the Eucharist.

And yet, a parish culture is more complex, perhaps at times even deviating from the Eucharistic vision offered by Catholicism. Our parishes in the United States exist within a wide array of cultures that may not be hospitable to a Catholic worldview. For example, many residents of the United States think about worship as a private affair. The individual chooses some of her free time

on Sundays to belong to a congregation. Otherwise, this worship has nothing to do with the rest of her life.[1] We can be Catholic on Sundays, but the rest of the week, we might exercise our identities as nuclear engineers, factory workers, scientists, short-order cooks, teachers, and moms and dads. The parish may take on this private culture, never asking that the parishioners integrate faith and life. Parishioners may run off as individual family units to brunch after Mass, rarely getting to know their neighbors in the next pew. After all, in this case, the real purpose of Mass is one's individual (or nuclear family's) sanctification, not belonging to the communion of the Body of Christ with all believers.

I have belonged to parishes that thought about the Mass in this way, as a private act of devotion disconnected from the rest of our lives. Growing up, I attended a parish that had a chapel dedicated to perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. We loved the Eucharist. And yet, this parish once included an announcement in the bulletin that cruelly insulted parishioners who depended on food stamps for their livelihood. No one in the parish recognized the incongruence of perpetual Eucharistic Adoration and marginalizing the hungry and thirsty in our parish.

For Catholics, our common worship in the Eucharistic liturgy is not a private affair. It is a public act whereby the whole Body of Christ is transformed by the Eucharistic offering into a sacrifice of love for the life of the world. What we do on the altar on Sunday is a global reality, inviting the Catholic to let their flesh-and-blood bodies become living or reasonable sacrifices, "holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). There is no such thing as a private Catholic. Every Catholic is a

public person, whose life witnesses to the Eucharistic presence of our Lord in the world.

A Eucharistic culture will not, therefore, be generated automatically in a parish that focuses on individual devotion. This Eucharistic culture requires occasions of common discernment. Do we offer to our parishioners a Eucharistic culture that integrates faith and life, or do we propose a privatized faith in our Sunday worship? If the latter, then we require a conversion or renewal of that culture.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

As I noted in the preface to this book, there are a variety of ways to define what we mean by *culture*. Culture could refer to nothing more than high art. We feel "cultured" when we listen to a symphony by Mozart or have spent time contemplating the art of Picasso. While art is important to human life, this approach to culture is too thin for a Eucharistic renewal of parish life. It risks confusing Catholicism for the religion of the aesthete who delights in pretty things instead of the religion centered on the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Likewise, we can think about culture exclusively as an ethnic identity. Catholicism, in this case, consists of a variety of cultures. In our parishes, there are Mexican, Vietnamese, and Filipino Catholics. The goal of the parish is to include all ethnic identities. We want to feature their practices, welcoming them into the community of the Church.

The problem with this approach is that it presumes that only nonwhite ethnic identities possess a culture. Yes, Mexican, Vietnamese, and Filipino Catholics have culture(s) that may be different from the suburban Catholicism practiced at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic parish. But it is not true that Our Lady of the Lake is absent a culture. In fact, the possible difficulty that many parishioners at Our Lady of the Lake have in welcoming their fellow Catholics from Mexico is precisely because of the culture(s) of Our Lady of the Lake. To ignore the way that Our Lady of the Lake has enculturated Catholicism, often in a way that makes it difficult for anyone else to worship there except the residents of that suburban community, is a mode of bias. The parish community presumes that "we" possess a pure, unadulterated version of Catholicism, whereas the immigrants from Mexico are the cultured ones. The Mexican Catholics are exotic, whereas we are in the mainstream. We make some room for the practices of the Mexican Catholics, but in the way that a tourist on a cruise ship visits a local village. Yes, it is nice to see Our Lady of Guadalupe in our church once a year. But the rest of the year, she can return to her side chapel because our sanctuary does not have room for her. You can see the problems with such an approach, how this kind of bias would be detrimental to welcoming our Mexican brothers and sisters into our parish.

Lastly, we can think about culture exclusively as something negative. In evangelization literature, we hear "cultural Catholics" spoken about in less than flattering ways. The cultural Catholic does not fervently believe or practice Catholicism, showing up just for high holy days (Easter/Christmas) and other rites of

passage. To persuade the cultural Catholic to become a "real" Catholic is often the goal of evangelization programs.

This negative sense of culture is also frequently employed in homilies. The priest speaks about the harmful dimensions of culture and society: "We live in a culture of death. A culture that does not support the family. A culture where Christianity is rendered a hostile proposition against the liberalism of modern life."

It is true that what we mean by a cultural Catholic is insufficient to the Gospel. Likewise, contemporary culture is indeed often driven by a lack of solidarity, what Pope Francis refers to as a throwaway culture, where the unborn, the elderly, the migrant, and the prisoner are considered expendable. US political culture is not always friendly to those who want to practice their faith. And yes, we have to admit that secularization is a pressure upon US Catholics today. Such realism is necessary.

But the word *culture* can also be used in a positive sense. At the Second Vatican Council, the Church defined *culture* as indicating:

> everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates, and conserves in his works great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even the whole human family.[2]

In this positive sense, there is no such thing as a non-cultural Catholic. Every Catholic is cultural insofar as she is a human being who lives her Catholic faith in the context of civilization. As human beings, we pass on wisdom from generation to generation through doctrines and practices that we "hand on" (the literal meaning of the word *tradition*) to the young.

