

Dublin's Saint of the Eucharist

St Charles of Mount Argus



THE THEME of the 2012 International Eucharistic Congress is *The Eucharist: Communion with Christ and with one another*, and the meaning of this theme is nowhere more clearly shown than in the life and ministry of Dublin's own Eucharistic saint, St Charles of Mount Argus. In his love for Christ and his generous service of his brothers and sisters, especially the sick and the needy, St Charles shows us what it means to live the mystery of *Communion*. Those who knew him tell us that the two most striking aspects of his life were that he was always available to those in any kind of suffering and that he lived continually in the presence of God. The many extraordinary cures brought about by his healing blessing testify to the transforming grace of Christ who, through the Eucharist, shares

with us his triumph over suffering and gives us a foretaste of eternal glory:

*O sacred banquet
in which Christ is received,
the memory of his Passion is renewed,
the mind is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory to us is given.*

(St Thomas Aquinas, *O Sacrum Convivium*)

For St Charles, devotion to Christ's presence in the Eucharist was a driving force throughout his life. Born in the village of Munstergeleen, The Netherlands, in 1821, he became an altar server

RECOLLECTIONS OF ST CHARLES

Father Eugene Nevin CP (1868–1957) was a student at Mount Argus in the last years of St Charles's life. His Recollections of Father Charles give us a picture of the Saint drawn by someone who knew him well, with all his holiness and his human foibles. These extracts are an eye-witness's summary of the place of Mass and Eucharistic Adoration in his life.

At Mass with Saint Charles

To assist at Father Charles's offering of The Holy Sacrifice was to see a man swayed and animated by the most powerful emotions that can influence a human being; agitated at times to trepidation by the contrasted feelings of reverential love and fear mutually contending within his bosom. It was, in fine, to see a man who realized to the full the tremendous nature of the high office he was called upon to perform.

He did not say Mass in the Church for two or three years before his death except one Sunday that I remember when it became a matter of necessity

after his First Communion and was enrolled in the Confraternity of Perpetual Adoration. By the time he was fourteen, he was already spending time each day adoring Jesus in the Eucharist, and it became his usual practice to visit the Blessed Sacrament on his way home from school. It was said of him that he knew only two roads, the road to school and the road to church.

After his military service, Charles went to Belgium to join the Passionists at their monastery at Ere, near Tournai. Here he studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1850. In the Passionist Rule, Charles would have seen how St Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, saw the daily celebration of the Mass as the central moment in the life of every Passionist priest:

All the priests are earnestly entreated to collect their spirit and compose their minds devoutly for their sacred functions, before the Divine and spotless Sacrifice of the Mass.... The Sacrifice being finished, let them give due praise and thanks to God, and not immediately turn their attention to other matters. They will thus derive more abundant fruit from the Sacrifice which they have offered, will every day burn



Altar at which St Charles celebrated his last Mass on 8 December 1892 (now in the St Charles Exhibition at the Shrine).

owing to the large number of Fathers absent on missions. But I am afraid he was not much of a success then from the public point of view. He was too slow, an hour being his usual length in his later

Only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception [of the Eucharist] mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another

Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 66.

with more and more love of God, and become, at the same time, fitter and more worthy to handle Divine things (Rule of St Paul of the Cross, 1775).

Through his celebration of the Mass and the many hours he spent each day praying before the tabernacle, Charles sought to open his heart to the love of God so that, inflamed with love, he could minister to those weighed down by physical or mental suffering and also by sin.

After his ordination, St Charles worked in England, where he had been sent after the untimely death of Blessed Dominic Barberi CP. Then on 9 July 1857 he arrived in Ireland to join the community at the newly founded Blessed Paul's Retreat, Mount Argus. Apart

years. Indeed were he left to himself and unassisted he would likely on occasions have gone far beyond the limits of the hour.

Rarely as long as I knew him did he celebrate without tears, very copious were it a feast in any way relating to The Passion; for he paid special attention to the Mass of the day following it word for word. There would be long pauses in which he seemed to have lost himself; sobs and tears and turnings aside of the face with frequent use of the handkerchief. As he celebrated in the choir after the Father Spiritual director it fell to our lot as students to serve his Mass. This we shall ever look upon as amongst our greatest privileges; though the student whose turn it was would be still serving when his companions had their day's work well under way.

When more than usually fervent by reason of the feast or from some other cause, the pauses became more frequent and progress in consequence more slow, portending the danger of unconscionable

from another few years in England, he was to pass the remainder of his life in Dublin, dying at Mount Argus on 5 January 1893. His years in Dublin were spent hearing confessions and blessing the people who came to him for healing. Often he was called to the home or the hospital bedside of those who were seriously ill. His seemingly unlimited compassion for those who were suffering flowed from his deep union with Christ who, through the Eucharist, shares with us the compassionate love of God: 'As I who am sent by the living Father myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me' (Jn 6: 57).

For St Charles, the daily celebration of the Eucharist and the hours spent each day in adoration shaped his life. The personal encounter with Christ in the Sacrament of his Love enabled Charles to be a visible sign of the presence of Christ living in him: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him' (Jn 6: 56). As someone who showed by his life the meaning of the Mystery of Communion, he helps us to grasp more profoundly the theme of the Eucharistic Congress *The Eucharist: Communion with Christ and with one another*, and he underlines the relationship between love of Christ and loving service of our brothers and sisters.

lengthening. On such occasions someone would whisper 'Go for Father Salvian!' It was our only remedy students without orders as we were. Word is brought to Father Salvian, who on entering takes a small stole from his breast pocket throws it on and stands beside Father Charles on the predella. The effect is always electrical. Not a word for the present is spoken; but Father Charles well knows the meaning of the manoeuvre; and he needs not to be told to hurry up, for hurry he does in no unmistakable fashion under the reproachful eyes of his mentor.

Soon however a stronger influence governs him, and under its sway the figure standing close to him becomes shadowy and gradually fades away, when he is again alone with God giving way to demonstrations as before. But Father Salvian is never slow to remind him of his presence by a gentle tap on the shoulder and a mild if not a trifle profane command 'Go on Charlie, go on'. Other methods obtained with those who served him in the days when he said Mass in public as they can still testify. They had instructions to pluck sharply at his vestments whenever he stopped for any considerable time; and so bring him back to earth.



Altar of the former community chapel, the 'Choir' where St Charles often celebrated daily Mass.

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament

Whenever possible night or day he paid visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Of what passed between him

and The Master in those heart to heart talks we may judge from the fervour of his life only, since during them he made himself as invisible to human eye as his ingenuity could devise. His favourite place in the daytime was the organ loft, which is reached without leaving the monastery or going through the Church, where a crowd was always sure to gather round him. He was undisturbed in the organ loft and reckoned he was also unobserved.

At night and in the winter evening his spare time was spent chiefly in the Choir, a fact we students had

ample opportunities of knowing, it being our duty, in turn, to prepare the altar overnight for Mass the following morning.

As we get there for our work silence reigns supreme. Darkness is over all save for the fitful flicker of the Sanctuary lamp. But when light is introduced and every nook and corner gives up its secret, then is revealed the grey head resting on the bench in some out of the way place. This became so common an experience that we quite expected it as a matter of course after a while.

THE SHRINE OF ST CHARLES OF MOUNT ARGUS

*Saint Paul's Retreat · Mount Argus
Lower Kimmage Road · Dublin · 6W*

Mount Argus is located near Harold's Cross, on the south side of Dublin, about two and a half miles from the City Centre. It is on the 9 and 54A bus routes.

Masses at Mount Argus

Sunday: 8.00 and 11.00 am, 4.00 pm
Monday to Friday: 10.00 am, 6.15 pm
Saturday: 11.00 am, 6.15 pm

Blessing with the Relic of St Charles

Sunday: after the 11.00 am and 4.00 pm Masses
Monday to Friday: after the 10.00 am Mass
Wednesday to Friday afternoon: 4.00 pm
Saturday: after the 11.00 am Mass

Perpetual Novena in honour of St Charles

Every Saturday at the 11.00 am Mass

Monthly Healing Mass

Last Saturday of the month at 11.00 am

The Church and Shrine are open daily for prayer

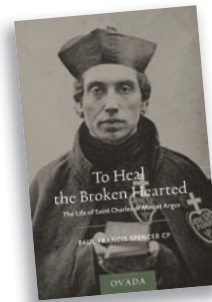
Sunday: from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm

Monday to Saturday: from 9.00 am to 6.45 pm

*The permanent exhibition on the Life & Ministry
of St Charles is open during these hours*

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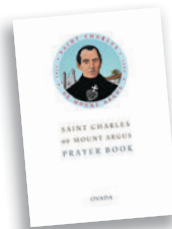


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