The O'Malley family, for example, possesses a culture related to Notre Dame football. We order our Saturdays in the fall to the Fighting Irish by wearing certain clothes, talking about games past and present (incessantly, if you ask my spouse), going tailgating, and listening to the fight songs of Notre Dame. Without this culture, there would be no way for us to invite our children to become fans of the Fighting Irish. There would be no way for us to be the O'Malleys.

This richer sense of culture is the one that this book will adopt in thinking through the Eucharistic culture of a parish. In his study *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, the Jesuit priest and theologian Michael Paul Gallagher describes twelve features of this richer sense of culture that will be relevant to our consideration of the parish.[3] In the second part of this chapter, I will adapt these twelve dimensions to four principles in conversation with Pope Benedict's document on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis (The Sacrament of Charity)*.

MICHAEL PAUL GALLAGHER'S TWELVE FEATURES OF CULTURE

1. Culture is a human creation.

This is important. Culture is not received as part of divine revelation. Because of the freedom that we possess as human beings to shape our common lives, we can change the culture of Our Lady of the Lake in such a way that conforms more truly to the Gospel. If we are inhospitable to our neighbors or live a privatized Catholicism, we can do something about it. Because of the power of the Spirit given to each of us, we can become agents of cultural renewal.

2. Culture is handed on to us and yet is interpreted differently in certain times and areas of the world.

Growing up in East Tennessee, attending a small parish in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, I learned to be Catholic in this context. Sure, all the rudiments of Catholic culture were passed on to me. I regularly attended Sunday Mass. I abstained from meat on Fridays during Lent and attended Stations of the Cross on Fridays. But my Catholicism took on a specific shape. I heard stories of the early Catholics in Blount County, Tennessee, worshipping out of a house church. I was regularly reminded that we were but 2 percent of the population of the entire diocese. The way that we lived our Catholic life—with the warmth of an evangelical but with the fervor of someone whose religion was often marginalized by our neighbors—was

integral to the culture of those practicing in the Diocese of Knoxville. We loved Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Rosary, and many traditional Catholic practices precisely because it made us different from our neighbors (and not because we were rejecting the Second Vatican Council, which we barely thought about). Although we shared Catholicism in common with parishioners in the Archdiocese of Boston, even a non-Catholic would recognize the differences between a Catholic parish in Boston and one in Knoxville.

3. Culture often shapes our assumptions about the world in an unconscious manner.

Living in Boston from 2006 to 2010, I picked up certain ways of viewing the world that were rather different from those in my eventual home in South Bend, Indiana. When I went to the grocery store in South Bend, I did not expect the clerk to ask me what I was doing for the weekend. In fact, because of my time in Boston, I viewed this as a rude intrusion upon my privacy. I was not right to see my fellow human being with such suspicion. Still, after living in the culture of New England, I had come to see such questions as a form of intimacy inappropriate to share with a stranger. I did not adopt this viewpoint consciously but picked it up in the water (along with rooting for the Patriots and the Red Sox).

4. Culture proposes a whole way of life that gives me an identity within a community of other persons.

The Notre Dame experience—often referred to among my undergraduate students—is a comprehensive proposal related to the identity of the students. It means being able to talk about what dorm you live in, thinking about the act of education in a particular way, tailgating and going to football games, choosing which of the two dining halls on campus is superior, commiserating about South Bend winters, and going to this or that local watering hole (after you turn twenty-one, of course). This comprehensive culture allows students at Notre Dame to share solidarity across classes. A Notre Dame graduate from 1975 shares a worldview, stories, and practices in common with a Notre Dame graduate from 2025.

5. Culture consists of both stuff and a way of interpreting the world.

Catholicism, for example, is a sacramental culture. We worship using matter. You likely know that you have found a Catholic when she is wearing a scapular, she fasts on Good Friday, she crosses herself when entering a church, and she genuflects before entering her pew. These are some of the visible and tangible things of Catholicism. Taken together, this stuff forms us to see the world differently, to engage in a process of interpretation that is not reducible only to the tangible. We view creation as revelatory of God. We have a positive view of the body. We recognize the

places where God is revealing himself in the world today. The use of sacramentals in worship, where the whole created order is employed in liturgy, shapes a sacramental imagination for Catholics that makes it possible for us to see creation as revealing the mystery of divine love.

6. Culture must be comprehended in terms of meanings or beliefs, values, and customs or practices.

If you go to New Orleans during Mardi Gras, there are certain meanings and beliefs that are proposed about what it means to be human. Human beings are made not just for work but also for festivity. Carnival turns the world upside down much as the Gospel does. There are ways of behavior that are proposed, values that might otherwise seem out of place. If I showed up wearing plastic beads or carrying a coconut and a to-go cup of the finest daiquiri this side of paradise in the city of Cleveland, there would be inevitable confusion (and a possible arrest). In New Orleans, during Mardi Gras—and who am I kidding, the rest of the year—there are norms proposed about human behavior that are unique to that city. And these norms are passed on through the cycle of feasts and seasons related to Mardi Gras. You get a King Cake starting at Epiphany. You find the baby in the King Cake, making you the king or queen of the party and tasked with bringing the next King Cake to the next party. You start going to parades three weeks before the start of Lent. Meanings, morals, and tradition make up the culture of Mardi Gras in New Orleans.